

# **THE SLEEPING BEAUTY WAKES UP**

A Feminist Interpretation of Fairy Tales

**Sreetanwi Chakraborty**

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By  
**Sreetanwi Chakraborty**

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Dedicated  
to  
*My family & my dearest students*

## Foreword

A Fairy tale, Wonder tale, Magic tale or Marchen is part of a folklore genre that germinates from the Collective Unconscious of a race, a culture, a Nation. It moves in a dream world teeming with the marvelous. As they stem from archetypal human emotions and experiences, fairytales with common plots, motifs and characters are found across a variety of cultures. The *Sleeping Beauty Wakes Up: A Feminist Interpretation of Fairy Tales* by Prof. Sreetanwi Chakraborty explores the cultural and social influence on fairytales, highlighting questions of gender stereotypes, female victimization and patriarchal codification of female desire. Probing into the cogent symbols and archetypes frequently used in such tales, like the garden, the glass coffin, the mirror and elements like fire and ice, the author points out the incarceration and passive objectification of the female body and soul in traditional fairytales. Most significantly, she brings up quite pertinent discussions on the re-workings of traditional fairytales by women authors such as Angela Carter, Jean Ingelow, Sara Maitland et al towards a subversion of the established canon in search of an alternative female narrative. This book is definitely a sincere attempt towards a deconstruction of feminine archetypes such as the Angel and the Monster along with an assertion of identity of the woman author. In its effort

to create a resisting reader, able to dissect fairytales in a new light, Prof. Chakraborty's critical discourse surely makes a serious contribution.

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illustrating and formatting this book. I really admire his knowledge and subtle inputs and examples, as well as all the philosophical nuances, which we had discussed all throughout this project. He has always been a great friend, philosopher and guide, both in personal and also in professional life.

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*I left my love in the Fairy Glen  
Home of the little fairy men  
I met her there on a July night  
When a Summer moon was beaming bright.*

**Francis Duggan**

I had always been fascinated with fairy and folktales as a child, and as I grew older, the sheer enormity of their many-layeredness, that evoked a multiplicity of interpretations, lured me into exploring their labyrinths. And now, sometimes, on a casual afternoon, tottering across the unsteady edges of my infantile memory, I suddenly encounter a dream world, separate from, and incongruent with the current state of spiritual inertia, and instantly get transported to the puerile world of fairies, gnomes, elves, angels, demons, kings with mighty sceptres and queen with rubicund cheeks. Fairy tales that have the autonomy of creativity and the power to mesmerize us beyond the scientific realm—this needs reading and loving. Fairy tales are definitely meant to be cherished, and not to be dissected beyond comprehension, to unearth those materials, voices and emotions which were left unsaid. They were kept as a

veritable storehouse of fantasy stories that proclaimed the onset of a kingdom, cottages made of delicious chocolates, candy bars and gingerbreads, princes in silken robes wearing garters, crowns and coronets made of Topaz and Garnet, fairies, elves, nymphs fluttering flippantly and following five hundred fathoms under the furious seas and then gently caressing the princess's hair, the princess herself-the female protagonist (if she really was one!) who was soft, nimble, chaste, docile and the representation of the eternal beauty, and last but not the least, fairy tales incorporated the wicked, malicious and vindictive witch who stood out as the eminent repulsive female figure.

Feminist approaches to the interpretation of fairy tales have been instrumental in representing the form's potential for renegotiating and transforming categories of gender. Question may be raised on how women and women writers used, pondered upon, articulated and disseminated fairy tales. Did they remould them with an eye toward their capability of emancipation, recast them as autobiography, or dream out the passive plot of rescue by Prince Charming? Did they visualize themselves as assistants to their male counterparts? Did they see fairy tales as part of an aesthetic agenda, a ground for introspection, or as a lucrative means to earn their livelihood? This study will not just aim at giving a cogent argument regarding the Feminist approaches but it will also try to subvert and reconnect new forms

of culture, by unearthing the nuanced portions of traditional social values, myths and foibles associated with the myths.

It should be worthwhile mentioning that fairy tales have already formed an essential element of popular culture, social beliefs, and tradition and even, they form part of human consciousness. From our very own vernacular fairy tales in Bengali, told at bedtime by our grandparents to the dissemination of popular folk and fairy tales in America and England, Latin America, Russia, France, Poland, Turkey, Afghanistan and Africa, fairy tales are reproduced, moderated, modified as time moves on, and they clearly emphasize the variations and dichotomy in culture and gender-related issues. There are some modern versions of the older fairy tales which tend to challenge and subvert the conventions of older fairy tales and empower women through positive and active role models reincarnated through them. The art of storytelling is a part and parcel of every culture and even ours is no exception. There is an excessive regard for 'once upon a time, there lived a beautiful princess' and that the prince and princess 'lived happily ever after'. In fact, we still refer to some sort of marriages as 'fairy tale' ones, forgetting completely that the princess is never allocated her own private, individual and particular space. It is like an endless abyss, dismal and incongruent with all the previous nuptial dreams that generated her existence.

It will be quite illogical only to say that fairy tales

satisfy and satiate the play spirit of childhood, because, under an innocent garb of playfulness and jovial outburst, they are actually strong literary ammunitions that have relegated the women to background, for nearly centuries. The proper articulation of fairy tales gave rise to hostile social surroundings for females, and they crossed the barrier of being just the product of a people in a primitive stage when all the world is a wonder-sphere, to a sweltering melting pot of several cultures where dignity and subjectivity, as well as existence of women have been questioned and manipulated. According to most of the feminist critics, fairy tales seem to be impregnated with vague dread, a catastrophe that seems to befall only little girls. There are frightening male figures who are metamorphosed as wolves, and females are docile, creeping with fear, eclipsed and humiliated by the fiery passion and outburst of male strength. These critics generally recognize a method of codified behaviour, and tend to identify the problematic themes of unrealistic standards for women, female malleability and restriction of roles for women to marriage and motherhood. The cumulative effect, they say, materializes in 'repression', and the gender-based themes of males who are rewarded and females who suffer humiliation, loss of prestige and inner spirit.

In Marcia R. Lieberman's book *Someday My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy tale*, we find that Lieberman emphasizes limited

scope that these stories have - an analysis of those fairy tales that children actually read indicates that they serve to acculturate women to traditional social roles (line 185).<sup>1</sup> Her article can be embedded in the larger feminist debates on the biological nature or cultural constructedness of gender, and as she contemplates, children are often beguiled and are ascribed limited capacity to consider and recognize the explicit and implicit ideology transmitted by the text. This concept has also been re-affirmed and re-iterated by the Dutch feminist publishing house De Bonte Was (The Coloured Wash) and it echoes Lieberman's critique of the fairy tale ending: 'the fairy tale of marriage influences the life of all women, because from childhood onwards all of us have been presented with marriage as the future ideal.' The Dutch critic Eric Hulsens (1978)<sup>2</sup> in fact, echoes lieberman's title when he calls Snow White a 'twat who doesn't take her fate into her own hands for a single moment, but only gets saved because of her female charm.' However, there are few instances when the common trope where the hero must endanger his life to go on a quest to save the princess, is inverted. Instead of rescuing a maid from captivity, it is a maid who saves a prince from a terrible state of dungeon. For instance, in a Russian tale named The Feather of Finist the Falcon, it is shown how the story is inverted in favour of the potency, stamina, and supreme will power of the heroine. She not only chooses her own bridegroom and spends nights

with him, but also embarks upon a perilous journey to rescue the prince from a sorcerer queen. This story is, interestingly, female-driven to an enormous extent; there are basically only two male characters: Finist and the girl's father. All the other characters - the evil sisters, the helpful Baba Yagas ( in this story there are three of them), and the sorceress queen - are all women.

Another heroic character is from Russian heroic epics called Vasilisa Mikulishna. Her husband Staur offends Prince Vladimir and he is imprisoned. She dresses up as a Tatar emissary and using her cunning, dexterity and physical strength; she rescues her husband and is able to deceive the prince. But these are generally considered to be exceptional and new-age fairy tales. Cartoons, picture adaptations, new forms of storytelling and posters, as well as advertisements, put forward the fact that fairy tales are no longer just for the sake of a unidimensional reading. The body of female almost now coalesces with the body of a fairy tale and, it is now read keeping in mind one part of the 'resisting reader' also, to autopsy, cut, dissect and analyze fairy tales in a new light.

It is worth mentioning that in an intriguing essay in Elizabeth Wanning Harries' compilation of essays named *The Mirror Broken: Women's Autobiography and Fairy Tales*, it is shown that the most popular fairy tales like Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, heroines are mostly shown as involuntary elements, submissive, apparently dead, and often suffering from

the unbearable cases of somnambulism, dependent on the entrance of some prince for any form of animation and, for entry into a real life - however, it is just a real life which is not given any contours after the obligatory royal wedding. In fact, if we agree to this point, it is revealed how there was no further traces of the princesses after their so-called happy marriages. We purchase greeting cards which proclaim how we can live happily ever after with the woman or man of our choice, but no card display the story of 'what'? What exactly happens after the lovers are happily united? We can just remember the only scene that happens after this is a royal wedding, lavish titles, along with royal responsibilities which are conferred upon the prince, with the princess occupying only a limited, nominal, titular and ceremonial position, a mere appendage to the royal name, fame and authority, just like the socializing forces that make it mandatory for a male to be immune to all sorts of labour, problems, and he is expected to be smart and learn the livelihood to nourish and feed his wife and family. This idea percolated so deeply in parts of later writings also, that this resulted in the women 'in-thrall' concept of the later English, American and many other novels, where the women half-consciously submit to being male property, handed from father to suitor or husband, without complaint or volition. As Elizabeth Wanning Harries notes:

"Beauties slept in their woods, waiting for princes to come and wake them up, in their beds, in their glass

coffins, in their childhood forests like dead women. Beautiful, but passive, hence desirable: all mystery emanates from them.”<sup>3</sup>

In the large corpus of fairy tale scholarship since the 1960s, feminist criticism has done a substantial contribution in examining, interpreting and re-evaluating the Grimm tales. Simultaneously, they have been re-written countless times with an explicit or implicit feminist agenda. A comparison between ‘Snow White’ adaptations and emancipatory criticism shows that fairy tale criticism and fairy tale retellings have often addressed similar issues. Garrison Keillor’s *My Stepmother, Myself*, for example, shares with the author Andrea Dworken, a complete distrust and faithlessness of the prince’s fascination with Snow white (there is a concept of necrophilia attached to him), and with Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, a defence of the stepmother as victim of patriarchy can be seen. In retellings like Keillor’s, a double intertextual dialogue can be reconstructed. For example, on the one hand, there is the explicit intertextual link with, and a critique of the Grimm tale of ‘Snow White’ and also an implicit intertextual link between Keillor’s text and that of feminist fairy tale criticism. Fairy tales can be considered to be a “borderline” or transitional genre where they necessarily do not have a unidimensional pattern, but are amalgamations of folkloric tradition, quality, socio-cultural performance, and shaped and remoulded by

literary traditions with different social usage and users. Like a magic mirror, the fairy tale recognizes the true life story of the individuals, and they remain important elements in their symbolic resonance, in their logic. The 'mirror' is a symbol of unspoken natural occurrences, and communication medium between the natural world, and the psycho-social human world. There is a 'special effect' of ideological expectations and unspoken norms - a naturalizing technology that works hard at among other things, reproducing 'woman' as the mirror image of masculine desire. The female is both a victim as well as a despondent and psychologically unstable individual. Her blood, her experience, her dilemma is essentially categorized by the male world.

As creating form of cultural constructs (discussed in chapter 2 of this work), fairy tales definitely play a formidable role and they affect the way children are treated by their peers, adults and influence future behaviour expectations. As children grow up, they tend to utilize the information from their parents, peers, school literature and the media to form theories on how man and woman 'should' behave in particular to a social context. The sensitivity about good, bad, what it means to be a male, and what are the essential qualities of a female, penetrate well into their minds as promoted and exhibited through colourful pages of most of the fairy tales. Traits, occupational backgrounds, personality features of children all are powerful cultural agents

incorporated by the fairy tales. A large number of research studies conducted in United States reveal that repeated exposure to the stereotyped image of gender was likely to have a detrimental effect on the development of a child's self-esteem as well as his/her perceptions of his/her own and others' ability and potential (Lach and Peterson, *Gender Stereotypes in Children's Books, Their Prevalence and Influence on Cognitive and Affective Development*. Volume: 2, issue:2, 1990, Routledge Publications).<sup>4</sup>

What is important is that, in spite of all adaptations of Snow White in movies, cartoons, comics, posters, advertisements, there are certain changes, but the basic remains the same - the girl is given a shelter among robbers, assassins, giants, fairies and many other professions, but the fixing of Snow white remains homogeneously fixed all throughout in our imaginations. Similarly, in the dramatized version of the Innocent Persecuted Heroine, for example, we find variations of name but similarity in concepts.

However, as is evident in the 18th and 19th centuries, critically thinking women and men questioned the ideology of immutability of the predestined female and male role. Mary Wollstonecraft, Olympe de Gouges, Stuart Mill, Rosa Mayreder mostly critiqued the "female nature" that should prevent women from getting education and the right to vote. This complete process of change in the original role and function formation

of women is portrayed in a meticulous manner in the writings and rewritings of 20th century onwards. For example, in Ethel Johnston Phelps' book *Tatterhood and other Tales*, in the story *Tatterhood* we find how the two daughters are an examination in opposites. While *tatterhood* is "strong, raucous and careless, and was always racing about on her goat;" her clothes were begrimed, torn and mud-spattered, her hood in tatters, and "she insisted on wearing old clothes and the queen finally gave up and let her dress as she pleased."

What men fear perhaps is that, women do not want and remain satisfied with equality, but they want dominance. Therefore what is required is just a silence or muting of the female voice, so that it can be transferred to incoherent mumblings made by the witches, or else it is problematized by robbing the heroine of her speech power, enumerating that it is all a handiwork of a monstrous and diabolical witch figure. Their only preoccupation left therefore, is spinning or yearning for their princes to come. Hence, when a group of students were casually asked the following questions, the only answer that was easily available was the gender sensitization:

1. How princesses are usually portrayed at the start of a story? (*Beauty and the Beast*, *Rapunzel*, *Cinderella*, for example).
2. Towards the end of the story what makes *Cinderella* and *Snow White* happy? Why do you think that might be?

3. What do the princesses remind us of our real lives?
4. Can a prince and princess be single and live happily ever after? Why or why not? Do you know anyone who is single and happy?

It is a noteworthy piece of information that the extent of gender stereotype is considerably more in stories written exclusively for the consumption of the higher classes-the nobility and the aspiring middle class audience as in Perrault's tales than those that are closer to its folk origins as in the Brother Grimm's tales. While stories like *Aschenputtel* teaches young girl audience not of noble origin, not to hope to transgress their social class boundaries, *Cinderella* intends to inspire young girls to motivate themselves as prim and proper ladies so as to be one, if not in birth, then in behaviour and in virtues that one day will attract a prince to marry her.

Cultural influence of fairy tales, on a community is so large and unavoidable that when Cherland (1994)<sup>5</sup> studied younger girls and their reading of fiction both in and out of school, and found that the affluent lower middle class white girls she studied, she used their fictional reading to act out their culture's beliefs about girlhood, time and consumerism. Girls gradually began to exercise agency, ability and the spirit to act on the world around them, through their reading. It should also be noted that, gender stereotyping and cultural patterns

were extended to girls' playing of computer games also. In 2000, *The Sims* was released, and its follow up, *Sims 2* has become the top-selling computer game of all time. Along with traditional gamers, girls and women were buying and playing the game in record numbers. *The Sims* and its franchise, it has since been argued, is successful as a crossover hit for a number of reasons: its design team includes women, the game is based on the premise of an elaborate doll's house (much similar to the house made of candies, chocolates and other toffees in fairy tales); it provides varying and frequent interactions that appealed to female audience and it is essentially non-violent. And so, through a cumulative sense of shared gender identity, developmental stages in girlhood can provide bases from which girls come to know what it means or feels like, 'to be a girl'. But then, that concept too, is manipulated and mechanized by the patriarchal social norms and values that girls and girlhood loses its actual sense.

Apart from dissecting fairy tales for either their worth or vicious impact, it is also noteworthy to mention that these kinds of narrative patterns enabled human beings to shape, re-adjust and survive through varied experiences of their lives. These stories definitely have an undeniable role to play in one's life, and they are containers and mediums of expression in which we can organize, collect and correlate our numerous experiences of life. They contain all those 'archetypes' that have

penetrated, and were part of the human race for quite a long time. According to Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung, the theory of collective unconscious composed of 'archetypes' which are 'typical forms of behaviour that manifest themselves as ideas and images to the conscious mind' and this indeed explains the recurrence of similar themes in multiple cultures and in dreams of persons who are unaware of folklore and myths.

A slight introspection about the 1960s will reveal that during this time baby boomers entered adolescence and young adulthood at a time when African Americans, Hispanic farm workers, American Indians and women were fighting for recognition and equality. In 1964 the Civil Rights Act was passed which forbade job discrimination on the basis of sex. In 1966 the National Organisation for Women was established. Against this historical, political and social backdrop, the genre of feminist rewritings of fairy tales emerged in the 1970s, which called for fairy tale liberation, and in 1972, Marcia R. Lieberman's issue of a "forceful rebuttal" in *Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale* had a formidable impact in deconstructing, devastating and re-examining the canonization and institutional control of fairy tales as well as recovery of alternative narratives and the location of female "voice" in them. What ensued as a result, was a psychological defense mechanism for all or most of the women who could now, at least, consider themselves as part of the competitive gender,

or that part of the society which was still now awaiting its due respect. Women now were trying to be conscious about comprehending the gulf that existed between dream and reality and female voices in fairy tales could speak about their own attributes and not just stand as a replacement to the earlier male characters. It was a kind of revisionist idea that the rewriting of fairy tales were trying to propagate and their preponderance over the reworking and rehabilitation of the female mind was a feature that gained them an entirely new position in the literary world.

On analysing Angela Carter's *The Old Wive's Fairy tale Book* (1990), for example, it is seen ( in the later few chapters it has been discussed in much details ) how the writer and critic compels us to rethink our own social position in the erstwhile and present male-infested hierarchy, challenging the archaic perception of women as "passive, powerless and subservient" and presenting instead , women who are bent upon creating a new set of values, about strong, outspoken, zestful, sexual women who cannot be kept down.<sup>6</sup>

As we go through this entire project, we will see in different perspectives how there has been a constant striving towards change in the overall pattern and structuring of fairy tales. With reflections upon Freudian concept of fantasy, dream, subconscious and the defense mechanism, the interpretation of the earlier tales have changed.

Historical and scientific details are often strongly embedded inside the tales that are otherwise, in the form of allegorical pursuits. Displaying female articulation of wants, space, subliminal mental conflicts and liberated forms of mind. After the 20th century, suffrage and liberation movements, feminists such as K.E.Rowe argued that certain "domestic fictions" like the fairy tales have increased the tendency in women to berate, underestimate and disregard their own selves, and so development in its truest form is required. So, a strategic weapon to eradicate the bad mother or the step-mother forever, is replaced by the most outspoken, violent and radical interpretation of the female evil who is a threat and has a negative impact on the male ego and self-conceit. The social values, norms dominant male discourse that was essentially a site for producing sexist social prescriptions have changed with the rewriting of fairy tales. However, it is only a limited few who can digest this sort of interpretations and therefore, even full-scale and fast-revisionings have also not helped much. It is a terrifying challenge to both the readers and writers because, quite interestingly, rewriting of fairy tales also mean destroying and annihilating a male pattern first and then giving the women their due position. So question still remains that if the male-dominated and male-written, phallogentric fairy tales were not there, the feminist writers could not have any document to work upon. Dealing with reality and often unreality, mystery,

love, prowess, freedom and necessity, fairy tales become important social documents which are archetypal form of literature and which help lay the ground work for all kind of literature and art.

This introduction specially deals with the oppositional elements, inversions, subversions and new approaches that underscore how women create, destroy and face self-identity problems when they try to fit into, or imitate values of patriarchal society. This piece of writing also places into perspective the roles that fairy tales and fairy myth have in the formation of stereotyping and the effect of the patriarchal society on the individual's achievement and the retention of an integrated, acceptable self. The underlying subject of demonstration and objectification in fairy tales was so strong that we hardly remember any heroine or female character who was not supported and rescued by some male (beneficent ). Rewards for good works and female dexterity is thus, a chief feature of the rewriting of fairy tales, where an active heroine, at the end of the story, is the fortunate recipient of divine and human benediction, due to her self-assertive, non-conformist, clever and candid nature and the feminist author is happy not to restrict the female characters to domestic hearth and quotidian life of marriage, conception and pregnancy only.

1. Lieberman has been an Assistant professor of English at the University of Connecticut. Lieberman emphasizes on how little children

are moulded, and what effect do fairy tales have on their infantile minds. She analyzes the tremendous socializing roles that fairy tales convey. She has been active in women's studies and also a notable Feminist writer. Marcia R. Lieberman *College English* Vol. 34, No. 3 (Dec., 1972), Published by: National Council of Teachers of English.

2. Eric Hulsens is an independent writer and editing professional from Gent area, Belgium. He calls himself a 'snowwhitologist', and he has been instrumental in delineating the faults of the old fairy tales in many of his blogs.
3. Elizabeth Wanning Harries notes that the re-affirmation and the position of female in fairy tales is decided by the concept of the male rules and regulations. She especially talks about how far the heroines were away from the reality of life and how they had to depend on a prince for their survival. Chapter - 5, Donald Haase. *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*. Wayne State University Press.
4. Fairy tales can be immensely influential in children's developing gender identity, so it is important to analyze the messages that are being transmitted. It has long been identified that the traditional European canon of fairy tales, those that have survived till the present generation, are

tales that reflect and reproduce the patriarchal values of the society that created them. Mary Alyce Lach and Sharyl Bender Peterson, *Gender Stereotypes in Children's Books: Their Prevalence and Influence on Cognitive and Affective Development*. Volume:2, issue:2, 1990, Routledge Publications.

5. Cherland presents the ideas of consumerism as presented through fairy tales. The author tells how the cultural influence becomes important in educating girls from different sections of the society. We see sets of hierarchical opposites that take their meaning in relation to each other. Binaries like male/female, rational/irrational, mind/body, and good/evil are created by the society and embedded in its discourses and story lines. *Harry's Girls: Harry Potter and the Discourse of Gender* by Meredith Cherland : *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 52(4) December 2008.
6. Angela Carter : *The Old Wive's Fairy tale Book* Pantheon Fairy Tale & Folklore Library. Hackett - Goodreads. Here she makes a re-examination of the earlier fairy tales in a new light, specially concentrating upon the female mind and the complexities that haunt her.

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The Image Of the Garden In Fairy Tales:  
Feminine Enclosure And Entrapment

*Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female- whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male.*

### **Simone de Beauvoir**

**I**n English, we are quite commonly acquainted with the Garden of Eden. Garden is generally derived from an Indo-European root (ger IV; shipley) meaning 'enclosure' and is cognate with girdle. Paradise, another word for the garden of Eden, comes from Persian (shipley, 64), meaning a garden with clay walls built up around it. The Hebrew word for garden, 'gen', means a place metaphorically for a chaste woman (genesis 13-14), as in 'A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed' (Cant. 4:12).<sup>1</sup> And Eden means 'pleasure' or 'delight' (Genesis 608-9).<sup>2</sup> Hence, the biblical 'gan eden' is an enclosure of delight, a woman set to receive a man. Here in this garden, as is natural, once one reaches a certain age, the man looks towards a woman, that is, towards the fruit, to enjoy. With varied implications where we are having, variations of garden, like hedges, briars, shrubs, forests and dense foliage, we find that only the names and qualities change, but

garden, apart from being a spot of pleasure, is also an integral image of enclosure and entrapment in fairy tales.

If we diagnose carefully and then go over some of the notable fairy tales, we find that there is frequent use of the juniper tree as an epitome of death, rebirth and the dispensation of justice. The plight in the woman's condition is accentuated, highlighted when a woman dies after eating juniper berries and her dead baby is buried under that same tree, leaving behind a motherless son. As in accordance with the normal patriarchal norms, regulations and conditions of the society, the father and widower remarries, and the new young wife gives birth to a daughter. The mother, as an act of protective gesture towards her daughter, becomes vicious, jealously buries the step-son's bones under that same juniper tree. Hence, the previous wife, who was troubled, and died out of enormous joy when her baby was born, is now nowhere to be found. Thus the garden becomes not only the medium of entrapment, but also raises pertinent questions about substantial dilemma, psychological turmoil, fears and assurance, as well as wicked nature and the evil. The garden also becomes a burning document of retaining everything across the teleological progress of time.

Forests and gardens, thickets and shrubs, trees with black trunks are not just illusions but real things as they look. They are darkening recesses of the human mind, which often the lure of the delicious fruits, musical and

aromatic herbs and birds that even gossamer heroines fall entrapped in these cage-like forests. It does them probable grievous harm, but more than that, the forests and gardens display a strong, hypnotic charm which is unavoidable. Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' protagonist depicts the light filtering through the trees as: "these vertical bars of a brass-coloured distillation of light coming down from sulphur yellow interstices in a sky hunkered with grey clouds".<sup>3</sup> Since the narrator here is complicit in her entrapment, she knows that she is "caged" or trapped from the moment she enters the woods.

This similar trope also occurs in a German fairy tale which is named Rapunzel, in the collection assembled by the Grimm Brothers, and first published in 1812 as part of *Children's and Household Tales*. The plot is constructed only in order to bring out the superstitious, mysterious nature of the story and also the physical prowess of the prince, but underneath the readers find a deep message that is very similar to a trope of entrapment. And it goes something like this:

A couple, who have been living an isolated life, constantly yearn for a child, and they live next to a garden that is strictly fortified, belonging to an enchantress. The wife, experiencing the cravings associated with her long-desired pregnancy, notices a rapunzel (or, according to some other versions of the story, rompion), growing in the garden and wishes to procure it, desperate to the

point of death. Everyday the husband tries to arrange for some fruit for her and on the fateful third night, as he decides to return home, the witch Dame Gothel nabs him and accuses him of theft. He begs innocence and he is discharged only on one condition - that the then-unborn child should be surrendered to her at birth: desperate, the man agrees.

It would be mandatory to stop at this juncture and relocate, analyze and embark upon what pivotal role the garden plays here. As a source of the nutritious as well as the delicious rompion, it definitely acts as an entrapment, or temptation for the pregnant mother of Rapunzel, and she is ensnared in that constant urge for the rompion, that the garden nestles within it. Like the old story of Tantalus who stole ambrosia and nectar in Olympus, the garden also presents the mellow prospects of acquiring a rompion. It can be dealt as a stage in consciousness. The wife is entrapped in her own motherly instincts ( as she was supposed to do, as she was cultured, nurtured and taught about the ways mothers should be ), but more than the motherly affection, it is the fatal lure of the rompion which holds a tantalizing aspect for her. The garden contains the rompion which is said to produce green leaves and pretty blue flowers. In other folklores, it is generally associated with funerals. Rapunzel's mother has an irresistible urge for the rompion so much that her husband is compelled to steal it. His intervention into the bastioned garden to procure a root vegetable

enhances the picture of the involvement of the soul or consciousness in a body and the manifestation of the divine form in the representation of a baby, who becomes a prey to the sorceress who holds supreme authority over the garden. But at the same time, the depiction also shows how only women are susceptible to temptations and for alleviating their plight, the men have to risk their life and enter into danger zones. This further shows that if Rapunzel's mother was not so thirsty about the rompion, perhaps the witch would not have eyed for her child. She is enclosed in her own subconscious desires and dilemmas, and unlike the good woman who must be possessed, the witch is likely to be killed, punished, victimized, and nullified, in spite of all her fortifications and bastions. She stands out as an individual woman character who is having only a self-dominated ego to satisfy herself and give her an assurance of her identity.

The enchantress of Rapunzel, Dame Gothel, (who was in Greece initially designated as a cannibal named Drakena), has actually fortified herself and her lush, exotic garden, as a formidable, impenetrable bastion against other's voracity. It is just similar to that of a protective cocoon created by the sorceress to protect her own self, because she knows that would entail at least, her living, as she is, according to society, a malevolent and repulsive creature. She hides her sorrows, angst, pain and bafflement behind the fortification.

Therefore, when her "walls" are violated, she

snatches the violator's child, and constructs a mirror image that Sexton emphasizes in her Rapunzel poem. The witch "separates her from all the world". The concept of the garden as an enclosure can be very easily discovered in other fairy tales also. In *Fairy tales for Grown-Ups* (1867), the writer Anne Thackeray genuinely tries to transform the old tale into a social satire that ridicules the stereotypical female passivity so essential to the Victorian ideology, of separate spheres. Jean Ingelow's use of the story in her *Mopsa the Fairy* (1869) is also an ironic representation of this garden as an enclosure. Although Jack's kiss is responsible for the metamorphosis of the chubby sleeper into a queen, this human boy is not allowed to become her consort once she grows beyond him in maturity and power. The story juxtaposes the masculine capitalist realm, which entraps women, with one in which female characters receive power through language and the telling of tales. Yet this language and the telling of tales which articulate a woman's over-restricted condition and how the women became blinding themselves, and the power gained proves limited if not illusory. Hence, it is depicted with adequate illustration that Mopsa shapes "female education into a narrative of captivity". Hence, as the queen grows up, the same reeds that "he had penetrated" earlier, soon grow into the "long, spear-like leaves" that will keep him away from Mopsa's castle (311).<sup>4</sup> Unlike the thicket traversed by the prince in *Sleeping Beauty* or in *Dornroschen*, this

barrier proves insurmountable: woman and boy are now incompatible, destined to remain apart. There is a lot of distance between the actual beauty who sleeps, almost conforming to the tendency what the male structural pattern has included in her and there remains nothing to be done by her, until and unless there is a prince who takes her out of the wilderness. The reeds, on the other hand, poke, cajole, penetrate, as well as pacify her as if her entire sublimation process is a careful orchestration of the garden, the unfathomable depth of the forests and the reeds.

And this picture of garden as both an enclosure and entrapment widens as we further deal and analyze other noteworthy fairy tales through all generations. In E. Nesbit's *The Enchanted Castle* (1907), two boys and a girl enter a maze that lies beyond a rose garden "out of a picture of a fairy tale" - border with "thick, close-cut yew edge". In a clearing at the center of this enclosure they find a recumbent female figure, attired in a "rosy, gold dress". Given the setting and the veiled figure's royal garb, the children agree that she can be none other than sleeping beauty herself. But Gerald, the oldest, refuses to bestow a princely kiss on the young stranger; when his sister takes on that role, the sleeper fails to stir. As a result it remains upto Jimmy, the youngest and the most sceptical of the three trespassers, to 'plant' a 'loud, cheerful-sounding kiss' on the princess' 'pale cheek'. Yawning and stretching her arms, the veiled young

beauty theatrically exclaims—"then the hundred years are over? How the yew hedges have grown! Which of you is my prince? "

And for a hundred years, she dreamt while the forest grew around her. Each dream took a whole year and acorns became oak trees while she dreamt about "mosses" and ferns and horsetails and liverworts, as well as soft breezes that wafted in birch pollen and trees that began to sprout, apples and blackberries and mushrooms from the generous forests, and later grain, carefully grown, gathered and ground. The Brother Grimm's version says:

"A large hedge grew round the palace, and every year it became higher and thicker, till at last the old palace was surrounded and hidden, so that not even the roof or the chimneys could be seen."<sup>5</sup>

Not only from Nesbit's modern, stylized version of the sleeping beauty, but the 'sleeping beauty' narrative gains considerable symbolic and stylistic force from Angela Carter's intersection of the tale with the cliches and tropes of the classic nineteenth-century vampire story. Simultaneously, the sleeping beauty's thorn-surrounded castle is re-interpreted in a less concrete fashion, a cultural and patriarchal entrapment which dooms the lady to an unfulfilling existence.

In her celebrated essay collection *Gossip From the Forest: A Search for the Hidden Roots of Our Fairy Tales*, Sara Maitland retells these stories from Northern Europe

collected by the Brothers Grimm and remoulds them to bring about a new interpretation of those old tales that have arrested the attention of the readers generation after generation. In a modified and completely altered version of Hansel and Gretel she starts telling the story about how the witch has died and at present how Hansel and Gretel live a life of their own, surrounded by their individual families, children, part of an entirely new village and adhering to the strictures of a new community.

However, with Gretel, the change is unexpected, different and pushed to the periphery of loneliness. She lives in a solitary life in a forest. She is quiet, almost silent, and solitary by choice. She is often present in the garden. Plants, vegetables, herbs and flowers grow well for her. Her garden is a place of colour and sweetness. Yet she feels enclosed, entrapped amidst the dense foliage which even the sunlight often fails to penetrate. Once while Hansel visits her she contemplates:

“You see, sometimes now I think I may be turning into our witch. I live in my little house and put out sweeties for the children. I hope they will come along the path, but when they do, I sometimes feel cross or ragged with the disturbance. I wouldn’t like it if they killed me and then went home and boasted about it.”<sup>6</sup>

Along the garden, she stands a secluded, emaciated figure, easing her back with her hands, and calls out a low but cheerful greeting to Hansel, when he comes

to visit her. Hansel looks at the trees which “are just reaching the fullness of leaf canopy, darkening from early bright gold green to full rich green, so that less sun is finding its way through the ground litter.” Gretel recalls once when she was younger, she set off along the road through the forest to join the Holy sisters in the convent at the Waltham. But after a few years, she came quietly home again, because, she says, “I could not live with enclosures.” However, this is extremely ironical because it is this same enclosed life, the garden trying to eliminate all external objects from her side, is actually making her turn into a witch, insinuated, and later, becoming insensitive to her self-confessed seclusion. It is a woman’s incarceration, the garden and the dense wood just portraying her anonymity. Her house is built of wood with a thatched roof, but it too, is sturdy and cosy. It looks rather more like a gingerbread house than Hansel’s does, because it is painted in bright, pale colours, and because under the leaves and around the windows are filigree strips of curved wood, which most people think are pretty but frivolous, and beside her little twisty iron gate at the bottom of her garden path, there is always a bowl of sugar plums which local children know are put out for them.

The garden, bushes, briars, hedges, shrubs, all of them, therefore, are agents that preclude a natural growth and revelation of a flower, in this case, it is specifically the maid who is concealed from visibility. Quite

surprisingly, this visibility and how she is to be viewed, is also decided by a male society, and the parameters which judge her physical attributes, are also male-dominated and created by male mindset. Garden not only obliterates her actual self, but just like the flickering sunrays that jostle to impenetrate the dense foliage, she is seldom shown on her full self, we can just find parts of an enigmatic female character first, who is perhaps the protagonist (although credibility is very less that she is also a steady character in the story, as multiple shades to her character is 'pruned', expropriated and taken over by her male counterpart), somewhere amidst the dense foliage perhaps, there is also hidden a subconscious wantonness of the female mind, which she suppresses either when she is in sleep, or when obstructed by the growing plants and trees. Very ironically, trees and plants in the garden are living things which are allowed to grow, germinate, develop, and pop their heads high above in the sky, whereas the princess, another living being enclosed inside the forest, is not permitted to frolic around, grow, germinate, and enjoy with the instrument of the 'self' amidst the sprawling beauty of nature.

The figurative and metaphorical use of the concept of the glass coffin and the mirror are other diverse ways of constructing an atmosphere of entrapment and incarceration for women or female characters in fairy tales. The issues of consciousness, mental illness, linguistic and emotional, manipulation as well as

entrapment play a dominant role when we scrutinize carefully the glass mirror, for example, in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs we discover it is the wicked queen's sedentary preoccupation, a most viable option to satiate, fulfil, nurture and transmit to herself the already-vanishing signs of youth, charm, attraction and vivacity. She is entrapped and enclosed into her own world of saturated satisfaction of beauty, and trying to hold on to it, against the possible encroachment by her most indomitable adversary- Snow White, the latter's pristine, delicate, unadulterated and captivating beauty and innocence and the celibacy attached to her character. The almost histrionic outburst of the volley of questions hurled at the glass mirror is a reflection of her inability to control the normal passage of time and Nature and her inevitable failure to comprehend the fact that extreme beauty, physical attraction is only evanescent, and what finally the story preaches is a doctrine of the all-goods being triumphant over the eccentric, ghoulish, the epitome of all-bad - the witch queen.

And this constant obsession with the need to hold on to her position, actually resides in nowhere but the subliminal level, of course, she being unaware about it, but eternally falling a victim to, and getting entrapped in her self-created mirror - an amalgamation of hallucinatory extravaganza, obsession, and a necessary compulsion to eradicate the 'Other'. Not only in the mirror, but she is confined also to her wicked, unscrupulous motives of

removing Snow White permanently from her life, and the temporary assurance that is provided by the mirror. This is, in accordance with what Gilbert and Gubar offer early in the 1979 - a tale about the magic mirror where the mirror holds up before women a patriarchally-defined identity. And what happens when the mirror reflecting this patriarchally-defined identity is broken, is discussed in Chapter - 4 of this work. Questions arise as who actually holds the mirror, where the potential, actually repeat and contain, as well as, represent. The mirror represents, above all, the latent content of wish fulfillment, capturing a symbol, the wicked step-mother's reflection in the mirror representing the destroying mother. In fact, the main ambit on which Evolutionary Psychology will become important here is the theory that the step-mother would demonstrate less paternal investment in non-genetic children. The Danish story of Askepot, the Czech story of Popelka, the Arab tale of Roodoopis, the Maiden King, and the Kind and Unkind Girl, through the mirror, in fact, the malicious stepmother represents the part of the child's demands. In other words, the stepmother in the mirror is just a replica behind the child's idealized mother. When we peruse through, and tend to dissect the book *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual dialogue between Fairy-Tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings*, edited by Vanessa Joosen, and specifically the chapter by Sandra Gilbert

and Susan Gubar, it is revealed to us that the curious concept of 'getting away', defying or resisting the male author is developed. They argue that Snow White and seven Dwarfs is not just an entertaining reading for the children but the plausible dimensions and complexities stretch also to the adult psyche, with the inevitable subversion of the true female archetypes. Gilbert and Gubar essentially do a post-mortem of what can be called the three-fold aspect of Snow White: the function of the mirror, the deconstruction of the angel and the monster and the development of the women author.

For the first one, they point out, that the mirror emblemizes that inherent and continuous patriarchal entrapment in the bourgeoisie culture. The story enumerates the battle between the two mystic images with which patriarchy has tried to identify, label, commodify, and grapple with the concept of women: one is the angel; another is the oppositional element or the witch. On the surface level, it is the angel who is the incarnation of everything impeccable and chaste and who conquers and on the other hand, is the quintessential evil embedded in the witch who is punished or tortured at last. As Gilbert and Gubar analyze, it is the inevitable patriarchal ideology whose fears and ideals are projected, authenticated and transmitted through this clear distinction between 'good' and 'bad' woman.

A further interesting image that hovers around their text is that, the constant incarceration of woman is

symbolized by a succession of glass enclosures that tend to envelop, envenom and quite curiously, tend to make and unmake their identity; this cluster of images include the window through which Snow White's biological mother stares at the snow, the evil queen's magic mirror about which I have discussed previously and Snow white's glass coffin, the last two being interpreted by Gilbert and Gubar as the 'tools patriarchy suggests that women use to kill themselves into art' (The Madwoman in the Attic/36), to become lifeless objects of the male 'gaze'. And therefore, looking long enough into the mirror is just like resembling the speaker of Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's *The Other Side of the Mirror*, where the speaker herself is an enraged prisoner:

"I said before my glass one day,  
And conjured up a vision bare,  
Unlike the aspects glad and gay,  
That erst were found reflected there-  
The vision of a woman, built  
With more than womanly despair,  
Her hair stood back on either side,  
A face bereft of loveliness." <sup>7</sup>

The concept of the formation of the female self, as projected into and through the mirror is also visible in later English poetry, for instance, *Mirror* by Sylvia Plath, where a woman's preconceived notions about her own beauty suffer a catastrophic jolt, when she discovers her

ageing self like a detestable and “terrible fish” that rises everyday out of the depths of the mirror to convulse and catapult her to the abject reality that beauty is transient. Also, a recent poem by Mark R. Slaughter (2009), representing the mirror as a bloody “fibber”, says that the poet takes great plight in experiencing the troubles shot through the mirror.

The major feeling involved is not just disgust but also a recklessness as well as a helpless outlook, just as the Thuringian Queen or Mirror Queen played by Monica Bellucci in 2005 fantasy film *The Brothers Grimm*, remains obsessed with preserving her youth and being the fairest in the land- an ideology which backfires when she acquires a spell for eternal life that does not bless her with an eternal youth.

Similarly, the snow, the ice-capped mountains, the white frock of Snow White, the pale skin (drained of blood almost!)- all unflinchingly reverberate that frigidity, coldness, and moreover the immaculate statuette that she has been transformed into. White also, quite naturally, harbours the feelings and idea of female virginity, chastity, an extravaganza of moral scruples which demarcates the existence of any good and worthwhile woman. And so, the stagnant Snow White is pitted pitilessly against the flaming red of Little Red Riding Hood, who again, later grapples with the sordid reality that the wolf has killed her grandmother.

Therefore, glass and ice metaphorically explore the

nature of narrative as artefact. These images can be said to represent a paradoxical situation for the woman, entrapping, and often empowering also, and enabling feminist explosion of the implication of sexuality for the female artist. It could also be possible that these images could not be examined in this light, but the continuous “doll-like” reshaping of women, like a cut-glass structure of beauty, has been taken over for feminist reinterpretation.

The Glass Coffin, in Byatt’s version, enumerates the story of a tailor, who is honest but jobless. In the course of his wanderings in a dense forest, he confronts a difficult situation, comes to a cottage and find in it a little man with grey hair, who shares his home with a variety of animals, including a large, grey dog. This man gives the tailor a night’s shelter in return for an evening’s work, which the tailor carries out assiduously. He is rewarded for his work with the option of three gifts, of which he selects a fragile glass key, declaring that with it he will embark upon an adventurous expedition. The grey-haired man advises him to go outside and give himself up to the west wind, which will carry him to his destiny. Adhering to his advice, the tailor finds himself put down in front of three doors, of which, from a sense of destiny and duty, he chooses the least attractive.

He makes his way underground through a claustrophobic dungeon and comes upon a pile of bottles, jars, a dome and a coffin, all made of glass.

Then he stumbles into a morbid-looking chamber, infested with an unpleasant odour. Peering into the coffin he finds a beautiful, blonde young woman who narrates to him how she has been charmed, intrigued and then beguiled into marrying a black artist. In spite of those provocations, she would not budge, and as a consequence, the sorcerer first turned her beloved brother into a dog, and then cast a spell on her so that she would sleep for a hundred years. She further adds that the bottles contain the staff of her castle, and that the castle itself is beneath the dome. In fact, in seeking to situate all these tales in the context of position, it should be noted that in Freudian criticism, it is a long period of sleep which corresponds to the time of latency undergone by the pubescent girl before she is sexually awakened. In the Jungian scheme of things on the other hand, the woman who sleeps for a prolonged period in coffin represent the psyche dominated by the animus, and is thus, an emblem of sexual repressions.

These entrapments are definitive implications of how the female body is subjugated, enclosed, manipulated and codified inside a particular domain; the ice-cold coffin is no better than just a soddy piece of earth and synonymous to her death. While the most important feeling invoked in the queen is not jealousy but envy: to make beauty an abstract concept which is of supreme concern and to mitigate the entire world, to one in which only two people count. The queen is not only enclosed

and restricted to an examination of beauty, but her power is solely based upon that beauty, hence that is also similar to a kind of terrible entrapment. The tale implies that if she loses her beauty, the king will definitely turn his attention to another woman, an unpalatable truth for her. And therefore, witchcraft and the mirror can also ensure her position in the heart of her beloved husband. The mirror is crucial in exemplifying and foreshadowing the concepts of self-reflection and vice, malice and pulchritude, or associating evil and vanity with beauty, so these mirror representations are taken as the eternal truth by the queen. Hence, she is induced into believing that the main aspects of human nature is just exploiting the physical potential and bodily vitality as and when the time is ripe for a person to do so.

In the words of Bruno Bettelheim, 'whereas Snow White achieves inner harmony, her stepmother fails to do so. Unable to integrate the social and the antisocial aspects of human nature, she remains enslaved to her desires and gets caught up in an Oedipal competition with her daughter from which she cannot extricate herself.'<sup>7</sup> This imbalance between her contradictory drives proves to be her undoing. Entrapped into a giant vortex of sexual innocence and sexual desires, she embodies narcissism, and Snow White, on the other hand, embodies parts of that child who is trying to overcome this tendency. But as is said, and described, and materialized through the indistinct implantations created by the male writers,

vanquishing the queen represents a triumph of positive forces in the self over vain impulses.

However, contradictions to the conventional role of the mirror is also present in some of the extremely modern fairy tales, just as the short story *Snow Night* published in Barbara G. Walker's 1996, *Feminist Fairy Tales* shows: the king's master of the hunt tries to infuriate and instigate the queen by infiltrating in her jealousy, after having been rejected by *Snow Night*. However, the queen laughs at, scorns, and refutes the magic mirror's answer, claiming that people go through cycles, and that it is impossible to challenge the ineradicable laws of nature. The traditional version of the tale is contorted just and only in order to form an opinion that the tale is actually invented by the exiled and crazed huntsman, now imprisoned in a distant country.

But in a quite insipid, morose and transparent manner, contradictions are very few, and they also cannot really uproot those grimy, uncouth, uncompromising remnants of the male psyche, male-dominated world that is all-pervasive, and that does not allow for once also, to change the scenario of the woman's world. A man's virility, his way of living life vicariously, a prince's horse, sword, cap, swashing buckles and other paraphernalia are still a sharp contrast to the congealed expression on the countenance of the princess, whose chastity and primordial instincts are made to freeze and become impotent, barren, and infertile, against the

tremendous masculine instincts of a prince. The glass is almost akin to that of the protective membrane called 'hymen' in a female's body, which, when is broken, is actually flouting her virginity rules. Therefore it is better that she is kept in a state of staunch sterility, where sleep at least indicates no movement on her part, or hoodwinking social decorum. Somehow, therefore, the blush of her character, the blood red ruby of her cheeks, and her demure attitude cannot really eclipse the excessive, hypocritical, frustrating white that surrounds her even when she becomes "pale" with the advent of death.

All images, ice, mirror, coffin, garden, everything, are used later on as bridges to cross, weapons to blind men, and to reverse the position of women and not reflect it. Beauty itself is a kind of entrapment that dominates most of the prominent fairy tales. An exclusive physical beauty that is often highlighted by the mirror is also a kind of entrapment used in fairy tales. But women earlier failed to realize how that beauty is self-devastating, making them cringe in fear if they found that they were no longer beautiful, by the standard norms (and standard norms obviously implied how they have been imposed, cancelled, superimposed and deeply penetrated upon the female psyche, by the male world). Very ironically, the garden that is synonymous with the flowers, fruits and fertility as well as beauty of the female, is actually a venomous trap.

It is very easy, almost a non-hazardous task to sit and try to intensify the various consequences that these images like snow, frost, coffin, ice, mirror, or garden have, but putting them across a larger social tapestry which is very intricate about the dichotomy between male and female characters and their development, is almost an unachievable task because symbols and tropes like the ones which have been discussed, are having a ready effect on the polarization of women, their socializing process, cultural and commodification of females as well as producing various gender stereotypes, which has been discussed in the next chapter.

It is not always mandatory that these tropes should have a unidimensional pattern or ramification only, because often, we come across many fairy tales which, consciously or unconsciously, employ an admixture of all the elements. Thus, Snow White's perfect radiance, her blanched and bleached whiteness is almost a foil, and also it co-exists with the fiery, energetic, boisterous beauty of this queen beauty that would almost scorch the eyes of the beholder, as is not to be disregarded how women themselves unconsciously and subconsciously petrify themselves, by accepting the fact that sticking to an already-existing pattern actually promises them their safety, security and position either in a prince's heart, or in a king's political house, or even in society. This is part of the larger and macrocosmic cultural and gender stereotypical behaviours which focus primarily upon

female subjectivity and blood, as well as victimization. The garden and the wood is a highly important site of conflict; therefore, in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Alice's quest is a gendered quest during which she investigates types of feminine representation. Trying to situate herself between the little girl and the woman, or between the chaste angel and the fallen woman, she is physically positioned between duchess and pigs, March hares and mad hatters, greedy little girls and debilitated women.

#### **Endnotes:**

1. The concept of a carefully decorated garden appears in Shipley's version of the Bible, where the writer says how in Genesis, the enclosed garden stands for an enclosed sister, or a spouse, which is compared to a spring shut up or a fountain which has been stopped from overflowing. (Canto 4:12). Shipley, Melvin John, *The Shipleys of Maryland (Organization) 2002: A Study of the Descendants of Adam*, volume 1, Gateway Press.
2. It means how the Garden of Eden opens up an experience of delight or immense pleasure or satisfactions that the man receives from a woman as he enters the garden to enjoy the fruit. Genesis, page 608-9, Shipley, Melvin John, *The Shipleys of*

- Maryland (Organization) 2002: A Study of the Descendants of Adam, volume 1, Gateway Press.
3. Angela Carter has done a feminist rewriting of the previous male-authored fairy tales, and in her revisionist approach to the story of Hansel and Gretel, she describes how the character of Gretel stands alone, an emaciated female figure girdled inside the dense woods, often resembling that same witch whom they had killed earlier in the previous versions of the text. Carter dissects the female psyche, loneliness, abstraction and immurement in a forest, and also in her own life. *The Bloody Chamber*, published by The Penguin Group, Penguin Books USA Inc, 375 Hudson Street, New York.
  4. *Mopsa the Fairy* is actually a serial process of how the female actually grows, alongwith the reeds, the foliage and the trees around her. Jean ingelow delves deep not only into the physical growth, but also on the growth that could have been better, but it has been stunted due to some awkward reasons. *Mopsa the Fairy*, Jean Ingelow, Philadelphia J.B. Lippincott Company, 1910.
  5. In *The Enchanted Castle*, E.Nesbit talks about the re-rendering of the original story of Sleeping beauty. Puffin Classics, July 1,1995.
  6. Sara Maitland has actually written in her own webpage how she had to traverse the forest

metaphorically, to find out the journey and enclosure of the heroine in fairy tales. She has provided a new set of interpretations to the age-old fairy tales, often from the perspective of the heroine. *Gossip from the Forest: A Search for the Hidden Roots of our Fairy Tales*.

7. Mary Elizabeth Coleridge's *The Other Side of the Mirror*, where the speaker herself is occupying a central position as a victim of her own disillusionments regarding youth and beauty.



## 2

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Creation Of Cultural Constructs Through  
Fairy Tales

A two-faced man is more venomous  
Than the snake with two fangs.  
    Bitten by a snake.  
One can withdraw the venom.  
    Bitten by a man,  
    That's the end.

Taslima Nasreen. (Poem Venomous)  
(Translated by Niharika Mishra)

A close and critical approach to the ancient, "classic" fairy tales reveal that the plethora of stories, fables, textual discourses—all were resting on the hypothetical assumption that patriarchy infused its values and judgments so strongly into the entire social structure, that only those tales could gain prominence which were conforming to this tradition and when the characters were trying to shed their archetypes, they disappeared into oblivion. As we analyze, we see that, a large number of fairy tales emanate from a patriarchal government or a super-structure that has been made effective and perennial by what the male candidates thought were right and the proper way of behaviour

for the women. Characters like Snow White, Red Riding Hood, Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, and a host of other fairy tale heroines represent themselves as docile, submissive, reticent, mere alabaster beauties who are non-resistant, fertile and eager to marry. Strongly embedded in these tales, are those concepts that what can be the probable disastrous consequences if these women chose not to exhibit female traits.

On the other hand, a gregarious nature is most often associated with the witches who are in league with unclean forces. For example, in a Russian fairy tale named *The Merchant's Daughter and the Slanderer*, what is evident is how speech has an important role to play in fairy tales, how speech strongly associates authority and people occupying authoritative position, which are, generally, and most often, an overwhelming majority of men. The above tale illustrates the importance of, and value placed on a silent woman. Before the king will even consider taking the merchant's sister as his wife and queen, he inquires about her manners. As soon as the merchant confirms that 'she is quiet and chaste as a dove', the king remarks 'she will be queen.' Hence, the prerequisite for a king to marry a girl is her refinement, manners, attitude and her virginity. So, quite contrary to a true fairy tale, it is just a farce of what can be called fairy tale, as none of the female characters enjoy a blissful life, akin to that of a fairy.

Many fairy tales inject an impression in the mind

of children that unattractive people are evil, which conversely also implies that 'beauty' is associated with the pleasant, and it is synonymous with what appeals not to the spirits first, but to the eyes at first. During the formative years these unique points are generally taught to children so it becomes almost an inextricable part of their entire learning process, and children find it improbable to eradicate these concepts from their minds altogether. In this direction, it can be pointed out that Sociologist Anthony Synnott discoursed that "judgments about appearance imply values about good and evil. These conclusions are often false, unfair, dangerous and silly, yet it is perpetuated by our language, literature, media, many philosophers and our simple binary perspectives". In fact, in her celebrated book *Someday my Prince Will Come*, Marcia R. Lieberman says that, "girls win the prize if they are the fairest of them all, boys win if they are bold, active and lucky. If a child identifies with the beauty, she may learn to be suspicious of ugly girls, who are portrayed as cruel, sly, and unscrupulous in these stories if she identifies with the plain girls, she may learn to be suspicious and jealous of the pretty girls, beauty being a gift of fate, not something that can be attained, these are no examples of cross-patterned girls" (Lieberman, 188).<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, some fairy tales do follow a different storyline, altogether. In Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, for example, we find that although told

by the usual third-person narrator, in many points it focuses upon mermaid's point of view (one of the reasons contributing to the tragic nature of this story), with very little focalization on the part of the prince. The mermaid falls in love with the prince, and on analysis it is seen that the goal of marriage is secondary (mentioned only, and briefly, by the sea-witch, from whom the Little Mermaid seeks advice). The feminist concern here is the notion of a young woman's sacrifice for single, unified, romantic goal; the mermaid willingly sacrifices her beautiful voice and has her much-needed tail replaced with legs in order that she can be in the human company of the prince.

In *Sleeping Beauty*, for example, the star of the tale slept for hundred years passively waiting for a man to come and rescue her. The protagonist in *Snow White* cooked, cleaned and took care of seven male dwarfs, and after being poisoned by her wicked stepmother, was placed in a glass coffin so she would be sure to be spotted as she awaited her male saviour. They no longer possess any subjectivity as they lie passed out, vulnerable, and therefore, desirable, as they wait for things to be done to them, their enforced silence allows us as readers to project meaning upon their inert bodies; *Cinderella* is, of course, saved by a prince who rescues her from playing the maid in her evil step-mother's house to stay at home and to cease venturing out after being frightened and nearly eaten by the wolf and saved by the beneficent man. Another story in Bengali *Sonar Kathi Rupal Kathi*

(The Golden Wand and The Silver Wand) where the supine princess resembles almost death waits in her prolonged reverie, till a prince arrives and fights a heroic war with a diabolical monster who was supposed to marry the princess. Since the princess denied any formal union with an ugly looking monster, she was held as a captive and the monster poses an open challenge for encounter to the prince. It is so pugnacious on the part of any feminist approval of the text that the entire existence of the princess depends upon how her fate is going to be decided by either the 'male' monster or the prince. If she has to extricate herself permanently, the prince has to touch the 'golden' wand (obviously all his male powers are concentrated symbolically in that wand) to her hand. In fact, she wakes up in a debilitated manner, she needs food for her further survival and the prince deliberately goes to fetch some fruits for her. What else do we get here, apart from a midget female figure, rickety, unable to articulate herself properly, weak, emaciated, forlorn, working up after so many years, only to be captivated again by a prince.

Fairy tales represent the problematic of being a woman, as vulnerable consumers, vulnerable through their positions in the home (Snow White is constantly tortured by her wicked step-mother and similar is the case of Cinderella, who is subjugated to the position of a domestic servant), through their irrational desires, their obfuscated mentality, their yearning for something

good to happen, and inability to control their mind, and through their incapacity to make informed choices about their own bodies-and all these situate women in contrast to the masculine, rational production sphere.

Another common characteristic of traditional fairy tales was the portrayal of a dichotomous image of women as either good and beautiful or bad and hideous. This was just a careful machination to caution young girls about the perils of non-conformity and to endorse the joys of chastity and passivity. Imitating archetypal temptresses like Hesiod's Pandora and the Biblical Eve, the ambiguous representation of the witch and the wicked stepmother and her supernatural faculties lay bare the ambivalent quality inherent in female empowerment. This is apparent in Greek myths also, where the recurrent dichotomies that juxtapose virtuous female characters to their malicious counterparts: in Greek myths, for example, the Siren's treacherous song and the Gorgon's petrifying beauty are opposed to the Sibyl's divine wisdom: in the fairy tale, for example, the fairy godmother's benign generosity is pitted against the tricks played by the evil stepmother (who can also be a witch): in the androcentric world of mainstream fairy tales, 'masculinized' overtly sexual female characters are typically opposed to their 'feminine' counterparts, and the 'otherness' associated with these malign forces represent all that is outside the white, normal, male, heteronormative community. There is a bias in each

case, because the male characters are given chances to take control of any particular offensive or hazardous situation, who they can marry, and what fields they may pursue a career in. It is, through pictures, stories, a lilting rhyming pattern, and depicting absurd dreams, actually reinforcing the subjugation, alterity, negativeness, otherness, solitary and almost nullified role of the woman, hence, when Snow White remains frigid throughout the story (the whiteness of her alabaster skin, the ice and the white coffin symbolize this), she receives a happy ending with the prince of her dreams. On the contrary, the evil queen stands bereft of any mercy, a solitary, wretched figure, jealous, vulnerable, jittery and angry. She defies, plays with, gulps in one moment the age-old conventions of femininity, and therefore, she is compelled to reach the nadir of disappointment.

Various versions of myth and fairy tales already persuade popular culture, therefore, they are powerful talismans when infused with the depth and gravitas from their original source texts and contextualized in a contemporary, autobiographical, or biographical setting. Both fairy tale and myth have stood the test of time and fairy tales contain an underlying undulating pattern and structure that speaks to our present day condition. They conform to what Carl Gustav Jung has classified as archetypes- which are 'imperishable elements of the unconscious but they change their shape continually.' For example, an analysis of Snow White reveals that

the entire story outlines the state of immature feminine psyche. For instance, there are three women in this story, and the first, the protective mother soon dies, leaving our heroine Snow White with no psychological dependence. Therefore all the images in the story can be seen or can become aspects of a feminine or the 'anima' irrespective of gender (Jung,1960).<sup>2</sup> As we see in several fairy tales, the psychological importance of the anima is so large and all-inclusive that it is passed on from one generation to another. As we see in case of the glass mountain, it is a 'symbolic expression of the distance between the fragile princess and her lover', and this anima of the insurmountable barrier still remains as a common feature of several love fairy tales where the hero has to give an examination of his prowess, by crossing a mountain and leaping on the other side, so that he can win the love of the princess and the princess herself in marriage.

Though many ancient tales might seem magical, unscientific, or unreal to us, people believed them, and these people were no different from today's generation some of whom believe in totem, taboos, miracles, and unrealistic occurrences. But it is also not to be neglected that fairy tales are informed by a human disposition, action, and an urge to transform the external surrounding and re-create it as a more adaptable experience to human needs, and also to try to change and make one's self fit for the world. In fact, incessant inclination to weaken "once strong female characters", demonize male powers

impose a male perspective on stories voicing women's discontents, and rendering heroines powerless by depriving them of speech, all in accord with the social values of their time, mark the cultural phenomenon of creating women characters in fairy tales.

Taking up sanctioned patterns of desire and conventional subject positions in the patriarchal order are concomitant process. As children start becoming susceptible to the concepts nurtured by fairy tales, they get a first hand impression of the desires, yearnings, struggle and fears in fairy tales, especially their strong and invariable trust embarking upon those characters who reaffirm what they already know through cultural discourse. The tales retell that it is not natural for a woman to be active or powerful. Rather than being empowered through sisterhood and community, the heroines in traditional tales are most often isolated: intensifying and accelerating their submission and lack of power. They are disassociated as good or evil, and also as women who must vie for the one prince.

As for the death of the witch, and the evil queen, it is so evident that from a psychological viewpoint, it was useless locking up the queen in a dungeon, or exiled, as the story provided intermittent descriptions of how a "thoroughly despicable creature" like the evil queen 'deserves the worst conceivable punishment'. It is quite a barbaric act, almost showing the murderous instincts of a man, that the reader is given glimpses into the fact that the

death of the witch is complete, even if it means exposing young readers to acts of violence that are extreme by contemporary standards. Children are motivated in such a manner from their formative years that they fail miserably to observe and examine the pain and fear in the queen's eyes, and the deplorable way which awaits her. But what happens is that Snow White can celebrate her life due to the queen's death, thus conforming to her reputation of being naive, perfect and utterly foolish.

The concept of physical vanity, beauty, seduction, pretentiousness, and the redundancy of female propriety has also resulted in numerous and quite blameworthy racist features in the twenty-first century world. The idea of 'blue-eyes', 'red cheeks', blushing of a female character, male chivalry, alabaster-white skin, perfect, svelte body index and structure all have led to the racial discrimination in the oriental and foreign countries regarding the status of women, as well as men (although the number of atrocities perpetrated on women were much more and we are dealing essentially with a feminist approach), based on their external beauty, and very specifically to their skin colour. In American Novelist Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*, we perhaps find an ample indication and an extended pattern of the obsession with the blue eyes of the princesses in fairy tales. However, it is to be taken into consideration that the metonymic function that this title serves is not the be all and end all of this novel. It is further extended to do a microscopic reading about the

racially marginalized individual's desire for assimilation and acceptance into the actuality or reality of what is called society, in popular overview. Marked out early in her life as ugly, Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel, constantly yearns for blue eyes, blonde hair, and quite unmistakably, white skin, in order to become acceptable in the white society. The novelist also does not forget to mention that the African-American's desire for the metonymic 'blue eyes' - 'beauty, order, cleanliness, and praise' - is bred by the contradictions of their own self-alienation. Hence, what standards of beauty do to individuals is just a piercing, pathetic and crude story, much dissimilar to that what has been portrayed in fairy tales, centuries back. Hence, Pecola's sense of isolation is made all more complete. From all she has learned about herself from school, from her peers, and the world around her is that, she is black, poor and ugly, the antithesis of all that society loves, values and esteems. This also happens when she plays with a white doll, picking "at all pearly teeth" that "struck like two piano keys between two eye balls".<sup>3</sup> And the impact of white standardized concepts of beauty upon the young girls like Pecola, claws at her face. But it is the image of the dead cat with his blue eyes closed, "leaving ugly an empty, black and helpless face", that evokes most powerfully the suggestive pathos as of the title of Toni Morrison's novel by suggesting as it does, the cultural vacuum in which blacks who aspire to white norms may eventually find themselves.

Similar are those cultural norms which set a rigid pattern of what to play (varying accordingly, based on whether it is a male or a female. It is one undeniable fact that in most of the normal circumstances, in most of the households, we find that girls are prone to play with 'baby dolls' and all things nice, whereas speed, journey, experience, expedition, scientific advancement all are echoed through buying a robot, a swanky car, a devilish show of a computer game or a wooden cricket bat, for a boy).

The history of fairy tales as present in 19th century Germany is a case in this point of view of how patriarchal practices have qualified in diminishing the public perception of women's contribution to the genre; it also demonstrates the depth and magnanimity of revisionist scholarship in documenting the continuity of feminist concerns in literary history in order or consider the history of woman and their contribution in the tradition. Writing contemporaneously with the Grimms and perhaps even greater numbers than their male contemporaries, women fairy-tale writers of 19th century Germany dealt with issues anticipatory of those women writers and feminists' world treat in the last three decades of the 20th century.

However, the cultural constructs are often so deeply embedded that they are almost synonymous to impossible to repress them altogether, and to embark upon a fresh project all on a sudden. The beauty of

the princess, with which young girl face in love, go for admiration of their own selves, and their fantasy revolving around an overindulgence of external lustre which is, most of the times, a blatant portrayal of the western concept of beauty and femininity, residing under the complete oblivion that fairy tales are not always an infallible mimesis of real life situations. Prejudices are yet another aspect which form part of a cultural pattern in fairy tales and which have an obvious repercussion in the world of practicality. As Leslie Marmon Silko has maintained in her article that Language and literature from a Pueblo Indian perspective, and that 'storytelling constructs our identity: and identifies our culture.'<sup>4</sup> But fairy tales have certain ingredients which make a person remain unconscious about the real nature of existence in this world. In them, we find how children are delivered by storks, or gifted by some beloved god mother. Often it is the exceptional figure of their mother, the all-enduring passive female figure who has to deliver a child at the beck and call of her husband and how the most important preoccupation of that a mother's life is to protect her daughter and send her a warning signal against the atrocities that may befall her in the external world. She is a woman indoor, as we see Snow White's mother sewing before she is born, her embroidery explaining the difficult maze that her daughter is going to encounter, and very unconsciously she also prays for 'white' skin and 'blood red' lips for her daughter,

in order to be acceptable in the parameters of beauty according to the society.

And perhaps, related to the concept of male supremacy and sexual predominance, is the irreparable and despondent dependence and attachment to male 'potency' and female 'infertility'. Fertility in fairy tales is a beautiful depiction of not only the granaries which are overflowing with excess harvest, corn and pulses, the verdure of vegetation, with orchards, wines and fruit trees, but fertility also extends to the potential perspective of how, where, when, and what a woman or female should become fertile, or conceive. A close glance at The Singaporean Fairytale website reveals the fact that it features fifteen updated fairy tales (along with facts), about women's fertility, marriages and pregnancy. And very interestingly, more than one of the fairy tales seems to shame women for waiting to, or choosing not to have children. The story of the Golden Goose, in fact, very explicitly ties women's value of their fertility. It reads:

"The Golden Goose was prized for her eggs/ that shone light in brilliant gold/ but there soon came a time she could make them no more/ for her egg-making device was rusty and old."<sup>5</sup>

Question arises as why always it is the woman's 'device' which is always either sacred or profane, that is generally examined in these stories and perhaps wombs of good women undoubtedly breed a good, servile, domestic and passive female generation, whereas

complications in her fertility processes and bad quality eggs do give birth to 'witches' and 'demons', as well as other sort of devilish creatures. In fact, in one of the Bengali fairy tales in Thakuma'r Jhuli by Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder named, Saat Bhai Champa (Seven Brothers and their sister Champa) we find that the queen is forced to evacuate the kingdom after there is connivance against her and her seven newborn boys are buried inside a graveyard, and replaced by odorous, ugly-looking kids. The king cannot tolerate her distorted fertility and orders her banishment from the palace and from the entire kingdom because she was incapable to produce a future prince for her kingdom. Other stories are also present to offer similar messages: 'The Fairy Godmother' is ridiculed for being a 'maiden some suspect past forty' with "ten cats" and no suitors.

So strong is the entire concept of 'giving birth' that it forms an integral part of the female subconscious automatically, and just like the norms, exceptions and desires associated with childbirth, the females also crave for a 'normal', sane, beautiful and attractive daughter who can be the cynosure of all eyes. And if it is a boy, he should be a constant reminder of the physical prowess, skill, stamina, sportsmanship, and an amazing ability to contribute to society. An added advantage is his ability to rescue a princess in distress or danger. This is, what we see again *The Bluest Eye*, where Pecola's mother works in a White household, and she is bogged down by her own

unhappy marriage and life of drudgery and destitution. Pauline, Pecola's mother suffers from the illusions created by the values and norms of the White society and strictures of a dominant culture, and therefore she tries to escape the deformity in her life by conforming to all exceptions of those she envies. In an attempt to cling on to the fairy tale notions of White's supremacy as a prerequisite of beauty, we discover Pauline striving to deny and negate her harsh realities of life and creating a cordial relationship with the Fishers, the White people for whom she works. In a kind of an analogue of her daughter's desire for blue eyes, Pauline too idealizes the cultural norms represented by the Fishers. As Morrison writes in a key passage in the novel: "more and more she neglected her house, her children, her man - they were like the ... dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lively".<sup>6</sup> And so, we find how the conventional concept of beauty is given prominence in a race which has been marginalized for a long period of time.

In fact, the creation of cultural concepts is an important enterprise that cultural studies try to promulgate and authenticate. The production, reception and cultural significances (among which literature is also accounted as one of the many 'signifying practices').

Bengt Holbek is unusual among folklorists in that his interpretation of Fairy Tales is uncompromisingly set on a theoretical level. When we analyze this Danish author's findings, we find that he proposes a

comprehensive theory on the basis for which is the clear assessment that all problems in the realm of 'oral verbal art' have 'to be seen as being dependent upon that of meaning'. He further expounds that the 'marvellous' elements in fairy tales are 'symbolic', meaning that they 'convey feelings rather than thoughts'. It is true, because as they percolate down through generation after generation, there is a tendency that the maximum of the tales are coloured, partially or wholly by the dominant norms, values, ethics, morals and prominent ideals of a particular generation and behave cordially or virulently with the female characters accordingly. Thus, in some tribal societies, till now, maternity, maternal supremacy and matrilineal line of control is a socially prestigious issue, although it is almost a rare case.

In the realm of cultural studies, for example, anthropologist Chris Knight defines the dragon as paradoxical element to the core worldwide- uniting in it high and low, death and life, animal and human, water and fire, dark and light. It is a symbolic presentation of the accumulation of power, strength of sinews, fiery upheaval, and darkness filtering through steady realms of light. Women are not like dragons (although villainous women characters are made akin to them), and dragons also stand for masculine potency and supremacy, that cannot be ignored.

Prejudices become so deeply rooted that children begin to absorb and accumulate these messages

through their exposure to the seemingly wholesome children's films, and often construe their worldview accordingly. Little girls frequently dream of becoming beautiful, acquiescent princesses and little boys strive to identify with the mighty and brave knights, warriors and fighters. Body basic of males is another criterion which is prioritized in fairy tales. 'A girl will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars', says soldier Yao in *Mulan*. Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* boastingly proclaims that he's 'got biceps to spare'.

Those characters that do not fit these idealized body types usually represent outcast, misfits or evil personages.

There are certain codified works which are highlighted in fairy tales. Household tasks are given foremost importance and an expertise in household tasks actually symbolizes the victory of any fairytale female character. For example, in *Snow White*, a strong gusto for cleaning is noticed. She is characterized as the perfect maidservant who carries out her domestic chores while singing happy tunes. *Cinderella* too, is given her identity while she works in clearing the cinders and other unwanted dirt and squalor of her household.

Moreover, sacrifice is also associated with female characters in fairy tales. *Ariel*, for instance, gives up her voice, in the hope of getting her man while *Belle*, in *Beauty and the Beast* is discouraged from pursuing self-actualization. When she is caught reading, Gaston tells her:

"It's not right for a woman to read. Soon she starts getting ideas, thinking."<sup>6</sup>

Male occupations on the other hand, are more defining of their identity. The male characters do not have to prove their self-worth, and selfhood through brave actions such as diving into danger, combat against evil forces, and mortal battles of other kinds, all with fearless determination. I am specially referring here to the Bengali fairy tale *Bete Rajputra* (The Short Prince), where three princes go to a country where everything has been petrified due to the curse of a witch. The elder prince is advised by an old man to excavate ten thousand gold coins from underneath a ground. But that has to be performed before sunset. And instantly the eldest prince starts delving deep into the earth, the muscular body, the perspirations trickling down his face, all represent the immense male potential to do physical activities. But quite surprisingly, it is a version of a female- a princess watches the sweat-clad body of the three princes, and it is given a feminist dimension that even a female can watch the sexually appealing male, when his performance is at his best, sweating, with rhythmic sound made by the axe, ploughing out the land.

All these images help to construct domination as a cultural masculine norm-and in certain cases, violence as an accepted part of masculinity. They depict man as forceful and aggressive, if not abusive, towards other men as well as their treatment of women. 'Now you

respect me, because I am a threat' says syndrome in *The Incredibles*. The unwillingness or inability to fight is shown as unmanly. If they express aggression, this is also taken as a normal behaviour, and it is expected that normal women should tolerate this behaviour and take responsibility for keeping men's violence at bay. In *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle endures the Beast's abusive behaviour in the hope of bringing out his tender side. This aggressive phase is brought out in many Bengali Fairy Tales which eulogize princes playing with swords, and remaining unrivalled in archery and other masculine activities. In fact this is what constitutes the major concerns of the Feminist studies. Also Feminist writers concentrate upon the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object, or 'other'. To man as the dominating 'subject' who is assumed to represent humanity in general. In fact, by the cultural process where the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as the master, the originator, creator and designer of the other non-important forms that exist in our society.

The tremendous impact of the socializing force of fairy tales can also be viewed in several forms of later English and American writings (1950 onwards). When we peruse through Lisa M. Fiander's book titled *Fairy Tales and The Fiction in Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble and A.S.Byatt*, it is revealed that there is a curious amalgamation of the children's fairy tales and

the socializing and re-shaping of women characters in modern English and American writings. They become a chequered pattern of animated fairy tales of suffering, cruelty and helplessness of the woman. In chapter two: *Cinderella Stories*, where Fiander discusses how in Murdoch's novel *The Italian Girl* (1964), the tale of Cinderella helps to explain the domination of a male character by his mother, with Edmund Norraway filling not just the role of the prince, but also that of Cinderella. If this is examined as a single step towards the rectification of the utter pathetic situation of a woman (here, it is a man who is constantly dominated by a 'mother', the figure who intimidates him), but simultaneously his mother is almost a modern-day replica of a witch or an inherent evil who tries to restrain the forces of mankind. Very easily it can be generated as part of the re-shaping of older fairy tales, but the fact that she is given a formidable, and therefore, an evil dimension, cannot be neglected altogether. It is not just a remembrance of the magical reality, but also a delineation of the weakness in character of males, when they are fascinated with the sexual maturity of women. Even societal prescriptions dwindle when Edmund is fascinated by Otto's daughter, his own brother is Otto, his own niece, who is now a teenager, and for the first time since Edmund last saw her sexually mature.

In chapter three of this particular book, *Bad Love and Beast Tales*, it is similarly found what the actual extent of

damage that bad love, beastly love and association with beasts can cause is. Being more of a ghastly tale of cruelty inflicted upon woman, these tales are preoccupied with the alien concept of fairy tales. The deep, unknown familiarity and fear of the world of beasts, and how the woman is torn, ripped apart, tortured upon and violated by both man and beast. Bad love and beast tales project the story of Beauty and the Beast encouraged in a circus act, where a young woman dances with the tigers. In the indomitable spirit of the tiger and a world representing fur, sinew, and grace, the socializing power of circus is brought forward as a gigantic ring of cruelty where beast is allocated a much superior position and the woman pitted against the tawny hide, the brutal force and the unknown fear that the tiger exhibits. It is almost a diabolical act where she is constantly dancing with the tiger and is scratched and wounded. In a pathetic manner, it is then revealed to the readers that after entertaining the audience, when she retires backstage with her human companions, she (Mignon) always makes love 'in the dark because her body' is 'every inch scattered with claw marks, as if tattooed.' This imprint is a social imprint, society has always derived an immense pleasure from the animal instincts that impregnated women almost devoured them and they had to retire 'backstage'. This backstage is relevant as it symbolizes, for me, the impenetrable world of darkness where the woman is relegated, for the second time, to entertain her

male lover. It is the 'body' which matters as it is the prime source of entertainment. Hence, fairy tale concepts are born large in various subconscious recesses of the public mind, and the retelling of Beauty and the Beast becomes a tale of the atrocities done to women.

Even if the life of a princess or a woman is to be made secure, that cannot be possible without the cautious intervention of a male character. In *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel is provided with a secure future and a life of luxury by Prince Eric; it is Cinderella who is extricated from a life of drudgery by Prince Charming. Fairy tales as an important part of popular culture, were adapted to the silver screen during the 20th century, a time when many minorities were jostling hard for a better social position in the ladder of the social hierarchy, *Twilight Saga*, for example, is nothing but a teenage girl named Bella's imaginative world and her urge for dependency on a strong, capable man. Since she herself is extremely weak clumsy and a vulnerable woman, it requires her vampire boyfriend Edward and Werewolf friend Jacob to constantly come to rescue her.

The image of a female and how she is to behave is imposed upon her by the society. Although the social causes of her suffering are not always visible and ready to be interpreted, yet her excruciating pain has to be silenced, if she is not to be stigmatized and vilified by males. At least, the witch should be careful to hide herself in her anguish, because recognition will bring social exclusion and for the

heroine also, misrecognition of her qualities can land her into big troubles. By action, or by indifference, a woman cherishes the lonely and fantastic world that she creates. Unlike the happily ever after catchword, her union with a man is often cemented in heartlessness, not in love. Relations often become undifferentiated, transitory, devoid of all personal preferences.

So cultural constructs are generally facts that tell story about our lives, and constantly challenge, idolize, subvert and confuse the concepts of self, prominent ideologies and conventions. What actually constitutes a good home is a pertinent cultural construct that numerous fairy tales pose as an objective. Defeating and beguiling a stepmother, achieving a successful marriage, producing children, restoring an endangered household, gaining wealth, escaping danger, and breaking a dehumanized enchantment- all have a cumulative effect in constructing identity, community and security in a way that warrants a proclamation of 'happily ever after'. Everything ranging from naming a girl or a boy, to his parents' identity- all are complicated cultural constructs which are governed by society laws. And this is really pathetic and thought-provoking that, in spite of changed social circumstances of reproduction, gender differentiation and considerable polarization of interests, activities and personalities of women and men prevail in most areas of our life. And although the biological sex is not completely separable from cultural gender, and gender stereotypes bank

upon biological sex, the variability of women and men within their own sex is much more pronounced than the difference between women and men as groups.

It should not be disregarded that culture, in its broadest sense, is a huge corpus of timeless and stable representations. It is often passed on as an uncritical, solid, and catch-all expression for everything, where visions of people are agenized, and it is generally a tendency to call on culture when faced with something we cannot otherwise understand. And so, very aptly, the fairy tale heroine finds out that this big, bad, brutal world cannot be truly identified by the naked eyes. It is generally a concept therefore that the interpretation of fairy tales vary from country to country and ages to ages, or generation after generation, and Angela Carter has very aptly opined, therefore that in fairy tales once upon a time people could see the wood for the trees and with a grim humour and clarity, she still registers the awful legacy of the fairy tale which concentrates on the perfect woman, and also she sees the genre a means by which a writing woman may take flight. Gender-politics do not undo the formal appeal of the fairy tale, though they mean that we have to take a longer detour through cultural history to arrive at lightness. Culture, gender stereotype, male, female, virtuous, vicious, black, white, race, milieu, generation, infertility- all are inextricably linked to one another when we start examining the cultural constructs and gender stereotyping present in

fairy tales and accelerated by them. But it is quite sad that women, their position, their achievement, their inhibitions, faults, penury, starvation, deprivation, success and failure all are measured, contained, manipulated and given a concrete shape in a culturally biased, superficial atmosphere that was, that is, and that will be predominantly masculine. It is obviously no use dealing with the evils of cultural constructs that fairy tales have projected, because mere reflections on these hazards would not really matter to the development of women, even by an inch. But it will be good to see if at least a minimum change is also visible, if finally there is a subversion of the masculine cultural pattern and gender stereotyping, then that will be a welcome relief to most women of all countries.

#### Endnotes:

1. Marcia R. Lieberman speaks about the images formed in the mind of girls and boys during their formative years, regarding beauty, and how disparaging these concepts are, in the course of their life. *Someday My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through Fairy tales.*
2. Explained by Jung as part of his *Contributions to Analytical Psychology*, in 1928 and also in 1960 version.
3. Morrison's underlining of the cleft between

the Black and the White is also visible in the description of the piano keys. *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison.

4. Leslie Marmon silko's discourse about the culture of storytelling as an art, oral and verbal form and how they create impressions in the mind of individuals. *Storytelling from A Pueblo Indian Perspective*, by Leslie Marmon Silko, in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*. Carole Boyce Davis. Routledge Publications, page number : 119.
5. Concentration upon the female fertility under the disguise of animals. It talks about the egg-laying potency of the Golden Goose. *The Golden Goose Book*.
6. A kind of indirect injunction about how reading injects new ideas into female mind, and therefore this habit of her's has to be discarded. *The Meanings Of "Beauty and the Beast"*. A Handbook. Jerry Griswold. Broadview Press.
7. A poem by the famous Bengali Feminist poet and writer, Taslima Nasreen. Translated by Niharika Mishra.



3

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Gender Stereotyping As Presented  
Through Fairy Tales

“I am an expression of the divine, just like a peach is, just like a fish is. I have a right to be this way...I can't apologize for that, nor can I change it, nor do I want to... We will never have to be other than who we are in order to be successful...We realize that we are as ourselves unlimited and our experiences valid. It is for the rest of the world to recognize this, if they choose.”

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

The representations of gender identity and behaviour of children were also moulded and shaped by the classical attributes of female cultural phenomenon. The classical tales were primarily objectifying theorems like how we were born (delivered by the stork), what sexual scripts are accepted as part of the social norms, regulations and prescriptions, how men and women were supposed to act, and ultimate love resembled a phenomenon that ends in a happy marriage and reproduction. Stories like *Cinderella*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Frog Prince*, *Beauty and the Beast*- all describe and further authenticate stereotypically demeaning sexual script, and the association with women as witches and the role

of woman as the 'other'. However, blurring of gender roles happens regularly in American individuals, but it is not depicted after in popular culture and media. The act of petrifying a female serves as a short cut to the way that majority of the population views our culture. A thought we may disagree with, is the manner in which gender roles are represented in these fairy tales, it still serves us in gaining a basic understanding of how our society accepts or rejects what it means to be male or female.

Gender roles in fairy tales are more lenient toward man than woman, when it comes to actions in their life, which then gives man more power, and therefore reinforces the subservience of woman to man, while depicting woman as vulnerable and more susceptible to sin. In fact, the most famous series of children's literature, Harry Potter, is also caught in a vortex of allegations regarding gender discrimination in the text. Elizabeth E. Heilman and Trevor Donaldson discuss on the grave differences between the male hero and his female companion in their book *From Sexist to (Sort of) Feminist: Representations of Gender in the Harry Potter Series*. It is written that, for the novels to be progressive and contemporary, Harry should have been a 'Henrietta' (quoted in Thompson 44). Accusations have also been made against J.K. Rowling of undermining women because, women do not get important parts in the series since the person who is ultimately the most important of them all, is Harry, a boy.

Heilman further adds that Bloomsbury, the English publishing company that agreed to print *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in 1997, urged Rowling to only publish her first name's initials, J.K., for fear that boys, initially the book's target audience, would not read a book written by a woman. As is evident, it would be rather an irresponsible act to portray Molly Weasley mainly as a housewife, or to give Hermione a leading role only because of her cleverness to help Harry in fulfilling his final task of killing Lord Voldemort. In fact, as Kylene Beers, the creator of an online discussion guide has observed, that Hermione becomes the outspoken champion of the marginal in the entire series, as she herself is marginal, the other, born out of non-magical parents. As the "other" however, she resists clear-cut definitions of who can or cannot be a wizard or witch, since she is the most accomplished student in Hogwarts.

Fairy tales are definitely locales for the construction of much of the dominant and usual gender behaviour. They are a definite and concrete part of the complex layering of cultural stories and influences that constitute a different type of 'Script', as P.S. Rice has mentioned in the book *Gendered Readings of a Traditional Feminist Folktale by Sixth-Grade Boys and Girls*, and the script contributes for acceptable forms of feminine and masculine behaviour as well as, facilitate the production of such behaviour by 'creating positions to occupy.' It is a general tendency on the part of the fairy tales to form the boundaries of

agency, subjectivity and anticipated rewards. They are powerful and indomitable cultural agents that tell us how 'to be' - what ensues is this- the tales; like Cinderella, Snow White, Thumbelina and many others prepare the young girls for romantic love and heterosexual practices. Girls come to know that their value lies in men's desire for them, and the characteristics and qualities that will assure their desirability are revealed in cultural storylines (P. Gilbert, *And They Lived Happily Ever After: Cultural Storylines and the construction of Gender*). Girls do not adopt these positions passively, but however, actively construct their subjectivities in response to the power of discourse and ideology.

In the book titled *Encyclopaedia of Feminist Theories* by Lorraine Code, we find references of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan offering insight into the socializing force that fairy tales act as. They are immensely pivotal in controlling the desires of young girls, teaching them the damaging 'virtues' of self-effacement and sexual restraint. For example, if the pinnacle of ambition that is reached by the female protagonist such as Cinderella is taken into consideration, then it is seen that this ambition actually renders fallacious hopes of a 'happy ever after' ending in women readers, discouraging them from thinking independently about themselves.

Donald Haase presents a more detailed criticism on this topic, in his edited compilation of several essays titled *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, and

penetrates into the nineteenth century most influential body of popular tales, the Grimms collection which categorized a bad girl and a boy for one and the same deed (Bottigheimer, *Grimm's Bad Girls*). That curious polarization corresponded to social assumptions about gender in nineteenth century Germany and in western culture as a whole in that period. Bottigheimer's study shows how Grimm's revisions 'weakened once strong female characters, demonized male power, imposed a male perspective on stories voicing women's discontents, and rendered heroines powerless by depriving them of speech, all in accord with the social values of their time.'<sup>1</sup>

Clash between males and females and the specific way of visualizing the feminine concept as the accumulation of a bundle of emotional excesses, has given rise to the creation of 'boundaries', between the self and the 'Other', where there is an incessant, and often obnoxious tussle between the urge to decide who is the 'self', who is the 'other', and how their identities are decided. If we view culture not as a homogeneous, generalized concept, but as a stable value system, which governs human action and is concretely observed in social institutions like family, corporations, or else, government,<sup>2</sup> we find that the female subjectivity has long been one of the natural (according to patriarchal dictat) and cardinal feature of most of the cultures. The embeddedness of appropriate gendered behaviours masks the fact that fairy tales are created and reproduced through the

dominant discourse. A primary motivation for gender construction in a patriarchal culture is to prepare and inculcate in young girls, the exulted process of romantic love and heterosexual practices. Girls come to know that their worth lies when they are considered desirable and good by men, and the parameters which determine their desirability is noted down in famous classical fairy tales.

As we see in tales like *Cinderella*, she is the epitome of the ideal angelic female, as an oppositional character to the stepmother and stepsisters, representing the 'monster' images (Gilbert and Gubar).<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the queer and nefarious act of burning witches (in Germany) was from a folk belief that burning a witch's body ended her power, and also the folk practices of destroying a witch through the magic agency of iron.

Historian Sylvia D. Hoffert defines a gender ideal as 'the cluster of characteristics, behaviour patterns, and values that members of a group think a man or a woman should have a set of cultural expectations'. Another thing quite common in the fairy tales is that, the hero can never be wrong and his virulent acts are always justified as something, which if not done, would have endangered the entire kingdom and mankind. For instance, in one version of *Cinderella*, the hero is set to marry a young woman, but falls in love with her more beautiful younger sister. He ends up marrying the beautiful girl, and the elder sister then tries to kill the new wife. And quite similar to what the world thinks,

the hero is not termed as fickle minded, but a ferocious judge who did the right thing, since the scorned women turned out to be pure evil.

Apart from constructing stereotypes, fairy tales also deal with biased matters relating to gender roles. There seems to be a known pattern which is very easily discerned from most of the fairy tales: the wealthy man who remarries after his wife passed away due to childbirth, the daughter who grows up to be the most beautiful yet most vulnerable to outside sorceries and malevolence, and lives a most tragic life, till a prince comes to rescue her and give her only a secondary position, compared to himself, where he becomes the king of an empire, and she the brittle and fragile queen. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that Sigmund Freud has theorized that each human goes through five stages of psychosexual development and will experience pleasure in one part of the body more than in others at each stage (Santrock, 49). The stages include oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latency stage, and genital stage. According to Freud, the phallic has a special significance because this is when the Oedipus complex appears, causing the child to replace the same-sex parent and to find affections in the opposite sex parent. Freud also referred to this stage as "penis-envy" for girls because girls blame their mothers for their lack of penis, and change their sexual focus toward their fathers (Santrock,50).<sup>4</sup> The psychoanalyst

further reassured that boys do shift their sexual focus toward the opposite sex but they will surely and still identify with their fathers because they both have a penis. This theory clearly makes males a predominant figure because of their sexual advantage. Bringing this back to gender roles in fairy tales, males seem to have more power than females when it is a matter of love because males have what it takes to satisfy females, which somewhat put them in charge. If this is the case, then love mainly revolves around sexual acts between a male and a female because he holds the supreme key to sexual acts.<sup>5</sup>

When Bengt Holbek talks about how fairy tales convey feelings rather than thoughts, he also talks about impressions. The vivid emotional 'impressions' refer to beings, events and phenomena of the real world. In doing so, we find Holbek focusing on emotional impressions whose interpretation consists in retracing all "marvellous" elements back to the real world referents of such impressions. He further uses a system of seven rules for reverting symbolic expressions to their corresponding emotional impressions. In doing so, he mainly concentrates upon three thematic oppositions- young versus adult, male versus female, and low versus high. In adherence to his theory, if we concentrate on how these alternative elements are set up in pure juxtaposition in fairy tales, we will see in examples like the weapons like the knives, the

axes, all are 'sensitive' and painful images of those problems will experience pleasure in one part of the body more than in others at each stage (Santrock, 49). The stages include oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latency stage, and genital stage. According to Freud, the phallic has special significance because this is when the Oedipus complex appears, causing the child to replace the same-sex parent and to find affections in the opposite sex parent. Freud also referred to this stage as "penis-envy" for girls because girls blame their mothers for their lack of penis, and change their sexual focus toward their fathers (Santrock, 50).<sup>4</sup> The psychoanalyst further reassured that boys do shift their sexual focus toward the opposite sex but they will surely and still identify with their fathers because they both have a penis. This theory clearly makes males a predominant figure because of their sexual advantage. Bringing this back to gender roles in fairy tales, males seem to have more power than females when it is a matter of love because males have what it takes to satisfy females, which somewhat put them in charge. If this is the case, then love mainly revolves around sexual acts between a male and a female because he holds the supreme key to sexual acts.<sup>5</sup>

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her celebrated book "Feminism and the Subversion of Identity", Butler puts forward the fact that 'women' and 'woman' are fraught categories, complicated by class, ethnicity, sexuality and other facets of identity. This also enhances the reasons put forward by Luce Irigaray when she proposed that this dialectic belongs to a "signifying economy" that excludes the representation of women altogether because it employs 'phallogentric' language. The lack, vacuity, distance that has been created by the female 'self' thus becomes almost synonymous to a non-existence. It is a male-imposed vacuity and this vacuity is condemned, derogated, amplified and hurled at, by the male only. This is a reason why many men, even today, are keen on seeing pictured editions of *The Arabian Nights*, to satiate their soul, in interpreting who in reality is the 'self' and who is the 'other'. But Butler, on the contrary, notes that there was a prior assumption that there exists a female, 'self-identical' being, which required representation, but these arguments hide the impossibility of "being" a gender at all.

It is noteworthy how the gender stereotyping has extended its tentacles to job sector also. Psychologists have performed experiments and studies to support this concept. Taking an arbitrary group that consisted of numerous males and females, they asked them to write 'female' and 'male' to a list of job occupations and personality traits. Most of the secretary, assistant, in-house work was categorized under 'female', while

lawyers, CEOs and other high-profile positions were designated to 'males'. Dominant, loud traits were viewed as masculine attributes, whereas comforting warm traits were viewed as feminine. This is also visible in fairy tales very easily, for example, in the Brothers Grim's story Twelve Huntsmen, it is clear after reading the narrative that no man would ever think of casting his eyes on a spinning wheel. To test whether the twelve huntsmen of the tale's title are male or female, the king proposes having them pass by a row of dozens of spinning wheels; that the hunters fail to take notice of the instruments proves to him that they must be men. Had they smiled they would have betrayed their identity as 'women'.

Another story, Nicolas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn's book titled *Half the Sky* also portrays women who were physically abused, tortured, beaten up and even asphyxiated when they tried to run away from abusive marriages or simply for not conceiving a baby boy. One woman was left as a destitute in a shanty on the edge of her African village, because of a fistula that disturbed her husband from physical intimacy with her. She was left to fend off the coyotes and protect herself while still suffering from her fistula. Conflict engulfs her, her madness and the consequent suffering, a kind of word-language used by the people around her creates a double standard of whom and what she really is and the value systems expect her to be.

## Endnotes:

1. Torture done on women and the display of masculine power. *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*. Donald Haase. Published by Wayne State University Press.
2. Culture is a heterogeneous concept, modified and governed by several of the apparatus used by the state. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviours, Institutions*. By Geert H. Hofstede. Sage Publications. 2001.
3. Gilbert and Gubar describe the monster images attributed to the women when they necessarily do not try to conform to the patriarchal values. She is a dangerous creature, then. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*, By Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Yale University Press.
4. The stages of psycho-sexual development and the growth of the concept of penis-envy, discussed by J.W. Santrock in *Psychology Essential 2nd Updated Edition*. Tata McGraw Hill Education
5. The weapon with which the male satisfies the female is the penis, so that itself promises a victory to the male. Their identity is boosted ;discussed by Santrock in *Psychology Essential 2nd Updated Edition*. Tata McGraw Hill Education.
6. The site and origination principle of any matter

decides its future course. The location of the male and female body and matter is very important in deciding the role and significance of the female. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. By Judith Butler, in the year 1993, published by Routledge Publications.

7. Epigraph : Alice Walker wrote these lines in her book *The Color Purple*.



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Rewriting Of Fairy Tales

“Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate,  
no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of  
my mind.”

Virginia Woolf, (*A Room of One's Own*)

Fairy tales scholar Marina Warner enunciated that ‘it is the openness of myth, allowing for the weaning of new meanings and patterns that creates its (The Fairy Tales) ongoing potency’ (Warner cited in Sellers - 2).<sup>1</sup> It was, in fact, this ardent dedication to other archetypes that inspired feminists to undertake the re-examination and rewriting of the original fairy tales. After rummaging through the works of Goodwin Bradley, I found out that in America in the 1960s baby boomers entered the topsy-turvy phase of adolescence and young adulthood at a time when African Americans, Hispanic farm workers, American Indians and women were fighting for recognition and equality. The assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King increased, accentuated and infuriated the sense of urgency for change. In 1961 President Kennedy established the Presidential Commission on the status of women and in 1963; Betty Friedan published *The*

Feminine Mystique, widely considered the immediate inspiration for the Women's Movement. Radical Ideals, women empowerment, rational frames of mind, and analytical outpouring became the mainstream voice of the women. Women became more involved in politics, tripling the number of women in State Legislatures.

During this smouldering phase of discontentment against how women has been continuously treated in fairy tales, in 1979 Carolyn G. Heillbren called for a kind of re-interpretation of the tales to include the 'emerging female self' and insisted that women to be identified with male attributes in the tales, so that she could discover within them, alternative parts of themselves (Haase 5-6).<sup>2</sup> However this also set the stage for fresh speculations, leaving women with an 'ambiguity' about enacting change or adhering to prescribed roles. In this case, what comes to my mind right now, is a passage elucidated by Homi Bhabha, in his postcolonial rendering of the Location of Culture, in the first chapter in this edition, which is named The Commitment to Theory, Bhabha asserts that in any political change, there is a hybrid moment. It is during this critical phase, where the 'transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the one' (Unitary working class, as he mentions), 'nor the other' (which is, obviously, the politics of gender, but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both).<sup>3</sup> The hybrid

moment is very significant, as there is a true revelation of character and consciousness at this particular juncture, translation of feminist elements does not become mandatory, but it comes out automatically, with giving potency to not only any particular female character, but a complete revolutionary breakthrough, demolishing the stereotypes.

Moreover, as form of the 'resisting reader', in the 1970s there is a shift away from the passive female stereotype, and in this case we discover that women writers begin to offer alternative versions of fairy tales featuring dominating, indomitable, carefree, tough, physically strong and invincible heroines who rework fairy tale plots and motifs in their novels. They also tend to draw attention to the international fairy tales that portray women who also exhibit a liberating resistance to patriarchal constrictions, constructions and implications. One such text which reinforces this idea of female prowess, intellect and the warrior like figure is *Womenfolk and Fairy Tales (1975): An Anthology of Fairy Tales* by Rosemary Minard, which is marked by an awareness of its cultural capital, a revival of the non-canonical tales featuring strong women and the revision of well-known tales. This book is a challenge to both fixed and cultural notion about both gender and genre of fairy tales. It is not just a collection of Celtic, European, Japanese and Persian, as well as African tales. For example, in one of the stories of this anthology, *The*

Chinese Red Riding Hoods by Isabelle C.Chung, we find an extremely mighty Chinese Character Felice, Mayling and Ganne who confront a wolf who enters their house in the disguise of their grandmother- they 'pulled with all their might ... down he fell with a crash ... he began to scold'.

The True Story by Pat Murphy, published in the 1998 collection *Black Swan White Raven* tells the story of how a queen who sent her daughter away to avoid the incestual advances of her pedophilic and abusive husband, the king. The princess in under the tutelage of seven witches in the forest, and when the king dies, she is brought back to rule the kingdom in her own right, instead of at the side of a prince. Like *The Old Woman who Lost her Dumpling* by Lafser lio Hearn, and *Clever Grethel* by Walter de la Mare, in which we find the same reverberation of the Woman's omnipotence. In *The Old Woman Who Lost her Dumpling*, we come across a dumpling-maker, an emaciated old woman who crosses various roads, tunnels, holes and stones, to find and relocate one of her lost rice dumplings which had rolled in the floor of her little kitchen.

In a yet more unconventional explaneroty about the fate of Snow White, *Blancanieves* by Carmeh Boulosa, we find the experimental outburst of female sexuality, unravelling the relationship between the Queen and a forester (the hunter whom she had appointed to kill her step-daughter), and the 'love' triangle between the

two and Blancanieves (Snow White). In it, the sexuality starved and domineering queen dominates the forester, who, within his narrative, blames his sexual weakness on the magic potion that he was forced to drink. Kitchen and hand disappeared. When she also follows that, she falls down inside a big hole, and quite contrary or the earlier fairy tales which depict mentally emaciated women, this Japanese tale describes that the old woman is not at all hurt. She looks intently for her dumplings and cries:

“My dumpling, my dumpling, where is that dumpling of mine?”

After a while she sees a stone jizo standing by the roadside, which warns her of an imminent danger:

“Yes I saw your dumpling rolling by me down the road. But you had better not to go farther, because there is a wicked oni living down there, who eats people”.

The resisting and modern liberated woman recognizes the potency in this female character all at once, when the old woman laughs and disregards the forecast of the stone jizo.

Gradually, the oni arrives and takes the old woman far down the road, and brings her to his home, with the help of a boat. He leads her at once into the kitchen and tells her to cook some dinner for herself and the other oni who lives with him. The woman starts cooking for Oni everyday, and due to the magical spell that Oni had cast upon the kitchen single grain of rice multiplied the

pot and becomes a pot full of rice everyday. But very soon, the old woman becomes exhausted of the domestic chores performed in the house of the Oni, and she decides to leave the place. She takes the magic paddle and slips it under her girdle. Then she goes down the river and starts rowing very fast. Soon she is away from the shore.

But when the Onis come back, they see their cook has gone and they chase her to the river. They run down to the river at once, and see the old woman rowing away very fast. Perhaps they could not swim, at all events they have no boat, and they think they only way before she gets to the other bank. So they kneel down, and begin to drink so fast that before the old woman gets half way over, the water becomes quite low.

But the old woman starts making such funny faces that the Oni laughs and they throw up all the water they had drunk. And so the river becomes full again. The Oni cannot cross; and the funny old woman gets safely over to the other side, and runs away up the road to reach her home, and resumes the task of dumpling making. If we correlate this particular vivid and imaginative Japanese fairy tale with the erstwhile male-dominated ones, it becomes lucid to us that it is not only the physical stamina and understanding of the old woman that allows her to save her dumplings, but also she is a container of virtues, intellect, wit, and above all, unadulterated humour. She is intelligent enough to understand the psychological framework of the mind of the male Onis and moreover,

unlike her precursors in the conventional fairy tales, this old woman is not intimidated by anything. On the one hand, she retains her spontaneous, extraordinary culinary skills, (she cooks with satisfaction for the Oni), and on the other hand, she can comprehend and project what 'her' mind, the female mind and heart actually thirsts for. Her affinity to the domestic life that she has already left, does not for once, make her intellectual faculties blunt. But she can balance both the lives (the life in her home and in the house of the Oni) with equal élan and diversity.

She shows extraordinary courage and a steady spirit when she is not at all perturbed even after hearing the name of the Oni, from the stone jizo. It is on the dumplings that she concentrates and like the space travel or a dangerous odyssey undertaken by the prince in earlier fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, she embarks upon not only a journey on foot, by boat and various other ways of communication, but also a mental journey where she is more powerful and blessed with a never-say-die spirit, almost double to that of any of her male counterparts.

The latter quarter of the twentieth century, with particular emphasis on the women's movement on the development of the genre of feminist retelling of fairy tales is also an important occurrence. Donna Jo Napoli is one feminist author whose singular contribution to the re-working on fairy tales has made it only fertile, but

also a domain for creating an individual female voice of the protagonist as well as other characters who were erstwhile termed as 'negative'. Using narrative strategies that subvert the traditional omniscient narrator, she, on the other hand, selects as first person narrative most often, allowing the protagonist to be the agent of his own narration. A female protagonist is enabled if she narrates her own story. For example, in *The Magic Circle*,<sup>4</sup> Napoli makes a feminist re-vision of "Hansel and Gretel", allowing a deliberate decision to give her sorceress protagonist (the traditional witch) voice and agency. Napoli's decision regarding the sorceress invites the readers to rethink the age-old fairy tales from a new perspective.

There is a considerable upliftment in the mind of the readers when in modernist fairy tales, there is stress not only upon a replacement of all those qualities that were erstwhile present in the princess, but an emphasis upon the individual existence and building up a separate personality of female or the princess, is also observed. In the Bengali fairy tale *Chhoy Rajputra O Ak Rajkanya* (six princes and one princess), we find that contrary to what had been the conventional mode of story-telling in a fairy tale, here the king constantly yearns for a daughter, as against his six sons, and he does not deter himself from being abusive to his wife, for not being able to deliver a daughter. But one day, after contriving with a witch who promises a boon of a daughter upon him,

the king decides to excommunicate all his six sons. A daughter is born in the family thereafter.

When the princess reaches twelve years of age, she goes in search of her brothers and after much exhaustion; she is finally successful in finding them. No sooner does the princess and her brothers start living happily, than the wicked witch plans yet another tactic, and the brothers are transformed into scavenger birds and ravens. They visit her only during daytime, and keep on suffering. It is the princess' duty in this story, to protect and save the life of her endangered brothers. Much against the grain of how the earlier stories have depicted women, this princess plays a dexterous sleuth, to unravel the mystery behind her brother's transformation. She lures the wicked witch into believing that she is her distant relative and also brings delectable foods for her. Gradually, she comes to know that the witch has transformed many other mortal beings into insects, bestial animals, or else mawing and gibbering apes.

But even after all these it is a story that fully does not describe the princess's victory on a whole, because it is on the fortuitous arrival of the prince who wished to marry her, that her actual survival depends upon. The prince says the witch, in a devastating battle where the princess can just 'wait' and 'weep' for her brothers, the prince kills the parrot that is the source of the witch's life and finally, he is successful in taking the princess in marriage, to his own kingdom.

In a continuation of the story of Tatterhood (a small portion has been described in the Introduction), we find how Tatterhood faces a group of marauding invaders, the Trolls, single-handedly. She gives a confident shout:

“I will go out and drive them away”.

What follows is a vehement encounter between Tatterhood and the Trolls:

“She laid about with the wooden spoon, whacking trolls on the head or shoulders, rounding them up to drive them out. The whole palace shook with the crashes and shrieking, until it seemed the place would fall apart.”

On the contrary, the meek and overprotective mother could not save the fair and beautiful sister from getting hurt, and having a calf’s head replacing her own head. It is the extraordinary courage and indomitable mental spirit that further drives Tatterhood into embarking upon a sea-expedition and crossing the sea to reach a troll’s house, to fetch her sister’s head back:

“She leapt the goat through the window and into the house, snatched the head and leaped back outside again. She set off with it, and after her came the trolls. They shrieked and swarmed about her like angry bees. But the goat snorted and butted with his horns, and Tatterhood smacked them with her magic wooden spoon until they gave up and let her escape.”

She is given almost a triumphant subversion of what has earlier been shown as the sole prerogative of princes. We encounter, quite fortunately (although the

fact remains that it is not a projection of reality where the female's prestige is enhanced, but only another fairy tale). A tattered, shabby, out of the closet, peculiar (if she is to be judged by male values) in her own attributes and essential elements that constitute her, but at least, she is a mesmerising character not for the plastic beauty which her sister possesses, but by sheer dexterity of mind and courage.

In the Japanese fairy tale *Three Strong Women*, we discover how a man who desired to derive great satisfaction by almost eve-teasing and physically abusing a fat girl, is ultimately overthrown and relegated to an inferior position, only to be reminded that it is unpleasant and not desirable for any girl to get her prestige hampered by a man, even if a wrestler. When he tries to tickle the fat girl and makes a funny ticklish "kochokochokocho", the girl instantly brings one of her arms down so that the male wrestler's hand is caught between it and her body. He tried all his strength to pull out his hand; and even warns the girl that 'I am a very powerful man. If I pull too hard, I might hurt you', to which the girl just says:

"I admire powerful men."<sup>5</sup>

And then she walks forward, and "though the wrestler tugged and pulled until his feet dug great furrows in the ground, he had to follow. She couldn't have paid him less attention if he had been a puppy- a small one."

It is, therefore, a carefully constructed female single act of self-statement where the woman takes a superior and more powerful position than that of her early counterparts, and in the process, she demolishes the myth of female weakness that men have constructed for so long, a conflict which comes to a resolution where her own identity was questioned.

In the Punjabi fairy tale *Kamala and the Seven Thieves*, we similarly notice how the intelligence and spontaneous wit of Kamala, a young Punjabi maid is able to beguile a group of thieves, and forcing them to plough and make ready a piece of arable land for Kamala and her husband to survive.

A significant development towards women empowerment through fairy tales was the female sexual potency that was given an entirely new dimension in the re-writing of fairy tales. These provided a welcome alternative to the male-dominated tradition of credentialed experts who had long been bent upon reflecting about the nature of female sexuality and what consisted 'pure' womanhood. But now, the rewritings focused upon the woman's autonomous sexuality, a cultural medium and a context which reflected historical change and conflict, and on which the politics of gender are inscribed with special clarity. It cannot be said to be a complete role-reversal where the need for phallogocentric worldview is totally and utterly neglected, but keeping the male counterparts intact, these writings emphasize,

instead, on the revitalizing and open, candid, frank description of the woman's own physical, bodily, clitoral needs and desires. Now, along with care, perfection, feelings and traditional moral and ethical heritage, the woman of substance shows the need for a radical reorganizing of stipulated data that deal with the prevailing opposition between emotion and thought. Moral and ethical heritage, again, are very relative concepts and what constitutes the rewriting is just an analysis of how the females were compelled to 'fit in' these moral and ethical concept. This is what we find in *Devi and the Sea-witch*, a story in Barbara G. Walker's collection of stories in *Feminist Fairy Tales*. Part of the story goes like this:

"Devi led her along the beach to his cottage, thinking that this must surely be a dream. Once indoors, the sea-witch threw off the shirt and took him in her arms. She taught him to make love to her and stayed with him all night. Devi was so happy that the hours seemed to pass like minutes. At the first light of dawn, the sea-witch kissed him and left, promising to return the next night." (page 125).

Here we see not just the physical, crude sensuality that a woman can possess as well as exude, but also how the female body and carnal desires stand out as both attractive, captivating, as well as oppressive elements on man. The intense and fatal association with the consummation of love, attraction and raw enigma is presented through the portrayal of the sea-witch.

Spiritual tenacity and conversion, as well as adherence to something new, and doctrines of religious vitality are also important features which are part of the new feminist re-working of fairy tales. Suddenly there is a realization for the women that they also have substance as an individual; for instance, in Janette Winterson's *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*, a part of the writing deals with the depiction of the story of *The Princess and the Moth*, where romantic love between man and woman is replaced by profound love for God. This can also be true and unquestionable faith on religion also forms a part of that same female who has tried to beguile, dupe and attract innumerable men for satisfying her young, youthful, fiery desires.

However, there are so many variations of the rewriting of fairy tales that they form not just a unidimensional portrayal of strong heroines, but also comply with the fact that even in a female world where she is undertaking a hazardous expedition, risk and reward exists with every choice- the magic beans in *Kate and the Beanstalk*,<sup>6</sup> for example, are initially disappointing, but they lead Kate and her mother to their rightful home and property. Not only this, but the tale also suggests that with confidence, quick thinking, alertness of mind and action, even a woman can surmount the biggest challenges of life. Mary Pope Osborne's *Kate and the Beanstalk*, the protagonist Kate accomplishes the daunting task of retrieving treasure, climbing down the stalk to hide them in the

bush, and outwitting the giant and his wife by wearing disguises.

Thus we see a bold and almost Gothic description of Angela Carter's rewriting of the picture of Sleeping Beauty in *Lady of the House of Love*, in which the reorganizing and reiterating of the sleeping beauty as vampire negates, befuddles and topples the patriarchal construction of the symbol- the ultimate passive woman, asleep and awaiting the kiss of the prince, becomes a powerful devouring feminine. The tremendous erotic extravaganza attached to the vampire, whose possession of fangs appropriates in particular obvious symbolic terms phallic authority of the male. All primordial notions regarding scientific rationality, historical architecture, sleep/death parallels- all come as a wholesale rejection of the canonical narrative patterns. Women in the feminist rewriting of fairy tales at least have a name of their own, where they can reject marriage in favour of personal independence, they can have supernatural, and often astronomical powers, they are worldly wise and do not care for patriarchal rejection or redemption. If earlier they were seen as the manifestation of the 'Other', now also, in the graphic descriptions of fearless feminist fairy tale heroines, they are remaining the 'Other', but obviously with a radical metamorphosis from their previous position. They are often projected as a receptacle for mysterious and negative, or psychologically complicated projections of the entire mankind. Even the virtues that

these women possess are a precise and urgent threat to male constitution and male body. Behind the normal, all-complacent existence, and human features now pose a constant stimulation of fantasies of castration and devouration and a preternatural intelligence constantly lurks which both exerts violence upon the masculine identity and morphs them, or makes them docile and submissive, quite contrary to their earlier indomitable selves. Therefore one of the basic roles that the feminist writer is trying to perform is entering into a dialogue with other literatures and realities not only in criticism but also in fiction, often with the hope of stimulating and training others in becoming resisting readers.

While the primary fairy tale texts displayed what Vivian Liska describes as “ an optimism derived from the enlightenment’s promises odd justice, equality and emancipation (criticism,96),<sup>6</sup> and a belief of a staunch support of the fact that literature can change society for the better when it is penned with the “right” ideological stance. This is especially, and quite conspicuously present in the late 1970s and 1980s, with revealing titles such as *The Princess Who Stood on her own Two Feet* by Jeanne Desy,1982, *The Tough Princess* by Martin Waddell and Patrick Bencon, (1986), and *Rapunzel’s Revenge: Fairy tales for Feminists*, by Anne Claffey et abe (1985). These tales have evolved under the influence of numerous theoretical perspectives like semiotics, Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Deconstruction theory and Queer studies,

but obviously retaining their individuality in each case. And quite successfully they have done that, by exploiting the critical potential of this intertextual links with the traditional story, these “alternative” versions give readers an impression of what literary theory can bring about: fairy tale retellings try to make readers who draw the connection with the pre-text aware of issue and possible interpretations in these texts that they may not have noticed before.

Thus, in *The Princess who stood on her Two Feet*, it is seen how a prince is almost shocked to disappointment when he discovers that the princess to whom he is going to be betrothed, is actually taller than him. When the naive princess asks her silky, pet dog why the prince is amazed, the dog voices forth its observation- he explained that outside the princess kingdom, “man liked to be taller than their wives.” The dog struggles to explain:

“They think if they’re not, they can’t...train falcons as well. Or something.” Hence, that something is unanswered, because that is also a dogmatic opinion put forward by the patriarchal society that wives should always be shorter than their husbands. This trend is strictly visible when the prince goes for a ride with the princess on a ride. He thought that both of their height will be same and so he canters along happily with the princess. When he comes in front of a hedge, he gallops faster, and to his utter disgrace, he finds that, instead

of appreciating him, the princess also does the same. Retaining his composure although he again feels like leaving her, he asks:

“ Didn’t anyone ever tell you,” he said coldly, “that ladies ride side saddle?”

It is a shameful revelation that the prince makes later much to what the feminist fairy tale writers have also noticed earlier in the conventional fairy tales- very carefully and off-guardedly he asks the princess:

“Haven’t you ever heard that woman should be seen and not heard?”

But the ending of the story comes out as an inevitable jolt to the readers when after compliance with everything that the prince demands the princess finally decides to cancel her engagement. When her parents are hopeless about how she has ruined the onset and advantages bestowed upon her by destiny and a worthy prince, she can retort, but in an intelligent, soft, stoic but active manner:

“It is not necessarily my duty to sacrifice everything... and I have other duties: a princess says what she thinks. A princess stands on her own two feet. A princess stands tall. And she does not betray those who love her.”

She understands at last that to exonerate herself from the manacles of patriarchy and the normative behaviour imposed by the kingdom or as kingship defined behaviours are, she must sacrifice her own life. But that is, of course, not on the literal level. The wizard

says to her in an extremely philosophical tone that for "Rebirth", a "Death is sometimes necessary". Thus, it is a portrayal of venturing forth into the darkest realms of one's own inner self and mind, to emerge victorious, try and test the trials and victories of initiations and the return and restabilization of one's own concepts with that of society's. For far and wide, they are feminine in the pattern of their reproductions, incest and also the killing of their mates. They have their own female 'space', often portraying the disturbing representation of aggressive, revolting female sexuality confounded by equal and opposite masculine sexual aggression represent the extreme, demoniac portrayal of femininity directly opposing the ineffectually angelic women.

But even the retellings are not free from criticism. Anne Cronny-Francis focuses her analysis of feminist rewriting of fairy tales on the readers' oscillation between pretext and revision. The texts in question operate as metafiction which, while significant in themselves of particular gender relations, relay on the constant comparison with traditional narrative to construct a feminist reading position. If we even take into consideration this particular fact then it is also to be admitted that this reliance on the earlier narratives does not, in any way, tarnish or reduce their reputation of being a literary product in their entirety. They are complicated and made simplistic re-appraisal of parody and pastiche, critique, and redeployment, which can

both conserve or contest dominant cultures and the cultural values of intertexts.

The Story of the Red Fox (Powerbook 179-181), for instance, though employed within a more complex narrative, seems similarly illustrative in its moral, depicting as it does the power relations between two lovers: Alix, the cyber storyteller and her unnamed client.

Interplaying with the theme of love as entrapment, the tale is of a hunter's unrequited love for a vain princess, and traces his traditionally machismo production of ever-more savage animal pelts as love tokens. Demanding the skin of a mysterious red fox, she agrees to his demand that the fox be brought to her alive. Despite the magical redness against the world of white snow, its ability to melt winter, and its eloquent, brave eyes, she hesitates 'only a second' (181) before having it slaughtered, whereby she is left with the corpse of the hunter. No overt moral accompanies the story, which ends abruptly with the sacrifice of the lover, but it stands as a story 'as present', given by the ardent narrator, Alix, to the expensively dressed lover, reluctant to risk a relationship.

The simple plot and the magical duality of the snowy world of the white-skinned princess and the rich red warmth of the fox linked to blood and passion, point to the lost opportunities of the married lover, afraid of passionate excess and intensity, and also hint at what Alix risks in loving (the slaughter of the self).

Sexing the Cherry, another story, a rewriting of The Twelve Dancing Princesses, uses as its central motif, a description of Jordan, one of the two main narrators, searching for Fortunata, the twelfth princess. The initial conventional tale of the twelve princesses depicts how the princesses escape their father's incarceration each night to dance in a magical kingdom underground. The king offers a princess' hand in marriage to whosoever can discover why they are found each morning exhausted, with their dancing shoes worn out. Though the sisters drug various men who attempt to uncover their secret, an old soldier at last outwits them and uncovers the answer. He chooses the eldest daughter, due to his age, while the story ends and the other daughters are left to an unknown fate.<sup>7</sup>

In spite of all the successes and reworking of the earlier tenets of fairy tales, however, a question that constantly perturbs me, is, that if the masculine power was not there, or if the male characters were not there, if the social prescriptions were not entirely male, and if the parameters of courage, prowess, intelligence and dexterity were not to be epitomized in men earlier (and now also), then whom would have the feminist females defied? One particular fact should not be blurred from our perspective and that is, if Perrault's or Brothers Grimm's stories were not actually present, the basis for a feminist rewriting perhaps, would not have been that much smooth as it actually seems to be. Providing

sufficient and male-centered materials, glimpses of a social working of the female body, and the vital role of the male in consolidating the emergence and running of an empire, a house or a kingdom, all these were ready sources and details present in front of the feminist writers to dwell upon, and most of the times, dynamic princesses, highly intellectual princess, or socially aware and thinking woman was a concept that was just a replacement of all the earlier qualities that were projected by the prince in the original, ancient fairy tales. Although this reference to source materials cannot be abnegated in any sense, yet in no manner, does this reduce the creditability and worth of the new forms of feminist re-writing of these tales. Hence there is not just one particular way of relating with the stories.

### **Endnotes:**

1. Marina Sarah Warner, is a British novelist, a notable short story writer, an eminent historian and a mythographer. She is famous for her several work, including non-fiction books on feminism and myth. She is currently working as a Professor in the Department of Literature, Film and Theatre Studies at the University of Essex.
2. The emerging female self was a new concept for all the prowess, skill, potential and intelligence which were earlier considered to be solely

- male attributes. Discussed by Donald Haase in *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*. Published by Wayne State University Press.
3. Explained by Homi Bhabha in his first chapter, *The Commitment to Theory*, in his book *The Location of Culture*. Published by Routledge Classics.
  4. In this book, Napoli makes an inverted attempt to give voice and extreme power to the traditional witch figure. Published in the book *The Magic Circle*. Baker and Taylor Publications.
  5. *Three Strong Women : A Tall Tale from Japan*, by Claus Stamm. Published by Viking Press. 1962.
  6. A Feminist version of the older Jack and the Beanstalk, re-written as *Kate and the Beanstalk*, by Mary Pope Osborne. Published by Turtleback Books, in 2005.
  7. A modernised version and a historical account of the re-examination of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. In *Sexing the Cherry*, by Jeanette Winterson. Published by Grove Press, 1987.



# Appendix & Reference

Even after all the dichotomy surrounding the nature and extent of what exactly the feminist fairy tales should portray, there can be no denial of the fact that they catered a lot to historical occurrences such as the German unification, providing common social and cultural scripts, an insight into the concepts of nationhood and social cohesion. Fairy tales bring joy, happiness and ethical values in the life of children. The mission of joy has not been fully preached, but we know that joy works toward physical health, mental brightness, and moral virtue. In the educational sphere of the future, happiness along with freedom will be recognized as the largest beneficent powers that will permit the individual of four, from his pristine, inexperienced self-activity, to turn into a mature, self-sufficient, socially developed being. According to J.R.R. Tolkien, Faerie is a world that:

“Contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants or dragons: it holds the seas, the Sun, the moon, the sky, and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted” (On Fairy stories, 34, 14).

Feminist interpretation and retellings do not expect, or hanker for perfection, political correctness, social justification or cleaning up the arena of modern politics. Although not an entire, but definitely a major portion of these tales try to explicate that females ought

to have their own, strictly individual choices. There is every probability that their choices, in one way or the other, will be determined, subconsciously affected, regulated moderately, or bifurcated by the male-dominated paradigms of literature. But on a whole, it should be presented as a woman's choice, selection and appropriation of her identity, after much introspection.

Modern versions of fairy tales, therefore, teach us a simple phenomenon- that there can be multifarious ways how a female or a heroine can conduct herself. With the new-born physical courage, an amalgamation of male-defying personality as well as immense pulchritude that is enough to entangle men, an epitome of motherhood as well as a soldier working outside the kingdom to ward off the evil, as a detached entity from the spinning wheel to the wheel of work, that is worthwhile for her, the new fairy tale heroine is almost like a goddess with multiple hands, a multitasker. Some of the other responses to this concept better serve to narrow the meaning of fairy tales. To some fairy tales were simply made-up stories. Though this does help some, it is still quite broad. To others, fairy tales were stories with talking animals or fairies or magic. Many fairy tales may have talking animals. And to say that fairy tales are stories with fairies in them does certainly make a fair amount of sense. But fairy tales can be so much more. To say that fairy tales are stories of magic may come the closest yet and perhaps may be

close enough. Hopefully it is, and all this has helped to make what is meant by 'fairy tales' a bit more clear though it does not approach defining it. Some things resist defining. To again quote Tolkien, 'Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients, but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole' (39).

Fairy tales are magical. They may provide a window to another world, a chance to look beyond the mundane. They may provide a means of relief from some of this world's troubles simply in their otherworldliness. This otherworldliness is one of the many questioned virtues of fairy tales. Some people worry that fairy tales do not give a truthful rendition of life. They fear such stories are therefore unhealthy for children. Bruno Bettelheim, who is an educator and therapist of severely disturbed children, confronts this misconception. Speaking of the people that fear that fairy tales are untruthful, he says, 'That "truth" in the life of a child might be different from that of adults does not occur to these people' (116). On this level, therefore, fairy tales remain just mere written stories to delight children. He goes on to say that, no child with a sound frame of mind ever believes that these tales describe the world realistically. According to Bettelheim, Children understand that fairy tales are not real. He further discusses that some parents are worried that telling such stories to their children constitutes

lying to them. The concern of these parents is spurned on by the child asking, 'Is it true?' Bettelheim mentions that parent that is already convinced of the value of fairy tales has little trouble answering the child. Such a parent is assured of the story's worth beyond its factual truth, and thus is confident that the story will still have meaning regardless of its other complexities.

The tale 'The Fisherman and the Jinny' which we get inside the Arabian Nights can well illustrate the point of how a simplified story can fall short. At the surface level The Fisherman and the Jinny, may seem to be easily told as simply as a story of an evil Jinny seeking to kill his weak human liberator, who manages to eclipse the powerful Jinny. It might seem unnecessary to include that the fisherman had cast his nets into the water three times before that and that each time he pulled up something that seemed even worse than the last. It might also seem unnecessary to include the history of the Jinny's thoughts. In the original tale, for the first hundred years that the Jinny is trapped, the Jinny said in his heart that he would enrich forever whoever released him. Over the course of centuries that the Jinny was trapped, this wish to bless whoever set him free gradually turned into a promise to kill his now unfortunate benefactor. And as Bettelheim notes further, Though these details may seem unimportant to the overall story, they are a large part of what helps the child relate to and learn from the story.

That the fisherman has to cast his nets several times can be an important part of the story. Although it certainly would be simpler to start the story with the fisherman catching the Jinny, this aspect of the story tells, without moralizing, that one cannot expect to get what one wants on the first, the second, or sometimes even the third try. This perhaps seemingly trivial part of the story tells children that things may not always be as easy to accomplish as they might wish them to be. This sort of message is often a part of fairy tales. Fairy tales can do this effectively without presenting it as a demand or a moral, which perhaps is the most effective way to present it to a child.

Very often, fairy tales and folk tales coalesce. Many writers have written folktales in the form of the fairy tale. These are notable as the literary fairy tales, or *Kunstmärchen*. The oldest forms, from *Panchatantra* to the *Pentamerone*, show a considerable remodelling and new explanation from the older forms. The Grimm brothers were among the first to try to preserve the characteristics and essence of oral tales. But the stories printed under their name have been considerably changed, to try to fit the written form.

Literary fairy tales as well as fairy tales which were transmitted orally did not initially have the feminist undertones. They were the classical storehouses which could generate just the idea of male supremacy at a basic level. New version of Feminist fairy tales, however,

freely did an exchange of plots, ideas, and elements with each other and with the tales belonging to foreign lands. Many 18th-century folklorists attempted to recover the 'pure' folktale, uncontaminated by literary versions. Yet while oral fairy tales likely existed for thousands of years before the literary forms, there is no pure folktale, and each literary fairy tale draws on folk traditions, if only in parody. This makes it impossible to trace forms of transmission of a fairy tale. Oral storytellers have been known to read literary fairy tales to increase their own stock of stories and treatments.

In contemporary literary circuit, many authors have taken interest in the form of fairy tales for various reasons, for example, examining condition of humans, from the simple framework that is provided by a fairy tale. Some authors try to recreate an image of the fantastic in a contemporary literary discourse. Some writers also try to use fairy tale forms for re-negotiating modern issues; this can include dealing with the psychological dramas implicit inside the story, very similar to what we see when Robin McKinley retells the story of *Donkeyskin* as the novel *Deerskin*, with special emphasis on the abusive treatment the father of the tale dealt to his daughter. Sometimes, especially in children's literature, fairy tales are retold with an immediate twist simply to have a comic effect, such as in *The Stinky Cheese Man* by Jon Scieszka or else, *The ASBO Fairy Tales* by Chris Pilbeam. A very common comic motif is the depiction of

a world where all the fairy tale occurrences take place, and the characters are well aware of their function in the story, such as what happens in the film series *Shrek*.

Fairy tales have also been enacted dramatically; we see a record of this in *commedia dell'arte*, and later on, in pantomime. The advent of cinema has created the impression that such stories can be presented with more plausible explanations, with the dexterous use of special effects and animation; for example, the Disney movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937 can be considered to be a ground-breaking film dealing with fairy tales and, indeed, fantasy in general. Disney's influence has helped to establish this genre as a children's genre, and has been also been blamed for simplification of ending in several fairy tales where situations arise, where everything becomes right ultimately, as an opposition to the severe pain and suffering – and sometimes unhappy endings – of many folk fairy tales.

Many filmed versions of fairy tales have been instrumental in retelling the fiction and fantasy, from Disney's later works to Aleksandr Rou's retelling of *Vasilissa the Beautiful*, the first Soviet film which has used Russian folk tales on a large scale. Others have used the traditional pattern and conventions of fairy tales to create new stories with sentiments more relevant to contemporary life, as in *Labyrinth*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, the films of Michel Ocelot, and *Happily N'Ever After*.

Other works have re-examined much-familiar

fairy tales in a darker, often verging on more horrific or psychological complexes aimed primarily at adults. Specially I would like to mention examples like Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Company of Wolves*, based primarily upon Angela Carter's retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Similarly, *Princess Mononoke*, *Suspiria*, and *Spike* try to recreate new stories in this genre from fairy tale and folklore motifs. The open-ended fairy tale retellings chosen by the readers in these texts actually determine his/her assessment and comprehension of the areas of liberation that are experienced by the witches and Princesses. As a writer of this dissertation and when drawing parallel with the older fairy tales, I discovered the numerous complex and psychologically intriguing passages of the feminine psyche, I get confused sometimes about the revelation of characters who never stop short of achieving the self-actualization process and voice envisioned by feminists. The witch and Princesses do have choices, but often they show a great determination of character where they are not entirely interested to invite changes in their life or to embrace new set of difficulties, and consequences of their action, whatever they may be. In fact, the change is sometimes so very temporary that neither of them is capable to maintain a position of agency and both relapse into a sort of vague compromise. However, both of them develop an awareness of parts which were disowned, and then they

struggle to face and accept them, contemplate upon new forms of behaviour, and risk change. These tales are an immensely realistic portrayal of the entire process of mental growth and the profound psychic function that should be undertaken to emerge victorious in this pursuit of the feminist recovery of self.

A more modern cinematic fairy tale would be Luchino Visconti's *Le Notti Bianche*, starring Marcello Mastroianni before he became a superstar. It involves many of the romantic conventions of fairy tales, yet it takes place in post-World War II Italy, and it ends realistically.

Snow White portrayed by Donoghue, on the contrary, is entirely active. She does not walk away from her stepmother's castle because she is unwanted; she goes out because she cannot tolerate the spiritual claustrophobia there. She chisels her way through the dangerous forest and very soon, she develops a relationship with seven dwarfs. She is self-reliant, intelligent, and very soon shows her bravery: "One of the men asked me what was in my skirts to make them so heavy, and I said, Knives, and he took his hand off my thigh and never touched me again." Weapons, therefore, form an integral part of the female existence, and in the Feminist revisionings, we find women who can at least try to defend themselves against all odds. Finally, she returns to her former position in the castle, because she selects her life in that pattern. The myth is

also subverted in many of the later writings of the 20th and the 21st centuries, where we find female figures that are, somehow, conscious of their being. There is a tremendous and first-hand knowledge present in the females, for upholding and guarding their own sexuality, privacy, and they are not relegated to the background anymore through any wicked tact. For the new feminist fairy tale heroine, independence does not ensure just a physical abandonment of the earlier burdens of life, but like Tatterhood, or the princess who stood on her two feet, independence also means a private assertion of their finer senses, and what they think about things around them. They are now thinking heroines, with perhaps possessing even those qualities which men fear to annihilate altogether. By portraying Snow White as the feminine ideal, several texts suggest that women should disregard the age-old practices where she will sit down, stifle her voice, be pretty and wait for time immemorial for a man. Many modern retellings of the age-old texts are, therefore, not just descriptions of stories, but perhaps also a new idea about how future women are to behave. By subverting the myths surrounding women, the new feminist writings actually show that women can be both active and decisive without positioning herself as a wicked stepmother or an eternal bad figure like the witch.

Napoli's retelling, for example, at first appears subversive at first glance, but it is soon discovered that

she reiterates all the previous features of the earlier fairy tale myths, and thus her subversion occupies a place of central importance. Writers like Donald Haase and Angela Carter not just create a re-telling of the earlier texts, but they also stir the female psyche, the deepest crevices of the female mind. They manage to wrestle at least a little part of the power away from the omnipotent male characters that were given all the prominence earlier, and bestow it instead on the females. New tales, in particular manage to subvert many of the most deeply ingrained fairy tale myths, producing characters having personalities who can read their own minds and achieve what they want. However, the lack of successful retellings is not because of lack of trying: as a mythic framework that has been formed as part of our earliest childhood memories can simply be so deeply ingrained that they cannot be thoroughly destroyed.

And last but not the least; I would like to mention a quote by Alice Walker in this direction.

“When life descends into the pit  
I must become my own candle  
willingly burning my self  
to light up the darkness around me.”

Alice Walker

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