

**THEORISING RETELLING: A STUDY OF
SELECTED RETOLD FAIRY TALES**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

TILAK MAHARASHTRA VIDYAPEETH, PUNE

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BY

ZEENAT KHAN

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF

LATE DR. VIVEKANAND D PHADKE

AND

DR. CHITRA SREEDHARAN

FACULTY OF ARTS AND FINE ARTS

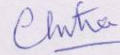
TILAK MAHARASHTRA VIDYAPEETH, PUNE

[MARCH 2016]

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Theorising Retelling: A Study of Retold Fairy-Tales," which is being submitted herewith for the award of the degree of Vidyavachaspati (Ph D) in English of Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune is the result of original research work completed by Smt Zeenat Khan under my supervision and guidance. To the best of my knowledge and belief the work incorporated in this thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree or similar title of this or any other University or examining body upon her. The work however is an extension of her M Phil research on retold fairy tales.

Place: Pune



Dr Chitra Sreedharan

Date: 17-3-16

(Research Guide)

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Zeenat Khan

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled "Theorising Retelling: A Study of Retold Fairy Tales" completed and written by me has not previously been formed as the basis for the award of any Degree or other similar title upon me of this or any other Vidyapeeth or examining body. The work however is an extension of my M Phil research on retold fairy tales.

Place: Pune

Date: 17-3-16



Zeenat Khan

Research Student

ABSTRACT

The thesis ‘Theorising Retelling: A Study of Selected Retold Fairy Tales’ attempts to explore a relatively less probed area of retold fairy tales. Considering the attraction children and adults alike have for fairy tales and the impact these tales have and the adults wish them to have on children and their upbringing it becomes imperative to explore what values are really transmitted to children through the literature supposedly composed for them.

The probe into and analysis of classic fairy tales brings one to an awareness that the apparently fascinating fantastic world of fairy tales actually bulges with class, race and gender stereotypes and a well rooted patriarchal value system. It also gives a realisation of manipulation of this world of entertainment and enlightenment by the adult world. The fact that children are exposed to fairy tales at an early age indeed is important since it is the formative period in life and as such implicit messages of the manipulated tales condition the process of socialisation and acculturation.

It is in this realisation about the possible hidden adult agenda particularly of retaining and generating the patriarchal undemocratic worldview and status quo that re-viewing, re-visioning and re-telling of fairy tales takes its origin. The retellings present “a different view of the world ... in a voice that has been customarily silenced.” (Zipes, *Don’t Bet...*) While attempting to break the illusions of the classic tales these retellings invite their readers to confront the tales and relate them to their own social contexts. The purpose of the retellings is to liberate – liberate the fairy tale itself and its readers – from a conditioned mode of reception. For the purpose the retellers acknowledge and manipulate the liberating, emancipatory potential of the genre itself. They seem to manipulate this potential towards a more democratic and egalitarian cause and make it meaningful by voicing suppression and authoritarianism of all kind.

The present thesis argues in favour of such manipulation by the fairy tale retellings, of the liberating potential of the fairy tale genre in order to replace the discriminating, stereotypical worldview in it with an egalitarian one wherein human beings are viewed and assessed sans the labels of gender, class, race and so on. For this purpose

it aims and attempts to study selected retold fairy tales and justify the rationale with which retellings are attempted. This aim is achieved in the conclusion derived at the end that underlines the need to retell classical fairy tales to suit the standards and contexts of the contemporary times and the democratic, humanitarian values of all times.

With this aim the thesis introduces the present research topic and a review of the literary material available on the concerned field in its Chapter I. This chapter presents the development of fairy tale scholarship and sets the tone for the argument made later in the thesis. Chapter II ‘Exploring Childhood and Children’s Literature,’ probes into the concepts in its title. Considering fairy tales in the context of these concepts and vice-versa and the fact that fairy tales are manipulated by adults as a tool of socialisation and for transmitting “accepted” social behavioural patterns, Chapter III ‘Fairy Tales: Generators of Values and Stereotypes’ seeks to present the stereotypical representation of gender, class, race etc in fairy tales in relation to children’s social development. It ends with the justification of the rationale behind retelling the classical tales in a new light. Chapter IV attempts a thorough analysis of some retellings of the well-known ‘Sleeping Beauty,’ ‘Cinderella,’ ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ and ‘Snow White.’ For want of space and time required for the completion of the present project, the analysis is restricted to an overall 25 retellings of the above mentioned tales. Admitting the limited scope at the outset the Chapter justifies the selection of the particular tales that are analysed. In the course of the textual analysis of the retellings however the Chapter does present a critique of the traditional tales strengthening the argument made in the earlier chapters regarding the rationale behind fairy tale retelling and preparing ground for the final argument regarding the need for continuous attempts at retelling fairy tales. Chapter V “Towards an Understanding and a Better Acceptance of the Theory and Attempts of Retelling Fairy Tales” undertakes to see and understand the critical and creative interactions in fairy tale studies and logically leads to the conclusion that retelling the old tales to suit contemporary and universal human experience and values is the need of all times. Despite discomfort with and hesitation in acceptance of the retold tales, the attempts at retelling should continue and improvise to suit the times.

As mentioned clearly in the thesis its scope is confined only to a few retold tales. Retellings of a few famous tales of the Brothers Grimm alone have been considered.

Further research could be undertaken on retellings of even lesser known tales by the Grimms. Retellings of tales by Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Andersen as well could be separate research topics. Comparative analysis of fairy tales by these fairy tale writers and their retellings too could be considered for thorough research. Scholars in India could explore Indian fairy tales and their retellings as well as the interaction of the Indian reader with classical fairy tales and their retellings.

Dealing with children and with the literature transmitted to them are our important routine concerns. Hence the argument of the thesis regarding the adult awareness about alert transmission of fairy tales to children and for this purpose, positive and conscious acceptance of retold fairy tales, which uncover the prejudiced parochial patriarchal value system and make us visualise an egalitarian democratic social set up bears considerable relevance to modern society and times. If this study creates slight ripples about this awareness and alertness in transmission of fairy tales to children, I think, the purpose of the research would be served.

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CHAPTER-I

Introduction

Here is an attempt to interweave chapter-wise progress of the present thesis with the development of fairy tale scholarship simultaneously offering a review of and a glimpse into the literature composed in this field.

The term fairy tale was first coined by Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy in 1697 when she entitled her first collection of tales '*Les Contes de fees*' literally meaning "tales about fairies." She did not justify the use of the term 'fairies' for her stories. The English translation of her collection '*Tales of the Fairies*' was published in 1707 and the term fairy tale became part of the common English usage only from 1750. As J R R Tolkien points out in his essay, it is in the supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary in 1750 that the first citation for "fairy tale" was included.¹ There could be found some stray references to the term before 1750, as for instance, in Sara Fielding's *The Governess* (1749)

Fairies strikingly made their appearance in literary fairy tales only in the late 17th century in France. Until then the fairy tale had not established itself as a genre nor did it bear this name. Giovan Francesco Straparola (1550) and Giambattista Basile (1634) did not use the term fairy in the description of their stories. Some stray instances of the early appearance of fairies could be cited in the early Italian tales. However it is the French conteuses and salonnières of the 17th century who made the fairies prominent in literary tales.²

Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy in her 1690 novel published a tale "The Isle of Happiness" in which she presents nymphs and a heavenly island bearing resemblance with fairies and a fairyland. This became the first published literary tale. D'Aulnoy recited such fairy tales in literary parlours and salons. Since then the term fairy tale became viral. The salons and parlours in Italy, France, Spain and England witnessed creative storytelling about fairies before their publication.

The term fairy tale was used more to announce "difference and resistance" (Zipes 224) since many writers started using it to signify "much more than tales about fairies." (Zipes 224) As Zipes maintains, "It can be objectively stated that there is no

other period in the Western literary history when so many fairies like powerful goddesses were the determining figures of most of the plots of the tales written by women – and also by some men.” (Zipes 224) While recording reasons for the predominance of fairies in marvellous tales and labelling of these tales as fairy tales, Zipes brings to highlight the fact that the women fairy tale writers who were members of private literary salons could use the storytelling pastime as a means of displaying their unique abilities in a social milieu where women were extremely underprivileged. Through the fairies they portrayed “their actual differences with the male writers and their resistance to the conditions under which they lived, especially regulations that governed manners and comportment in their daily routines within the French civilisation process.” (Zipes, 224) The world of fairy tales and their creation remained away from the religious and royal intervention. Hence in them these women could express their desired alternatives. The salons thus nurtured fairy tales and their perpetuation/ dissemination/ spread.

Fairy tales became “femino-centric,” necessarily a “female genre” of the 17th century.³ They portrayed a fashionable secular society, its luxury and dependence on the powers of fairies and other supernatural beings. This was in direct contrast with the Christian outlook and its preachers like Louis XIV’s wife who staunchly professed the Christian mode of living. The Italian opera impacted the French fairy tale writers. Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy particularly mimicked certain aspects of it in her fairy tales. This led to the development of *divertissement* – the unusual entertainment known as *feerie* which originated from the court ballets of 16th and 17th centuries. *Divertissement* later included ballets, theatre, games and so on, which became very common in the court of Louis XIV in the latter half of the 17th century. The fairy tale operas were subversive; the fairies and their supernatural abilities could be made tools to comment on the court’s religiosity and misogyny.

One more reason for the predominant presence of fairies in fairy tales by women writers, as recorded by Zipes, is the dependence of these women writers on midwives and nannies before, during and after childbirth. The *salonnières* in their oral and literary fairy tales assigned this role to the fairies and fairy like godmothers and not to any goddess or religious Christian entity. Fairies in the tales are shown to predict corruption or cast a spell of infertility. They provide or refuse help to the delivering mother. They attend the birth scene; forecast the child’s future and shower

benevolence or malevolence. The queens and princesses are shown to invoke not gods and goddesses but fairies to beget a child. Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's fairies as midwives and godmothers with supernatural powers could be traced back to Greco-Roman mythology and French customs regarding bearing and rearing of children. The way in which fairy tales represented fairies in their tales had obvious relevance to the lives of the women writers, the conteuses.

According to Zipes another important reason why these women writers emphatically presented fairies in their tales was "because they were steeped in the lore of fairies and appealed to them out of protest against the Church and the state." (Zipes 229) Study of the symbolic significance and function of fairies and fairy tales necessitates the understanding of socio-cultural context of the time when fairies featured in the tales. In the Middle Ages for instance, as maintained by Harf Lancner there were two types of fairies viz. the fates and the ladies of the forest. The 12th century witnessed a gradual separation of the word "fairy" from the fate and thus the ladies of the forest became the fairies. The Greek fates were transformed and in the 13th century and later this transformation gave birth to two types of tales/plots and resulted in their dissemination in the learned literate culture. The tale types were based on 1) the adventure of the fairy Melusine depicting the plot in three stages viz. a) a human encounter with a beautiful fairy in a forest, b) his expression of love and proposal to marry the fairy who obliges on condition of observance of a prohibition laid by her, and c) deliberate or inadvertent violation of the condition and loss of the wife and happiness; and 2) the fairy Morgan ley Fay the plot of which comprises a hero who i) travels into a world of super humans in search of a nymph or a fairy; ii) spends a long time in blissful existence in this other world; iii) desires to return home; iv) seeks the fairy's permission and is allowed to go back on the promise of respecting a prohibition; v) breaks his promise, is banished from the faerie land and dies.

Both the tale types almost always have unhappy, tragic endings. Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy perhaps was aware of these tale types. For instance, her first tale mentioned earlier, 'The Isle of Happiness,' clearly displays elements of the Morgan ley Fay tale type.⁴ She however, reflects in her tales the socio-political conditions of her time. Her fairies – good or nasty – have extraordinary powers. This she did as well as the other conteuses in order to disguise their borrowings. As Zipes quotes Seifert and Stanton in his essay from their book *Enchanted Eloquence: Fairy Tales by 17th Century Women*

Writers,⁵ “Intent on affirming their own social status, the conteuses disguised and transformed whatever they borrowed from lower class tales with an abundance of literary and cultural references. Indeed, the wide variety of intertexts woven into their contes de fees shows sophistication that defies the stereotypical simplicity of the fairy tale genre. Notwithstanding their modernist affiliations, allusions to Greek and Roman mythology recur throughout the texts of the conteuses, sometimes alongside more folkloric characters. In many of d’Aulnoy’s tales, for instance, Cupid makes an appearance as either an ally or an enemy of fairies. More often mythology is used as a conventional rhetorical trope. The stories in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, extremely popular throughout early modern Europe, were particularly useful to the conteuses, especially for the concept of metamorphosis and the plot situations it could generate. However, their tales also evoke motifs and characters reminiscent of medieval romance, with such figures as the fairies and such topoi as the maiden imprisoned in a tower.” (Zipes 232-233)

The term fairy tale has culturally evolved over a period of time. It has undergone several changes and transformations from the Greco-Roman period to the present. These changes “reflect key moments in cultural evolution and reveal the memetic power of the term fairy tale or conte de fees.” (Zipes 237) As discussed at length in Chapter V of this thesis, evolution of this genre from oral to written through centuries has been marked by its male bourgeois manipulation and appropriation. The ‘male’ institutionalisation and manipulation of the originally feminocentric fairy tale genre started being critically challenged in the late 19th century.

It is only in the 1970s that a serious attention was drawn to the study of fairy tales as an important literary genre. This critical attention was significant more due to its feminist inclination since it was also the time when feminist scholarship emerged. Both fairy tale and feminist studies raised questions about the process of socialisation and social, cultural institutions involved in this process. Alison Lurie in 1970 and 1971 respectively brought forth her two articles viz. “Fairy Tale Liberation,”⁶ and “Witches and Fairies.”⁷ The thrust of these articles was that the classic fairy tales and lesser known tales with strong and resourceful fairy tale characters had a liberating force and potential which men obscured by controlling the selection, editing and publication of fairy tales. Dismissing the second part of Lurie’s argument on account of her references to lesser known or unknown stories, which hardly have any impact

on children as compared to the massive impact of the mythic figures of Cinderella, Snow White, and the Sleeping Beauty, Marcia Lieberman in 1972, came up with a strongly opposing view in her article “‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale.”⁸ As the title itself indicates Lieberman was exclusively concerned about the process of acculturation of women in a social system through the fairy tale.

Acknowledging that “[T]he best known stories ... have affected masses of children in our culture,” (383-384) Lieberman who thinks of children as naïve, inexperienced and capable of being moulded and conditioned by what they read, hear and see wants adult facilitators of the tales to play a responsible role. “If we are concerned, then, about what our children are taught, we must pay particular attention,” she says, “to those stories that are so beguiling that children think more as they read them ‘of the diversion than of the lesson.’” (384) Assuming the manipulative socialising potential and power of the tales, she objects to the ideological messages transmitted explicitly or implicitly through them. These messages are “imprinted” in children and being untrained readers/ listeners children, particularly girls are influenced by the ideology: “Millions of women must surely have formed their psycho-sexual self concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behaviour could be rewarded, and the nature of reward itself, in part from their favourite fairy tales.” (385)

Lieberman addresses the unresolved questions about “what is biologically determined and what is learned” (394) raised in the 1970s and which remain unanswered yet. The questions she raises – “to what extent is passivity a biological attribute of females; to what extent it is culturally determined? ... to what extent [do the stories] reflect female attributes, or to what extent they serve as training manuals for girls?”(395) – have been the issues confronted by fairy tale critics, scholars, re-tellers and researchers throughout the four decades after Lieberman voiced them in 1972. This milestone article written as a response to Alison Lurie’s and the debate between the two sparked early feminist discourse on fairy tale research and at the same time, an introduction to a new outlook on fairy tale studies emphasising social, political and historical contexts of this literary genre. Their arguments have overshadowed and haunted much of the fairy tale discourse and research till date. As Donald Haase maintains, “Already anticipated in their terms of debate are nascent questions and

critical problems that over the next thirty years would constitute the agenda of much fairy tale research.”⁹ (2) Haase is proved correct when one recognises the undisputed influence of Lieberman's article forty years after its publication. It has provoked widespread agreement amongst and influence on fairy tale criticism, studies and retellings. Vanessa Joosen¹⁰ cites examples of critics like Patricia Duncker (1992), Maria Micaele Coppola (2001) and Gerard Gielen (2006) who reassert Lieberman's critique and views. (Joosen, 50) Some of the retellings depicting Lieberman's influence till the recent past are *Long Live Princess Smartypants* (2004) by Babette Cole, *Sleeping Bobby* (2005) by Will and Mary Pope Osborne and *Little Red Riding Hood Was a Cool Girl* (trans. 2010) by Marjet Huiberts. Barbara Walker in her introduction to her collection of feminist fairy tales in 1996 echoes many of Lieberman's concerns when she criticises society's preoccupation with the idea of beauty: “Only to be decorative is the customary female function in these old stories. ... The message that such stories convey to girls is plain: Your looks are your only asset. Whatever else you might be or do doesn't count.”¹¹

In view of the fairy tale researchers' concern with the effects of fairy tales on children, Chapter II of this thesis deals with an understanding of the concepts of 'child,' 'childhood,' and 'children's literature.' It tries to explore these concepts and how changes in them and their understanding get reflected in the literature meant for children. An interesting aspect of children's literature is that it is composed, promoted and distributed consciously and purposely by adults for children most of the times with implicit adult agendas apparently to protect the ideal of childhood as a period of innocence and playtime. The Chapter tries to comment on how the moral obligation to protect the childhood innocence and hidden adult interests behind children's literature fail its innocent nature. On discussing the characteristic features of children's literature based on the writings of well-known experts in the field, the Chapter moves on to consider Fairy Tales as a type of children's literature. The whole concept of children's literature as an important tool of socialisation, seen in the context of fairy tales reveals a lot of serious concerns related to the presentation of gender, society and social, behavioural patterns in fairy tales. It is these concerns that are revealed in the research by fairy tale scholars for the last three decades. The Chapter therefore ends with a briefing of how fairy tales are seen from various perspectives like psychological, Structuralist, Marxist and feminist.

These various perspectives on fairy tales have at their centre a consideration of how various facets of society are represented in fairy tales and their impact on socialisation. Lurie and Lieberman's debate could be at the root of these views. For though diversely, the two are mainly focused on the representation of women in fairy tales – while one sees in female portrayal in fairy tales, a potential for liberation, the other sees the consequences of women's peculiar representation into stereotyped acculturation. Both are concerned about the effects of fairy tales on their readers, girls and boys, and what fairy tales mean to women. For instance, about the impact of women's representation in fairy tales on children with respect to their gender identity and social behaviour Lieberman says: "We must consider the possibility that the classical attributes of 'femininity' found in these stories are in fact imprinted in children and reinforced by the stories themselves" (395) "(The tales) have been made the repositories of the dreams, hopes, and fantasies of generations of girls" (385) Both Lieberman and Lurie's concern raised an inquiry into the relationship between development of the classical fairy tale and its role in the process of socialisation, how fairy tales are perceived by children and adults and how the relationship between fairy tale and gender could be viewed anew without inviting any generalisations about the fairy tale genre and its diverse complexity and responses.

In keeping with this discourse, Chapter III of the thesis attempts a thorough analysis of fairy tales as generators of values and stereotypes that could impact their readers' perspective on and formation of gender identities and social, behavioural roles. Following a detailed discussion of these stereotypes the Chapter establishes the rationale behind retelling fairy tales in a new light. Various retellings, as illustrated later in this chapter, originated in Lieberman's conviction that fairy tales impact gender construction and address and counteract biased, negative representation of women, stepparents and stepsiblings.

Parallel to fairy tale criticism focusing varyingly on female representation in fairy tales and its impact on gender identity and child behaviour were classic tales re-framed along completely revolutionary lines during the 1970s and 1980s. Behind these tales was a strong belief in the ideological impact of the tales on the process of socialisation and that an appropriate ideological position in the tales can bring about a change in social attitudes and psyche by creating critical readers. Thus following Lurie and Lieberman, on the one hand, we have Andrea Dworkin (1974), Susan

Brownmiller (1975), Bruno Bettelheim (1976), Mary Daly (1978), Sandra Gilbert and Gubar (1979), Jack Zipes (1979), Karen E Rowe (1979) and so on coming up with more and deeper explorations into the fairy tale genre and explicit/implicit gender and social concerns in it and similarly on the other hand, poets and writers of the 70s ushering in an upsurge of revolting fairy tale retellings with Anne Sexton perhaps as one of the first to do so followed by an army of retellers like Olga Broumas, Angela Carter, Robert Coover and many more.¹² Since then the critical and creative parallels seem to have been interacting with and enriching each other while challenging the social, political, cultural stance of the classical tales and furthering new positions taken by the different retellings.

Chapter IV of the thesis, therefore, attempts to analyse thoroughly some of these retellings to exemplify and demonstrate how the retellings of the classic tales function and are composed to serve different purposes. The analysis includes the Grimms's popular tales namely, 'Briar Rose/ Sleeping Beauty,' 'Cinderella,' 'Little Red Riding Hood,' and 'Snow White.' These analyses intend to support the implicit psychological, social, cultural assumptions that inform most of the fairy tale retellings for children and adults. These tales seem to assume and underline Bettelheim's conviction that fairy tales have a therapeutic effect on child readers. However unlike Bettelheim's insistence on such a therapeutic effect workable only on the child's unconscious level majority of retellings seem to side with Alan Dundes's claim that children should be consciously given awareness about the latent content of the classic tales. He assertively says that, "... fairy tales ought to be explained to children so that the underlying emotional traumas with which they deal may be less threatening."¹³ This thus stresses the responsibility of the adult facilitators – parents, teachers, writers, retellers, illustrators, publishers and so on – of fairy tales to children to read, understand and pass on the "correct" – unbiased, democratic, egalitarian, and above all humanitarian – perspective and interpretation of the tales they read or hand over to their children. Most of the retellings are perhaps therefore addressed to adult readers while some specifically target the child audience. The Chapter on analysis of the retold fairy tales thus underlines this assumed need behind composing the retellings.

Lurie and Lieberman's debate fuelled, for nearly a decade later, oversimplified feminist ideas and thoughts on how representation of women in fairy tales was oppressive and how fairy tales generated myths of female oppression. Throughout this

period the fairy tale was either criticised for its gender stereotypes or admired for its subversive power and emancipatory potential. Andrea Dworkin in *Woman Hating* (1974)¹⁴ like Lieberman sees the presentation of passive girls and active boys in fairy tales as generator of cultural values and gender roles. Susan Brownmiller in *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975)¹⁵ analyses 'Little Red Riding Hood' as a story composed through a male gaze and takes Lieberman's stance to an extreme to suggest that fairy tales teach women passive tolerance of oppression and victimisation by participating in rapes and being sexually abused. She argues that fairy tales present women as necessary and necessarily objects of male desire. Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology: The Meta-ethics of Radical Feminism* (1978)¹⁶ elaborates on how fairy tales condition their child readers to become typical patriarchal subjects at the hands of women – their mothers or teachers. She uses the metaphor of the poisoned apple and wicked mother for the tales like 'Snow White' and their tellers. Children, she says, are unaware that "the tale itself is a poisonous apple" (Daly, 44) and its teller "a wicked queen" who too is "unaware of her venomous part in the patriarchal plot." (Daly, 44)

While discussing European fairy tale critics of the 1970s who, like Lieberman, acknowledge the socialising power of the genre and who admit Lieberman's critique in her book, Joosen cites Otto Gmelin (1975) who saw fairy tales as a means of promoting sexism, capitalism and arousing fear and aggression in children.

With Karen Rowe's "Feminism and Fairy Tales"¹⁷ in 1979 came to the fore a new and more complex insight into gender construction in not just fairy tales but in romantic and gothic fiction for adult women. She focused on the impact of fairy tale such as representation of gender roles and socio-cultural values not just on children but also on adult women who tend to internalise the conformist female attitudes and aspirations. But at the same time she also points out these women's awareness of the gap between the ideal presented in the tales and actual practice resulting in an unresolved tension between adherences to social, cultural values and accommodating changing realities. Rowe hopes for building "courageous vision and energy to cultivate a newly fertile ground of psychic and cultural experience from which will grow fairy tales for human beings." (223)

Later feminists furthered Rowe's agenda of cultivating a ground for egalitarian tales. Carolyn G. Heilbrun in 1979 in her *Reinventing Womanhood* urged the need for the women to recognise the human structures of fairy tales and manipulate malehood to their own interests and to establish their own self-identity, to see the wakening hero as that part of their selves that "awakens conventional girlhood to the possibility of life and action."¹⁸ For this purpose she strongly proposed "bold" re-interpretations of myths, tales and tragedies "in order to enter the experience of the emerging female self." (150) Behind her argument is the assumption that gender of the reader hardly affects the impact of the tale on him or her. Madonna Kolbenschlag in her *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye: Breaking the Spell of Feminine Myths and Models* (1979)¹⁹ reassured the liberating potential of the fairy tales. She saw a hope and an awakening potential in the same stories that tend to socialise women. She established for women a hope of "spiritual maturity" (4) in the stories that determine "feminine socialisation." (3) Acknowledging what is usually considered "natural" as actually culturally mythological/ mythical, and admitting the power of myths to reflect and "model our existence" (x), Kolbenschlag "introduced six familiar fairy tales as heuristic devices for interpreting the experiences of women. These tales are parables of what women have become; and at the same time, prophecies of spiritual metamorphosis to which they are called." (x)

Thus like Kay F Stone before her, Kolbenschlag too refuted the assumption that all women in all generations respond to the fairy tale alike, that the ideological content of fairy tale is automatically internalised by the child readers. Stone in "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us"²⁰ concluded after interviewing 40 women of different ages and backgrounds that though the influence of the fairy tale was undeniable for many, many others were bored by the passive heroines in the tales. (48-49) Like her Kate Bernheimer's study of women authors' varying experiences of fairy tale influence too supports Stone and Kolbenschlag in countering Lieberman's assumptions to some extent.²¹

In 1980 Ronda Chervin and Mary Neill in *The Woman's Tale: A Journal of Inner Exploration*²² emphasised the psychological and spiritual enrichment fairy tales could lead women to experience if they reflect on their responses to the tales and their inner journeys. Psychological and social insights into and interpretations of fairy tales and their consequences for women readers are positively probed in Colette Dowling's

*The Cinderella Complex*²³ (1981) According to her, understanding psycho-social attitudes of women reflected in fairy tales that restrict women's freedom enables imagination of alternative constructions of life for women. Another instance of psychoanalytic perspective on fairy tales for helping women to be self-dependent in the male order is the Jungian commentary on the Grimm tales in *Leaving My Father's House* (1992) by Marion Woodman.²⁴ All these perspectives on fairy tales despite their variations were directed towards critically considering fairy tales as a tool with which women's liberation could be attained and new possibilities of life for them could be projected. In the light of these approaches and despite reservations about Lieberman's stance, various collections of tales portraying strong women characters started being published assuming the negative ideological impact of classical fairy tales. The aim was mainly to react to and substitute the gender bias of the classic tales. Some retellers took up lesser known tales and converted their weak heroines into strong and active ones. Lurie herself consciously worked on tales prioritising women and their strength in her collection, *Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folktales*²⁵ (1980). This along with *Womenfolk and Fairytale*²⁶ (1975) by Rosemary Minard and Ethel Johnston Phelps's *Tatterhood and Other Tales*²⁷(1978) and *The Maid of the North: Feminist Folk Tales from Around the World*²⁸ (1981) remained prominent works for the following decades inspiring writers and publishers to collect feminocentric tales from around the world exploring diverse presentations of women in fairy tales.

While some writers' focus was on presenting this diversity of women in fairy tales others rewrote the popular tales necessarily presenting women positively as heroic, strong, helpful, clever, and so on while some others chose tales that have ideal female characters to be emulated by readers. For instance, Jeanne Desy's "The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet"²⁹ (1982), Anne Sharpe's "Not So Little Red Riding Hood"³⁰ (1985), *Rapunzel's Revenge: Fairy Tales for Feminists*³¹ by Anne Claffey and others (1985), *The Tough Princess*³² by Martin Waddell and Patrick Benson (1986) etc. The inclination of these tales was towards accepting the socialising and ideological power of the tales. Writing in the same year as Lieberman's essay the Merseyside Fairy Tale Collective's retold tales underline the impact of the classic tales on children's socialisation and warn the adult facilitators of these tales to be

cautious while passing them on to the young ones since these tales “help to inform children’s values and teach them to accept our society and their roles in it.”³³

However all these writers, retellers and their collections could not and did not attempt to formulate a uniform identity, image or definition of the fairy tale heroine. Angela Carter, for instance, in her *Old Wives’ Fairy Tale Book*³⁴ presents a variety of female characters as protagonists of her tales with the aim to present multiple identities of a woman hero. Even in her *Strange Things Sometimes Still Happen: Fairy Tales from Around the World*³⁵ she continues her agenda of “reasserting precisely those dimensions of a woman’s life – including sexuality – that male editors had suppressed.” (Haase, 22)

Parallel to these collections of folk and fairy tales from around the world were anthologies of literary fairy tales edited by both male and female writers during 1980s and 90s. Amongst them Jack Zipes’s *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*³⁶ (1983, 1993) is a remarkable anthology depicting 35 versions of the tale ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ with a critical introduction and epilogue that demonstrate how the tale has been created by and projected the middle class male values and ideology of power over women and how this projection and gender identities reflected in the tale have contributed to the civilising and socialising processes in the western society. As such this book and its critical commentary rendered a remarkable contribution to the feminist fairy tale scholarship.

While fairy tale retellings co-exist with the traditional tales, they do overlap and are connected with fairy tale scholarship/criticism. Critics like Stephen Benson for instance, point out “the extraordinary synchronicity”³⁷ of the retellings and fairy tale criticism: “The concerns of the fiction are variously and fascinatingly close to those of scholarship.” (Benson, 5) Zipes too argues that “the innovative fairy tale experiments in all cultural fields” in the present are a result of “an inextricable, dialectical development of mutual influence of *all* writers of fairy tales and fairy tale criticism.”³⁸ Maria Tatar similarly brings to our notice the critical, interpretive impulse of retelling and the literary, creative potential of criticism: “Just as every re-writing of a tale is an interpretation, so every interpretation is a re-writing.”³⁹ This interactive relationship between criticism and creation is evident in the increasing allusions by the fairy tale critics to examples from fairy tale retellings and by the retellers to the thoughts of

the critics. For instance, Zipes, Gilbert and Gubar, Ruth Bottigheimer often refer to a variety of retellers and quote from them in order to support their views on traditional tales whereas Jane Yolen in her retold *Briar Rose*⁴⁰ quotes P. L. Travers (pages 1, 161, 223) and Zipes from his *Spells of Enchantment*. Evelyn Conlon in her “That I’ll Teach Her”⁴¹ (1986) too illustrates Zipes’s theory in *Why Fairy Tales Stick* to argue that the stories have to transform themselves if they were to survive.

We thus see a significant critical attention paid to the fairy tale genre since 1970s when feminist perspective on fairy tales was outspoken. Since then a culture of re-visiting and re-visioning these tales started building up. As Chapter V of this thesis enumerates in detail, the art of spinning the fairy tale was mainly initiated by women conteuses. Karen Rowe in her article points out that the European women writers of literary fairy tales of the 17th and 18th centuries tried to assert their right as the tale spinners. Classic fairy tale motifs and narratives were widely re-used by the women writers of the 19th century English novel. Writers of fairy tales after 1970 did not only spin or re-use the fairy tale, they engaged themselves in a broader revisionist project in which “defining a female self has been a major endeavour,” says Alicia Ostriker.⁴² (70) Aptly enough Ostriker selects Anne Sexton’s *Transformations* (1971) to display “multivocality” of revisionist attempts at fairy tale (re)telling. Multiple voices according to her is the characteristic feature of revisionist writings of women. She describes women revisionist myth makers in terms of female Prometheuses who commit thefts of language. Feminist fairy tale scholarship had been intent on enquiring the representation of the female hero in fairy tales. Ellen Cronan Rose, Gilbert and Gubar, Cristina Bacchilega, Kate Bernheimer, Elizabeth Wanning Harries etc manipulated in their enquiry the metaphor of the mirror that reflects patriarchal values in the tales. The early revisionist writings by Anne Sexton, Olga Broumas and Angela Carter (*The Bloody Chamber*, 1979) had been used as exemplary for their scholastic arguments. Feminist fairy tale scholars intended at finding out the consequences of women fairy tale revisionists’ quest for female identity after trying to destroy the patriarchal mirror held in the classic fairy tales.

Lieberman in her essay voices feminist rejection of a beauty contest held in Atlanta in 1968. Hence she criticises fairy tales for the priority given to beautiful girls. “Beautiful girls are never ignored.” (385) The “beauty contest” and the rivalry set amongst women on that ground was and has been condemned by feminists as

a patriarchal tool and strategy to keep women apart from one another. So does Lieberman condemn it as a patriarchal ideology of the fairy tale.

Fairy tale scholars in their criticism and fairy tale retellers in their retellings take up this issue variously. Jane Yolen for instance, in her *Sleeping Ugly*⁴³ attempts a critique of the beauty contest by completely discarding and reversing its pattern. So in her tale the most beautiful girl does not win the prince but is left asleep forever. Priscilla Galloway in her retold tale “A Taste for Beauty”⁴⁴ (1995) presents a first person narration of Snow White’s young stepmother who realises clearly that she is chosen by the king only for her physical beauty: “Nobody ever said much about my character and intelligence. I became queen because I’m the most beautiful of all.” (106)

The concern of the classic tales with beauty conditioned by patriarchy instigates feminist critics to use and manipulate the mirror metaphor. In “Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales”⁴⁵ (1983) Ellen Cronan Rose argues for women rewriting fairy tales that would reflect genuine female experience more accurately. Her unchallenged reliance on Bettelheim’s idea of fairy tales as “embryonic” (Bettelheim, 211) stories about growing up, however, confines Rose’s argument to the notion of singular, linear female development alone. She does not move beyond this notion of female growth and experience. As a result her interpretations of the revisionist fairy tales expect mere re-evaluation and revision of patriarchal paradigms.

Going beyond Marcia Lieberman, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their remarkably noteworthy essay “The Queen’s Looking Glass” in *The Madwoman in the Attic*⁴⁶ talk about a fairy tale’s multilayered structure wherein they identify a conflict between two female archetypes – the angel and the witch – the necessary constructs constructed and used by patriarchy to understand, judge and limit/ constrict women. Gilbert and Gubar undertake a detailed analysis of “Snow White” that forms a significant part of their wider exploration of the 19th century women writers’ discomfort with authorship. Their analysis of “Snow White” becomes part of their analysis of metaphors of and women’s representation in male writing. It is men who expect and design what a woman is or should be. And thus the archetypes of the angel and the monster, Gilbert and Gubar believe are the masks men artists have fastened to women limiting entire womankind into these two categories alone.

Basing their argument on Bettelheim's that the focus and centre of the conflict between Snow White and the queen is the king himself and his authoritative voice, Gilbert and Gubar identify the mirror's voice as the patriarch's, the king's, but dismiss the positive connotations that Bettelheim sees in it. Their valuable insights into "Snow White" effectively demonstrate 19th century woman's confinement at the hands of the prevalent bourgeois culture. Granting the central role to the king in the form of the mirror's ruling voice representing patriarchy, Gilbert and Gubar attempt and offer a powerful critique of patriarchy.

The influence of feminist criticism on fairy tale retelling and the impact of revisionist retellings on fairy tale scholarship and criticism are most noticeably obvious in the interaction between the "Snow White" retellings and Gilbert and Gubar's insights in their analysis of the tale. Gilbert and Gubar's concerns parallel Anne Sexton's ideas expressed in her retellings. Many other "Snow White" retellings on the other hand, echo and reflect Gilbert and Gubar's convictions particularly about patriarchal control of and over female identity. This creative interaction between criticism and literary composition is presented in Chapter V of the present thesis. Gilbert and Gubar reconsider and innovatively rewrite "Snow White" in *No Man's Land*⁴⁷ (1994) wherein they underline the necessity to write new tales which could explain multiple roles women are able to play as authors and as characters. In the concluding retelling they refer emphatically to the mirror once again: "Sometimes when this Queen looked into the mirror of her mind, she passed in her thoughts through the looking glass into a forest of stories so new that only she and her daughter could tell them." (403)

The mirror metaphor continues to fascinate feminist fairy tale scholars when they attempt to enquire into the issues of female identity while composing and consuming fairy tales. Using the mirror metaphor, Kate Bernheimer in her essay collection about women and fairy tales, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall* asserts that women perceive and receive tales differently. The multivocal responses by women parallel and authenticate the multiplicity of the genre. Elizabeth Wanning Harries too reasserts the complexity of relationship between the classic tales and gender construction in them by arguing that "Fairy tales act as broken mirrors for women who use them to construct incoherent and unknowable images of themselves." (Haase, 36)

Cristina Bacchilega in her work *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*⁴⁸ (1997) re-reads the postmodern versions of 'Snow White,' 'Little Red Riding Hood,' 'Beauty and the Beast' and 'Blue Beard' using the mirror metaphor. As said earlier, after the Lurie-Lieberman debate in 1970 the four decades have seen fairy tales being either admired for their liberating potential or criticised for being sexist. Bacchilega addresses the complexity of women's representation in fairy tales and uncovering the mirrors and revisions, establishes the need to question the narration, action and perspective of any revisionist attempt so that a new understanding of women in fairy tales is obtained. As she herself claims, "this feminist and narratological project" attempts to address "several problems related to how fairy tale materials are selected, appropriated, and transformed... What kinds of images of *woman* and *story* do these rewritings/revisions project? What narrative mechanisms support these images? And finally which ideologies of the subject underlie these images? In short, this book explores the production of gender, in relation to narrativity and subjectivity, in classic fairy tales as re-envisioned in late 20th century literature and media for adults." (4) Consistently manipulating the mirror metaphor Bacchilega concludes: "The wonder of fairy tales, indeed, relies on the magic mirror which artfully reflects and frames desire. Overtly re-producing the workings of desire, postmodern wonders perform multiple tricks with that mirror to re-envision its images of *story* and *woman*." (146) She thus demonstrates that human desire is shaped by history, ideology and changing material conditions.

The attempt to understand the critical and creative interactions in fairy tale studies undertaken in Chapter V of the thesis concludes with insistence on the need to positively keep on the attempts at retelling old tales until the time they are accepted willingly and without any discomfort. The thesis ends on the conclusive note that despite hesitation and discomfort in the reception of the retold fairy tales attempts at retelling should continue since it is the need of the time to have tales reflecting contemporary values and universal humanitarian values. To this end the retellings should be directed and for the purpose, the thesis argues, the retelling attempts should continue persistently and keep improvising themselves.

Literature consulted before arriving at the above stated conclusion includes the following major works, apart from the ones mentioned in the discussion above:

Kay Stone's works offer quite significant insights into the matter of fairy tale production and reception by women. Feminists have always argued about unchallenged, unquestioned, passive reception of classic fairy tales by women. Stone's majority of works are interactive and she being both a scholar and a storyteller offers new and original perspectives from these three viewpoints. Her first essay "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us" (1975) recorded the folklorist's perspective that foregrounded her conviction that fairy tales presented positive and aggressive heroines as well. Her conclusions were based on the interviews of women readers she had conducted for her research on "The Romantic Heroine in Anglo-American Folk and Popular Literature" (1975). As she herself claims her 1980 article "Fairy Tales for Adults: Walt Disney's Americanisation of the Marchen"⁴⁹ treats Disney films more even-handedly while criticising Disney for his gender stereotyping. Her argument here is that the happy endings of fairy tales are mainly about finding oneself and not any prince or princess. It is this position with which she continued most of her later writings which surveyed the actual reception of the fairy tale heroine by women readers, whose reactions and interpretations, to Stone, were more significant than theoretical positions. Thus when Bettelheim considered fairy tale models of fairy tale heroes and heroines problem-solving and feminists claimed the opposite, Stone decided to actually probe the reactions of the female fairy tale readers before she wrote "The Misuses of Enchantment: Controversies on the Significance of Fairy Tales" (36-54) and found that the women she interviewed sided with both the positions – the one considering fairy tale gender constructions problem-solving and the other considering them problem-creating. And hence Stone concluded that "fairy tales are not inherently sexist, many readers receive them as such, ... that girls and women find in fairy tales an echo of their own struggles to become human beings. Thus gender, both of the reader and the protagonist, is indeed significant in this struggle." (54)

In her "Feminist Approaches to the Interpretation of Fairy Tales" (55-61) she critically analyses the three approaches taken up by feminists with changing times and perspectives: the earliest feminist position, which illustrated and criticised the unjust, unequal treatment of women in life and fairy tales; the second generation feminist view that considered women separate from and superior to men and the third who

talked of equality between men and women stressing the need for a change in male biases for this equality to establish itself.

Stone retains in all her works, her confidence in women's mature reception of the tales by using their conscious and unconscious reinterpretation of the tales which they dislike but cannot give up. "It is the possibility of such reinterpretation that gives hope that women can eventually free themselves from the bonds of fairy tale magic, magic that transforms positively at one age and negatively at another." (53) Her interviews, scholarship and her own retellings as well as fairy tale performances authenticate her views and offer original valuable insights into fairy tale studies. She records her journey from fairy tale scholar to storyteller in her book *Some Day Your Witch Will Come* (2008), which constitutes the three decades of her work and scholarship divided into folkloristic analysis, storytelling performances and contemporary retellings including five of her own.

Significance of Stone's work in the present study is that it makes one aware of the necessity of a variety of approaches to fairy tales. To quote her own words, "no single outlook or approach offers a final answer to the mystery of this genre, because the wonder-tale at its best is multi-faceted in depth and meaning, always open to new breath and breadth." (233)

The view Stone expresses in her "Fire and Water: A Journey into the Heart of a Story" (232-247) published later in Donald Haase's *Fairy Tales and Feminism* also, about the experience of composition of revisionist tales being both "frustrating and rewarding, in quite different ways" (243) and her determination and provocation to the feminist scholars, writers and retellers to continue the struggle "to keep going, keep writing, keep telling ... [keep] our voices alive even when we feel petrified" (243) help in validating this researcher's conclusion drawn at the end of the thesis.

Ruth B Bottigheimer's works similarly contributed to the depth of the present thesis. Bottigheimer is known for her social critique of fairy tales. In her article "Tale Spinners: Submerged Voices in Grimms' Fairy Tales"⁵⁰ Bottigheimer explores the oral tradition from which the Grimms derived their material for their collection of fairy tales. Her probe into the negative associations of the word 'spinning' with curse and punishment and an activity necessarily associated with "subjugated womanhood"

raises doubts that the Grimms perhaps attempted to submerge messages in the original tales.

Her edited book *Fairy tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm*⁵¹ (1986) puts fairy tales in the social context while considering them from historical, folkloristic as well as literary and psychoanalytic perspectives. The exemplary essays study the social values these tales contain and generate and how the tales in some social contexts function as a paradigm for understanding and developing oneself in relation to society. She continues her probe into the Grimm tales and their intentions in her next book in 1987 *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boys: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales*.⁵² Here one sees a progress in her earlier arguments about gender biases in Grimm fairy tales. From a feminist perspective set in the framework of historical philology Bottigheimer shows how in their progressive versions of the book of fairy tales the Grimms revised the tales to suit the 19th century moral code that explicitly discredited women.

Bottigheimer's research since the early 1990s culminated into her book *Fairy Tales: A New History*⁵³ (1990) wherein she recapitulates the theories she has developed relating to a definition of fairy tales and an alternative history of the origin and dissemination of these tales through print media. The book offers her original insights into and fruitful research on the components of fairy tales, "foundations" (26) of these tales and the ways in which these tales spread amongst their reading masses. She digs the oft believed history of the literary fairy tales and brings to our notice that "newly emerging evidence supports a new and vastly different history of fairy tales." (26)

Maria Tatar's *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*⁵⁴ coincides with Bottigheimer's work on the Grimm fairy tales, their origins and spread. Considering the psychological import of the fairy tale plots and assuming that the Grimm tales that are widely read "took on a special character" (xxi) with every new edition of their book, Tatar records the important stages in the editorial history of the Grimms' *Nursery and Household Tales* demonstrating how the Grimms shaped the adult folk material to suit children and the contemporary social moral values. She reflects on fairy tales theoretically and raises issues like "To what extent is the Grimms' variant of a tale type such as 'Cinderella' culture bound and to what extent does it veer off into pure fantasy? What does one make of a fairy tale's repetitive patterns and

recurrent motifs? ” (xxii) She thoroughly deals with male and female heroes in fairy tales in one part of the book and male and female villains in its other part. She concludes with the art of getting even in keeping with the fairy tale plots.

In her essay “Tests, Tasks, and Trials in the Grimms’ Fairy Tales”⁵⁵ published earlier in Bottigheimer’s *Fairy Tales and Society* Tatar offers interesting observations about characters of the heroes in fairy tales who, she sees as “exceptionally unmemorable, unlikely to win prizes for intelligence and good behaviour ... Frequently their stories chronicle perilous adventures, but they themselves remain cowardly and passive.” (33) Through these observations she implies that even the traits attributed to the male protagonists are not positive suggesting thereby that the sexist bias of the fairy tale may have its origins in psychological realities. She asserts this when she says, “psychological realities of a more fundamental nature seem to have given rise to the general plot structure of these tales.” (45) Tatar’s works along with Bottigheimer’s innovatively new probe into the fairy tale history offered valuable insights to this researcher while working on the project.

Donald Haase’s essays and books have been greatly resourceful for the present research. Haase in his works has always established parallels between feminist studies and feminist fairy tale scholarship. In his book *Fairy Tales and Feminism*⁵⁶ too, as the title itself clearly suggests, he combines fairy tale study with the fresh evaluation of feminist focus on the genre. Inclusion of Bottigheimer’s article mentioned above and of Lewis C Seifert’s essay in this book brings to light Haase’s emphasis on what these two writers argue about the need to address the ambiguities and contradictions in the fairy tale text. Response oriented approach by the feminist fairy tale scholars is underlined in Elizabeth Wanning Harries’s article “Women’s Autobiography and Fairy Tales” and Kay Stone’s “Fire and Water” also mentioned above. The main thrust of these two articles is to study female response to fairy tales at different times and ages and to empower both the tellers and readers of new versions of tales in the face of apparent victimisation.

Crossing the Anglo-American bounds of the fairy tale research, Haase includes the essays of Patricia Odber de Baubeta and Fiona Mackintosh who examine reception of fairy tales by Iberian and Latin-American writers and Argentine women respectively. At the same time Bacchilega’s essay shifts the focus slightly to India and oriental

nations. The concluding essay by Cathy Lynn Preston considers the ‘Cinderella’ text in different contexts of film, television and internet. The collection of essays is complemented by primary texts and illustrations of the classic tales. The book with its extensive bibliography acquires a significant place in fairy tale studies. Similarly extensive and critical bibliography and survey by Haase appears in *Marvels and Tales*, Vol. 14 dedicated to the theme ‘Fairy Tale Liberation – Thirty Years Later.’ It must be admitted here that this introductory chapter of this thesis considerably draws on this particular article by Haase: “Feminist Fairy Tale Scholarship: A Critical Survey and Bibliography.” In his article “Decolonising Fairy Tale Studies”⁵⁷ (2010) presented by him first at an international symposium in 2008 Haase talks about efforts to resolve “continuing colonisation” of the fairy tale genre and studies owing to certain problematic notions and practices such as categorisation of tales as per tale types and motifs: “Identifying a tale as a variant of any international tale type, with its component motifs, automatically subsumes that tale in a general classification system, displacing and abstracting it from its context ... With the reduction of tales to types and constellations of motifs, the value of the story as a verbal text essentially disappears.” (27) Haase argues for the need to decolonise the fairy tale and usher in “a responsible form of trans-cultural fairy tale research” (29) and for this purpose he insists on relinquishing universalisation of the classic texts at the expense of their specific socio-historical and cultural contexts and generalisation of the European fairy tale as a universal genre. His interesting analytic argument in this essay offers a hope for fairy tale studies to move beyond its Anglo-American confines and be international, intercultural and cross-cultural. It is his broader vision on the issues relating to fairy tale scholarship which perhaps drove Haase to edit three volumes of *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Folklore and Fairy Tales*⁵⁸ underlining the challenge confronting fairy tale studies – the challenge “to cultivate a constructive transnational interdisciplinary conversation that can promote approaches that are appropriate both for rethinking the past and for coming to grips with new forms of production and reception during this dynamic era of fairy tale proliferation and change.” (xxxviii) References to Haase’s committed scholarship indeed contributed fruitfully to the present thesis.

Kate Bernheimer’s idea of “explosion of fairy tale influences in art and literature” (Bobby, 7) is extended in Susan Reddington Bobby’s attempt throughout the essays

on transformed traditional fairy tales by contemporary writers in her *Fairy Tales Re-imagined: Essays on New Retellings*⁵⁹ (2009). Bobby throws light on new fairy tale forms ushered in by the contemporary retellings which reflect the changing world and perspectives. Apart from the well known revisionist writers like Sexton, Broumas, Coover, Byatt etc Bobby acknowledges the efforts by lesser known retellers as well by including essays on them in this collection. Another very remarkable aspect about this book is that it extends the scope of retold fairy tales beyond the concerns of gender and links it to trauma narratives of the holocaust and socio-political commentaries. On the whole the book is a valuable guide on the retelling of fairy tales and their value in the contemporary world.

Elizabeth Wanning Harries's book *Twice Upon A Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale*⁶⁰ too has been a resourceful guide for the present project and could be treated as a valuable, thought provoking contribution to fairy tale scholarship in further future studies on the subject. Harries discusses the "compact" and "complex" fairy tale telling traditions that exist alongside each other. Both these traditions are kept alive by the conteuses of the 1690s and their late twentieth century women successors. Harries traces the social history of fairy tale tradition and makes us look at it from a focus and perspective not considered before.

Similarly valuable and resourceful is the book by Vanessa Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue between Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings* (2011). It has an incredible reference value for research in the field of fairy tale studies since it offers the latest novel approach to the fairy tale scholarship. It suffices to quote Jack Zipes on this book of Joosen's: "Her book is the first comprehensive study to focus on the major critical works, intertextual references, and scholarly debates that have invigorated the hybrid genre of fairy tale. Joosen succeeds in shedding new light on the overlap between fairy-tale re-creations and critical analyses without privileging one over the other." (Cover page)

Any fairy tale study or research is absolutely incomplete without a mention of Jack Zipes and his views on a variety of topics related to the subject. The amount of work he has done and the commitment with which he progressively addresses the issues concerning the fairy tale genre is stupendous and admirable. It is opportune to mention here that this research greatly owes to Zipes's scholarship in the field.

Jack Zipes in his *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*⁶¹ (1979) describes the rise of the literary fairy tale in Europe at the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century as the “bourgeoisification” of the oral folktale. What he means by this is the manner in which the bourgeois educated the masses, appropriated the tales of and by the non-literate peasants and manipulated them to serve the interests and needs of the new literate audiences.

His *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (1983) again demonstrates how the folktale has been appropriated and re-appropriated in Europe and America with an intent to socialise children about the socio-cultural values particularly gender identity and behavioural patterns. Zipes’s essay, “Who’s Afraid of the Brothers Grimm? Socialisation and Politi[ci]sation through Fairy Tales” presented by him in 1979-80 was later incorporated in this book. This essay shows illustrations and comparisons from different Grimm versions and shows how the brothers altered tales to generate patriarchal bourgeois values for the purpose of socialisation.

Zipes divides his edited book, *Don’t Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*⁶² (1989) into three interesting parts: ‘Feminist Fairy Tales for Young (and Old) Readers,’ ‘Feminist Fairy Tales for Old (and Young) Readers,’ and ‘Feminist Literary Criticism.’ Zipes clearly advocates retelling as an alternative to counter the “atavistic notions of sex roles” and “ideology of male domination” in the traditional fairy tales. The retold stories and their specified target audiences, as Zipes claims in his introductory remarks, have an obvious political purpose to symbolically represent “the authors’ critique of the patriarchal status quo and of their desire to change the current socialisation process.” (xiii)

The articles in Part III of the book include “Some Day My Prince Will Come,” “The Queen’s Looking Glass” and his own article “A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood’s Trials and Tribulations.” These articles justify Zipes’s claims made in the introduction and his intent behind bringing out this book. Though at times one-sided and reductionist this book does offer new perspectives on the tales and an overview of concerns and issues of feminism and feminist fairy tales from 1970 to the late 80s.

In *Spells of Enchantment: The Wondrous Fairy Tales of Western Culture*⁶³ (1991) discounting, right at the outset, that fairy tales “were first created for children and are largely the domain of children,” (xi) Zipes presents more than 60 fairy tales – classic

and retold – with a view to give his readers a sense of history of the fairy tales as a genre since they are “grounded in history: they emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces [which they set] out to conquer.” (xi) Zipes, through the tales he has arranged in an order that tries to prove the historical evolution of the genre and power of fairy tale enchantment to “free us” (xxx) asserts his faith in the power of fairy tales “to arouse our imagination and compel us to realise how we can fight terror and cunningly insert ourselves into our daily struggles and turn the course of the world’s events in our favour.” (xxx) This assertion and insight supported the emphasis in the present thesis on the necessity of fairy tales in their retold forms for us.

His scholarship continued on these lines and a remarkably illustrative book demonstrating stages of changes in a tale from an oral tale to an appropriated tale and then a variety of revisionist versions of the same tale appeared in the form of *Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (1993). Zipes very painstakingly shows the manipulation of a tale about a peasant girl meeting a werewolf in the forest into a story about the initiation of a shrewd girl belonging to a sewing community and later into a text that lays the responsibility of rape on the bourgeois girl herself. By attempting to reveal “the true history of this seductively innocent girl” (18) Zipes tries to hint at the danger in considering the classical fairy tale as too monolithic with one-dimensional impact on the readers.

Zipes continues and furthers this assertion in his book *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale*⁶⁴ (1994) by disclosing ideological linkage between the genre and systemic oppression and domination. He illustrates his idea of mythicisation of fairy tales by showing, for instance, Disney’s film on ‘Snow White’ as expressing typical male individualism in America or by elaborating how Robert Bly in his ‘Iron John’ misunderstands folklore and classical fairy tales. The book, extensively referred to in this thesis, does offer a novel look into fairy tales as a literary genre.

Zipes in his *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition*⁶⁵ (1999) accounts for the reasons why and the manners how the fairy tales acquired the power they exercise on human beings right from childhood. He explores the social emergence of the fairy tale from 16th century till the twenty first. He throws light on the manipulation of the fairy tale genre by its writers in order to express their own

deeper desires, views and preferences in the existing social context. He also assesses the values fairy tales generate for children and adults and their role in the process of socialisation.

In the year 2000 Zipes came up with a valuable book on fairy tales: *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales: The Western Fairy Tale Tradition from Medieval to Modern*.⁶⁶ Reference work of its own kind and great worth this encyclopaedic source contains more than 800 useful entries on writers, illustrators, retellers, books, films, opera, music etc related to the fairy tale genre. 67 experts in the field have contributed to the *Companion* exploring the development of the fairy tale tradition particularly in the western, European and North-American regions.

In his second edition of *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*⁶⁷ (2002) Zipes claims that he substantially and thoroughly revises, re-examines, expands and alters his original theses about the fairy tale genre. His attitude here to the Grimm brothers is softened and in their treatment of the oral tales he sees extraordinary artistry. He is critical and sceptical about their art and ideology and the way modern, postmodern writers and filmmakers have appropriated their art, ideas and tales. However he acknowledges the great hope the Brothers perceived in fairy tales for themselves and for their nation. Overall Zipes's reading of the brothers Grimm in this book grows to become more balanced.

Zipes continues his firmly grounded historical approach to fairy tales in *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*⁶⁸ (2006). On the basis of this approach he addresses the question why some fairy tales 'work' while some others do not, the question about fairy tale's stable, steady cultural acceptance. As such bringing forth the cultural ramifications of the fairy tale he establishes the profundity of the fairy tale as an important and serious literary genre. To address the issue he includes two chapters on history and theory of the fairy tale and proves his contentions by case studies of well known tales like Snow White and Cinderella. In the concluding chapter he summarises the problems of telling old classical tales in the twentieth century.

Zipes's latest book of 2012 *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre*⁶⁹ provides us with a new theory about the manner and reasons of fairy tale evolution, retellings and their relevance to our lives even today.

His scholarly meditations, for decades, on the subject are reflected in the variety of essays included in the book. Particularly the inclusion of “Sensationalist Scholarship: A ‘New History of Fairy Tales’” and “Reductionist Scholarship: A ‘New’ Definition of the Fairy Tale” presents an analytical critique of and a different outlook on the trends in fairy tale scholarship.

Zipes’s immense work and scholarship certainly has a great resource value and the present thesis uses it to the fullest extent. Apart from the literature reviewed above a number of scholarly articles on fairy tales and retold fairy tales have been written and published in the famous journals devoted wholly or partly to the study of the field. They include volumes of *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy Tale Studies*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *Women and Folklore*, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, *Children’s Literature in Education*, *Women and Language*, *Women’s Studies*, *Signs* etc.

The scope of the present thesis is confined to a detailed study of only a few retold tales. Of course this scope could be extended to include even less known classic and retold fairy tales. Further one of the limitations of the field of fairy tale studies in general has been that it is vastly and mainly confined to the European-American world and worldview. As Haase in one of his articles maintains, it is really necessary to go beyond these bounds and peep across the restricted perspectives. Thus attempts could be made to research fairy tale impact on readers in other developed and developing countries as well as the cross-cultural, inter-cultural state of this impact. Further the response-oriented study undertaken by scholars like Kay Stone and to some extent Kate Bernheimer could be stressed to judge where exactly we stand in our understanding of the field of fairy tale study. For Indian scholars the study of fairy tales in India, the interaction of the Indian reader with the classical fairy tales and the ones rooted in India could be an interesting area to probe into. The field of fairy tale studies is extremely vast and definitely innumerable possibilities of research are hidden in it. This project is but a mere fraction of the tiniest drop in the fairy tale ocean.

NOTES

¹J R R Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (Oxford: OUP, 1947) 38-39.

²See Jack Zipes, "The Meaning of the Fairy Tale within the Evolution of Culture," *Marvels and Tales* 25.2, (2011): 221-243. Subsequent references are given parenthetically.

³Patricia Hannan's perception as quoted by Zipes.

⁴Jack Zipes, ed and trans. *Beauties, Beasts, and Enchantment: Classic French Fairy Tales* (New York: New American Library, 1989).

⁵Lewis C. Seifert and Donna C Stanton, eds. *Enchanted Eloquence: Fairy Tales by 17th Century Women Writers* (Toronto: Iter, 2010).

⁶Alison Lurie, "Fairy Tale Liberation," *New York Review of Books*, 17 Dec,(1970):42-44.

⁷_____, "Witches and Fairies: Fitzgerald to Updike," *New York Review of Books*, 2 Dec. (1971): 6-11.

⁸Marcia R Lieberman, "Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale," *College English*, 34 (1972):383-395. Also found in Jack Zipes's *Don't Bet on the Prince*, 185-200.

⁹Donald Haase, "Feminist Fairy Tale Scholarship: A Critical Survey and Bibliography," *Marvels and Tales: Journal of Fairy Tale Studies*, 14.1. (2000):15-63.

¹⁰Vanessa Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue between Fairy Tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State UP, 2011) 50.

- ¹¹Barbara G Walker, *Feminist Fairy Tales*. (San Francisco: Harper, 1996) ix.
- ¹²Jack Zipes in the second edition of *The Brothers Grimm: from Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* points out that there were almost no major revisions of the Grimm fairy tales in West Germany between 1946 and 1966. In 1967 Lutz Röhrich parodied the Grimms' 'Little Red Riding Hood.'
- ¹³Alan Dundes, "Bruno Bettelheim's Uses of Enchantment and Abuses of Scholarship," *Journal of American Folklore*, 104(1991):74.
- ¹⁴Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating*. (New York: Dutton, 1974).
- ¹⁵Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. (New York: Simon, 1975).
- ¹⁶Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. (Boston: Beacon, 1978).
- ¹⁷Karen E Rowe, "Feminism and Fairy Tales," *Women's Studies*, 6 (1979): 237-357. Reprinted in Zipes's *Don't Bet on the Prince*, 209-226.
- ¹⁸Carolyn G Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (New York: Norton, 1979, 1993) 150.
- ¹⁹Madonna Kolbenschlag, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye: Breaking the Spell of Feminine Myths and Models* (Toronto: Bantam, 1979, 1981).
- ²⁰Kay Stone, "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us," *Journal of American Folklore*, 88(1975): 42-55.
- ²¹Kate Bernheimer, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favourite Fairy Tales* (New York: Anchor, 1998).
- ²²Ronda Chervin and Mary Neill, *The Woman's Tale: A Journal of Inner Exploration*. (Minneapolis: Seabury, Winston, 1980).
- ²³Colette Dowling, *The Cinderella Complex* (New York: Simon, 1981).
- ²⁴Marion Woodman, *Leaving My Father's House: A Journey to Conscious Femininity* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992).

- ²⁵Alison Lurie, ed. *Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folk Tales* (New York: Crowell, 1980).
- ²⁶Rosemary Minard, ed. *Women Folk and Fairy Tales* (Boston: Houghton, 1975).
- ²⁷Ethel Johnston Phelps, ed. *Tatterhood and Other Tales* (Old Westbury, New York: Feminist, 1978).
- ²⁸_____, ed. *The Maid of the North: Feminist Folk Tales from around the World* (New York: Holt, 1981).
- ²⁹Jeanne Desy, "The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet" 1982 Zipes's *Don't Bet on the Prince*. 39-47.
- ³⁰Anne Sharpe, "Not So Little Red Riding Hood" 1985 Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* 324-327.
- ³¹Anne Claffey et al., eds. *Rapunzel's Revenge: Fairy Tales for Feminists* (Dublin: Attic, 1985).
- ³²Martin Waddell, *The Tough Princess* (London: Walker, 2002).
- ³³Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Methuen, 1983).
- ³⁴Angela Carter, *Old Wives' Fairy Tale Book* (New York: Pantheon, 1990).
- ³⁵_____, ed. *Strange Things Sometimes Still Happen: Fairy Tales from around the World* 1993 (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994).
- ³⁶Jack Zipes, ed. *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- ³⁷Stephen Benson, ed. *Contemporary Fiction and the Fairy Tale* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2008) 5.
- ³⁸Jack Zipes, *Relentless Progress: The Reconfiguration of Children's Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling* (New York: Routledge, 2009) 122.
- ³⁹Maria Tatar, *Off With Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992) xxvi.

- ⁴⁰Jane Yolen, *Briar Rose*. (New York: Doherty, 1992).
- ⁴¹Evelyn Conlon, "That I'll Teach Her," *Ms. Muffet and Others*. (Dublin: Attic, 1986) 32-36.
- ⁴²Alicia Ostriker, "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking," *Signs* 8 (1982):68-90.
- ⁴³Jane Yolen, *Sleeping Ugly*. (New York: Paper Star, 1997).
- ⁴⁴Priscilla Galloway, *Truly Grim Tales*. (Toronto: Lester, 1995).
- ⁴⁵Ellen Cronan Rose, "Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales," Elizabeth Abel et al eds. *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*. 209-227.
- ⁴⁶Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Queen's Looking Glass," *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Image*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).
- ⁴⁷_____, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994).
- ⁴⁸Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997).
- ⁴⁹Kay Stone, "Fairy Tales for Adults: Walt Disney's Americanization of the Marchen," *Some Day Your Witch Will Come* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2008) 24-35. Subsequent references are given parenthetically.
- ⁵⁰Ruth B Bottigheimer, "Tale Spinners: Submerged Voices in Grimm Fairy Tales," *New German Critique* 27(1982):141-150.
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- ⁵³_____, *Fairy Tales: A New History* (Albany/ New York: State U of New York P, 2009).

- ⁵⁴Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1987).
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- ⁵⁶Donald Haase, ed. *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2004).
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- ⁶⁰Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon A Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2001).
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- ⁶²_____, ed. *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (New York: Methuen, 1986).
- ⁶³_____, ed. *Spells of Enchantment: The Wondrous Tales of Western Culture* (New York: Viking, 1991).
- ⁶⁴_____, *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1994).
- ⁶⁵_____, *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and Their Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1999).
- ⁶⁶_____, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales: The Western Fairy Tale Tradition from Medieval to Modern* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000).

⁶⁷ _____, *The Brothers Grimm: from Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*
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⁶⁸ _____, *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre*
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⁶⁹ _____, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2012).

CHAPTER - II

Exploring Childhood and Children's Literature

Childhood as a concept has evolved over time and continues to do so. It is a social, cultural construct. In that, it is viewed differently in diverse texts and media. For instance, popular media aimed at a child audience, educational texts for children and academic research on children, which sees childhood as a social stage of life rather than simply a developmental one. The ways in which society looks at, understands and treats children and their needs and the ways children see or are conditioned to see themselves are different and at times perhaps conflicting. In the present, while educational experts consider children's rights and responsibilities while drafting or designing texts for them, media perceives them as active and demanding consumers while at the same time academic research increasingly insists on children's autonomy and competence. However children's own perception about themselves could be altogether different from these. Therefore while framing educational material or passing on the media content and while undertaking academic research, it is absolutely essential to attempt to see and understand children's own perspective rather than moulding children's world view to adjust with that of the adults. As W.B. Drummond rightly points out in his book *The Child- His Nature and Nurture*:

“...the child does not see *as* we see, and therefore does not quite see *what* we see, and therefore at least to that extent words do not mean to him, even when they are used by him and not by us, exactly what they mean to us. A fuller knowledge of a child's normal mode of mental and moral growth, and the way in which he reacts to different materials of instruction, must make great changes in our (present) methods of school training.”¹

Drummond speaks in the context of school training. However what he says holds true in every field concerning children as what they grow to be is a result of all sorts of influences they gather as children from a variety of sources. It should be noted at this point that the word 'child' here has the implications of its definition in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: “A child means every human being below the age of 18 years.” However childhood cannot be a uniform or homogeneous category. David Buckingham argues, for example,

“What childhood means and how it is experienced, obviously depends on other social factors, such as gender, ‘race’ or ethnicity, social class, geographical location and so on.”²

As such every child’s childhood (experience) is different and unique. Different children have different sorts of childhood and different peoples and societies hold different views about childhood. This complicates the term. However, it could be seen as an inclusive term covering a different array of socially, geographically, culturally and historically contextual childhoods.

Philippe Aries in 1962-63 tried to trace the history of childhood. He asserted that childhood was discovered in the seventeenth century with the introduction of the printing press and claimed that the notion of childhood became solidified in the eighteenth century. Despite this kind of study it is difficult to establish a universal/global history of childhood without consulting at least sociological, anthropological and psychological works.

Child study as an organised movement is a modern day phenomenon. Considering this, Drummond credits Rousseau with the doctrines which are followed in New Education. Rousseau in *Emile* (1762) rejected the puritan concept of original sin. He asserted that children were born innocent but corrupted later by society. He was the first to emphasise the knowledge of children’s ways in their education. He was much ahead of his times when for the first time he based education entirely on a study of the child to be educated. Rousseau’s influence inspired later educators and also publication of many books for children that resulted in the growth of child study as an organised movement in modern times. Drummond categorises the interest in child study as i) scientific which could be traced to the scientific work of Darwin and ii) practical which promises the establishment of a true scientific pedagogy.

Anthropological study of childhood addresses many important issues in childhood by trying to know fully about the course of a child’s development e.g. the origin of language.

Psychological study of the child interprets the observations in the child in the course of his development. Though most difficult and most fascinating, psychological study of the child demands that the one who undertakes it “must be gifted not only with

the power of observing with scientific accuracy but with... scientific imagination. He must love his subject and his subjects. He must possess an understanding heart and sympathetic insight, and be able to lay aside his own grown up habits and ways of looking at things. Only by becoming again as a little child can he hope to sit down with the child in his kingdom and once more to see and hear and understand *as a child.*" (Drummond, 15-16)

Drummond puts forth two methods of child study viz. i) direct methods which include individual and collective observations of children and their ways in various incidents/ events in their lives and through physical examination, experimental tests and analysis of oral and written replies by children, ii) indirect methods of child study which include the study of a) spontaneous writings of children in the form of letters, essays, autobiographies, diaries etc which provide childish or child's ways of looking at things; b) autobiographies containing accounts of reminiscences of childhood which are mostly coloured by the writer's later personality and prejudices; and c) portrayal of the child in fiction and poetry.

After Rousseau's account of how a child can 'learn' by doing, the interest in 'childhood' shifted to a largely biological view of the term in the mid nineteenth century. Darwin's theory inspired scientific enquiry and the search for scientific universals. These earlier studies did not consider however the social or cultural influence which was taken up in the twentieth century by developmental psychology. In the latter half of the twentieth century, with the work of the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky intellectual enquiry into the socio cultural influences in child development began. The latest sociological studies of childhood focus on the 'constructed' nature of the term. Childhood as a socio cultural construct implies conditioning/ shaping and developing of the ideas of childhood in different societies at different times. Concepts of childhood developed and maintained over a period of time by a society determine adult attitudes toward children in different fields, expectations from children, things they should be allowed or disallowed from knowing or experiencing, things they are able or unable to do and so on. Intellectual enquiry into 'childhood' in the last decade of the twentieth century recognises children as '*beings*' and not '*becomings*', as individuals active and able to make their own choices and take decisions. James and Prout in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* centralise the issue of how these capacities are either smothered/

suppressed or encouraged by adult society and other authoritative sources. It thus follows that adult power interests and concerns artificially construct, colour and shape 'childhood'. James and Prout stress the need to 'deconstruct' these constructions and uncover the unique views and abilities of children unconditioned by adults because children do have their own concerns and capacities independent of the adult perspective. With such insights into the understanding of the concept, the views on childhood are fast changing in contemporary times. These views have other facets of economic, social and cultural trends. Therefore along with its biological context 'childhood' needs to be considered in its social and historical contexts as well.

In a 2005 study on the transformation of childhood, Jyotsna Kapur brings forth a number of contradictions with which the twenty first century society confronts the idea of childhood. She points out that while the market presents innumerable commodities evoking childhood, children and families are denied social protection.

“While new fads hit the market everyday that promise adults they can remain forever young, children are represented in popular culture, law and public policy as little adults. Instead of imagining childhood as a birthplace of new possibilities, we are now confronting the death of the notion of childhood itself. Evidence of this death lies in the new image of children that has emerged in contemporary children’s consumer culture, at the heart of which is the children’s or family film.”⁴

Children are portrayed as independent entities “managing by their wits in a world peopled by ineffective adults.”(Kapur, 2) This notion of childhood is in complete contrast with and mocks the nineteenth century notions of childhood as a special, eternal and pure state and of children as opposites of adults, thus blurring the boundaries between adulthood and childhood. Kapur’s observation about the presentation of childhood and adulthood in present day films for children as “permeable and reversible; children can turn into adults and back into children again” (Kapur, 3) can well be applied to the contemporary literature for children. Analysing images of childhood, Anne Higonnet in *Pictures of Innocence* tries to prove how the romantic child in avant-garde and commercial art is being replaced by the child who is aware of his sexuality. Apart from being just a cultural entity, this changing, growing child image is also moulded by institutions like that of law which had established childhood and adulthood as separate categories. These institutions have

started 'reviewing' childhood. For instance, while in India a demand is being made to revise the juvenile delinquency law and try children as adults in cases of sexual assault, in Iran, the Congo and the United States children under 18 are actually tried for death penalty.

The new century does not see children as embodying childhood. It looks at them as independent, capable and at times more effective and efficient than adults. However this does not put an end to childhood as a concept. Rather it should be seen as a reinvention of the concept. Besides the inner child in the adult is evoked and attempts are made to appeal to, please and release this child within in many ways in media, advertisements and literature. The end and reinvention of childhood, the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of childhood could be seen as continually going on with historical and material changes in society which affect all aspects of socio cultural life including the family. As Kapur claims, the present day change in the meaning of childhood is "a structural feature of post modernity, which,... David Harvey and Frederic Jameson... understand as the cultural logic of late twentieth century capitalism."(Kapur8-9) This implies that the free market society has commercialised every form of social interaction including the spirit of domestic life and as such children and childhood too have been moulded to suit its commercial purpose. The 'home alone' children taking care of themselves and childhood getting more or less independent of adults are a product of this society. Growing consumer culture and new technologies have enabled and perhaps forced the child to grow up. Conflict arises when these children whose socio cultural and economic environment pushes them to grow up socially are at the same time forced into the mould of innocent childhood:

"In this struggle we should think of children as our collaborators. Just as we teach children to read and write, clothe and feed themselves, in a bid to make them autonomous members of society, we should teach them to think critically, organise, collaborate with others, and protest so that they can cope with a system that is essentially hostile to life and therefore to children."(Kapur, 19)

Changes in the concept and understanding of childhood get reflected in the literature meant for children making this literature in turn a similar socio cultural construct

evolving over time. David Rudd's attempt to depict the nominal essence of children's literature could be useful here. He maintains:

“Children's literature consists of texts that consciously or unconsciously address particular constructions of the child, or metaphorical equivalents in terms of character or situation (for example, animals, puppets, undersized or underprivileged grownups), the commonality being that such texts display an awareness of children's disempowered status (whether containing or controlling it, questioning or overturning it), just as children themselves engage themselves with many 'adult' discourses. But it is how these texts are read and used that will determine their success as 'children's literature'; how fruitfully they are seen to negotiate this hybrid, or border country.”⁴

The fluid boundaries between children's and adult literature pose difficulties in defining the former. One very important aspect about children's literature is that it is not composed, produced and circulated by the children for the children. In fact, on the contrary, it has almost always been written, illustrated, published, publicised, purchased and circulated by adults for the education, enrichment and entertainment of children. At the same time though it is primarily intended for children, it is read and enjoyed both by children and adults. More often, it is the adults who determine texts appropriate for children's consumption. Naturally authors and publishers tend to produce texts that please adult facilitators of children's books. As Perry Nodelman points out,

“In terms of success of production, what children actually want to read or do end up reading is of less significance than what adult teachers, librarians, and parents will be willing to purchase for them to read. Nevertheless, these adults make their purchases on the basis of their ideas about what the children they purchase for like to and need to read – so it is those ideas that writers must appeal to in order to be successful.... Its producers must make judgements about what to produce based not on what they believe will appeal to children but rather on what they believe adult consumers believe they know will appeal to children (or perhaps, what should appeal to them, or what they need to be taught).”⁵

Success of children's literature is measured in terms of its popularity with children. This success confirms the correctness of its producer's judgements which 'engender' the texts.

“Whether or not child readers do match how adults think about them, the children in the phrase ‘children’s literature’ are most usefully understood as the child readers that writers, responding to the assumptions of adult purchasers, imagine in their works.” (Nodelman, 5)

Though with the advent of the paperback book and spread of public education children can select their books without adult guidance, a book intended for children very often reflects the ideology of the culture in which it is produced and presents assumptions about children and their appropriate behaviour in the time of its production. As a result children’s literature generally projects adult concerns and concepts of childhood. What children might choose for themselves perhaps would be different from what adults present them with, in the books meant for them. “[T]exts written by adults for children reaffirm and communicate the foundational idea that engendered them – the idea that children are different from and even opposite to adults.” (Nodelman, 63) Literature for children celebrates adult ideas of childhood and conveys those ideas to its child readers. It views and reads childhood through adult perspective.

It is in this sense too that children’s literature is a constructed phenomenon. Various forces mainly regulated by adults are responsible for its existence. Walter Benjamin’s distinction between children’s books and children’s literature signifies how certain types of texts alone get categorised as literature for children. It implies intervention of adult concerns and interests. Usually biographies, myths, fables, fantasy, patriotic stories, fiction, educational texts are included under children’s literature whereas comics, jokes, gossips, narratives presenting family histories, local heroes and deities are not acknowledged as formal children’s literature. Texts which are characterised as children’s literature seem to conform to a set of recognisably common and powerful characteristics. As such children’s literature could be seen as a genre – “a group of texts characterised by recurrent features.”⁶ Texts sharing similar characteristics/attributes could be considered as a genre – a particular type of literature. Speaking about the literary genre Derrida in “The Law of Genre”, contends that the literary genre “covers the motif of the law in general.”¹⁷ The genres establish the law and impose it on readers. He further maintains that the value of genre rests on the ideas of inclusion and exclusion:

“as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity.”(Derrida, 224-225)

As mentioned above children’s literature as a genre definitely exists and operates on the principle of exclusion:

“Proclamations by adults that certain texts they don’t personally approve of are not actually children’s literature at all – and therefore not suitable candidates for their library or home or classroom – have been central to the discourse surrounding children’s literature ever since it began.”(Nodelman, 110)

This brings to light the social dimension of categorisation of certain texts as children’s literature and exclusion of certain others from it. Genres in general and children’s literature as a genre in particular seem to have social and communal dimensions exercising political effects on their readers and writers who at a conscious level do not seem to be aware of the social dimension of what they are reading/ writing. This points to methodical institutionalisation of children’s literature. It is unwise to view children’s literature as having a self-evident and natural existence. Shared attributes and ideas that inform and encourage the production of ‘typical’ children’s literature and form its genre communicate special forms of social action having significant impact on individual readers – child or/ and adult – and on all the facilitators of children’s literature. As said earlier, production, circulation and consumption of texts for children is thus regulated and manipulated by creating a demand for and authenticating certain kinds of books as children’s literature. It is this institutionalisation which mainly aids vested forces to regulate, propagate and extend ideological, cultural and hegemonic discourses in children’s literature so that through it are formed subjects who will voluntarily consent to and conform with the social culture presented to them. Thus children’s literature as an institution facilitates and at the same time controls the discourse(s) which adult forces of the dominant culture suppose to be appropriate for children. As such children’s literature is constructed to serve the function of teaching on the one hand, and of entertaining on the other. In both the constructs the generation of perceptions of the existing ideology believing in the status quo is mainly presupposed. This is done by way of actually preaching these perceptions through the texts and by asserting them while entertaining children.

The context, style and language in children's literature thus are selected and moulded to conform to the standard elitist cultural vision. They are standardised to assert the status quo. On account of such insistence on continuity of elitist standardised cultural ideology, many cultural exchanges between adults and children have been muted to the extent of being totally forgotten. For instance, folklore traditions including performance and verse traditions, community histories, family sagas, ballads etc seem to be lost to the extent of being derecognised as children's literature.

Children's literature as an institution regulates the proliferation of utterances on and by children thereby restricting its free production or circulation. Foucault in his 'Order of Discourse' points out procedures in the production of any discourse which enable and at the same time restrain the utterances and their circulation within a field. He says, "in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality."⁸

For instance, as explained earlier it is the adults who assume the power to select/choose/ determine what is good for children, what they should or should not read. As such it is they who taboo, tame or discourage subjects like sexuality, violence, politics, rebellion etc and privilege certain other subjects such as triumph of the good i.e. those who submit and conform to the order and punishment for the bad i.e. those who do not conform and actively rebel. It is they, the adults, who simplify and naturalise the associations like those between good and beautiful, bad and ugly, kindness and servitude, passivity and reward, action and punishment. These adult facilitators of children's literature assume the child reader to be essentially there to unquestioningly accept whatever is given to him. As Philippe Aries proves, like family the idea of childhood too is a carrier of changeable social, moral and ethical values and motives within the framework of society and culture. This assumed reader cannot be effectively or definitely figured out. His presence as an unproblematic universal figure is assumed for the existence of the literature meant for him. Jacqueline Rose points out that "children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed.... The 'child' is a construction invented for the needs of the children's literature authors and critics, and not an 'observable', 'objective', 'scientific' entity."⁹

However Rose further maintains, “If children’s fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who doesn’t come so easily within its grasp.”(Rose, 2)

Thus ‘constructedness’ of the child reader has another function of ‘securing’ the actual readers by identifying with the child characters in the text that too are constructed to satisfy adult wants and needs.

As per Aries’ observation in *Centuries of Childhood*, it is the printing press which enabled the separation of the worlds of adults and children and invented childhood. With the replacement of oral culture by literacy, a long period of learning in school and family was instituted for children. This hierarchy was broken down by the intervention of media, the television to be precise, according to Postman. In *The Disappearance of Childhood* Postman contends that the television’s audio visual culture blurs the boundaries between entertainment and information and makes the world seem out of control and irrational. He therefore suggests that childhood should be restored by adults’ asserting authority and banishment of television sets. As such in this institutionalised discourse entertainment alone is not seen to be its end goal but it transcends entertainment and assumes the function of teaching. It takes upon itself the function of communicating and continuing certain values thus inviting and conditioning the implied assumed reader to side with certain positions. For instance, triumphant, award winning and therefore desirable characters are portrayed as having qualities like beauty, passivity, loyalty, honour, courage, humility, dutifulness, non defiance or conformity, and responsibility. Such characters are elevated and are the suffering and victorious heroines and heroes.

Continual exposure to such texts without the benefit of critical questioning and discussion could indoctrinate readers into the ideology of the story.¹⁰

Thus the process of formation of the desired and desirable subjects to retain the status quo continues through this discourse subtly and systematically. The texts seem to work towards constructing the subjectivity of their readers, making them think of themselves only in certain ways and not in certain others. In response to the constructed nature of the implied child reader, one may consider Peter Hunt’s assumption in his concept of ‘childist criticism’¹¹ that adults can imagine and attempt to read as children would read, enjoy and understand. This implies generalisation

about children's abilities and interests possibilities of which developmental psychologists rule out. They assert that if at all adults claim to understand children's ways of enjoyment and thinking it is only through their own assumptions about children and childhood, their own construction of children as they have imagined. Talking about childhood as a biological 'reality', Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers claim that we can know about it only "within humanly constructed systems." (Quoted in Nodelman, 85) John Stephen also maintains that "all developmental paths are ideologically constructed, involving conformity to societal norms."¹²

Thus children in children's literature are as much a constructed notion as the idea of childhood is informed by the cultural conventions which shape children's literature. Karin Lesnik-Oberstein's observation in this respect brings to light the fact that various forces are implicitly and explicitly are at work in the production, circulation and consumption of children's literature:

"The meaning of children's literature as 'books which are good for children' in turn crucially indicates that the two constituent terms—'children' and 'literature'—within the label 'children's literature' cannot be separated and traced back to original independent meanings, and then reassembled to achieve a greater understanding of what 'children's literature' is. Within the label the two terms totally qualify each other and transform each other's meaning for the purposes of the field. In short: the 'children' of 'children's literature' are constituted as specialised ideas of 'children', not necessarily related in any way to other 'children' (for instance those within education, psychology, sociology, history, art, or literature), and the 'literature' of 'children's literature' is a special idea of 'literature', not necessarily related to any other 'literature' (most particularly 'adult literature')."¹³

Adult control seems to be a central characteristic of children's literature. It is produced and its existence is established in order to convey and shape ideology. John Stephens argues, "Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader a positive apperception of some socio cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author and audience."(Stephens, 3)

Claiming adult thinking about childhood as inherently colonialist, Rose sees adult attempts in children's literature to control and manipulate less-knowing children as

colonial: “children’s fiction has a set of long-established links with the colonialism which identified the new world with the infantile state of man.”(Rose, 50)

Nodelman throws light on this colonising role of children’s literature. He sees children’s literature as an adult tool to produce knowledge of and about children and for children with the intention to rule over them, to have the power to understand, control, contain and mould them. “...colonialist thinking imposes a fictional childhood on children for adult purposes,” he maintains. (Nodelman, 171) He also points out “a fatal contradiction” (Nodelman, 67) at the heart of adult views of childhood in children’s literature. Adults consider children different from and even opposite to them and at the same time view children as continually growing more and more adult. He traces the origin of this contradiction in the context of the European colonialist thinking which formed the backdrop for the emergence and development of children’s literature as we find it now. Colonial thinking operates on two contradictions: i. The less powerful are seen as different from and opposite to the more powerful in every way. The powerful are strong, the powerless weak. ii At the same time the powerless are seen as more primitive than the powerful but are seen to have the capacity to evolve by way of instruction and improvement. This, however, ironically reinforces control and oppression of the weak by the strong. The strong think it obligatory to colonise the weak to help them become stronger. Texts written for children tend to view childhood as both static and changing and children as incapable of learning while at the same time in the continual process of learning from adults who assume to know more. Speaking about this ambivalence one can agree with what Peter Hollindale says. Quite a few books for children “test and undermine some of the values which they superficially appear to be celebrating”¹⁴

In this literature the qualities positively portrayed in the main characters with whom children are expected to identify are the qualities any ruler would like his subjects to possess or aspire for. Adult opinions about children and childhood are generated in this literature for an unquestioning acceptance and conformity. The strange or alien nature of ‘childhood’ and the hidden or explicit ruling nature and intent of the adult attitudes and opinions reflects a colonial relation between the two – the adult and children – in children’s literature. Like the ‘Orientalist outside the Orient’¹⁵ adult facilitators of children’s literature are outside of childhood as pointed out by Nodelman. Childhood and children are aliens. They are mysterious and unknowable.

They are silent about themselves. They are assumed to be there and are addressed. Adult authority is set up over them thus reflecting a coloniser-colonised relationship. It is the adults who speak for, about and to children who are assumed to be unable to do it for themselves. Children's voice is negated and derecognised. Literature written for children is filtered through adult reading, editing and reviewing. Thus the adult (the coloniser) discourse is prioritised and magnified at the cost of or even by derecognising or changing the discourse of children (the colonised). The texts thus appeal to and satisfy the needs and tastes of the adults who control children's readings and thus wish to condition them to accept adult ideas of the desired child. "The only way we come to make sense of the world is through the stories we are told. They pattern the world we have fallen into, effectively replacing its terrors and inconsistencies with structured images that assure us of its manageability. And in the process of structuring the world, stories structure us as beings in that world."¹⁶ Since children know about themselves only through adults who speak for them, the adult coloniser in children's literature re-expresses and re-confirms his notions of childhood and socially acceptable behaviour for children like the 'Orientalist' *confirms* the 'Orient' in his readers' eyes. (Said, 65) Thus children's literature continually keeps replicating itself. At the same time it is the former who speaks for the latter again by negating or derecognising the latter's voice. It is the adults once again who take it upon themselves to decide for the children who are not allowed freedom to take decisions. An essential opposition between the self and the other is established. Children's otherness is established by adults in order to define and present themselves as "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (Said, 40) because the 'other' is their opposite. "Childhood exists ... to allow adults to be adults – so children's literature exists in order to impose childhood on children. ... If adults need children to be childlike in order to understand and confirm their own adulthood, then children's literature exists more significantly as part of a system that confirms the childlikeness of children in order to confirm the adulthood – and the power and authority – of adults." (Nodelman, 169) The binaries like superior-inferior, adult-child, ignorance-knowledge, safety-danger, home-away lead to ambivalence in the text. In that, one of the two opposites is triumphant at the cost of the other, by negating it and thus reinforcing the inherent opposition. Winners and losers are clearly marked and therefore the bipolarity of and within the texts sustains unceasingly. This literature, whether it performs the ideological, pedagogic or entertaining function, reflects this

trait of the colonial relationship between adult writers and child readers. It is this repressive kind of children's literature which is widely produced and read and is more dominant the world over. However, on the other hand there have been attempts at transformation bringing in new forms of writing and changing the face of children's literature in particular and of literature in general. There also have been attempts at producing children's own writing for themselves. These discourses counter the ideological function of children's literature though they face the risk of becoming 'constructs' themselves.

Some definitions of children's literature

'What is children's literature?' seems an apparently quite simple but is in fact a very complex question. Torben Weinreich maintains that there could be many and various answers to this question. "There are not quite as many answers as there are researchers." (Nodelman,136)

Literature for children emerged a few centuries ago. Discussions on children's literature since then however are rampant with attempts to define and also evade definitions of children's literature. While Jacqueline Rose negates the possibility of the term children's literature, Robert Bator says, "Critics often shun definition entirely. ... it is unfashionable to hold any definition of children's literature. ... To avoid definition may be to flee 'rigid' constraints. But constraint, delimits. Any literature directed at a special audience is a necessarily limited literature. Literature for children will remain largely a critically uncharted and confusing territory if its limitations are not defined."¹⁷ Joan Glazer and Gurney Williams maintain that since children cannot be defined easily their literature too is beyond definition.¹⁸ Lillian Smith considers the magic of children's literature elusive enough to make children's literature indefinable.¹⁹ John Rowe Townsend agrees with Roger Sale who claims that despite their knowledge about children's literature writers and critics of children's literature fail to define it. "Since any line-drawing must be arbitrary, one is tempted to abandon the attempt and say that there is no such thing as children's literature, there is just literature. And in an important sense, that is true. Children are not a separate form of life from people; no more than children's books are a separate form of literature from just books."²⁰ Thus in abstaining from or evading definition of children's literature Sale and Townsend club this literature with adult literature meant for adult

consumption too. Michael Steig who maintains that children's literature is defined by adult use and not by what children read, goes to the extent of saying that all literature is " 'children's' in a fundamental sense."²¹ Writers like John Stephens and Rebecca Lukens find in children's literature a simple form of adult literature differing only in degree but not in kind because children themselves, according to them, are "different from adults in experience, but not in species, ... in degree but not in kind."²² On the other hand writers like Emer O'Sullivan say, "...the definition of children's literature is determined not on the level of text itself, that is to say in the form of specific textual features, but on the level of the actions and actors involved: texts are identified by various social authorities as being suitable for children and young people. These include educational institutions both ecclesiastical and secular, figures active in the literary market ... and those who produce the books."²³ This parallels what Sarah Trimmer in 1803 maintained: "...children should not be permitted to make their own choices, or to read any books that may accidentally be thrown in their way, or offered for their perusal; but should be taught to consider it as a *duty*, to consult their parents in this momentous concern."²⁴ Thus saying Trimmer indirectly suggests a definition of children's literature as exclusively that literature which parents select and consider appropriate for their children. Adult intervention and interests in children's literature make Steig call children's literature "a constructed category...determined by those who make professional use of it, rather than the children who supposedly read it." (Steig,36) Townsend's 'practical' definition of children's literature echoes these concerns: "The only practical definition of a children's book today – absurd as it sounds – is 'a book which appears on the children's list of a publisher.'"²⁵ Marjorie Hancock defines children's literature as "...literature that appeals to the interests, needs, and reading preferences of children and captivates children as its major audience."²⁶ Hancock's definition rests on the assumption that adult producers of children's literature accurately understand children's needs and interests which cannot be uniform and that children are captivated by the literature produced for them and presented to them.

These views present the vastness of the field of children's literature and its lack of clear-cut boundaries. Perhaps that is the reason why most scholars find it difficult to define the term. For defining allows exclusion and for exclusion commonalities between the vast range of texts available need to be identified. However scholars like

Clifton Fadiman do postulate and prove children's literature as an independent genre having its own history and classics and assert that children's literature can be identified as a separate entity. This kind of identification as an entity suggests the possibility of marking specific common characteristics in the texts categorised as children's literature and enables its definition. As said earlier defining amounts to exclusion. Adult perception of children's limitations leads to exclusion of some texts from children's literature. For instance, linguistically complex books considered beyond children's cognitive capacities, texts too violent or sexy considered dangerous for children's tender sensibilities, innocence and purity, texts too long to hold children's attention and so on. Critics who think children's literature includes only those texts which intend to offer sheer pleasure to children obviously exclude implicitly or explicitly didactic writings for children including children's educational texts, stories with morals and so on. Critics who think of children's literature as meant for children's enjoyment would focus only on those books which are popular amongst children leaving out texts which have a literary value. Peter Hunt in his article "Defining Children's Literature" argues that what constitutes children's literature keeps changing with children's choices for reading. What children stop reading ceases to be part of children's literature. He assumes that these changes in children's choices depend on adult concepts of childhood. It is the adults who determine what books are in vogue for child readers. Changes in their perception of childhood determine which books are applicable or no longer so to childhood and therefore are of interest to children or not. "...On the whole, then, that a particular text was written expressly for children who are recognisably children, with a childhood recognisable today, must be part of the definition." (Hunt, 61-62) Hunt, thus, puts forth yet another exclusionary view.

However in all these views and attempts at defining as well as evading or abstaining from definition of children's literature there seems an undercurrent of common principles: one that children and adults are different and opposite on the basis of their levels of knowledge and therefore a special form of literature for children is provided by adults and two, that existence of children's literature enables adults who take it upon themselves as a duty to teach innocent, inexperienced children what they do not know and what they should, to influence children for making better people out of them. In this sense, however, children's literature is necessarily didactic whether

written for children's pleasure, enjoyment or enrichment. Adults, whether parents, teachers, librarians, writers or publishers of children's literature concerned about children's social, emotional, psychological and intellectual upbringing do stress the educational value of literature they hand over to children. They are concerned about the morals and messages conveyed in these texts. They expect these texts and their messages to shape children's understanding of themselves and others in the world and in turn their own lives. However, didacticism coated under entertainment is what is usually preferred. As Charles Temple asserts in *Children's Literature in Children's Hands: An Introduction to Their Literature*, "many children's books turn out to be about something, and it is often possible to derive a lesson from them. But if a book seems too obviously contrived to teach a lesson, children and critics will not tolerate it."²⁷ Explicitly didactic writing has a repelling reaction. Adults want children to enjoy the literature they read, learn through it and at the same time learn only that which adults think children ought to know, thus excluding a certain body of knowledge considered not apt for the innocent world of children – "something the child should be protected against or something society should prevent the child from finding out about." (Weinreich, 56) Thus we see a general expectation of a combination of entertainment, didacticism and exclusion. Based on this Nodelman defines children's literature as "that literature that gives children what they need by *not* being didactic about the wrong things – by *not* teaching them what they cannot or should not know." (Nodelman, 158) Thus it wouldn't be unjustifiable to maintain that children's literature is more or less literature for children that talks about adult expectations of children.

Let us, at this point again, ask questions touched upon earlier in this chapter: Can we generalise about children? Can we generalise about their wants, needs, tastes etc.? Can we generalise about their capabilities to respond to literary texts as adults want them to? Children are different, have different tastes and needs and have varying abilities to perceive and respond. As Nodelman reflects if at all we think of 'constructed' children and child reader, the generalisation that "children are most significantly a body of differing individuals with different needs, tastes, and so forth and with the potential to respond to a wide range of literary experiences seems a positive (and) useful... [and] the best construct to have."(Nodelman, 160) He also addresses the question of which children are generalised about. As he firmly

maintains, since its beginning in the 18th century “children’s publishing has been primarily a middle class venture, pursued by middle class writers and intended most centrally and most often for audiences of middle class children.” (Nodelman, 101) He tries to prove how children’s literature constructs and supports the value of assertion of private property and individuality which are considered thoroughly middle class values. On the basis of this assertion Nodelman defines children’s literature as “the literature produced for and in order to construct the subjectivity of the children of the middle class.” (Nodelman, 177)

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

On the basis of the discussion above one may derive some observable features of literature written for children:

- i. Implied Reader – Children’s literature, as discussed earlier, assumes a universal, non questioning, unproblematic child as its reader. This reader is addressed in special ways and the content to be conveyed to him is specified by the adult writer.
- ii. Simplicity of Language and style – The implied child reader is addressed in simple language and style. Here, a stereotypical view of children’s limited abilities is assumed. The texts therefore are simple and direct. C. S. Lewis while justifying why he writes for children, says, “This form permits or compels one to leave out things I wanted to leave out. It compels to throw all the force of the book into what was done and said.”²⁸
- iii. Minimal Description and Focus on Action – Simple language is associated with very limited description of events. Rather than focusing on the process or a series of happenings in an event, the event/action itself and its consequences, their broad outlines are focussed. For this, considerably complex actions or a series of similar events are merely quickly summed up.
- iv. Undercurrent of Complexities – Simplicity, directness and straightforwardness of these texts actually disguise underneath them a more complex level of text which Nodelman calls a “shadow text.”(Nodelman,8) Children are assumed not to understand beyond

the simple text presented to them. However, research shows that they do have the capacity to understand beyond what they read and hear. It is the same simplicity and directness which moves children subtly into these shadow texts. Children thus can be conditioned to accept what adults want them to believe. This could be seen as the usual form of narrative meant for children.

- v. Strange is familiar - The texts present action in them in such a matter of fact manner that the strangest events assume a familiar appearance. Children tend to accept them as a regular, normal course of happenings. Use of fantasy in children's literature is instrumental in this kind of familiarity and acceptance of the strange as normal.
- vi. Child Protagonist - The texts present children as their protagonists. The implied readers are expected to view the events and actions of the text through its central child protagonist. Generally as readers we tend to identify with the characters through whose perspective we view the action. Similarly child readers too identify with their child protagonist and with what he feels and thinks about events, other characters, his own and others' lives, the world and so on. This sort of identification and controlling of perspective through one focal character is termed as 'focalisation' (56) by Nodelman.
- vii. Third Person Narration – The focalisation is manipulated by a third person narrator in the texts. The protagonist's responses are conveyed, reported and at times opposed by this narrator suggesting thereby that there exists yet another, more mature and different point of view which could and should be accepted as correct. The narrator knows more than the child protagonist and child readers. The children know less. They should know and understand about their ignorance and what it means to be so. At the same time they can and must change, must shed their ignorance and become mature, become adults. These seem to be the assumptions behind the presentation of two different perspectives in the texts. As discussed above these assumptions and attitudes represent colonialist thinking.
- viii. Childlike Animals – In many books written for children along with or instead of child protagonists, childlike animals are centralised and

the actions are shown through their perspective which in turn is controlled by the third person narrator.

- ix. Interplay of Binary Opposites – The texts suggest the changing nature of children and childhood. They expect children to change and yet be childlike, shed ignorance and yet be innocent, make choices but on adult terms. Children are invited or encouraged to think in oppositional terms: this or that, freedom or constraint, ignorance or knowledge, safety or danger, home or away. Children while expected to become adults, are also seen as in need of adult protection from dangers they are unaware of. Adults take it upon themselves to provide places of protection for children. These places are identified as home. A general pattern of action as revealed in the tales for children presents a child moving away from home for one reason or another, confronting dangers or undertaking adventures and returning home again as a more mature being. This line of action itself provides an opposition between danger and safety, freedom and restraint, rebellion and conformity, innocence and experience. The texts further reinforce adult point of view and authority by showing one pole winning over the other.
- x. Didacticism and Entertainment – The end goal of texts meant for children's consumption seems to be to influence children with adult ways of desired behaviour and therefore to educate them about the 'proper,' conformist actions and attitudes. This didacticism is achieved under the guise of pleasure and entertainment. Both pleasure and freedom of choice are offered to children in a subtly masked and manipulated form. The contradiction of pleasure coated in hidden didactic intentions could be seen as the central marker of children's literature. Adoption of fairy tales as children's literature in the 19th century exemplifies this claim. These tales written for children were originally folktales orally circulated amongst peasants. The implied audience i.e. the underclass peasants were perhaps expected to unquestioningly, passively conform to the control and authority of their rich and powerful masters. This principle of control rules even the written form of the tales, the only difference being the controlling authority (adults) and those controlled (children).

- xi. Stereotypical Associations – Fairy tales contain and offer various markers for literature for children. They present black and white allocation of punishment and reward. Passivity of a child protagonist is shown to be admired and rewarded. Those who challenge their fate and act to govern it are shown miserable, defeated and punished. Weak, ignorant and therefore good characters achieve what they desire and dream whereas active, powerful ones get punished and are banned. The stereotypical associations of beauty and goodness, ugliness and cruelty, passivity and reward, action and punishment and many more have been bestowed on children’s literature by fairy tales. These stereotypes and fairy tale motifs are so powerfully implanted that they have sustained for centuries together not just in literature for children but even in popular literature, media, cinema, and so on.

Fairy tales play an important role in socialisation and are considered the “first poetic form with which people come into contact in their lives.”²⁹ Among the various forms of folk narratives the fairy tale has grown to be the most dominant genre. Scholars of fairy tales like K.F. Stone rightly point out the “continuing oral vitality” of the fairy tales. As Röhrich says, “fairy tales concern everyone, because they reproduce an Everyman-Reality and Everyman-Ideal.” (Röhrich, 9) This statement confirms the universal importance of these tales.

As mentioned earlier the adoption of fairy tales in the written form in the 19th century, marked its entry into the literary world. Since then the fairy tale has established itself effectively as an accepted literary genre. Bruno Bettelheim for instance gives the evidence of their literary qualities as follows:

- i. Their deepest meaning is different for each person and for the same person at different stages in his/her life.
- ii. They have psychological meaning and impact.
- iii. A cultural heritage finds expression in them.
- iv. They contribute to the child’s moral education. They indirectly address themselves in the most imaginative form to essential human problems.

Based on this he observes that the delight and enchantment experienced in response to a fairy tale comes not from the psychological meaning of the tale “but from its literary qualities – the tale itself as a work of art. The fairy tale could not have the psychological impact on the child were it not first and foremost a work of art.”³⁰ As Bettelheim records in his book, G.K Chesterton and C.S. Lewis acknowledge the importance of fairy tale in their being “spiritual explorations” and thereby “the most life-like” since they reveal “human life as seen, or felt, or divined from inside.” (Bettelheim, 24)

Fairy tales are essentially seen as children’s literature though there is not necessarily a connection between them and children. The deliberate relegation of fairy tales to the nursery “as shabby or old fashioned furniture is relegated to the playroom, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused” is according to J.R.R.Tolkien “an error of false sentiment,” “an accident of our domestic history.”³¹ Impropriety of the adult scorn of fairy tales is evident in Jacob Grimm’s assertion that his tales were not intended for children but adults: “The book of fairy tales is not written for children at all, but it meets their needs and desires, and that pleases me immensely.”³²

J.R.R.Tolkien too emphasises fairy tales as essentially adult literature. In his essay ‘On Fairy Stories’ he speaks at length about what fairy tales are, about their origin and their use. He describes them as “the land full of wonder but not information.” (Tolkien, 109) They are “wonder tale(s) involving marvellous elements and occurrences though not necessarily about fairies.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica) They are rather about what Tolkien calls “faerie” – “the pre-eminently desirable land” the land of desires, “the realm or state in which fairies have their being.” (Tolkien, 113)

Various other scholars have paid serious attention to the study of fairy tales which in a way proves their significance as serious literature. *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology (1891)* by Edwin Sidney Hartland was one of the first attempts at defining and discussing fairy tales. The book claims to deal with tradition and defines fairy tales as “traditionary narratives not in their present form relating to beings held to be divine, nor to cosmological or national events, but in which the supernatural plays an essential part.”³³ Hartland studies various integral aspects of fairy tales and throws light on their oral orientation, the difference between sagas and

fairy tales, the element of witchcraft and magic, 'the supernatural lapse' in fairy tales and so on.

The Swiss folklorist Max Luithi's contribution in this respect is significant too. His folk narrative research comprises three major books published in English almost a decade after the publication of the original: *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales* (1962/1976), *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* (1967/1982), *The Fairy tale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* (1975/1987). Luithi carefully examines in these books the aesthetic dimension of fairy tales and undertakes a "humanistic interpretation of stories as stories." He believes in the possibility of various interpretations of fairy tales and negates the view that fairy tales influence children negatively. On the contrary he considers fairy tales as developing trust, self confidence and confidence in the world.

Fairy tales from psychoanalytical perspective:

Sigmund Freud in 1913 threw light on the psychological orientation of fairy tales in *The Occurrence in Dreams of Material from Fairy Tales*. In 1915 F. Ricklin discussed wish fulfilment, symbolism and defence mechanisms in fairy tales. T. Hagglund and V. Hagglund again stressed the psychological importance of fairy tales and studied the theme of death in them in 1976. They tried to prove that fairy tales help children deal with the meaning of death.

Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1977) was a very significant attempt at a psychological study and understanding of fairy tales. Bettelheim speaks about the therapeutic value of fairy tales for children and adults. He tried to prove that people could find solutions to their physical and mental ailments by meditating over fairy tales. Like Freud, he claims that fairy tales are gender free and help children of both sexes to solve their own inner conflicts and define themselves as human beings. According to him, fairy tales are significant for children as well as adults as mirrors of their basic emotional response to problems of maturation. Bettelheim significantly brought out this importance of fairy tales. However his work was criticised as being reductionist by many critics.

Fairy tales from Structuralist perspective:

A structuralist approach to folk and fairy tales was attempted in 1975 by Vladimir Propp. He defined fairy tales as ‘folktales in the strictest sense of the word.’³⁴ Propp classified folk tales into fairy tales, tales of everyday life and animal tales. According to him, “...fairy tales possess a particular construction which is immediately felt and which determines their category even though we may not be aware of it.”(Propp, 5) Propp analysed fairy tales according to the functions of their dramatis personae. On the basis of this analysis he graphed a morphology of folktales which in his own words means ‘the description of the folktale according to its component parts and relationship of these components to each other and to the whole.’(Propp, 1)

Many structuralists after Propp attempted the study of fairy tales. Amongst them Alan Dundes structurally analysed folk narratives and applied linguistic theory to this analysis. Scholars like Ilana Dan and Eleasar M Meletinski followed the Proppian theory. They applied Propp’s model to their fairy tale analysis. As Anna Tavis holds, Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* also gives semiotic insights into the folklore studies and Levi Strauss’ speculative and deductive method offers a critical response to Propp’s empirical and inductive study.

Fairy tales from Marxist perspective:

Marxists also attempted the study of the meaning of folk and fairy tales. Prominent amongst them was Jack Zipes. He summarised the contemporary Marxist thought on fairy tales by synthesising the notions of Hoernle, Bloch and Benjamin who opened up three areas of fairy tale research in the 1960s.

Zipes discusses these notions in three general theses and comments on how the contemporary Marxists elaborate on them:

- i. Woollen Weber, Richter, Merkel, Manfred Klein and Werner Psaar, Ulrike Bastion, Bernd Dolle and Christa Burger study the changing role of fairy tales in history and their manipulation to influence the behaviour and thinking of their readers – both children as well as adults. All these researchers worked on the assumption that fairy tales share close ties with real situations of children and they have positive as well as negative impact in the process of socialisation. They “demonstrate how

the transformation of the tales and their employment have been ideologically determined to legitimate the interests of the capitalist societies.”³⁵

- ii. Marxists also worked on the assumption that fairy tales have the potential to contain elements of political protest and wish fulfilment. These elements hint at the possible ways in which the oppressed can bear and overcome the power of the exploitative rulers. The Marxists undertake an analysis of these elements in the light of their anachronistic and feudal features. Gottner-Abendroth takes a historical feminist perspective to analyse the tales. From this perspective he emphasises the patriarchal nature of the tales. Most of the contemporary Marxists believe in modernisation and reshaping of the oral and literary fairy tales in order that they reflect and include a critique of the present society.
- iii. In order to preserve the authentic folk tradition, contemporary Marxists carefully distinguished between the folk and fairy tale. For them fairy tales are appropriated forms of folk tales. Jens Tisman, for instance, speaks about the ‘bourgeoisification’ of fairy tales. Friedman Apel discusses the aesthetics of the fairy tale in relation to bourgeois standards of the time of Louis XIV.

Zipes draws an important conclusion from these views: Fairy tale of any kind is “a social product stamped by its times, its power resides in its utopian potential to illuminate ways by which we can come to terms with injustice and pursue dreams of a golden age.”(Zipes, 241) He acknowledges Propp’s Marxist writings as significant for they “link ethnography and folklore ideologically” (241) by “stressing that the people have cultivated folk art in resistance to the oppression of the ruling classes.” (241)

In his book *Breaking the Magic Spell* Zipes studies the socio historical forces influencing the transition of the oral folk tales into written fairy tales. He bases his theory on the assumption that fairy tales are basically bourgeois literature originated as a result of the appropriation of the folktales, which according to him were the property of the community into the written form as fairy tales. He examines and argues about this transition and hegemonic establishment of fairy tales by the bourgeois, dominant classes in order that the status quo is maintained

and ideas convenient for such maintenance are systematically generated through the tales. The Marxists like Zipes and the feminists do stress the significance of the reworking of fairy tales and seek justifications for such attempts.

Fairy tales from feminist perspective:

Fairy tales attracted feminist attention in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the focus of the attention was not exclusively on fairy tales as the tales were considered one of the many sources of negative female stereotypes. Therefore we find mere passing references to fairy tales rather than their detailed analysis in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In the '70s however, fairy tales did receive a serious consideration by feminists. As said earlier in Chapter I Alison Lurie's articles in 1970 and 71 could be said to have initiated a serious discussion on fairy tales and their liberating potential for women. In response to her Marcia Liebermann's 'Some Day My Prince will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale' (1972) could be seen as the earliest essay attacking the negative female images and stereotypes in fairy tales and trying to show how these stereotypes, behavioural and associational patterns are acculturated in children through the tales. Following her Andrea Dworkin also speaks, in her book *Woman Hating*, about the negative effects of fairy tales. However her arguments seem reductionist and limited. As Jack Zipes mentions, her assumption seems that "the tales are automatically received in fixed ways and that all fairy tales contain the same message."³⁶ Robert Moore's 'From Rags to Witchcraft: Stereotypes, Distortion and Anti humanism in Fairy Tales' (1975) also emphasises the negative features of the tales. Kay F. Stone in her essay 'Things Walt Disney Never Told Us' (1975) studies the changes made in the tales through centuries and the reasons behind these changes thus allowing women to be aware of their own history and to have the possibility to change the existing socio-political arrangements. She even attempted in her reconsideration of fairy tales, to replace stereotypical popular princesses with more aggressive heroines. However this attempt was criticised on the grounds of being a mere superficial consideration of the tales. Jane Yolen in her 'America's Cinderella' (1977) throws light on how the change of folk 'Cinderella' into a literary tale by Perrault in the seventh century involves the transformation of the originally active, assertive heroine into a passive, servile, submissive girl. Yolen, in Zipes' words,

intends to “rectify history and suggest alternatives to our common picture of Cinderella so that women could use cultural material to realise their own essence through art and literature.” (Zipes, 7) Heather Lyon in her essay ‘Some Second Thoughts on Sexism in Fairy Tales’ (1978) re-examines and re-discovers matriarchal features in folk and fairy tales. In 1979 Karen Rowe in the essay ‘Feminism and Fairy Tales’ challenged Bruno Bettelheim claiming that fairy tales are not gender free but are full of gender stereotypes and as such cannot have a positive impact so far as an egalitarian social view is concerned. She attacked fairy tales as “purveyor(s) of romantic archetypes and thereby, of cultural precepts for young women.”³⁷ The feminists suggested substitution of narrow female images with more aggressive heroines, strong and enterprising women to counterbalance stereotypical passive princesses. Writers like Jay Williams, Ethel Phelps etc did attempt such stories but they remained unrecognised in the feminist scholarship.

These feminists felt that women in fairy tales were purposely and unjustly discriminated against by men. The next generation of the feminist writers however, opted for the reworking on the conventional stories in order to give vent to the deliberately neglected aspects of the women’s world. Feminist critics of the early ’70s considered women as naturally separate from and superior to men. Those of the late ’70s struck a compromise between the two earlier views, thus maintaining that women and men are naturally separate but not essentially antagonistic to each other. Books like Patricia Managhan’s *The Book of Goddesses and Heroines* (1981), Barbara Walker’s *The Women’s Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets* (1983), Marie-Louise von Franz’s *The Problems of the Feminine in Fairy Tales* (1982) and Madonna Kolbenschlag’s *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye* (1979) furthered the thought put forth by the feminists of the late 70s. Kolbenschlag, for instance, undertakes a radically challenging study and analysis of femininity and fairy tales. She instigates the readers to think of alternatives to the socially built up role models. She does not hold fairy tales responsible for the creation of these role models but sees them as symbolical forms that strengthen the self-destructive, social, psychological patterns of behaviour in life. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) use fairy tale motifs to examine the socio-psychological situation of

women writers in the male dominated discourse of the 19th century. They use 'Snow White' as the paradigm for the dramatisation of the conflict between the witch and the angel, the two types of females – the conflict manipulated purposely by men by playing off the two types of females against each other.

In the light of fairy tale critique against the backdrop of the discussion on 'childhood' and 'children's literature,' the following chapter undertakes to explore in detail the values and stereotypes for which fairy tales have been attacked and on account of which the need to retell them arises.

NOTES

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- ² David Buckingham, *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003) 21.
- ³ Jyotsna Kapur, *Coining for Capital: Movies, Marketing and the Transformation of Childhood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2005) 2.
- ⁴ David Rudd, “Theorising and Theories: The Conditions of Possibility of Children’s Literature,” *International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children’s Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London, New York: Routledge, 2004) 39.
- ⁵ Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children’s Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2008) 4-5.
- ⁶ Torben Weinreich, *Children’s Literature: Art or Pedagogy?* (Frederiksberg, Denmark: Roskilde UP, 2000) 34.
- ⁷ Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992) 243.
- ⁸ Michael Foucault, “Order of Discourse,” *Untying the Text: A Post Structuralist Reader* ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981) 52.
- ⁹ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan; or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 1.
- ¹⁰ Cynthia McDaniel, “Critical Literacy: A Questioning Stance and the Possibility for Change,” *The Reading Teacher* 57.5, (2004): 477.

- ¹¹ Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991) 16.
- ¹² John Stephens, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992) 3-4.
- ¹³ Karin Lesnik-Oberstein, "Essentials: What is Children's Literature? What is Childhood?" *Understanding Children's Literature*, ed. Peter Hunt (London: Routledge, 1999) 16.
- ¹⁴ Peter Hollindale, *Ideology and the Children's Book* (Stroud: Thimble, 1988): 20.
- ¹⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 21.
- ¹⁶ Karen Coats, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire and Subjectivity in Children's Literature* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P., 2004) I.
- ¹⁷ Robert Bator, *Signposts to Criticism of Children's Literature* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1983) 5-6.
- ¹⁸ Joan Glazer and Gurney Williams III, *Introduction to Children's Literature* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979) 10.
- ¹⁹ Lillian Smith, *The Unreluctant Years: A Critical Approach to Children's Literature* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1976) 12.
- ²⁰ John Rowe Townsend, "Standards for Criticism for Children's Literature," *The Signal Approach to Children's Books* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1980) 196-197.
- ²¹ Michael Steig, "Never Going Home: Reflections on Reading, Adulthood, and the Possibility of Children's Literature," *Children's Association Quarterly* 18. 1 (Spring 1993):38.

- ²² Rebecca J Lukens, *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2003) 9.
- ²³ Emer O'Sullivan, *Comparative Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 2005) 14.
- ²⁴ Sarah Trimmer, "On the Care which is Requisite in the Choice of Books for Children," *Children and Literature: Views and Reviews* ed., Virginia Haviland (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1973) 4.
- ²⁵ John Rowe Townsend, *A Sense of Story* (London: Longman, 1971) 10.
- ²⁶ Marjorie R. Hancock, *A Celebration of Literature and Response: Children, Books, and Teachers in K-8 Classrooms* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill, 2000) 5.
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- ²⁸ C. S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," *Children and Literature: Views and Reviews*, 236.
- ²⁹ Lutz Röhrich, "Introduction," *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm* ed. Ruth B Bottigheimer (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1986) 1.
- ³⁰ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) 12.
- ³¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," *The Monsters and Critics and Other Stories* ed. George Tolkien (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983) 130.
- ³² Rudolf Schenda, "Changes in Communicative Forms," *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm* 87.

- ³³ Edwin Sidney Hartland, *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology* (London: Walter Scott, 1891) 3-4.
- ³⁴ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: U of Texas P, 1968) 1.
- ³⁵ Jack Zipes, "Marxists and the Illumination of Folk and Fairy Tales," *Fairy Tales: Illusion, Allusion and Paradigm* 239.
- ³⁶ Jack Zipes, *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 5.
- ³⁷ Karen Rowe, "Feminism and Fairy Tales" *Women's Studies* 248.

CHAPTER - III

Fairy Tales: Generators of Values and Stereotypes

Fairy tales, which speak in a language well understood in the modern world, remain relevant because they allude to deep hopes for material improvement, because they present illusions of happiness to come, and because they provide social paradigms that overlap nearly perfectly with daydreams of a better life. (Bettelheim, 13)

C. S. Lewis maintained that many children do not like fairy tales whereas many adults love to read them. Children are increasingly fascinated by fairy tales from their early childhood till about the age of ten years. Particularly the age between six and eight years shows remarkable attraction towards the genre. However, as the child outgrows or sheds its animism and egocentrism – Freud is significant in this respect – and gets engaged with the process of conscious independent social interaction and socialisation, especially by the age of 10, its interest in the genre starts declining. This decline continues well till the child reaches adulthood when once again there erupts a nostalgic attachment to and attraction for fairy tales. These shifts in the love for, refusal of and a revised interest in fairy tales at different stages of human life are well recorded by Andre Favat in his *Child and Tale* using Piaget’s cognitive theory and approach as the base for explanation. Jack Zipes in his article “The Potential of Liberating Fairy Tales for Children”¹ documents Favat’s exploration of this idea.

Children between 6 and 8 years of age perceive the world around them in a peculiar way, according to Piaget. During this phase of their development “children believe in the magical relationship between thought and things, regard inanimate objects as animate, respect authority in the form of retributive justice and expiatory punishment, see causality as paratactic, do not distinguish the self from the external world, and believe that the objects can be moved in continual response to their desires.” (Zipes, 311-312) Favat shows a corresponding relation between such perception of the world on part of children and the form and content the classical fairy tales of Grimm,

Perrault and Andersen present. The universe of even those fairy tales which were not necessarily intended initially for children meet the children's emotional and psychological needs and worldview in this phase of development. Children seem to desire for an ordered world different from the real one which they actually experience. Favat says that it is possible to see a child's fascination for fairy tales "as a salutary utilisation of an implicit device of the culture... [T]he reader invests the real world with the constructs of the tale." (Zipes, 312) Children gratify and thereby try to realise their own selves through the tales. However greater interaction and confrontation with the real world and increasing cultural socialisation with age result in a rejection of fairy tales by the age of ten years. The child however, revisits these tales once again as a young adult to find, recapture and consciously gratify and realise himself/herself with a similar earnestness of the earlier age. Zipes terms this recurrence of interest in fairy tales and the fairy tale fantasy as a return to a homeland which, according to him, is "philosophically... a move forward to what has been repressed and never fulfilled. The pattern in most fairy tales involves the reconstitution of home as a new plane, and this accounts for the power of its appeal to both children and adults." (Zipes, 310)

The tales this thesis undertakes to consider confine to the Grimms' collection, the *Nursery and Household Tales*. This collection went through as many as seven editions during the Grimms' lifetime. The movement and growth (!) of the tales from manuscript to print in these editions gave the tales a special character. The Grimms were greatly concerned about the values of their time and responded to these values. They seemed to be considering the enlightening function of the tales as well. Using different editorial practices, odd at times, they are said to have "transformed adult folk materials into a hybrid form of folk lore and literature for children."²

The movement of fairy tales from folk tales to the printed literary form mainly marked their shift from adult amusement to entertainment and edification of children which J.R.R. Tolkien described as fairy tales' neglect and 'relegation to the playroom' by adults. In the process of befitting these tales for the consumption of child readers/listeners the Grimms adopted such practices as tampering with the language of the tales, homogenising and stylising this language and investing the tales with morals, messages, judgements, values and contemporary pedagogic, didactic issues. In their efforts to recast folktales, the Grimms remarkably changed the texture of the tales

to suit their literary and social purposes. At times they simply stylistically expanded and embellished the tales. Commenting on the expansion of 'Briar Rose' from its original version in the first through its final edition, Maria Tatar quotes Max Luithi as saying that the passage "grew and expanded almost as quickly as the hedge surrounding the castle." (Tatar,27) Going beyond such expansion the Grimms even put forth their own values and ideas about gender roles compatible with the prevailing patriarchal social set up. For instance, stories in the *Nursery and Household Tales* differ incrementally from one edition to another in their presentation of the heroine's physical hardship, torment and passive suffering. In the first version, Snow White, for instance, takes shelter in the dwarves' house on the promise that she would cook for them. In later editions the dwarves demand that she should perform all the domestic chores for them if she wants shelter: 'If you will keep house for us, do the cooking, make the beds, wash, sew, knit, and keep everything neat and clean, you can stay with us and you won't want anything.' Tatar claims that these were undoubtedly the Grimms' "notions on contractual relations between men and women."(Tatar, 29) She further establishes that the Grimms emphasised "the virtue of hard work and made a point of correlating diligence with beauty and desirability wherever possible."(Tatar, 30) These features markedly increase from edition to edition.

The fairy tale heroines are beautiful, good, responsible, contrite, soft hearted, passive, delicate, weak, docile, god fearing and so on. Instead of letting the characters reveal themselves through their action which is a significant feature of folktales, the Grimms passed their own value judgements on their fairy tale characters as they went on editing the tales. Tatar claims, "That we are forever coming across wise monarchs, compassionate heroes, toiling beauties, and proud princesses has something to do with folkloric plot patterns, but it also has a great deal to do with Wilhelm Grimm's preconceived notions about sex, class and character "(Tatar, 30)

Scholars have been able to identify these changes by comparing the Grimms' later editions of the *Nursery and Household Tales* with their original manuscripts and the first edition of the collection in 1812. With every successive edition the tales became more and more readable but at the cost of the transparency in and proximity to their oral forms.

In their attempts to tame the tales from the adult world of entertainment and make them bedtime stories for children, the Grimms censored those aspects of the fairy tale world that their value system could not tolerate. This was also done to conform to the existing social value system of the time. For in their uncensored, unexpurgated editions intended as bed time stories for children, the Grimms did include graphic descriptions of murder, incest, mutilation, infanticide, cannibalism, evil ways and practices of men and women, maternal, paternal and fraternal cruelty and so on. In her “new history” of the Grimms’ tales Ruth Bottigheimer claims the brothers to be “unworldly, inexperienced, and like the tales they recorded, generally innocent of sexual knowledge.”³ She illustrates their naïveté and ignorance of folk world and folk humour in the inclusion of the story ‘Mrs Fox’s Wedding’ in the first edition for children. The story includes lewd references which only adults could recognise. The expression ‘nine tails’ in the innocently funny story has lewd and sexual implications. However the Grimms were unaware of these implications in German slang usage and refused to accept that it was a ‘dirty’ tale. “The innocence with which the Grimms – and Jacob in particular – credited the folk was in fact their own.” (Bottigheimer, 46) The first two editions of the Grimms tales came under ruthless censure by critics like Johann Gustav Busching and Fredrich Ruhs. Ruhs claimed that the book was not appropriate for children, that the stories in it may look short and simple but they do have the capacity to disturb children and make them uncomfortable.

Relatively unwelcome acceptance of the tales, criticism laid against them and the Grimms’ own awkwardness and at times ignorance about the issues concerning “certain conditions and relationships” (Grimms’ Preface) which mainly included pregnancy, incest, incestuous desires, sexual details, child abuse, cruel punishments etc paved the way for changes in the tales. Thus cruel parents, maternal malice, sexual jealousy etc were metamorphosed, modified and made more palatable for children. For instance, ‘Hansel and Gretel’ was originally a story of parental, particularly, maternal malice. In the fourth edition however the father of the kids was freed from the accusation of being cruel and abusive. The wicked mother who wishes to thrive by sending the kids into the forest to starve was replaced by a heartless stepmother. In doing so the focus of the story moved from child abuse, childhood anxieties and abandonment to a cruel stepmother. Similarly Snow White’s mother and the mother of the heroine in “Mother Holle” were transformed into wicked stepmothers on

the presumption that children would tolerate the idea of wicked stepmothers more easily than that of cruel mothers. Such conscious and deliberate alterations challenge the Grimms' claim about their hard efforts to preserve the folklores in their pristine form making evident the appropriation of fairy tales in the literary realm. Offering an alternative history of fairy tales Ruth Bottigheimer in 2009 questioned the very assumption of folk invention and transmission of fairy tales. Claiming folk invention and dissemination of fairy tales as baseless enough to be verified, she maintains "Literary analysis undermines it, literary history rejects it, social history repudiates it and publishing history (whether of manuscripts or of books) contradicts it." (Bottigheimer, 1) She attempts a "history in reverse" (Bottigheimer, 26) moving backward in time from the 19th century Germany through France to Italy. She advocates that all modern fairy tales have print origins and not purely oral ones.

Bottigheimer's history demonstrates how the traditional history of fairy tales projected the Grimms' tales as recordings of the oral folklore heard from folk informants while in fact most of the best known Grimm tales originated in and were informed by urban middle class sources. It is in the last quarter of the 20th century that critical re evaluation of fairy tales began. Heinz Rölleke's contributory study, in 1975, of the Grimm brothers' folk informants and editorial practices brought new insights into the understanding of the genesis of the *Nursery and Household Tales*. Comparing the printed tales through their successive editions with the manuscripts, the scholars discovered and demonstrated the extent to which the tales were shaped in their content and ideology by the Grimms themselves through their methods of collection, selection and editing. Scholars like Bottigheimer challenged the socio historical roots of the Grimms' tales in particular and fairy tales in general and their relationship to the oral tradition. These findings instigated research and critical examination of nature and methods of collection, selection and edition and destabilised the dichotomous thinking about the oral – literal opposition. It is this opposition which constrained the folktale and fairy tale studies. However it is as a response to this conventional cultural trend of oral- literal divide that some scholars initiated re examination of the fairy tale tradition, creating and producing new tales which "question, challenge, subvert, revise and otherwise adapt classical tales."⁴

The reason behind elaborating researched facts about the Grimms' fairy tales is to show the deliberately manipulative nature of the tales in question for the present

study. Intending the tales for children's consumption, modifying them for the same purpose, and in so doing sowing deep in children's psyche the seeds of the existing value system which they would passively accept and not challenge is what the words manipulation and appropriation of the tales would imply. Consideration of the possible psychological impact of fairy tales on children which is claimed while composing tales appropriate for them disregards the possible psychological, emotional and social impact on the kids of the values generated in these tales. In his 1994 work on fairy tales and myth Jack Zipes sketches six features of the process of institutionalisation of (adult) fairy tales for children:

- “ a. the social function of the fairy tale must be didactic and teach a lesson that corroborates the code of civility as it was being developed at that time;
- b. it must be short so that children can remember and memorise it and so that both adults and children can repeat it orally...;
- c. it must pass the censorship of adults so that it can be easily circulated;
- d. it must address social issues such as obligation, sex roles, class differences, power and decorum so that it will appeal to adults, especially those who publish and publicise the tales;
- e. it must be suitable to be used with children in a schooling situation; and
- f. it must reinforce a notion of power within the children of upper classes and suggest ways for them to maintain power.”⁵

All these features signify how conscious manipulation and conditioning of child psyche is successfully attempted by giving children cultural information about themselves and others, shaping their self image as desired by the social, political forces/agencies of authority. As a result children don't just see themselves in the tales but more often they are made to see how they should be. Stereotypical and pejorative images of women, gender roles, poor and middle classes, races and so on frame, shape and reinforce a belief system for children, their worldviews and perceptions of themselves and the society they live in.

Textual and visual exposure to images and stereotypes vis-à-vis the notion of good, bad, beautiful, ugly, worthy, unworthy as reflected in texts and films can have

a permanent stronghold on the belief system formed by children in their formative age. It does impact the process of children's acculturation and socialisation. Social discrimination, prejudices and biases on the basis of class, caste, race, gender, power relations etc. get rooted at this age risking the creation of a generation of people who are unable to see and meet one another as human beings sans any label of class, race, gender, and so on. Surveys of the extent of these tales' impact on children have revealed the enormous efforts needed to undo the adverse negative consequences of the generation of stereotypes in fairy tales. For instance, E. Yeoman in his study of school children aged 9-11 years in 1999 demonstrated that children, particularly, Afro-American children associate the colour white with good, pretty and living happily ever after. Segura Mora's study in 2003 points out that the impact of this kind of association of white as socially worthy and black otherwise and the preponderance of the white and fair world in fairy tales is not confined to the concerned cultural groups only but crosses the ethno cultural boundaries. It is not a rare experience, for instance, to find the desire for fairness, lack of trust for the dark skinned, association of the fair with lovely/handsome even in the Indian cultural context which does stress casteist and communal concerns. A flashing glance at any matrimonial column could serve as enough evidence. This thus reveals a considerably great extent to which fairy tales indoctrinate children – boys and girls – irrespective of their class, caste, gender etc to the accepted classist, racist and sexist belief systems.

Children love to read and listen to these tales that have a great potential to acculturate them to traditional social roles. For children are very quick to grasp and absorb far more than simply the storylines, they are always very curious to know how the stories end and how things turn out. They do not just find out what happens to various princes, princesses, witches, woodcutters and children in the tales but also learn behavioural and associational patterns, value systems and ways to anticipate and predict the consequences of specific actions or circumstances. The picture of gender roles, behaviour, psychology and ways of predicting the result or fate according to sex, beauty, class and race etc. presented in these tales are internalised by the child readers/ listeners of fairy tales.

Stereotypes in fairy tales and their permeation through popular media:

Ellen Cronan Rose in her 'Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales' mentions, "When we turn to fairy tales we are most familiar with, preserved and transmitted by Perrault and the Grimm brothers, what we see is that in our culture there are different developmental paradigms for boys and girls. In fairy tales, boys are clever, resourceful and brave. They leave home to slay giants, outwit ogres, solve riddles, find fortunes. Girls, on the other hand, stay home and sweep hearths, are patient, enduring, self-sacrificing. They are picked on by wicked step mothers, enchanted by evil fairies. If they go out they get lost in the woods. They are rescued from their plights by kind woodsmen, good fairies, and handsome princes. They marry and live happily ever after."⁶

Fairy tales are preoccupied with the idea of beauty. Their obsession with beauty is reflected even in the titles of the tales like 'Beauty and the Beast,' 'Sleeping Beauty,' 'Snow White' etc. The stories reward the most beautiful and pretty girls. These beautiful heroines are docile, gentle, meek, and good tempered. Ugliness on the other hand is associated with evil and villainy. Ugly characters, mainly witches, stepmothers, stepsisters etc are arrogant, cruel and bad tempered. 'Cinderella' is the evidence.

Children's – both boys' and girls' – concept of sexual/gender roles gets conditioned by the peculiar treatment of girls and women in fairy tales. In stories depicting a family of several daughters or a story having several girl characters, the prettiest usually the youngest is invariably the winner, is singled out and rewarded. Beautiful girls are always noticed while the others seem almost non-existent. The former may be oppressed initially but ultimately they are chosen for the reward. This pattern suggests two fundamental conventions of the tales: i. the youngest child-girl or boy- is designated with a special destiny; and ii. beauty is focused upon as the most valuable asset of a girl.

Stories presenting the pattern of reward for the most beautiful girls and bold, active and lucky boys and vice versa become gendered texts and tend to legitimise and reinforce the dominant patriarchal gender system. Hence perhaps Judith Lorber

describes these tales as culturally representing gender in artistic and symbolic language.

The socially constructed notion of woman's beauty and physical attractiveness is an oppressing and subordinating patriarchal value leading to commoditisation of women. And this value has pervaded fairy tales and has continued to persist not just in tales but even in other media. Of course for centuries it has conditioned the readers, both girls and boys. For instance, the obsession with the idea of beauty in our day to day life is reflected in matrimonial advertisements, advertisements for soaps, fairness creams, hair oils, shampoos and even insurance schemes.

Greer Fox in the article " 'Nice girl': Social Control of Women through a Value Construct" presents how this stereotypical ideal of beauty, the value of 'nice girl' not just reproduces gender inequality but operates as a normative way of socially controlling and restricting women's lives and behaviour. Women's potential and ambition for achieving and exercising "power and control in the world"⁷ is nipped in the bud when women as children internalise the value of beauty and passivity associated with it. This value affects children's worldview and their perception of their own roles in society as men and women. While boys would look for beautiful, homely girls as ideal, any attempt by any woman, beautiful or plain, to defy homeliness would be condemned as inappropriate, villainous and nasty. Normative control becomes necessary in a patriarchal set up when women desire to flow against the current and desire social status and independence. In that, internalised value constructs would automatically forbid women from crossing the gender boundaries. This normative control is desired in the system to maintain gender inequality. Fox observes that the greater the enhancement of women's status the greater and more urgent is the demand for normative control through socially constructed values. Fairy tales perform a significant role in exercising and reinforcing such normative control thus helping the discriminating system sustain and prosper.

Girls identifying with the beautiful heroines may learn to be suspicious of plain looking girls (not necessarily ugly, but not fitting the conventional idea of beauty), who are associated with cruelty, slyness and unscrupulousness. Identification with the plain female characters on the other hand, would teach the girls to be suspicious and jealous of the pretty ones, since beauty is fated and not attained. It has psychologically

been proved that as children and as women girls are scared of being plain. This fear is at the root of anxiety, diffidence and feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. It could also be the origin of envy and discord among them. The suggestive link between the lovable face and lovable character, and the plain face and unpleasant, undesirable character could be very damaging to a girl's self esteem and overall growth as a human being. Literature and for that matter any other material – written, oral or visual – aimed at children can be easily manipulated by the dominant social set up as a tool for internalisation of normative values and restrictions. Children's literature, particularly fairy tales, does become a useful cultural tool in this respect. For, as Bettelheim maintained children very effectively assimilate culture through fairy tales and other stories which implicitly or overtly generate values, messages etc about the social power structures. Changing power relations shape and get reflected in the tales. The historical period of time in which they are published impact their presentation. While Marina Warner calls fairy tales documents of “conditions from past social and economic arrangements”⁸, Betsy Hearne views each new version of a tale as “new variation(s) of culture and creativity.”⁹ This thus necessitates the consideration of socio political, economic and cultural aspects and intents of the tales. For changing social pressures, social norms, mores and manners transform and refigure the tales and their discourse in order to strengthen, reinforce and be compatible with the existing dominant power structures in society. Jack Zipes gives extremely fruitful critical insights into this in his 1988 and 1997 works. Studying socio cultural references in the revisions of folktales in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, Zipes reveals that though through these centuries fairy tales moved from a limited audience and readers to a greater variety and number of masses they have continued to generate patriarchal values emphasising male domination and female subjection and “contain symbolic imagery that legitimates existing class, race and gender systems.”¹⁰

Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz in their article on pervasiveness of the feminine ideal of beauty in fairy tales research the questions ‘Is there a clear link between beauty and goodness?’, ‘Are there instances where danger and harm are associated with beauty or desirability?’, ‘Is beauty or desirability the cause?’ Their analysis brought forth the existence of “association between beauty and economic privilege, beauty and race, beauty and goodness, and beauty and danger.” (Baker-Sperry, 716) Cultural associations of beauty not just with gender but even with age –

it is the younger girls who are presented as more beautiful (Snow White and the Queen provide excellent evidence) – too are found in the tales. The age and gender specificity of the idea of beauty encodes messages about being attractive and therefore desirable. Compared to the consistent and pervasive references to feminine beauty the fairy tales contain rare, passing references to male handsomeness.

The findings illustrate the clear link between beauty and goodness, ugliness and evil, beautiful and industrious, ugliness and laziness. Beautiful, docile, delicate heroines are presented as hardworking whereas the wicked ones who are ugly or relatively plain are shown to be lazy. Cinderella and her stepsisters present this opposition well. ‘Mother Holle’ begins with the description of Mother Holle’s two daughters: “A widow had two daughters, one who was beautiful and industrious, the other ugly and lazy.” (Grimm, 96) Beauty is always rewarded while ugliness/ plainness/ absence of beauty is most often severely or humourously punished.

Stories like ‘Mother Holle’ associate beauty with race and class as well. While beautiful heroines necessarily have fair complexion, the plain and ugly ones are relatively dark. Dark and black are not beautiful and therefore not good and therefore not socially noticeable or acceptable. The ugly, lazy daughter in ‘Mother Holle’ is covered in pitch. Cinderella remains unnoticed till she is in cinders. The title ‘The White Bride the Black Bride’ presents the race binaries and the story shows the ugly mother and daughter as “cursed” with blackness. Blackness is a curse while whiteness a reward. These associations carry implications of distribution of social and economic privileges i. e. classes. Thus fair and beautiful Cinderella becomes a princess, moves upward in her socio economic status. Also as long as she suffers and works hard or rather slaves she is in cinders and meets the prince only as a lovely fair girl.

The tales also present the association of beauty with danger and jealousy. Physical attractiveness is seen as one of the causes of women’s victimisation in the tales. As a result the beautiful heroines in the tales have to disguise themselves or escape for protection away from their own household. This and the relation between beauty and jealousy are best reflected in ‘Snow White’ wherein the mother in her desire to be “fairest of all” sends Snow White into the jungle to be killed.

Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz conclude, on the basis of these observations that the image of women’s beauty is so ingrained in fairy tales that “it is difficult to imagine

any that do not highlight or glorify it. Recent Disney films and even contemporary feminist retellings of popular fairy tales often involve women who differ from their earlier counterparts in ingenuity, activity, and independence but not physical attractiveness.” (Baker-Sperry, 722) Increased emphasis on beauty as a salient feature particularly in fairy tales of the 20th century, they suggest, may operate as “a normative social control for girls and women” since “external constraints on women’s lives diminished” (Baker-Sperry, 722) in this century.

Beauty leads to passivity, a trait desired in women in the patriarchal set up. In fact it is the main contributor to the latter. Sleeping Beauty is the archetype of female passivity. In the stories the immediate and desired consequence of being beautiful is being chosen. A beautiful girl does not have to do anything to be noticed, chosen and be married to a handsome rich man. She is chosen because she is beautiful. The plain on the other hand, would have to struggle for every achievement which would be below the mark set by the beautiful ones. Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel all just have to wait till their prince charming comes and rescues them from suffering. “Since the heroines are chosen for their beauty (en soi) and not for anything they do (pour soi) they seem to exist passively until they are seen by the hero or described to him. They wait, are chosen and are rewarded.”¹¹

Certain stories do depict women as active and courageous but they are so only after their men are taken away from them. For instance, Gretel, Hansel’s sister, punishes the witch who locks up Hansel and plans to eat him. However in the earlier part of the story she is shown as a weeping girl always comforted by Hansel who finds a way of escape every time they are in trouble, until he himself is imprisoned by the witch. In another story a maid kept hidden in a giant’s house knows all the secrets of the giant and the way out; she can escape if she wishes to but waits for a prince escort to come and rescue them only with her advice and help.

Thus passivity of one kind or another is always associated with women in fairy stories thus encouraging passive, patient suffering on the part of women. Victimized heroines who suffer silently and submit themselves to ill treatment instead of rebelling against oppression are rewarded and glorified. Andrea Dworkin in *Woman Hating* points out that women are desirable when they are asleep, that good men under the influence of powerful woman can harm their children. The tales seem to convey that “The good

woman must be possessed. The bad woman must be killed or punished. Both must be nullified.”¹² These associational patterns do have a strong imprint on a child’s mind.

A suffering heroine becomes an archetypal model to be followed by girls and it is what male children too might grow to expect of their companions unless they question these ideas themselves.

Women trying to swim against the current are seen as repulsive. Active, extraordinary, powerful, power seeking women are always seen as unwomanly, bad, a disgrace to society and are mostly portrayed as witches or stepmothers. Though there are many male magicians depicted in the stories, magic and witchcraft are associated with women in most of them.

This reinforces the stereotypical construct of womanhood in literature i.e. women are intuitive, emotional, irrational etc. Cinderella watches the godmother perform the magic; Sleeping Beauty sleeps for an unnaturally long period only to be awakened by the kiss of the prince.

If one contrasts the sleep of Rip Van Winkle with that of Sleeping Beauty one easily notices the influence of such stereotypical associations in the treatment of men and women in literature. Unlike Sleeping Beauty Rip Van Winkle wakes up to a revelation, a discovery of a new America. Sleep here is seen as a metaphor for a period of physical self-effacement and a voyage of self discovery manifesting itself upon awakening. Our Sleeping Beauty, however, awakens to no such epiphanic revelation but only to be accepted by her future husband in marriage.

As mentioned earlier, active and powerful women mainly include witches and witchlike stepmothers. The wicked stepmother is a stock figure in fairy tales. It is so typical a figure in these tales that a mere mention brings to the reader’s mind a clear image of the character and her role. Interestingly this villain of the tales originally was not necessarily wicked nor was always a stepmother. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in the editorial changes from one version to another the Grimms brought in the wicked stepmothers in the absence of good mothers. In order to make the tales more didactic the Grimms made room for the wicked stepmothers by killing off the good mothers. Thus in the folklore tradition mothers of Snow White and Hansel and Gretel were actually villains but later in fairy tales they were removed and replaced by

cruel, selfish villains – the stepmothers. Bruno Bettelheim provides a psychological justification for such replacement. According to him, the “fantasy of the wicked stepmother not only preserves the good mother intact, it also prevents having to feel guilty about one’s angry thoughts and wishes about her – a guilt which would seriously interfere with the good relation with the Mother.” (Bettelheim, 69) Thus Bettelheim believes that this presentation of stepmothers equips children to handle their feeling of anger towards a loving parent. Critics consider Bettelheim’s Freudian reading extremely damaging and limited. For it does not take into consideration the editorial and historical origins of the cruel stepmother figure. Marina Warner, for instance, holds the popularisation of Bettelheim’s psychoanalytic approach responsible for the sustenance of the wicked stepmother as the fairy tale villain: “the bad mother has become an inevitable, even required ingredient in fantasy, and hatred of her a legitimate, applauded stratagem of psychic survival. Bettelheim’s theory has contributed to the continuing absence of good mothers from all fairy tales in all kinds of media, and to a dangerous degree, which itself mirrors current prejudices and reinforces them. His arguments, and its tremendous diffusion and widespread acceptance, have effaced from memory the historical reasons for woman’s cruelty within the home and have made such behaviour seem natural, even intrinsic to the mother child relationship. It has even helped to ratify the expectation of strife as healthy and the resulting hatred as therapeutic.” (Warner, 212-213)

We see the evidence of what Warner says in Walt Disney’s characterisation of the wicked stepmother as a queen. In 1937 Disney in his film turned Snow White’s stepmother into a terrifying, wicked queen. Thus with this film the figure of a cruel stepmother became a typical, famous, villainous figure of the fairy tale tradition. The stereotype thus was permanently reinforced. Stepmothers and witches are active, powerful women. These are older women who in the tales are usually more powerful than men. But their power is of a different nature than that of the latter. They are powerful and bad older women. Generally female wickedness is associated with extreme ugliness. Powerful good women are nearly always fairies and godmothers. They are unapproachable. They appear on the scene only when the young people are in distress and need to be saved. They are superhuman whereas the powerful bad women are extra human. Whether human or extra human, the bad ones are shown to be very active, ambitious, strong willed and almost always ugly. They are jealous of

women more beautiful than they are. This is obviously because of the power that beauty carries with it in fairy tales.

Being powerful and active is mainly associated with being unwomanly. Activity thus gets morally linked to sex. The active boy with a kind heart is assured of success. It is praiseworthy in men. But the same praise is denied to women. The heroines are shown as strong sufferers. Their strength lies in their ability to endure and do nothing to seek to change their lot. The more suffering and passive they are, the stronger are they called. There is thus a clearly evident bias in the treatment of genders.

Assertive women are also treated as reprehensible and are expected not to be imitated by children. Young readers could easily grasp the bias against the active and ambitious women. They could establish a dichotomy between the women who are gentle, passive and good looking and those who are active, wicked and ugly. Powerful and good women characters are always fairies, not human. Power seeking women are always repulsive. Reprehensible women also include princesses and girls who refuse marriage. They are portrayed as neither admirable nor wicked. They are spoilt, vain and wilful. Princess Goldilocks exemplifies this. Bellisima in 'The Yellow Dwarf' is even shown to meet a tragic end for her stubbornness which is very unusual in fairy tales. Wilful girls are shown either to accept marriage or be forcefully tamed or meet death. Their submission to marriage is presented with a sense of triumph thus denying and disallowing them the possibility to preserve their freedom and independent identity. Whether a reward for "good girls" or forceful imposition on the wilful, marriage is necessarily presented as and reinforced as the ultimate goal of a woman's life.

The thought, belief and association of beauty with passivity and reward naturally culminate into marriage in the tales. In fact marriage with a handsome hero is the major event of almost all fairy tales. The idea of getting married dominates the heroes and heroines of the tales. The boys too are shown as heading towards marriage. It is presented as the ultimate and perhaps the only desired and desirable, self fulfilling goal in life, particularly for girls. For beyond it is the promising dream of living happily ever after. However, while the girls are passive in their attainment of the desired handsome and rich prince, the boys play a very active role and work hard and cleverly to win princesses and kingdoms.

The reward system of the tales also contains evident mercenary concerns. The girl getting married is going to be forever happy because she is getting rich after marriage. Marriage in the tales is associated with getting rich and richness equated with happiness. Good, meek, docile and beautiful girls always win rich and handsome princes. Already rich heroes or heroines marry their equals. Girls are chosen for their beauty and boys for their charm and bravery. The association of beauty and happiness with wealth brings forth the commercial advantage to beauty thus allowing the young readers/listeners to equate being beautiful with being chosen and thus getting rich, climbing upward the social and economic ladder.

Almost every time, however, the heroine has to go through a phase of passive, unchallenged suffering. There is glamour attached to this suffering and victimisation to the extent that there is a fear of girl readers not just identifying with the suffering kid but even desiring the glamorous hardships. They find women in distress interesting. Archetypal female behaviour is introduced in the tales in this manner.

Suggesting a reward for submissive, meek, passive female behaviour could have the effect of sensitising the child reader's personality, rendering it susceptible to melodramatic self conceptions and expectations. The thought of marriage as the only self fulfilling destination for girls is so deeply rooted in the social psyche in many communities that a girl's marriage is considered a matter of great concern and worry even today almost everywhere in our society. In fact, unfortunately it is one of the reasons for female infanticide in India. Reinforcement and permeation of stereotypical attributes of femininity, class and racial differences etc found in fairy tales get imprinted on children thus conditioning the social psyche at an early age.

The deep rooted effects of social stereotypes through various means, fairy tales being one of them, perpetuated and strengthened for generations together are evident in mass media too which in turn reinforce the stereotypes even more deeply. Familiar instances of this are the several Hindi movies which adore fairy tale motifs and advertisements. Advertisements of soaps, washing powders, washing machines etc project women as beautiful objects, as secondary to men, aspiring to be ideal wives, trying to please their men and family whereas men are portrayed as lovers of beauty, dominant, outgoing, admirers of ideal wives, always conscious of their manliness and their duties as breadwinners.

Portrayal of inequality and socio cultural differences between men and women is evident in the movies too. Many movies do talk about the greatness of women, their strength and tolerance. But all this has a tinge of glorification of womanhood ultimately denying women the status of an ordinary human being with flaws and pushing the readers to the accepted stereotypes. Typical Hindi movies portray girls as passive recipients of what fate and society offer them. They are beautiful, delicate, weak, docile, good natured, long suffering, home loving, obedient, self sacrificing, dumb but the ultimate victors of that coveted prize – the handsome and rich husband. The heroes on the other hand are clever, brave, handsome, outgoing, active, ready to do anything to save their beloved, always ready also to teach the girls a lesson, tame them and show how their own perception of the world is right. For almost always the woman is wrong and short sighted whereas man being experienced knows a lot and has a wider view. Those inflicting suffering on the innocent are also almost always women or are supported by women.

As in fairy tales most of the movies too present women as the ones who passively suffer and the ones who wickedly inflict or help in inflicting suffering. Like the tales these films too end with a happy ending showing the lovable, fair, good and therefore desirable lovers live happily ever after. This formulaic fairy tale ending presumes an ordered pattern in the universe of a woman – suffer...get ennobled by it... win the prize and then live happily ever after without any problem. That such projection of traditional stereotypes is done without any inhibitions through the mass media is an evidence of a prejudiced upbringing and development not of a single individual but of the entire social psyche.

Fairy tales as the carriers of a variety of stereotypes particularly gender, class and race stereotypes can undoubtedly have deep social impact and at the same time can deeply affect the child under their influence. Young girls, for instance, reading fairy tales and charmed by their lead characters learn to value looks and material things. The fairy tale heroines with their pretty dresses and Prince Charming coming to their rescue strike a chord with little girls who live in their own make believe world. Fairy tale importance to beauty, material comforts, money and pretty outward appearance sieves through the genre into movies, advertisements and cartoons increasing and solidifying the impact of the stereotypes. Apart from the message that being pretty and beautiful make them successful and happy, a more dangerous message that gets embedded in

their impressionable minds and that can damage their self esteem is that they have to suffer passively till a good looking prince rescues them, that they have to rely on a saviour to make things better for them. Tales focus on pretty and nice things. Girls are impressed by the romanticism in such tales. They consider themselves at the centre of the fairy tale universe and are obsessed about the considerations of beauty and its advantages. Girls seem to be affected thus till adolescence. However if they do not outgrow this state, it could affect their personality and their value system in the long run. It may lead them to seek superficial friendships or a controlling lover or in some cases, to think very high about themselves. They could have superficial ideas about life and their status in life and society. The desire to be lovely and beautiful could backfire if they do not turn out to be beautiful. They could be sufferers of a superiority or inferiority complex. In any case they would cease to grow as respectful and self respecting human beings. Besides, the impression created on the young male children could also be shattering. They too would grow up with the expectations of finding the other sex to be docile, passive, meek and above all pretty. Girls not fulfilling these criteria would be not just out of their consideration but even the object of their fun and teasing. The personal, emotional and social impact of the fairy tale stereotypes thus becomes an important social and literary concern.

Youth, beauty, passivity equated with goodness and projected as deserving to attain prizes, on the one hand, and old age, ugliness, action equated with wickedness, fear and punishment on the other emphatically represent women as pitted against each other and show them necessarily in a competitive relationship with one another. As Joyce Carol Oates maintains in her article “In Olden Times, When Wishing was Having,”¹³ young girls on the verge of womanhood like Snow White or Cinderella are shown as “the natural targets of the homicidal envy of older women; ubiquitous in the tales are ‘wicked stepmothers’ who conspire to injure or kill their beautiful stepdaughters...” (Oates, 248) This kind of representation of women as either valuable or contemptible is bound to make women see one another as rivals in constant struggle to win the prize: “... the lot of women in a patriarchal society which privileges them as valuable possessions (of men), or brands them as worthless and contemptible, made it inevitable that women should perceive other women as dangerous rivals.” (Oates, 248-49).

As Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz remark, “Children’s media can be a powerful mechanism by which children learn cultural values. Through the proliferation of fairy tales in the media, girls (and boys) are taught specific messages concerning the importance of women’s bodies and women’s attractiveness. The messages presented in the Grimms’ tales portray differing means of status attainment for women and men, especially white, heterosexual women. The pervasiveness of fairy tales in our society, through books and movies, suggests that there are many opportunities for these messages to become internalised.”(Baker-Sperry, 724) Consideration of fairy tales through a socio political perspective thus becomes necessary.

The indirect portrayal of social reality in the fantasy of fairy tales is remarkable. This is precisely why the unreality of the fairy tale world should not lead one to consider it untrue. “For fantasy...is true. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary and trivial in living. They are afraid of dragons because they are afraid of freedom.”¹⁴ Fantasy, Rosemary Jackson maintains, exists in “symbiotic relationship to the real.”¹⁵

Feminist fantasists consider fairy tales as one of the kinds of fantasy used to describe the experience of women in the contemporary society in the west. The other two types are “secondary” or “other” world fantasy and horror. Many feminists prefer fantasy to realism which according to them “naturalise(s) ideological discourses, aligning ideological practices with conventionally accepted and produced representations of the real.” (Anne Cranny-Francis, 79) They use fantasy as a means to disrupt the realistic discourse and disclose its limits. They situate the reader in the position wherein “the deconstruction of patriarchal discourse is a fundamental strategy.” (Jackson, 20)

It is the need to react to the realist trends, realistic literature functioning under the dictates of patriarchy conveying patriarchal, chauvinistic values which urges the feminists to rework and challenge the traditional fairy tales which to a contemporary reader seem to be full of “incidents of inexplicable abuse, maltreatment of women, negative images of minority groups, questionable sacrifices and exaltation of power.”¹⁶

Writing the tales from a feminist or a woman's or a Marxist or for that matter any egalitarian perspective does not necessarily involve the depiction of the reversal of the roles lest it amounts to another kind of sexism. It involves exploration of the ways women and the other victimised groups are subjugated openly and subtly, of their oppression under the patriarchal yoke and an attempt to change the minds and attitudes of the people, by depicting the victimised humans to be capable of asserting themselves, as being self dependent and having their own separate identity as human beings, capable of taking their own decisions actively and deserving an equal status with all those who are supposedly in power.

Judith Viorst rewrites the story of Cinderella in four lines in '...And Then the Prince Knelt Down and Tried to Put the Glass Slipper on Cinderella's Foot':

'I really didn't notice that he had a funny nose

And he looked better all dressed up in fancy clothes.

He's not really as attractive as he seemed the other night.

So I think I'll just pretend that this glass slipper feels too tight.'¹⁷

Jack Zipes in his preface to the book *Don't Bet on the Prince* rightly sums up the nature of the feminist fairy tales and the need to write them: "Created out of the dissatisfaction with the dominant male discourse of traditional fairy tales and with those social values and institutions which have provided the framework for sexist perceptions, the feminist fairy tale conceives a different view of the world and speaks in a voice that has been customarily silenced.

It draws attention to the illusions of the traditional fairy tales by demonstrating that they have been structured according to the subordination of women, and in speaking out for women the feminist fairy tales also speak out for other oppressed groups... Thus the aesthetics of the feminist fairy tales demands an open ended discourse which calls for the readers to complete the liberating expectations of the narrative in terms of their own experience and their social context."¹⁸

Combining Freud, Bloch and Favat's concepts of Piaget, Zipes sees the emancipatory potential in the fantasy of fairy tales. Fairy tales do incorporate within themselves a power to liberate readers and make them return to the primal moments in their lives.

However this liberating space would become meaningful and the tale would appear liberating and forward looking only if “it projects on a conscious, literary and philosophical level the objectification of home as real democracy under non alienating conditions.” (Zipes, 312) Such a tale would present “human beings in an upright posture who strive for an autonomous existence and non alienating setting which allows for democratic co operation and human consideration.” (Zipes, 310) It must be written with the object of reflecting “a process of struggle against all types of suppression and authoritarianism and project(ing) various possibilities for the concrete realisation of utopia.” (Zipes, 312)

What one may argue here is that the attraction for and popularity of fairy tales amongst human beings in different stages of their growth and the liberating potential of the genre could and should be manipulated to project, at the expense and instead of their stereotypical presentation, an egalitarian worldview and a perspective wherein human beings are treated as human beings without the labels of gender, class, race, caste and so on. This needs re-visiting, re-viewing, re-writing and retelling the existing tales in a new light liberating their readers i.e. freeing them from the controlling social order which commoditises human beings through stereotypes in order to be manipulated by groups and institutes which rule the public domain so that the discriminating status quo persists and the vested interests of the groups in power are systematically served.

NOTES

- ¹ Jack Zipes, "The Potential of Liberating Fairy Tales for Children," *New Literary History* 13.2, (Winter, 1982): 309-325.
- ² Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of Grimms' Fairy Tales* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1987) xxii.
- ³ Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Tales: A New History* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2009) 45.
- ⁴ Donald Haase, Introduction. *The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales, Volumes 1-3* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood, 2008) xxxvii.
- ⁵ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth, Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1994) 33.
- ⁶ Ellen Cronan Rose, "Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales" *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* Eds. Elizabeth Abel et.al.(London: UP of New England, 1983) 209-210.
- ⁷ Greer Litton Fox, "'Nice Girl': Social Control of Women through a Value Construct," *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2.4 (Summer, 1977): 816.
- ⁸ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1995) xix.
- ⁹ Betsy Hearne, *Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1989) 1.

- ¹⁰ Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz, "The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales," *Gender and Society* 17.5 (October, 2003): 714.
- ¹¹ Marcia R Lieberman, "Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale," *College English* 34 (1972): 386.
- ¹² Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: Dutton, 1974) 48.
- ¹³ Joyce Carol Oates, "In Olden Times, When Wishing was Having," in *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favourite Fairy Tales* ed. Kate Bernheimer, (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1998) 248-49.
- ¹⁴ Anne Cranny Francis quotes Ursula LeGuin in *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (London: Polity, 1990) 75.
- ¹⁵ Rosemary Jackson *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (New York: Methuen, 1981) 20.
- ¹⁶ Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (New York: Methuen, 1979) 170.
- ¹⁷ Judith Viorst, *If I Were in Charge of the World and Other Worries: Poems for Children and Their Parents* (New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1981) 29.
- ¹⁸ Jack Zipes, *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (New York: Methuen, 1986) i.

CHAPTER – IV

Reviewing Fairy Tales – Attempts at Fairy Tale Retellings

This Chapter deals with the analysis of retellings of some well known fairy tales. It is opportune to admit at the outset here that the intent and principle that drives these analyses is merely to exemplify or showcase a variety of retellings with the focus on what is to be argued in the following chapter. Hence strict attention is not paid to the historically sequential appearance of the retellings as well as to the number of retellings of each story analysed. It must also be admitted at this juncture that the Chapter offers but a mere glimpse of the retold tales. Many worthwhile retellings have escaped mention, attention and interpretation on account of practical considerations and limitations of the present project. Most prominent among these are the retellings by Angela Carter who is held up as “the fairy godmother of magic realism”¹ and praised as “high sorceress” and “benevolent witch-queen” by Salman Rushdie.²

Briar Rose/ Sleeping Beauty:

Christa Joyce in her article ‘Contemporary Women Poets and the Fairy Tale’³ (Bobby, 31-43) describes fairy tale heroines as “female characters who sleep through their lives: vain representations of real women who are cloistered and trapped, they are commonly flat, one dimensional characters who come to life only through the actions of a male character.” (Bobby, 31) Sleeping Beauty is a prototype and incarnation of the stereotypical images and roles that fairy tales promote and prescribe for women. Actually these stereotypes are reflections of the real life social norms which are reinstated/ reinforced aesthetically interestingly and therefore subtly through the tales. Male dominated society and culture expect women to be fragile and passive and wait for men to make their lives meaningful. This expectation is so deeply ingrained and rooted in the female psyche that women themselves aspire for it and consider it fulfilling. Rewriters of the Sleeping Beauty tale acknowledge this fact and try to subvert the male oriented perception of women in fairy tales by using the tales themselves as a tool to serve their purpose.

The Grimm version of 'Brier Rose' considered less grim than Perrault's presents a protective father-king who orders all the spindles to be destroyed from his kingdom lest his daughter succumbs to a "bad" fairy's curse at the age of 15. The birthday celebration of his long desired for daughter is marked by an evil spell on the girl by an uninvited fairy who arrives anyway and in a fit of rage proclaims that the princess will prick herself on a needle and die when she turns 15. Another fairy alters and softens the curse of death to a deep sleep of a hundred years. Despite the king's precautionary measures the princess on her fifteenth birthday finds an old woman spinning at a spindle and as the abetted curse will have it, she pricks herself and falls asleep for one hundred years along with the entire kingdom. After this long period is over a prince from the neighbouring kingdom goes through the briars around the palace and upon noticing the beautiful princess sleeping kisses her, awakens her and the entire kingdom. They get married and live happily ever after.

- Anne Sexton's 'Briar Rose'⁴

Anne Sexton subtitles her 'transformed' 'Briar Rose' as Sleeping Beauty giving a modern substitute and hinting at a new perspective to look at the story. Diana Hume George commenting on the two versions of 'Briar Rose' says, "The tale Sexton has transformed here tells us only that the king dearly loved his child and that, because of this love and fairy's curse, he overprotected her – a circumstance that, with or without a fairy's curse is common enough to be normative in our culture. In her version of 'Briar Rose', Sexton plays out the effects of such smothering and overprotective love on the part of fathers for the 'purity' and 'safety' of their daughters – effects also sufficiently common to be normative."⁵ Sexton transforms the overprotective and therefore thoughtless Grimm father into a perpetrator of sexual abuse and shows that it is the father himself who brings upon the daughter the danger from which he tries to protect her. As Diana Hume George further says, "...the father of the prologue is the daylight daddy, a bringer of lollipops as well as that vaguely threatening 'root.' ... But the father of the epilogue comes to the daughter at night 'circling the abyss like a shark.' This is the flip side of the daddy who bounces her on the knee." (George,39)

Anne Sexton in *Transformations* gives a transformed look to her tales not just in their content but even in their form. Like other tales in the collection, the verse 'Briar Rose' too has a tripartite structure: a prologue, the transformed tale and the epilogue.

In the prologue, the middle aged witch-narrator of the entire collection introduces a new and different Briar Rose who is on a backward voyage into her disturbed and horrifying childhood – a voyage “rank as honeysuckle” (T,107-108) She is a surviving victim of sexual abuse by her father. The ‘trance’ girl who “keeps slipping off,” whose arms are limp and who is “stuck in the time machine” (T,107) desires security and protection from the abuse and seeks it in her mother’s ‘pocketbook’- the place where she was conceived, suggesting thereby her lost childhood and a desire to regain it and start her life afresh, anew. She has been robbed of her ability to speak with the “gift of tongues” (T,107) and wants to learn to talk again. She feels that her childhood has been taken away: her arms “limp as old carrots” (T,107) and her tendency to “keep slipping off” (T,107) into “the hypnotist’s trance” (T,107) suggest numbness and disorientation; her inability to articulate her experience and her feeling that suddenly she has become a thumb sucking two year old child “stuck in the time machine” imply the contradiction in her actual physical and mental age. As she attempts to articulate her “rank as honeysuckle” journey, her speech is interrupted by her ‘hypnotist’ father who, exercising his patriarchal power over her by virtue of his age and relation, asks the “little doll child” to sit on his knee and offers her in return “kisses for the back of the neck,” “a penny for [her] thoughts” and “a root” (T,107) – an explicitly phallic image. He invites her to be his ‘snooky’ – a trickster and a lover as the slang implications of the word suggest. Here is a father who wishes to control the daughter’s body as well as her mind. He would “hunt” her thoughts “like an emerald” if she does not oblige to give them in return for a penny. Sexton here subtly throws light on the commoditisation and bartering of women in patriarchy and also perhaps hints at the historical evidences of how virgin daughters have been exchanged “passed hand to hand/ like a bowl of fruit”(T,112) by their fathers for money.

Patriarchy values virginity of a woman and therefore, perhaps, at the same time tends to silence, suppress and discredit expression of experiences of violation and incestuous abuse of virginity. Sexton’s prologue hints at this cultural diplomacy and presents the predicament of a modern day survivor of sexual abuse in childhood. In the story that follows Sexton bluntly outpours her rage against the culture which allows sexual abuse of women and tries to take us to the roots of this culture.

The transformed tale omits the original introduction of the Grimm tale wherein a king and a queen desire a child for a long time; a frog creeps out of the water and

prophecies that they would have a child; they beget a daughter within a year and the king in his joy prepares “a great feast.”⁶ The transformed tale begins thus:

Once

a king had a christening

for his daughter Briar Rose

and because he had only twelve gold plates

he asked only twelve fairies

to the grand event. (*T* 108)

The Grimm princess who is named Briar Rose because of the hedge of briar roses growing round the castle where she lies asleep for a hundred years is introduced as Briar Rose and not as a princess at the outset in the transformed tale. This suggests Sexton’s assumption of the readers’ foreknowledge of the story. The verse tale teller does not describe the drama of how the first eleven fairies endow the princess with different gifts and how the haughty, revengeful thirteenth barges in and curses the child before the twelfth fairy softens the irrevocable death sentence and converts it into a long deep sleep of a hundred years. The witch narrator merely gives the details relevant to the ‘fall’ of Briar Rose which include the reason why the thirteenth fairy curses the child and her description in a manner which suggests her appearance to be an embodiment of jealousy and evil:

The thirteenth fairy,

her fingers as long and thin as straw,

her eyes burnt by cigarettes,

her uterus an empty tea cup,

arrived with an evil gift. (*T* 108)

The thirteenth fairy is thus presented as an a-normal, unusual creature and it is hinted that perhaps for this reason she is purposely left out of the celebration. The court’s reaction to this fairy’s prophecy in the verse tale suggests the sexual connotations of

the girl's pricking on the spindle on her fifteenth birthday – the age when a girl reaches womanhood. Her bleeding finger on the wheel suggestive of the broken hymen is equated with a sexual experience and perhaps the king's fear is grounded in the sexual connotations of the prophecy. He does not want this to happen and perhaps has a desire to violate the girl himself which he actually does later in the verse tale. His extreme concern for the daughter and care not to allow any stranger to meet her is suspected by the witch speaker. It smacks of his incestuous attraction for the daughter. Later in the tale he is shown to have purposely maddened her to fulfil his own foul intention. Hence he is shown to be more surprised and shocked to hear the prophecy because

Fairies' prophecies,
in times like those,
held water. (T 108)

Sexton, through irony in instances like this, ridicules the naïve fantasy of the fairy tale world and refuses to willingly suspend disbelief. The mitigation of the curse by the twelfth fairy is similarly sarcastically ridiculed in a tongue in cheek manner:

However the twelfth fairy
had a certain kind of eraser
and thus she mitigated the curse
changing that death into a hundred year sleep. (T 108)

The Grimm king sends out a command that all the distaffs in the whole kingdom be burnt. In the transformed tale, on the other hand,

each night the king
bit the hem of her gown
to keep her safe.

He fastened the moon up
with a safety pin

to give her perpetual light. (T 109)

Biting is associated with food, sex, anxiety, violence whereas hem implies boundaries between the child's body and the outer world. Biting the hem would imply maintaining the boundaries. But, in so doing, he does consume the gown and tear it. His teeth and the safety pin to fasten up the moon imply a physical threat in the father's protection. His attempt to keep her in perpetual light and order to prohibit males "without scoured tongues" make the sexual innuendos obvious. This change clearly and drastically transforms the king's character and the theme of the story making readers view it in a completely different light.

Despite the curse the king and the queen of the original tale are away from the castle on the very day when the princess turns fifteen. In their absence the princess wanders about the whole palace and comes to an old tower with a narrow winding staircase and a little door with a rusty key sticking in the lock. She turns the key and the open door shows her an old woman spinning on her spindle. The woman tempts her to touch the spindle and as per the curse the princess falls into a deep sleep which spreads over the entire castle. These happenings are elaborately described in the Grimm tale. The verse tale focuses more on the end result of the happenings rather than the sequence of how it happened. It merely mentions the girl's fall and sarcastically describes the consequences of the curse. The sleeping animals, servants, fire, wind and trees in the Grimm story are reduced to a trance and are "stuck in the time machine" in the verse tale. The description of the growth of a hedge of briar roses around the castle, the unsuccessful attempts by many princes to get through the hedge and their miserable deaths too are sarcastically voiced in the transformed tale. The growing briar roses form a wall of tacks around the castle, no one can pass through them and many princes are crucified because they have not "scoured their tongues." Thus in spite of the curse and its mitigation the dictates of the king still pervade and cannot be disobeyed because it is, in fact, he who really desires to dwell with the princess, as clearly mentioned in the tale later. Biblical figures appear in the verse tale to describe the successful and unsuccessful princes. While the unsuccessful ones become Christ figures, the successful prince is compared to Moses crossing the red Sea to take the Israelites to their promised land of Canaan. The description of time too receives a sarcastic tone and once again the fairy tale fantasy is falsified:

In due time
a hundred years passed
and a prince got through

...

[he] found the tableau intact. (T 110)

In the Grimm tale, the princess, everything and everyone else come back to their own selves when the prince kisses the girl. The two get married and live happily till the end of their life. The verse tale prince takes the princess out of the prison of Daddy and brings her to her “promised land”- the land of marriage. But it is not a happily ever after marriage. The princess becomes insomniac and is scared of sleep as she associates it with male violence and her sexual abuse. Sleeping beauty becomes afraid of sleep because it is sexually induced.

“I must not sleep,” she says,

“for asleep I’m ninety

and think I’m dying.

Death rattles in my throat

like a marble.” (T 110-111)

Her nightmares about having grown old, is a death for her since her whole life has been based on being beautiful and young. Sexton touches upon the beauty stereotype here which is stressed and valued in the patriarchal order. Sleeping Beauty is actually completely stunted and stuck in the time machine, objectified and commoditised to be passed on from one man to another as they wish. Though she cannot sleep or rather because she cannot sleep, she is almost always unconscious, injected with Novocain and has lost all awareness of her existence. So anyone can use her the way they like and do anything to her. For This trance girl is yours to do with

You could lay her in a grave,

an awful package. (T 111)

She is benumbed. A single kiss on her mouth (not lips) reminds her of the atrocities and cruelties meted out to her by her father and she cries “Daddy! Daddy!” She discloses that it is her father who has abused her.

It’s not the prince at all,
but my father
drunkenly bent over my bed,
circling the abyss like a shark,
my father thick upon me
like some sleeping jelly fish. (T 112)

The “charred spinning wheel” now becomes meaningful signifying her father “circling the abyss like a shark.” Sexual cruelties inflicted on her by her father make her call him “another kind of a prison.” Careful analysis of the verse tale leaves a scope to doubt that all that happens to Briar Rose is a consequence of a deliberately conspired plan hatched by the father-king and the thirteenth fairy of whom the girl is scared even in her dreams. For, there is a striking similarity between the description of the thirteenth fairy and the “faltering crone” in Briar Rose’s dream. They seem almost identical:

Further, I must not dream
for when I do I see the table set
and a faltering crone at my place,
her eyes burnt by cigarettes
as she eats betrayal like a slice of meat. (T 111)

The omission of the thirteenth fairy with straw like fingers suggestive perhaps of an eating disorder, cigarette burnt eyes and an empty tea cup like uterus suggesting her inability to bear children is perhaps a deliberate decision of the king who does not wish any of these features in his daughter. Usually fairies are good looking and fair. Sexton subtly points out the unusual leaving out of the thirteenth fairy from the feast.

Ugliness and the unwomanly aspects of this fairy perhaps are the causes why the king omits her from the list of guests, Sexton suggests. In the Grimm tale the thirteenth fairy was inadvertently left out of the party. The verse tale on the other hand doubts the king for deliberately leaving her out for her frightening looks. Briar Rose's identification later in the tale with the faltering crone and her dream that the crone eats betrayal serve as a reminder that she, (Briar Rose) is betrayed by another woman and also of the king's betrayal of the forgotten fairy. Thus theirs is a story of betrayal. Hence as said earlier by the witch speaker it is actually a tale of every woman's betrayal at the hands of powerful men. That is the dominant male order.

Thus the betraying king and the betrayed and yet betraying fairy seem to consciously stunt Briar Rose's growth making her a "moon girl"

dwelling in his odour

rank as honeysuckle. (T 109)

She becomes a forgetful insomniac haunting the horrifying cattle prod the palace has turned into. Her journey makes her permanently afraid of "that brutal place" where she lies down

with cattle prods

The hole in (her) cheek open. (T 111)

The consequence is amnesia:

There was a theft.

That much I am told.

I was abandoned.

That much I know.

I was forced backward.

I was forced forward.

I was passed hand to hand

like a bowl of fruit.

Each night I am nailed into place

and I forget who I am. (T 112)

She is a sacrificial figure. Her father nails her into place, crucifies her making her lose and forget her identity. She becomes an extreme, horrifying representative of captivity, imprisonment and utter “fall” of women at the hands of the patriarch, the man, his order and his violence under the guise of smothering sweetness. Patriarchy exerts control over women, hypnotises them, makes them hysterical, stunts them, and infantilises them. Briar Rose on her journey “further and further back” victimised by the undue approaches by her father under the guise of caring protection is made a lunatic, a hysteric controlled by the moon and is stuck in time to an early phase of existence which is marked by mere biological, physical awareness. This fall to sheer animal existence emphasises the traditionally imposed typically male belief in women as mere objects of sexual desire.

The animal images used in the verse tale and its prologue sufficiently reflect the assumed status of women in patriarchy and their forced journey towards accepting that status. For instance, “she is stuck in the time machine ... as inward as a snail;” “she is swimming further and further back/ up like a salmon;” “my father thick upon me/ like some sleeping jelly fish.” (T 112) Animals mentioned in the description of the tableau are suggestive of the stoppage of physical activity:

The king and the queen went to sleep,

the courtiers, the flies on the wall.

The trees turned into metal

And the dog became china.

Even the frogs were zombies. (T 109)

Food images in “arms limp as old carrots,” “The fire in the hearth grew still/ and the roast meat stopped crackling,” the faltering crone eating “betrayal like a slice of meat” underline the point of physicality mentioned above. The verse tale ends with a question and in turn raises a series of thought provoking questions about the voyage in

the minds of the readers answers to which must be sought for the betterment of the entire (wo)mankind:

What voyage this, little girl?

This coming out of prison?

God help –

this life after death? (T 112)

Through the retelling of 'Briar Rose' Sexton attempts a cultural critique and for the purpose creates a new voice with which to challenge and ask the readers "to consider personal, cultural and even critical power relationships as inseparable."⁷ Dawn Skorczewski in her article on incest in Anne Sexton's poetry says that the final lines of the 'Briar Rose' tale "question the possibility of speaking within dominant discourses without being imprisoned by silencing codes and repressive institutions. This final voice in 'Briar Rose' is the voice of one who knows that the personal trauma and the existing arrangements of speech are part of the same patriarchal plot." (Skorczewski 320)

- Olga Broumas's 'Sleeping Beauty'⁸

Sexuality, sexual discourse, articulation of sexual abuse, incest etc. are, in the dominant male order, sanctioned on the one hand and tabooed on the other. Language is essentially a man's privilege. Man can be expressive and openly articulates his sexual, physical needs and desires. A woman, on the other hand, is expected not just to curb and repress her physical needs, desires and her sexual preferences but is even supposed not to utter a word about and against linguistic and physical abusive attacks on her. It is interesting here to consider, may be as a point of relevant diversion, the abusive words in the Indian languages this researcher is familiar with viz. Marathi and Hindi. At the centre of most of the swear words in these two languages are references to women and particularly to their sexuality and sexual organs. These words also reflect demeaning attitudes towards the network of maternal relations which deliberately humiliate women. It is an example of how language in patriarchy sexually abuses and ill treats women in general. At the same time when patriarchy gives a free hand to man to use language to express his sexual feelings, physical

desires and necessities and allows him to express his anger even in small matters in sexually abusive language, women's sexuality on the other hand, is so severely repressed that women are not just not allowed but are even not able to express it openly.

Olga Broumas in her re-vision of 'Sleeping Beauty' undertakes this issue of female sexual repression and restraint on its articulation in patriarchy and a possible resolution to it. Like her 'Cinderella' discussed later in this chapter, Broumas's Sleeping Beauty is a subversive female character who challenges the given, blindly accepted and sanctioned gender stereotypes concerning women's identity and role in the patriarchal order by probing deep and attempting to bring to the readers' notice the silenced, deliberately neglected and repressed aspects of a woman's existence and being for centuries in the conventional tales which are constructs of the same dominant male order. It is by way of this attempt that Broumas endeavours to articulate and voice the hitherto suppressed female desire. In this articulation she uses an innovative language which provokes and explicitly attempts to liberate. Broumas in her re-told 'Sleeping Beauty' too presumes the readers' foreknowledge of the story and simply alludes to the traditional tale and proceeds to tell her version. The speaker, Sleeping Beauty, begins the tale with a first person narration mentioning the long hours of her sleep, the lethargy spread over an extensive period of time:

I sleep, I sleep

too long,...

Broumas strikes a personal chord here by her involvement in the narrative making the narrative naturally intimate and close to her self. The enjambment in the introductory lines of the poem implies a deliberately ambiguous structure of the verse stanza suggesting perhaps a continual entrapment of the narrator and the extreme intensity of her sleep. The intense sleep for hours which 'hound' her also leave her 'breathless' with her 'heart racing.' Lethargic when she wakes up, the feeling is like momentary satisfaction of a nap/ sleep peeled off "like a hairless glutton." She dreams and the "cold water shocks [her] back from the dream." However it turns out that what she calls a dream is actually a real life experience which can be confirmed and evidenced in the fossilised "love bites" on her neck "that *did* exist" (italics in the original) and could be witnessed in the mirror. Though she feels that it is dreamlike, she realises its

actuality in the visible physical marks of the passionate moments shared with the lover in a state of delirium. The dreamlike memory of love clings to her like “a ceremonial necklace” tightly wrapped round and strangling her neck. This necklace of traditional love and its memory is suddenly “snapped apart.” The lovers’ unbridled passion is described in the lines that follow: the “vital salt” of body - blood and tears, the “bitter, metallic” “taste of you” that “sharpens” the speaker’s tongue emphasise the physicality of their bonding and again appear to her “dreamlike.” Nonetheless she is aware (“I know”) as she sleeps, that her blood runs clear as salt in the lover’s mouth and her eyes which open to a new awakening which is no more personal/ private or hidden but in the midst of a crowded city amid traffic. This awakening is different from the one in the original traditional tale.

This Sleeping Beauty is not choiceless and voiceless. She exercises her choice and voices her desire in public. This Briar Rose is awakened not by a charming prince’s kiss but a “public kiss” by her woman lover Judith’s “red lips.” The pedestrians gathered beneath the red light are shocked to behold the public demonstration of homoerotic love. Broumas’s mention of the red traffic light and its implication in “our culture” – the male dominated culture – is remarkable. She underlines the significance and implications of “red” in patriarchal culture. The red traffic light orders us to stop. The shocked pedestrians gathered under the ‘red’ light suggest the fact that the customary, reactionary response to this kind of bold deviation from the “sacred law” of the male order would be to stop such blasphemy. The culture which would react thus considers red as a warning and “men threaten each other with final violence.” Red for them implies a sign of danger and betrayal. They are there under the red signal signalling to the “deviant” women not to cross their ‘given’ bounds. For the women lovers the same red colour connotes erotic desire, passionate love and conscious, deliberate transgression of social norms and accepted customs in patriarchal order and conventions. Broumas’s Sleeping Beauty defies the order and its code system. And in defiance she boldly declares, “I will drink your blood” and accepts her woman lover’s kiss in front of the shocked society’s open eyes suggesting a total determination to not conform with the social laws guided by the male order. She finds in this act “unspeakable liberties,” – to be her own self, to articulate her sexuality, to defy social restraints and taboos, and above all to be able to make her

own choice consciously. The woman's kiss liberates this Sleeping Beauty; she gains the power to defy and transgress.

Unlike the Grimm Briar Rose Broumas's Sleeping Beauty does not have to wait till the prince comes through the brambles to save and free her. Instead she herself chooses to "wake" to her female lover's "public kiss." Judith, her lover, is not her saviour. Sleeping Beauty is not saved; her happiness is not controlled by anyone else. Rather she chooses to awaken mutually with Judith's kiss. Both are each other's equals in this relationship. It is a relationship where the two women have their own individuality intact; neither exercises control over the other; there is no suppression but liberty and free choice which revitalises both of them. As Nancy Walker puts it, "Broumas's revisions reverse the central gender relationships of the traditional tales. Men are not rescuers, but rather intruders; women are lovers and nurturers of each other instead of jealous competitors."⁹ Hence the name Judith too achieves significance and becomes connotative. With its biblical associations the name Judith implies feminine heroism, bravery, adventure and recklessness. The deliberate choice of the biblical Jewish heroine who liberated her clan from oppression implies the democratic and egalitarian approach Broumas sees inherent in a lesbian relationship. Delighted in her new freedom and triumph they

cross the street, kissing

against the light, singing, This

is the woman I woke from sleep, the woman that woke

me sleeping.

It is thus a happy awakening for this Sleeping Beauty who is very much unlike Sexton's mainly because Sexton like many other re-tellers emphasises the theme of sleep more than her awakening. Broumas does recognise Briar Rose's sleep but remarkably shifts her focus and the readers' attention to a lively awakening of the girl providing a sort of resolution to the passive reliance of women on male favours. In doing this Broumas offers for her awakened Beauty an alternative, a possibility of a vital and liberated life which she can live on her own terms.

Lesbian defiance is a conscious political stance against the accepted norms of heterosexuality. It is presented as a rebellious attack on the existing establishment which has a rigid set of norms concerning gender and sex relations, which are oppressive and degrading. It also serves as a feasible and liberating substitute for the establishment and its hetero-normative values. Homosexual relationship between women is shown in this re-vision of 'Sleeping Beauty' as a means of redemption of women. Broumas's Sleeping Beauty attains awakening through a woman who is not her saviour but a companion on par with the girl. Thus the lesbian, homosexual relationship offers a democratic, egalitarian option to the subordinating and discriminatory male order. In this sense it becomes a conscious political stance. Also the female lover and her "public kiss" in the presence of shocked believers in patriarchy under the symbolic red light underline the feminist motto "the personal is political." Feminist movement considers the public articulation of the 'private' as an important presupposition for creating self awareness amongst women about their systemic suppression and entrapment and forming a community of women bound with solidarity and a feeling of sisterhood. Broumas in her retelling brings to the centre the peripheral aspects of womanhood that remain unarticulated in the male dominated culture. She gives Sleeping Beauty a new alternative and a new identity remarkably enough not through a man but by her own choice. By exercising her own choice without affecting the other's individuality and freedom Sleeping Beauty and through her, Broumas utter a political statement of defiance of the order and culture, which sanctions and represses abuse of women and demean their status as free, individual human beings.

In 'Sleeping Beauty' Broumas, by demonstrating woman's right and freedom to exercise her choice provides women with a political statement for challenging the age old gender stereotypes and re-define and re-establish their place, role and status in the male dominated world.

- Sara Henderson Hay's 'Sleeper'¹⁰

Sara Henderson Hay's 'Sleeper' is an instance of appropriation of the sonnet – a poetic form and tool widely used by men in the history of literature. In her new vision of the conventional tale presented in her sonnet based on the tale, Hay tries to reveal Sleeping Beauty's future. Sleeping Beauty when she wakes up is dissatisfied with

the changed world she finds herself in. She hates the chaos in this “new and noisy” world which surrounds her and wishes that “the prince had left me where he found me.” She has also lost her peace and tranquillity that she experiences while asleep. She was happy in her “cloistered world,” in her “rosy trance ... charmed and deep.” In fact, she is irritated with the prince who breaks her tranquillity and removes the lovely brambles around her palace which give her a feel of being secure and safe. She, therefore, calls the prince a “clumsy trespasser” causing her discomfort. This implies her unwillingness to wake up to a chaotic world from a tranquil and pacifying sleep. She has loved her “cloistered world” for a century and has set her own “pattern” of dreams of her own. It seems a trespasser’s scheme to tread upon this world and tear apart the pattern of her dreams just “with a kiss or two.” The princess is determined. She will not allow anything of this sort to happen. She has decided not to wake up from her world and break or violate her own heartfelt wishes and desires. She will not let her privacy be encroached upon by the intervention of apparent love of man. She will not sell her privacy in exchange for man’s deceitful love – deceitful because under the guise of love is a plot to invade her private world wherein her mind and body are at liberty to exercise her needs and desires on her own terms. Besides, in such intervention and offer of love, her wishes are not taken into account or respected and hence she rejects man in her world and his role as a rescuer and a saviour.

...if he thinks that with a kiss or two

He’ll buy my dearest privacy, or shake me

Out of the cloistered world I’ve loved so long

Or tear the pattern of my dreams, he’s wrong. (Hay 10)

She refutes the general claim that Sleeping Beauty needs to be saved by man. She refuses the heroic role of man in her life and as such considers any such attempt as an intervention and invasion. She is firm in fulfilling her heart’s desires and not letting anyone control her body:

Nothing this clumsy trespasser can do

Will ever touch my heart, or really wake me. (Hay 10)

She thus is not a woman without voice passively guided by her fate and conditioned by the male ideas of a woman's happy life. She wakes up but does not like being awakened. She utters her disillusionment in this awakening. She refuses to be fully awakened by the prince. In not bartering her "dearest privacy" with the prince's kisses she reserves her right to marry him.

Scratching the surface, one can see that at a deeper level this revised tale too hints at a rape, a molestation of the girl's modesty and virginity by the prince. The violation seems to provoke her rage against the prince. The invasion of her privacy and her being are unacceptable to her. Though the prince is responsible for her waking up, she is not grateful to him. She has been invaded against her wishes when she was asleep. Besides, she dislikes the world around. The girl's anger is against the object she has been made into when she slept. Unlike Basile's 16th century Sleeping Beauty who after a hundred years' sleep gives birth to two children soon after waking up and accepts the prince in marriage, this Sleeping Beauty refuses to accept the relation established through sexual violation against her conscious wish. Sleeping Beauty here thus dares to challenge her fate preordained by the fairy's curse and blessing and decides to exercise her own will. This is yet another portrayal of the Sleeping Beauty seeking her own independent universe.

Sara Henderson Hay also voices the prince's feeling and opinion after being rejected by Sleeping Beauty. The partial awakening of Sleeping Beauty and the unmasking of the prince's real goals and his generous guise of a saviour, rescuer disappoints him and leaves him annoyed at the refusal of his role and heroism in the act of rescue. Thus in 'The Sleeper -2'¹² the prince himself wakes up to realise "far too late"

How sound she sleeps, behind a thorny wall

Of rooted selfishness, whose stubborn strands

I broke through once to kiss her lips and hands,

And wake her heart, that never woke at all. (Hay 11)

He realises that he was wrong to have considered the "slumberous look" on her face, "the dreaming air, the drowsy-lidded eyes" during her sleep were "nothing more" than an "artless affectation."

The prince represents the male order, which in the event of defeat and denial by female rebellion attempts to accuse the defiant woman of being selfish, hypocritical, and corrupt and of using their feminine assets to beguile men “to cling about, to strangle, to destroy.” His irritation at Sleeping Beauty’s refusal to admit man’s heroism, her determination and positive assertion makes him wish that he had left her before learning how she had used her sleep and beauty to hide her revolt:

I wish I’d gone away that self-same hour,

Before I learned how, like her twining roses,

She bends to her soft, implacable uses

The pretty tactics that such vines employ

To hide the poisoned barb beneath the flower,

To cling about, to strangle, to destroy. (Hay 11)

Hay, thus, records the typical male reaction to any woman’s attempt at self assertion and claiming the right to privacy and freedom of self.

- Sara de Ford’s ‘Sleeping Beauty’,¹²

Sara de Ford’s ‘Sleeping Beauty’ is another poetic version of ‘Brier Rose’ presenting yet another Sleeping Beauty “no one can wake...no sound can shatter.” (171) De Ford too presents a dormant and powerless beautiful maiden induced to sleep sexually and experiencing a life of torpid unconsciousness – a shatterproof trance. “Pricking” male relationship presents explicitly the sexuality hinted at in the original tale. In her variation De Ford presents Sleeping Beauty as the youngest princess. Her elder sisters are bestowed with the gifts of “goodness,” “quick bright wit,” “dower of wealth,” “long life” and so on while Sleeping Beauty is left with only the gift by the “sly witch,” the cruel “malignant” fairy “the spindle prick of sex.”(171) This gift would leave her doomed in a “stuporous” life of deathlike unconsciousness. The prick is sexual. She however, is not going to remain youthful but is destined to grow older with time while asleep through life, her “torpid unconsciousness” (171) She is thus left to a fate of a living cadaver – motionless, benumbed, dormant, hibernating with

latent consciousness. She is neither dead nor alive. She sleeps all through their life on account of the “keen wound” of love.

The story in a subtle way presents a representative state of womankind living hopelessly in a trancelike state throughout life her desires, wishes and feelings governed by the male dominated value system.

- Robert Coover’s ‘The Briar Rose’¹³

Robert Coover’s ‘The Briar Rose’ is an instance of a male attempt at rewriting the story of the Grimms’ ‘Brier Rose’ and Perrault’s ‘The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood.’ Coover in a very interesting and novel manner exposes the sexual meaning of the original classics through the thoughts of the prince, dreams of the princess and stories told by the old crone/ fairy who takes care of Briar Rose during the century of her sleep. It is an allegorical playful parody left open for the readers’ decoding and interpretation. It is like a game used as a strategy to awaken the readers, to provoke them to undertake critical examination of cultural norms, values, codes and “established patterns of thought.”¹⁴

To begin with, like the rewrites mentioned earlier in this chapter Coover too assumes readers’ foreknowledge of the original Grimm, Perrault and Basile’s versions of the tale, begins in media res and ponders on the sleep metaphor but completely strips it bare. The retelling attempts to take us into the psychological depths of the characters’ thoughts and dreams – their conscious and sub/unconscious psyches.

Before the well known Grimm version of ‘Brier Rose’, which became more famous with its more reductive adaptation by Disney, the 17th century Neapolitan writer Giambattista Basile in his 1636 collection of 50 stories in *Pentamerone* included ‘Sun, Moon and Talia’ on which Charles Perrault based his version ‘La belle au bois dormant’ translated as ‘The Sleeping Beauty in the Woods’ in 1697. It is said that the elements of this tale type were found in an earlier version in the 14th century French Arthurian story *Perceforest*.

Whereas the Grimm tale simplistically presents and focuses on the enchantment and release of the fairy tale heroine after a hundred years and a ‘happy ever after’ end, the earlier Basile and Perrault versions present the heroine impregnated in her sleep. Besides, the stories do not conclude with her awakening. The princess and her two

children are persecuted by the cannibalistic Queen, Beauty's mother-in-law. They are rescued and reunited with the prince. Basile's story has Talia, impregnated by a married king. She gives birth to twins – Sun and Moon – during her sleep. One of the infants sucks from Talia's finger the flaxen fibre which had caused the enchantment. With the removal of the fibre she wakes up. On discovering this, the king's wife tries to eat Talia's children but is not successful. Perrault's 'Sleeping Beauty' is relatively less explicit and violent. It shows Sleeping Beauty having twins named Dawn and Day born after the prince weds Beauty when she wakes up. Perrault ends his story with a moral which Angela Carter translates as follows: "A brave, rich, handsome husband is a prize well worth waiting for; but no modern woman would think it was worth waiting for a hundred years. The tale of Sleeping Beauty shows how long engagements make for happy marriages, but young girls these days want so much to be married, I do not have the heart to press the moral."¹⁵

Robert Coover in his hyper textual attempt at the rewrite of the tale combines all three versions and mainly usurps the gaps in the legend with respect to the issue of Sleeping Beauty's dreams, which Perrault mentions parenthetically while writing his version. Consciously inter-textual, intensely psychological, clearly postmodern in its references to the pre-existent narratives and at the same time subverting these "bourgeois"¹⁶ narrative traditions and "challeng[ing] linearity" (707) by creating 'hyperspace' for his 'hypertext,' Coover indeed offers a revived look to and comment on the tale of Sleeping Beauty. Undertaking the innovative form of writing Coover infuses the theme and content with the hypertext form and vice versa. As he himself mentions in *The End of Books* "the most radical new element that comes to the fore in hypertext is the system of multidirectional and often labyrinthine linkages we are invited or obliged to create." (707) So does his tale flow in many directions and make the readers create meaning and author the tale themselves. This novel hyperfiction is "so radically new it is hard to be certain just what it is. No fixed centre, for starters – and no edges either, no ends or boundaries. The traditional narrative time line vanishes into a geographical landscape or exitless maze, with beginnings, middles and ends being no longer part of the immediate display ... topless (and bottomless)... paragraphs, chapters and other conventional text divisions are replaced by evenly empowered and equally ephemeral window-sized blocks of text and graphics..." (707)

Hypertext with its nonlinear or non sequential segments called lexias allows an interactive, graphic, multivocal discourse and aims at empowering the reader to interact, interpret and organise the given text “...freeing the reader from the domination of the author,” (706) making reader and writer “co-learners or co-writers...in the mapping and remapping of the textual...components, not all of which are provided, by what used to be called the author.” (706) Coover, in his ‘Briar Rose’ illustrates all his insights about the hypertext thus making the retold tale itself a metaphor for hypertext and represents it with newer intricacies and complexities. Coover deconstructs the source tale, its story, plot and narration, and at the same time attempts its critique targeting the arbitrary perpetration in it of archetypal social and gender roles, identities and the archetypes of ‘appropriate’ sexual behaviour which gets blindly transmitted in and adopted by society as morally and politically correct. Deviating from linear, logical and causal structure, this novella offers 42 lexias which begin in the middle and cease to move ahead of the moment where they begin. Indeed nothing happens. There is no progression of events in either time or space. The story, like the hypertext format itself is circular and entrapping like the young prince caught in the thorny brambles around the castle wherein the princess lies asleep (?) dreaming (?) entertained by the good/bad fairy with her apparently varied tales. At the end of the novella (if one can call it an end) nothing or no one has moved on. We along with the characters in the retold tale return to the same point where we had started. The narration and characters are stuck in the moment and place and so are we when we read the tale. “This one point in time, however, cannot pass, and the characters and the reader remain right there for the length of the book.”¹⁷

In a very subtle and interesting manner Coover follows the fairy tale technique of repetition and variation to debunk the fairy tale. His retelling itself is a re-viewed variation on the three varied versions of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ as mentioned above. Within it are repeated variations of the Sleeping Beauty myth. The old crone keeps telling Briar Rose stories all of which begin with the moment in which Coover’s own narration is caught thus delineating multiple possibilities of the ways Briar Rose can awaken and the consequential responses to those awakenings from the prince and the princess. These possibilities are furthered by and in fact inspire Briar Rose’s dreams in her sleep. The fairy’s stories, the prince’s thoughts on heroism, his vocation, adventure and frustration and the princess’s dreams keep occurring cyclically and

perennially in a repetitive/repeated structure rendering to the retold tale what Coover calls, “ fluidity, contingency, indeterminacy, plurality” (709), circularity sans centre and a “dimensionless infinity.” (709)

The prince is “hopelessly in the flesh-rending embrace of the briars” (L 24) that he slashes but they grow back “doubly forked; rearmed, he slashes them again, he must strive.” (L 24) Heroism is his vocation and disenchanting the princess from her century long sleep just with his magical kiss “(he has a talent for it, women have often told him so)” (L 24) is his “fabled adventure.” (L 28) He undertakes his adventure, therefore, with his sense of vocation and not for the fabled reward – “what is another lonely bedridden princess?” (L 1) Though described in a sexually provocative language the adventure, for the Prince, is not desired for the sexual pleasure but to confront “the awful powers of enchantment...To tame mystery. To make ... his name.” (L 1) He thinks or “prefers to think” (L 3) that perhaps he is the chosen one, that the object of his heroic quest is “Honour. Knowledge. The exercise of his magical powers” (L3) and of course, love. He is uncertain and rather doubtful about the outcome of his adventure. The prospect of suffering, pain and cruelty at the end of the adventure excites him, incites him: “if there be any truth in these century-old rumours from benighted times, this adventure could end, not in love’s sweet delirium, but in its pain, its infamous cruelty. This prospect, however, does not dissuade him. On the contrary. It incites him.” (L3) For, he is proudly obsessed with the fabled “heroic task” (L6) – that of not just crossing the hurdles but on reaching the sleeper, awakening her to the knowledge about herself and getting rewarded with the princess’s unconditional love and honour for his favour. The embracing briars which he slashes are the impediments that entice and lure him away from the prize inside and dissuade him from playing “the fabled fool” (L6) for choosing an imagined prize over “a real and present one” (L6) i.e. “the immediate gratification of flesh” amidst the briars that “voluptuously caress him” (L9) He moves on with his manly resolve presuming “I am he who will awaken Beauty!” (L9), thinking that it “is a marvellous and emblematic journey beyond the beyond, requiring his unwavering courage and dedication, but promising a reward beyond the imagination of ordinary mortals.” (L9) As he continues to be ‘caught’ in the gnarled, entwining briars that he continues to slash away “valiantly” (L16) it dawns upon him that the ‘beautiful’ is “a deadly illusion.” (L14) His erotic longing for the princess is now replaced with “sympathetic

curiosity” (L14) for her. He equates his life “driven by his dream of vocation and heroic endeavour and bewitched by desire” (L14) with the possible “strangely timeless and insubstantial” (14) existence of Briar Rose if no one reaches her to awaken her from her dreams. His vocation is replaced by the fear that the journey would be timeless and insubstantial and his doubt about whether the castle and the princess really exist and whether the princess there is beautiful and loving or just “the wicked fairy’s wicked creature, more captor than captive, more briar than blossom.” (L16) However “he will remain a hero to the end.” (L21) Unable to release himself from the “flesh-rending embrace” (L24) of the briars and imagining his “fabled” (L6) victory and the consequent fame and happiness that would “naturally flow therefrom” (L24) he hears the bones of his predecessors stuck and lost in the brambles, speak about “the vanity of all heroic pursuits and of the dreadful void that the illusion of immortality, so called, cannot conceal.” (L24) They describe the essence of heroism as “willing self-delusion, masks, artifice, a blind eye cast toward the abyss.” (L24) He is aware but still would ‘strive’ to make his name “for love of love.” (L24) He expects that Briar Rose would appreciate his strife for love since she too is chosen as he himself is or he thinks he is. Both are repeatedly pricked and stripped naked. In his imagination – the only asset he is left with – he visualises the completion of his “fabled adventure” and the “ever after” that follows including “the disappointments and frustrations and betrayals, the tedium, the doubts (was it really she after all? was it really he?), the disfigurement of time, he draining away of meaning and memory, the ensuing silences, the death of dreams; and enrobed in pain, wilfully nameless, yet in his own way striving still, he slips back into the briars’ embrace.” (L28) By and by he seems utterly exhausted to the extent that he doesn’t even wish to reach her and awaken her. Still his vocation compels him to move on. He thinks of the tranquillity and peace in his life before this adventure and resents her “for getting him into this mess.” (L30) In Lexia 33 the prince thinks, imagines or perhaps indeed has escaped the briars, scaled the walls, explored the castle, found the princess, is already at her bedside and has awakened her. Surprised as he himself may be, we too wonder whether “he is generating this illusion himself, or if it is fairy magic.” (L33) He finds her as per his fabled imagination and expectations: “beautiful, gentle, innocent, devoted, submissive.” (L33) Humorously Coover presents him as “suffused with love and desire” wanting “to take a nap” (L33) He is lost in his thoughts about his quest while the princess tells him what a flying goose foretold her: “You will never awaken

because the story you were in no longer exists.” (L33) The prince doubts his role as the chosen saviour and feels that he might as well face the same fate as his predecessors whose rattling bones talk to him about the vanity of the quest which ends in an anonymous death/eternity “forever after.” Continuously shifting between determination and resignation, repeatedly he imagines and thinks in his imagination that he has broken the princess’s spell only to realise in a while that he is still caught in the briars.

“Nothing in this castle is simply what it is, everything here has a double life,” he realises by Lexia 35. Everything is masked, hidden and complex. He believes that the princess would bring him out of the “thorny maze” (L35) but her questions, “When will this spell be broken?” “When will my true prince come?” (L35) awaken him to the realisation that “as he feared, he is not the one.” (L35) If he is not, he would like to ‘become’ the one she dreams of but she holds a mirror up to him wherein he sees that he is a “hairy, toothy” (L35) beast. His self-reflection “Who am I? What am I?” (L23) is answered here. She dresses him up for the ball “with all the needles left inside” (L35) and leads him by the paw. The hall which he enters is the perilous edge of the world and he realises that from here “there will be no departing.” (L38) Engulfed in pain he howls for help and release. Still trapped in the brambles, he feels he has rescued the sleeping princess and “feels substantially unrewarded for all his pain and suffering.” (L38) The rescue of the princess appears such “a long ago” happening that “his memory of it is as though a borrowed one.” (L38) He analyses the reason why he remained entrapped in the hedges: “I feel the reason I never escaped the briars was that, in the end, I loved them, or at least I needed them.... They grew on me...” (L37) The blossoming briar hedge is the princess’s double whom the prince has been experiencing sensually ever since he begins his quest which for him initially seems very easy. The briars “part like thighs, the silky petals caress[ing] his cheeks.” (L1) Throughout Coover playfully exposes the sexual elements and symbolism in the hero’s quest constantly referring to the spindle in association with the penis and violation of Briar Rose’s virginity in each of her dreams of awakening. The prince thinks he is the one chosen for the heroic task of making his name. But so did all the preceding princes who die entrapped in the brambles: “all around him, the pendulous bones whisper severally in fugal refrain: I am he who will awaken Beauty! I am he who will awaken Beauty!” (L9) The princess awakens again and again and is still in

the castle sleeping; so does the prince repeatedly reach her passing through the brambles and scaling the walls and yet is caught, trapped, stuck, “hopelessly enmeshed” in the hedges wounded by the pricks of the briars.

Coover in his humorous presentation of the prince in the brambles sarcastically criticises and deconstructs the fairy tale hero and the fabled adventure of the hero as well as the fabled notion of heroism. The hero’s task of rescuing the princess and “making his name” (L 1,9,32, 33, 42) itself is challenged and questioned. The hero and heroism are denied in this rewrite. Coover mocks the fabled hero and his fabled heroic adventure. The hero here is destined to remain entrapped in his own understanding of the happily ever after – “a fall into the ordinary” – “whether he makes his name or not (what does it matter?)” (L28) When he ultimately feels/imagines he has reached the princess and is stunned by her beauty, “[H]e is thinking about the quest that brought him here. Has he made his name then? If so, what is it?” (L33)

The princess: “She awakens to repeated awakenings as though trapped in some strange mechanism.” (L39) She experiences repeated stabbings by the treacherous spindle and is “impregnated with ... despair” (L3) Each Lexia that presents the princess’s dream brings near the closure of the spell but right there she is pulled back again into a new beginning, a restart of another dream narrative, which moves round and round (like the spinning wheel) with no hope of reaching a happy (or otherwise) conclusion.

The princess describes herself as the one “that hurts” (L4) since she has no other answer. She craves to know who and what she is, why she is fated to experience “an endless stupor and its plague of kissing suitors.” (L8) “Throughout the long night of the hundred year sleep” (L8) she confronts these questions and the fairy tries to answer them: “You are such a door, accessible only to the adept, you are such a secret passageway to nowhere but itself.” (L8) It is thus difficult to fathom the truth about this Briar Rose.

Coover’s Briar Rose wakes up every time after a sexual assault “on her lifeless body” (L19) by a band of ruffians, by “her prince or some prince anyway” (L22), by a wild bear, by a monkey, by her king father in alliance with her mother and so on. She is entrapped in the confusion between the dreams and awakening. “She longs to bring it

to a standstill” (L39) but every time she wakes up with varied feelings only to realise that it had been yet another dream sequence. Her awakenings are deceptive; the happy endings are delusive. They torture, traumatise or mock her as well as the readers who desire such endings. She feels destiny has been unjust to her and curses it. To this, “her ancient friend” the fairy reacts in a consoling tone and suggests to her that she has meted with a better fate than others: “You are one of the lucky ones, the old crone says, wagging a gnarled finger at her. Your sisters were locked in iron towers, lamed and stuck in the kitchen, sent to live with the savage beasts. They had their hands and feet cut off, were exiled, raped, imprisoned, reviled, monstrously deformed, turned to stone and killed. Even worse, many of them had their dreams come true.” (L17) Coover in a delightfully sarcastic comment mocks the “fabled” dream and the prize for the beautiful princess. The prize of marriage with the handsome prince is mocked in the tale as a shattering and severe fate for the winning beauty. Paradoxically enough the awakening - the happy end with disenchantment, rescue, kiss and wedding of the princess - is shown as a nightmare, a horror.

Tired of the evasive and deceptive happy endings “all she longs for, as she tells the old crone in the tower, is to sleep again.” (L42) She is again restored to her dream wherein the fairy would lull her to sleep with yet another version of ‘Briar Rose.’ The sleeping princess closes her eyes to such a cruel fate, but as always, it is as if she has opened them again, and now to yet another prince arriving, bloodied but exultant, at her bedside. “... Yes, yes, that’s right, my prince! And now, tenderly if you can, toothily if need be, take this spindled pain away ...” (L42). The novella ends on this note of continuity and circularity suggesting “the eternal re-enactment” (L42) of Briar Rose’s fate and her desire to rid herself of the spindled pain.

Coover perhaps depicts representatively through his ‘Briar Rose’ the continual eternity and eternal re-enactment of painful destiny of the womankind determined by and in the male dominated order for centuries past and to come. The princess’s and so every woman’s “longing for integrity... is itself fragmented.” (L2) Being stabbed again and again “by the treacherous spindle, impregnated with despair from which, for all her fury, she cannot awaken” (L2) and she will never as the plucked goose in one of her dreams prophecies in Lexia 33. She thus represents the male ordained fate of women in patriarchy: “the object of male gaze or even rape.” (Redies 23), a helpless victim of violent male sensuality and violence. “[A] band of drunken

peasants ... intent on loot ... commenced to strip her, of her finery and naturally one thing led to another and they all had a turn on her, both before she was kissed and after.” (L15) Another band of ruffians who in fact are “her father’s household knights” all have “a go on her lifeless body, sometimes more than one at a time.” (L19) The answer to Rose’s and in turn every woman’s “Why?” is because “you won’t listen!” (L19) Coover takes a trivial detail to a larger, vaster canvas to represent the plight of women as helpless, passive victimised patriarchal subjects and at the same time plunges into the typical male psyche and reveals the derogatory, demeaning and dehumanising attitudes of patriarchy towards women.

As mentioned earlier in this analysis Coover in his rewrite has worked on the suggestive, suggested and unexplored links in the tales by Basile, Perrault and Grimm. Perrault’s tale mentions the good fairy amusing the sleeping princess with pleasant dreams during a century long sleep. Working on this idea Coover presents a fairy who is a combination of many female stereotypes in fairy tales. The good fairy is also a wicked, bad, old crone. She is the one who curses her, the witch; she is the one who blesses her, a mother figure. She is the enchanter, she, the amuser. She has magical or at least medical powers and is at the same time a nanny with the power to spin tales. In Lexia 19 Rose calls her mother: “Oh mother, she groans, why am I the one? Because you won’t listen! cries the ill tempered old crone” who after a while apologises to the child “as though to right the wrong.” She is a surrogate mother as it were. The loving old crone is “hideously ugly and vaguely threatening, yet dearer to [Rose] in her dreams than any other, even courting princes.” (L4) Hurt at being called ugly, however, the good-bad fairy sarcastically thanks all those who consider her so including the beautiful princess and without inhibitions exposes the factual issues involved in a hundred year long sleep and the retention of the princess’s beauty: “Has that smug sleeper paused to consider how she will look and smell after a hundred years, lying comatose and untended in an unchanged bed? A century of collected menses alone should stagger the lustiest of the princes.” (L5) It is this crone who maintains the princess’s beauty during her sleep. She feels obliged to “freshen her flesh and wipe her bum, costume and coiffure her, sweep the room of all morbidity and cushion her for he who will come in lustrous opulence.” (L5) She nurses the princess and amuses her too by ornamenting her dreams with moral lessons in her stories. The stories are but “mere fancies invented for her own consolation while

awaiting that which she herself, in her ingenerate ambivalence, has ordained.” (L5) In a way she too is trapped and desires rescue, a way out. She too is “castle-bound as the dreamer.” (L29) She is “a caster of spells and a manipulator of plots.” (L18) With her talents she imagines and describes for Rose “a rich assortment of beauties and princes, obstacles, awakenings, and what-happened-nexts, weaving in a diverse collection of monsters, dragons, ogres, jests, rapes, riddles, murders, magic, maimings, dead bodies, and babies... the illusion of boundaries, above all that the body has been ... thereof.” (L29) Many of her tales are about “infanticide and child abuse, abandonment, mutilations, mass murder and cruel executions, and, in spite of the subjects, not all endings have been happy.” (L31) She is aware that her stories necessarily linger on suffering “often intolerable and unassuaged suffering.” (L31) This is her wickedness.

However, her cruel façade hides a practical and well meaning intention, that of preparing her “moony charge” for the real, the actual and the harsh. Reality is not so simple and easy as “a quick kiss” followed by a wedding party and happy ever after life. It is much more complex and unusual. Goodness of this wicked fairy lies in her intention to hold before the princess a mirror that reflects the challenges of real life. Hence she has told her “the story of the musicians at Beauty’s wedding feast who distracted the bride with their flutes and tambourines and kettledrums, while their dancing girls were off seducing the groom, thereby sending him to his nuptial bed with a dreadful social disease. She has told her (also forgotten) of a monstrously evil Sleeping Beauty and of the horrors unleashed upon the prince and all the kingdom when he awakened her, as well as of the hero under a beastly spell who ate Beauty immediately upon finding her so as to avoid returning to his dreary life as a workaday prince, adding a few diverting notes about his digestive processes just to stretch the tale out.” (L31) The princess, as the fairy tale reader, used to the formulaic romantic tales with happy endings distrusts and doubts the tales: “it doesn’t seem right” (L32), “she doesn’t like this story.” (L32), “That’s not how stories are” (L32), “It just doesn’t sound right ... Real stories aren’t like that. Real princes aren’t” (L26), “it’s terrible” (L11) She clearly does not believe the tales but is repeatedly drawn to them “back for more of the same.” (L23) The fairy loses her temper to see how despite her promises and reprimands, the princess either bewails or doubts or dreads her fate. She can appreciate the child dreading what she longs, as princely heroes are generally

“unreliable and often beastly.” (L18) However the princess’s doubts about the arrival of the prince to awake her suggest, for the fairy, “that she underestimates her own legendary beauty and its power to provoke desire in men.” (L18)

The fairy, however, with a conviction perhaps that “the sugar coated fairy tales” are “escapist and numbing constructions” (Redies 21) keeps on inventing and repeating new variations of the tale having the same plot. She is frustrated to see the “empty head” not learning “her dreamtime moral lessons” (L18), which talk of the pleasures got from withheld satisfaction. As Brian Evenson points out Coover deconstructs the fairy tale inside and through his story: “the text illustrates the attack on the myth as well as the stubborn adherence to the tradition in the relationship of the old crone and the sleeping beauty.”¹⁸

The retold tale debunks fairy tale traditions and even the conditioned expectation /desires of the fairy tale readers mainly for structure, linearity and meaning. Rose’s dismissal of the fairy’s tales as wrong and terrible because they deviate from the fairy tale structure and happy endings can actually be seen as the responses of the readers accustomed to the classical fairy tales, their traditional structure and happy endings with sugar coated escapism.

Coover’s narrative strategy involves the fairy telling many variations in her repeated tales. Historical development of oral tales constituted such endless variations within repetitions. Coover through his narrative strategy “reveals layers upon layers of historical development in the tale, older versions and bawdy elements found in Basile and Perrault that were sanitised away in the Grimms’ version.” (Redies 21)

In Lexia 8 Coover makes the fairy define beauty with a capital ‘B.’ The fairy’s answers to Rose’s questions, “Who am I?” “What am I?” could be related to what Coover wishes to suggest cynically about the character of the fairy tale itself: “You are all things dangerous and inviolate. You are she who has renounced the natural functions, she who invades the dreams of the innocent, she who harbours wild forces and so defines and provokes the heroic, and yet you are the magical bride, of all good the bell and flower, she through whom all glory is to be won, love known, the root out of which all need germinates. You are she about whom the poets have written: The rose and thorn, the smile and tear: / The burden of all life’s song is here. [...] You are that flame, flickering like a burning fever in the hearts of men, consuming them with

desire, bewitching them with their radiant and mysterious allure.” (L8) What the fairy does not utter for the fear of terrifying the princess are the words: “You are Beauty.” This would terrify even the readers who realise the undercurrent allusions, in these remarks, to the form, nature and character of the fairy tale itself. The wish fulfilment and desire for structure in the traditional, classical fairy tales produces individuals who are “integrated into a (social) structure: desire gone wrong but transformed and reintegrated within an accepted value system.”(Redies 25) Coover’s fairy tale desires this gratification and attacks our adherence to the fairy tale traditions.

This hyper-textual retelling serves different purposes like parodying and at times cynically challenging the ideas about the hero, the heroic and heroism; exploring the notion of beauty and the beautiful in fairy tales; critically attacking the traditionally burdened roles of fairy tale characters; commenting on the “shifting depiction of sexuality and of male and female desire: female purity combined with passivity versus male conquest and possession,” (Redies 25); failing, breaking down and debunking traditional desires and expectations of the readers from the classical fairy tale and above all deconstructing the myth, the fairy tale, its predetermined story lines and narratives paradoxically through the redundant narratives of the old crone. The beautiful world of the fairy tale is proved “a deadly illusion” (Redies 14) in Coover’s attempt at this rewrite. Coover tries to explore and reveal a variety of possible alternative approaches to and versions of the Sleeping Beauty tale by challenging the traditional and old conventions and set rules of the fairy tale genre. As Jaroslav Kusnir in his article maintains, Coover’s ‘Briar Rose’“ expresses the desire to overcome the traditional, old sensibility, represented by old narrative forms; and at the same time, [...] establishes a new sensibility and new approach to reality and its representation.”¹⁹

In Lexia 37 the princess is shown to be sitting beside the king, “the crowned and bearded stranger” (L32) at the dining table with her heavy crown on her head. A lot of time seems to have passed since her awakening or she is perhaps still sleeping and dreaming the fairy’s yet another piece of entertainment. Sighing, belching and “scratching his hairy belly” he says, “Happily ever after... It’s never quite like you imagine it. She nods. A mistake.” (L32)

The rewrite presents a dream reality. Within the dream many other dreams with a feel of reality are presented/ dreamt. The prince, the princess and the fairy are forever trapped within the tale. There is no escape from the entrapment. The circularity keeps rolling: the prince imagines reaching the princess and still finds himself struggling with brambles; the princess finds herself in yet another dream just when one feels she is about to wake up; the fairy is trapped in the act of spinning the same stories with variations repeatedly. There is no end to the story. It rolls on forever repetitively. One could see it as Coover's comment on and mockery of the "forever aftering" in a manner exactly contrary to the fairy tale "happily ever after" ends.

"What is happily ever after, but a fall into the ordinary, into the human weakness, gathering despair, a fall into death?... He imagines the delirium... the death of dreams." (L28) Just when the prince imagines he has fulfilled his vocation, he doubts that perhaps he has come to a wrong castle and asks the princess, "What is your heart's desire? To live happily ever after, she replies without emotion." (L33) Coover makes fun of the happily ever after in the prince's pinching response to the princess's desire to live happily ever after: "Of course, he replies, it's yours for the asking. And also I wonder if you'd mind watching the babies for a while? Babies - ? !" (L33) Later in one of his imaginings he hears the princess telling him, "It doesn't last, forget happily ever after..." (L35)

"The bad fairy, who is also the good fairy" in Lexia40, begins her story with a happily ever after life of a prince and a princess: "Once upon a time, she says with a curling smile, her wicked side as usual taking over, there was a handsome prince and a beautiful princess who lived happily ever after." Terrified to hear this Briar Rose objects to such a start and is repelled from the story. The witch in response admonishes: "Happily ever after... may not be worth a parched fig, my daughter, but it hides the warts, so don't be too quick to throw it out!" (L40) She continues the story.

Coover presents the cruelty of the "ever aftering" in the combination of the good and the bad in the same fairy. She is a good fairy because she had blessed this child with death "before suffering the misery of the ever-after part of the human span." (L40) It is the wicked fairy in her who keeps going the ever-aftering pain: "... the wicked fairy

in her, for the sake of her own entertainment, transforming that well-meant gift to death in life and life in death without surcease.” (L40)

Coover thus turns the fairy tale characters and the fairy tale endings topsy turvy revealing the essential, hidden deception in both, in an exceptionally novel and wonderful manner. The prince seems to have escaped but is actually trapped, continually possessed by his vocation and desire to “make his name;” (L1) the princess demands to wake up and be rescued but longs to sleep again and dream; the crone endlessly spins the yarn reproducing the same tale differently. Like the characters the reader too gets trapped and lost in the hyperspace of the text realising like the prince, “it’s too hard to know what is real and not.” (L36)

Every new version, repetition and variation of the old tale is so intricately spun and fused in the narrative of this ‘Briar Rose’ that an attempt to pick one of the variations out of the many as the real or true story “just lands you in this self-reflexive thicket, with the thorns tearing at your clothes.”²⁰ The narrative thus becomes a metaphor for the art of spinning the tales pricking us, entrapping us in the brambles like the prince and at the same time like the princess keeping us in a constantly trance like state entertained with variations on the tales for centuries to come. The book, the narrative will continue to go on forever. At the end (?) of the tale the reader is exactly in the same condition as of the prince at the start of the book – wondering like him “how easy it is” (L1) to penetrate the thicket but eventually getting trapped. The spell, thus, is never broken either for the characters or for the readers.

- Jane Yolen’s ‘Briar Rose’²¹

Jane Yolen’s ‘Briar Rose’ is an allegorical novel which intertwines the theme of the Grimm fairy tale with the traumatic tale of the Holocaust. A postmodern allegorical appropriation of the Briar Rose tale and the wielding and syncretisation of a tale of horror with a literary genre results in an interesting and a refreshingly new outlook on the age old tale. The fusion of the two extreme opposites suggestive of the fairy tale of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ in a horrifying manner is striking. However it does demand an exploration of the common grounds between the Holocaust and the fairy tale genre: Bruno Bettelheim, the author of a legendary book on the uses, meaning and importance of fairy tales and a well acclaimed psychiatrist himself was a concentration camp survivor. He grew up listening to the Grimm fairy tales from his

Viennese mother. Both as a witness to the Holocaust and a student of psychiatry and fairy tales, Bettelheim in his book acknowledges and proves that fairy tales become a means for a child to express its existential anxieties like the fear of death. A fairy tale protagonist, with whom children identify, finds himself/herself in a world beyond his/her comprehension and is threatened by the possibilities of death and triumph over it. The fairy tale world appears threatening and incomprehensible. The plot of the fairy tale involves a struggle to survive in the midst of a terrorising environment. The fairy tale protagonists are themselves ordinary human beings having fears, weaknesses and are involved in an existential struggle against odds and fatal dangers. They are very often helpless and cast out. Such commonplace characters and their plight in the horrific world are the commonalities between the Holocaust horror and the fairy tale humour. The fairy tale thus also bridges the horrific world of the Holocaust and the simple, ordinary world of the readers.

Yolen's 'Briar Rose' is set in Nazi occupied Poland. It centres on the characters of Gemma and Becca. Gemma the grandmother is a survivor of the Holocaust, almost brought back to life from the jaws of death. However she has never conveyed to her family about this past of hers. She is obsessive about the tale of 'Sleeping Beauty' and repeatedly tells it to her granddaughters. She has in fact lost her memories of the past and tries to re-live it through the fairy tale: "I have no memories in my head but one... a fairy tale," she says. (Y 211)

Yolen looks upon fairy tales as a means for retelling the past metaphorically. Like herself she makes Gemma encode her hidden memories of the horrific past experiences using the Briar Rose metaphor. Allegorically thus the theme of the Holocaust is depicted through Gemma's real life story discovered through Becca's quest to trace Gemma's history in Poland and to reach the truth and depths of the coded narrative. Becca the most committed of Gemma's granddaughters, feels on account of the obsessive repeated telling of the story of Briar Rose, that Gemma's story has meaning beyond the literal. Her doubt is answered when Gemma on her deathbed reveals that she "was the princess! ...In the castle. The prince kissed me." (Y 16) She leaves behind her just a box of old photos and documents as clues for Becca to explore and unfold Gemma's past. In her quest Becca comes to know about three different names by which Gemma was known. All of them meant or referred to Briar Rose or princess: Gemma's nickname Dawna or Dawn (Y 29) means Princess Aurora;

her name recorded officially on the immigration card is Gitl Rose Madelstein (Y 62) meaning Briar Rose and Becca discovers to her surprise another of her names, Ksiezniczka, which means 'princess' in Polish. (Y 65) As children, Becca and her sisters are impressed with the tale of the sleeping beauty for its confrontation with the theme of death, victory over it and the power of love. As with the tale Gemma remains connected to her terrible past and the comforting present, so does Yolen bridge, using a fairy tale, the unimaginable Holocaust experiences of her protagonist with her present day. The coded narrative of horror serves as an entertaining tool for the children. For the teller the tale works as a stress reliever and a means of expressing her feelings associated with her horrific past and at the same time, for the listeners it resolves their own childish existential issues and anxieties.

Writers of the holocaust narratives believe and find that ordinary language falls short of adequately expressing experiences of the unbearable and unspeakable horrors so that they could evoke empathy in the readers. Besides, direct depiction of the holocaust could repel the reader than make them understand the plight of the victims. In such a situation fairy tales with their metaphoric richness serve the purpose of appropriately conveying the horrors to and eliciting the desired responses and emotions from the readers. Jane Yolen achieves exactly this by using a fairy tale for portraying the unrepresentable and evoking empathy from her readers. Hence this successful infusion of the extreme narratives.

Yolen quotes Jack Zipes to introduce and describe her novel: "Both the oral and the literary forms of the fairy tale are grounded in history: they emanate from specific struggles to humanise bestial and barbaric forces, which have terrorised our minds and communities in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors."²² Based on this conviction she uses a variety of fairy tale motifs to metaphorically hint at different facets of the Holocaust horror. Using them efficiently she both describes as well as disguises the horror to attain aesthetic results. For instance the sleep motif takes on many connotations suggestive of forgetfulness, unawareness, indifference, death which occupied the entire German nation. It symbolises the sleeping of the conscience, of feelings of sympathy and empathy towards fellow human beings. Gemma refers to the image of mist and fog alternatively to make the sleep metaphor more comprehensive to include

the indications of the Holocaust terrors. It is interesting to see how Yolen appropriates the sleep metaphor to suggest a nationwide indifference and lack of empathy. Gemma says, “A mist. A great mist. It covered the entire kingdom. And everyone in it – the good people and the not so good, the young people and the not so young, and even Briar Rose’s mother and father fell asleep. Everyone slept: lords and ladies, teachers and tumblers, dogs and doves, rabbits and rabbitzen and all kinds of citizens. So fast asleep they were, they were not able to wake up for a hundred years.” (Y 43-44)

Gemma refers to sleep and mist again on her deathbed: “I was the princess in the castle in the sleeping woods. And there came a dark mist and we all fell asleep.” (Y 16) The woods, the castles and forest which are commonly found in fairy tales and presented as dangerous, dark, mysterious and fatal too appear in her tale. She uses the word ‘schloss’ meaning castle to describe the manor house of Kulmholf/Chelmno. The forest is the place where all the gassed Jews, homosexuals and other marginalised are dumped and buried. Even the thorns metaphorically imply the barbed wire around the concentration camps and also the refugee camps in Oswego. (Y 80) The cover page of the novel very suggestively presents this barbed wire image.

Yolen shows Gemma hiding the harsh details of her survival in the magical fairy tale thus using the tale as a coating for the horrific experiences. The two narratives however coexist mutually. Yolen uses the fairy tale language as a reminder of this thematic arrangement. For instance, the fairy tale language is used in Becca’s conversation with Stan at the airport. The names that Josef gives to the partisans in his story of Gemma’s rescue bear resemblance to the fairy tale names. Gemma’s retelling of the tale is unusual and repetitive. It is different in details from the traditional tale. This irritates and terrifies the granddaughters, particularly the two elder ones. Like in many classical fairy tales the older sisters are unsympathetic to listening to the same story told again and again and like in such tales it is the youngest that shows goodness and empathy towards Gemma and her story.

Gemma is Briar Rose because her names echo the meaning of princess, and Briar Rose; her hair is red “the crown of red hair” (Y 14) and on her deathbed she whispers “I am Briar Rose!” (Y 17) Becca, fascinated by Gemma’s account of the tale, realises that Gemma chooses her to find the truth and identifies herself with Gemma. She thus becomes her double and in that sense, a Briar Rose with a difference. The castle

where the fairy tale Briar Rose lay sleeping is the extermination camp – the schloss at Chelmno. Hitler and the Nazi soldiers of his army are equated with the bad fairy cursing the maiden princess: “Not the bad fairy. Not the one in black with big black books and silver eagles on her hat.” (Y 19) The partisans coming to her help could be seen as good fairies. She being a Jew in the Hitler regime was cursed to be gassed in the trucks on the way to Chelmno, cursed to death “from the exhaust piped in” (Y 210) In her story Gemma would refer to “[U]ncles, aunties, cousins, family... I curse you Briar Rose, your father, mother, cousins and aunts” (Y 19) and to the effect of the curse “everyone slept ... and all kinds of citizens.” (Y 43) These people in her coded narrative are all the Jews, gypsies and the gay who were ruthlessly massacred.

“[A] briary hedge [beginning] to grow with thorns as sharp as barbs” (Y 58) in Gemma’s story are actually suggestive and symbolic of the spread of concentration camps: “higher and higher the thorny bush grew...” (Y 58) Gemma in her story refers to the prince coming riding by his troops and on seeing the hedge trying to see over it. In her own real life, Josef Potocki is her saviour. Coming out of the woods with the partisans he sees a heap of gassed Jews unloaded from the trucks and very (s)lightly breathing Gemma, who they believe, could not be saved. “However, he put his mouth on hers and as he did so it was in Josef’s mouth that she, at last spluttered and coughed.” (Y 207) Josef’s attempt at “giving her breath for breath” (Y 238) awakens her. Josef turns out to be her prince who causes her disenchantment and helps and supports her till she is completely rid of the Nazi terror. When she feels completely freed she is with child from her lover husband, Aron, one of the partisans known mainly as the Avenger who dies a heroic death. Gemma, after her disenchantment, experiences a considerably warm and happy ever life (till her death) with a supportive and loving family.

Becca realises Gemma’s telling of an old version of the Briar Rose tale as a metaphor for Gemma’s life. The fragments of her tale interspersed in the narrative create suspense and mystery in the novel. References to the fairy tale deepen Gemma’s story of sufferings and make it representative of the Jewish plight. Apart from Gemma’s version of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ told in the novel through extracts there are two more distinct narratives which Yolen interweaves with one another: the story of Becca’s quest to find true meaning of Gemma’s tale, of her discovery and adventure; and Josef’s narrative which provides Becca and the readers of the novel with answers

to all the questions raised by Gemma's coded narrative. In her search for the knowledge of the past, Becca's own engagement with a fellow journalist, Stan and a mature relationship that grows between the two is presented as suggestive of likely happy ending for Becca. Thus unfolding Gemma's life story leads her to find her own happy ever after tale as well and for the readers softens the effects of the traumatic narrative of the Holocaust suffering.

Through Josef's essential narrative, Yolen debunks the idea of glamorous hero, heroism and courage. Given the centrality of this narrative Yolen's second purpose – apart from the first of presenting the unimaginable wounds of the Holocaust survivors – of debunking and mocking the stereotyped ideas of the hero and the heroic are underlined in the inclusion of the character of Josef and his narrative. She makes Josef frequently refer, in his account of his Holocaust experience, to his views on heroism, courage, human spirit and survival: “this is a story of survivors, not heroes ... a man is not a hero if he scrabbles to stay alive, if he struggles for one more crust of bread, one more ragged breath. We were all heroes of the moment.” (Y 163) The Holocaust brings forth in him disillusionment with what he romantically believed to be ideals of strength and courage. He grows to a mature understanding of these notions and experiences truly the states of being fearless. His escape from Sachsenhausen gives this feel: “he was not afraid ... he had no fear left.” (Y 185) The war experiences bring about a change in his attitudes towards survival and courage and also within himself as a human whom the horrors of the Holocaust have numbed but at the same time made stronger than what he was before.

The realistic touch given to Yolen's hero serves as a comment on and a critique of the fairy tale concept of the ideal hero, a figure perfect in every possible way, in all matters of life and at all times. Yolen's characters in this novel including the 'prince' are imperfect human beings, ordinary people with ordinary wishes and desires in life. Josef, the hero, who resuscitates Gemma to life by actually breathing into her mouth and helps to rescue her, is a homosexual who would never marry the princess whom he saves. He comes to a better realisation and understanding of the heroic and heroism and is a more enriched human being at the end of his experience of suffering and trauma. He is an ordinary fellow trying to survive against certain death and in the event saves and rescues Gemma. As a homosexual and as a mere layman struggling for survival, he is far from the ideal stereotypical hero prince of any fairy tale.

When Becca tells him he is indeed a hero though he has been modestly denying it, he says to her, “Your own American writer Emerson said: ‘The hero is not fed on sweets but daily his own heart he eats.’ If that is a definition you can accept, then I will tell you I have dined long and hard on my own heart. And it is bitter.” (Y 230) Such portrayal of the hero seems to serve an important purpose of debunking the fairy tale concept of the hero and defining heroism anew while bringing forth the factual detail about the Holocaust that apart from the Jews many other marginalised sections like the homosexuals, gypsies, and mentally and physically challenged too were victims of the Nazi terror.

Yolen thus achieves multiple aims by depicting the Holocaust through a fairy tale. Besides such portrayal of the holocaust as would evoke empathy, she also undertakes a successful attempt at breaking and critiquing the fairy tale stereotypes of the hero, the heroic, heroism, the princess, her beauty and passivity. The princess of the Yolen story is as active and determined in her escape as the unusual prince of the tale. The values of loyalty, faith, love and commitment figure in the depiction of relations between the characters. These values are fragmented in this rewrite. The characters are thus appealing to the readers and therefore they empathise with the Holocaust victims’ sufferings as well.

The two stories – the fairy tale and Gemma’s tale – run parallel to each other. The courage and strength presented in them is the strength of the human spirit trying to overcome difficulties and at the same time making the strugglers humbler.

Cinderella:

“... [T]he Cinderella type heroine was changed during the course of four millennia – approximately 7000 B.C. to 3000 B. C. – from a young active woman who is expected to pursue her own destiny under the guidance of a wise, gift-bearing dead mother; into a helpless, inactive, pubescent girl, whose major accomplishments are domestic, and who must obediently wait to be rescued by a male.”²³

- Anne Sexton’s ‘Cinderella’ (T 53-57)

Anne Sexton places ‘Cinderella’ at the centre of her verse fairy tale re-visions. The prologue to her retold ‘Cinderella’ lists casually the similar stories of luck as of

Cinderella's – from rags to riches – a much hackneyed theme in fairy tales, literature and other entertaining media particularly, films. The refrain "That story" is repeated in the prologue and is used even at the end of the story. The stories listed in the prologue are the stories reflecting the so called 'American Dream', which seem mere accidental strokes of good fortune. All these stories are cumulatively summed up in the expression "That story." They are described in terms of modern, cultural symbols viz. "From toilets to riches," "From diapers to Dior," "From homogenised to martinis at lunch," "From mops to Bonwit teller. / That story." (T 53-54) The familiarity with the story leaves little for the witch speaker to convey. She assumes our knowledge of the tale and our ability to predict as reflected in the lines such as "Next came the ball, as you all know," "That's the way with stepmothers," "so she went, which is no surprise," "These events repeated themselves for three days," "That's the story with amputation," "Cinderella and the prince lived, they say, happily ever after." etc. (T 53-57)

The transformed 'Cinderella' observes a predictable pattern. It does not give the relevant details on account of the readers' foreknowledge of the classical tale. However, a number of authorial comments are sprinkled throughout the transformed tale.

The Grimm tale emphatically presents Cinderella as good and devout as per her dying mother's wishes. It also explains why Cinderella is called by this name and describes Cinderella's ill treatment by her step mother and step sisters. In the transformed tale the details about Cinderella's hard work and harassment are described in one brief line: "Cinderella was their maid" followed by the reference to her father's indifference to her. Sexton's story shows the father bringing the twig for Cinderella on his own and precious gifts for the other two daughters:

Her father brought presents home from town,
jewels and gowns for the other two women
but the twig of tree for Cinderella. (T 54)

The transformed tale describes the utility of the tree the twig has grown into and the dove which sits in it:

Whenever she wished for anything, the dove
would drop it like an egg upon the ground.

The bird is important, my dears, so heed him. (T 54)

The ironic tone in the lines presents the narrator as a mocking modern reader who would not believe in such a fantasy. It is through the tone that she displays her unwillingness to suspend disbelief. The witch narrator describes the king's proclamation of a three day festival when his son would choose a bride for himself in a "marriage market" where all marketable, beautiful objects – the beautiful girls of the kingdom – would willingly display themselves for sale. As mentioned earlier the goal of happy marriage as the only good and secure future for girls is so deeply ingrained and rooted in the female minds through socialisation and social expectations that women on their own unquestioningly offer themselves to be objectified.

Sexton deletes the Grimm details of how Cinderella's step mother asks her to collect the lentils she has thrown in the cinders and refuses to take her despite the fact that Cinderella accomplishes her task twice with the help of the doves, "all the little birds under heaven." (Grimm 65) She simply sums it up in one verse line: "That's the way with step mothers." (T 55) implying thereby all the connotations that the step mother stereotype carries with it. Sexton describes the crying Cinderella as crying "like a gospel singer" (T 55) and sarcastically comments upon the bird's act of dropping down a golden dress and delicate little gold slippers:

The bird dropped down a golden dress

and delicate little golden slippers.

Rather a large package for a simple bird.

So she went. Which is no surprise. (T 55)

The personal aside comments on Cinderella's feminine desire to be in the 'market' and be displayed to be chosen by the prince: She "begged to go too." She follows the accepted well trodden path. Hence "no surprise." Sexton describes the intentions of the prince in these lines:

He would find whom the shoe fits

And find his strange dancing girl for keeps. (T 56)

Perhaps he fears the competition for gaining hold of the commodity he desires. The verse tale unlike the Grimm shows the eldest girl cutting off her toes to fit into the slipper on her own. It doesn't show the mother asking her to do so. Despite the prince's openly businesslike attitude towards marriage, the sisters compete to win him and his favour that could earn them a privileged and a respectable place in a male dominated society. Sexton satirises and mocks their attempts to fit into the slipper:

The eldest went into a room to try the slipper on

But her big toe got in the way so she simply

sliced it off and put it on the slipper.

The prince rode away with her until the white dove

told him to look at the blood pouring forth.

That is the way with amputations.

They don't just heal up like a wish. (T 56)

The other sister "cut off her heel/ but the blood told as the blood will." (T 56) Sexton mockingly emphasises how women caught in the trap of patriarchal values and unaware of their victimisation and objectification unquestioningly and in an extremely docile manner go to the extent of sacrificing and physically torturing themselves to meet the demands of the male gaze and standards in return for which they get compensated with a so called happy marriage. It is this patriarchal snare, which puts women in "horizontal hostility"²⁴ toward one another as displayed in the rivalry between the step sisters to earn a place of respect and privilege in a male dominated society. Masculine culture instructs women to be rivals – rivals in becoming more acceptable in a male society. The aesthetic demands of the male gaze reside within themselves and they willingly 'normalise' themselves as per male orientation. In the process they victimise themselves and are unaware of it. In their attempt to win a privileged position in a male dominated social structure they do not realise the extent to which their lives are shaped by external oppressive forces in the system.

This is precisely what Sexton seems to convey when she so emphatically presents the ways the sisters try to fit into the slipper by hurting themselves brutally.

The mockery continues in the description of the prince tired of trying the slipper on girls:

The prince was getting tired.

He began to feel like a shoe salesman.

But he gave it one last try.

This time Cinderella fit into the shoe

like a love letter into its envelope. (T 56)

The verse tale repeatedly critiques through mockery the naïve fantasy of the fairy tales particularly the dove's deeds in this story:

At the wedding ceremony

the two sisters came to curry favour

and the white dove pecked their eyes out.

Two hollow spots were left

like soup spoons. (T 56)

The falsity and unreality of the "happy ever after" end is suggested and criticised through the mockery. As Bernard Hall calls it, such ending is "an illusion."²⁵ Leventen in "Transformations's Silencings" maintains that parting shot of this story – "Regular Bobbsey Twins/That story" – serves as an instance of Sexton's understanding of "the aridity of once-upon-a-time's happily-ever after resolution."²⁶ Sexton does present the happily ever after as but an illusion causing the fall of both Cinderella and her prince into a bondage and prison of a stereotype of an ideal couple imprisoned in a museum case like "Regular Bobbsey Twins" suggesting entrapment, objectification and passivity. Cinderella and the prince are objectified into mere dolls implying perhaps that sudden riches or sudden transformation from rags to riches does not make real the romantic fantasies in fairy tales with delusive promise of happiness.

Cinderella is the prince's "dancing girl." They dance the dance of passion which ultimately causes the fall of both into "a kind of coffin." Her desire for passion is fulfilled by the dove. Bruno Bettelheim points out that the white dove stands for "the Holy Ghost" in religious symbolism.²⁷ The Grimm tale may have used this implication. However, the transformed tale seems to imply the sensual more than the religious i.e. the dove in this tale is portrayed as an agent in helping Cinderella achieve her sensual goals in the "marriage market." The bird sits on the twig planted on her mother's grave. She calls it a turtle dove. Her desire to go to the ball where she lures the prince and disappears into a "pigeon house" when he follows her is very much a passionate desire intending to attract and entice the man. The turtledove becomes the means of fulfilment of this desire. The animal symbolises here the sensual.

The story of Cinderella as said at the beginning is placed at the centre of the collection, the *Transformations* suggesting perhaps the central concern of the poet in rewriting the tales – the concern with patriarchal codes for marriage, its drudgery and boredom, and the objectification of women. This story goes a little further in stressing the concern with objectification. In that, she presents the commoditisation of men too in patriarchy:

Cinderella and the prince

lived, they say, happily ever after,

like two dolls in a museum case

never bothered by diapers or dust,

never arguing over the timing of an egg,

never telling the same story twice,

never getting the middle-aged spread,

their darling smiles pasted on for eternity.

Regular Bobbsey Twins.

That story. (T 56-57)

Sexton subtly ridicules the ludicrous elements in 'Cinderella.' This last stanza presents Cinderella and her prince's ever-after existence in a museum case far from experiencing domestic tribulations or even death. However, this too furthers the stereotypical gender roles in patriarchy. They, the people uphold, preserve, are caught up in and content with the patriarchal way of thinking about the sexual stereotypes. The traditional viewpoint is so deeply ingrained in them – both men and women – that it becomes unthinkable for them to discard not just these patriarchal gender stereotypes but even the belief in them. They perpetually believe that a woman marrying a rich and charming man and a man marrying a beautiful woman have a happy and fulfilling life till the end. Sexton questions the perpetuation of stereotyped romance in the last stanza. Frozen in time and space like “two dolls in a museum case” both Cinderella as well as the prince maintain the gender stereotypes but in the process become objectified and dehumanised. Their human existence and qualities are stagnated and further stressed in their description as “Regular Bobbsey Twins.” These are the main characters in a series of children's novels written during 1904-1979 by many writers under one pseudonym Laura Hope. These characters are repeatedly shown to live happily in about 72 volumes. Reference to them suggests Cinderella and her prince's happy ever after life as phony, artificial and lacking in individuality and life. It is a lifeless inanimate existence. The so called success story – That story – upholding the male centred perspective and the tenets of patriarchy tricks, captivates, immobilises and dehumanises people of both the sexes. Sexton attempts successfully to suggest through the doll figures with “their darling smiles pasted on for eternity” that patriarchy which openly victimises women is as much threatening for men too. The male centred culture captures and holds in its thrall both women and men draining them of their individuality, and stagnating them to the extent of they being commoditised and immobile. In showing the prince too getting tricked into the dehumanising trap the witch poet successfully suggests the captivating and suffocating impact of the patriarchal snare on men as well. Men captured in systemic thrall too are forced to remain as silent and “powerless victims frozen in – and fated to act out – the prescribed social roles” (Leventen, 140) as women victimised by the patriarchal culture. Unless this is realised and pondered upon “That story” continues to seduce both men and women, captivate them and render them immobile and lifeless in life. Being at the centre of the collection the tale reinforces and strengthens Sexton's concerns and claims she wants to convey through her retellings.

However, though critically censured, the stereotyped gender roles are not drastically revised in the retold tale by Sexton. An insight into the effects of patriarchal snare is offered but no alternative is suggested. Perhaps the witch narrator does not intend to do it. However, taking her cue from Sexton, Olga Broumas rewrites 'Cinderella' with yet another distinct perspective attempting to provide an alternative to the heteronormal happy endings of the tales. By opening her rewrite with a quote from Sexton as an epigraph, Broumas connects her retelling with Sexton's to suggest further strengthening of the liberation of the tales from the patriarchal thrall:

...the joy that isn't shared

I heard, dies young.

-Anne Sexton, 1928-1974.

- Olga Broumas's 'Cinderella'²⁸

Broumas in her 'Cinderella' speaks for 'sisterhood,' for solidarity amongst women who are separated from one another by the patriarchal/male order making them judge their own kind as "inadequate, bitchy, incompetent, jealous, too thin, too fat." (B 58) Broumas attacks the patriarchal strategies, which use women to victimise other women and create such constructs as 'women are their own enemies.' The step mother and step sister figures portrayed in 'Cinderella' and for that matter in most fairy tales and literary works, are wicked, jealous, inconsiderate and not beautiful as per the male standards. Cinderella's marriage with the prince is always presented as her release from the prison, ill treatment and abuse at the hands of women. Broumas's Cinderella however, is emotionally hurt on account of her bondage with the sisters being snapped and feels being estranged from her mother. She has a close sense of belonging to her mother and sisters and hence after her marriage with the prince she finds herself all alone amongst men in their house:

Apart from my sisters, estranged

from my mother, I am a woman alone

in a house of men

who secretly

call themselves princes, alone

with me usually, under cover of dark. (B 57)

Broumas right at the outset defies the patriarchal construct of “horizontal hostility” between women before demystifying the prince fantasy. Marriage with the prince is disillusioning and unhappy for her. Broumas through Cinderella’s disillusionment demystifies and subverts the prince fantasy and the happily ever after that follows the arrival of and union with the dream lover. Stereotypically portrayed in fairy tales this fantasy of the prince rescuer is shockingly challenged and attacked in Broumas’s version. Her tale begins at the end i.e. after Cinderella’s marriage with the prince. She becomes aware of the feelings of separation, estrangement and loneliness even though surrounded by men. In “the house of men” she feels the absence of feminine bonding. There she is in “a state of [domestic] siege” (B 57) like the classical Cinderella. There is also a similar longing to escape this miserable condition. However, unlike the latter this Cinderella does not seek her escape in marriage with a prince. In fact, on the contrary, she has come to experience the drudgery of what is perceived as ideal, rewarding and fulfilling for a girl. It is in this state of disillusionment that Broumas’s Cinderella is filled with a sense of loneliness, isolation and entrapment. She is “the one allowed in/ to the royal chambers” (B 57), yet she is lonely, apart from her sisters and mother. Entrapped and alone in the company of princes in the royal chambers she feels “as one piece of laundry, strung on a windy clothesline a/ mile long.” (B 58) This hyperbolic auditory image indicates her extreme and unbearable solitude and objectification. This feeling seems an outcome of the fact that her intelligence and efficiency in “cracking/ the royal code” (B 57) goes unacknowledged by the men round her. The princes praise her instead for her “nimble tongue” (B 57) – the expression that deliberately hides sexual connotations behind its literal implications of eloquence. She thus is a mere sexual object. Her disillusionment with the happily ever after marriage is sharpened when she says,

What sweet bread I make

for myself in this prosperous house

is dirty, what good soup I boil turns

in my mouth to mud. (B 58)

Despite the prosperity and comfort in her life with the princes in the royal chambers she feels dislocated. She has no sense of belonging to the household and its male inhabitants. There is a realisation that she has been lured into the “house of men” (B 57) by being pitted against her “own kind,” by being “co opted by promises: the lure/ of a job, the ruse of a choice,” (B 58) by being “forced/to bear witness, falsely/ against my kind.” She realises the patriarchal deception of women by allowing some of their kind “whose small [feet] conveniently/ fill[s] the slipper of glass” (B 57) to enjoy the seemingly happy and cosy royal pleasures and in the process keep them in a constant state of competition and rivalry judging one another as “inadequate, bitchy, incompetent,/ jealous, too thin, too fat.” (B 58)

Any dominant system for its own flowering and sustenance needs its victims, the ‘others,’ to remain under siege, divided and competing amongst themselves. The dominant system accuses the victims of victimising themselves and their kind by creating hierarchies among them and making them judge one another thus placing them in a state of battle. Broumas here presents Cinderella as a representative of the entire womankind isolated by choosing her conveniently to fill “the slipper of glass” and used by the male dominated society as a tool against her “own kind.” Her allurement into the trap is attained by the princes speaking in “their father’s language” (B 57) and promising her rewards for her “nimble tongue.” Once entrapped, she realises her deception in being praised, apparently for her linguistic dexterity, but implicitly focusing on her sexual competence. She is reduced to a mere sex object. She also realises that the recognition and identity that she gets in this social set up is always in terms of her relation with a man:

The woman writer, the lady

umpire, the madam chairman, anyone’s wife. (B 57)

A lonely woman in the battle, she desires to re-unite with her sisters, to be with them again. She prefers a life of hardships and her sisters’ hut to the comforts and the princes’ royal chambers. She wishes to rid herself of the superficial and suffocating existence in the men’s world:

...Give

me my ashes. A cold stove, a cinder-block pillow, wet

canvas shoes in my sisters', my sisters' hut. (B 58)

She demands an escape lest she dies young

like those favoured before me, hand-picked each one

for her joyful heart. (B 58)

Writing in the 1970s Broumas's retelling has a backdrop of the rising feminist movement. Using the basic elements of the classical version of 'Cinderella' Broumas challenges the cultural values and ideology of patriarchy, demystifies the happy ending and questions the dream of fulfilment necessarily in heterosexual coupling alone. Going against the accepted heteronormal code, she shows her heroine's disillusionment with and suffocation and suppression in patriarchal heteronormal set up and stresses the importance of women's solidarity. She desires a change – a change in attitudes both of men and women. She doesn't want women to be "hand-picked" for their "joyful heart[s]" and be used against their own kind to be victims and be victimised at their own hands. The story has a rich symbolic significance. Cinderella symbolises and represents all women, her sisters the female community. The princes symbolise all men dominating women's personal, social and professional walks of life, determining and directing women's success and fulfilment. The royal chambers symbolise the male dominating spheres of society or for that matter the entire society while the glass slipper symbolises the male or patriarchal preferences. As long as she fits the male centred standards a woman is allowed to enter the royal chambers i.e. acquire a social status and identity only in her relation to any man. Broumas uses the Cinderella metaphor and tale to critique the patriarchal practice of defusing female solidarity by under-representing or not representing women as society and as individuals. Society refuses to acknowledge a woman's autonomous, individual identity and sees her fulfilment in being bound domestically as "anyone's wife" and a mother. Worse still is the fact that solidarity amongst women is sabotaged by pitting them against one another breaking all the female bonds. Women are confined and are expected to confine themselves necessarily to the domestic sphere. Hence professionally successful women are perceived as exception to the norm. Hence the nouns identifying any profession need gender specifying modifiers in case a woman in a particular profession is to be mentioned. As such women are usually "anyone's wife" or the "woman writer, the lady umpire, the madam chairman" and so on.

Broumas attacks this discriminating value system and as an alternative offers a community of women solidly resting on the feeling and bond of sisterhood. In the process she subverts and demystifies the heterosexual ideal projected in the happily ever after end in fairy tales. Bruno Bettelheim perceives the happily ever after ending as an important factor in children's socialisation. However other scholars of fairy tale impact on children also see an implicit message to children through such endings and that is that heterosexual is normal, natural and fulfilling. Any other type of union is abnormal or a-normal, unnatural, strange and 'queer.' Heteronormality is a patriarchal social ideal. Through fairy tales children are encouraged to believe, follow and pattern themselves necessarily after "the omnipresent and omnipotent heterosexual script" for their 'good' future.²⁹ Happy and good future assured through heterosexual coupling attach morality to sexual identity. "Heterosexuality is good and right." (Lester 61) Lester tries to prove that a child not fitting and aligning with the heterosexual ideal of the fairy tale is negatively affected as the tale infuses him/her with a sense of guilt of being morally wrong. With heterosexual marriages at the end, the tales condition children's idea of happy future – getting married and producing children. This heterosexual norm which excludes those who do not conform with it is critically defied by Broumas's Cinderella who prefers impoverished sisterhood (cold stove, cinder-block pillow, sister's hut) to being surrounded by princes speaking "their father's language," keeping her under siege in their royal chambers. Based on the knowledge she has gained from experience – "I know what I know" (B 57) - she confidently asserts this preference and expresses her desire to rejoin her sisters.

Broumas thus uses the fairy tale to profess her feminist agenda through her revision of the tale. As said earlier Broumas provides an alternative to the heteronormal model of relationship wherein both men and women as well as those who do not conform to the heteronormal codes are oppressed. Critiquing the heteronormality implied in the 'happily ever after' fairy tale endings and defying the reinforcement of the social belief that such endings hint at, Broumas offers an alternate ending in the form of female solidarity and sisterhood – an alternative wherein the future of human beings is not scripted or better still they are allowed to live life on their own terms without getting cowed down by the oppressive social norms.

- Emma Donoghue's 'The Tale of the Shoe'³⁰

Like other tales in her collection, Donoghue in this remaking takes the deeply familiar tale of Cinderella and unspins it to weave its older version together and tell it anew with an unexpected twist. The common feature of the thirteen transformed tales is that they read between the lines of the older known fairy tales and strongly react to the male dominated fairy tale canon. 'The Tale of the Shoe' initiates the polyphonic volume in which anonymous female narrators of different ages, circumstances and sexual orientation share and pass on their own tales sequentially, each one starting at the point where the preceding narrator stops. Each narrator is speaker to the following and a listener to the earlier narrator. Each one has a voice and is heard. Each one confides in her listener while responding to the story heard earlier. Thus one woman's story generates and promotes and prompts another's creating a strong bond between women tellers and listeners.

Donoghue's interest in women's relationships and her intent to recast these relations in a positive manner and explore further possibilities are reflected in her subtle retelling of 'Cinderella,' 'The Tale of the Shoe.' The shoe motif, the story line, innovative ideas, quotations from and allusions to various retellings of 'Cinderella' in the narrative and the unexpected twist at the end function as hints that help the reader identify the tale as a remaking of the old 'Cinderella' tale. It is the first anonymous female narrator's personal life story. This narrator knows the 'Cinderella' tale and presents her own tale in the pattern of the 'Cinderella' plot line. As a girl her inner and internalised voices tell her the ways of behaviour and thinking but a woman who has the looks of a witch and a heart of a good mother and who turns out to be her foster, god mother and later a lover patiently and lovingly prompts her to seek her own desires and fulfil them. It is then that the girl gains courage and changes the course of her life and of the old tale of 'Cinderella.' She attains a sense of independent identity of her own self and defying her internalised voices uncovers and reaches her own free, independent voice that with allusions to various retellings of Cinderella attempts to emancipate her from the pre written texts and at the same time plays with the idea of rewriting as dress making. Donoghue's Cinderella grows from self-loathing to self-confidence. Her female saviour offers her love and independence. The former, unlike the traditional male hero, does not have the high handed attitude of a saviour and a 'giver' but creates confidence in the girl that she herself sought her

own freedom and hence she should take her life in her own control: “You think I have saved you, but the truth is that your need has conjured me here.... The thing is to take your life in your hands.” (D 11)

‘The Tale of the Shoe’ begins with the sentence: “Till she came it was all cold.” (D 1) stressing the warmth brought in by the arrival of the woman who helped her confront the misery and coldness she feels in life. However, at the time of narrating her experience this Cinderella has come to awareness that her punishments were inflicted upon her by herself: “...nobody punished me but me. The shrill voices were all inside. Do this, do that, you lazy heap of dirt.” (D 3) The step mother and step sisters of the Grimm tale are present within her as patriarchal voices instructing her about her socially accepted behaviour. She has internalised these voices that keep insulting her. She feels rejected, alienated and utterly isolated. As a result she loathes herself so much so that not just her clothes but even her speech she feels is loathsome and repulsive: “Every word that came out of my mouth limped away like a toad. Whatever I put on my back now turned to sackcloth and chafed my skin.” (D 1) Realisation of these psychological and emotional conditions is an aftermath of the loss of her mother. Her perception about herself and her internalised voices come to the surface in the permanent absence of her mother and her love. There is neither stepmother nor any stepsister. However out of her sense of self-loathing she imposes upon herself the chores and trials which in the traditional tale are inflicted by the stepmother. In removing completely the characters of the cruel women of the Grimm tale, Donoghue explicitly suggests that women conditioned in and by patriarchy do not need rival women to victimise them but are themselves their own enemies. So is her Cinderella responsible for her own abjection. And to rescue her from her self-created problems and self-inflicted tribulations, Donoghue creates another female character whose arrival brings warmth, self-realisation and a longing for a meaningful life for Cinderella: “She took me into the garden and showed me a hazel tree I had never seen before.... My old dusty self was spun new.”(D 3) The helper figure profoundly transforms Cinderella inside out. Cinderella re-fashions herself and Donoghue, the classical text. Since the sentence echoes and underlines the subtitle of Donoghue's collection- “old tales in new skins,” its utterance in the initial story sparks the beginning of the process of newly re-dressing both the fairy tale heroine and the fairy tale tradition and text. The metaphor of spinning a new self and identity continues in

the immediate reference to Cinderella's new dress: "This woman sheathed my limbs in blue velvets. I was dancing on the points of a clear glass." (D 3) Happiness at the idea of transformation and re-dressing is conveyed using the glass shoe metaphor. The helper woman lets the narrator Cinderella to come to her own realisation and does not preach or instruct her. She makes her sense, on her own, the vanity of her internalised voices. Hence it is on Cinderella's asking that she takes her to the ball. Narrator Cinderella's self-conscious question "Isn't that what girls are meant to ask for?" (3) and later her knowledge and observance of the socially accepted behaviour and etiquettes reflect Donoghue's condescension and social comedy of the expected gender roles and relations as well as the narrator's awareness that she is playing a role in a well known story: "I knew just how I was meant to behave. I smiled ever so prettily... I refused canapé and kept my belly pulled in.... I danced with ten elderly gentlemen who had nothing to say but did not let that stop them. I answered only, Indeed and Oh yes and Do you think so?" (D 4) On the second night she "tittered at the king's jokes; ... accepted a single chicken wing and nibbled it daintily... danced three times with the prince, whose hand wavered in the small of (my) back. He asked (me my) favourite colour, but (I) couldn't think of any. He asked (me my) name, and for a moment (I) couldn't remember it." (D 5) She describes the third night as follows: "That night my new skin was red silk, shivering in the breeze. The prince hovered at my elbow like an autumn leaf ready to fall.... I danced... and smiled till my face twisted. I swallowed a little of everything I was offered, then leaned over the balcony and threw it all up again." (D 6)

It is the shrieking voices within her which keep prompting her to seek her future in the balls and hence she asks the helper motherly figure to take her there. On the first two nights the gentle helper repeatedly asks her "Had enough?" (D 4, 5) to which the narrator, her "barking voices" (D 5) prompting her within, responded with the desire to go back to the ball the next day. On the third night, however, when the prince proposes to her, "As soon as the words began to leak out of his mouth, they formed a cloud" (D 6) in which she saw her future. In the midst of the voices which were shrieking "Yes yes yes say yes before you lose your chance you bag of nothingness" (D 7) she realises that she had "got the story all wrong." (D 7) She does sense and admit the comfort and absence of insecurity in the prince's proposal but a new realisation dawns upon her. Wondering how she could see the beauty of the helper

woman she “reaches out” for her. The older woman surprisingly asks her, “What about the shoe?”(D 7)

“It was digging into my heel, I told her.

What about the prince? she asked.

He’ll find someone to fit, if he looks long enough.

What about me? She asked very low. I’m old enough to be your mother.... You’re not my mother, I said. I’m old enough to know that.” (D 8)

She throws the other shoe into the brambles and both of them go home together. The narrator Cinderella’s growth and self realisation are gradual and progressive. Excited first at the prospect of going to the ball, she prepares nervously for the last one. Her growing discomfort is suggested in the change in the nature of the voices inside her. The voices jabbering at first start barking in the end. It is on the third night that she gathers courage to completely defy social conventions and correct the “all wrong” story. She is fed up to the extent of being nauseated. The same musical tune being played “over and over,” her dance like a “clockwise ballerina,” the forced smile twisting her face, all suggest her physical discomfort and nervous tension which culminates into the act of vomiting everything that she “was offered.” It is symbolic of her disgust with and rejection of the social conventions, good behaviour, polite manners, courtship and romance – everything that the ball stands for. By the third ball she has developed the ability to objectively assess the situation from a distance and give a courageous response. The conventional voices urge her to accept the proposal so that she a “bag of nothingness” could become “somebody” thus suggesting that it is only through conformity can a woman achieve an acceptable status in society. It is important here to know that never ever once in the story is the narrator protagonist named or called Cinderella. She is anonymous and describes herself depreciatingly as “sackcloth,” “heap of dirt” and on her self- realisation, too retains and reclaims this anonymous status in a bolder way. The prince’s proposal, the heterosexual norm and the “voices” of convention are mutely refused in her failure to speak when the prince proposes and physically denied in her act of vomiting. She runs away to free herself from the prince and the patriarchal and heterosexual imperatives that he represents. She runs away to reach out to the motherly stranger who gradually makes her realise

her own independent self and replace her self-loathing, self-deprecatory image with a self-asserting and self-respecting one.

The sense of self-esteem that the anonymous narrator gains in the company of the older woman figure is significant. The heterosexual relationship is completely devoid such a sense. Secondly this relation is of dominance and domination which is absent in the relationship of the two women. Their relationship acknowledges and respects equality, freedom and the growth of the both involved in the relation. This sense of liberation attracts the anonymous narrator-protagonist. In her act of transgressing her desire for her female helper she not only rebels against the accepted social behaviour and norms but also radically deviates from the traditional plot of the old tale and offers an alternative to its stifling, oppressive end. The new story breaks the powerful spell of “the constraining discourse of social advancement and compulsory heterosexuality.”³¹

The speechlessness of the two women on their reunion is perhaps because of the inadequacy of the existing language and the want of a language which could articulate their love story. To her amazement the girl narrator protagonist realises that the story she confronts now had always been there, she had got it wrong. She fends for words but finds that she “must have dropped all [the] words in the bushes.” (8) Her dumbfoundment substitutes words with touch and “I reached out,” she says. The old body of the tale and of the female protagonist-narrator are literally given new skins as the subtitle of the collection intends to do. Her act of throwing the shoe “into the brambles” symbolises the refusal of the conventionally prescribed role of a fairy tale heroine and those readers who identify with her. She approaches her happy end – so much insisted in the fairy tale endings – in seeking and attaining self-fulfilment and happiness.

Donoghue manipulates the emancipator potential and the subversive dimension of the classical tale and the pre existing mockery of aristocracy imbued in Perrault and Grimm versions. She manipulates fairy tale magic and metamorphosis to challenge social identities, gender roles, and binary oppositions. She favours love, friendship, sisterhood and solidarity among women while at the same time stressing the creative role of the readers in the process of creative appropriation of old tales.

- Francisca Lia Block's 'Glass' (2000)³²

Francisca Lia Block in her 'Glass' (2000) presents a version of heterosexual love story wherein the protagonist comes to a self-realisation and self-assertion through a motherly strange woman as in 'The Tale of a Shoe.' 'Glass' is a third person narrative. The young girl protagonist is a home maker and likes to be so. She loves to be at home and perform domestic chores: "And she had tasks. She loved to plant...To arrange flowers...To make the salmon in pomegranate sauce; the salads... the golden vanilla cream custards; the breads and pie crusts that powdered her with flour. She loved, even, to dust the things, to feel them in her hands, imagining their history." (Bl 56-57) It is her stories which bind her with the sisters with affinity. "She had the stories she gave to her sisters which made them love her. Or need her at least." (Bl 56) She is different from them. "They care more for the eyes and ears and the mouths whispering – beautiful, beautiful." (Bl 55) She wonders why it matters at all. "She was free, still, like a child, the way it is before you are seen and after that you can never remember who you are unless someone else shows it to you." (Bl 56) She comes across a strange woman, a fairy "who was not old, not young, who was red roses, white snowfall, who was blind and saw everything, who sent stories resounding through the universe" (Bl 70) This woman who "laughed at her own sorrow and wept pearls at wedding" (Bl 60) teaches her to come out and assert herself: "You cannot hide forever, though you may try... you are the one who transforms, who creates. You can go out into the world and show others. They will feel less alone because of you, they will feel understood, unburdened by you, freed of guilt and shame and sorrow. But to share with them you must wear shoes you must go out you must not hide you must dance..." (Bl 61)

The self-asserting new Cinder girl attracts the attention of the prince which makes her sisters feel jealous of her. When she realises her sisters' jealousy on account of the prince's attraction to her, she commits an act of sacrifice by way of running away, losing her shoe and deprecating herself. Ultimately, however, the pursuing prince finds her "even without her enchantments, her stories, her dress, her shoe." (Bl 68) Witnessing "how he looked at her, how he needed her" (Bl 69) the sisters realise the vanity of their envy and jealousy. The story ends with the strange woman saying, "You must reach inside yourselves where I live like a story, not old, not young,

laughing at my own sorrow, weeping pearls at weddings, wielding a torch to melt sand into something clear and bright.” (BI 70)

On the whole the story transforms the Cinderella tale within the heterosexual patriarchal confines unlike Donoghue’s ‘Tale of the Shoe.’ However in both the retellings the focus is not on passive suffering of a girl but on her self-affirmation and assertion by means of an elderly wise woman whose intervention and guidance lead the young girl to discover her true self.

‘Cinderella’ being perhaps the most famous of the fairy tales has been equally fervently retold by contemporary writers with an either feminist or sceptical bent. Besides the three instances above there have been considerable attempts at retelling ‘Cinderella’ with the attitude to rather “correct” the story

cooked up years and years ago,

And made to sound all soft and sappy

Just to keep the children happy.³³

Revisionists Iring Fetscher, Richard Gardener, Jay Williams, Judith Viorst, Jane Yolen share Roald Dahl’s sentiment of reframing the Cinderella plot to explore and reveal to the readers “the conditions underlying the heroine’s passivity.” (Brothers Grimm 199) The retellings like those of Emma Donoghue reflect and suggest the need to change cultural attitudes to gender roles and step motherly figures. Gail Carson Levine, Priscilla Galloway, Philip Pullman, Francesca Lia Block could be cited as instances of such revolutionary retellings. Their retellings either portray the female protagonist as a young girl who learns to shape her own destiny or despise/ criticise her for not actively controlling her own life. Levine, Pullman and Galloway replace the female Cinderella with a male hero. While Levine’s ‘Cinderellis and the Glass Hill’³⁴ (2000) is humorous and predictable Philip Pullman in his ‘I was a Rat’³⁵ (1999) harmonises the traditional fairy tale features of the Cinderella tale with a contemporary late 20th century context and setting. It is a revision of Perrault’s ‘Cinderella.’

Galloway’s ‘The Prince’³⁶ (1995) provokes the readers to believe that the pathetic prince in the story would bring nothing but troubles and sufferings for Cinderella.

A self-indulging prince with a foot fetish narrates this tale. This prince is highly narcissistic, self-obsessed and self-absorbed. In his first person narrative he reveals his homosexual affair with his tutor Stephen whom his father punishes with a death sentence since he does not approve of the relationship. The king arranges a ball for the prince wherein he would choose a wife for the prince if the latter fails to do it himself. The prince does not desire to marry and takes an oath he would not. Still he dances with the princess wearing glass slippers. The princess's toes remind him of Stephen and his own foot fetish. The glass slipper left behind by Cinderella induces his obsession with finding the girl.

Throughout the story the focus is on the prince's narcissism and his foot fetish. His quest for Cinderella too is self-satisfying and obsessive. Hence it is suggested towards the end that even if Cinderella gets him as her husband she cannot hope to be happy, but on the contrary would invite troubles and sufferings. Galloway thus brings forth the ambivalence of the happy endings of this particular tale and fairy tales in general.

Babette Cole's 'Prince Cinders',³⁷ Ellen Jackson and Kevin O'Malley's 'Cinder Edna',³⁸ and Melissa Kantor's 'If I Have a Wicked Stepmother, Where's My Prince?',³⁹ are re-workings which relocate the Cinderella tale in an easily recognisable context of the 20th century reality. Ann Jungman in her humorous feminist re-vision 'Cinderella and the Hot Air Balloon',⁴⁰ presents Ella who knows and pursues her mind's desires. It is she who actively helps Bill, the prince, who wants to run away from his dominating father. Ella helps him in his endeavour and because she starts liking him flies off with him in a hot air balloon. The humour in the tale serves two purposes of bitingly exposing, criticising the gender biases prevalent in the traditional tale and thereby reverting gender identities but with an acceptable human(e) perspective.

- Roald Dahl's 'Cinderella',⁴¹

Roald Dahl who begins his *Revolting Rhymes* with the Cinderella tale calls the classical tale 'phoney.' The "first bit" of the tale till Cinderella's departure leaving behind her shoe, he says, is "right". The rest of the tale he assures the readers "was cooked up ...just to keep the children happy" (RD 5)

Dahl's Cinderella authoritatively dictates the "Magic Fairy" to get her to the Ball well dressed and decked up in a coach. She is shown to hold the prince

very tight and pressed

herself against his manly chest.

The prince himself was turned to pulp,

All he could do was gasp and gulp. (RD 6)

Thus even the part of the traditional tale that he calls "right" is reformed by showing Cinderella quite assertively expressing her desire to attend the ball with the intention to impress and entice the prince and make him fall for her. At midnight when she hastily rushes away from the prince he grabs her dress "to hold her back."

As Cindy shouted, 'Let me go!'

The dress was ripped from her head to toe.

She ran out in her underwear,

And lost one slipper on the stair. (RD 8)

Then the prince makes the famous announcement of marrying the girl who fits the shoe. From here on Dahl's story changes. He calls his version real, "much more gory." (RD 5) The prince puts the slipper "rather carelessly" (RD 8) on a crate of beer. One of the Ugly Sisters, "the one whose face was blotched with blisters" (RD 8) flushes the dainty shoe quickly down the loo and replaces it with her own slipper smelling "a wee bit icky." (RD 9) After trying it vainly on "thousands of eager people" (RD 9) the Ugly Sister's "hot and sticky" foot fits the slipper:

...The Prince screamed, 'No!'

...went white from ear to ear. (RD 9)

The girl persists: 'Oh no you don't! you made a vow!

There's no way you can back out now!' (RD 10-11)

The prince orders her head to be chopped off. The prince's pervert and cruel nature is revealed when he is shown to be pleased with the act of extermination:

This pleased the Prince. He smiled and said,

'She's prettier without her head.' (RD 11)

The second Ugly sister too is beheaded at once. Cinderella working in the kitchen comes out hearing the "thuds/of bouncing heads upon the floor" (RD 11) She is startled and troubled at the Prince's cruelty and insensitivity:

Poor Cindy's heart was torn to shreds.

My Prince! She thought. He chops off *heads!* (RD 11)

What follows depicts a girl wise enough to change her decision and practical enough to change her criteria while choosing her man:

How could I marry anyone

Who does that sort of a thing for fun? (RD 12)

The Magic Fairy who intervenes before the prince victimises Cinderella asks her to make a wish which she promises to fulfil. Cinderella wishes for "a decent man...hard to find" (12) She desires "No more Princes, no more money." (12) Her wish is fulfilled and immediately she is married to a simple and lovely 'feller', a jam-maker "who sold good home-made marmalade." (RD 12)

Hers is a successful happy marriage:

Their house was filled with smiles and laughter

And they were happy ever after. (RD 12)

Giving an original comic twist to the classic tale and calling this tale real, Dahl surprises and shocks the readers, who passively relish and pass on the traditional tale with all its hidden biases and values. Dahl breaks the readers' complacent acceptance of the classic tale and hilariously presents the revolting tale "with bite." (Cover page 2 of the book)

Judith Viorst's tale too has this biting and revolting quality with which it shakes the accepted reception of the tale. The title of her Cinderella tale is of almost half the length of its content. In fact it could be read along with and as part of the tale that follows. The title '...And Then the Prince Knelt Down And Tried to Put The Glass Slipper On Cinderella's Foot'⁴² assumes the readers' foreknowledge of the incidents in the tale and at the same time discounts the importance of the happenings till the prince reaches Cinderella. The focus of the story is on Cinderella's decision and the surprising and amusing twist. The four verse lines that the retold tale constitutes are eloquent and depict a sensible, wise and assertive Cinderella who has made up her mind to deny the prince on the pretence that the glass slipper does not fit her. Though she takes this decision on account of his physical looks, which she does not notice earlier, the fact and point that she has the courage to decline the prince with all the social and economic benefits that accompany him and follow her mind's voice puts before us a thinking Cinderella who has her say anyway:

I really didn't notice that he had a funny nose.

And he certainly looked better all dressed up in fancy clothes.

He's not nearly as attractive as he seemed the other night.

So I think I'll just pretend that the slipper feels too tight. (29)

Dahl's and Viorst's funny feminist renditions employ humour to mock outdated sexist notions in the classical tales, which have still retained their impact on adults who delightfully relate the stories to the young ones. These humorous attempts ironically present the farcical aspect of the sexist attitudes and expectations the traditional tales perpetuate.

Little Red Riding Hood:

Continual retelling of different versions of 'Little Red Riding Hood' in the western world is seen by Jack Zipes as a consequent offshoot of the issues raised in the classic tale about "gender identity, sexuality, violence, and the civilizing process in a unique and succinct symbolic form that children and adults can understand on different levels."⁴³ These issues, according to him, play a vital role in establishing "principles of social justice and gender equality that have not been satisfactorily practised in

Western societies.” (TT 343) and hence we get repeated attempts at addressing these issues in variant retellings of the tale.

This tale orally emanated in the 17th century Europe, particularly France, Tyrol and Northern Italy, where women told tales of sexual and social initiation while sewing. These tales led to the rise of warning tales explicitly intended at children. Zipes cites Marianne Rumpf’s research on the social emergence of the tale. Rumpf points out instances of werewolf trials during 15th, 16th and 17th century France and traces the origin of the ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ tale in the regions where these trials were practised and the fear of werewolves was widespread. She maintains that it was Perrault who replaced the werewolf villain of the original French tale to a simple ferocious wolf (TT 19) since werewolves were no longer significant and relevant after the practice of witch hunting had stopped or declined. Perrault also expurgated a number of violent elements in the oral tale, namely for instance, the werewolf killing the grandmother and keeping a slice of her flesh and blood for the girl to eat, the girl consuming her nanny’s flesh and blood and later strip teasing herself and asking the wolf where to keep each of the garments she removes and so on. Perrault “refined” and “civilised” the tale for the upper class audience who upheld values, standards and a worldview different from those of the poor. Zipes also cites Gottfried Hensses who while exploring the oral tales of warning in Europe and Asia which might have influenced Perrault, points out that in the oral versions of the tale the motif of red hood and red colour was absent and the girl was not killed by the wolf or saved by her father or the hunter but she herself “outwits the wolf and saves herself” (TT 23) The act of the girl consuming her grandmother’s flesh and blood in the oral tale has been interpreted as a symbolic act of self assertion by replacing the grandmother. Literary versions of the tale simply reduce the grandmother to a sex object. This reduction is not intended at in the oral tale. On the contrary “her death in the folk tale signifies the continuity and reinvigoration of custom, which was important for the preservation of society.” (TT 24) This aspect along with the ones mentioned earlier suggests that the oral tale of the masses stresses self-assertion and self-dependence or independence of a young girl rather than the normative sexual behaviour and consequences of breaking away from it as focused in the literary tale developed from Perrault onwards.

Against the backdrop of newly emerging awareness of the difference between the terms ‘child’ and ‘adult’ and changes in the process of civilisation, Perrault

completely transformed the character of the little girl from a shrewd, brave and self dependent peasant girl to a completely defenceless, helpless, spoilt pretty girl. The Red hood gifted by the grandmother was a major addition by Perrault, suggesting the spoilt nature of the girl who is held subconsciously responsible for and inviting her own rape by talking and listening to the wolf, amusing herself and lingering in the woods while on her way to the grandmother's house. Writing for both children and adults like the other French fairy tale writers of his time, Perrault sought to set standards of virtuous behaviour and bourgeois aristocratic values to improve the minds of children by depicting model characters and manners in the tales. In keeping with his intent, he infused the tale and character of the girl with a new ideological content. He appropriated the folk tale and motifs therein to suit and teach the upper class child audience and at the same time amuse the adults. Perrault's own male chauvinistic views and opposition to women's independence and assertion also contributed to the shaping of the tale and the character of Little Red Riding Hood. The literary tale thus is "a projection of male phantasy" (TT 31) and the changes in its discourse indicate real shifts, conflicts and ruptures in the Western civilising process." (TT 31)

Changes in the ideas about prudent and prudish child rearing in the 19th century brought about a transformed Little Red Riding Hood in the form of Grimm Brothers' Little Red Cap. The prevalent social ideas of socialisation of children made the Grimms revise the content and intent of the tale. The Christian and male lessons of the Perrault tales were to be retained and at the same time the explicit cruelty, sexuality and tragic end were needed to be expurgated. The Grimms did so and produced a more helpless, naive, beautiful, little Victorian girl who is punished for her disobedience, temptations and indulgence in sexual pleasures of the woods. However, unlike in the Perrault tale, she is saved at the end first by the hunter and then by the old grandmother without whom she would be totally lost. Thus by saving her she is shown at the end of the tale to be grown to a rational child who promises not to "wander" (sexual repression) and obey the normative standards of behaviour set for her by adults. So by the end of the 19th century "a frank oral tale about sexuality and actual dangers in the woods became...a coded message about rationalising bodies and sex." (TT 34) It is assumed that the Grimms infused the tale with a political suggestion while transforming the French Perrault version.

Symbolically Little Red Cap is seen as the German youth attracted by the French revolutionary and once in his grip, repulsed by his violence, harshness and barbarism. The Grimms obliquely present the temptations of and destruction at the cost of Revolution and justify absolute conformity with and reverence for law, order and patriarchal rule. The Grimms' puritanical revisions suited the Victorian middle class values better and hence despite Perrault's popularity the Grimm versions of the tales became more viral and fashionable in the upcoming bourgeois society of the 19th century. General middle class ideas about childhood, maidenhood, child rearing and behaviour are voiced in the Grimm version. Interestingly, a majority of the later adaptations and translations of this tale are based on the Perrault and Grimm versions. Both the model versions and their adaptations present a male idea and image of childhood, maidenhood, sexuality, standards of behaviour and conformity with these. A general middle class acceptance of these 'male' cultural notions and fear of consequences of non-conformity led to an unchallenged, unquestioned reception of the tale for almost three centuries more. Though the Perrault and Grimm versions still exercise their influence over the minds of readers – old and young alike, in the early 20th century the dominant traditional plot was started being revised and radicalised. Most of these were intended for adult readers. However almost till the 50s strict obedience of law and order and conformism were still the implicit messages of the revised tales.⁴⁴ Towards the 1950s however, the tale saw radical, rebellious changes throughout Europe and America.

Zipes points out three major currents in the revisions of the 'Little Red Riding Hood' tale during 1950-1993 viz.: 1) Retellings that projected Little Red Riding Hood growing into an independent girl without any help from men. The girl in these different adaptations is not disobedient, helpless and innocent but on the contrary, quite brave, brilliant and confident. She is able to learn and grow through experience and be independent of male help and support. Merseyside Fairy Story Collective's 'Red Riding Hood' (1974), Tony Ross's 'Little Red Hood: A Classic Story Bent Out of Shape' (1978), Anneliese Meinert's 'Little Red Cap' (1965), etc could be cited as some examples belonging to this current. 2) Tales which tend to "rehabilitate the wolf." (TT 59) These tales present the wolf's perspective and challenge his bad reputation in Perrault and Grimm versions. The wolf is shown in these tales to help the girl or to teach human beings a lesson or to reveal the wolf in us in order to

suggest the extinction of human species in technological progress. He is not presented as a threat in these revisions. Rudolf Otto Weimer's poem 'The Old wolf' (1976), Tomi Ungerer's 'Little Red Riding Hood' (1974), 'Little Aqua Riding Hood' by Philippe Dumas and Boris Moissard (1977) with the moral "certain men are more dangerous than wolves" (TT 63) could be seen as such revisions seeking the wolf's rehabilitation. 3) Revisions which sought to liberate readers to question the traditional cultural patterns presented in the classic tale. These tales completely debunk the traditional narrative and contents of the tale and mock and criticise conventional ideas of socialisation, social behaviour, sexuality, and gender roles. Jean Merrill's 'Red Riding' (1968), Anne Sexton's 'Red Riding Hood' (1971), Angela Carter's 'The Company of Wolves' (1979), Olga Broumas's 'Little Red Riding Hood' (1977) fall into this current.

All these revisions have more or less radically challenged the powerful and enduring influence of the tale which Zipes describes as "a cultural configuration of legalised terror." (TT 74) Some of these stories here are analysed to demonstrate how this challenge is managed by the re-writers of the tale. It is interesting to see however, that despite these radical revisionist currents the ever dominant Perrault and more so Grimm versions of 'Little Red Riding Hood' continue to capture even the 21st century audience. It takes a long time to accept changes and defy the ideas so strongly rooted in the social psyche. As Zipes rightly says: "...it took 200 years of hunting witches and werewolves to give birth to the traditional helpless Red Riding Hood and restrictive notions of sex and nature, then another 200 years to establish the proper bourgeois image of the obedient Red Riding Hood learning her lessons of discipline; it may take another 200 years for us to undo all the lessons Red Riding Hood, and the wolf as well, were forced to learn." (TT 81)

- Anneliese Meinert's 'Little Red Cap 65' (TT 239-240)

'Little Red Cap 65' by Anneliese Meinert depicts a spoilt Little Red Cap "a friendly person" (TT 239) who despite her unwillingness to carry cake and whiskey to her granny zooms through the woods in her sports car without stopping for the wolf who signals "to hitch a ride" (TT 239) and almost running him over. Granny is not happy to see her since she has a bridge party nor does she want cake and whiskey since she

is on a diet. “Get that stuff out of here before I’m tempted,” she says. (TT 239) To Red Cap’s questions Granny gives interestingly funny answers:

“Granny, how come you have such sparkling eyes?”

“So that I can see you better,... Contact lenses. They’re much better than glasses.”

“How come you wear such big ear-rings?”

“So that I can hear better. This is the latest invention. The hearing aids are built into the ear-clips.” (TT 239)

About the unusual mouth she says, “That’s so I can eat you better! No, that’s not it. I’ve got new dentures...” (TT 240)

After this conversation Little Red cap drives off to meet her date – Hans Hunter. He questions her for being late and asks if she didn’t meet anyone on the way to which she answers, “Oh, just old Mr Wolf. He wanted to hitch a ride, and I almost ran him over.” (TT 240) Hans eats the cake and drinks the whiskey on the way through the woods over the highway. Neither he nor Little Red Cap notices the pretty flowers along the roadside and under the trees. In fact, Red Cap had never noticed them even before. “How could she, especially when one is going a 100 miles an hour!” (TT 240)

The revision presents a somewhat rash and careless but liberated independent Red Cap who is her own person and does not bother about the old ‘wolves’ and shares an equal status with her man. The neglect and almost running over of the “old” wolf could be seen to symbolise irreverence of the old conformist ideas, views and values. The light-hearted, casual treatment of the classic tale and the humour in the revision serves the purpose of mocking the excessive importance, and value attached hitherto to the traditional tale and its implicit messages.

- Merseyside Fairy Story Collective’s ‘Red Riding Hood’ (TT 251-255)

Feminists Andrey Ackroyd, Marge Ben-Tovim, Catherine Meredith and Anne Neville present in their revision a Red Riding Hood who grows to overcome her timidity and fear of the dark and of the wolves. Little Nadia who wears her great-grandmother’s thick red cloak with a hood and therefore called Red Riding Hood is

a quiet and shy girl. She loves to visit granny living in a cottage in the forest but is extremely scared to walk through the forest alone. She is frightened by many other things like going to bed alone, dogs, thunder and strangers. As such she is portrayed as a representative of all children who too are unusually scared of these things. Her parents mock her for her fear of the forest and wolves. But her great-grandmother trusts her and tells her that the speaking guy wolves exist. She confides in her that as a strong and agile child she fought and killed the wolf with her hatchet. Now that she is very old and weak she needs others to cook for her and to accompany her. As such Red Riding Hood goes to her everyday either with her parents or with some other children. Her fear of cutting herself on a sharp knife deters her from making a winter jacket in school. While other children in school proudly cut and stitch their own jackets for the bitter winter, Red Riding Hood wishes to wear the worn out red cloak and hood which can hardly protect her from the harsh weather. While the parents are worried great-grandmother promises to make a sheepskin lining for her cloak when she goes to her after school the next day. Now Red Riding Hood would have to go to the granny alone since the parents have other engagements. So though she is happy at the thought of getting a new sheepskin lining done, she is frightened of the prospect of going through the forest all alone. Throughout the next day she is haunted by this fear so much that she does not even eat at the dinnertime. Out of fear though in the morning she prepares to go to great-granny with brown eggs, chocolate, blackberry jam, a special needle and thread and a sharp knife in her basket, she changes her mind against her wishes. As she starts walking back towards her home, however, she hears grey wolves howling and becomes worried about the lonely great-grandmother who is no longer young and agile. She turns around and starts running toward great-granny's cottage when she hears a cold voice asking her to run back home. "This is the night of the wolf." (TT 253) Just before reaching the cottage she sees a streak of grey moving towards it. Tired, with great efforts she drags herself to the cottage. The well known conversation between Red Riding Hood and the wolf in the guise of granny takes place. However while asking her last question about great-granny's big teeth she backs away and as the wolf leaps from the bed to catch her she hears great-grandmother calling her from outside to open the door. The old woman pulls a blazing branch from the stove to frighten the wolf with the flame. The thoughtful Red Riding Hood imagines what would happen once the branch burns out completely. She remembers how other children cut through

the animal skins to make their winter jackets. She pulls out the sharp knife from her basket and heroically just at the right moment kills the wolf. At a very critical moment she emerges absolutely fearless. Her timely rush to the forest and killing of the wolf with a sharp knife brings her face to face with her inner courage, presence of mind and confidence. She grows to self-awareness and an awareness of her own brave spirit. She grows to realise the vanity of her fear of the dark, the wolves, the knives and everything else.

While skinning the wolf and making a lining of his fur the old woman tells Red Riding Hood "...this cloak now has special powers. Whenever you meet another child who is shy and timid, lend that child the cloak to wear as you play together in the forest, and then, like you, they will grow brave." (TT 255) The little girl does so and for many years explores deeper and deeper into the forest.

The revisionist Merseyside writers convert the tale and its message and transform its protagonist into an exemplary model to be followed by other children who should shed the fears of the dark, the unknown and the wolves with all their symbolic connotations in the traditional tale and instead confront them fearlessly. Departing from the traditional tale and its message, the group of re-writers here depict a fearless old woman and little girl who confront the challenges before them independent of any male support and emerge victorious. The message is the need for women and girls to gather courage and fight the oppressive forces intending at threatening and consuming/devouring their very being. Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will* (1976) says, "Fairy Tales are full of a vague dread, a catastrophe that seems to befall only little girls." (TT 350) This retelling in a way suggests a solution to overcome these fears. It completely overlooks and does away with the "male oriented sexual pedagogization" (TT 39) and the loaded warnings for children of the traditional tale in this revision.

Conventional male attitudes reveal that men and patriarchal system in general consider women responsible for their rape. Even if men are the victimisers, imposers and offenders, women are made to appear a willing party to the act of their own rape; they are shown to desire being raped. Moreover it is some man who comes forward to protect the helpless victim. Thus as Brownmiller contends, men establish and assert "the supreme rightness of male power either as offender or protector."

(TT 351) The two retold tales discussed above challenge this codified male ideology in the classic versions and present a girl attaining mature understanding and a fearless spirit for fighting independently without any male help. They demonstrate a confident and intelligent Red Riding Hood who is able to grow and learn through experience, help herself and gain an independent self-identity.

As said earlier some revisions take into account the wolf's perspective and present it to expose the falsity of the classic tale which projects the wolf as a male predator.

- Rudolf Otto Weimer's 'The Old Wolf' (TT 265)

In this very short verse retelling Weimer presents the "now piously old and good" wolf complaining to Red Riding Hood, when they meet again, that 'wild' stories are spread about him and he blames the Brothers Grimm for his bad reputation:

... Incredible, my child,

What kinds of stories are spread. They're wild.

As though there were, so the lie is told,

A dark murder affair of old.

The Brothers Grimm are the ones to blame.

Confess! It wasn't half as bad as they claim. (TT 265)

The wolf's order 'confess' perhaps makes Little Red Riding Hood shiver and remind her of the old incident. She looks at the wolf's bite and stammers in agreement to what he says:

Little Red Riding Hood saw the wolf's bite

And stammered: "You're right, quite right."

Whereupon the wolf, heaving many a sigh,

Gave kind regards to Granny and waved good-bye. (TT 265)

The ironic tone comments on how the tale has been appropriated by the Grimms and their followers. However at the same time the wolf's command and Red Riding Hood's stammering affirmation are suggestive also of the terror that the wolf was and is capable of inflicting upon/ generating in the minds of Red Riding Hood and her kind. It seems that Red Riding Hood's expected positive response to his complaint keeps him cool and he satisfactorily bids her good-bye. His sighs may be a sign of regret at the past act, or perhaps the sigh about the 'wild' false lies spread about him. It however shows his changed, good being.

- Tomi Ungerer's 'Little Red Riding Hood' (TT 261-264)

The attempt at rehabilitating the wolf is more emphatically witnessed in Tomi Ungerer's "Re-rumination" of Little Red Riding Hood.⁴⁵ Ungerer's re-rumination begins "once upon many times." (TT 261) At the centre of the tale is the wolf – "mean, broody and ferociously ferocious." (TT 261) The story presents him as the ruler and owner of a castle in a "godforsaken forest." (TT 261) He doesn't have a wife or an heir and looks forward to having one. One day a watchcrow brings him news about a girl "dressed in reds all over like a stop sign," picking berries off his domain. The wolf happy to hear this goes off to meet the girl – Little Red Riding Hood. The writer expressly acknowledges the readers' familiarity with the character of Red Riding Hood but wants them not to consider her because this Riding Hood, he says, is "not the one you might already have read about. No. This Little Red Riding Hood was the real, no non-sense one, and this story is one-hundred-to-a-nickel genuine." He describes her beauty using funny comparisons and metaphors: her blond hair shone like fresh bread. Description of her beauty is followed by one pinching statement – "Besides, she had wit and sense." (TT 262)

Ungerer discounts all the hitherto notions and connotations of the red hood which the original Red Riding Hood wears as her grandmother's gift. He mocks the idea of being in reds all over: "She was dressed in red because it was one of her mother's outlandish notions that her daughter might easily be spotted that way. Little Red Riding Hood didn't mind. She thought it made her special." (TT 262) It is also shown as the mother's gift rather than grandmother's since the grandmother is portrayed later in a very negative and dark light. She is "mean and cranky" (TT 262) and needs "a weekly supply" of hogheads, rendered lard, applejack and bread.

She superstitiously believes that “smithereened voice” could be restored by eating pig heads. Disgust about her character is intently and comically suggested by Ungerer in the statement “Her place was buzzing with flies who liked pigs’ heads, too, in summer especially.” (TT 263) Little Red Riding Hood hates her grandma and her visits to her. She calls the old woman “vicious to the core.” (TT 263) She carries the bluish marks of the old woman’s beatings and bitings on her tender skin and in order to delay reaching there she purposely stops in the shade of the forest and picks berries: “I might just as well stop and be late and rest.” (TT 263) After all what she gets there is “blows and insults” and accusations for things she hasn’t done “and so beside the point, the comma, and the asterisk.” (TT 263) The comic undercurrent continues throughout the tale. Quite a few things in the original tale are reversed. For instance, there Little Red Riding Hood has to carry simply a piece of cake and a bottle of wine to her grandmother but in this revision she has to carry a number of things mentioned above every week. In the original classic it is the wolf who tries and succeeds in distracting her attention and persuading her to linger and loiter in the woods. In the revision however, she herself decides to slow down and linger in the forest to delay the experience of what is in store for her – blows, insults and accusations. The kind and loving grandmother of the old classic is atrocious, wicked and almost witch-like in this retelling and the malicious wolf, on the other hand, is a kind hearted, helpful duke in search of a lady love. Startled by the wolf’s sudden appearance, Little Red Riding Hood tries to justify her unawareness about whose bushes she was picking the berries from and tells him about her visit to her “mean old grandmother who lives by the green fly pond.” (TT 263) Asking her to call him Duke instead of Prince as she does, he offers to carry the heavy baskets in his “strong arms” not to the old woman’s house since “her reputation is worse than mine” but to his own castle. He promises her all the comforts and luxuries she could dream of. “I’ll make you happy, you’ll make me happy, as in a fairy tale.” (TT 264)

Ungerer’s mockery continues throughout: Not knowing the meaning of reputation Little Red Riding Hood seeks an explanation. “A reputation is what people think you are. Reputations come in all sizes. Some are good, some are bad or very bad, like mine.” (TT 263) When in distrust Little Red Riding Hood expresses her fear of being eaten by the wolf with his big mouth, he calls this fear “a mere slander. ...Wolves feed only upon ugly children, and then only on special request.” (TT 264) She goes

on asking him further questions about his enormous jowls and the pink tongue. He tries to satisfy her quest. However, as she goes even further as in the original tale, he interrupts her saying, “Stop asking foolish questions... Questions are bad for your happiness.” (TT 264) Lifting the baskets he asks her to accompany him. Little Red Riding Hood willing to go with him asks him, “What happens to my parents and my mean grandmother?” This question also in the minds of the readers is answered by the wolf cleverly: “Read the end of this story, and you’ll find out.” (TT 264) As per the end they invite Red Riding Hood’s parents to the wedding. “Off they went to live happily ever after. They did get married and they had all sorts of children who lived happily, too.” (TT 264) The old woman left to herself, without food “shrank and shrank until she was just six inches high. When last seen, she was scavenging someone’s larder in the company of a Norway rat. And, tiny and hungry, she was just as mean as ever.” (TT 264)

In this attempt at rehabilitating the wolf the re-teller of the tale positively suggests that the wolf is not a predator and that on the contrary, the girl is victimised by her parents and grandmother with their fears and needs. By making her happy and by understanding her, the wolf attempts to erase his ‘very bad’ reputation and proves that the grandmother representing old morals and conventions perhaps is worse reputed than he. The focus of the conventional tale and its interpretations is completely shifted in this retelling from the symbolic sexual innuendos and rape to a more positive acceptance of one’s own sexuality and lack of fear of sex. Little Red Riding Hood in this revised tale learns to trust her own senses and that is the lesson Ungerer wishes to convey. Hence the slandered wolf is shown not as a carnal symbol but as a helpful, considerate though moderately shrewd being with human emotions and ability to give happiness.

Tomi Ungerer’s retelling does successfully convey his non-conformist stance and values. Radical revisions like his tend not to present the wolf as a real threat. Zipes offers two major explanations for this reversal: 1) Wolves have been almost extinct in Western societies and therefore do not represent any threat any longer. 2) Symbolic carnal connotations associated with the wolf no longer hold in the present since with greater scientific control over the body fear about sex has reduced and acceptance and expression of one’s own sexuality has increased. Thus in the versions rehabilitating the wolf “the assumptions of the traditional cultural pattern” (TT 63)

are undermined. This trend continues even in the third current of re-visionist retellings of ‘Little Red Riding Hood.’

- Anne Sexton’s ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ (T 76-79)

Anne Sexton’s ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ centres on the theme of deception. Naturally the deceiving wolf is presented as the hero of the “transformed” tale. The prologue for the tale begins casually affirming the existence of a number of deceivers and listing some of them. The list includes the suburban matron in the supermarket pretending to perform household duties but actually thinking of her lover and planning to meet him in the church parking lot, two apparently respectable ladies who rob an old woman of her savings, the stand up comic who entertains the audience at night but commits suicide the very next morning. In this list she includes herself as well: “And I, I too.” She admits that behind her suave appearance hides a self which undergoes an open heart surgery in its head and the heart. This heart is an eyeless (I-less) beetle which is dissected by the head. The open heart surgery thus implies that the rational tries to open up the I-less self-less other. There is a kind of deception even when the speaker Dame Sexton builds a “simple A frame house.” Description of this experience of being haunted by the reproaching figure of the mother echoes the lines of Emily Dickinson:

One need not be a chamber to be Haunted

One need not be House

The brains has corridors – surpassing

Material Place...⁴⁶

Concern with the mother-daughter relation which Anne Sexton comments on in her other “transformed” tales is touched upon and rendered trivial in ‘Red Riding Hood.’ The instructions given to Red Riding Hood by her mother in the Grimm tale are dropped in the transformed story because that is not the point that the tale wants to establish or stress. The witch-narrator calls it a digression and decides to begin the story at its ‘proper’ beginning:

In the beginning

There was just Red Riding Hood

so called because her grandmother

made her a red cape and she was never without it. (T 76)

Her mother sends her to the grandmother with wine and cake:

Wine and cake?

Where's the aspirin? The penicillin?

Where's the fruit juice?

Peter Rabbit had camomile tea.

But wine and cake it was. (T 76)

Red Riding Hood's love for her red hood and greater love for grandmother (But more than she loved her riding hood/ she loved her grandmother) and the detailed description of the redness of the blanket in the verse tale make explicit the associations of the red colour with sexuality and at the same time suggest a sexual attraction and attachment between the two women. The sexual undertones deepen with the description of the grandmother's house:

There among the roots and trunks

with the mushrooms pulsing inside the moss

he planned how to eat them both,

the grandmother an old carrot

and the child a shy budkin

in a red red hood. (T 77)

The verse tale describes Red Riding Hood's wandering off deeper and deeper into the forest in psychological terms. It does not moralise about this wandering off the path despite the mother's warnings, which too are omitted from the verse tale.

The wolf's act of donning grandmother's night dress and cap is seen as a sexual abnormality in his character. He is a deceptive fellow engaging in transvestism. This transformed aspect of his nature is what introduces him at the beginning of the tale:

Long ago

there was a strange deception:

a wolf dressed in frills

a kind of transvestite.

...

A deceptive fellow. (T76)

His odd looks in grandmother's clothes are ironically and comically described:

Grandmother looked strange

a dark and hairy disease it seemed. (T 77)

Red Riding Hood's questions to the strange grandmother are all summed up in just a couple of verse lines in this retold tale:

Oh Grandmother, what big ears you have,

ears,eyes,hands and then the teeth.

The better to eat you with my dear. (T 77)

The comic manner in which the wolf's gluttony is described focuses on the relation between the two women and on the wolflessness of the wolf while asleep. The word 'wolfless' is stressed by isolating it:

Now he was fat.

He appeared in his ninth month

and Red Riding Hood and her grandmother

rode like two Jonahs up and down with

his every breath. One pigeon. One partridge.

He was fast asleep,

dreaming in his cap and gown,

wolfless. (T 78)

Red Riding Hood's destination is among the "roots and trunks." She is made to look at and collect bloodroot, bunchberry and dogtooth. Her journey through the woods becomes a sexual exploration whose destination is the dark belly of the wolf. It has explicit echoes of animality, sexuality. The two women, Red Riding Hood and her grandmother, are united in the kingdom of the belly for a short time and are released again by a huntsman. He suspects the loud and 'contented' snores of the grandmother and hearing them believes that "that was no grandmother." (T 78) The word 'contented' is stressed perhaps to suggest the supposition that women can never be contented or cured. For it is the 'ill' grandmother who the huntsman believes cannot sleep peacefully. It suggests eternal dissatisfaction of women in life. The verse tale almost imitates the source tale in its discussion of how the hunter decides to shoot the much wanted wolf but thinks of saving the grandmother except the short narratorial comment that describes the cutting open of the wolf as "a kind of caesarean section." (T 78)

The 'carnal knife' brings out Red Riding Hood from "kingdom of the belly" like poppy and grandmother also comes out still with the desire to have wine and cake – again an indication of discontent. The wolf dies of the weight of the stones. The moral of the story becomes clear that if one deceives the weight of deception kills him. "Many a deception ends on such a note." (T 79) The story does not end here. Sexton further comments on what happens to the grandmother and the girl. The two with the huntsman sit down by the wolf's corpse and have a meal of wine and cake:

remembering

nothing naked and brutal

from that little death,

that little birth

from their going down

and their lifting up. (T 79)

This takes us back to the story's end where the two women are substituted by stones. Outside the dark belly too the two are stone like as their indifference to the dead wolf and the way they have their wine and cake shows. This equates them with the stones they are replaced with. Perhaps that is the reason why the wolf does not realise the difference when he wakes up and tries to run away only to be killed by the weight. The two women do not learn anything from the "naked and brutal" journey of and experience of death and birth. They do not even remember it.

Omissions of the mother's instructions to the girl in the verse tale logically invites the absence of the lesson that the Grimm Red Riding Hood learns and therefore decides not to wander off into the forest when her mother forbids it. No lesson is given at the end of the verse tale except the possible implication that women keep committing the same mistakes as in the past because they do not learn from their experiences and remember nothing from it. They will continue to fall a prey to deception, despite experiencing its consequences.

- Olga Broumas's 'Little Red Riding Hood' (TT 272-273)

Olga Broumas's 'Little Red Riding Hood' amounts to a poem of self-expression with personal references revealing unawares quite a few things about herself as a woman. She represents women who are free of men and their ideas of sexuality. Within the framework of the Grimm tale Broumas critically and minutely observes the phallogocentric exclusive notions of womanhood and femininity. These notions in patriarchy exclude women who love women because the idea of femininity in this system can be attained necessarily with male involvement that results in the birth of a child. Critical interpretations of the old tale 'Little Red Riding Hood' focus, as mentioned earlier, on the sexual initiation of the girl, her disobedience and the implicit connotations of her rape as a consequent punishment. However that the girl is brought out of the wolf's belly and is born again is not stressed much. Anne Sexton makes a tangential reference to the "caesarean section" in her retelling. But it is Broumas, however, who brings this circumstance of Little Red Riding Hood's birth cycle to the focal point and discusses the idea of male centric femininity and

womanhood. Little Red Riding Hood is born from a man (the wolf) and delivered by a man (the huntsman) and as such she is produced for men and is tied to male sexuality. Olga Broumas compares her own birthing experience with Little Red Riding Hood's. She is delivered not by a male doctor but a midwife. Her emergence into the world is naturally "guided" by the midwife's hands rather than forcefully pulled by the forceps of the doctor:

... I slipped out like an arrow, but not before

the midwife

plunged to her wrist and guided

my baffled head to its first mark. (TT 272)

As such, unlike Little Red Riding Hood, she is free of the ties of male sexuality and has a say in her own being, her own existence. She is free to "become" and determine her own self. The midwife's hands "guide" her. The "good woman" however, does not do what the "high forceps" of the doctor can:

... High forceps

might, in that one instant, have accomplished

what you and that good woman failed

in all these years to do: cramp

me between temples, hobble

my baby feet.(TT 272)

By birth she is not hobbled to a male defined womanhood nor are her rationality and intellect cramped by the high forceps. The symbolic value of forceps and the word hobble cannot be overlooked. The forceps cramping her temples suggest control over her ability to think and be rational and hobbled feet suggest control over her actions and movements. The fact that she is guided into this world by a midwife and not the forceps implies that she is no longer owned or marked by men for men. She is autonomous. She is free of men. Dressed in her red hood – the blood – she evades

the male bondings and grows more and more skilful at the act of evading male forceps in life.

... Dressed in my red hood, howling, I went—

evading

the white-clad doctor and his fancy claims: microscope,

stethoscope, scalpel, all

the better to see with, to hear,

and to eat – straight from your hollowed basket

into the midwife's skirts. I grew up

good at evading.(TT 272-73)

Echoing the wolf's lines in the Grimm tale Broumas personifies the doctor as a wolf and at the same time equates him with the huntsman who performs a C-section on the wolf for 're-producing' Little Red Riding Hood.

As per her mother's instructions she keeps to her self-determined road.

... When you said

'Stick to the road and forget the flowers, there's

wolves in those bushes, mind

you get there.' I

minded. I kept

to the road.... (TT 273)

She defines and determines her own course of life. It is her own decision to keep her femininity and womanhood untouched by men:

... I kept

...

the hood secret, kept what it sheathed more

secret still. I opened

it only at night, and with other women

who might be walking the same road to their own

grandma's house, each with her basket of gifts, her small hood

safe in the same part. (TT 273)

The hood has direct implications of the hymen kept protected from men and exposed only to other women of her kind. She refers to her autonomously accepted lesbian affiliations and sexual preferences. She has the satisfaction of determining and following the path of her own life. However there is a sense of grief and grievance she feels within and seems to seek an answer to the stagnated question in her mind. With the growing age she seems to be filled with a feeling of incompleteness. Without a child of her own she has no one to send to her mother with her "laden basket of love" on the one hand and on the other, not a mother herself she finds herself growing "old,old" without her mother, "the landscape of her heart." There is pain and grief of loneliness in the repeated expression of old. She addresses both her own mother "the architect of my body" and the mother that she could not be. Her mother gave her body a structure and her body was structured to be a mother. Her autonomous self struggles with this sense of loss and lack of attachment of that womanhood which patriarchy prescribes and subscribes to. She wishes to "conceive" some other gesture which would match with this idea of womanhood:

... what other gesture

can I conceive

to make with it

that would reach you. (TT 273)

With an intercourse with this substitute gesture she wishes to reach her lonely mother awaiting her. The two are apart from each other. She wishes to reach out to the mother alone and waiting:

... across this improbable forest

peopled with wolves and our lost, flower gathering

sisters they feed on. (TT 273)

As per patriarchal prescriptions she is not a complete woman. However she seeks to go across, beyond this brutal system, the “improbable forest” run by “wolves” that feed on “our lost, flower gathering sisters.” The system, in its idea of femininity and womanhood, discounts women like her. As such she does not fit this idea of femininity nor is her conception of femininity accepted by the system. She needs a way to find a substitute gesture that would accommodate women of her kind and their femininity. She yearns for such a more accommodating ‘conception’ and generous acceptance of this womanhood.

- Roald Dahl’s ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ (RD 36-40)

Roald Dahl takes a comic, ironic take on the classical tale and presents a new tale whose main character – the girl, is carried on to the next revolting tale in his collection. The revolting ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ first introduces the wolf who wants to have “a decent meal” and eats up grandma in “one big bite.” However he doesn’t feel full enough and waits for Miss Red Riding Hood to arrive so that he can have “another helping.” The story begins in-media-res. The readers’ foreknowledge of the tale is taken for granted. The mother’s instructions to the little girl are omitted. In fact, the characters of parents and the hunter are totally dispensed with in the ‘revolting’ version. The hungry wolf is depicted in a comic light and almost like any human being or more like a hungry child. The wolf is not given any attributes that the Grimm tale and many other adaptations have. He is just a wolf with a capital ‘W.’ He is hungry and almost as a matter of fact he goes to grandmother’s house to eat her up:

As soon as Wolf began to feel

That he would like a decent meal,

He went and knocked on Grandma's door.

...

He ate her up in one big bite.

But Grandmamma was small and tough,

And Wolfie wailed, 'That's not enough!'

'I haven't yet begun to feel

'That I have had a decent meal!'

He ran around the kitchen yelping,

'I've *got* to have another helping!' (RD 36)

His frightening, scary nature too is defused with the use of humour. To have a second helping he decides to wait for Little Miss Red Riding Hood. He would wait as her Grandma would and hence he dons her clothes which is quite wittily and connotatively mentioned:

He quickly put on Grandma's clothes.

(Of course he hadn't eaten those.)

He dressed himself in coat and hat.

He put on shoes and after that

He even brushed and curled his hair,

Then sat himself in Grandma's chair. (RD 38)

On the arrival of the "girl in red" the famous "What big..." conversation between her and the wolf takes place and through this dialogue as the wolf imagines how the girl would "taste like caviare" the tale takes an unexpected and interesting twist:

Then Little Red Riding Hood said, 'But Grandma,

what a lovely great big furry coat you have on' (RD 38)

Little Red Riding Hood strays from the old script and the wolf chides her for that:

‘That’s wrong!’ cried Wolf. ‘Have you forgot

‘To tell me what BIG TEETH I’ve got?’

The Wolf knows by heart the sequence of the old tale, his role in it, the questions the girl would ask, his own answers to them and what follows as per the canonical text. He is clearly aware of being in a frequently told tale and playing his part. Like an actor annoyed at the fellow actress for forgetting her lines, he tries to “correct” her.

An interesting thing happens at this juncture. In that, the readers who too are aware of the story and its sequential development into its supposed end are identified or equalled with the Wolf. Their expectations fail as the Wolf’s. Like the Wolf the readers too expect that at any cost the Wolf would eat her up:

‘Ah well no matter what you say,

‘I’m going to eat you any way.’ (RD 40)

However nothing happens as both expect. The final twist in the plot surprises both and while it turns out to be fatal for the Wolf, it amuses and delights the readers. This identification with the Wolf, however, serves the purpose of killing, like the Wolf, their own belief in the old text and its implicit messages.

The girl’s smile at the Wolf’s confident compliance with the canon and the expected consequence is very suggestive. She strays much too far from the “given” text:

The small girl smiles. One eyelid flickers.

She flips a pistol from her knickers.

She aims it at the creature’s head

And *bang bang bang*, she shoots him dead. (RD 40)

Dead is the Wolf and so are the established notions about the helpless naive girl and her lessons generated by the classic tale. The surprising twist continues as the narrator of the revolting tale appears on scene:

A few weeks later, in the wood,
I came across Miss Little Riding Hood
But what a change! No cloak of red,
No silly hood upon her head.

She said, 'Hello, and do please note

'My lovely furry WOLFSKIN COAT.' (RD 40)

She has dropped her "silly hood upon her head" after her successful encounter with the Wolf. The implicit sexual connotations here and earlier in drawing the pistol from her knickers are suggestive of the naive girl's growth to mature womanhood with the changing times. This mature and worldly wise riding girl without hood reappears in Dahl's next and last of the revolting tales of three little pigs who are threatened by a wolf. This wolf huffs and puffs and blows down the stick and straw houses of two "juicy little pigs." (RD 43) The third, the wisest, calls the wolf killer, Red Riding Hood still called and remembered as 'Miss Hood':

'I know you've dealt with wolves before,

And now I've got one at my door!' (RD 46)

The "brave Miss Riding Hood" comes to the piglet's rescue:

Once more the maiden's eyelid flickers.

She draws the pistol from her knickers.

Once more, she hits the vital spot,

And kills him with a single shot. (RD 47)

However a more unexpected twist in the tale occurs when the end suggests violation of the piglet's trust in the girl. She is now seen in the forest with two wolfskin coats and a PIGSKIN TRAVELLING CASE. The story of Little Red Riding Hood ends here in the real sense of the term. Her true nature is revealed in this tale. That she is no longer innocent and naive was already established in the first tale but here her heroism is tinged with selfishness and shrewdness. Her selfish materialistic

ambitions make her villainous. Her wickedness presented in a humorous light acquires a garb of practical wisdom for accomplishing her practical, materialistic needs. Without much male intervention this Riding Hood over a period of more than a couple of decades is shown to have grown self-dependent, practical, worldly wise and materialistic.

A more serious instance of a retelling of 'Little Red Riding Hood' with the girl shooting the wolf dead is Francisca Lia Block's 'Wolf.' Canonical fairy tale narrative discourse, its motifs, contents and conservative values and expectations are torn apart by these revisionist writers. Let us consider one more such anti-canonical revision to conclude the analysis of the retold 'Little Red Riding Hood'

- Gianni Rodari's 'Little Green Riding Hood' (TT 256-257)

Readers' age-old conditioned expectations are defused in this retold version of 'Little Red Riding Hood.' The narrator of this tale is an old man who mixes up the narrative, content, plot and characters of the old tale. The grandchild well-versed with the oft heard story keeps correcting him every time and in the end accepts the new details "all the same." (TT 257) Grandpa begins with a little girl called Little Yellow Riding Hood. "No! Red Riding Hood!" the child says. Despite corrections the old man refers to the little girl in the tale every time by colours other than red – yellow, green, black. Grandpa corrects himself and gives yet another wrong detail to be corrected by the listening child: "Oh yes, of course, Red Riding Hood. Well, one day her mother called her and said: 'Little Green Riding Hood'

'Red!'

"Sorry! Red. 'Now, my child, go to Aunt Mary and take her these potatoes.'"

"No! It doesn't go like that! 'Go to Grandma and take her these cakes.'" (TT 256)

This goes on. With every wrong detail like – the girl meeting a giraffe in the woods, the wolf asking her, 'What's six times eight?' – the child gets annoyed and says, 'What a mess you are making of it!' (TT 256) However even after the grandchild correcting him, this time Grandpa substitutes the wolf with a horse which gives the girl lost in the woods following directions: 'Take the 75 bus, get out at the main square, turn right, and at the first doorway you'll find three steps. Leave the steps

where they are, pick up the dime you'll find lying on them, and buy yourself a packet of chewing gum.' (TT 257) By this time the child is quite fed up with the mistakes and the act of correcting them. He certifies the grandfather as a wrong and bad storyteller and doesn't seem to be interested in listening to him ahead. He says, 'Grandpa, you're terribly bad at telling stories. You get them all wrong. But all the same, I wouldn't mind some chewing gum.'

'All right. Here's your dime.' And the old man turned back to his newspaper. (TT 257)

Both the grandpa as well as the grandson get rid of the story: neither the child wishes to go ahead with the wrongly told old tale nor is the old man interested in continuing with his own totally new version of it. The casual giving up of the tale half-way by both is suggestive of the denial of the tale – old and new – with whatever messages it conveys. The traditional narrative discourse is completely dispensed with displaying a view that it hardly matters if the tale is told wrongly or left untold. One of the most remarkable aspects of this short retold version is that except for the last sentence the entire tale is in dialogic form and it is only through the dialogues that we come to realise the characters' relation with each other. Also, it is only once and that too in the last sentence of the tale that the grandpa is referred to as 'the old man.' Neither of them is given a name which makes them representatives of the generations past and present while the tale itself becomes a representative defying discourse of revolt.

Snow White:

In a very impressive and important discussion of 'Snow White,' Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar underline the relevance of this multilayered tale that could illustrate how two female archetypes devised by men "to lessen their dread of [a woman's] 'inconsistency' and ... to possess her more thoroughly"⁴⁷ are constructed and possibly subverted.

- Anne Sexton's 'Snow White' (T 3-9)

Anne Sexton calls her 'transformations' "an enlarged paper clip" with a potential to become "a piece of sculpture." This implies as suggested earlier in this analysis and later, in the following chapter, the new retellings intend to broaden the earlier perspectives on and perceptions of the classic tales. The previous parochial, narrow

views are magnified so that the readers/listeners can see the yet unprobed or overlooked subtleties more clearly. It has been a daring endeavour on part of the revisionists. Anne Sexton herself raises a doubt about the aesthetic potential of her retelling efforts and herself pacifies and reaffirms their creative authenticity and aesthetic potential:

Transform? As if an enlarged paper clip

could be a piece of sculpture

(And it could!) (T 2)

Her revolutionary take on the classic tales reaffirms the “black art” of spinning the yarn and validates it. The preface raises our expectations and curiosity. Following this prefatory tale ‘Snow White’ initiates Sexton’s transformed tales each of which begins with a prologue wherein she finds space for addressing social issues and whatever thoughts the tales evoked in her. “[T]hat’s where ... I expressed whatever it evoked in me.”⁴⁸ It is the prologues which greatly help us understand the transformed elements of the tales and Sexton’s stand on various issues. More than her direct sardonic comments and hints throughout the stories, it is the prologues which offer us the context and clues to interpretation and introduce the context of the tales providing a thematic focus for the following stories. Their indentation suggests their supplementary nature. It appears that the traditional tale does not offer Sexton enough space to articulate her views and accommodate the transformed tale. The prologues provide her with this extra space wherein she directly expresses what she only hints at in the transformed tales. Sexton perhaps doubts the ability of the transformations to prove the point she wants to make and so she uses an additional tool and space of the prologue to make a clean breast of her perception of the tales and her interpretations of them. Hence perhaps they appear irrelevant and do not necessarily seem to pass a comment, except tangentially, on the stories to follow. However a close study of the retold tales and images therein establishes the link between the tales and the prologues.

It is the description of a “lovely virgin” in the prologue to the transformed ‘Snow White’ that connects its prologue with the tale and explicitly determines the line of Sexton’s sardonic attack on the presentation of women in fairy tales. The unsoiled,

white as bonefish virgin with fragile cheeks, delicate arms and legs, enticing lips and rolling china-blue doll eyes is a desirable object (“number”) irrespective of the kind of life she lives. This description of the lovely virgin in the prologue is at once followed by the beginning of the transformed tale:

Once there was a lovely virgin

called Snow White. (T 3)

The very first line announces the expected transformation of our perception of the classically represented innocent, virtuous, good Snow White. The implied meaning of the expression ‘lovely number’ as defined in the prologue at once gets associated with the character of Snow White. She is a girl with all the qualities the expression implies suggesting clearly passive objectification, dumbness, fragility, concern with beautiful appearance like a china-blue doll and fear of male domination and phallic thrust. All these implications recur throughout the transformed tale. The transformed Snow White is a beautiful adolescent girl of thirteen unlike a seven year old in the Grimm tale. She is soon to replace/succeed the middle aged queen who “eaten...by age” (T 3) is no longer beautiful as per the accepted standards of male society and who dies in the hot iron shoes for losing her status of acceptance. The change in the age of transformed Snow White hints at Sexton’s aim of showing a slow transformation of an innocent virgin unaware of her beauty into a beauty conscious woman; of a daughter into her mother; of innocence into corruption; of an unaware innocent virgin into a cautious, conscious, corrupt woman; of a living woman into an object of beauty and desire, which is left unnoticed once its utility is exhausted.

Sexton does not mention Snow White’s own mother who, in the Grimm tale, desires to have a beautiful child with skin “as white as snow, lips as red as blood and hair as black as ebony.” (Grimm, 70) It is this desire however, that triggers her definition of the beautiful virgin in the prologue and the presentation of Snow White as a lovely virgin. The girl is not seven but thirteen years old, as mentioned earlier. As such both the mother and the daughter are at a crucial phase in their lives: one, the older, on the verge of being rejected by the social system that is conscious of a woman’s utility value on the basis of her beauty and the other, the younger, on the verge of being welcomed by the same society only to be rejected later once she steps into her mother’s shoes. The mirror in the transformed tale is “something like a weather

forecast” (T 5) implying thereby perhaps the traditional metaphor of stages in human life corresponding with the four seasons of the year. The question regarding beauty addressed to the mirror receives similar answers both in the Grimm and the transformed tale, with just a difference of one pronoun. The Grimm answer “You are fairest of them all” (Grimm 70) becomes “You are fairest of *us* all.” (Italics mine) (T 5) Sexton’s witch-narrator perhaps wishes to include herself among the women contesting for acceptance in ‘male’ society.

Sexton describes the proud, overbearing nature of the stepmother in expressions like “pride pumped in her like poison.” (T 5) Sexton deflates the stepmother’s pride and abruptly sums up her jealous reaction to the mirror’s rejection of her as the fairest woman:

Until that moment Snow White

had been no more important

than a dust mouse under the bed.

But now the queen saw brown spots on her hand

and four whiskers over her lip. (T 5)

Brown spots and whiskers, the indicators of ugliness, repulsiveness and jealousy, replace the description of the queen’s jealousy in the Grimm tale. Jealousy and hatred however, are less focussed in the transformed tale than the queen’s hurting disappointment with herself on becoming less desired than the step daughter. It is the idea of losing the status of “the one (and the only) beauty of the land” (T 5) that disturbs her more and compels her to condemn Snow White to be “hacked to death.” (T 5)

Elaborate description of the hunter’s reactions to Snow White’s pleas and his act of mercy is covered in a single verse line:

The hunter, however, let his prisoner go

and brought a boar’s heart back to the castle. (T 5)

The queen chews it up “like a cube steak” while Snow White fearfully walks in the dark and lonely unacquainted places. The much discussed hidden, psychological connotations of Snow White’s fright are made explicit in the transformed tale in the expressions like “the wild wood,” “doorways,” “hungry wolf” lolling out his tongue “like a worm,” lewd calls of the birds “talking like pink parrots,” snakes hanging down in loops. Sexual undertones of this description are quite clear. The queer little house that the Grimm Snow White reaches accidentally is in the transformed tale suggested almost as her chosen destination:

On the seventh week

she came to the seventh mountain

and there she found the dwarf house. (T 6)

The clean and pretty dwarf house described in great detail in the old tale becomes in this retold version a “droll...honeymoon cottage” again suggesting sexual undertones in Snow White’s confrontation with the dwarfs who are described in the verse tale as “little hot dogs” (T 6) walking around her three times as dogs do around a bitch. The phallic implications of the dwarfs are explicit. As Bettelheim mentions, “Anne Sexton’s poetic rendering of ‘Snow White’ suggests their phallic nature, since she refers to them as ‘the dwarfs, those little hot dogs.’” (B 210)

These dwarfs have a businesslike attitude towards her and consider her a “good omen.”

She told them

about the mirror and the killer queen

and they asked her to stay and keep house. (T 6)

Their warning to her is stressed in the verse tale:

Beware of your stepmother

...

While we are away in the mines

During the day, you must not

Open the door. (T 7)

The queen's disappointment, her anger, jealousy and thought of Snow White's murder on hearing from the mirror about Snow White being alive are briefly and speedily summed up:

The mirror told

and so the queen dressed herself in rage

and went out like a peddler to trap Snow White. (T 7)

Snow White's "dumbness" in buying the lace is stressed suggesting her slow realisation of and attraction to the norms of beauty and physical appearance. She is slowly moving towards her transformation into a beautiful object, which is emphasised by references to the modern consumer culture of America:

The queen fastened it tightly

around her bodice,

as tight as an Ace Bandage

so tight that Snow White swooned.

She lay on the floor, a plucked daisy. (T 7)

Her attempt at beautification objectifies her to "a plucked daisy." After the dwarfs unlace her she "revives miraculously" and is as "full of life as soda pop." On many occasions like this one Sexton through sarcasm notes down the inability to 'suspend disbelief.' Assuming the readers' familiarity with the Grimm tale Sexton hastily mentions the other two instances of the queen's attempts to 'trap' Snow White:

Looking glass upon the wall...

once more the mirror told

and once more the queen dressed in drags

and once more Snow White opened the door.

...

but the mirror told,

the queen came,

Snow White, the dumb bunny,

opened the door. (T 7-8)

More than the stepmother's wickedness it is Snow White's dumbness, impulsiveness and vulnerability to the idea and thoughts of beauty that are emphasised. Snow White dumbly lets the disguised queen comb her hair and falls unconscious. The dwarfs remove the "curved eight inch scorpion" and she revives miraculously again opening her eyes "as wide as Orphan Annie" (T 8) The queen's third and last attempt to kill Snow White is presented as the near completion of Snow White's objectification: "She lay as still as a gold piece." (T 8)

Sexton describes all the attributes of Snow White's beauty in terms of objects – number, cigarette paper, Limozes, Vin Du Rhoe, China-blue doll. She is an "unsoiled" doll, a sleeping virgin, a gold piece, a plucked daisy; she is associated with soda pop, Orphan Annie; she becomes "it" – "the glass Snow White," "a good omen." This objectification in turn leads to and implies helplessness and passivity. As such Snow White is rendered an epitome of passivity that is closely associated with the idea of beauty. She becomes passivity incarnate, a personified object. This objectification is aggravated by the various "falls" of Snow White. She falls for beautifying objects. The lace and the comb – pointers of beauty – cause the first two falls and the final fall is a result of an apple bite objectifying her completely, turning her into a gold piece lying in the glass coffin till her prince arrives. It has implications of complete entrapment, constraint and captivity. The objectified captivity, the various falls and revival only by external efforts concretise Snow White's intellectual dumbness as well.

The dwarfs in the transformed tale are shown to bear a business minded attitude towards Snow White's still existence:

The seven dwarfs could not bring themselves
to bury her in the black ground
so they made a glass coffin
and set it upon the seventh mountain
so that all who passed by
could peek in upon her beauty. (T 8)

Her last miraculous revival by the prince results in her marriage with him: “And thus Snow White became the prince’s bride.” (T 9) She attains the status of a queen and as such her ultimate transformation from an unaware innocent object-like virgin to a conscious beautiful object is complete. On her “becoming” the queen, the other queen has to perish. She is now a worn out object and is no longer required. This queen was aware of her fate and hence undertakes all types of endeavours to maintain her status as a socially accepted entity. Her feelings of jealousy and hatred on her realisation that she is no longer the most beautiful one are given a slight twist and a detailed description of the burning queen follows:

First your toes will smoke
and then your heels will turn black
and you will fry upward like a frog
she was told.

And so she danced until she was dead,
a subterranean figure,
her tongue flicking in and out
like a gas jet. (T 9)

Snow White witnesses her predecessor dying out of passion for beauty and acceptance from society. However, she cannot and does not learn to defend herself against such fate. While the wicked queen is dying Snow White holds court,

rolling her china blue doll eyes open and shut

and sometimes referring to her mirror

as women do. (T 9)

A cycle of victimisation and objectification will continue. Ironically, also the queen herself who is cautious not to let Snow White surpass her beauty makes the girl aware of her own beauty and its value in a social system ruled by men. The mirror makes a woman objectify other women. Snow White is made a representative of the entire womankind who thus objectifies and is objectified at the “mirror’s” bidding. As Carol Leventen says, “Sexton is hardly sanguine about Snow White’s ability to break the cycle. Just as the girl succumbs to the step mother’s proffering of conventionally feminine ornamentation (the laces and the comb), she succumbs to the temptations of the mirror; her future is her (step)mother’s past.” (Leventen 144) Women’s “simple passion” for beauty ruins them and they continue to fall a prey to such ruinous scheme. As Barbara Swan mentions, the mother in the transformed tale is shown to symbolise “the universal problem of aging beauty, needing every prop available, and the young girl, smug and indifferent, temporarily secure in her glorious youth. ... you know that twenty years later she, too will face a middle age crisis.” (Swan 86) Snow White holds and consults the same mirror which dictates a step by step death dance of the queen. It is the mirror that objectifies and makes women objectify themselves and others. Through the mirror the verse tale does not emphasise narcissism as much as it does its male voice and male gaze determining the social acceptability and utility of women as the basis of male standards of beauty. This essence of the transformed tale is concentrated in the picture of Snow White referring to this mirror “as women do.” Ellen Cronan Rose’s remarks on this are quite relevant and insightful: “The cool mockery of Sexton’s tone might seem to be directed against women, were it not for the evidence in the prologue and throughout the poem, that the cause of female narcissism is a male dominated culture that perceives women as objects and conditions them to become objects.”⁴⁹

Taking their cue from sexton’s revolting re-vision of the old Grimm tale Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in 1979 called the mirror’s voice as the king’s, the patriarch’s: “His surely is the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgement that rules the Queen’s and every woman’s self-evaluation. He it is who

decides, first, that his consort is ‘the fairest of all,’ and then, as she becomes maddened, rebellious, witch-like, that she must be replaced by this angelically innocent and dutiful daughter, a girl who is therefore defined as ‘more beautiful still’ than the Queen.” (GG 38) At the root of women’s objectification by the male power is man’s fear of female power. Men do not want women to overpower them and hence as part of power strategy women are kept constantly struggling with one another for their acceptable social status and in the process are objectified. They are objectified because though men fear women they cannot abolish the latter altogether. They need women, glorify and adore them but at the same time want them to be powerless. Hence the male system builds “constructs” to ward off its fear by objectifying women. Folk and fairy tales become conveyors of such constructs as Nancy Chodorow points out: “Although a boy fears [a woman], he also finds her seductive and attractive. He cannot simply dismiss and ignore her. Boys and men develop psychological and cultural/ideological mechanisms to cope with their fears without giving up women altogether.”⁵⁰

For Gilbert and Gubar the conflicting – “essential but equivocal” relationship between Snow White and the queen is centrally so dominant a theme of the tale that they would rename it ‘Snow White and Her Wicked Stepmother.’ It is, according to them, the relationship between “the angel woman” and “the monster woman” that instigates the central and the only action of the tale:

“... the central action of the tale – indeed, its only action – arises from the relationship between these two women: the one fair, young, pale, the other just as fair, but older, fiercer; the one a daughter, the other a mother; the one sweet, ignorant, passive, the other both artful and active; the one a sort of angel, the other an undeniable witch.” (GG 36) These two female characters, the “two mythic masks” (GG 17) and the conflict and competition between them are foregrounded while the father though physically absent from the scene actually is the driving force, in the persona of the mirror, behind the fight. The women’s entrapment within a patriarchal frame is symbolically suggested in ‘the transparent enclosures’ of the glass window frame, “a magic looking glass (and) an enchanted and enchanting glass coffin.” (GG 36) For Gilbert and Gubar these are the tools that patriarchy indirectly instigates women to use against themselves to ruin themselves leaving ‘man’kind blameless.

As patriarchal subjects and objects women are fatally set against one another within a patriarchal frame. Angela Carter rightly says:

To be the *object* of desire is to be defined in the passive case.

To exist in the passive case is to die in the passive case – that is to be killed.

This is the moral of the fairy tale about the perfect woman.⁵¹

Gilbert and Gubar point out that the mirror – the patriarch, patriarchy – determines women’s fate and rules over them. As such ‘he’ is the author and the authority and thus becomes a metaphor for textual paternity as well. Through the tale of Snow White the mirror “reproduces a cultural script in which women are enmeshed in a discourse connecting beauty, death, and femininity. Beauty as reflected in the glass and seen through the coffin, may be attractive, but its seductions have a sinister, lethal side.”⁵² Also the objectified, passive, inert body of a woman itself becomes a mirror projecting and reflecting male desire and ego. A systematic, schematic elevation of the female body contributes paradoxically to the debasement and dehumanisation of women. Cold, static, inert and silent female body fascinates and arouses men as an art object. They look upon it not as a human being but as an enchanting object of beauty and desire to be enchanted by it. Patriarchal tendency and agenda to objectify women in its thrall dehumanises them at their own hands and refuses them a right to a dignified life of their own desires and its fulfilment. The magic mirror’s strategy of objectifying women affects and victimises not just women but even and perhaps more stifles the men themselves. Robert Coover in his rework ‘The Dead Queen’⁵³ (1973) undertakes the attempt to explore and reveal these effects of the objectifying strategies of patriarchy on women as well as men.

- Robert Coover’s ‘The Dead Queen’ (704-711)

Coover’s revision is a first person narrative by the prince. The story opens on the second day of the prince’s wedding to Snow White. It is the occasion of the queen’s funeral. The glass coffin in which Snow White was lying till the wedding day now contains her dead stepmother. As he speculatively looks at the dead queen in the glass coffin he narrates this narrative using flashbacks. The very initial image of the glass coffin containing Snow White and now the queen is suggestive of what Sexton and the feminist critics have said about women’s fate in patriarchy – continuation of

the cycle of objectifying and getting objectified, replacing and being replaced by more desirable objects. However depicting lifelessness and objectification of women has an added facet of how they could impact even men.

Coover invests the queen with the power and energy of an immaculate artist, a schemer, a plot-maker and its director. One is not sure but perhaps like Anne Sexton's 'Snow White' Coover's rework too offered interpretive clues to Gilbert and Gubar when they said that the queen is "a plotter, a plot-maker, a schemer, a witch, an artist and impersonator, a woman of almost infinite creative energy, witty, wily and self-absorbed as all artists traditionally are." (GG 38-39) Coover's prince looking at the grin on the dead old Queen's face at the time of her burial in the mountains says, "I knew then it was she who had composed this scene, as all before, she who had led us, revelers and initiates, to this cold and windy grave site, her the design, ours the enactment, and I felt like the first man, destined to rise and fall, rise and fall, to the end of time." (C 704) She "the master of disguises" (C 708), "the old clown" (C 711) is likely to have no feelings – either of love or hatred – towards Snow White at all, considers the Prince. "And thereby (she) hatch(es) a plot" (C 705) which she ends ironically with her own cruel death dance in the red hot iron shoes. However while probing the drives that compel her to design the tale the Prince says, "... she had lusted for ... a part in the story, immortality, her place in guarded time. To be the forgotten stepmother of a forgotten princess was not enough. It was the mirror that had fucked her, fucked us as all. And did she foresee those very boots, the dance, that last obscenity? No doubt. Or something much like them. Just as she foresaw the Hunter's duplicity, the Dwarfs' ancient hunger, my own weakness for romance. Even our names were lost: she had transformed us into colours, simple proclivities; our faces were forever fixed and they weren't even our own. ... we've all been reduced to jesters, fools; tragedy she reserved for herself alone." (C 705-6) Appreciating her subtlety the Prince calls "her use of a princess with hair as black as ebony, a skin as white as snow, lips as red as blood, ... her use of miners of gold" (C 711) and her use of the mirror "as a door" a "Great Work." (C 711) The Prince breaks away from the traditional one-dimensional, unquestioning role of a hero. He is inquisitive, curious and reflective.

At the wedding feast the night before the Queen's funeral, he is puzzled by Snow White's reaction to her "stepmother's terrible entertainment," (C 704) her death

dance in the red hot iron shoes. He wonders at her cheeks becoming even rosier with the merriment and cheerfulness at the sight of the “awesome execution.”(C 705) Her excitement, squealing applause and clapping make him wonder whether despite all their “watchfulness” (C 705) the innocent child had “become the very evil she had been saved from.”(C 705) He wonders whether she has become heartless and her “good and simple soul envenomed” (C 705) enough to vindictively arrange for her tormentor’s “death dance” or whether she is the same innocent child unaware of any pain, malice or risks. He cannot really understand her. He suspects that she has become corrupt from within and by no means can he probe deep into her true self: “I could vouch for her hymen from this side, but worried that it had been probed from within.” (C 705) On the wedding night he is troubled by the true meaning of the name Snow White, “her taste for luxury and collapse,” (C 707) and also the compulsion leading him to the mountain, “the birdshit on the glass coffin.”(C 707) The revelation comes to him at last and he realises for the first time in his life that Snow White is a “frozen void,” (708) that she is an inaccessible, heartless virgin beyond change or growth, as lifeless as the dead Queen. The Prince’s gaze into the mirrors to view Snow White’s “paradigmatic beauty” (C 709) reflects not the girl but the old Queen “flailing about madly in her red hot shoes.” (C 705)

After a passionate wedding night the Prince in a state of “delicious annihilation” finds at dawn “the bed unmussed and unbloodied, her hymen intact.” (C 710) Intense speculations lead him to think that “she’s suffered no losses, in fact, that’s just the trouble, that hymen can never be broken, not even by me, not in a thousand nights, this is her gift and essence, and because of it, she can see neither fore nor aft, doesn’t even know there is a mirror on the wall. Perhaps it was this that made the old Queen hate her so.” (C 705)

Thus the Queen was fully aware of the mirror’s authority and power but Snow White is taken in by this authority and framed by it unawares, completely unconsciously. The grip of the mirror on them is so strong that though with all her creative energy she plots and struggles to escape the mirror she has to remain within the narrative frame that sentences her to death. No matter how desperately she may try to free herself and “to jump out of her skin” (C 706), she has to return to the “mirror.” She tries to break away from the mimetic conventions and narrative norms of the fairy tale genre but is herself captured and victimised by it. The prince says, “... it could be

argued that she had invented, then pursued the impossible, in order to push the possible beyond her reach, and thus had died as so many have believed, of vanity, but ... the fact is she was her own consummation, and we, in effect, had carried out – were still carrying out – our own ludicrous performances without an audience.” (C 706) He feels that the Queen “had poisoned us all with pattern. In the end, in spite of everything, she had been accepted as part of the family, spared the outcast’s shame, shrouded simply in black and granted her rings and diadems.” (C 706)

Like the Queen the Prince too is victimised. His questions: “Why did things happen as though they were necessary?” (C 707), “Why hadn’t I been allowed to disenchant her with a kiss like everybody else?” (C 709) show his irritation with disallowance to conform. He questions the narrative in which he plays a part, resists it, recognises the role of the mirror in the Queen’s rivalry with Snow White, and identifies the Queen as a constructor of this narrative, however, fails to see the Queen’s own conformity with the narratological, framed, mimetic conventions of the fairy tale. Against his father’s disapprobation and disapproval he too desires and attempts to change the plot: “the old Queen had me now, ... I knew now the force that had driven her, that had freed me, freed us all, that we might live happily ever after, though we didn’t deserve it.” (C 711) Out of this revelation he kisses the dead Queen with a hope to disenchant her. Trying to reject the old narrative he is ironically caught in it. His expectation to disenchant reflects the romantic disenchantments by the fairy tale heroes: “If I had expected something, it did not occur. She did not return my kiss,... I’d been wrong about her, wrong about everything...” (C 711) He could not, was not allowed to resuscitate Snow White. And now to the dismay and horror of the onlookers including his father who is angry and in tears and Snow White, who faints, the Prince out of pride and affection rather than expectation and hope, kisses the stinking Queen for the second time. Nauseated and hopeless, the Prince wants to try once more thinking this time it would work, when he is whisked away from the dead Queen. He pleads; the guards restrain him; his father utterly unhappy about the son’s act turns his back. “The Queen’s corpse [which had tumbled down is] dumped hastily back into the coffin and quickly interred, everyone holding his nose.”(C 711) The story ends with the Prince thinking: “if this is the price of beauty, it is too high. I was glad she was dead.” (C 711)

Thus in fact, the conventions and norms of a fairy tale hero and narrative that the Prince wishes to part with, he observes in the most conventional manner possible. He desires a romantic role of a hero and an act of disenchantment. His disillusionment with this expectation makes him say, “It was the mirror that had fucked her, fucked us all.” (C 705)

The mirror restricts choices of both women as well as men. The framework of the mirror maddens everyone. It victimises and stifles all. Most of the contemporary retellings and critical thinking on ‘Snow White’ discounts magical meaning and function of the mirror. As seen earlier in this analysis the mirror has been invested with metaphorical meaning and function. It stands for authority. Different retellings and interpretive criticism see beyond its literal reflective function. As discussed earlier Gilbert and Gubar call the mirror’s voice the voice of the father, the patriarch. Bettelheim sees the mirror as a symbol of the young girl projecting her oedipal feelings on her mother. For Shuli Barzilai the mirror stands for the inner voice of the Queen who cannot accept the natural phenomenon of ageing and her daughter’s growing independence.⁵⁴ While Steven Jones maintains it is the voice of both Snow White’s and society’s,⁵⁵ Girardot hears the voice of truth in the mirror⁵⁶. Irrespective of what the mirror is learnt to stand for it definitely is a powerful, dictating image and an intertextual link between the retold tales and the old Grimm tale.

Mirror as a mouthpiece of patriarchy:

Patriarchy sustains by controlling women with restrictions on her body and mind. Her continued confinement alone could ensure its existence. As a result the system pits women against one another and keeps them in a continual competition/ rivalry. The three female figures in ‘Snow White’ - Snow White herself, her own mother, the Queen and her stepmother, the wicked Queen – are all entrapped in glass enclosures. Snow White’s mother looks through a window at snow while wishing for a child, the new Queen consults her magic mirror whereas Snow White is placed in a glass coffin till her resuscitation. The continuity of entrapment is symbolically suggested in the succession of one female figure by the other. The magic mirror’s patriarchal voice of judgement and gaze determine the Queen’s and thereby “every woman’s self-evaluation.” (GG 38) It is his rule that the “maddened, rebellious, witchlike” Queen be “replaced by [his] angelically innocent and dutiful daughter, a girl who is

therefore defined as ‘more beautiful *still*’ (my italics) than the Queen.” (GG 38) Six years before Gilbert and Gubar’s interpretation of ‘Snow White’ in these terms, Coover had thematically articulated the above mentioned thought in his retelling. He presents not only the evaluation of the Queen but even a suggestive confirmation of the Queen’s status and spirit /traits in Snow White. The fixation of angel-monster images of women finds an explicit expression in the tale. Prince Charming, the narrator of the tale and the to be king and patriarch, trembles at the incomprehensible expression on the dead Queen that is suggestive of greater power than she is expected to have. He looks at his father who reassures him: “no, it was a mere grimace, the contortions of pain, she had suffered greatly after all, torture often exposes the diabolic in the face of man, she was an ordinary woman, beautiful it is true, and shrewd, but she had risen above her merits, and falling, had lost her reason to rancor.” (C 705)

Patriarchy masks women’s revolt and positive self assertion as madness, irrationality and aggression. Their attempts at voicing themselves are sidelined and their sufferings are stressed. The King in the tale too masks the Queen’s superiority by stressing her suffering, thus suggesting that she is not victorious but defeated. Remarkably enough the Prince mentions that he sees that the Queen is “masked to hide her eyes, which to what my father called a morbid imagination might seem to be winking, one open, the other squeezed shut.” (C 706) The dead Queen’s wink is indicative and ironical. It is suggestive of the subversive indications underlying the surface of the masks that patriarchy imposes on women. Prince Charming does not believe in the mask his father tries to force on the Queen’s face: “But I did not believe him, I could see for myself, did not even entirely trust him, this man who thought power a localised convention, magic a popular word for concealment, for though it made him a successful King, decisive and respected, the old Queen’s grin mocked such simple faith and I was not consoled.” (C 704)

Gilbert and Gubar in their assessment of the tale identify Snow White and the wicked Queen and argue that in patriarchy every angelic woman has a monster hidden within. Coover too thematises this idea when his Prince Charming witnesses traits of the Dead Queen in his bride. While he recognises the whole experience of the Queen’s death and his wedding as a plot hatched by the Queen herself and realises himself playing a role determined by her, when he sees Snow White full of joy and

“outrageous” (C 705) excitement at the Queen’s death dance, he suspects Snow White of plotting this end for her mother in order to replace her: “... was it she who had invited her old tormentor to the ball, commissioned the iron slippers, drawn her vindictively into that ghastly dance? Or did she simply laugh as the righteous must to see the wicked fall? Perhaps her own release from death had quickened her heart, such that mere continuance now made her a little giddy. Or had she, absent, learned something of hell?” (C 705) “Mere continuance” is the fate of all women in patriarchy. The “inexorably and inescapably monstrous” (GG 31) traits of Snow White’s character are suggested through her association with hell.

What patriarchy deems punishable in women is actually their potential to act and to create. It is actually the artistic potential of the Queen, her desire to have “a part in the story” for which she is termed wicked and punished. Snow White too is seen by the Prince as a plotter, and artist who will confront a similar, inevitable fate.

On their wedding night the Prince sees Snow White and the Queen almost merged with each other in the mirror: “I gazed into the mirrors to see, for the first time, Snow White’s paradigmatic beauty, but instead it had been the old Queen I’d seen there, flailing about madly in her red hot shoes.”(C 709) The mirror prophecies Snow White’s future by reflecting the dying Queen in her place. Later in the tale the interchange between the two women characters’ fate is shown to be mutual. Like Snow White turning into the Queen, the latter too is buried in the same glass coffin which displayed Snow White before her revival to life. The Prince even imagines deliberate purpose in her dying in this manner: “to lead me away from the merely visible to vision, from the image to the imaged, from reflection to the projecting miracle itself, the heart, the pure Snow White...!” (C 711)

Considering himself to be the focus of her art, the Prince slips into a patriarchal reading of the tale. He imagines that it is for him that the Queen died and now assumes the role of a traditional hero, a disenchanter and an awakener. When he cannot awaken the Dead Queen he confirms the message of the traditional tale that the Queen had to pay the price for wanting to be the fairest in the world. His disgusting attempts at kissing the stinking Queen with the hope of awakening bring him to realise the vanity of imagining the Queen to have lived and died for him and awaited him. Though his illusion is unmasked as “the mask fell away from her open

eye, now milky white,” (C 711) and he is rendered comic, his revelation critically underlines and deconstructs the traditional assessment of the Queen and Snow White. It presents Snow White as not really angelic while the Queen not that monstrous. With her mastery in disguises the Queen succeeds in subverting patriarchy and shaking monarchy. While the King loses his composure, is enraged and ashamed at the act of the son, the future king’s dignity is lost to the extent that he might not be considered worthy enough to succeed the throne. Everyone including Snow White is disgusted with him. The Queen thus undermines patriarchy and as such is victorious in subverting male-order. She triumphantly kills the patriarchal ideals of beauty, innocence and resignation that Snow White represents.

- Patricia Carlin’s ‘The Stepmother Arrives’ (2002)⁵⁷

The unidirectional transformation of Snow White into her stepmother, of the angel into a monster is cyclical. It is suggested in many retellings including the ones discussed above. As Gilbert and Gubar explicitly point out Snow White “in fiery shoes will do a terrible death-dance out of the story, the looking glass, the transparent coffin of her own image.” (GG 42) Patricia Carlin in her retelling shows this pattern but even expresses the wish for this cycle to stop. For the purpose perhaps she very emphatically and forcefully relates the end of the two women:

The stepmother dies

in her burning shoes. Her dancing

days are over. The girl acquires

a castle, a kingdom, a mirror,

and a new daughter.

She dances away her days in the castle.

“Mother, my glass eyes

are open,” she sings

at night in her silent dream mouth.

The face in the mirror changes.

It's time for an ending.

Upstairs they are heating the iron shoes. (47)

Snow White in Carlin's retelling "acquires" after her stepmother's death the rewards of beauty and innocence along with a mirror and a new daughter to continue the cycle. In the quiet of the night she calls her mother to tell her that her eyes are open. There is a clear intertextual reference to Anne Sexton's retelling wherein Snow White is described as having china-blue doll eyes rolling open and shut. Besides, it suggests on the one hand, the girl's awareness of her forthcoming fate and on the other, an insightful moment of awakening. Writing in 2002 with a reference to Sexton's revolutionary retelling of the 1970s, Carlin presents how Sexton's Snow White who at the end of the tale looks into the mirror "as women do," has changed over time and come to understand her mother. Her "glass" eyes strike an association with the mirror. She too now opens up to the looking glass. The ambiguity of this image continues in the line that follows:

"The face in the mirror changes."

It could mean, on the one hand, a change in Snow White; both physical and psychological/attitudinal and on the other, that she is being replaced by her "new daughter." The pessimistic assertion of the cyclical pattern also expresses the urgency to end this fate for women. Though it literally suggests that Snow White's days are over, the line "It's time for an ending," indicates the ending of the poem, of Snow White and mainly the urge and desire to put an end to the cyclical pattern.

- Emma Donoghue's 'The Tale of the Apple' (1997) (41-58)

Emma Donoghue in her retelling retains most of the motifs in the original tale and specifically presents intertextual links with the mirror in an interesting manner. Explicitly in tune with Gilbert and Gubar's views on the mirror as a mouthpiece of patriarchy Donoghue literally puts the words of the mirror into the king's mouth. There is no mirror in the tale. However when the King sees his daughter and newlywed bride in his bed, he says, "Two such fair ladies,...have never been seen in one bed. But which of you is the fairest of them all?...Tell me,...how am I to judge between two such beauties? " (D 47-48) It is this question of his that sets the two women "like mirrors set opposite each other, making a corridor of reflections,

infinitely hollow.” (D 48) It is the father’s comparison that instigates rivalry between the two of them: “We looked at each other, she and I chimed in the chorus of his laughter. Am I imagining in retrospect that our voices rang a little out of tune?” (D 47) Before his words the women, particularly Snow White, prejudiced against each other have started building a bond of friendship. Fragility of this bond is on account of first, preconditioned beliefs Snow White has gathered from her childhood songs: “...I knew from the songs that a stepmother’s smile is like a snake’s, so I shut my mind to her” (D 46) and second, it is she who is more jealous for being replaced by the new Queen: Before she came “it was me who was mirrored in my father’s fond eyes; mine was the first apple from the orchard.” (D 46)

Donoghue in her work puts a share of blame on Snow White too. It is rather the “infinitely hollow” standards of beauty dictated by the King-father who desires a son and curses both the Queens for failing him and the internalisation of these standards by both the women that really sets them apart. Donoghue implicates Snow White in the growth of rivalry between her and the Queen. For at one point Snow White says, “I know now that I would have liked her if we could have met as girls, ankle deep in a river. I would have taken her hand in mine if I had not found it weighted down by the ruby stole from my mother’s finger. I could have loved her if, if, if.”(D 46) It is Snow White who is more jealous of her new mother: “... I could tell she would be my enemy. There was only room for one queen in a castle.” (D 45)

The Queen initiates friendship and softens Snow White. Slowly the closeness increases. She would lace up Snow White’s stays, comb her hair and feed her fruit. However Snow White is hesitant in the relation: “Though I never trusted her, I took delight in what she gave me.” (D 47) The father initially “cheered” to see them so close later rifts them apart to the extent that when the Queen fails to bear a child even after a year of marriage, he forbids her “to go walking in the orchard [with Snow White], or lift a hand, or do anything except lie on her back and wait to find herself with a child, the child who would be his longed-for son.” (D 48-49) From here onwards the Queen snaps her bond with Snow White and after a year when the king is sick past caring, cursing his enemies, wives and the son he cannot beget, the Queen asserts her power and wishes Snow White to disown her right to it. The tussle between the two displays the challenge they throw to each other and is interspersed with intertextual references:

“Say that I am queen, she said.

You are my father’s wife, I replied.

I will be queen after he is dead, she said.

I made no reply.

Say that I am queen, she repeated, her fingers whitening around the sceptre.

If you really were, I told her, it would need no saying.

She stood on the pedestal above me.

The moment I am a widow, she said, I could have you cast out.

Indeed.

If you cross me in this, she said confidently, I could have a huntsman take you into the forest, chop your heart, and bring it back on a plate.

Strong meat, I murmured.

I can do it, she howled, I have the power.

I said nothing.” (D 50-51)

To prove and assert herself and her power the Queen gets the King killed the same night. Here the retold story takes a new twist.

Snow White sensing the threat to her life decides to leave the castle and manages to escape: “I decided to leave it all to her, and leave her to it. I filled my hems with gold pieces and slipped away.” (D 51) In the forest beyond the castle wandering for many days she is picked up by a gang of woodsmen. Just as her practical wisdom is displayed in her timely decision to run away from the castle, so is it reflected even when she defends herself against the possible sexual assault on her by one of the woodsmen: “One of them asked 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.” (D 52) She works hard for them to keep the bad memories at bay. However she is haunted not by her father but the stepmother and to her surprise, picturing to her mind the stepmother’s life as the Queen, she sees strangely striking similarity in their lives:

“long days in charge of fire, and iron, and water. Her hands would stay smooth as lilies while mine were scrubbed raw day by day, but we were living much the same kind of life.” (D 53) Slowly Snow White gets sympathetic towards the stepmother though she fears being killed by her: “The thread between us was stretched thin, wound round trees and snagged in thickets, but never broken.” (D 54) The Queen comes searching for Snow White apparently, to her, to kill her. However she is different. The first time she comes she seems to have changed: “There was nothing of the wife about her when she smiled.” (D 54) Snow White refuses entry to her into the household but when out of curiosity looks out to see whether the queen has gone she sees her still there under a tree. She lets her in for a moment. The stepmother tells her, “I keep breaking mirrors.” (D 55)

Female bonding is shown to form between the traditionally polarised angel-monster figures. Gilbert and Gubar do not deem it possible in patriarchy. Donoghue, in her attempt to put new skin on the old tale shows this possibility gradually building in the breaking of mirrors. Snow White while sitting by the fire with her stepmother gets nostalgic about their relation. The stepmother laces up her stays tightly. Snow White is lost in a stupor like state. The men who never bother to know what is in her mind get angry to see no food cooked for them. This visit becomes a sort of one of Snow White’s daydreams till after some weeks her mother visits her again. This time “there was nothing of the queen about her.” (D 55) She urges Snow White to return home. For life without her is “like dancing in shoes of red hot iron.” (D 56) Snow White turns down her offer. With her jewelled comb the Queen starts combing Snow White’s hair, “patient with all the burns and knots my new life had put in it.” (D 56) Snow White shuts her eyes and lets her comb dig into the scalp “scraping down to the kernel of memory.” (D 56) It puts her to sleep and thus again when the men come home they curse the Queen calling her a “witch to put such poison of idleness in [Snow White’s] head.” (D 56) They warn her to stay inside the house and not let anyone in. As she resumes her life as per their dictates her hair knot again and her stays hang loose. The stepmother returns after a few weeks in early autumn. This time “there was nothing of the mother about her.” (D 57) She has a half ripe apple – one side green the other red – in her hand. She bites into the green side and Snow White the red. The latter begins to choke with fear and excitement and swoons. When she wakes up she realises she is being carried in an open coffin to another

kingdom, as the men tell her, to be treated like a princess. Her mouth is full of apple and as she chews it she realises that it is not poisonous but is “the first apple of the year from [her] father’s orchard.” (D 58) This last act of her stepmother softens her completely. The Queen symbolically returns to Snow White her rightful place in the kingdom and biting into the green part of the first ripe apple and offering Snow White the ripe side she shows her willingness to accept her secondary status to Snow White. Above everything else she initiates to re-establish and strengthen the fragile bond with Snow White and patiently waits for Snow White’s willing acceptance of this bond. Realising the stepmother’s loving attempts at winning her heart and her true sacrificial love for the stepdaughter, Snow White chooses to join the Queen: “I made them set me down, and I got out of the box, deaf to their clamour. I stared around me till I could see the castle, ... I turned my face toward it, and started walking.” (D 58) Her observation “there was nothing of the mother about her” points to the dissolution of the mother-daughter relationship between the two and its substitution with a bond of sharing, love and care.

The traditional tale of Snow White and most of the retellings including the ones considered above generally focus on the individual character of Snow White and her happiness. This is true about other tales and their retellings as well though in feminist retellings personal choices of the heroine could be seen as representative. For instance, Marxist retellings present a utopia not for an individual character but with their anti-royalist, anti-capitalist messages they desire and design a happy existence for the entire society. Merseyside Fairy Story Collective’s ‘Snow White’ undertakes this Marxist agenda in combination with the feminist concerns of gender equality.⁵⁸ Egalitarian thought incorporates emancipation of all the suppressed and the victimised. As such retellings with a Marxist agenda attempt to assert women’s right to liberation while also at the same time voice loudly the suppressed voices of the lower classes and bring to the fore oppressive and artificial class differences. In doing so these retellings intend to advocate an absolutely non-discriminating social system that gives everyone his/her due. Mary Maher’s ‘Hi Ho, It’s Off to Strike We Go!’(1982)⁵⁹ and ‘Snow White’ by Merseyside Fairy Story Collective (1972) exemplify and represent retellings, which attack idealised values of beauty, riches and royalty in the classical tales. They present a different view on happiness. Breaking away from the traditional happy ending which focuses mostly on the royal

couples these retellings end with happiness in society at large and suggest revolutionary political changes substituting monarchy with democracy and capitalism with socialism.

- Merseyside Fairy Story Collective's 'Snow White' (74-80)

Merseyside Fairy Story Collective's 'Snow White' presents a Snow White who rebels against monarchy and successfully fights for the rights of the poor and the low. The Queen here is an epitome of oppression and cruelty. She has power and uses it tyrannically. Her question to the magic mirror that she always carries in her hand and that reflects everything happening in her kingdom which leaves very little scope for her subjects to act against her wishes, echoes the question in the traditional tale. However 'fairness' of the original question is replaced by happiness. She returns to the mirror always to ask:

'Mirror, mirror in my hand

who is the happiest in the land?'

She would be pleased to hear the mirror announcing each time:

'Queen, all bow to your command,

You are the happiest in the land.' (74)

Nothing useful and beautiful belongs to the people. They have to offer everything they own and make to the Queen of the Mountains. Everyday people in long processions toil the steep path to the castle to submit things they have made of which the Queen keeps the best to herself and allows the subjects to take whatever is "left over or spoiled." (74) Pale little Snow White belongs to the mining community living in "the diamond mines beside the distant sea" (75) and is a skilled jewellery designer. The Queen forces the miners to mine diamonds and present to her a chestful of them every year. She accumulates these jewels in glass jars.

The story presents the year when Snow White accompanies the seven little dwarfs. When the Queen learns that the beautifully well-made diamond necklace is made by Snow White she orders her to "stay in the castle as a jewellery maker." (75) Snow White, her pale cheeks turning red, is about to cry "No!" when all the dwarfs putting

their fingers to the lips warn her to be silent. They are led to the workshop where jewels are stored. The light from the accumulated jewels gives Snow White a headache. While bidding her goodbye the dwarfs call her lucky, for henceforth she would no longer be poor or lead a hard and dangerous life toiling underground for long and weary hours: “Here servants will wait on you. You will sleep in a soft, scented bed and be brought whatever delicious food and drink you want. And, if the Queen is especially pleased with your work she will give you rich rewards.” (75-76) Snow White however does not long for such happiness. Her happiness and comfort is where her poor fellowmen are, despite the hardships and misery that accompany such a living. She works to please the Queen and win a reward. But for her the “rich” reward is to go back home. The Queen angrily disallows and shows her in the mirror the dwarfs and others toiling in the mines. She does not understand Snow White’s idea of happiness in longing to return to the miserable existence: “You could have anything your heart desires and yet you ask to return to that miserable life!” (76) The Queen’s (Capitalist) mentality of enjoying comforts and happiness at the expense of others’ hard labour and by exploiting those who toil for her makes Snow White restless. She makes one more beautiful piece of jewellery for the Queen so that she calls her before the throne. When the Queen does so and asks Snow White to speak her heart’s desire Snow White replies, “Majesty, ... what I ask for is this: take only what you need from the people of the kingdom and let them keep the rest so that they can no longer be cold and hungry and miserable.” (76) Controlling her anger, since she does not want to lose the skilled artist useful to her, the Queen makes Snow White look into the mirror that reflects a strange image of Snow White wearing a rich gown and adorned with pearls and rubies with a golden crown on her head the Queen says, “You could be a princess.” (77) However this possible future does not tempt Snow White. She remembers the words of a song she would sing with her friends while returning from mining:

Emerald’s green but grass is greener.

Sapphires pale beside the sea.

No jet as black as the wild night sky,

No ruby red

No ruby red

No ruby red as hearts which cry to be free. (77)

She like her friends and fellowmen longs for freedom which the Queen has denied to them, freedom which every human is naturally endowed with, freedom which every human is entitled to. The closeness to nature that these miners share is contrasted with the Queen's appreciation of artificial beauty: "No flower in all my gardens is as delicately shaped as these ear-rings you have made," (77) she says. Snow White keeps making beautiful jewellery for the Queen but does not ask for any reward. The Queen tempts her to be a princess but Snow White's denial enrages her and she tightens the vigil on Snow White. After a year Snow White sees the dwarfs carrying up the castle the chest of diamonds. However she is not allowed to meet them. While the Queen keeps a watch on the dwarfs through the mirror, Snow White empties the chest herself and manages to escape the tower. The Queen watches the dwarfs go further and further away from the castle and by the evening is shocked to hear the mirror tell her:

Though all bow to your command,

Snow White is the happiest in the land. (78)

The Queen sees Snow White joyfully appearing out of the chest of drawers and is filled with terrible rage. After ordering the soldiers waiting on Snow White to be thrown from the castle walls for their negligence and thinking overnight how to punish Snow White, she orders her soldiers to seal up the entrance of the diamond mines so that Snow White and her companions would die underground while at work. The soldiers are horrified but dare not disobey her. She sees in the mirror how the soldiers seal up the way out of the mine and is happy. The news spreads and people gather in crowds to witness the Queen's cruelty. Throughout the night a great crowd of people waits at a distance from soldiers guarding the mine and whisper in low voices about the cruelty of the Queen. However suddenly they hear a tapping sound and see a rock moving. Soon one of the dwarfs appears from a narrow passage and is followed by all others, Snow White one among them. The oldest of the dwarfs is reminded of another way out of the mine and all of them dig up in the dark until that way is opened up. The people as well as the soldiers are amazed to see this

happen. People start cheering. Some of the soldiers join them too. However some soldiers ask Snow White to surrender and return to the castle. Before this huge crowd Snow White refuses the soldiers point-blank and speaks out people's mind aloud: "I will not go back to the castle and we will send no more diamonds to the Queen. Everyone will keep the things they make and send nothing to the Queen of the Mountains." (79) On being threatened to be killed she courageously confronts them saying, "You may kill some of us... but in the end you will lose for there are far more people than there are soldiers." (79) She has given vent to the people's suppressed emotions as a result of which people join Snow White's rebellion and dauntlessly surround the soldiers to snatch the weapons from them. The Queen is enraged to see the people rising against her and expresses her anger at the instigator of this rebellion by breaking into pieces all the jewellery made by her. The uprising renders even the mirror disobedient. When she orders it to "Make them bow to my command," the mirror expresses its inability by saying,

'Queen who was so rich and grand

The people cast you from the land.' (80)

So saying the magic mirror mists over and beyond the mist the Queen can see nothing but herself. She tries to fling the no longer useful mirror from the castle wall. But the mirror is stuck to her hand and as she lifts it above her head and throws it, she falls with it screaming deep down until she is shattered into pieces on the rocks.

The story ends with the Queen's end before which Snow White has announced the beginning of a social structure where one would reap and own the fruits of one's labour. A utopian revolutionary social set-up without any authoritarian, oppressive control is imagined and projected in the tale. The Queen and the mirror are identified. They end together and in a similar manner. Their complete destruction symbolises total denial of centralised power which affects the marginalised sections of society and introduces a rift between classes. A classless society where everyone would be treated equally and everyone would fulfil his/her needs and be happy, is dreamt and established at the end of this retelling.

Though the focus of the tale is political it does not do away with the feminist concern with gender. It does not have a prince nor is the mirror a patriarchal voice.

However that it is Snow White who acts as a rebel and a spokesperson of equality and that the mirror and the Queen who is the epitome of power are identified, hint at the feminist aspects of the tale since patriarchy necessarily denotes power and authority concentrated in the hands of men. Thus through its Marxist agenda this revision of the traditional 'Snow White' touches upon gender issues as well. Marriage with a rich prince or a dream of being a princess is just dispensed with and happiness is seen not necessarily in financial well being. Traditional happy ending in marriage here is replaced by a revolutionary political change suggesting a profound change in the status-quo.

As rightly observed by Vanessa Joosen many retellings of 'Snow White' like Gilbert and Gubar's analytic discourse on the tale view it in a broader literary context; depict the character's psychological depth rather than presenting them in black and white shades; fill in the gaps like the disappearance of the king from the tale; challenge or question the happy endings by presenting alternatives and lastly, rationalise the supernatural role of the magical mirror.⁶⁰ Many of Gilbert and Gubar's concerns are reflected in these retellings, particularly in the depiction of the wicked Queen as a creative plotter/schemer. In most cases she is presented in a positive light while it is the King, physically absent but exercising his authoritative role through the mirror, who is assigned negative features.

Retellings like those of Donoghue's 'The Tale of the Apple,' Grainne Healy's 'Snow Fight Defeats PatriArki'⁶¹ (1989) offer female bonding as an alternative to the traditional happy ending. Retellings like Coover's present a male character's perspective maintaining a distance from the narrative. Writers like Hubert Schirneck in his 'The Latest News from the Seven Dwarves'⁶² (2000) present 'Snow White' from the dwarves' perspective. Herein the dwarves see Snow White as an ungrateful child. This retelling aimed at children invites children to self-critically identify themselves with Snow White rather than see her either as a victimised or idealised role model.

Retellings of 'Snow White' range in narratological perspective from the Queen, Snow White, the dwarfs, the prince and in some cases the mirror⁶³ and even the apple⁶⁴. However, no retelling has been attempted through the king's or the hunter's perspective. That fairy tale retelling has been greatly influenced by feminist criticism

and the limited role performed by the two characters in the original tale could be the reasons why retellings from their viewpoint are absent.

It is in their 1994 book *No Man's Land* that Gilbert and Gubar return to 'Snow White' and its retellings. They confirm the need to retell the old tales (not just 'Snow White') in order to understand the variety and complexity of roles women have been and are able to play as authors and characters: "... the old fairy tales about relations between men and women have mutated in increasingly complicated ways, so that many of us – feminist critics, cultural historians – seem to be lost in a forest of stories about the future of sexuality and sex roles."⁶⁵ Feminist literature and criticism have remarkably shaped the attempts at retelling fairy tales. Gilbert and Gubar themselves at the end of the book present retellings that "crystallise controversies about the erotic that have persisted from the turn of the century to the present."⁶⁶ Readers, particularly women, are offered a choice to select their favourite retold version and even visualise and create their own stories. Thus retelling provides writers and readers with a means through which socio-political and humanitarian perspectives could be discussed though to some extent at the expense of literariness of the tales.

As said above this Chapter showcases a few varieties of retelling and through their analysis, particularly of the tale 'Snow White,' also attempts to project the creative and critical interaction that occurs within the scope of fairy tale retelling.

NOTES

- ¹ Johnson Daniel, "Books Barely Furnish a Room," *The Times* 16 Sept. 1992:3.
- ² Salman Rushdie, "Angela Carter, 1940-1992: A Very Good Wizard, A Very Dear Friend," *The New York Times* 8 Mar. 1992. 13 May 2008.
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/12/27/specials/carter-rushdie.html>
- Carter was not much analysed in this project also because she deals with the Charles Perrault tales and the present project mainly assesses the Grimm fairy tales.
- ³Christa Joyce, "Contemporary Women Poets and the Fairy Tale," *Fairy tales Reimagined: Essays on New Retellings*, ed. Susan Reddington Bobby (North Carolina: McFarland, 2009) 31-43. Subsequent references are given parenthetically as (Bobby,).
- ⁴Anne Sexton, "Briar Rose," *Transformations* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971)107-112. Subsequent references are given parenthetically as (T,).
- ⁵Diana Hume George, *Oedipus Anne: The Poetry of Anne Sexton* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1987) 38. Subsequent references are given parenthetically as (George,).
- ⁶F. Jacobi, *Fairy Tales of Jacob Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen* (New York: Modern Library, 1952) 48.
- ⁷ Dawn Skorczewski, "What Prison is This? Literary Critics Cover Incest in Anne Sexton's 'Briar Rose,'" *Signs* (Winter,1996, 309-342): 320.
- ⁸Olga Broumas, "The Sleeping Beauty," *Beginning With O* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977) 50-53.
- ⁹ Nancy A. Walker, *The Disobedient Writer* (Austin: Texas UP, 1995)60.

- ¹⁰Sara Hendersen Hay, "Sleeper," *Story Hour* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1998)10.
- ¹¹ Sara Hendersen Hay, "Sleeper - 2," *Story Hour* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1998)11.
- ¹²Sara de Ford, "The Sleeping Beauty," *JSTOR and Poetry Foundation*, 171.
- ¹³Robert Coover, "Briar Rose," (Hypertextual version)
<http://www.brown.edu/Departments/MCM/people/scholes/BriarRose/texts/BRhome.html> 1-42 Subsequent references are given parenthetically as (L) L for Lexia.
- ¹⁴Larry McCaffery, *The Metaphorical Muse: The Works of Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, and William H. Gass*(Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1982)14.
- ¹⁵Angela Carter, *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (London, US: Penguin, 1977, 2008) 25.
- ¹⁶Robert Coover, "The End of Books," *The New Media Reader*, ed. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort (London: The MIT Press, 2003) 707. Subsequent references are given parenthetically.
- ¹⁷Sunje Redies, "Return With New Complexities: Robert Coover's 'Briar Rose,'" *Marvels and Tales*, 18.1 (2004:9-27)14.
- ¹⁸Brian Evenson quoted by Redies, 25.
- ¹⁹Jaroslav Kusnir, "Subversion of Myths: High and Low Culture in Donald Barthelme's 'Snow White' and Robert Coover's 'Briar Rose,'" *European Journal of American Culture*, 23:1 (2004): 47.

- ²⁰Michael Gerra, "The Awakening," *The New York Times Books*, (February 16, 1997) 2.
- ²¹Jane Yolen, *Briar Rose* (New York: TOR Book, 1992) Subsequent references are given parenthetically.
- ²²Jack Zipes quoted from *Spells of Enchantment* on the introductory page of Yolen's novel.
- ²³Jack Zipes, *Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (2nd ed. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002) 195. Subsequent references are given parenthetically as (Brothers Grimm ____).
- ²⁴The term has been used often by feminists since the 1970s to refer to factionalism and infighting within feminist movement which mostly is instigated by men or patriarchal interests directly or indirectly.
- ²⁵Caroline King Bernard Hall, *Anne Sexton* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989) 106.
- ²⁶Carol Leventen, "Transformations's Silencings," in *Critical Essays on Anne Sexton* ed. Linda Wagner-Martin, (Boston: G K Hall, 1989)136.
- ²⁷Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976) 102.
- ²⁸Olga Broumas, "Cinderella" 57-58.
- ²⁹Neal A. Lester, "(Un)Happily Ever After: Fairy Tale Morals, Moralities and Heterosexism in Children's Texts," *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education* 42(2007): 69.
- ³⁰Emma Donoghue, "The Tale of the Shoe," *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (USA: Joanna Cotler Books, 1997) 1-8.

- ³¹Susan Reddington Bobby, ed. *Fairy Tales Re-imagined: Essays on New Retellings* (USA: McFarland & Co. Inc, 2009) 24.
- ³²Francisca Lia Block, "Glass," *The Rose and the Beast: Fairy Tales Retold* (New York: Joanna Cotler Books, 2000) 53-70.
- ³³Roald Dahl, *Revolting Rhymes* 1982, Illus. Quentin Blake (New York: Puffin Books, 2009) 5.
- ³⁴Gail Carlson Levine, *Cinderellis and the Glass Hill* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000).
- ³⁵Philip Pullman, *I Was a Rat!* Illus. Kevin Hawkes (New York: Dell Yearling, 2000).
- ³⁶Priscilla Galloway, "The Prince," in *Truly Grim Tales* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1995).
- ³⁷Babette Cole, *Prince Cinders*, 1987, (London: Puffin, 1997).
- ³⁸Ellen Jackson, *Cinder Edna* Illus. Kevin O'Malley (New York: Lothrop, 1994).
- ³⁹Melissa Kantor, *If I Have a Wicked Stepmother, Where's My Prince?* (New York: Hyperion, 2005).
- ⁴⁰Ann Jungman, *Cinderella and the Hot Air Balloon* Illus. Russell Ayto (London: Lincoln, 1992).
- ⁴¹Roald Dahl, "Cinderella," 5-12.
- ⁴²Judith Viorst, *If I Were In Charge of the World and Other Worries: Poems for Children and Their Parents* (New York: Alladin Paperbacks, 1981).
- ⁴³Jack Zipes, ed. 1983 *Trials and Tribulations of Little Red riding Hood* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1993) 343. Subsequent references are given parenthetically as (TT _).

- ⁴⁴Ibid, 49-58.
- ⁴⁵ Zipes describes the title of his retold tale as ‘Little Red Riding Hood-Re-ruminated by Tomi Ungerer’, pg 261.
- ⁴⁶Thomas H Johnson, ed., *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little Brown, 1960) 333.
- ⁴⁷Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 17.
- ⁴⁸ Steven E Colburn, ed. *No Evil Star – Selected Essays, Interviews and Prose* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: U of Michigan P, 1985) 145.
- ⁴⁹Ellen Conan Rose, “Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales,” *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* eds. Elizabeth Abel et al (London: UP of New England, 1983) 215.
- ⁵⁰Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975) 183.
- ⁵¹Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (New York: Pantheon, 1979) 76-77.
- ⁵²Maria Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (New York: Norton, 1999) 77.
- ⁵³Robert Coover, “The Dead Queen,” *Spells of Enchantment: The Wondrous Tales of Western Culture*, ed. Jack Zipes (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991) 704-711.
- ⁵⁴Shuli Barzilai, “Reading ‘Snow White’: The Mother’s Story,” *Signs* 15 (1990): 515-534.
- ⁵⁵Steven Swann Jones, “The Innocent Persecuted Heroine Genre: An Analysis of Its Structures and Themes,” *Western Folklore* 52.1 (1993): 13-41.

- ⁵⁶N J Girardot, "Initiation and Meaning in the Tale of Snow White and Seven Dwarfs," *Journal of American Folklore* 90 (1977): 274-300.
- ⁵⁷Patricia Carlin, "The Stepmother Arrives," *The Poets Grimm: Twentieth Century Poems from Grimm Fairy Tales*, eds. Jeanne Marie Beaumont and Claudia Carlson (Ashland: Storyline, 2003) 46-47.
- ⁵⁸Merseyside Fairy Story Collective, "Snow White," *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England*, ed. Jack Zipes (New York: Routledge, 1989) 74-80.
- ⁵⁹Mary Maher, "Hi, Ho, It's Off to Strike We Go!" *Rapunzel's Revenge: Fairy Tales for Feminists* eds. Anne Claffey, et al, (Dublin: Attic, 1985) 31-35.
- ⁶⁰Vanessa Joosen, *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue between Fairy Tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State UP, 2011) 291.
- ⁶¹Healy Grainne, "Snow Fight Defeats Patri Arky," *Sweeping Beauties: Fairytales for Feminists* eds. Elaine Crowley, Rita Kelly and Maeve Kelly (Dublin: Attic, 1989) 39-45.
- ⁶²Hubert Schirneck's "The Latest News from the Seven Dwarves" is an originally German retelling. This reference is taken from the translated extracts of the tale and its analysis in Vanessa Joosen's book mentioned above in note 59.
- ⁶³Examples: a) Mette Ivie Harrison, *Mira Mirror* (New York: Speak, 2004).
b) Alice Friman, "Snow White: The Prince," 1984, Beaumont and Carlson, 218.

c) Thylia Moss, "Lessons from a Mirror," 1989, Beaumont and Carlson,
169.

⁶⁴Sue Owen, "The Poisoned Apple," Beaumont and Carlson, 110.

⁶⁵Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer
in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994) 359.

⁶⁶*Ibid*, 363.

CHAPTER – V

Towards An Understanding and a Better Acceptance of the Theory and Attempts of Retelling Fairy Tales

There is considerable scope to believe that the idea of ‘fairy’ may have existed in the human mind and may have been called by a different name before d’Aulnoy coined the term in the 17th century and along with other contemporary conteuses and male writers included the fairy in their tales. As said earlier d’Aulnoy and other salonnières exploited the subversive potential of the fairy tales also to attack the narrow religiosity and misogynist tendencies of Louis XIV’s court. Different kinds of fairies that they created in their tales – just, witchlike, evil, sympathetic, dirty etc – subtly challenged the court, the Catholic church and the pietistic reign that Louis’s wife insisted on practising at court. “... [I]n the context of a pietistic fin de siècle, the fairy tale constituted a defence of fashionable secular society. Its portrayal of earthly luxury and happiness and its reliance on the supernatural powers of fairies, sorcerers, and other ‘pagan’ figures obviously run counter to a Christian world view. And yet, as a narrative form associated with children and the lower classes and championed largely by women writers, this defence of secular culture appeared largely innocuous, at least if the lack of the extended critiques is taken as any indication. Still, the unsettled political and social climate of the time partially explains the appeal of the genre,” say Lewis Seifert and Donna Stanton in this respect.¹

They projected through these fairies their innermost rage against the non-secular attitudes of the court and Louis’s wife. It is interesting to note here the fact that these early women writers of fairy tales referred to themselves in their frontispieces as sibyls or fairies.²

Evolution of any cultural manifestation, be it literature, language, music or any other art, is possible, according to Kate Dustin, owing to the strikingly unique ability of the human mind “to extract information from one context and manipulate it in another,”³ which could lead to the convergence of the old species resulting in the emergence of new ones. It is human nature to acquire, discretely share and reflect on the shared information. It is from this process that cultural evolution springs. D’Aulnoy

successfully attempted a creative and innovative dissemination of the terms fairies and fairy tales, which were culturally informative units – known as memes – with which she was familiar. Applying Dustin’s views on cultural evolution Zipes proves that D’Aulnoy discretely shared her inherited information with her contemporary salonnières, readers and writers of her society and consequently readers of other linguistic societies as well. These contemporaries reflected on the shared information and spread it by recreating tales about fairies in extraordinary ways that helped the genre to flourish and expanded the meaning and growth of fairy tales. In the process of cultural evolution the original significance attached to the conte de fees in the late 17th century French society is lost today and has assumed extremely different meanings and associations. However it is still remarkably significant and necessary even today. It has become more and more complex and expansive with its commercialisation in the form of Disney films on the one hand and various innovative experiments in literature, theatre, film etc on the other. However with its increasing expansive cultural evolution and necessity of its existence in the human society, it still retains its complexity to make its scholars puzzle over why fairy tales are so very necessary and relevant.

Zipes claims that the critical and utopian function of fairy tales is “to suggest imaginative ways to alter our lives.”⁴ The aristocratic salonnières used fairy tale telling as a means of self-portrayal and representation of their own interests, interests of aristocracy as well as proper aristocratic social manners. In the process they not only displayed their intelligence, education and linguistic abilities but many times opposed the set male standards that governed their lives. Thus besides amusement and aesthetic enrichment and enhancement the aristocratic conteuses used fairy tales as symbolic gestures to subvert and question the ruling male standards of taste, values and social behaviour. Their attempts at imaginatively presenting ideal behaviour, manners and attractive standards and values laid the foundation for the institutionalisation of the literary fairy tales. What established itself as a literary fairy tale had begun as an aristocratic conversational game in the parlours and salons of the mid 17th century. Though both men and women participated in and enjoyed the game where challenges of new inventions and refinement were thrown at the tellers, it is the women who particularly manipulated the opportunity to improve their linguistic, conversational, imaginative and oratorical abilities to portray ideal morals, manners,

tastes and etiquettes and also to exhibit their rebellion against the existing oppressive male standards and values. They would display their knowledge of and familiarity with folk tale motifs and also invent new tales. These linguistic games started as a social amusement also offered the conteuses scope to portray themselves and imaginatively project their innermost thoughts about their oppressive experiences. For effective self-expression they set their own rules of narration, one of them being impromptu telling of even a known tale/motif in an innovative manner.

Thus converging new ideas, motifs etc with the old ones the conteuses also wrote down the tales. This paved the way for the fairy tales to be an institution. On the other hand the oral tradition continued too. In fact there was a healthy interaction between the oral and literal traditions. While the written tales appealed with foreknowledge and transformation of their oral counterpart, the orators circulated the truncated versions of the literary tales. Major writers of fairy tales were women who told them in the highbrow parlour games with a purpose, apart from their entertainment, to project their imaginative picture of improved alternative social system. The writers included men as well; prominent among them was Charles Perrault (1697). These tales were necessarily for adult consumption and aimed essentially at adult responses. We could derive two important observations here: one, that the institutionalisation of the fairy tale cannot be historically traced back to Perrault's publication of his collection of fairy tales in 1697 but mainly to women conteuses namely Madame D'Aulnoy (1697), Mademoiselle La Force (1697), Mml L'Heritier (1696), Chevalier deMailly (1698), Madame de Murat (1698) who promoted this game; and two, that this institutionalisation of fairy tales was not for children but for adults. It began with the adult addressee and later i.e. only in the 18th century children were thought of as prospective consumers of fairy tales.

As said earlier though the oral tradition of tale telling continued alongside the written literary tradition, the shift from the oral to the written and institutionalisation of the genre diversified the attitudes to the tales. It amounted to violation and appropriation of the oral story telling resulting in or intended at the establishment of the bourgeoisie. Besides with the literary form of the fairy tale the public and loud act increasingly started becoming private and silent, the communal, social gatherings shrank to individual, personal amusement and above all social classes were separated. Literacy and ability to read were limited to very few particularly of the elitist classes

and hence the French literary fairy tale that served the interests of the aristocrats and aristocracy sowed the seeds of social separation. The 'folk' thus became elitist. It became exclusive, restricted to the literate and moved away from the non-literate masses whose oral tales were social and represented recognisable themes and characters, ordinary wishes and desires especially of peasants. The literary fairy tales became individualistic and depicted the concerns, tastes and values of the rulers. The tales were collectively and socially received by the aristocracy and bourgeoisie. However gradually the same tales which could voice aristocratic women's disillusionment with the then existing codes and standards of behaviour and manner and their presentation of how they should be, now were thought of, in the hands of men writers and to the detriment of the women, a means by which patriarchal codes of civilité could be enforced on children. There was a shift in the implied reader of the literary tales. The focus shifted from the adults to the children of the upper classes, few in number and able to read and write. Fairy tales for children till the early 18th century were orally transmitted. The literary tales intended for adult readers and emphasising values of civilité in France were thought of as adept means by which children could be influenced and moulded to accept the ruling standards of taste and behaviour, the status-quo. However though the existing stories talked of mores and values of French civilité, they were connotative and suggestive on so many different levels that they were considered unsuitable for children on this account. And it is due to this same reason that the tales for children were "sanitised and expurgated." (Z, 14)

To repeat once again, institutionalisation of the literary fairy tale was initiated by Madame D'Aulnoy and not Perrault as usually and quite mistakenly assumed. (Z, 25-26) Madame D'Aulnoy was familiar with many different folk tales. In her salon games she consciously undertook to present through her tale a woman's perspective on love, fidelity, sincerity and other values forced upon women by a male dominated culture. Thus while putting forth her views on aristocratic manners and civility in her tales she made them a vehicle for representing her ideas of how women can govern themselves and determine their own fates. She was by no means a rebel against patriarchy nor was she a feminist. However, by exposing the irrelevant decadent aristocratic practices and behaviour she simultaneously created and offered in her tales a space for women where they could display their individual potentials and realise themselves as independent individuals. As such D'Aulnoy in all her tales

invests all her women characters with special powers. The all powerful entity in her tales is not a patriarchal god but a fairy or a group of fairies. It is the fairies in her tales who judge men and women, reward or punish them for obeying or violating the rule of “fairy civility.” (Z, 28) However the women in her tales are shown to assert themselves only within the constraints of the patriarchal code; the female desire is tamed and shaped as per male standards of industriousness and fairness reflected in the endings of her stories. As Zipes puts it, “Active submission to a male code qualified by tenderness does not lead to autonomy.” (Z, 28)

The institution of the literary fairy tale underwent changes in their social function from social amusement in the form of games and discourses through self representation and through generation of the patriarchal code of civility to a form of individual amusement. What began with Madame D’Aulnoy as an art of social amusement and a means of self-representation in the latter half of the 17th century became in the 18th an art intended at amusement and instruction of an isolated reader reading in private. The institution of fairy tale created by women and its social function changed. It is in these changes that the fairy tale for children originated. Around 1720s and 1730s simultaneously the literary tale became a privilege of the literate aristocrats and bourgeois and didactic moral tales were composed and distributed for young aristocrats. The social function of the literary fairy tale thus shifted to instructing children through entertainment. With these changes fairy tales became one of the prime means by which paternal rule could be subtly and consistently reinforced. While discussing the institutionalisation of fairy tales Zipes points out that the story “‘Beauty and the Beast’ has been especially instrumental in rationalising male domination, gender polarity and violation because of its formation in the 18th century when the middle classes were restructuring family and society in specific patterns that would be internalised through literary socialization.” (Z, 36)

Madame Le Prince de Beaumont’s version of the Beauty and the Beast tale in 1756 was one of the first fairy tales written exclusively for children. She had condensed and altered the earlier version of the tale and targeted it towards young girls to teach them how to become ladies. The tale seems to have been aimed at conditioning girls to be subservient and boys to be in a position of power and domination.

Beauty in the tale is an obedient girl who accepts her father's decisions unquestioningly. She is willing to serve and be ruled by her father who is the final authority for her. She desires to please her father and hence out of her unquestioned acceptance of her father's rule and her desire to please him, she sacrifices herself to the beast. She is passed on from one male master to another. Willingly and without complaining she accepts the rule of another father-figure and sacrifices her body to the Beast who desires it. Beauty selflessly allows herself to be ruled and sacrifices herself in obedience to and worship of the male authority. As a result the fairies reward her with a perfect husband. Beauty thus becomes an exemplary figure – selfless, nameless, the submissive and loving wife. As time passed the printed literary tale received the attention of the illustrators. The illustrators mostly reinforced the message of the tale. With the spread of literacy and technology the printed word and the illustrated image paved the way for the stereotypical ideas and patriarchal values to percolate deep into the social psyche. With technological advancement in the 19th century in the form of films the visual animated image emphatically reinforced the word of the text and the illustrated message. The fairy tale became mythicised in order to instruct its consumers about the stereotyped gender roles and behaviour to serve and sustain patriarchal rule.

The rising bourgeoisie expected extremely didactic stories for children. Though stories were being told and written for children on a small scale in the mid 18th century the debate on the use of printed tales exclusively for children continued from the 17th and 18th centuries till the 19th throughout Europe and part of America. However by the 19th century the attempts at tailoring the oral tales and their fantasy and magic to suit and sustain the norms, needs and expectations of bourgeois reader and culture were triumphant and thus while the Grimms' tales were famous in Germany in the 19th century, Hans Christian Andersen's tales were more popular in England and America. The tailored, mended and ironed tales in a male-dominated discourse had great social and ideological ramifications for the process of civilisation in the west.⁵

Jack Zipes summarises the crucial functions that the literary fairy tale as institution performed in and for the middle class society by the end of the 19th century as follows:

- “1. It introduced notions of elitism and separatism through a select canon of tales geared to children who know how to read.
2. Though it was also told, the fact that the fairy tale was printed and in a book with pictures gave it more legitimacy and enduring value than an oral tale which disappeared soon after it was told.
3. It was often read by a parent in a nursery, school, or bedroom to soothe a child’s anxieties, for the fairy tales for children were optimistic and were constructed with the closure of the happy end.
4. Although the plots varied and the themes and characters were altered, the classical fairy tale for children and adults reinforced the patriarchal symbolical order based on rigid notions of sexuality and gender.
5. In printed form the fairy tale was property and could be taken by its owner at his or her leisure for escape, consolation, inspiration.
6. Along with its closure and reinforcement of patriarchy, the fairy tale also served to encourage notions of rags to riches, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, dreaming, miracles and such.
7. There was always tension between the literary and oral traditions. The oral tales continued and continue to threaten the more conventional and classical tales because they can question, dislodge, and deconstruct the written tales. Moreover, within the literary tradition itself, there were numerous writers such as Charles Dickens, George MacDonald, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde, and Edith Nesbit who questioned the standardised model of what a fairy tale should be.
8. It was through script that there was a full-scale debate about what oral folk tales and literary fairy tales were and what their respective functions should be. By the end of the 19th century the fairy tale had expanded as a high art form (operas, ballets, dramas) and low art form (folk plays, vaudevilles, and parodies) and a form developed classically and experimentally for children and adults. The oral tales continued to be disseminated through communal gatherings of different kinds, but they were also broadcast by radio and gathered in books by folklorists.

Most important in the late 19th century was the rise of folklore as an institution and of various schools of literary criticism that dealt with fairy tales and folk tales.

9. Though many fairy tale books and collections were illustrated and some lavishly illustrated in the 19th century the images were very much in conformity with the text. The illustrators were frequently anonymous and did not seem to count. Though the illustrations often enriched and deepened a tale, they were more subservient to the text.” (Z, 74-75)

By the turn of the 20th century however the institutionalisation of the fairy tale genre was revolutionised further by the film technology when it usurped the printed word to replace the dominant word/text with an animated image. By institutionalisation is meant in Zipes’s words “the manner in which a certain type of literature develops conventional narrative motifs, themes, semantic codes and character types that are easily recognisable (despite variations); sets up a customary social system that calls for its use in socialising and amusing children in schools or at night time and in providing pleasure for adults, who can recall childhood experiences or experiment with more complicated versions of the genre; and engenders a production and distribution system that responds to market conditions.”⁶ The cinematic institutionalisation has helped in bringing about the process of mythicisation of the fairy tale genre to its completion – a point when and where a tale becomes and is accepted as natural and eternal.

Myth as Roland Barthes defines it is “a system of communication,” “a type of speech chosen by history,” “a message,” “a mode of signification,” “a form.”⁷ According to him since it is not the object of its message but the manner of the utterance of the message and its intention that defines myth, everything can be a myth as long as “it is conveyed by a discourse.” (107) By discourse he does not mean simply oral speech but extends the term to include written, pictorial, cinematic, journalistic, advertising communication. Myth he says, “is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication” (108). As such myth is “*a second order semiological system*” (113) since it works on a system which already exists before it. Thus the material that the myth uses viz. language, picture, rituals, posters, objects etc start functioning as signifiers as soon as “they are caught by myth.” (113) The form and meaning of the mythical signifier are never contradictory or split.

“The meaning is always there to *present* the form; the form is always there to *outdistance* the meaning.” (122)The form of the mythical signifier is thus “empty but present” and its meaning is “absent but full.” (122)As such myth acquires the status of a “*value*.” (122)

As mentioned earlier it is its intention rather than its literal meaning, which determines and defines myth. Yet the intention of the myth is “frozen, purified, eternalised, *made absent* by this literal sense.” (122-123)The freezing offers it an innocent look. In fact in order to appear neutral and innocent it freezes, “suspends itself, turns away and assumes a look of generality... stiffens” (124) just at the moment of reaching its recipient. “This is because myth is a speech *stolen and restored*,” Barthes says. (124) However the restored speech is not the same as that was stolen. It fakes itself. The moment taken for this “surreptitious faking” (124) gives myth its frozen, “benumbed” look. This freezing is freezing into something natural. Myth naturalises the concept when it has to choose between either unveiling or liquidating the concept. This is the main principle and function of myth. It naturalises the concept; “transforms history into nature;” (128) gives a natural justification to a historical intention. Naturalisation of the concept is the essential function of myth and since its intentions are naturalised, not hidden, myth is “experienced as innocent speech.” (130)Such naturalisation and innocence make myth “imperfectible and unquestionable; time or knowledge will not make it better or worse.” (130)The characteristic feature of the stolen speech that myth is, is to invade meaning and to transform it into form. Myth robs language, in other words. It insinuates itself into meaning and rests and prospers there. It is “a robbery by colonisation.” (132)The meaning, which attempts to resist mythical capture, is bodily carried away by myth i.e. the language. The object that “resists completely yields completely.” (132) Poetic language resists myth but in turn becomes “an ideal prey for myth: the apparent lack of order of signs, which is the poetic facet of an essential order, is captured by myth, and transformed into an empty signifier, which will serve to *signify* poetry.” (133) Myth thus talks about things, “purifies them ... makes them innocent ... gives them a natural and eternal justification [and] ... a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.” (143)The passage, in myth, from history to nature leading to an eternal and innocent appearance, Barthes equates with the process of bourgeois ideology. He calls bourgeois society “the privileged field of mythical

significations.” (137) Different types of bourgeoisie, share at a deeper level, “a certain regime of ownership ... order ...ideology.” (137) Bourgeois society hails and functions as per a certain ideology; it obliterates its name in its ideological manifestation. Ideologically it is nameless. Bourgeoisie is “the social class which does not want to be named.” (137) Bourgeois ideology spreads over everything, obliges that which is not bourgeois to borrow from the bourgeoisie. This is its way of ex-nominating itself, losing its name without the risk of being erased. It therefore can achieve non-resistant inclusion/ merging within itself of bourgeois theatre, art and humanity. The bourgeois becomes completely nameless when “there is only one single human nature left” (138). This nature, the Man who emerges from this nature is the “Eternal Man” that the bourgeois ideology upholds. This Eternal Man is neither proletarian nor bourgeois. The bourgeoisie sets its norms “in everything in everyday life;” (139) it “has and makes us have” (139) its own representations of the relations between man and the world. These representations are “normalised.” The avant-garde revolt, the militants act, the intellectuals quarrel. However these are fractions of the same bourgeois society and their intolerance of the bourgeoisie is limited and more or less abandons the “normalised forms” which then “gravitate towards the enormous mass of the undifferentiated, of the insignificant, in short, of nature.” (139) Spread and practice of the bourgeois norms on a national level give them a look of the laws of a natural order thus causing a complete absorption of the bourgeoisie to the extent of total loss of its name. It is in this anonymity that the bourgeois ideology flourishes and prospers. In fact, being nameless, losing the name itself is the bourgeois ideology – “the process through which the bourgeoisie transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world, History into Nature.” (140) Bourgeoisie attempts this namelessness by penetrating the intermediate classes. The bourgeois norms and their representations are slowly sowed into the social psyche of the lower middle classes. Through the press, the news, and literature these norms become the very norms “as dreamed, though not actually lived” (140) of the lower classes. “The bourgeoisie is constantly absorbing into its ideology a whole section of humanity, which does not have its basic status and cannot live up to it except in imagination, that is, at the cost of an immobilisation and an impoverishment of consciousness.” (140)The bourgeoisie converts reality into an image. The world presents the bourgeois society with its reality and in return receives its inverted image in which man is shown as universal, eternal; humanity and nature are presented as unchanging and unchangeable.

Bourgeois ideology is “scientific or intuitive” i.e. “it records facts or perceives values, but refuses explanation.” (141)

Barthes draws parallels between bourgeois ideology and myth. Myth in a bourgeois society is a “depoliticised speech.” Just as bourgeois ideology offers the world’s reality into a natural image of this reality, just as the former gains its identity through obliteration and disowning of its name so in myth do the things lose their historical quality, “the memory that they once were made.” (142) Like the bourgeois ideology the myth completely transforms reality, empties it of history and fills it with nature; it removes human meaning from things and is perceptibly absent. Like this ideology, myth in the process of passing from history to nature, “acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organises a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, ... it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves.” (143) To sum up in Barthes’s own words: “Myth consists in overturning culture into nature or, at least, the social, the cultural, the ideological, the historical into the ‘natural.’ What is nothing but a product of class division and its moral, cultural and aesthetic consequences is presented (stated) as being a ‘matter of course;’ under the effect of mythical inversion the quite contingent foundations of the utterance become Common Sense, Reason, Right Reason, the Norm, General Opinion, in short the *doxa* (which is the secular figure of the Origin).⁸

The classical fairy tale – the ones analysed in Chapter III are examples – has been mythicised, dehistoricised and depoliticised to represent and serve the interests of the bourgeoisie: Thinking of fairy tales the well-known tales come to everyone’s, even a child’s mind, as if they were part of our day to day life and our nature. These tales have acquired a universal, natural and eternal status in human society and with a neutral and innocent look give their readers what Zipes calls a feel “that we are all part of a universal community with shared values and norms; that we are all striving for the same happiness; that there are certain dreams and wishes which are irrefutable; that a particular type of behaviour will produce guaranteed results, - like living happily ever after with lots of gold in a marvellous castle, *our* castle and fortress, which will forever protect us from inimical and unpredictable forces of the outside world. We need only have faith and believe in the classical fairy tale...”⁹

Like the myth which works with already existing material the fairy tale mythicised into the classical fairy tale has worked on the material which belonged to and was orally transmitted by archaic, pagan societies, tribes and communities. It hardened the oral word into a written script – a “Christian and patriarchal” script. (*Brothers Grimm*, 211) like myth which desires its historical, political and systemic development despite the fact that it continues to undergo such development, the classical fairy tale has undergone and continues to undergo systematic and intentional “process of revision, reordering, and reinforcement.” (*Brothers Grimm*, 211)

“All the tools of modern industrial society (the printing press, the radio, the camera, the film, the record, the videocassette) have made their mark on the fairy tale to make it classical, ultimately in the name of the bourgeoisie, which refuses to be named and denies involvement, for the fairy tale must appear harmless, natural, eternal, ahistorical, and therapeutic. We are to live and breathe the classical fairy tale as fresh, free air. We are led to believe that this air has not been contaminated and polluted by a social class that will not name itself, wants us to continue believing that all air is fresh and free, and all fairy tales spring from this air.”(*Brothers Grimm*, 211) It is because of this mythicisation of the fairy tale that classical fairy tales like the myth, continue to fascinate human beings and have remained almost an inescapable part of the conscious human existence till date. Mircea Eliade in his *Myth and Fairy Tales* demonstrates how the two share a symbolic connection. According to him myths set ideals for human beings and their behaviour and have the potential of offering to humans genuinely religious experiences, an awareness of the deep roots of history and time. They mainly serve a religious and sacred function in society. Oral folk tales and literary fairy tales on the other hand are secular narratives presenting a mere “structure of an exemplary behaviour.”¹⁰ They do not point at a particular cultural phase or stage. They appropriate mythic notions and motifs thus suggesting that myths preceded folk and fairy tales. Eliade further sees parallels between the religious myths and the secular fairy tales. He suggests that the fairy tale is an imaginary continuation of the religious initiation in the myth “recreating the ‘initiatory ordeals’ on the plane of imagination and dream.” (202) As such to him, the fairy tale becomes “an easy doublet for the initiation myth and rites.” (202)

The blending of myths and folk tales in the oral tradition and modern literature have blurred the distinction between myth and fairy tale and in a way have rendered them

nameless. Like mythical speech fairy tales work on the already available material and are continually and purposefully “re-framed” to suit ideological communication which seems non-ideological. It is in this sense that Zipes calls fairy tales “contemporary myths” (*Brothers Grimm*, 209) “a stolen and frozen cultural good” (*Brothers Grimm*, 211) “open for appropriation by society.” (Barthes, 107) The ‘universal’ appeal of the fairy tales can thus be seen as an outcome of the systematic construction of the tales as “mythic constellations.” “They are constantly rearranged and transformed to suit changes in tastes and values, and they assume mythic proportions when they are frozen in an ideological constellation that makes it seem that there are universal absolutes that are divine and should not be changed.”(Z, 19)

It is the conteuses who prominently produced and wrote fairy tales for more than a century starting from the late 17th century. Their tales were considered the models to be followed. In their attempt at establishing the genre they worked on and at times questioned the earlier romantic patterns found particularly in the tales of Straparola and Basile in Italy and were fully aware that they were creating and establishing a new genre. Charles Perrault who was part of the salon games and interested in the budding form too simultaneously modelled on it his own tales. However one wonders why the conteuses, their tales and the inventive mode of their story telling that have been influential and ideal for more than a century were gradually eclipsed, why their attempts and efforts at establishing this genre were forgotten and sidelined if not wiped out and why it is Charles Perrault instead whose tales and model got projected prominently as the original institutionalising model.

The systematic and perhaps deliberate disappearance of the women storytellers, writers and their fairy tales perhaps amounts to what Zipes terms as “patriarchalisation” (*Brothers Grimm*, 194) not just of the matrilineal tales, and literary tradition but of matriarchal society at large. In patriarchalisation of literary tradition female protagonists are replaced by male heroes; rituals celebrating goddesses are substituted with rites upholding male gods and their superiority; and the sun god takes the place of the moon goddess. In fairy tales particularly, patriarchalisation demonises the goddess assigning demonic qualities to the virtuous princesses of the matrilineal tradition, replaces the major heroines with heroes, reinforces patrilineal marriage, degrades female ritualistic symbols, disfigures

the mythic structure based on moon worship and transforms young active women into helpless, domesticated, inactive or passive, obedient observers of the male rule.

Patriarchalisation laid the foundation for bourgeoisification of the fairy tale in the literary tradition. This process contributed to and consolidated the institutionalisation of the fairy tale leading to appropriation of the literary tale and its re-appropriation when it was (and is) orally transmitted at home, in school or in the theatre. In fact, appropriation was an important mode for the bourgeoisie to create its own institutions and conventions. It meant usurping the property, goods and cultural forms of lower classes, mending, tailoring, refining and at times altering them to suit the needs and sensibilities of the bourgeois culture. As a matter of fact, historically every ruling class and all colonialists have used this mode over the people and cultures they have dictated and governed or colonised. However in case of bourgeois appropriation, literary education and technological advancement were greatly effective in dissemination and institutionalisation of bourgeois ideas, views and practices. The bourgeoisie could establish its rightful place in German society only by using its culture as a weapon to assert their demands and needs. It was successful in this attempt and as a result bourgeois attitudes and practices were accepted widely by people of other social classes as almost natural standards of behaviour. Attempting to prove one's merit, to rise in social status and being successful through industriousness or at times even shrewdly became almost natural standards of behaviour to be followed by everyone. It is these seemingly natural ideas generated by the bourgeois appropriation of the oral folk tradition that are reflected in the Grimms' tales. The socio-historical context, the existing social norms, accepted behaviour and prevalent ideologies play a significant role in the shaping of a tale at a certain point of time in history. They affect the oral communication of the tales which in turn influences and results in "new literary rearrangements within an institutionalised discourse." (*Brothers Grimm*, 198) Thus there is a constant interaction between orality and literacy which needs to be considered in the study of the literary fairy tale. For it is the oral narratives which get arranged in a particular order as literary tales in which social norms, accepted behaviour and thinking of the dominant class are depicted thus rendering the tales representative and exemplary. They are used as ideal role models to be followed by children. The manner in which these arrangements are achieved to form literary tales is termed by Zipes as "semiotic constellations" or "semantic

consolidations.” These constellations and consolidations however are again subject to ambivalence or subversion in the oral communication leading to yet more and newer literary rearrangements of the tale. The cycle continues.

Taking the example of ‘Sleeping Beauty’ one could see such arrangements and rearrangements in the literary tradition shaped and influenced by the prevailing social factors exemplifying the process of mythicisation mentioned above. The first recorded appearance of the Sleeping Beauty in literature was in the 14th century Italian works *Perceforest* by an anonymous writer and Giambattista Basile’s “Sun, Moon and Talia” in *Pentamerone*. *Perceforest* presents a knight taking advantage of the sleeping woman and violating her whereas in Basile’s tale sleeping Talia’s beauty arouses a king, he carries her to a bed, abuses her, leaves her asleep and returns to the kingdom. Violation of a sleeping woman became a material which the later writers used and revised shifting their focus to a moral act of the woman’s salvation. So in 1697 Perrault in his version presented a prince, a man whose mere arrival and kneeling down beside the girl was enough to end the enchantment. “He approached trembling and admiring, and knelt down. At that moment the enchantment having ended, the princess awoke and bestowed upon him a look more tender than a first glance seemed to warrant. ‘Is it you, my prince?’ she said. ‘You have been long awaited.’”¹¹

Brothers Grimm in 1812 added the kiss to revive their Brier Rose. The 14th century versions reflect the social reality of the Baroque period wherein the power of princes and knights to exploit sleeping women and fulfil their sexual passion was socially permissible and was condoned. Hence the salvation of the helpless girl was not the focus of the tales in this period. In the 17th century, in keeping with the social norms of not openly justifying women’s violation and trying to present appropriate behaviour, Perrault did away with the violation and presented the princess’s salvation. However he also included in his tale a cannibalistic Queen – ogress who desires to eat Talia and her sons. The “proper” way in which women could be saved was depicted only in the 19th century in the Grimm version ‘Brier Rose.’ After Perrault Grimms’ version perfectly fit the bourgeois myth and was frozen and restored neglecting, forgetting and making us forget the ancient literary traces of the tale in the 14th century. The tale’s history was lost; it was naturalised, made to look neutral and innocent, turned into a myth and frozen as an ideologically classical tale.

This classical version and its ideology are now virally spread and duplicated differently in media, print and daily interactions at home and in public.

The bourgeoisified tale was greatly mythicised and patriarchalised by the “mythomaniac” (*Brothers Grimm*, 214) Disney in his films in the 20th century, which conveyed several apparently neutral and innocent mythic messages that remain intact even in the present. Zipes notes down the following mythic messages that the tale of the Sleeping Beauty has generated for centuries till date:

1. “Women are all naturally curious, and, as we know, curiosity kills cats and even sweet innocent princesses.
2. Men are daring, persistent and able to bestow life on passive or dead women whose lives cannot be fulfilled until rescued by a prince.
3. Women are indeed helpless without men. And without men they are generally catatonic or comatose, eternally waiting for the right man, always in a prone, deathlike position, dreaming of a glorious marriage.
4. Male energy and will power can restore anything to life, even all the people in an immense kingdom. We just need the right man for the job.” (*Brothers Grimm*, 214)

The classical tale of Sleeping Beauty is thus further mythicised into a tale about gender stereotypes, male hegemony, heterosexual and patriarchal resolution.

However though it stresses the Sleeping Beauty motif, mythicisation also cannot deny the motif of resurrection, revival, immortality and an uprising to the knowledgeable existence of a girl. The original utopian impulse of the tale cannot be completely erased and it is this indelible memory of the original tale that allows scope for “resurrection,” “revival” and “re-creation” of the tale by innovative re-tellers and re-writers of the tale. Thus new and innovative arrangements of the tale keep taking place and patriarchalisation in the literary tradition is challenged by these innovative endeavours that try to break and move beyond the male discourse and the mythical ramifications it generates. Whereas patriarchalisation continues in duplications of the tales in which structures and norms of the classical tales are repeated and decadent modes of thinking and believing are reinforced, a parallel anti-mythical and “non-male” discourse is established in the “re-visions” of the same tales in which attempts are made “to alter the reader’s views of traditional patterns, images, and codes.” (Z, 9)

Beyond being culturally significant re-vision is “an act of survival” as Adrienne Rich puts it, not just for women but even for men or male writers: “Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival ... [a] drive to self-knowledge, for women, ... more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see – and therefore live - afresh.”¹² In her assessment of women writers of 20th century and earlier Rich recognises that women writers saw love as the source of their suffering and victimisation instead of Man’s rule over women and power to dominate, terrorise, choose or reject her for his pleasure. The myth-making romantic tradition has been patriarchal, male dominant. Man did not appear as a ‘sex’ in women’s writing but the opposite was quite common: “[A] culture controlled by males, has created problems for the woman writer: problems of contact with herself, problems of language and style, problems of energy and survival.” (Rich, 20) The charismatic power of Man has fascinated and terrorised the woman under his control. The sexual identity established in a male-dominated culture needs to be changed if the old political and cultural order is to be kept at bay and dissuaded from re-asserting itself. Writers, particularly women, therefore “need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us.” (Rich, 19)

Rich wrote this article in 1972 – a period that witnessed emergence and progress of the second wave of feminist thinking. The fairy tale genre could hardly miss the attention of the feminist critics. They could see fairy tales generating expressions of proper gender behaviour and social expectations for women. They undertook criticism of these tales and the myths they generated while determining through them women’s lives and hopes. The dangerous and self-destructive ideas of passivity, uncomplaining and non-resistant self-abnegation, patience, servitude and sacrifice suggested through the prominent fairy tale heroines like Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White etc came under feminist censure during this period. Patriarchal assumptions and bourgeois attitudes reflected subtly as well as explicitly in the tales, particularly

the Perrault, Grimm and cinematic Disney versions have been attacked by the feminists since the 70s. It was the time when women writers and even some men had started thinking and writing differently. As Rich expected the writers particularly women writers in the 70s changed and challenged through their writings patterns that the earlier male writers had established. The “disobedient writer” does not conform with the traditional pattern and attempts to break its hold on her. This disobedience is not a privilege simply of women but even of men.¹³ Nancy Walker points at this process of modification and re-vision of traditional literary patterns at the hands of women as well as men writers, however differently: “Appropriating a literary genre in order to revise or even reverse its assumptions, ideologies, or paradigms is one of several ways in which a writer may alter an inherited tradition, and such a method is by no means the exclusive property of women. Indeed, literary history – particularly the history of fiction – is frequently constructed by successive writers turning to their own purposes the patterns and materials created by other writers. And yet it is also true that women’s relationship to such an inheritance has normally been fundamentally and dramatically different from that of men.” (Walker, 4)

Once again, at this point, it should be noted that by re-vision and retelling here is meant critical questioning of the existing forms and cultural assumptions that shape the tales. The stories chosen for analysis in the earlier chapter are such retellings which go beyond mere revision of the canonical tales. Writers of contemporary fairy tales, both women and men, in the 19th and 20th centuries targeted the dominant canonical fairy tale mode established by the tales of Perrault and the Grimms. Particularly Grimm fairy tales had a great impact and grip over the German and the entire European social psyche so much so that their texts were considered sacred. Even in the modern western culture the classic tales of Perrault and Grimm are revered and tampering with their texts, the traditionalists consider, “tantamount to sacrilege”¹⁴

The Grimms were very much interested in old German literature and folklore. They looked upon the old German literature and tradition as constituting basic truth about German culture and having the potential to bind the Germans together through customs and laws of their own making. Devoted to the idea of a united Germany the Grimms who were groomed in the reformed Calvinist religion desired to restore and reconstitute the old German tradition in its ‘pure’ form and this desire at

an unconscious level could have been a wish to assert and validate their own values which were conditioned by the patriarchal control that they experienced and practised at home and observed in public. Various circumstances in their childhood and early manhood during 1802-1812 influenced their literary works particularly on folk and fairy tales.¹⁵

Interested in seeking and restoring truths about old German culture, the Grimms had never intended to collect and publish tales for children. It was Clemens Brentano, a very well-known German poet who in 1806 requested the Grimm brothers- known for their study of and command over the old German literature and folklore- to collect old tales for him. Brentano had already published a collection of old German folk songs titled *The Boy's Wonder Horn* in 1805. In the second and third volumes of the book in 1808 he published some songs which the Brothers had collected. In 1807 as per Brentano's request the Grimms started working on the tales with the view and intention to reproduce authentic folklore for adults and thus through the tales document and preserve etymological and linguistic truths about the German people's customs and practices and their genuine ties to the oral tradition. In the course of their investigation of the history of German literature and culture they discovered the deep international and intercultural connections of the tales, realised and brought to the surface the meaning of the true folk tale. They however sought to bring into reality their imaginary notion of the ideal Germany, the Fatherland. They directed this project at nation building. It is evident in the letter of appeal to their friends and scholars to collect, select and forward any songs, rhymes, tales, legends, festivals, mores, games, proverbs, superstitions, dreams or expressions stemming from German peasantry: "Our fatherland is still filled with this wealth of material all over the country that our honest ancestors planted for us, and that, despite the mockery and derision heaped upon it, continues to live, unaware of its own hidden beauty and carries within it its own unquestionable source. ... it is extremely important that these are to be recorded faithfully and truly, without embellishments and additions, whenever possible from the mouth of the tellers in and with their very own words in the most exact and detailed way. It would be of double value if everything could be obtained in the local live dialect."¹⁶ They thus desired to record and save the natural and pure folklore and "celebrate a paternal heritage of a fatherland" (*Brothers Grimm*, 28) The Grimms invited various storytellers to their home and on hearing once or

many times the tales told by them would note the tales down. Most of their informants and storytellers were educated young women of the middle or aristocratic classes. They were “familiar with the oral tradition and literary tradition of tale-telling and would combine motifs from both the sources in their renditions. In addition to the tales of these storytellers and others who came later, the Grimms took tales directly from books, journals, and letters and edited them according to their tastes, preferences and familiarity with different versions.” (*Brothers Grimm, 29*)

Working for Brentano they did send him 49 tales that the former did not consider and abandoned. Eventually as they continued to research the tales and collect them, they sought permission from Brentano to publish the tales themselves. As a result the first volume of *Kinder-und Hausmarchen (Children's Household Tales)* came out with elaborate annotations in 1812. Fully annotated second volume of the tales came up in 1815, second edition with 170 tales in 1819, followed by five more editions till the last edition with 211 tales appeared in 1857.

After 1819 it was Wilhelm Grimm who exclusively revised, edited and shaped the tales. He would compare different versions of a tale and would alter, refine and synthesise it. It was he who particularly tried to idealise the messages they captured from the tales and attempted to represent them to suit and appear more proper for the bourgeoisie. Ironically thus in their endeavour to “restore” the truth they idealised it. Heinz Rölleke, who published in 1974 the 49 handwritten tales that the Grimms had collected for Brentano and that were discovered in 1920, reveals subtle contradictions and changes of meanings in the tales from the original handwritten texts to the last edition of 1857. He points out how the Brothers introduced great changes in shaping the tales to their purpose. Rölleke calls synthesising and changing process a “contamination” in the positive and creative sense of the term: “To contaminate an oral folk tale or a literary fairy tale is... to enrich it by artfully introducing extraordinary motifs, themes, words, expressions, proverbs, metaphors, and characters into its corporate body so that it will be transformed and form a new essence.”¹⁷ Folklorists use the term ‘contamination’ to indicate addition or inclusion of foreign or alien ingredients into a seemingly pure narrative. This addition could be enriching leading to something new, genuine and unique in and by itself. Though the Grimms intended to restore the true essence of the Germanic tradition of language and lore and though the Germanic essence and character of their tales have been researched,

discovered and rediscovered, the Brothers themselves admitted their fascination of numerous other cultures and folk traditions and how they saw great varieties among the Germans themselves and their dialects and customs. As mentioned earlier they shaped their tales by comparing different versions from different cultures. As Zipes records in *Brothers Grimm* many of the Grimm tales had French origin. (*Brothers Grimm*, 29) Haase too records that “Some of the Grimms’ most significant informants have turned out to be educated bourgeois women from families of French Huguenots who had settled in Germany after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.” (Haase, 360) Their knowledge of ancient myths and tales from different oriental societies and cultures did affect and influence and at times was consciously employed by them in their revision and edition of the tales. They were aware of this and hence, Rölleke claims that the Grimms did not use the word German in the title of their books on fairy tales. They did seek to establish a great legacy and cultural heritage of and for the German readers and people in general. However their conscious emphasis on the Indo-Germanic roots of the tales and their passion to trace back to the most ancient times through the tales from different cultures made their tales socially relevant not just to Germany but to the entire world. Worldwide these tales were and are considered ideal in the fairy tale form and content. These tales became a national primer for the unified Germany after 1871 and were upheld as important in school education. As Haase quotes Carl France in his essay, “To the spirit of German school children the tales have become what mother’s milk is for their bodies – the first nourishment for the spirit and imagination ... Through such genuine German diet must the language and spirit of the child gradually become more and more German ...” (Haase, 355) But critics like Vincent Brun viewed the use of fairy tales for education instead of amusement as a perversion and in 1945 the Grimms’ tales were condemned for their “Teutonic” nature. Their publication was banned by the forces in Germany considering them responsible for and leading to the atrocities, crimes and cruelty of the Nazis. Even the Germans during this period thought of the tales as inappropriate for children since they were seen as giving children a false conception of the world and making them irrational and inhuman. However eventually the ban was lifted and soon the tales became popular throughout the world and since then for more than the last 150 years they have been preferred as a best seller next only to the Bible. The Grimms’ tales came to be regarded as “classical” fairy tales; they surpassed even the significant Perrault and Andersen collections in popularity, and thus for the model and

proper fairy tale scholars refer more to the Grimms than the rest. The Grimms' tales have been greatly challenged, contested and revised in Europe and America. It is perhaps the result of the creative and artful contamination of these tales by the Grimms themselves in the process of their collection and edition that in the 19th and 20th centuries these tales were increasingly revised, reformed and innovatively retold by experimental contaminators of the fairy tale. Various socio-political developments since 1945 could be addressed just on account of contamination that the Grimms attempted in the tales. The innovative, extensive and experimental revisions brought about a great change in the structure and contents of the contemporary fairytale leading to change in the attitude toward fairy tales in general. They are no longer discarded as children's elementary stories but are considered appropriate for all age groups leading to institutionalisation of the genre in the sense mentioned earlier.

Whether it is the Brothers Grimm, Perrault, Andersen or any other major collectors and writers of fairy tales like Andrew Lang, Oscar Wilde, A. A. Milne or J.R.R. Tolkien the fairy tale discourse quite open, however, has tended to persist in the shadow of male-dominated institutionalised conditions though women fairy tale writers have been quite influential in the last four decades. In case of the Grimms' tales though they were spread and made popular through translations worldwide, their Americanisation could also be accounted for their extreme popularity as an institutionalised literary genre. Particularly the cinematic form these tales assumed in the hands of Disney converted and re-contextualised them into mass culture with a stronghold of male domination. Disney transformed them into "entertainment commodities...[and] brought about significant changes by celebrating the virile innocence of male power; emphasising the domestication of sweet, docile, pubescent girls; and extolling the virtues of clean-cut, all American figures and the prudent, if not prudish life." (*Brothers Grimm*, 60) Other cinematic and animated productions of fairy tales followed suit.

Fairy tales are produced and received within the constraints of the conditions of institutionalisation and are ruled by male myths about the appropriate social and gender roles and nature: Disney in his film based on the Grimms' 'Cinderella,' 'Snow White,' and 'Sleeping Beauty' allots the heroes prominence and dominance. Unlike in the written Grimm texts the male rescuers do not play merely an incidental role. But on the contrary their role, adventure and ultimate triumph are at the centre of the film.

In the Grimms' tales the male heroes appear very late in the narrative and are rarely described at length. Disney films on the other hand introduce the men very early in the tales, project them as having all the ideal qualities a man is expected to display in patriarchy and offer them a fuller role to play in the plot of the tales. The female protagonists after whom the tales are named are on the other hand reduced to passivity and mere faithful waiting for a male god. The heroes in the films defeat the evil, which is necessarily personified in uncontrolled female characters of witches, stepmothers and stepdaughters. The rescue of the industrious and suffering heroine at the hands of a strong male hero is a reward for her patience, purity of heart and faithful waiting. It is men in this mass-mediated versions of the tales who bring about order and harmony: "In celebrating the moral innocence of the white Anglo-Saxon male, made in America, Disney projected his ideological vision of an orderly society that could only sustain itself if irrational and passionate forces are held in check, ... Instead of associating evil with the oppressive rule of capitalist or fascist governments or with in-egalitarian socio-economic conditions, it is equated with the conniving, jealous female, with black magic and dirty play, with unpredictable forces of turbulence that must be cleaned and controlled. Though the intention was not malevolent, the Disney films *were meant*, to distract viewers from grasping the evil they confronted in their daily lives, and pointed to illusory possibilities for happiness and salvation." (*Brothers Grimm*, 61) Important here is the fact which cannot be overlooked that Disney deliberated his efforts not just at young viewers but prominently also at an adult audience. He wanted adults to believe in the "once upon a time" fairy tale messages that he would convey through the films: "As we do it, as we tell the story, we should believe it ourselves. It's a 'once upon a time' story, and I don't think we should be afraid of a thing like that."¹⁸ And it is mainly because his intended audience included people of all age groups and interests that his cinematic versions of the tales are still available. He reinterpreted the tales and transformed their characters: "I'd make Cinderella a sparkling, alive girl, even going so far as to give her a few human weaknesses. In this way we can prove that Cinderella really did live and that she still lives in the heart of every young girl who dreams ... we wish Cinderella to have a certain strength of character quite unlike the fairy story version of the heroine." (Disney, 28)

As said earlier the heroes of the three cinematic tales are also changed in their appearance and role and are given greater importance than in the Grimm version. The Americanised girls and boys in the stories are pitted against ambitious, cruel, frightening women villains. Even in the tale of Sleeping Beauty he introduces wicked women whereas the Grimm version presents but an angry fairy. Besides presenting the contrast between the good heroine and a bad villainess, passive and active women, Disney infuses the tales with an element of humour by way of small, secondary characters, may it be some animal or dwarfs who mediate between the hero/heroine and the villains. Kay Stone in her article on Walt Disney's Americanisation of the fairy tale points out the traits of the North American story telling tradition in the three tales. The element of humour and intervention of the secondary characters in the main action of the narrative are typical North American traits. Besides these features Disney also incorporated two more of these traits and they are diminishing magic and downplaying royalty. He mocks the two and creates humour at their cost. Stone in her research has repeatedly pointed out on the basis of her interviews with fairy tale readers that people are mainly influenced by the romantic aspects of the fairy tales. In fact, the tales are popularly viewed as love stories. It is this popular belief that Disney manifests in his cinematic versions of the tales. It strikes a chord with the audience – young as well as adult – and thus very effectively Disney's romantic vision is realised. Sentimentality and cute, colourful presentation infused with humour facilitate Disney's romanticisation and Americanisation of the tales. However in so doing Disney has not offered anything new. Rather, on the contrary, he has magnified the popular romantic view of and attitude to the fairy tale. The dreaming young girls in Disney's magic land can actually expect to live happily ever after with their respective princes.

Disney's fairy tales are amusing and popular with the audience of all age groups. However, their fantasy is false. They do not challenge the audience. In fact, the romanticisation and sanitisation of the tales in Disney films are dangerously harmful since the utopia of the happily ever after that they present is perverse and does not leave scope for hope, for changes as the traditional Grimm tales do. The latter are more forceful in their address mainly to the adults and can be variously interpreted by listeners/ readers of differing levels of ages and understanding. The multilayered semantic, symbolic, psychological nature of the folktale and the classical fairy tale

and the possibility of multiple interpretations from superficial to profound make them challenging. Beneath their dreamlike simple facade, “[t]hese tales deal with mysterious magic and with real and frightening conflicts with one’s self – conflicts not simply resolved with the appearance of a lover. The ‘happily ever after’ meaning of the fairy tale is not about finding one’s prince or princess, but finding one’s self. You will not find that in Disneyland” (Stone, 35)

The Grimm tales though tailored and therefore heavily criticised by fairy tale scholars, sometimes even as ‘fakelore’¹⁹ are defended by Zipes as artful contaminations created and reworked for readers unfamiliar with the oral tradition. Each of the Grimm tales has in its narrative structure multiple representations and voices. The known, unknown voices of all those who created, passed on, informed and narrated the tales to the Grimms, the Grimm Brothers’ own different voices as editors, writers and re-viewers of the tales and the voices even of the experimental, innovative retellers of classical tales could be heard in the literary world only on account of the creative “contamination” mentioned above. This variety of voices in different developmental periods of the fairy tale assertively prove the riches of this genre in offering new reactions, interpretations and perspectives at any stage of life. The ‘Germanicised’ nature of the tales and their “nationalistic” character were apparently dissolved, with time, in their universal appeal. Their variety, mediation by educated people and their re-formation as literary products offered them an international and interrogational appeal and flavour. The Grimms’ tales also attracted ideological attention of and debate from various scholars ranging on the one hand, from the conservatives like “Josef Prestel and Karl Spiess, who used them to promote a racist ideology, and on the other, radical critics such as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and even Antonio Gramsci, who sought to grasp their revolutionary appeal.” (*Brothers Grimm*, 69) The only flaw that Zipes records in the universal popularity of the Grimm tales is the tendency to isolate the tales from their historical context while appreciating and appropriating them. The tales are endowed with more magic than they actually possess. The Grimms’s “enchanted forest, created to illuminate and celebrate the basic truths about German culture, was turned into and still is a pleasure park, where people stroll and pluck their meanings randomly, with complete disregard for the historical spadework of the Grimms.” (*Brothers Grimm*, 69)

Dismissal of historical conditions of the narrative formation restricts the exploration of greater ramifications of the tales. For instance, psychoanalytic study of a Grimm tale could be deeper if one tries to locate the historical conditions in which the tale was shaped i.e. institution of European family in the 18th and 19th centuries and the actual experiences of the Grimms themselves, their personalities and their psychological issues. It is necessary to ground psychoanalysis of the Grimm tales in their social history in order to understand the reasons and manner of the role these tales play in the process of children's socialisation as well as their influence on adults.

Socio-historical approach and awareness enable us to understand the purpose and rationale of the innovative contemporary attempts at re-visiting, retelling and transforming the Grimm tales by the experimenters, scholars and critics of the classical fairy tales. These reformed, re-told tales are innovative, radical, unusual, strange and artificial. They defy the patterns set by the classical fairy tale. They demythologise the fairy tale and themselves are "anti-mythical." They "disassemble" the mythic components of the fairy tale and re-assemble them into something anti-mythical. As such they are bound to be short-lived in the public memory but their appearance and existence are required: "The resurrection must take place, take its place outside the mythic framework in ... re-creations..." (*Brothers Grimm*, 216)

As myth the fairy tale sinks deep into the individual and social psyche and lulls its readers and listeners to complacent, unquestioning acceptance. It is as it were to wake up the "comatose" "undersea" consumers of the tales that the innovative acts of retelling the tales from new perspectives are performed. Anne Sexton, Olga Broumas and many other writers of the 1970s were "disobedient" writers who attacked and questioned the gender biased, patriarchal, racial and stereotyped fairy tale discourse and patterns of the classical fairy tale. Patriarchy and its discriminatory attitudes toward women and other marginalised, weaker sections of society reflected in the tales prominently become the butt of the re-tellers' attack and criticism. The presuppositions about gender, hero, heroism etc reflected in the classical fairy tale are questioned by means of varied attempts at retelling. These revised, re-visioned, renewed tales that open up new perspectives on the original tales and break down their negative elements are described as "de-Grimmed" tales by Eric Kaiser and renamed as "re-utilised" tales by Zipes. (*Brothers Grimm*, 245)

Zipes roughly categorises these experimental re-utilisations within Germany into six overlapping categories viz.

i. Social satire; ii. Utopian tales; iii. Pedagogical tales; iv. Feminist tales; v. Comic parodies; vi. Spiritual tales. (*Brothers Grimm*, 245) It would be useful here to consider this categorisation: (*Brothers Grimm*, 246-255)

Social Satire: Fairy tale retelling under this category includes attempts of re-tellers to satirise the Grimm tales and their ideology by debunking the style employed in the tales. These tales critically comment on the former West German social conditions. They expose through satire the hypocrisy and destructive aspects both of the Grimm tales and the then (west) Germany society. They provoke the readers to question the status of the Grimm tales as classical fairy tales and reflect on the relevance of contemporary social conditions. The tales are subversive and challenge the readers. However they do not offer any solutions to the problems they raise nor do they suggest any alternatives to the contemporary social issues. German writers of retold tales viz. Taxler, Maar, Janosch, Max von der Grun, Iring Fetscher, Peter Paul Zahl are cited by Zipes as writers writing satirical retold fairy tales.

Utopian Fairy Tales: Retold utopian tales do not present the hopelessness about social change that the satires do. These tales, on the contrary, implicitly criticise the Grimm tales and present possibilities of alternative modes of living. They demonstrate the possibility of social change through collective efforts and democratic share in the benefits of such action. They thus shift the focus of the tales from individual happiness and power to collective action and democracy. They use humour to convey a utopian message that oppression can be overcome. Tales by Basis Verlag, Friedrich Kar Waechter, and Irmela Brender are said to have attempted retold fairy tales with utopian messages.

Pedagogical Fairy Tales: Along with the positivity of the utopian tales retold pedagogical fairy tales convey didactic messages for children of growing ages. They object to the Grimms' ideas of good socialisation. As a result these stories tend to delete violence, sexual references, racism and other elements that could affect children's healthy psychological growth. They aim at a healthy growth and therefore in many of these tales the closures are changed to suit their didactic purpose. For instance, Otto F Gmelin, who was the most prominent re-teller of this story type,

changes the end of “Little Red Riding Hood” by transforming the wolf into a young boy who lives with Little Red Cap and her grandmother. Gmelin in his version of “Hansel and Gretel” removes the wicked stepmother, transforms the cannibalistic witch into a banished old woman in the forest who does not want to eat or exploit the children, deletes the children’s act of killing the so-called witch and presents children as returning to both the parents. Gmelin titles his collection of these tales *Fairy Tales for Brave Girls* (1978).

Feminist Fairy Tales: Retold feminist fairy tales confront the sexist ideology of the Grimm tales. These revisions suggest non-sexist behaviour by rejecting male manipulation. They also suggest the possibility of establishing female solidarity against patriarchal control. Most feminist revisions of fairy tales radically change the Grimm tales while some tend to simply alter passive roles and sexist ideology of the tales. Christa Reinig, Svende Merian, Ines Kohler-Zulch, Christine Shojaei Kawan in West Germany are reputed to have revised fairy tales from a feminist perspective.

Comic Parody: Comically parodied versions of fairy tales mock and debunk classical fairy tale conventions, characters and their virtues. While these tales simultaneously mock the Grimms’ tradition, ideology as well as contemporary mores they do not aim at providing any message. Mockery of the romanticism in the classical tales by means of wit and humour alone is critically biting and effective. Zipes gives instances of three typical parodies viz. Uta Claus and Rolf Kutschera’s *Total Dead House* (1984), Heinz Langer’s *Grim Fairy Tales* (1984), and Chris Schrauff’s *The Wolf and His Stones* (1986). These writers focus on the hidden implied meanings of the Grimm tales and their relevance to the contemporary readers.

Spiritual Tales: Spiritually told tales are more precisely spiritually re-interpreted tales for the upliftment and edification of individual reader of the tales. “Fairy tales are counsellors and anticipatory images of the most different situations and difficulties of life. That is why we can use them with trust to orient ourselves because there is no personal intention of a particular author behind them.” (*Brothers Grimm*, 255) Zipes mentions Johann Friedrich Konrad’s “modern and amusing” revisions of 9 Grimm tales which are intended at adolescents “to help in connection with other media and texts to free sex and eros from egotism, exploitation, and boasting, and also from

inhibition, besmirching and smut and to enable them to form a partnership that lives from consideration and fulfilment.” (*Brothers Grimm*, 255)

Somewhat similar categories could be devised to include retellings of the classical tales by various writers all over the world. Whatever the category, the retellings tend to convert and change not just the tales retold but the ideologies, conventions, views and attitudes they generate. As Karl Kroeber says, “Storytelling is perhaps humanity’s primary tool for *changing* reality.”²⁰ Each retelling is an attempt to change and bring about a change by foregrounding that which the original tale does not or cannot express. The gaps left in the original narration are filled in by the retellings which offer a new perspective on the same tale. Karl Kroeber points this out in his book: “Each retelling of a story permits the articulation of deeper possibilities that exist because they were *not* expressed in the original telling.” (Kroeber, 48)

The retold versions of classical tales analysed in Chapter IV of this thesis show this concern of the retelling project to express implicit, repressed and new possibilities at the root of the original tales. One of the earliest attempts at transforming the Grimm tales in America was undertaken by Anne Sexton who chose to re-frame 17 of her daughter’s favourite Grimm tales. She begins her retellings with the last tale in the Grimms’ final collection ‘The Gold Key.’ In other words she begins where the Grimms stop. Interestingly the young boy who is the hero of the Grimm tale is transformed into an Everyman, “each one of us/ I mean you./ I mean me.” (T, 2) The Grimm boy has a key which fits a box inside which are many wonderful things kept hidden from us as suspense: “We must wait until he has quite unlocked it and opened the lid, and then we shall learn what wonderful things were lying in the box.” (Grimm, 200) The key in the transformed tale “opens this book of odd tales/ which transform the Brothers Grimm.” (T, 2) Her book of Transformations constitutes “odd” retold tales. She transforms the omniscient, invisible third person male Grimm narrator into a middle-aged witch with whom Sexton explicitly identifies – Dame Sexton the witch calls herself in the transformed “The White Snake” – and who uses her witchcraft, here her art of poetry, to bring about her desired transformation. Thus using verse to re-tell the tales Sexton transforms the look, the style and medium of the tales as well. At the same time the witch-narrator transforms the Grimm characters, modifies their nature and alters their circumstances before presenting them in the verse tales. Thus the deliberately transformed tales in her collection have a strikingly

different look and nature with strikingly transformed characters in them. Her pose as a witch-narrator ready to tell a story or two is significant since it seems to have behind it her obsession with the witch persona throughout her literary career: “I am a witch,” she says in her letter to Paul Brooks, “an enchantress of sorts and have already been worshipped and hung.”²¹ It also reflects her awareness and perhaps an experience of social condemnation and literary stereotyped presentation of outgoing creative women as witches:

I have gone out, a possessed witch,

...

A woman like that is not a woman quite,

I have been her kind.²²

A feminist theory concerning witches believes that women rebelling against patriarchy, the first feminists so to say, were accused of being witches and were actually hunted for being so by the male-oriented society which felt threatened by the increasing influence of these ‘witches.’ There is no evidence whether Sexton was influenced by this feminist thought nor did she herself claim to be a feminist but surely the budding feminist discourse in the America of the 1970s must have touched the sensitivities of the rebel spirit in her. As a social outcast, one who does not comply and therefore shunned by society, the witch-narrator sympathises with the outcast figures in the tales. For instance, in *Rumpelstiltskin*, conceived and perceived traditionally as a wicked being, the witch-narrator sees signs of social hatred and victimisation. In fact, she uses her witchcraft in a way that her stories appear radically transformed within their original, classical plot and storyline. The verse form of the tales and their bipartite presentation – an indented prologue followed by the transformed tale, offer the retellings a transformed look. The tale-teller “tangled on [my] two great arms,/ [my] face in a book/ and [my] mouth wide” (T,1) unfolds the aim of the book in the prefatory tale ‘The Gold Key.’ With her face in the book she is “ready to tell a story or two.” (T, 1) Like the French conteuses Sexton here is referring to a book and speaking to an audience. She thus sets herself in both written and oral traditions of tale transmission. With a mouth wide open she would tell tales from the book or devour. She asks the audience to “draw near.” Quite admittedly the audience

is “comatose” and “undersea” adults who need to be reminded of this state of theirs. With her power to speak and narrate the tales – the power of black art of spinning tales – she would invoke the adults’ memories of the childhood stories and shake them out of their perceptions in which they seem to be locked and trapped:

I have come to remind you,
all of you,
Alice, Samuel, Kurt, Eleanor,
Jane, Brian, Maryel,
all of you draw near.
Alice,
at fifty-six do you remember?
Do you remember when you
were read to as a child?
Samuel,
at twenty-two have you forgotten?
Forgotten the 10 p.m.dreams
where the wicked king
went up in smoke?
Are you comatose?
Are you undersea? (T, 1)

She wants to disturb their complacency, drag them out of their entrapping perceptions and provoke them to confront the unquestioning adolescent in them. Hence she deliberately chooses and reutilises the Grimm boy with a key to a casket of wonderful things. He is everyone of us whom the writer addresses. She seems to show a boy on the verge of adolescence – a time of strongly emerging sexuality (The secrets of

the key whimper like a dog in heat) and identifying him with everyone of the readers/listeners she provokes the adolescent in each of us. Perhaps she also intends to show a boy who has not fully grown to be a patriarchal subject, who would educate himself by seeking answers to the unanswered questions, by his inquisitiveness and will “transform” himself and the society around. He could be viewed as a representative of the future men, much more rational, reasonable, egalitarian, non-prejudiced member of a society that needs to be freed from the parochial views and values prevalent in it. Sexton insists on asking questions and finding answers. She desires a transformed social order and for that insists on the complacent minds to “transform” themselves and consider the new perspective she presents in the transformed tales. The ever inquisitive boy represents Sexton’s desire and longing to go beyond what he seems to know. Such inquisitiveness she expects in the comatose adults the adolescent in whom would seek more and more unsought for questions and find answers for them:

Upon finding a nickel

he would look for a wallet

...

Upon finding a string

he would look for a harp. (T, 2)

The answers would unfold themselves as the boy turns the gold key. The Grimm tale keeps the contents of the casket hidden as a surprise and never discloses them. However Sexton’s Gold Key opens the book of the odd transformed tales which bring to the adults’ notice the “whimpering secrets” of the tales. She definitely expects that the comatose, adult consumers of these tales examine critically what the tales with a new perspective reveal to them. The “odd tales” are joined by “an enlarged paper clip” that the witch has. Through these tales she seems to produce and provide a new paradigm of contemporary tales. This paradigm examines the life of women in patriarchy, by casting sarcasm and cynicism on their passive and helpless existence in this order.

Sexton’s attempt at re-visiting the tales, transforming them and sarcastically criticising them makes explicit her awareness of the power exerted by fairy tales on

individuals, particularly women. She never liked to be called a feminist nor did she write these tales from a feminist perspective yet her tales do reflect her feminine concerns and her iconoclastic stance and critique of patriarchal culture and its social and moral conventions. Her explicit social criticism of patriarchal indoctrination and of its adverse impact mainly on women and the marginalised and also on men as suggested in Chapter IV certainly takes her very close to the feminist agenda of deconstructing narratives that are conditioned by the patriarchal system and expectations that curtail and repress any expression of freedom and equal status. Her tales reveal her consideration and awareness of the fairy tale potential to normalise and socialise female and male readers to accept the socially expected notions of “femininity” and “manhood.” Fairy tales can subtly and implicitly but extremely effectively win the young readers’/ listeners’/ viewers’ compliance with the existing cultural discourses. “[M]uch of Sexton’s achievement in *Transformations* stems from her recognition of the impact of socialisation process on women and her decision to focus on the socio-cultural context – on the way her protagonists are cast into roles and proceed to play them out.”²³ For this, Sexton retains the original structure of the Grimm tales which she has revised and yet within the original frame provokingly hastens “a transformed view of traditional social values, particularly those associated with the feminine life patterns: love and marriage, beauty, family and most radically, the idea of goodness and moral responsibility, all of which she slices through like butter.”²⁴ She brings to the surface the subtexts hidden in the tales and demystifies them as well as the culturally and traditionally assigned roles of the protagonists – male and female.

The transformed tales are subversive and provocative. The provocation is amplified by the use of black humour and irony. The strong authorial voice in the prologues to the transformed tales and the interpolations added to them guides the readers/ listeners of the transformed tales to the extent of directing and conditioning their responses, compelling them to meditate on, re-examine and challenge ideas and views implicitly generated through the classical fairy tales and firmly embedded in the collective psyche. Besides, she also makes use of highly graphic, modern images, blunt, colloquial language, at times slang expressions, and references to famous American brand names and trademarks of the 1960s like “sanforised,” “Bab-O,” “Duz,” “Muzak,” “Ace Bandage,” “Soda Pop,” “Orphan Annie,” “Coca-Cola,” “regular

Bobbsey Twins” and so on. As William Pitt Root says, taken out from the dark Germanic woods these stories are reinstated in “the well-lit but equally dark places at the heart of American consumer culture.”²⁵ Language plays an important role in subverting the tales for her own purpose: “Through language the poem’s speaker rebuilds the original Grimm materials reconstituting them into something all of her own.”²⁶ Apart from sarcasm Sexton employs casual, offhand and colloquial attitude to explicitly display her irreverence of the traditional tales and their ideology. Caroline King Bernard Hall calls Sexton’s tales “a pop-art creation, true to the cartoon nature of fairy tale character and situation.” (Hall, 96) The cartoon nature of the transformed tales is intensified by the colloquial and slangy language besides explicit references to characters from comic strips. For instance, ‘Z’ buzzes from the mouth of the sleeping Hansel and Gretel, One Eye has an eye “like a great blue Aggie,” Rumpelstiltskin “does” the trick etc. In order to combine her own universe with that of the Grimms she creates “a different language, a different rhythm” as she writes in one of her letters. (Linda Sexton, 367) This language and the content it shapes, together contribute to the transformations offering the book a look of “an enlarged paper clip,” “a piece of sculpture.” (T, 1) Bernard Hall uses the analogue of fun-house mirror to describe the sculpture-like aspect of the tales: “like a distorting mirror that enlarges and collapses parts of the original image reflected in it, both amusing and frightening the viewer, Sexton’s *Transformations* distort the original Grimm tales amplifying and magnifying some details, contrasting and eliminating others.” (Hall, 103) The thematic transformation lends modernity to the text and is achieved through the male and female characters seen in a completely new light e.g. the courageous, innocent heroes and heroines become “dumb bunnies,” “regular Bobbsey twins,” the witches and the like characters become sympathetic figures, the good and kind king marrying the cripple is seen to be self-serving, Briar Rose on her release from the curse is not happy but scared to death etc. Talking about the prologues Harries says, “She has transplanted them into apparently alien, even contaminated soil, where they ‘take root’ and send out new and unexpected shoots. The supermarkets, parking lots, cocktail parties, and mental institutions of her prologues – so far from the Grimms’ villages and dark woods – become the modern matrix for her ‘small, funny, and horrifying’ versions of the old stories. Without these deeply ironic introductions, her tales would lose their tensile roots in contemporary American culture.”²⁷ Thus the prologues contribute to the modernisation of the tales since it is in them that Sexton

records all the “unconscious messages” she received while reading the tales. In fact, what she could not accomplish in the body of the tales seems to get incorporated in the prefatory notes to the re-formed stories and the personal comments and twists at the end which we may call epilogues. To say it in her own words, “...if I got, as I was reading it, some unconscious message that I had something to say, what I had fun with were the prefatory things ... that’s where I expressed whatever it evoked in me – and it had to evoke something in me or I couldn’t do it...”²⁸ She liked but ruled out the possibility of using the prologues as epilogues as suggested by Stanley Kunitz. She claims in her letter to him, that the stories “seem to grow out of the prologue to, as it were, take root in them.” (Linda Sexton, 371) The prologues offer a contemporary context to the transformed tales. They play a dominant role in transforming the classical tales as the poet wishes. Being a confessional poet, Sexton successfully attempts to juxtapose here too the personal and the universal.²⁹ She says, “it would... be a lie to say that they weren’t about me, because they are just as much about me as my other poetry...” (Linda Sexton, 362) In yet another letter to Kurt Vonnegut, she asserts, “I think they end up being as wholly personal as my most intimate poems, in a different language, a different rhythm but coming strangely for all their strong sound, from as deep a place.” (Linda Sexton, 367) Her bold use of very personal imagery throughout the text, occurrence of the recurring themes in her poetry, which make her a confessional poet, for instance seduction by the father, mother-daughter relationship and references to her most private experiences of insanity and images based on them make the tales personal, and at the same time they are intended to be publicly, socially consumed, read, heard and reflected on by adult listeners. Thus there is a circularity i.e. the tales that originally belong to the public are appropriated and made personal but are meant for public consumption; the social is made personal for a universal appeal and application. Personalisation, however, heightens and enriches the appeal of the transformed tales.

Sexton’s transformations of the classical tales are revolutionary and revolting. However though they challenge and criticise they do not offer resolutions. The transformations work within the constraints of the masculine power. The witch’s sarcasm and sardonic humour fall short of total defiance of this dominant masculine discourse in the tales. Despite her provocation both of women and men to deconstruct the stereotypes of a patriarchal culture, at times the witch-narrator shows conformity

to the patriarchal ideology. The princess in the transformed “Frog Prince” for instance, views prince as an “old waddler.” He is a “tradesman” having no power whatsoever. Still he embodies a patriarchal tenet that men dominate women. The tale ends with the lines:

Thus they were married

After all he had compromised her. (T, 99)

The Frog Prince continues his dominant masculine role by hiring

a night watchman

so that no one could enter the chamber

And also has the well

boarded over so that

never again would she love her ball. (T, 99)

Thus the rebellion of the *Transformations* does not transgress the boundaries of the patriarchal ideology. As a result though the transformed tales raise a defiant voice against the original tales, they do not offer solutions or alternatives to the discriminating masculine power. An important reason behind this hesitant, reluctant stance of Sexton’s is her own experiences as a woman who could not be independent of male support in life and her own sense of entrapment in marriage. As Christa Joyce says, “Relying on the state of entrapment that she felt in her marriage, Sexton creates female characters who, while sardonically showing the underbelly of the tales, do not find freedom or enlightenment.”³⁰

It is Olga Broumas, the Greek American fairy tale re-teller, who furthered the view and the task taken up by Anne Sexton. Taking her cue from Sexton’s work and outlook, she proceeds to elaborate on the themes Sexton touches upon, expands Sexton’s characters “as if she has carefully taken each of Sexton’s women and with a fresh, more contemporary feminist view, has allowed choices that are not necessarily in line with the status-quo of society, particularly the patriarchal society that created the best known classic fairy tales.” (Joyce, 41) For instance, Broumas begins her “Rapunzel” with a quote from Sexton’s transformed “Rapunzel”:

A woman
who loves a woman
is forever young. (T, 35)

While Sexton, when she wrote so apparently had in mind her subtle relationship with her own great aunt Nana and very delicately hinted at sexual bonds between Rapunzel and Mother Gothel and vitality of such a relation, Broumas shows the two women as lovers able to flourish and revel in an idyllic union. While Sexton's women are estranged from each other as the young girl is shown to accept the tenets of a traditional, patriarchal way of life, Broumas's women "choose to maintain the union that seems almost divine, with both women able to grow in each other's light." (Joyce, 41)

Heterosexuality as the normal feminine sexuality is the widely imposed and accepted patriarchal tenet which "colonises" women's bodies.³¹ Universal observance of this tenet obviously marginalises and outcasts the non-conformists – homosexuals and lesbians. As a result these sections particularly lesbians are "driven ... into secrecy and guilt, often to self-hatred and suicide" (Rich, 225) despite the fact of historical and physical existence of erotic love among women: "Before any kind of feminist movement existed, or could exist, lesbians existed: women who loved women, who refused to comply with the behaviour demanded of women, who refused to define themselves in relation to men. Those women, our fore Sisters, millions of whose names we do not know, were tortured and burned as witches, slandered in religious and later 'scientific' tracts, portrayed in art and literature as bizarre, amoral, destructive, decadent women. For a long time, the lesbian has been a personification of feminine evil." (Rich, 225) Sexton could read the hidden undercurrent of erotic love between Rapunzel and the witch Godmother in the original tale and ably brought it to the surface but did not carry it to end as an alternative to the patriarchal tenets of heterosexuality though she mocked them. This was perhaps on account of her own sense of entrapment in the bonds of male-oriented ideology and hence perhaps the hesitation or fear of going against the "normal" notions of sexuality.

Broumas however, boldly defies these norms and almost explodes what Sexton delicately and at times timidly touches upon.

As “a woman committed to/a politics/ of transliteration”³² Broumas re-forms the old tales using her own “new language.” She seems to assume that the existing language and its expressions are not adequate enough to articulate the re-imagined visions of and perspective on the old tales. Transliteration, which she calls “the methodology/ of a mind/ stunned at the suddenly possible/ shifts of meaning” (Artemis, 24) can be attained only by “finding” words to express accurately the new meanings which can emerge in the re-formed traditional discourses. “Transliterating” writers place the old tales into unusual, unexpected patterns working often on the most subtle, peripheral details and bringing them to the centre thus generating more novel, liberal meanings. Feminist critics of fairy tales saw the classical tales as prescriptive, conveying and expecting an allegiance to harmful roles for women. As discussed earlier, lives of women (as well as of men) are directly affected and influenced by the fairy tales they read or listen to or are made to read or hear. Women in thrall of fairy tale ideology and happy ever after endings willingly let themselves be objectified and passed on from father to husband/ lover. Helen Cixous holds the impact of repetition of the “once upon a time”s – “ the same story repeating woman’s destiny in love across the centuries with the cruel hoax of its plot” (Harries, 138) responsible for the creation of gender hierarchy, which humiliates women resulting in women themselves lacking self-respect. It is these repetitive plots that transliterating writers like Sexton and Broumas re-frame using a different language in new and contrasting contexts and thus changing the focus and significance of the plots. Sexton uses the methodology of retelling the tales with her own spin to the plot while retaining their original structure. Broumas’s however, is different. Her poetic ‘methodology’ takes her back to her personal history, to Greek mythology, and to fairy tales. She ‘transliterates’ or re-forms the old stories, omitting some elements, emphasising some others, to make them part of her new and dangerous vision of the world.” (Harries, 135) As Harries sees it, Broumas’s quest is “urgent: there is no time to lose” because to contain her own re-visions the prevailing language is insufficient: “we must/ find words/ or burn” (Artemis, 24); she needs “to invent a language” (Harries, 135) wherein lies the act and essence of her transliteration. Like an archaeologist, as Mary Caruthers maintains, Broumas in her re-visions, discovers “fragments and remnants” of a language, which

is nowhere to be found, lost forever. (cf Harries) In her retellings of seven well-known fairy tales she offers completely new patterns and forms to the images in the familiar fairy tale narrative patterns. She isolates the familiar iconic images, shapes and transforms them “into letters of an unfamiliar language” and re-places them in new patterns. She does not end her poems with happy ever after heterosexual weddings but with a sense of faith in strong sisterhood and feminine solidarity. “Her transliterations demand that we read the images in a new cultural framework, a framework that not only questions the traditional patterns of what Sexton calls ‘that story’ but creates new patterns for stories women can tell.” (Harries, 152)

In 1997 with her book *Kissing the Witch: Old tales in New Skins* the Irish writer Emma Donoghue attempted to “queer” the fairy tale canon, a step further ahead of Broumas’s. Like Sexton and Broumas, Donoghue re-frames the tales but unlike them her tales are aimed at “young readers” and are not made contemporary. However she does challenge the stereotyped discourse of the fairy tale and stereotypical representation of characters particularly of women characters. Following Sexton she creates the persona of a human but vulnerable witch. She explores the relation between the popular tales and the system of gender in society. Challenging the representation of witches in the traditional tales constitutes her project. However unlike Sexton and more so Broumas, she does not invent new expressions but rather retains the simple language of the classical tales and their settings. She subverts the patriarchal language to attain her goal of re-fashioning the tales in her own stride.

Being a lesbian herself, Donoghue revisits thirteen tales from a lesbian feminist perspective. In her re-visions she mocks the norms of heterosexuality, challenges the authority of the classical tales and social, cultural norms represented in them, and at the same time while appropriating and “queering” the canon deviating from their patterns she also exploits the emancipatory potential of these tales and demonstrates that the tales have within themselves a critical dimension. This emancipatory potential of the canonical tales offers her room to present new possibilities, cover the tales with a “new skin” and offer alternative to the traditional fixed roles and identities in favour of more positive ones. She contests the patriarchal canon with “the lesbian continuum, i.e. a rich and diverse spectrum of love and bonding among women, which also includes female friendship, mother-daughter relationships, and women’s social groups.” (Bobby, 27) As analysed in the earlier chapter, while Broumas’s Cinderella

against her wishes and pining for her sister's hut continues to live among men estranged from her mother and sisters, Donoghue's Cinderella determinedly goes back to and shares her helper's house as their own: "She took me home. Or I took her home, or we were both somehow taken to the closest thing."³³ Donoghue does not just oppose the socially sanctioned heterosexual norm suggested in the traditional happy ever after weddings and endings, she offers an alternative ending that places lovers on an equal footing as human beings. All the narratives in her re-visioned tales project an answer to the male canon of the fairy tale. Thirteen tales are structured in a sequence of interlocking first person female narratives. Each anonymous woman tale teller passes on her tale to another and thus each story is the personal story of the prominent female character of the previous tale. The book thus becomes a story of multiple narratives intricately chained to one another. Like the tales their women narrators too become strongly bound to one another. The bond between them is strengthened with each one hearing and being heard. By means of the interlinked chain of narratives within the frame of a single story Donoghue creates a space where she could relate different intimate female voices, painful feminine experiences and choices. She recasts women's relationships in a positive light and demonstrates the possibility of a better and happier existence for them in a lesbian world where they could "take [their] own life in [their] own hands" (Donoghue, 11)

On the textual level Donoghue pays homage to and deviates from the female tradition of writing established by writers like Jane Austen, Cristina Rossetti, Virginia Woolf, Anne Sexton, Angela Carter, Olga Broumas and Adrienne Rich. Her creative re-making of the stories includes intertextual allusions to her literary predecessors. These literary women ancestors guide and instruct her on how to escape the patriarchal behavioural model of a woman. Amidst the various retellings of the tales by women writers Donoghue finds her own voice following their legacy and at the same time varying and escaping from them. For instance, Donoghue's mysterious woman helper in the tales, the witch of the title of her collection and the use of the term "transformations" by her Cinderella to describe the positive influence of this older woman on her mind are all reminiscent of Anne Sexton's middle-aged witch and her *Transformations*. Donoghue reverently acknowledges the impact, on herself, of earlier women writers and at the same time presents her furthered views than theirs by reversing or altering the situations and ends of the re-told tales and also by offering

an alternative world of female solidarity. Thus she “re-dresses” the pre-written texts in a “new skin.”

While attempting this transformation Donoghue, as Joyce demonstrates, seizes the “what if” moment in the heterotexts and puts forth her own lesbian perspective to overturn the patriarchal discourse of social advancement through heterosexual romance. Joyce quotes Bonnie Zimmerman to explicate lesbian appropriation of the pre-written traditional tales: “There is a certain point in a plot or character development – the ‘what if’ moment – when the lesbian reader refuses to assent anymore to the heterosexual imperative; a point in the narrative labyrinth where she simply cuts a hole and follows her own path.” (Joyce, 23) Donoghue thus creatively works on “the silences of the text.”³⁴ These silences mutely articulate the stress of the ideological agenda of any text. Donoghue beautifully and in fact, socially significantly manipulates these silences to re-tell the tales so that a new awakened view on the traditional tales could be offered. Thus she drags the reader of her tales too into the process of narration. She expects and stresses that the reader should be active and alert in reading these tales. She intends to develop a new awareness, a new awakening through her retellings. Thus she does not just challenge the fixed, given social roles and identities and question them but she tries to involve her audience to participate in the process of questioning and voicing their own experiences to develop a new creativity. While insisting on the need to change, re-dress and re-fashion the old tales in order to give vent to painful personal experiences and difficulties involved and strength required in making individual choices, the female narrators of Donoghue’s tales emphatically demonstrate how creatively the tales could be read and reinterpreted from every perspective. Hence at the end of the book the narrators invite the readers to tell their own stories, their own experiences expressing Donoghue’s trust in the readers’ impact and power on fairy tales: “This is the story you asked for. I leave it in your own mouth.” (Donoghue, 211)

Reader’s creative attempt at telling the story from her own perspective would allow an even deeper probe into and manipulation of the critical and subversive edge in the classical tales. Advancing Sexton and Broumas’s attack on gender discrimination in patriarchy in a novel way, Donoghue emphatically depicts homosexuality as a liberating force by giving a variety of textual examples and showing how lesbian relationships can function towards female redemption. What Ellen C Rose says about

feminist retellings of fairy tales holds true for Donoghue's tales which "force us to consider the possibility that lesbianism is not deviant but a natural consequence of the undeniable fact that a woman's first love object, like a man's, is her mother."³⁵

Whether it is Sexton, Angela Carter, Broumas, Robin McKinley, Sara H Hay, Tanith Lee, Donoghue or for that matter any not so known modern re-framer of the classical fairy tales, all use the technique of subversion to question how classical fairy tales have been appropriated and mythicised to instruct and reinforce patriarchal rule and a middle-class social code. Since the 1970s retellings and experimentations with the fairy tale genre have focussed prominently on the issues of gender. Most of them are feminist renderings of and against the patriarchal canon. But as Zipes expresses his fear, "just as feminisms and the feminist movement have been culturally exploited and compromised by the mass media and turned against themselves, the fairy tale that seeks to maintain its utopian purpose and social critique is always in danger of being defused and transformed into mere entertainment." (*Brothers Grimm*, 142)

The writers considered in this chapter till now have adults as their target audience. Donoghue's book though addressed apparently at young readers, with its urge at the end to make every reader participate in telling her own experiences, explicitly expects responses and reactions from adults. Fairy tale experimentations that were specifically intended at children came up in the resurgence of the fairy tale during the late 1980s. Some prominent examples of experimental writers writing for children include Maurice Sendak, William Goldman, Wendy Walker, Jane Yolen (*Tales of Wonder*), Robert Coover (*The Gingerbread House*), Terri Windling and so on. Despite their revisionary inputs, however, these authors in their revised tales for children equally stress the closure, unity, happy ending and a neatly ordered world. As a result these tales do not reflect to children the contemporary ossified reality but present both progressive as well as regressive tendencies. As Zipes claims, "In the case of fairy tales for children, the harmonious ends may be justified as long as they motivate children to believe that sex roles can be altered. But, given the vast problems confronting women in ... society – teenage pregnancy, pauperisation of single women with children, inequitable wages – these fairy tales also conceal reality and give children a false impression of what awaits them as they mature." (*Brothers Grimm*, 147) However re-visions like Martin Waddell's 'The Touch Princess' (1986), and Babette Cole's 'Princess Smarty Pants' (1986) do respect children's autonomy and

encourage them through the open ends to think and reconsider as their own their gender identities and choose for themselves their own roles.

Transgressing the traditional boundaries of the fairy tale and creating new worlds and progressive ideologies, manipulating the critical and utopian functions of the fairy tale, that of bringing its reader face to face with the ossified reality and suggesting alternative imaginary ways of life have been the common threads in all retelling experiments. Except for Jane Yolen's novel *Briar Rose* from the Terri Windling series and a few retold tales not considered in this thesis, the retold tales seem to address the adult facilitators of fairy tales for children. Even Yolen's novel retelling for that matter would appeal more to young adults who have knowledge about the Nazi period, Auschwitz and its aftermath. Jane Yolen too writes for both children and adults. She revises the traditional tales to expose their ideological undercurrents and at the same time creates her own narrative using fairy tale motifs and themes. Her experimentation with the fairy tale genre as shown in the previous chapter aims at transforming the tales into irresolute problems: her "stories make no promises, guarantee no happy endings. They present worlds which alter under our eyes like the shapes of clouds. Image flows into image: the tree becomes a lover, the ribbon of gray hair becomes a sliver road out of torment, the tears become like flowers, the old drunk on the beach becomes the god of the sea. Each image is a gift without explanation."³⁶ With a definite non-dogmatic, non-instructive feminist bias Yolen, in her experimental re-visions, undermines the authoritative voice of the Grimm brothers in the classical tales. Her concerns reflect the influence of contemporary socio-political and aesthetic issues and developments.

Like Yolen, Robert Coover too exposes, breaks down and recreates the fairy tale conventions and rules of narrative productions. His re-visions of 'Briar Rose' and 'Hansel and Gretel' break the conventional narrative down into 42 sequels each and the stories begin in media res. The utopian function of providing hope at the end of the tale is totally disrupted and debunked in these tales leaving the re-told tales at the same point where they begin holding "a cracked mirror up to the old fairy tales and reality at the same time." (Z, 159)

Overall in the attempts at retelling and revising the tales there is a general tendency to coldly attack and critique the canon and the patriarchal ideology and behavioural

patterns depicted in the tales that are considered exemplary for children to follow and for adults to imbibe on young minds. Re-writing and retelling usually rests on the dialogue between the writer and his/her inherited traditions. Readers are familiar with the old tales and because of this foreknowledge “the narrative could be stripped right down” making retelling easier: “There needed to be so little machinery it was easier to dive deep in them and find rhythms.”³⁷

19th and 20th century feminist and women writers of fairy tales subverted and opposed the canon in varied ways. Some re-writings are simple revisions and inversions or reversals: “There’s this thing going on at the moment where women tell all the old stories again and turn them inside-out and back-to front – so the characters you always thought were the goodies turn out to be the baddies, and vice versa, and a whole lot of guilt is laid to rest: or that at least is the theory. I’m not sure myself that the guilt isn’t just passed on to the next person, *intact* so to speak.”³⁸ Polarised categories of good and wicked characters in the traditional tales render ease in their reversal in the retellings. Early feminist writers of fairy tales resorted to simple inversion of passive princesses into active, inquisitive heroines exposing or justifying the wicked and ugly women characters. These reversals expose sexist patriarchal biases and values but do not attempt to move beyond leaving the criticised value system more or less unchanged. Some women writers like Maxine Kumin in her retelling attempts effectively to bring to the surface the inadequacies and silences of the old tales. Her revision comments on how the old notions generated by and about fairy tales continue to persist and question the “happily ever after” closures:

Why, for that matter, should any
twentieth century woman
have to lie down at the prick of
a spindle etcetera etcetra.³⁹

Harries calls such retelling attempts “sequels” or prequels that focus on imaginary happenings before or after the events in the traditional narratives.

One of the characteristic features of the contemporary retellings of the old tales is that they completely do away with the objective third person narrative. They transform

the impersonal narration and narrator into an individual, most often a woman's voice. Individualising narration necessarily implies mutability. While changing the old narratives the re-told tales through their subjective narration expect and desire further revisions. They do not try to establish themselves as a canon – the only and the final way of understanding and appreciating a tale. It is the subjective element that keeps open the possibility of re-vision and many such re-visioned versions of both the old and the re-told tales. These re-tellers of tales resurrect the old narrative forms full of worn out ideologies and ways of living and invent new forms to introduce a change of minds, hearts and social order. They manipulate the potential of the fairy tale to bring about such change and therefore turn to this genre for the transformation they desire. They keep engaging in what Christine Bacchilega calls “conflicting dialogue with a pervasive tradition.”⁴⁰ The techniques of calling fixed gender positions and authentic/canonical subjects into question, of carefully constructing first person narrative voices and exploiting the fairy tale magic to “unmake some of its workings” (Bacchilega, 23) are categorised by Bacchilega as “postmodern.” As post-modern fictions the retellings play with the tale's “framed images out of a desire to multiply its refractions and to expose its artifices.” (Bacchilega, 23) They are not merely stylistic and/or ideological reinterpretations appealing to the 20th century adult audiences. Rather they involve narrative and ideological critique which is exhaustive and positive. They question both the basic rules of fairy tale narrative construction and gender assumptions reflected in the classical fairy tale. Zipes calls these tales anti-mythic and points out, as Bacchilega and many others like Harries do, that there is a constant, continued interaction between the mythic and anti-mythic tales. It is the conflict between the normative function of the tale and its innovative and subversive power that erupts such interaction. As Walter Benjamin would have it, the well-made tale constitutes within itself the anti-tale and hence the inevitable conflict of varying ideologies within individual tales.⁴¹

The classical fairy tale naturalises and evokes consent to social rules in a subtle natural manner. Its artifice and social project remain hidden. Such tales emphasising women's experiences become dangerous since naturalising women's roles contributes to the long tradition of associating women with nature, which is seen as secondary or inferior, intermediary to men in the patriarchal order. Fairy tale narratives are proved to be inherently sexist. Feminists for years have continually questioned the sexism

involved in fairy tale narratives. They recognise the power of the fairy tale magic and critically analyse it. Besides they differently deconstruct and reconstruct the sexist narratives which determine the production of gender. In the midst of its “multiple retellings, the fairy tale is that variable and ‘in-between’ image where folklore and literature, community and individual, consensus and enterprise, children and adults, woman and women, face and reflect (on) each other.” (Bacchilega, 10) It is relevant here to paraphrase Bacchilega’s viewpoint on and understanding of postmodern fairy tales or more precisely postmodern transformations of the fairy tale. Acknowledging Linda Hutcheon’s appealing approach to postmodern narratives as “cultural enterprise” and “borderline enquiries” which contain self-reflexive contradictions and conflicting dialogue with history, Bacchilega exploits the metaphor of magic mirror that controls the fairy tale narrative and sees how postmodern fairy tales reproduce the mirror images and at the same time “make the mirroring visible to the point of transforming its effects.” (Bacchilega, 10) As such postmodern re-told tales are “doubling the double: both affirmative and questioning, without necessarily being recuperative or politically subversive.”(Bacchilega, 22)

Postmodern re-readings of the tales generate multiple possibilities that have remained unexploited and unexplored. They do not just change our reading of the tales but demonstrate how the anti-tale is hidden within the tale. Bacchilega says, “Post-modern revision is often two-fold, seeking to explore, make visible the fairy tale’s complicity with ‘exhausted’ narrative and gender ideologies, and, by working from the fairy tales’ multiple versions, seeking to expose, to bring out, what the institutionalisation of such tales for children has forgotten or left unexploited. This kind of rereading does more than interpret anew or shake the genre’s ground rules. It listens for many ‘voices’ of fairy tales as well, as part of a historicising and performance oriented project.” (Bacchilega, 50) The self-reflexive retellings thus exposing and at the same time reflecting on themselves with their multiple versions and permutations become in Nancy Walker’s words “disobedient.” For these tales are revisions which appropriate the classical tales with a view to “expose or upset the paradigms of authority inherent” in those tales.(Walker, 6-7) They exploit and revise the fairy tale magic to retell history, values and gendered figurations.”(Bacchilega,24) Critical self-reflection of the post-modern retellings takes multiple manifestations. In that, some retellings contest gender representation in classical tales just to re-inscribe

them in a different unchallenged model of subjectivity or narrativity; some re-visions undertake to expose traditional forms of ideologies of the western tales and question and create new rules of narrative production while some other retellings “re-place or re-locate the fairy tale to multiply its performance potential and denaturalise its institutionalised power.” (Bacchilega, 23)

In all the tellings and retellings, mirrors and their reflections, frames and images, gender plays a vital and indispensable role in the process of denaturalisation. Reflection, refraction, framing and re-framing of the tales destroy, construct, subvert, deconstruct and reconstruct ideologies and as “self-reflexive mirrors themselves are themselves questioned and transformed.” (Bacchilega, 24) The double vision of postmodern re-told fairy tales are “wonders in performance, and as such perform varying wonders.” (Bacchilega, 24)

Writing in 1997, Bacchilega considered the vitality, she felt, postmodernism, despite its conflicting interpretations, had in those days and explored the “post-modern” narrative techniques in re-told fairy tales. However one could find Bacchilega’s “post-modern” narrative techniques continually present in the fairy tale tradition from the very early tales of conteuses till the contemporary revisions. As Harries maintains, it is because of “our pervasive and one-sided understanding of the fairy tale tradition” (Harries, 16) as following set patterns and shapes that makes us call re-visioned narratives new and “post-modern” and the earlier ones “traditional.” Questioning, challenging and critiquing the forms of the fairy tale genre have been a consistent trend in the history of literary fairy tale since its very beginning. In fact, as shown earlier, the form originated in the hands of the conteuses as an intentionally expressive and questioning critical tool. “Throughout the history of written, literary fairy tale, from its very beginnings in Italy and France, insistent internal voices and narrative strategies have called the shapes and patterns we now see as ‘traditional’ into question. ... the history of the written fairy tale is a history of pouring old wine into new bottles, forcing new wine into old bottles, and often ‘distressing’ new bottles to make them look old.” (Harries, 18)

Constant conflicting dialogue with the earlier conventions and consequential creation of new ones to be challenged again by the subsequent recreations has marked the long tradition of the literary fairy tale. It originated, continued and continues to exist in two

modes – “compact,” and “complex,” in Harries’s terms. The two modes have “co-existed” and “competed” for more than three centuries. The conteuses, for instance, used and challenged the earlier romance while being aware of creating a new genre themselves. Their stories were “long, intricate, digressive, playful, self-referential, and self-conscious” (Harries, 17) – the features one can see in the above mentioned “postmodern” tales. Charles Perrault whose fairy tale model became established later as ‘classical’ was writing at the same time as the conteuses whose tales challenging the patterns established by Italian Straparola and Basile were sidelined later to the extent of being almost extinct, exemplify the co-existence of the ‘compact’ and the ‘complex.’ As discussed earlier, Harries who refuses the use of the term ‘postmodern’ describes compact fairy tales as “foundational or original,” tales that “come to us as unmediated expressions of the folk and its desires.” (Harries, 17) Their traditional status is marked by their simple structure. Complex stories “work to reveal the stories behind other stories, the unvoiced possibilities that tell a different tale.” (Harries, 17) Complex tale writers use the fairy tale genre as an agent of change – social as well as individual.

Contemporary complex tales as the ones discussed in Chapter IV tend to resurrect old forms and invent new ones. Writers repeatedly turn to the transformation and experimentation of the fairy tale genre. They manipulate the fairy tale potential to bring about a change in the attitude towards and understanding of the fairy tale and the society and human nature reflected in it. While retelling the old tales, the writers revise the old versions and at the same time initiate a new beginning. This amounts to what Zipes calls “anti-mythical” nature of the transformed retellings. In that the re-told tales themselves leave open the scope for further re-vision. As such they refuse to get canonised and mythicised. This again accounts for and amounts to the continuity of the tradition of framing and re-framing. In their intention to reinterpret the world and reorder it by refracting and criticising it the re-told stories become “now stories.”⁴²

Like the conteuses of the 17th century who initiated through fairy tales the mockery and subversion of gender roles and social practices of their times, the re-tellers of the 20th and the present centuries manipulate the genre to challenge and attack social patterns and hetero-normative patriarchal order. Contemplating the cultural forms reflected in the well known fairy tales, they “reveal the cracks and fissures in the old

bottles, and sometimes ... make them explode ... they see what needs to be seen again and seen afresh – and show it to us.” (Harries, 163) This is true even of those retellings which are undertaken with a social awareness and orientation. They do not necessarily focus on gender roles and relations though that could be one of the aspects of their re-told tales. They are more inclined towards making a socio-political statement and even an economic statement in so far as they depict class consciousness. Revised ‘Snow White’ by the Merseyside Fairy Story Collective analysed in the earlier chapter is thus politically charged exploring mainly the existing social conditions. It shows a revolutionary Snow White who professes equality and earnestly urges the tyrant queen to be just toward her subject. She leads the mine workers’ and later in the tale, the soldiers’ revolt against the queen who exploits them. Snow White’s revolution puts an end to the tyrannical reign of the queen and establishes a new egalitarian and democratic order. The four women of the Merseyside Women’s Liberation Movement in Liverpool, who composed this story in 1972 along with their re-visions of ‘Rapunzel,’ ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ and ‘The Prince and the Swineherd’ wrote with a strong belief that “Fairy tales are political. They help to form children’s values and teach them to accept our society and their roles in it. Central to this society is the assumption that domination and submission are the natural basis of all our relationships.”⁴³ In their revisions the weak and the oppressed female/male protagonists are shown to have the potential to liberate themselves. In general life is shown as a continual struggle suggesting a possibility to bring about a happy end that triggers the beginning of a development towards emancipation. The protagonists free themselves to come into their own. For instance, in their ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ the old grandmother teaches the girl to overcome her fear of the ‘forest’ and asks her to help other children like her: “whenever you meet another child who is shy and timid, lend that child [this] cloak to wear as you play together in the forest, and then, like you, they will grow brave.” (Merseyside, 5)

It is to be noted here that the re-workings of fairy tales from women’s perspective criticising the discriminatory gender issues actually seem to have paved the way for retellings focusing on the larger issues of socio-economic equality. Ruth B Bottigheimer in her *Grimms’ Bad Girls and Bold Boys*⁴⁴ illustrates, besides gendered representations, the class distinctions and socio-economic hierarchies depicted in the Grimm tales. She shows how “protagonists are introduced more often

by their occupation than by any other characteristic.”(Bottigheimer, 124) She shows that honest manual labour is unproductive in attaining economic power/strength. It is only through luck, lottery or magic that the hero/heroine yields a better, comfortable existence. Though the protagonists escape the socio-economic circumstances they are born in, this escape is not “solely emancipatory, but actually depict(s) the limits of social mobility.”⁴⁵ Tales retold with Marxist agenda seek alteration of social relations. Shannon Hale is one such re-teller who focuses specifically on class consciousness and social reformation in her works based on and retelling fairy tales. Her novels mostly touch upon the themes of political commentary and social reform. Her *Princess Academy*⁴⁶ has an overtly Marxist orientation. In it some peasant girls are selected and trained to become potential princesses to marry the prince. Miri, the heroine, denies the prospect of being accepted in and by the aristocracy and in her search for her self and her place in the world, she recognises that her born lower status and her relationship with the working class villagers are more meaningful and gifting, that they offer her experiences and companionship with nature unknown to the upper class world view. As a member of the class of the masses and close to nature she develops a language that she uses to save her and others’ lives. Given the opportunity to move up the social ladder she selflessly chooses to remain in her own social class and instead of making her own socio-economic progress decides to bring about changes that would benefit all her fellow villagers and workers. She attempts to reform society as a result of which the relationship of the villagers and the ruling classes improve initiating in turn social equality. She manipulates her training in the Princess Academy to benefit the villagers and her knowledge of “quarry-speech” – the language of the mountain folk – to initiate a revolution against the highbrow and condescending headmistress of the Academy, Olana Mansdaughter. She declines the prospect of being a princess and also the offer to become a delegate at the court and expresses a desire to found an academy to literate the mountain folk because she has realised that books are the most precious things in the world and knowledge can wipe out class distinctions. Hale, thus, in her re-workings of the Grimm fairy tales depicts her heroines moving towards attainment of social justice and equality among classes.

The contemporary writers of re-told fairy tales have moved the genre beyond the central consideration, in the classic tales, of marrying the prince. As Miri says,

“It seems that the world has changed and we shouldn’t still be talking about things like marrying a prince.” (*Princess Academy*, 286) The retelling of tales thus presumes changes in our world and worldview.

The contemporary writers tend to make the tales more liberating and progressive. Jack Zipes calls these writers “counter-cultural” who “transfigure” classical tales and encourage readers to critically reflect on the “conditions and limits of socialisation.”⁴⁷ These writers tend to “break, shift, debunk, or rearrange the traditional motifs to liberate the reader from the contrived and programmed mode of literary reception.” (178) Liberating tales of the contemporary counter-cultural fairy tale writers employ two major modes of experimentation as Zipes stresses, viz., i. transfiguration of the classical tale and ii. fusion of allusions to disturbing happenings in contemporary society. Both aim at disturbing readers so that they shed their complacency “toward the status-quo of society and envision ways to realise their individuality within collective and democratic contexts.” (178) These attempts question authoritarianism, male domination, gender stereotypes and social oppression and uphold anti-sexist and anti-authoritarian perspective. The quest for liberation and liberating fairy tales has been international since domination, exploitation and oppression have been worldwide experiences the human community confronts. Various struggles in the history of human civilisation viz., anti-war protests, civil rights movement, feminism, the struggle for autonomy by the minorities and small nations throughout the world in and since the late 20th century have shaped many writers’ vision of the fairy tale as a tool to bring about social change. Against the background of these struggles, liberating fairy tales for children did play a pivotal role since 1945. Writers manipulated the fairy tale motifs, ideas and styles for liberating purposes.

As Zipes notes, “There was a strong radical tradition of rewriting folk tales and fairy tales for children that began in the late 19th century and blossomed during the Weimar period, until the Nazis put an end to such experimentation.” (72) Writers like Walter Benjamin, Edwin Hoernle and others revived this tradition in the 1960s. It was a period when children and their socialisation became focal concerns of the anti-authoritarian and the leftist movements. The wave of progressive thinking, critique of capitalism and of exploitative bourgeoisie created different kinds of emancipatory messages for children in order to “offset the racism, sexism, and authoritarian messages in children’s books, games, theatres, TV, and schools.” (73) As a result

the alert left-oriented publishing houses focused on the publication of “counter-cultural,” “re-utilised” fairy tales and literature for children. The wave of politicising fairy tales for children in West Germany includes writers like Fredrich Karl Waechter who wrote and drew with an intention to invert the capitalist socialisation. Andreas and Angela Hopf wrote during the same period targeting mainly racism and militarism with a feminist and democratic bent. The Hopfs’ politicised tales, as Zipes analyses them, present symbolic goal-oriented behaviour “aimed at co-operation and collectivism, not domination and private control.” (75) Other 1970s writers writing/re-writing with socialist orientation in Germany include Janosch, Hans-Joachim, Gelberg, Rosemarie Kunzler and Irmela Brender.⁴⁸ Janosch in his *Janosch Tells Grimms’ Fairy Tales* (1972) inverts plots and characters, adds new incidents, pokes at the ethical/moral misery of the different societies, using modern slang expressions. He intends to defy and negate the socialising norms implied and represented in the Grimm tales. In doing so he exposes the hypocrisy, emptiness and meaninglessness of the rising upper class of the post-war period in Germany. Non-conformity to the Grimms’ socialisation is the strength of these retellings. It is by way of this refusal that “Janosch seeks to defend a ‘questioning spirit,’ totally lacking in the Grimms’ tales and very much alive in his provocative revisions, where everything depends on a critical new viewpoint.” (77) Gelberg, a staunch supporter of Janosch’s “re-visions,” himself reutilised the Grimm tales to create politicised stories for children and adults. His book of 58 different fairy tales and poems with a motto “No, I would rather have something living than all the treasures of the world,” is directed at “re-thinking and re-conceptualisation of traditional fairy tale motifs to question standard reading and rearing processes.” (77)

Kunzler through her tales attempts a harsh critique of exploitation and domination of women in patriarchy. She in line with Janosch refuses to conform in order to liberate. Brender focuses more on humane relations and co-operation. Both, however, direct their transformations at criticising male domination and seeking “a humanisation of socialisation process.” (78)

In Italy Adela Turin, Francesca Cantarellis, Nella Bosnia, Margherita Soccaro and Sylvie Selig have, as Zipes records, consistently protested for freedom in their work. Turin and Selig’s *Of Canons and Caterpillars* (1975), for instance, is an anti-war, anti-authoritarian fairy tale that proposes the possibility of realising democratic and

peaceful co-existence. Zipes cites Jean Pierre Andrevon's fairy tale novel *The Fairy and the Land Surveyor* (1981) and Michael de Larrabeiti's *The Borribles* (1978) as noteworthy experiments in France and U.K. respectively. Both the novels employ the fairy tale discourse – the first one, to depict optimistic struggle for qualitatively new social and ecological arrangements and the second, to deal with racism, sexism and contemporary political struggles.

The effect and effectiveness of the liberating, emancipatory fairy tale re-utilisations – whether they are called postmodern, complex or counter-cultural – depend not just on the manner of their production/ composition but also on their reception and consumption by the young and adult readers. In West Germany, for instance, their circulation in the 1970s was restricted to progressive educated classes. They were even attacked and banned by the conservatives on account of their alleged harmful social import considered harmful for children. However, despite such attacks on the experimental tales they have continued to be published suggesting the necessity, need for creation and availability of audience for the reading of these tales that propose to satisfy the young as well as adult readers' desire to connect the fantastic to their actual real life conditions.

Zipes addresses the issue of the success of the emancipatory and innovative tales in attaining their desired effect on children. As per his observations, it is found that children like classic fairy tales as they are. They do not want them to be transformed. They find the transformed tales humorous but are safe with the old ones. Even though the experimental tales open up and generate free, liberating messages for them, the young readers resist any alteration of the classic tale. They, however feel disturbed and upset by the emancipatory thought and questioning of social relations in the counter-cultural tales. This upsetting effect is the provocation of these tales. It is this discomfort which is expected to make readers reflect and question. And in this is their purpose attained.

However, in the absence of wholehearted acceptance by children and approval by adult facilitators of tales as well as inadequate system of their distribution and circulation, the progressive, emancipatory projections of the liberating tales have little room for expression. Yet within this limited sphere throughout the western world, progressive voices experimenting with the genre have continued their efforts

to develop new methods and techniques of questioning the fairy tale discourse. For instance, the Italian Gianni Rodary created games and published books that deconstruct the classical fairy tale encouraging children to shed the desired uniform reception of the classical tale, re-examine its elements, themselves consider the possibility of altering and re-creating the tale and actually re-create their own versions. George Jean in France developed card games in which children are encouraged to re-invent and re-imagine the tales by changing characters and situations relating to their actual real life experiences. The experience alerts children about the need to newly contextualise the traditional tales to suit their own conditions of life.

Fairy tale motifs and plots have been employed by creative experimenters to give vent to issues of child abuse, sexism, violence and so on in their transformations. Jane Yolen, Gregory Maguire, Francesca Lia Block in the U. S. and Philip Pullman, Michael Foreman, Emma Donoghue in the U.K. among many others not mentioned here, try to address children's issues comically, seriously, politically correctly through their transformation of the traditional fairy tales.

Efforts of the counter-cultural writers, their intention to expose the hidden, non-democratic, regressive messages in the classic tales, reception of the liberating tales and their impact, effect and effectiveness can be confirmed only if and when social conditions and on each individual's level, psychological/mental set up are made conducive to accept and benefit from the subversive power of and progressive ideas generated in the liberating tales. Otherwise these experiments in re-utilisation of fairy tales remain confined only to those readers and sections of society who seek such progressive changes. It therefore, perhaps necessitates some writers to address the adult readers and facilitators of the tales and seek changes in their attitudes to the subversive potential of the fairy tale genre. For, for a fuller realisation of the progressive social ideas amongst children there needs to be "a more progressive shift within the civilising process" (191) in which adults play an important role. "After all teachers, librarians, parents, and powers in the cultural industry exert a certain control over the popular reception of fairy tales by determining to a great extent not only the nature of the tales that are made accessible to children, but also the context of their reception." (Haase, 362)

Progressive social ideas need to be set in practice among adults and hence most of the tales considered and analysed in this thesis are intended at adult consumption. These tales see and show adults what is hidden and needs to be seen. As such, however the act of fairy tale telling has come a full circle. Beginning with the conteuses telling and writing tales for adults with subversive intent fairy tale has continued to be told and re-told till a variety of “conteuses” re-tell the postmodern, complex, counter-cultural, liberating tales with a similar intention to subvert the fairy tale discourse and “reveal the stories behind other stories” (Harries, 17) aiming mainly at adult reception. The purpose is to allow the passage of the old tales which fascinate children so much that they refuse to do away with them in an innovatively and creatively alert manner. Children’s awakening to the new, liberating form of enchantment could be attained, as Haase describes, in two ways: first, teachers and parents can expose children to a wider variety of fairy tales – not just the classic versions but even less known variants of the tales – arousing equally varied responses, questions and comparisons. Secondly, adults can encourage children to receive fairy tales creatively. They could prompt them to create and re-create their own versions of the tales. Evidently though children seem to shun the re-told tales, given the opportunity they do create their own tales reflecting and relating to their own world of experiences.⁴⁹ Eventually “children will take fairy tales into their own hands ... [and re-create them] in ways that express children’s power over the genre.” (Haase, 363)

With time this purpose of retelling could be achieved. As of now despite their limited and hesitant reception and acceptance, the discomfort that the liberating retellings generate and their process of compelling their readers “to reconsider where socialisation through the reading of the Grimms’ tales has led us” (Zipes, *Art of Subversion...*, 79) suffice and are enough guarantee that continuity in these attempts would one day attain the goal they seek and strive for.

NOTES

¹Lewis C. Seifert & Donna C Stanton, eds. *Enchanted Eloquence: Fairy Tales by 17th Century Women Writers* (Toronto: Iter, 2010) 9.

²Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of Fairy Tales* (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2003) 31.

³Kate Dustin, *Cultural Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) 209.

⁴Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale As Myth Myth As Fairy Tale* (Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1994) 154. Subsequent references are given parenthetically as (Z,).

⁵Jack Zipes, "The Origins and Reception of the Tales," *Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (2nd ed. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2002) 25-64.

⁶Ibid, 57.

⁷Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* 1972 Trans by Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991) 107-108. Subsequent references are given parenthetically.

⁸Roland Barthes, "Change the Object Itself: Mythology Today," *Image – Music – Text* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 165.

⁹Jack Zipes, *Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (2nd ed. New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2002) 208-209. Subsequent references are given parenthetically.

¹⁰Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* Trans Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1963, 195-202) 196-197.

¹¹Jack Zipes, Trans *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm* (New York: Norton, 2001) 691.

- ¹²Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" *College English* 34.1 (Oct.1972): 18.
- ¹³Nancy Walker, *The Disobedient Writer: Women and Narrative Tradition* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1995).
- ¹⁴Donald Haase, "Yours, Mine or Ours? Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and the Ownership of Fairy Tales" Rpt. In *The Classic Fairy Tales: Texts, Criticism* Ed. Maria Tatar (New York: Norton, 1999) 353.
- ¹⁵ See "Once There Were Two Brothers Named Grimm," *Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*, 1-24.
- ¹⁶The Grimms' letter translated by Zipes in *Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* 26-27. Subsequent references given parenthetically.
- ¹⁷Jack Zipes, "The Contamination of the Fairy Tale," (99-125) *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (New York: Routledge, 2001) 103.
- ¹⁸Walt Disney's "Cinderella Notes," January 15, 1948, quoted in Kay F Stone, *Some Day Your Witch Will Come* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State UP, 2008) 26-27.
- ¹⁹Alan Dundes, "Nationalistic Inferiority Complexes and the Fabrication of Fakelore: A Reconsideration of Ossian, The Kinder-und Hausmarchen, the *Kalevala*, and Paul Bunyan," *The Journal of Folklore Research* 22 (1985:5-18) 9.
- ²⁰Karl Kroeber, *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times* (New Brunswick, New York: Rutgers UP, 1992) 13.
- ²¹Linda Gray Sexton and Lois Ames, eds., *Anne Sexton: A Self-Portrait in Letters* (Boston: Houghton, 1977) 325.

- ²²Anne Sexton, *The Complete Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981) 15.
- ²³Carol Leventen, "Transformations's Silencings." *Critical Essays on Anne Sexton* ed. Linda Wagner-Martin, (Boston: G K Hall, 1989)139.
- ²⁴A. Ostriker, *Writing Like a Woman* (Ann Arbor: The U of Michigan P, 1983) 66.
- ²⁵William Pitt Root, "Transformations." *Critical Essays on Anne Sexton*. ed. Linda Wagner-Martin, (Boston: G K Hall, 1989) 49.
- ²⁶Caroline King Bernard Hall, *Anne Sexton* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989) 102.
- ²⁷Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *Twice Upon A Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (USA: Princeton UP, 2003) 129.
- ²⁸Steven Colburn, ed., *No Evil Star: Selected Essays, Interviews and Prose* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1985) 145.
- ²⁹Shiho Fukudo presents an interesting detailed account of Sexton's real life experiences within and against the patriarchal system and their reflection in the *Transformations*. The writer focuses on how and why Sexton hesitates against opposing masculine power in spite of voicing it. ("The Hesitancy of a 'Middle-Aged Witch': Anne Sexton's *Transformations*," *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos*, no. 13 (2008) 31-47.
- ³⁰Christa Mastrangelo Joyce, "Contemporary Women Poets and the Fairy Tale," *Fairy Tales Reimagined: Essays on New Retellings* Susan Reddington Bobby, ed. (USA: McFarland &Co.Inc, 2009) 41.
- ³¹See Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (New York, London: Norton, 1979).
- ³²Olga Broumas, "Artemis," *Beginning With O* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977) 24.

- ³³Emma Donoghue, *Kissing the Witch: Old tales in New Skins* (USA: Joanna Cotler Books, 1997) 8.
- ³⁴Alan Sinfield, *Cultural politics and Queer Reading* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994) 38.
- ³⁵Ellen Cronan Rose, "Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales," *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development* ed., Elizabeth Abel et al, (Hanover: New England UP, 1983) 221.
- ³⁶Patricia McKillip, *Dragonfield and Other Stories* (London: Futura, 1988) xi
- ³⁷Sara Maitland, "A Feminist Writer's Progress," *On Gender and Writing* ed., Micheline Wandor (London: Pandora, 1983) 17.
- ³⁸Sara Maitland, "The Wicked Stepmother's Lament," *Angel Maker: The Short Stories of Sara Maitland* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996) 222.
- ³⁹Maxine Kumin, "The Archaeology of a Marriage," *The Retrieval System* (New York: Viking, 1978).
- ⁴⁰Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997) 146. Subsequent references given parenthetically.
- ⁴¹Walter Benjamin, "The Story Teller," *Illuminations* Trans Harry Zohn, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968).
- ⁴²Salman Rushdie's phrase in the Introduction to *Burning Your Boats: The Collected Short Stories*. Angela Carter, (New York: Henry Holt, 1995, ix-xiv) talking of Carter's art of transliteration Rushdie says, "She opens an old story for us, like an egg, and finds the new story, the now story we want to hear, within." xiv.

⁴³Merseyside Women's Liberation Movement, *Red Riding Hood* (Liverpool: Fairy Story Collective, 1972) 6.

⁴⁴Ruth B Bottigheimer, *Grimms' Bad Girls and Bold Boy: The Moral and Social Vision of the Tales* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987).

⁴⁵Jack Zipes, "Breaking the Magic Spell: Politics and the Fairy Tale," 126 *New German Critique* 6(1975):116-135.

⁴⁶Shannon Hale, *Princess Academy* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005).

⁴⁷Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilisation* (New York: Methuen, 1983) 177. Subsequent references given parenthetically.

⁴⁸This account of the tales in German, French, Italian or any other foreign language draws on their analysis and criticism by Jack Zipes in his book mentioned above. The intention behind including it is to present a general and brief historical development of the retelling tradition in these languages. Jack Zipes's works offer valuable insights in this respect. Hence without much detailing and analysis major writers and their works are cited.

⁴⁹See Zipes's *Don't Bet on the Prince* for fairy tale experiments with school children.

CONCLUSION

The new, revised, modified fairy tales, whether serious or humorous, are deliberate creations with a view to establish new morals in tune with the current times. All of them to a more or less degree and extent follow somewhat similar strategies like reversing gender roles, blurring the lines between villains and heroes, challenging the traditional ideas of heroism and in fact, all outdated orthodox values peeping through the classic tales, twisting the plot unexpectedly giving readers a shock, modifying the age-old morals, deconstructing the old patterns and revolting against them, using anachronisms, giving the characters an awareness that they are playing roles in a tale, and activating the readers to think, challenge and question. The element of surprise and a new way of looking at the same old tales that these new tales introduce make them novel. Behind the superficial mask of surprise, amusement and twists is hidden the main intent of these writers and that is to discard traditional morals to establish new ones in tune with the current times while offering a critical statement on the traditional tales as well as the fairy tale genre. These retellings invite readers to participate in and interact with the tales and look at the old classic tales and their established patterns – never challenged before – extremely critically and awaken to a new reading of these canonical texts.

Angela Carter says that fairy tales “can be remade again and again by every person who tells them”¹ Fairy tales contain a rich treasure of motifs, narrative forms and images. This genre is remarkably emancipating and inherently transformative in nature. As Carter suggests every teller and every telling of a tale is a retelling. Michel Butor too claims, “A world inverted, an exemplary world, fairyland is a criticism of ossified reality. It does not remain side by side with the latter; it reacts upon it; it suggests that we transform it, that we reinstate what is out of place.”² Authors who sense these potentials of the fairy tale genre attempt to employ fairy tale themes and motifs for different purposes. Just as each retelling proves and strengthens

¹ “Introduction,” to *Book of Fairy Tales* (London: Virago, 2005) xi

² “On fairy Tales,” *European Literary and Theory and Practice* ed., Vernon W. Gras (New York: Delta, 1973) 352

the everlasting quality of this genre it, at the same time, articulates the need to re-fashion these cultural scripts so that new possibilities of the ways of life and social order emerge. As said earlier in Rich's words revision is an act of survival, an act to know ourselves. The fairy tales through re-writings have continued to be appropriated, subverted by means of parody, satire and other different intertextual modes.

Continuity, change, repetitions, innovations, and revisions have marked the history of the fairy tale. (Harries, 102-103) At different times in different contexts the same fairy tale has adopted dominant existing ideologies and constituted and expressed a desire for bringing about a change. Within specific historical and social contexts it has generated different ideological effects. For instance, as an oral folk tale the narrative of the fairy tale changed as per the beliefs and behaviour of the listeners and more often articulated concerns and wishes of the underprivileged. With printing the tale became a means to generate bourgeois conservative interests. This creative and critical potential of the fairy tale genre thus renders itself a very efficient agent of socio-political-cultural critique and a powerful tool of social change. It is this flexibility of the genre which needs to be manipulated to effectively re-construct egalitarian, human(e) social arrangements. Looking into the various elaborate ideological functions of the fairy tale that Zipes demonstrates in his "The Changing Function of the Fairy Tale" (*The Lion and the Unicorn*, 12, 2 (1988): 7-31), one realises that the folk and fairy tales have served both regressive and progressive purposes. It is the progressive aspects of the tales that can be utilised and manipulated in their revisions and transformations in different socio-historical contexts in order to "awaken our regard for the miraculous condition of life" (Zipes, 31) and to suggest that establishing an egalitarian, if not utopian, social order can be sincerely attempted and attained. The hope that it would work towards its goal rests on the fact that fairy tales as literature for children have been always considered an effective means of serving the civilising aspirations of adults. They do have a magical effect on all. Hence instead of breaking the magic spell the re-visioning and re-doing of the tales can manipulate the same magic with and for a continual progressive reconstruction of ideal, democratic order and ideology one must strive to establish. We may say in Bacchilega's words, "To break the magic spell, we must learn to recognise it as a spell that can be unmade," (8) and once unmade the magic can be directed

constructively towards building a democratic order. Rejuvenated fairy tales in the hands of “counter-cultural” writers undertake to unmake this magic and reflect “the courageous vision and energy” that Rowe expected. With this vision and energy they completely do away with the idealised romantic fantasies of the old fairy tales rendering the new retellings “bold acts of re-interpretation.”³

The fairy tale’s imaginative power can cultivate equality among men and women. That they are adopted, re-interpreted and rejuvenated by writers – both women and men – in the light of their endeavour to usher in a more democratic, liberal, egalitarian and above all humane social order despite and sans discrimination has been, is and would be a challenge ever. Hence indefatigable attempts at re-interpretations and retellings of the cultural constructs that the fairy tales are constantly and consistently stressing the significance of human equality are an urging need of the time. It is only through ceaseless self-conscious and critical engagement with the classical tales to create and re-create fairy tales “for human beings” can we seek to liberate humans to imagine and build new, self-respecting, self-sufficient identities and an ideal humane social order. Escape from the canonical demands experimentation with the past literature so that it is recycled in the present to create and say something new, relevant and suitable to the changing present. In this respect the retellings provide a space for and bring about a dialogue, a creative interaction between the traditional tales and contemporary environment. Retellings with progressive content can transform the classic tales criticised for being “parables of feminine socialisation”⁴ into tales that ultimately call forth all human beings and not just women to an “awakening.” Hence retelling is the need of the time and would continue to be so in all times. With their strategies of commenting on, exaggerating and correcting the fairy tale problems and at times reversing and undoing and even counteracting critical readings of these tales by psychoanalysts, feminists etc. the retellings become multi-vocal and creatively contribute to and enrich our experience of the fairy tale reading and enhance our understanding of the genre.

Continuity, in the fairy tale tradition, of revisions and re-framings is remarkable. As Haase says we need to save the fairy tale. And it could be saved only if we deny being

³ Carolyn G Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* 1979 (New York: Norton, 1993) 150

⁴ Madonna Kolbenschlag, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye: Breaking the Spell of Feminine Myths and Models* 1979 (Toronto: Bantam, 1981) 3

owned by it but rather “take possession of it on our own terms” (364) because they are not “sacred texts” and we need to suit it to our times and values that cherish human equality and freedom. Considering the fascination of the genre and its powerful impact on children and adults alike as well as its emancipating potential, re-viewing, re-framing, retelling of these tales from democratic perspective could definitely work towards building a utopia of “happy ever after” for all. To make the fairy tale an effective tool and agent of positive social change, irrespective of how they are distributed, circulated and received, genuine experiments in retelling the old tales while allowing and encouraging young readers to create their own and re-create older stories is the need of the time. Hence though retelling could imply pouring new wine in old bottles, looking at the kind of efforts made at retelling by experimental writers, the new wine has the force to explode the bottles and does necessitate the creation of the new ones.

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