

# Research on Transformation of Man and Beast in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*

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**Abstract:** Based on the fantasy of the fairy tale itself, the animality of children's thinking, and the closeness of the relationship between man and beast, human-animal transformation appears in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. These fairy tales of human-animal transformation have common characteristics such as human-animal transformation mode and growth-oriented transformation type, reflecting the miracle of life achieved by human beings through the mode of "transformation-tribulation-redemption", and implied the intention of punishing evil and promoting good, the idea of equality of all things and other ideological connotation.

**Keywords:** Human and animal transformation, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Children's literature.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. "Transfiguration" and "Transformation of Man and Beast" in Literature

The western word "metamorphosis" is derived from the Latin metamorphosis, meaning a change in the form produced by witchcraft or magic. *The Modern Chinese Dictionary* has two interpretations of "deformation": "The first is that the shape and format change." Secondly, it refers to fairy tales or mythological stories where people take the shape of an animal or animals take the shape of people." [1] In literary works, "deformation" refers to the change of body and shape.

"Human-animal metamorphosis" is one of the types of "metamorphosis", referring to the mutual changes between humans and animals in the body, there are two deformation dimensions of elevation and degradation, from things to people, from orcs to people is a kind of elevation deformation, and from people to things is a kind of degradation deformation. As a literary motif, human-animal transformation is a symbol of supernatural power and mystery, which can be traced back to Greek mythology, and it shows some kind of longing and fantasy in the heart of primitive people. Because of the uniqueness of the subject matter, the literature of human-animal transformation has been developed in the later generations, and is a part of the history of Chinese and Western literature.

### 1.2. Transformation of Man and Beast in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*

*Grimm's Fairy Tales* is a product of European Romanticism in the 19th century, most of which are derived from folk oral legends, with a large number of human and animal transformation stories. Taking the Complete *Grimm's Fairy Tales* translated by Yang Wuneng and Yang Yue (Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 2001) as an example, 37 stories of human and animal transformation in *Grimm's Fairy Tales* are sorted out (see the table below).

These stories can be divided into three types: one is the transfiguration of animals through magic, witchcraft, curses and other reasons; The other is that the shapeshifters are born animals, including orcs; Three deformation to wear animal skin, to achieve deformation. Of the 37 stories, most belong to the first category, *Hans My Hedgehog* and *The Little*

*Donkey* belong to the second category, and *Bearskin* belongs to the third category. From the perspective of deformation, except for the small toad in *Three Pieces of Feathers* into a girl, the fox in *Little Sea Hare* into a small trader, *Hans my Hedgehog* in the half-human half-hedgehog boy into a human, *Little Donkey* in the donkey into a human is a transformation of transformation, other stories are from human to beast. From the intermediary, basically for magic, witchcraft, curse, which in many articles, magic and witchcraft, witches and curses appear together, the concept of the distinction is vague, but magic, witchcraft, curse are supernatural forces, do not make a distinction here. But there are special transfiguration mediations, such as the bride in *Fitchell's Strange Bird* who "jumps into a honey bucket, cuts the feather quilt, and lets her body, covered with honey, roll in the feathers until it becomes a strange bird", here is the physical transfiguration; The bones of the dead boy in "The Juniper Tree" are buried under the juniper tree and become birds through the tree; The young man in *Bearskin* wears the devil's clothes and becomes *Bearskin*; The hunters, witches, maids and girls in the *Old Donkey* eat the bad lettuce and become donkeys; the foxes in the *Little Sea Rabbits* become small traders when they jump into the water; the young people sink into the water and become little sea rabbits; The "Ruyi" in "Lilac" is ordained by God and therefore has the power to turn bad cooks into black poodles; In *The Little Donkey*, God gives birth to a donkey prince. In terms of the result of the transformation, in addition to what is not explained in the story, basically the transformation of the subject is restored to human form.

## 2. Causes of Human and Animal Deformation Motifs

*The Grimm's Fairy Tales* have been revised in seven editions, and on the basis of retaining folk oral literature, many violent, pornographic, death, horror and other crude elements of the original story have been cut out, making it more suitable for children to read. There are 215 stories in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, 37 of which involve the transformation of human beings and animals. It can be seen that the transformation of human beings and animals is suitable for children's reading and is universal to a certain extent.

**Table 1.** Stories of Human and Animal Transformation in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*

Title of story	Transformation direction	Transformation medication	Transformation result
1.The Frog Prince	Prince → Frog	magic	Return to human shape
9.The Twelve Brothers	Prince → Raven	magic	Return to human shape
11.Little Brother and Little Sister	Little Brother → Deer	Witchcraft/Magic	Return to human shape
13. Three Little People in the Forest	Queen → Duck	/	Return to human shape
19. The Fisherman and His Wife	Prince → Flounder	magic	/
25.Seven Ravens	Prince → Raven	curse	Return to human shape
29. The Devil's Three Golden Locks	Boy → Ant	Magic (survival)	Return to human shape
46. Fitchell's Strange Bird	Bride → Strange bird	Physical transformation (Revenge)	Return to human shape
47.The Juniper Tree	Boy → Bird	juniper	Return to human shape (rise again)
49.Six Swans	Prince → Swan	Witchcraft/Magic	Return to human shape
51. Birdcast	Little Boy → Rose Little Girl → Rose	/ (save one's life)	Return to human shape
56. Lover Roland	Girl → Duck	Magic (survival)	Return to human shape
57.Golden bird	Princess Brother → Fox	magic	Return to human shape
63.Three Feathers	Small Frog → Pretty girl	magic	/
68. The Liar and His Master	Boy → Bird, hound, horse, sparrow, fish, fox	Witchcraft	/
69. Jorinder and Joringer	Bird Maiden	Witchcraft/Magic	Return to human shape
76. Lilac	Bad Cook → Black Poodle	God (Revenge)	Return to human shape (be condemned to death)
88. The Lion and the Larks that sing and dance	Prince → Lion, Dove Princess → Monty Python	magic	Return to human shape
92.King of the Golden Mountain	Girl → Snake	magic	Return to human shape
93.crow	Girl → Crow	curse	Return to human shape
96. Three Little Birds	Prince → Black Dog	magic	Return to human shape
101.Bearskin	Man → Bearskin Man	Put on the devil's clothes	Return to human shape
108.Hans My Hedgehog	Boy who is half man and half hedgehog → Man	curse	Return to human shape
113. Children of Two Kings	Princess → Fish	/ (save one's life)	Return to human shape
Old Donkey	Hunter, Witch, maid, girl → Donkey	Bad lettuce	Return to human shape (Witch Hunt)
123. Old lady in the forest	Prince → White Dove	Witchcraft/Magic	Return to human shape
135.White Bride and Black Bride	Girl → Duck	/	Return to human shape
141.Lambs and Little Fish	Little Brother → Fish Little Sister → Lamb	Witchcraft curse	Return to human shape
144.little donkey	Ass → human	God	Change to human shape
161. White Snow and Red Rose	Prince → Wild Bear	/	Return to human shape
163. Glass Coffin	Princess Brother → Deer	monster	Return to human shape
169. Cabin in the Woods	Three servants → Little hen, little rooster, flower cow	Witchcraft/Magic	Return to human shape
181. Selkie in the Pond	Wife → Toad Husband → Frog	Witchcraft (to save one's life)	Return to human shape
191. Little Sea Hare	The fox → the peddler	water	/
	Young man → Little Sea Hare		
197 Crystal Ball	Eldest Son → Eagle Second Son → Whale	magic	Return to human shape
Addendum 4. The Lazy and the Hard-working	The handsome man → The Crow	curse	Return to human shape
Addendum 5. Lion and Frog	Princess Brother → Lion Pretty Girl → Frog	curse	Return to human shape

## 2.1. Fantasy of fairy tale

Children like narrative ways full of story and fantasy, and they can tolerate ambiguity, eccentricity and illogic. Guo Morao also pointed out that "the world of children's literature is always mysterious" [2]. Therefore, children's literature needs to communicate the three worlds of reality, surreality and children's mind with poetic wisdom full of imagination. The transformation of human beings and animals in fairy tales is irrational, but it is in line with children's imagination and full of wonderful fantasy colors, and children's understanding and feeling of the world always rely on imagination and fantasy. Fundamentally speaking, fairy tales do not focus on the possibility of things, but on the satisfaction of wishes, and "paradoxical" is the rule that fairy tales should follow. The fairy tale of human-animal transformation is the ultimate expression of desire, is an idealized and artistic presentation, and reflects the original fairy tale creation thinking mode of "isomorphism in children's hearts".

## 2.2. Animality of Children's Thinking

Darwin's theory of evolution proposed that humans and animals are descended from the same ancestors, and Freud pointed out that humans have an "animal ID" [3] That is, human beings exist in the animal side. Man evolved from animals, inevitably both animal and human nature, the two opposites and unity, struggle and transformation. Compared with adults, children's thinking is generated through direct observation, contact and feeling of things, and their animality is more obvious, but they are difficult to perceive and understand their own animality, and it is difficult to explain and control their instinctive desires. The image metaphor caused by the fairy tale of human-animal transformation solves this problem and shows the children that there is an internal connection between human and animal. Through the narration of fairy tales, the inner changes of children are made visible by means of transformation, in which they understand the relationship between themselves and the world. Therefore, a large number of human and animal transformation stories appear in fairy tales, aiming to reveal the animal nature of children, showing that behind the barbaric and low power is the natural heart nature and happiness needs of children. However, children also worry that too strong animal nature will devour human nature, so the fairy tale of human-animal transformation explains that the period of becoming an animal is just a dormant period of becoming a better person through the basic transformation mode of "human-animal-human", so as to dispel children's worries and show the process of completing this change.

In *Little Brother and Little Sister*, the younger brother needs the sister's persuasion and warning to control his instinctive desire. After the risk of transformation is degraded, he no longer controls his instinctive desire, loses his rationality, meets the most basic physiological needs at the cost of becoming a deer, and is governed by the principle of happiness during the period of becoming a deer, indicating that the animal nature of children is stronger than human nature. The penis is a symbol of animality. The older sister is a representative of human nature, she can control her instinctive desires, refuse to succumb to selfish wishes, and persuade others to take care of her brother after he becomes a deer, indicating that children tend to be rational as they grow older, and human nature is stronger than animal nature.

## 2.3. Closeness of Relationship Between Man and Beast

Writing in *New Science*, Vico said: "The primitive ancestors of all peoples were the children of the developing human race, who created things according to their own ideas." [4] The survival of primitive people depended on animals. Because humans and animals had more similarities in appearance and living habits than other creatures, they believed that they were descended from animals. Gradually developed the "law of interpenetration" It is believed that humans and animals can communicate with each other and even transform each other, which gives animals divinity. Under the control of animistic thinking, they believe that powerful animals are the embodiment of corresponding gods [5] Thus, worship of animals is generated, and through analogy and projection, etc. Making oneself possess the power of animals even more than the power of animals themselves, this breeds the deformed thinking mode of human beings, creates the story of human and animal transformation, and intentionally manifests their "animal nature" for the characters in the story.

## 3. Universal Commonness of Human and Animal Transformation in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*

### 3.1. Human to Beast Transformation Mode

Among the 37 stories, 34 stories have humans changing into beasts, indicating that human changing into beasts is the main mode of transformation in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. The transformation of man into beast means that man loses his identity as a human being, and the most basic is to lose the human body. The loss of human form points to the disappearance of the objective entity that exists in human form, the assimilation of human and animal, and the blurring of the boundary between human and animal in appearance. The transformation mode of human into beast is in line with the thinking characteristics of children's "animism", so that the hidden animal nature of children can be recognized through transformation, and it is reasonable for children to exercise the same barbaric and low power as animals, and to satisfy their own spirit of play.

In *Little Brother and Little Sister*, based on the analogical thinking shared by ancient and modern human beings, the lively and lovely little brother becomes a deer with similar personality characteristics to its own, and the naive and pure nature of playing games is released through the body of the deer. The fawn eats grass from its sister's hand and "always jumps round her with joy"; It regardless of her sister's dissuasion, again and again to go to the hunting, it leaps in the forest, "really feel comfortable freely, it is happiness", and rely on his own as large, game under the hunter's bow and arrow, even if wounded feet, when it is "heard trumpeter and hunters hunting ho ho ho's shouts, can't quiet down", The little sister has been warning it to go out very likely to lose the danger of life, but it can not control the animal ID, "I can not stand it, must go to participate!" "Then I will die of boredom in the house!" "As soon as I heard the hunting horn, I felt my heart fly away!" The vivid language is in line with the stage of children's physical and mental development. Through this fairy tale, it reveals the innate animality of children and shows

children that there is an inherent connection between humans and animals.

### 3.2. Growth Transformation Mode

According to the purpose of deformation, there are three types of deformation: growth type, hedge type and punishment type. [6] Avoidance refers to avoiding danger. The transformations in *Three Golden Locks of the Devil*, *Bird Foundling*, *Lover Roland*, *The children of Two Kings* and *The Water Demon in the Pond* are all to avoid danger to save lives and to be risk-averse. The metamorphoses in *Fitchell's Strange Bird* and *The Lily* are to punish the bad guys, to punish the metamorphoses; The rest are growth deformation. The protagonists in such stories are deformed not because there is evil in human nature, nor because they are punished, but because they are deformed by magic or cursed by bad people. After their transformation, they have experienced a series of tests. After suffering physical and mental hardships, they do not remain depressed, but actively face them, grow up in the suffering, hide and weaken the "animal nature", and finally pass the test. The human form is restored, the soul is reborn. Growth is an important ideological theme and value function of fairy tales. Children need to grow up from ignorance to gradually build up their cognition and order of the world. In the fairy tale of human-animal transformation, the hero becomes a human again and encounters various hardships. We can regard it as a kind of crisis encountered on the road of children's growth. When the hero experiences growth, he can restore his human form. [7] Therefore, under the basic transformation mode of "human-animal-human", the final transformation into human is a symbol of growth, and the fairy tale of human-animal transformation highlights the ethical significance of growth.

In *Hans My Hedgehog*, the half-human, half-hedgehog boy is not loved by his parents, and the survival dilemma on the edge makes him choose to risk his home and go into the forest. In fairy tales, leaving home symbolizes children's appeal for independence and is a representative of children's coming-of-age ceremony. The forest is full of unknowns, a metaphor for the complex and seductive reality of society, and a place where children need to "know myself". In the forest, the boy learns to play Musical Instruments and herd cattle, and is able to support himself, which shows that he has the ability to survive independently and the way to entertain himself. He met two lost Kings, found the way home for them, and was promised. But the first king was punished for his treachery, and the plot was set up to serve the ordeal he had to go through to achieve true transformation. The second king kept his promise, and the boy underwent a baptism of fire and took on human form. A boy who is half human and half hedgehog has both animal and human factors. Only by growing up and achieving his own perfection and transcendence can he eliminate animal factors and become a real man.

## 4. Ideological Connotation of Human and Animal Transformation in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*

### 4.1. Possibility of Miracles

*Grimm's Fairy Tales* originated in 19th century Germany, which was torn apart by war, and the linguistic and cultural differences among the numerous principalities prevented national unity. In folk fairy tales, there is a narrative mode - "Man becomes beast - suffering - to be saved", that is, the plot

is set according to "balance - imbalance - balance", which implies that Germany will be saved after experiencing various hardships, and it must have a strong will and a positive spirit when it is in trouble. Back to the fairy tale itself, the object of deformation is almost all children or young people, they go through hardships, restore the human form, and have a perfect ending, get the salvation of life and self-transcendence, this eternal happy happy ending brings children the pleasure of reading. Humans are in a weak position compared to supernatural forces such as magic, witchcraft, and curses, but they are able to manifest themselves through transfiguration and achieve impossible miracles. This is a positive affirmation of the value of human existence, and the highest meaning of human existence is to create meaning. He experienced the hardships of his parents' rejection, living alone in the forest, being cheated and biting the hand that fed him, etc. However, he returned the results of his hard work in the forest to his family and villagers by virtue of his pure kindness, perseverance, hard work and wisdom, and helped the two Kings out of the forest. Finally, he married the king's daughter as his wife and became the new king. To achieve eternal happiness, to realize the possibility of miracles.

### 4.2. Intention on Punish Evil and Promote Good

In the Metamorphosis story, all the evil people are punished and all the good people have a perfect ending. Deformation is closely connected with human nature, "In Western literature and culture, human animal nature has always been an explanation of human evil" [8] The characters in *Grimm's Fairy Tales* are all flat characters with no complex and specific personalities, but are simply naive, kind, hard-working, or vicious, evil, and lazy conceptualization. Such single characters precisely represent the two poles of good and evil in human nature. However, fairy tales do not simply show the division of the two poles of human nature, but inform readers of the spirit of punishing evil and promoting good through deformation. For example, in *Three Little People in the Forest*, the queen who turns into a duck returns to human form because of her kindness and sincerity, and the bad people are also punished by the application of punishment - the stepmother and her daughter are "pressed into the bucket, the lid is nailed down, and the bucket is rolled down the hillside until it is rolled into the middle of the river"; In *Six Swans*, the princess's six brothers are transformed into swans, the princess needs six years not to laugh, not to speak, and to sew six shirts with green chrysanthemum to save his brother, the princess with amazing perseverance and the cost of putting herself in danger to free her brother from the control of magic, with lovers and relatives "happy and peaceful life for many, many years," while the vicious mother-in-law "is punished, Be tied to the stake and burned to ashes ", *Grimm's Fairy Tales* is in the story mode of "punishing evil and promoting good", showing that evil is destroyed and purified by good.

### 4.3. Idea of Equality

Human beings and animals are obviously interdependent, which reflects the idea of equality of all things in human beings and the construction of a community of destiny in which human beings coexist harmoniously with nature. Human beings do not think that they are the master of all things and do not grasp the privileges in the hierarchy of nature. Driven by this concept, deformation is not terrible for

people in fairy tales, deformation is just a different way of life, and sometimes deformation even means a new birth. For example, in *Juniper Tree*, the boy has lost his life, but through the magical power of the juniper tree, he becomes a bird, lives in the life form of a bird, and finally comes back to life in the fire, so "death is only a transition from one form to another, and the primitive people can display their inherent innocence to escape or avoid death." The way is to transform "[9], which implies the fairy tale concept of equality of all things. In fairy tales, deformation does not mean fear and escape, but another expression and experience of life, revealing human's understanding and pursuit of equality in all things.

## 5. Conclusion

There is rationality and necessity in the story of the transformation of man and beast in *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. These stories are the crystallization of folklore, with important cultural value, reflecting human's reverence for nature and animals, and also metaphorical to various moral concepts. For children, conveying entertainment and educational functions, human-animal transformation is not only a magical experience, but also a test for the protagonist.

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