



RE-READING SELECTED FAIRY TALES AS SEXIST PSYCHOANALYTIC STORIES WITH REFERENCE TO CINDERELLA COMPLEX

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Abstract:

Fairy tales, predominantly the first genre we encounter as a child, still fascinate us as adults. What do we not know of fairy tales?

Fairy tales are fictional stories that often involve magical or supernatural elements and are typically passed down through generations as a form of folklore. These tales are commonly associated with children's literature but can be enjoyed by people of all ages. Fairy tales often feature moral lessons or themes and typically revolve around characters such as princesses, princes, witches, fairies, talking animals, and mythical creatures. They take place in imaginary settings and often involve elements like quests, transformations, and happily ever after.

The term "Cinderella complex" refers to a psychological concept inspired by the story of Cinderella. Coined by Colette Dowling in her book "The Cinderella Complex" published in 1981, the term refers to a set of subconscious fears and behaviors that some women may experience. The Cinderella complex suggests that women may have an unconscious desire to be rescued, taken care of, or dependent on others, similar to the way Cinderella is rescued by the prince in the fairy tale. It implies a fear of independence, self-sufficiency, and a lack of belief in one's abilities and strengths.

Research has been done in numerous areas of fairy tales but the genre enchanting the way it is, is studied even to this day, this paper aims to evaluate fairy tales in a different dimension by analyzing through the clubbing together of two predominantly used approaches psychoanalysis and feminism. The analysis of the psyche of traditional female protagonists in two selected fairy tales, Rapunzel and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs by the Grimm Brothers shows the presence of characters wound up in Cinderella Complex which acts as an agent of sexism.

Index Terms – FAIRY TALES, CINDERELLA COMPLEX, PSYCHE, SEXISM

I. INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes. Therefore, their value for the scientific investigation of the unconscious exceeds that of all other material. They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form. In this pure form, the archetypal images afford us the best clues to the understanding of the processes going on in the collective psyche. In myths or legends, or any other more elaborate mythological material, we get at the basic patterns of the human psyche through an overlay of cultural material. But in fairy tales there is much less specific conscious cultural material, and therefore they mirror the basic patterns of the psyche more clearly. (Von Franz, The Interpretation of Fairy Tales)

A fairy tale is a short story that belongs to the folklore genre. Such stories typically feature magic, enchantments, and mythical or fanciful beings. Studying fairy tales as a genre gives insight into how it is not just stories but stories that is a manifestation of the deep fears and dark desires of the collective human psyche, this is what makes the genre relevant to this day tremendously and is also the basis of one of the most famous production companies, Walt Disney, for the movie adaptations, contemporary as well as older versions of fairy tale collections are equally considered and are loved by children and adults. Though Walt Disney and Netflix have made numerous adaptations of fairy tales, the genre seems to be the most famishing one in children's reading, though fairy tales are often associated with children, they can be enjoyed by adults as well. In fact, many classic fairy tales were originally intended for adult audiences, containing deeper themes and moral lessons that resonate with readers of all ages. Fairy tales can offer enchanting and imaginative narratives that captivate adult readers, while also providing opportunities for introspection and reflection on timeless human experiences.

Adult-oriented fairy tales often explore complex themes such as love, loss, personal growth, morality, and the human condition. They may delve into the darker and more mature subject matter, addressing the complexities of relationships, the challenges of adulthood, and the pursuit of one's dreams. These stories may also incorporate elements of fantasy, magic, and folklore, creating a sense of wonder and escapism that appeals to adult readers.

Furthermore, fairy tales have been reimagined and adapted in various ways to cater to adult audiences. Authors have written retellings and adaptations that infuse the original tales with more nuanced characters, deeper psychological exploration, and contemporary social commentary. Such adaptations can offer fresh perspectives on familiar stories, making them relevant and engaging for adult readers.

Overall, fairy tales have a timeless quality that transcends age, and they continue to inspire and resonate with adults by tapping into universal human experiences and desires and though many works from different genres are derived from fairy tales, the origin of the same is still unknown. This is mainly because fairy tales originated as telling tales and unlike the written texts, oral versions are hard to be traced back to their origin.

Fascinating the way, it is, many critics have studied the genre with respect to different approaches across centuries, the literary fairy tale became a scholarly interest in the 19th C, and since then fairy tales have been critically studied from different perspectives, no critical approach can be given a credit point more because every approach shows the genre in a new light.

The psychoanalytic approach to fairy tales involves analyzing these narratives through the lens of psychological theories, particularly those developed by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. This approach explores the hidden meanings, symbols, and psychological dynamics present in fairy tales, aiming to uncover unconscious desires, fears, and conflicts within the individual and the collective psyche. Psychoanalytic scholars examine the symbols and archetypes present in fairy tales to uncover their deeper psychological meanings. These symbols may represent unconscious desires, fears, or psychological states. (Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*)

For example, the wicked stepmother in "Cinderella" can be seen as a symbol of the repressed or destructive aspects of the maternal figure. The method examines how the fulfillment of desires or resolution of conflicts is represented in the narrative. Fairy tales can serve as a space for individuals to explore their fantasies, fears, and desires in a symbolic form. It also employs Freudian concepts such as the Oedipus complex (for boys) and the Electra complex (for girls), they are often applied to analyze the dynamics between characters in fairy tales. These concepts involve the child's unconscious sexual desires and conflicts with their parents and can be seen reflected in stories such as "Snow White" or "Hansel and Gretel." Predominantly the Psychoanalytic interpretations of fairy tales often examine the psychological development of characters and their journey toward self-realization. Fairy tales can be seen as allegories for the psychological maturation process, exploring themes of identity formation, individualization, and integration of the shadow self. It also focuses on the repression of desires and the existence of taboo elements. They explore how societal norms and cultural restrictions shape the narrative and characters, as well as the consequences of repressed desires or impulses. Critics argue that these interpretations may oversimplify or impose adult psychological concepts onto stories that were originally created for children. Nonetheless, the psychoanalytic approach provides a framework for delving into the symbolic and psychological dimensions of fairy tales, offering insights into the deeper psychological layers and universal human experiences embedded within these narratives. (Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*)

Feminist criticism of fairy tales focuses on the representation of women and gender roles within these traditional stories. Feminist scholars argue that many fairy tales perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes, reinforcing traditional gender roles and promoting the subordination of women. Feminist critics often criticize the stories for the embodiment of Stereotypical Gender Roles, that fairy tales often portray women as passive, weak, and in need of rescue by a male character. This reinforces the idea that women are inferior to men and should be dependent on them. It also promotes Limited Agency among women, that the Female characters in fairy tales are often limited in their agency and have little control over their own lives. This reinforces the idea that women are not capable of making their own decisions and need to be controlled by men. The tales often foreground an idealized beauty, that's Fairy tales often promote the idea that physical beauty is the most important attribute for women. This reinforces the idea that women's worth is based on their appearance rather than their abilities or character. Moreover, fairy tales are an embodiment of Patriarchal Values as Fairy tales often reinforce patriarchal values, such as male dominance and control over women. This reinforces the idea that men are entitled to power and women should be submissive.

This paper aims to club together the components of two prominent approaches, the Cinderella complex from the psychoanalytical approach and sexism from feminist criticism of fairy tales. The study aims at analyzing fairy tales as sexist, sexism is discrimination based on one's sex or gender. This is mainly directed towards the female and is promoted through gender roles and stereotypes, it is a belief that one gender is superior to the other, in this case, the superiority of the male. In the selected fairy tales, the story poses sexism because of the presence of the protagonist characters wound up in the Cinderella complex facilitated through stereotypically gendered archetypes. The project has taken three prominent fairy tales, Rapunzel, Snow White, and the Seven Dwarfs from "Grimm's Tales for Young and Old" written by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The selected fairy tales are analyzed in the light of the Cinderella Complex, a psychological phenomenon that was formulated and popularized by Collette Dowling in her popular book "The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence".

II. Fairy Tales: a genre for the young and the old

Psychoanalysis in Fairy Tales

Fairy tales have captivated audiences for centuries with their enchanting narratives, but beneath their surface lies a rich psychological landscape that can be explored through the lens of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud's ground-breaking theories provide a framework to delve into the hidden meanings and symbols embedded within these tales.

Fairy tales, with their enduring popularity and widespread cultural influence, often rely on archetypes to convey universal characters and themes. Archetypes are recurring patterns or symbols that tap into the collective unconscious, representing fundamental human experiences and aspirations. By recognizing and understanding these archetypes, we can gain deeper insights into the profound messages and psychological resonance of fairy tales. Archetypes form the foundation of fairy tales, encapsulating timeless human experiences, struggles, and aspirations. From the hero's journey to the battle between good and evil, these archetypes resonate with

our deepest desires and fears. By recognizing and exploring these archetypes, we can appreciate the universal themes and psychological insights offered by fairy tales. They serve as mirrors reflecting our own journeys, offering wisdom, inspiration, and a deeper understanding of the human condition.

Fairy tales, with their enduring popularity across cultures and generations, can be seen as powerful representations of the collective human psyche. They tap into universal themes, symbols, and archetypes that resonate with people from various backgrounds, reflecting shared psychological experiences and desires. Fairy tales address timeless themes that are common to the human experience, such as love, loss, identity, transformation, and the search for meaning. These themes touch upon fundamental aspects of human existence, appealing to a broad audience and reflecting shared emotional and psychological struggles. Characters and their struggles resonate with people across cultures and ages, illustrating shared psychological and moral dilemmas. Rich symbolism and imagery, drawing upon universal symbols that tap into the collective unconscious. The use of symbols, such as the forest, the mirror, or the enchanted object, evokes deep-seated emotions and meanings that transcend cultural boundaries. These symbols connect with our subconscious and evoke a sense of resonance and recognition. Fairy tales often depict psychological journeys of self-discovery, transformation, and personal growth. The protagonists navigate challenges, face their fears, and overcome obstacles, reflecting the innate human desire for inner exploration and development. These journeys mirror the psychological processes of individuation and integration, resonating with individuals' longing for self-realization. Often conveying moral and ethical messages that reflect collective societal values. These tales provide narratives that explore concepts of justice, kindness, courage, and the consequences of one's actions. By addressing ethical dilemmas and moral choices, fairy tales provide a framework for understanding and shaping societal norms and values.

The paper aims to criticize the hero archetype who represents the protagonist who embarks on a quest or faces challenges to achieve a goal. They embody courage, determination, and the ability to overcome adversity. Examples include the character of Prince Charming, who rescues the damsel in distress. The damsel in distress archetype explores themes of vulnerability, longing, and the search for love and security.

Gender stereotypes in Fairy Tales

Gender stereotypes as a literary theory examine how gender roles, expectations, and representations are portrayed in literature. This theory analyzes the ways in which literature reinforces or challenges societal norms and constructs regarding femininity, masculinity, and the relationships between genders. It explores the depiction of characters, their behaviors, motivations, and the power dynamics between them. This theory examines how male and female characters are portrayed in literature. It looks at the traits, roles, and behaviors attributed to each gender and considers whether they reinforce traditional gender stereotypes or challenge them. Literary analysis of gender stereotypes explores the use of language and linguistic devices in literature to convey gendered meanings. It examines how language can reinforce or subvert gender norms and how characters' speech patterns and dialogue contribute to their characterization. In literature, it often involves power dynamics between male and female characters. This theory explores how power is distributed, negotiated, or challenged within relationships and how it reflects or challenges real-world gender dynamics. In literature, it manifests through the use of stereotypical roles and archetypes, such as the damsel in distress, the strong hero, the nurturing mother, or the aggressive villain. This theory analyzes how these roles shape character development and narrative outcomes. With the coming of this theory in literature, stereotypes can be subverted or challenged by authors who offer alternative representations of gender, break traditional expectations, or critique oppressive gender norms. This theory examines instances of resistance to gender stereotypes and their potential impact on readers' perceptions and understandings of gender. By employing gender stereotypes literary theory, scholars and readers can critically analyze the ways in which literature reflects, reinforces, or challenges societal assumptions and expectations about gender. This approach sheds light on the complex interplay between literature and gender dynamics, raising awareness and inviting discussions about gender representation, equality, and social change. (Butler, Gender Trouble)

Sexism in literary theory refers to the presence of discriminatory attitudes, assumptions, and practices within the field of literary analysis and criticism. Many traditional literary theories have been shaped by an androcentric perspective, which places male experiences, narratives, and authors at the center while marginalizing or disregarding female perspectives. This results in an imbalance and exclusion of women's voices in the canon and academic discourse. Sexism in literary theory can be observed in the use of gendered language and concepts that reinforce stereotypes and unequal power dynamics between genders. This includes assumptions about women's supposed "inferiority" or the prioritization of male-authored works as the norm. It also has a tendency to essentialize and stereotype women characters, reducing them to limited or demeaning roles, archetypes, or one-dimensional representations. This can perpetuate harmful gender norms and restrict the exploration of women's diverse experiences and complexities. Sexism is reflected in the underrepresentation of women authors, critics, and scholars in the canon and academic discourse. This underrepresentation limits the diversity of perspectives and hampers a comprehensive understanding of literary works. It manifests through the silencing and exclusion of women's voices, both historically and in contemporary scholarship. Women authors and their works may be undervalued, dismissed, or overlooked, contributing to a perpetuation of male dominance in the literary field. Addressing sexism in literary theory involves challenging and deconstructing the biases, assumptions, and practices that perpetuate gender inequality. It requires promoting gender equality in the canon, diversifying the voices and perspectives included in literary analysis, and critically examining the impact of gender biases on interpretations and evaluations of literature. By adopting more inclusive and intersectional approaches, scholars can work towards dismantling sexism in literary theory and fostering a more equitable and diverse field of study.

II. Damsel in Distress

Cinderella Complex

The term is accredited to Colette Dowling, who is best known for her work "The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence", it was through her book that she formulated, established, and popularised this widely accepted term and psychological phenomena of the Cinderella complex.

The complex is named after the fairy tale character of Cinderella, in the story the female protagonist, Cinderella is forced to do all the housework for her stepmother and stepsisters, and she is treated poorly because she is not as wealthy as they are. She longs for a better life, but she is powerless to change her situation until a fairy godmother appears and grants her wish to attend the royal ball. At the ball, Cinderella captures the heart of the prince with her beauty and grace, and he seeks her out to be his wife. However, Cinderella is unable to save herself from her cruel family, and it is only the intervention of the prince that saves her, he rescues her from a life of poverty and abuse by marrying her and providing her with a happily ever after.

As the infamous fictional character the phenomenon refers to an ideal portrayal of femininity, where a woman is expected to be compassionate, petite, beautiful, forgiving, mannered, polite, and supportive of people in her life, but centrally and ironically incapable of taking care of herself and crafting the situation to better her circumstances or to escape from an abusive environment. Instead, she is conditioned to feel the need to be protected and taken care of by another, usually the man. This stereotypical conditioning of women to long for help and pity their sorrowful existence rather than acting can be observed in traditional as well as contemporary fiction and movies. Dowling examines the deleterious effects of this socialization on the psychology of girls and women., which is relevant even in the 21st C.

The Cinderella Complex is a psychological phenomenon that refers to a set of unrealistic and harmful ideologies that some women hold about relationships and personal success, the belief system associated with the Cinderella Complex often involves women feeling that they are incomplete without a man and that their primary goal in life should be to find a man who will rescue them from their current circumstances. Women who adhere to this complex may feel that they are not capable of achieving their goals or finding happiness on their own, they tend to believe that they need to be rescued by a man in order to achieve happiness and fulfilment in life. This belief system can have negative effects on women's self-esteem, as they may feel that they are not good enough on their own and need a man to validate their worth. It can also lead to unhealthy relationships, as women may enter into relationships with men who are controlling or abusive, they may also be more likely to stay in these relationships, even if they are unhappy or are being mistreated because they believe that they need a man to take care of them and cannot survive on their own. Women bound in this web are negatively influenced and impacted because first, it can lead to a sense of helplessness and dependence on men, which can undermine women's confidence and self-esteem. Women who believe in the Cinderella Complex may feel that they are not capable of achieving success on their own, and may therefore not pursue their own ambitions.

The Cinderella Complex can also have negative effects on women's financial independence. Women who believe in the Cinderella Complex may not take responsibility for their own finances and may rely on men to provide for them. This can leave them vulnerable to financial abuse and can also limit their options in life, as they may not be able to pursue certain careers or opportunities if they are dependent on a man for financial support.

To overcome the Cinderella Complex, women need to challenge the beliefs that underlie it. They need to recognize that they are capable of achieving success and happiness on their own and that they do not need a man to rescue them. This can involve setting goals for themselves, pursuing their own interests and passions, and building strong relationships with other women who support and encourage them. In addition, women need to be aware of the warning signs of unhealthy relationships and be willing to leave these relationships if they are not fulfilling or safe. They also need to take responsibility for their own finances and work towards financial independence, so that they have the freedom to pursue their own goals and dreams. The Cinderella Complex, therefore, is a set of stereotypical harmful belief systems that can limit women's potential and lead to unhealthy relationships and financial dependence. Women need to challenge this belief system and recognize their own strengths and capabilities, in order to achieve true happiness and fulfillment in life.

IV. Cinderella complex in Fairy Tales

Rapunzel

Rapunzel is a fairy tale character who has been portrayed as a victim in various adaptations of the story. In the original Grimm Brothers' version of the tale, Rapunzel is taken from her parents by a witch and locked away in a tower, where she is forced to let down her long hair so the witch can climb up and visit her. In many adaptations of the story, Rapunzel is portrayed as a helpless victim who is completely dependent on the witch and eventually needs to be rescued by a prince.

Rapunzel's victimization begins with her parents' decision to give her up to the witch in exchange for her mother's craving for a herb that grows in the witch's garden. This sets the stage for Rapunzel's captivity, as she is taken from her parents and forced to live in isolation in a tower. Throughout the story, Rapunzel is portrayed as vulnerable and helpless, with no control over her own life or fate. She is completely dependent on the witch for food, clothing, and companionship, and is not allowed to leave the tower. Rapunzel's victimization is further perpetuated by the prince's role in the story, the prince is portrayed as Rapunzel's rescuer, who saves her from the tower and the witch's clutches. While the prince's actions may seem heroic, they also reinforce the idea that Rapunzel is incapable of saving herself and needs a man to rescue her.

In conclusion, Rapunzel is often portrayed as a victim in adaptations of the fairy tale, as she is taken from her parents and forced to live in captivity in a tower. While she does display some agency in the story, her helplessness and dependence on others are emphasized throughout.

Therefore Rapunzel can be analyzed as a perfect example of a character with a Cinderella complex, she is portrayed as a victim who is dependent on others for her happiness and well-being, this portrayal of Rapunzel emphasizes the idea that women are incomplete without a man and need a man to validate their worth. The presence of the Cinderella complex in "Rapunzel" is what indicates the story as one that embarks and promotes sexism, the main issue that indicates sexism in the story is how the female protagonist is portrayed. As understood Rapunzel is often seen as a helpless victim who is dependent on the male character, the prince, to save her from her predicament. Her only value in the story seems to be her beauty and her ability to attract the prince's attention. Furthermore, the wicked witch who locks Rapunzel in the tower is portrayed as evil and manipulative, perpetuating the idea that women who are not beautiful or desirable are to be feared and shunned. This reinforces the idea that a woman's worth is based solely on her physical appearance and that those who do not conform to societal beauty standards are not deserving of love and respect.

The prince in the story is also portrayed as a hero who comes to rescue Rapunzel from her imprisonment. While his actions are certainly admirable, it reinforces the idea that men are the ones who hold the power and are responsible for protecting and saving women.

Overall, the story of Rapunzel can be seen as perpetuating gender stereotypes and sexism. It reinforces the idea of the Cinderella complex that women are helpless and dependent on men, and that a woman's worth is based solely on her physical appearance.

Snow White and the seven dwarfs

Snow White is another fairy tale character who is often portrayed as a victim. In the original story, which was written by the Brothers Grimm in the 19th century, Snow White is the victim of her stepmother's jealousy and cruelty.

The story tells of a beautiful princess named Snow White who is hated by her stepmother because she is more beautiful than she is. The stepmother orders a huntsman to take Snow White into the woods and kill her, but he cannot bring himself to do it and instead leaves her to fend for herself. Snow White eventually comes across the home of seven dwarfs, who take her in and care for her. However, her stepmother discovers that Snow White is still alive and creates a poisoned apple and tricks Snow White into eating it, causing her to fall into a death-like sleep. The dwarfs, heartbroken, place her in a glass coffin to mourn her. One day, a prince happens upon the glass coffin and is captivated by Snow White's beauty. He asks the dwarfs if he can take her to his castle, and they agree. While transporting the coffin, one of the prince's servants stumbles, jolting the coffin and dislodging the piece of apple from Snow White's throat. She awakens from her sleep, and the prince declares his love for her. They celebrate their love, and the Evil Queen meets her deserved fate during the wedding. Snow White and the prince live happily ever after, ruling the kingdom together.

In this story, Snow White is clearly a victim of her stepmother's jealousy and cruelty. She is hunted down and targeted for her beauty and is then forced to flee into the dangerous woods, where she could easily have been killed by wild animals or other dangers. Her only refuge is the home of the seven dwarfs, who offer her shelter and protection. When her stepmother tricks her into eating the poisoned apple, Snow White is again a victim. She falls into a death-like sleep and can do nothing to save herself. It is only the intervention of the prince, who recognizes her beauty and awakens her with a kiss, that saves her from a tragic fate.

Overall, Snow White can be seen as a victim of circumstances beyond her control. She is hunted down and targeted for her beauty and is then forced to rely on the kindness of strangers to survive. When her stepmother tries to kill her, Snow White is unable to save herself and must rely on the intervention of others to save her.

While Snow White is not the same character as Cinderella, she can be used as an example of the Cinderella complex because she shares most of the same characteristics. Like Cinderella, Snow White is portrayed as a passive and helpless victim who needs to be rescued by a man. The story preoccupies with physical appearance and portrays the protagonist with an extreme desire for a rescuer, moreover, the character lacks assertiveness. This portrayal of Snow White reinforces the idea that women are helpless and passive and need to be rescued by men. It also emphasizes the importance of physical beauty and perpetuates the idea that a woman's worth is based on her appearance.

The story can be analyzed as one that promotes sexism as it strongly embodies the characteristic features of sexism in it, Snow White is depicted as a passive character who is beautiful, obedient, and subservient. She is saved by the prince, who comes to her rescue and awakens her from a deep sleep with a kiss. This reinforces the stereotype of women as weak and in need of rescue by a man. The portrayal of the evil stepmother is also problematic. She is depicted as jealous and vain, and her worth as a woman is solely tied to her appearance. Her desire to be the "fairest of them all" leads her to try and kill Snow White, reinforcing the idea that women are in constant competition with each other and that their worth is tied to their physical appearance. Additionally, the story reinforces traditional gender roles, with the dwarfs taking on stereotypically male occupations like mining and Snow White performing stereotypically female tasks like cooking and cleaning.

Conclusion

In many fairy tales, including Cinderella, Rapunzel, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty, female characters are often portrayed as passive and helpless, waiting for a man to rescue them. These characters are typically beautiful and virtuous, and their worth is often defined by their physical appearance. This portrayal of female characters in fairy tales reinforces the idea that women are passive and helpless and need to be rescued by men, it also perpetuates the idea that physical beauty is the most important trait for women to have. In both the stories analyzed, the female characters live their life "happily ever after" as a gift from "the prince charming" and this is also facilitated only through their ravishing beauty.

It's important to note that this stereotypical portrayal of women is observed not alone in fairy tales but in every other genre, this is mainly because the archetype is embedded in the collective consciousness of humanity, moreover, fairy tales were mostly written by men ages before and the same concept perpetuates even in works written in the 21st C. In modern society, the Cinderella complex is often seen in the way that women are portrayed in media, such as in movies, television shows, and advertisements. Women are often depicted as passive and dependent on men for their happiness and success, and their worth is often defined by their physical appearance.

Additionally, many women today still feel pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, such as being a caregiver and putting the needs of others before their own. This can lead to a lack of assertiveness and a belief that they need a man to rescue them from their problems. However, there are also many women who are challenging these stereotypes and embracing their independence and strength. They are breaking down barriers and proving that women can be successful and happy without relying on a man to save them. It is important to recognize and celebrate these women, and to continue to work towards a society where women are valued for their abilities and achievements, rather than just their physical appearance.

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