

# Examining Intra-Familial Child Abuse in Charles Perrault's Fairytale

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

Department of English and Humanities  
Brac University  
September 2024

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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing a degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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## Approval

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## **Abstract**

Exploitation of power has been taking place the beginning of society, giving way to abuse. Abuse, at its core, is power that is exerted over someone who cannot fight back; be it physical abuse, mental abuse, or sexual abuse. It can occur anywhere in society; one's family is no exception. This phenomenon has been recorded and represented in all forms of media and literature; folklore and fairytales included. This thesis aims to look at intra-familial child abuse in the fairy tales, *The Fairy*, *Little Thumb*, and *Donkeyskin* published in Charles Perrault's *Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals* ('Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé'), subtitled *Tales of Mother Goose* ('Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oye'), published in 1697. By using Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist criticism, this thesis dissects the literary fairy tales to explore themes of the power imbalance between parent and child. The parents may exploit this power and subject the child to different forms of oppression, be it emotional or physical and sometimes even sexual. The study explores how society treats victims of abuse and also examines the consequences for the perpetrators.

## **Acknowledgment**

I would like to start by thanking the Almighty Allah for giving me the strength I needed to complete this journey.

I thank my supervisor, Rukhsana Rahim Chowdhury, for giving me the much-needed guidance I needed to reach my literary potential. I would also like to thank all my teachers, who have given me the knowledge and guidance that has made me who I am today. And to my friends who did not lose hope in me when I did not have any myself.

Finally, I thank my wonderful family for giving me a beautiful life.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*For there to be betrayal, there would have to have been trust first*

- Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

Every piece of literature is a reflection of society and the society it was born in, and the oldest form of literature available to us is folklore. Folklores have existed since humanity has. They have been passed down for generations; first via oral traditions and later through written texts. They reflect all aspects of life; be it societal morality, community, or even society's depravity. Here, the concept of "Mimesis" becomes relevant. It is a Greek word that means to imitate or represent. According to Plato and Aristotle, mimesis was the representation of nature; all forms of artistic creation are representations of real ideas that already exist in society (Mimesis, *Britannica*). Folklores, and their subgenre, fairy tales are no exceptions. These tales, which are primarily for children, appear to be funny and lighthearted at first glance. They carry morals and lessons that children can learn through a creative medium. However, a deeper analysis of these stories showcases numerous dark themes. From love, family, friendship, kindness, etc. to grief, death, and especially abuse, are all common themes present in fairy tales.

At its core abuse is an exploitation of power that can happen when there is a power imbalance. Physical, mental, and sexual abuse are all exploitation of power against someone who cannot fight back. Such cases can be found everywhere in the world, especially in one's family. Intra-familial child abuse or abuse at the hands of a parent or caregiver figure is far more common than society would like to admit. Intra-familial child abuse has always existed but they were not always seen as an act of violence. Anne M. Nurse writes in her book, *Confronting Child Sexual Abuse: Knowledge to Action*, "For most of US history, people

simply didn't talk about child abuse. This was partly because children were considered the property of their parents. This gave parents a wide berth to do as they pleased with them. Starting in the late 1800s, however, certain acts, like extreme beating, became socially unacceptable." (Nurse, 24). Nurse proceeds to talk about the case of Mary Ellen, who had faced severe abuse at the hands of her foster mother, and was later moved out of her home for her safety. Her case later inspired the first Society for Child Protection to be founded in 1874 (Nurse, 24). but cases of abuse have not ceased since, nor was physical violence the only form of abuse children were facing. In the WHO article, "Child Maltreatment", it is recorded that, "...international studies reveal that nearly 3 in 4 children aged 2-4 years regularly suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers, and 1 in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child." (Child maltreatment, *WHO*).

Children are vulnerable and only as they grow up into adults does that vulnerability go away to some extent. They are supposed to be the safest in their own homes but history has showcased numerous cases where home is the first place a child faces violence for the first time. That violence could range from physical violence to psychological violence and even sexual violence. Anne M. Nurse states in her book that it was only due to the growing awareness of child welfare in the late 1800s, did social workers began to recognize cases of child sexual abuse. The temperance movement ended up pushing incest and other types of abuse as a social problem. But incest was given barely any recognition compared to prostitution (Nurse, 25). Women and children who accused their family members of being sexually violent towards them were seen as liars for most of history. Then again history of child sexual abuse was also very closely related to child prostitution. Heike Bauer talks about this issue in the book, *The Hirschfeld Archives: Violence, Death, and Modern Queer Culture*,



In 1885, the English journalist W. T. Stead published a series of articles titled “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. They contained the findings of an investigation Stead had conducted into child prostitution. His revelations of the ease of procuring sex with young girls—including details such as that some children were trafficked by their own mothers and that some doctors and midwives agreed to certify a girl’s virginity—caused a public outcry. Stead’s articles set in motion developments that would lead to Section 11 of the Criminal Amendment Act of 1885.

But even then, same-sex violence was not given the same attention, even though the cases were just as prevalent. The BBC article, “A Secret History of Child Abuse” by Sanchia Berg, sheds light on cases of child sexual abuse and physical abuse from five orphanages and approved schools from 1948 to 1966. These places were for male children and they were the victims of long-term abuse in all of the institutions: their abusers and assaulters being their caregivers, teachers, priests, and more were all male as well. But these cases were given very little importance by authorities, and most of the perpetrators were able to get away scot-free or with very little punishment. Berg highlights that in St Vincent's approved school, a master had been accused of sexual violence towards young boys studying there, and he “[...] confessed to five counts of indecent assault and two counts of buggery, and was sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison. It emerged that he'd left his previous job in a remand home after assaulting boys in a dormitory. The Home Office had warned St Vincent's about him, but the headmistress had ignored it. She'd even allowed him to take boys away from the school premises for "parties". (Berg, BBC).

In cases of abuse, the perpetrators are often people the child knows and trusts. From parents to siblings, teachers and even religious authorities could cause physical and sexual violence towards children. According to Dorothea Nolde and Celia Britton in "Sexual

Violence against Children. A Report on Current Research", historically, the active definition for what is considered to be sexual violence towards children includes any sexual act performed by an adult on a child without consent. While it has no legal or penal implications, the absence of consent diverts focus from the many cases of sexual violence that are imposed on children: either in cases of physical constraints being involved or violence, specifically cases where the child cannot give consent. Wartime rapes, enslavements are also examples of sexual violence against children where they cannot give consent. (Nolde and Britton, 144).

Be it physical abuse, mental abuse, or sexual abuse, cases of abuse can be found in hundreds of folklores throughout the world. Fairytales, a subgenre of folktales have always depicted society's goods and its flaws. They are seen as lighthearted stories that showcase society's realities through their magical components. But they also carry deeper and darker themes as warnings to the people who consume the texts. Charles Perrault is one of the oldest authors of the fairytale genre and can be considered the father of fairytale writing. This thesis aims to look at themes of child abuse, and society's treatment of abuse victims and their perpetrators in three tales: *The Fairy*, *Little Thumb*, and *Donkeyskin*. They were first published in his first book for children, *Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals* ('Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé'), subtitled *Tales of Mother Goose* ('Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oye') in 1697. His tales are some of the oldest versions of many fairytales that children around the world grow up hearing, and they also carry morals and warnings for their readers to follow.

### 1.1 The Tales

*The Fairy* tells the story of a girl who is rewarded for her kindness and escapes the hands of her abusive mother. The widowed mother lives with her two daughters; the eldest, haughty and proud as the mother, and the youngest, sweet and kind, like her father. While the mother dotes on her eldest daughter, she treats her youngest terribly. The youngest does all

the housework, sleeps in the kitchen, and draws water for the household from a fountain that is one and a half miles away from the house. It is at this fountain that the youngest meets a fairy disguised as a poor woman. The fairy asks the youngest for some water and the girl very kindly gives the fairy water from the clearest fountain (Perrault, 28). Moved by her kindness, the fairy says to her,

"You are so very pretty, my dear, so good and so mannerly, that I cannot help giving you a gift" (for this was a Fairy, who had taken the form of a poor country woman, to see how far the civility and good manners of this pretty girl would go). "I will give you for gift," continued the Fairy, "that at every word you speak, there shall come out of your mouth either a flower or a jewel." (Perrault, 28)

When the youngest returns to her home, her mother berates her for being late. But the mother is left shocked when she sees the flowers and gems falling from the youngest's mouth during her explanation. The mother exclaims that her eldest daughter is deserving of such a gift and sends the eldest to follow the motions of her younger sister (Perrault, 30). But when the eldest meets the disguised fairy, the former treats the latter in a very haughty manner and ends up being cursed to have snakes and toads come out of her mouth every time she speaks. The mother blames this on the youngest sister and tries beating her, but she flees from the house. On her route to escape, she meets a handsome prince who proposes to marry her and they live happily ever after. And the mother, in the end, drives away the eldest sister who later dies in the forest (Perrault, 31).

This tale depicts an abusive mother who treats her daughters terribly. She spoils her oldest and refuses to teach her child any humility, and she treats the kind younger sister horribly. No matter what she does, the youngest is blamed for their misfortune. When the mother no longer has a scapegoat to vent her anger towards, she starts treating her beloved

older daughter horribly and ends up kicking her out of the house, which ends in the daughter's death. This is a clear example of intra-familial child abuse.

The story of the *Little Thumb* tells the tale of Little Thumb, the youngest child of a “faggot-maker” couple (historically faggot meant a bundle of sticks, and as faggot makers, the family chopped wood and made bundles of sticks) who have seven children. The couple sees the children as a burden as none of them can earn their keep and Little Thumb is under even more scrutiny as he was as big as a thumb. He is the scapegoat of the family as every little misfortune is blamed on him but despite the treatment of his family, he is a wise and observant child.

Their poor financial situation leaves them with meager resources to sustain their family. As such, the father decides to leave the children in the woods despite his wife's immense protest. And so, they do. But Little Thumb overhears their plans and cleverly brings back him and his sibling's home. The next day the couple left the children in the deepest part of the forest and, unfortunately, Little Thumb is not able to find a way to return home this time. Wandering through the forest the seven children happen upon an ogre's house and ask the ogre's wife for a place to stay. The ogre's wife reluctantly agreed knowing that if her husband finds them, he will eat the children. Despite her efforts to hide them properly, the ogre finds the children and wants to eat them, but Little Thumb tricks the ogre into killing his daughters and runs away with the ogre's magic boots and gold. Later, with the help of the magic boots, that allowed Little Thumb to cover great distances in less than a day, he became a hero for his country as he aided in war. He and his family lived happily ever after (Perrault, 98-110).

The tale showcases both the abuse a child can experience in an abusive household, as well as the fact that parents, sometimes, only care for their children when they can gain

something through them. This practice is both ironic, as a parent's love is supposed to be unconditional, and abusive as it sends the message that children only deserve love when they are of use. Now, Intra-familial child abuse does not only include physical and mental abuse, it also includes sexual abuse. An example of such a case in fairytales would be Charles Perrault's *Donkeyskin*.

*Donkeyskin* tells the tale of a princess's escape from her father who is adamant about marrying her and the obstacles she faces along her journey to freedom. To provide a summary, in a prosperous kingdom lives a king, his queen, and their only daughter. The unique thing about this kingdom is there is a donkey in the king's stable that defecates gold every day and that sustains the kingdom's economy. The queen gets terminally ill, and before dying she makes the king promise her, that should he remarry, he should marry a woman more graceful and beautiful than her. The queen's death causes the king extreme grief, but after some time his courtiers start pressuring him to get remarried as he only has a daughter to carry on his name. Even after searching through kingdoms, a woman more beautiful than the late queen is not found. But then, the king sees his late wife in his daughter and declares to marry her. The horrified princess, with the help of her fairy godmother, makes seemingly impossible demands to deter the marriage. The king, however, fulfills them all, including killing and giving her the skin of his precious donkey. Seeing no way out the princess wears the donkey skin and runs away. She takes refuge in a farm in the neighboring kingdom. There she is called Donkeyskin and treated horribly by people. One day when she takes off the donkey skin and adorns herself while reminiscing about the life she left behind, that kingdom's prince sees her and falls madly in love. Through a perilous journey, in the end, the prince and Donkeyskin get married and live happily ever after. (Perrault, 123-47). All three tales depict cases of intra-familial child abuse, but none of them show the children getting

any kind of justice for what they endured or any form of repercussions for their perpetrators. Such cases are often ignored by society, even if they are brought to light, as a 'family affair'.

## 1.2 Research Methodology

The two literary theories being used for this thesis are the theory of psychoanalysis and post-structuralism. According to Peter Barry, in his book, *Beginning Theory*, "Psychoanalytic criticism is a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature." (Barry, 92). Developed by Sigmund Freud, these theories take a closer look at the inner workings of one's mind, and how a person develops in the context of their upbringing, environment, and more. Freud was dedicated to finding out the inner workings of the mind and its control over a person. His "...work depends upon the notion of the unconscious" (Barry, 92).

Many of Freud's works and theories focus on sexuality. He draws from myths and folklore to add context to and to prove his theories; Oedipus complex, id, ego, superego, etc. Francisco Vaz da Silva states in his article, "Folklore into Theory: Freud and Lévi-Strauss on Incest and Marriage", that Different aspects of folklore had always influenced Freud's thinking. In April of 1896, a young Freud had presented the idea to his colleagues in Vienna that, sexual aggression towards children via adults could result in early sexual trauma which in turn could cause hysteria in later life. But his idea was met with ire as the meeting chair thought his hypothesis sounded "like a scientific fairy tale" (Masson 1992; Gay 1995:96-97). Freud may have been upset by this event but he had called his new theory of sexual intercourse in childhood a "Christmas fairy tale" only months prior (Gay 1995:89-111). However, the recurrence of his focus on childhood sexual trauma held much significance, as he very soon would transform his "fairy tale" into the building block of psychoanalysis with

heavy research into folkloric themes. (Silva, 1) Freud's theories explore themes of sexuality as well as the mind's inner workings, the subconscious's effect on the conscious, and more.

His theory of id, ego, and superego talks about the different effects one's inner desires and moral values have on how one chooses to act in society. According to Saul Mcleod, the id, ego, and superego represent different parts of the mind. The id is primitive and instinctual by nature, and it contains hidden memories, sexual and aggressive thoughts. The superego contains morality and the ego enforces reality and mediates between the id and the superego. (Mcleod, "Freud's Theory Of Personality: Id, Ego, And Superego"). Folklore and myths were a huge part of Freud's studies as Robert Kenny writes in "Freud, Jung, and Boas: The Psychoanalytic Engagement with Anthropology Revisited" ., "Freud's interesting mythology, primitivity, and so on, would result in significant insertions into subsequent editions of *Interpretation of Dreams* and other major Works, and, of course, in *Totem and Taboo*. Importantly it began the expansion of the psychoanalytic project from psychotherapy to social and cultural critique..." (Kenny, 174).

Displacement and projection are also two of Freud's key theories for this thesis. Projection is the practice where someone projects their negative thoughts and actions onto another (Freud). An example of this in Perrault's work is in *The Fairy*, where the mother blames the youngest daughter for the curse that had befallen the eldest sister. She treats her younger daughter with malice. And in turn, assumes that the daughter is returning the favor. Displacement, on the other hand, is when a person is experiencing something, but rather than facing their situation, they take action against someone or something completely different (Freud). In *Little Thumb*, the parent abandons their children due to their poor financial situation and their fear of starvation. They could have looked for other ways of earning a livelihood or managed the wealth they gained from their king well, but they chose to abandon the children as a way out.

Using psychoanalysis, a literary theory allows the reader to dissect the psyche of the characters in a story and try to find the motivation and context behind their actions. According to Francisco Vaz da Silva, Freud, "...writes that "the theory of the instincts is ... our mythology." (Silva, 2). For instance, in *Donkeyskin*, the king, despite his daughter's vehement protests chooses to declare her his future bride. Rather than listening to his ego and giving rationality to his thoughts, he gives into his id and gives into his depravity.

Post-structuralism on the other hand questions and deconstructs a work from within. It was born as a direct response to the rigid nature of structuralism. It dives into the web of intricate connections that go deep within the construction of a piece of work. As a literary theory it allows a text to be deconstructed and picked apart to find its deeper connections; be it of one character to the other, the story's connection to reality, or give context to a work's supposed absurdity.

The two renowned names connected to post-structuralism are Roland Barthe and Jacques Derrida. Barthes's work with mythology and pop culture allows any literary work to be viewed delicately regarding its connections to the past and present. Derrida talks about breaking a piece of work down to understand it to its finest details through his work on deconstruction. In *Writing and Difference*, Derrida wrote that there is no pure form of perception that could breach through everything. The existence of such a perception would mean that people would not be able to breach anything. Records of humanity would be written down but nothing would be recorded; no piece of written work would be produced, internalized, or taught as legible records. But this pure form of perception does not exist. Human agency and thought will always permeate through what they write. The writings will carry the authors' thoughts and experiences; internal or external. The process of writing cannot be seen as an isolated piece of work created by an author. Instead, according to Derrida writing is a system that encompasses all aspects of human life; spirituality, the human



psyche, society, and the world (Derrida, 285). A text cannot just be seen just as an individual piece, it should also be examined through the many connections it can form with the world it is set in. Post-structuralism can be used in the context of Charles Perrault's fairytales to understand the different struggles the characters face as they traverse through their perilous journeys.

### 1.3 Literature Review

The key texts to this thesis are Charles Perrault's *The Fairy*, *Little Thumb*, and *Donkeyskin*. They are part of the short stories published in his *Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals* ('Histoires ou Contes du Temps Passé'), subtitled *Tales of Mother Goose* ('Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oye') (Charles Perrault Biography) in 1697. These short tales have been translated from French to English many times. The versions used for this thesis have been translated by Robert Samber and J. E. Mansion. It follows the journey of a princess escaping the fate of marrying her father and her journey towards changing her fate. The tale will be analyzed in the context of intra-familial child sexual abuse and society's reactions to it through the lenses of psychoanalysis and post-structuralist criticism.

In terms of psychoanalytic criticism, Sigmund Freud's theory of id, displacement, and projection are the dominant theories used. For the post-structuralist criticism, Jacques Derrida's theories on texts and their place in society will be used. Derrida's deconstruction allows for a text to be dissected to find its inner connections to the outer world, the themes that are not immediately visible through a brief reading. Derrida wrote in "Chapter 2" of *Of Grammatology*, talks about the science behind language as he says,

...[I]f one wished to keep sonority on the side of the sensible and contingent signifier which would be strictly speaking impossible since formal identities isolated within a sensible mass are already idealities that are not purely sensible), it would have to be

admitted that the immediate and privileged unity which founds significance and the acts of language is the articulated unity of sound and sense within the phonic. With regard to this unity, writing would always be derivative, accidental, particular, and exterior, doubling the signifier: phonetic. (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*)

Thus, the theory of deconstruction will be used to analyze how the princess is treated by the people around her after escaping and how society treats perpetrators of abuse.

#### 1.4 Research Objective

This thesis is not and will not be the first and last paper written on the topic of intra-familial child abuse in the context of folklore, as there have been many who have written on this topic with many other fairytales and folklore as their base. What this thesis aims to do is to dissect the tales, *The Fairy*, *Little Thumb*, and *Donkeyskin*, shed light on society and its treatment of cases of abuse, and analyze further into the psyche behind the people who are involved in such cases. Despite being fairytales, these short stories carefully showcase society's values and injustices. By using Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis and Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist criticism, this thesis dissects Charles Perrault's Fairytales and explores the themes of the power imbalance between parent and child to see how an abuse victim is treated by society and the repercussions faced by the perpetrators.

## Chapter 2

### Children's Stories and Folktales

Children's stories have always been an integral part of the growth of any child. Be it fairytales that earn their awe, folklore that has been passed down from their elders, or bedtime stories that put them to sleep. These stories actively shape the minds of young children, teach them lessons, help shape their morals, and warn them against the many dangers they are susceptible to in society. These cautionary tales can have lessons ranging from stranger danger to abuse, even intra-familial child abuse.

There are many renowned writers of children's stories and fairy tales. For example, the Grimm Brothers: Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, Oscar Wilde, Neil Gaiman, etc., and also Charles Perrault, whose tales are the focus of this thesis. Some of these writers have collected oral fairytales and folktales from their community and some have written their own. But much like how abuse of all kinds has existed throughout history, so has the mention of abuse in literature, folklore, and even children's fairytales.

Hans Christian Anderson has many tales that highlight both the happiness and abuse a child may face at the hands of their own family. One such example would be the tale of "The Little Match Girl". The story follows a little girl who is walking around on snow-covered roads on New Year's Eve, hoping to sell some matches and earn some money. Even though the bare feet are almost frozen and she is not able to bear the cold, she still does not dare to go back because she is afraid of her father's beatings. Her value in the eyes of her father is equivalent to the amount of money she earned through selling matches and no sales or low sales would result in beatings. She would much rather huddle herself in between two houses amidst snowfall rather than go back home and face abuse (Anderson, 384-85). This showcases how value is added to children and when they fail to reach that potential, they may

face backlash. Failure to meet their parent's standards could result in a child facing verbal abuse and even physical abuse.

In Oscar Wilde's "The Happy Prince", there's a brief mention of the charity children looking up at the statue of the Happy Prince and exclaiming that he looks like an angel. When their math teacher (or Mathematical Master in the short story) asks how they know what an angel looks like, they answer that they saw it in their dreams. This earns the children their teacher's displeasure as Wilde writes, "...the Mathematical Master frowned and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming." (Wilde, The Happy Prince). This may not be a direct example of abuse, but this line alludes to one of the key acts of power imbalances in a caregiver-child relationship. Be it via a parent, a teacher, or any other caregiver or authority figure, dismissing a child's opinions or thoughts hamper their emotional development as well as delay the development of their individuality. It teaches children that having their own opinions is wrong and they should only listen to what their elders say without questioning anything. This specific phenomenon is also key when a child goes through any form of sexual abuse from a caregiver figure as questioning the latter is not something they are often taught.

In Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, the protagonist Coraline Jones feels neglected by her parents which allows the 'Other Mother' the opportunity to entice the little girl with the dream of a loving and present family. But that happiness bore the cost of Coraline being trapped and giving up her eyes for buttons. She later had to fight the other mother not only to save herself but also her family (Gaiman). This mimics how caregiver roles can take advantage of a child's insecurities to make them do things they do not want to in the name of receiving love and care.

The Grimm Brothers are some of the most renowned authors of fairytales through their collecting, rewriting, and publishing of folklore that had existed in their region for years. These stories also mention many forms of child abuse. In "Brother and Sister" a pair of siblings were forced to flee their home to get away from the physical abuse they had to hold through every day at the hands of their stepmother, while their father did nothing to help (Grimm, 18-19). There's also the tale of "Hansel and Gretel", where their parents abandon them in the forest since the former was unable to provide food for the entire family and chose to preserve themselves (Grimm, 245-246). Both stories mentioned here showcase abusive actions and tendencies against children. The stories discussed thus far are still quite close to us in centuries. As society has developed through time so have the discussions regarding abuse, child abuse, and sexual abuse progressed. But mentions of such cases are present in works much older than these, which brings the focus to Charles Perrault and the tales of *The Fairy*, *Little Thumb*, and *Donkeyskin*

Charles Perrault is one of the oldest known authors of fairy tales. He is even recognized as the father of the fairytale genre. Fairytales existed centuries before the printing press was even invented, but Perrault was one of the first authors who collected popular folk stories, put them into writing, and published them. Born to a rich family in Paris France, Perrault recalls his birth as he says, "I was born on the twelfth of January 1628, and born a twin. He who arrived in the world a few hours ahead of me was named François and died six months later. I was named Charles by my brother, the tax collector, who held me at the baptismal font with my cousin Françoise Pepin. (Perrault, *Charles Perrault: Memoirs of My Life*)".

He lived a successful life; both as a member of Louis XIV's court as well as an author. Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi notes in the Introduction to *Charles Perrault: Memoirs of My Life*, "Charles Perrault was a dynamic figure who played a dual role, as an administrator of the

King's buildings charged with promoting the physical manifestation of the monarch's glory, and as an artist in his own right, a prolific author whose mottos and devices adorned monuments and medals, and whose poetry won acclaim before the French Academy. (Zarucchi, *Charles Perrault: Memoirs of My Life*). It was not until his later life that Perrault focused on writing for children. Zaruchhi further notes in the Introduction, "*The Histories or Tales of Past Times, with Morals*, first appeared in 1695, in a beautifully hand-lettered presentation manuscript with watercolor illustrations, dedicated to the King's niece, the nineteen-year-old princess Élisabeth-Charlotte d'Orleans. The choice of such a distinguished recipient, who was clearly an adult by contemporary standards, was an indication of Perrault's pride in his accomplishment. (Zarucchi, *Charles Perrault: Memoirs of My Life*).

The collection of stories was properly published in 1697 as a complete book and has been translated multiple times since. Zarucchi says that by Perrault's description, the tales he wrote had charming narration, and plots and characters that were able to capture mass attention. The stories were so easily accepted by the public because they had been circulating for centuries as oral traditions, with no known author. Perrault's writing has become such a classic piece of literature, that almost every French child can identify the "contes de Perrault," or Perrault's Tales (Zarucchi, *Charles Perrault: Memoirs of My Life*). He was proud of the tales and believed that they were good stories with good morals for anyone who reads them, regardless of their social and economic standing. Perrault emphasized that only by relating to the greatest of things to the smallest can a reader enlighten themselves (Perrault, *Charles Perrault: Memoirs of My Life*).

Perrault wrote these tales both for the pleasure of writing, but also with the intention to educate future generations, to give them life lessons as well as warnings to remember. He wrote that the tales give a necessary representation of the experiences lived by most families. Knowing and reading about these experiences allows the future generation to take lessons

and learn from the past (Perrault, *Charles Perrault: Memoirs of My Life*). He reached the end of his life at the age of seventy-five on 16 May 1703, in his birthplace, Paris.

Folklore, folktales, fairytales, myths, etc. have always existed as the societal tool for passing in values, morals, warnings, and more. It allows for ancestral rules to be passed down as well as ancestral lessons. Regardless of its origin, folklore is collected from, these long-standing pieces are an undoubted reflection of that society and the humans living it. It's a tool that has always crossed the physical boundaries that have been put in place by countries and continents, as regardless of their setting and characters, the lessons they carry transcend worldwide.

Alan Dundes writes in "Folklore as a Mirror of Culture.", "...folklore is autobiographical ethnography-that is, it is a people's description of themselves" (Dundes, 471). Be it *Aesop's Fables*, *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, or Bengal's very own *Thakurmar Jhuli*, folktales have represented human values and deceit for centuries if not thousands of years. These are long-standing oral lore that were later collected and published; both to preserve as well as to educate people of past histories. They are often exaggerated in their characters and settings but they always carry core lessons and the history of society. Dundes says, " Folklore as a mirror of culture frequently reveals the area of special concern. It is for this reason that analysis of collections of folklore can provide the individual who takes advantage of the opportunities afforded by the study of folklore a way of seeing another culture from the inside out instead of from the outside in, the usual position of a social scientist or a teacher." (Dundes, 471).

While they are often enjoyed for their fun storytelling, looking deeper into the symbolism and metaphors allows for further dissection into the experiences that have shaped these tales. Francisco Vaz da Silva says,

...the examined suffusion of mythic schemes in the work of scholars bent on examining the unconscious workings of the mind suggests the mind-boggling power of unconscious processes in even the most strenuously self-conscious of scholarly pursuits. Last but not least, in light of Gregory Bateson's terms of stories" (1979:13), evidence of continuity between traditional: themes and modern theories suggests one reason why folklore still matters, provided folklorists take notice and rise up to the task of studying patterns in human stories, ancient and modern. (Silva, 15-16)

The tall tales of traditional folklore often bring about deeper underlying issues of society to the forefront. For instance, Charles Perrault's *Donkeyskin* can be seen as a metaphoric representation of intra-familial child sexual abuse and how it is treated by society, *The Fairy* showcases the realities of a dysfunctional family and *Little Thumb* talks about child abandonment. Dundes remarks that "one of the purposes of studying folklore is to realize the hypothetical premise." (Dundes, 471). It can be argued that it is a stretch to assume these simple folklores are carrying complex undertones but at the end of the day, the lore had to start somewhere, it needed a source. And what better source than the most nuclear sources of all: the family and the society? Dundes, on the topic of symbolism in folklore, writes that folklore is one of the many ways for children and even adults to face the many problems life presents. The fact that there are folklores that deal with sexuality and interrelationships within family members, tells us that it is a common enough occurrence for it to be present in these tales. If folklore from a community is collected and subsequently analyzed, it is very possible to pinpoint the key concerns, values, and anxieties people of that community may have. As such, if American folklore that is meant to be read by children and adults alike contains sexual elements, then that is an issue that has to be faced directly. (Dundes, 481) Folklore, in the end, is a reflection of society: both good and bad. Thus, Perrault's *The Fairy*, *Little*



*Thumb*, and *Donkeyskin* can be read as a symbolic representation of intra-familial child abuse.

## Chapter 3

### Exploitation of Power: A parent-child relationship

In a parent-child relationship, there is never an equal distribution of power. From birth, a child learns that they are required to listen to their parent in all cases. So, questioning their parent's decisions is something that is rarely taught to children. This causes the already skewed power dynamic to tilt even more in the parent's favor, which can result in the exploitation of that power. Geraldine Moane mentions in the article, "The Victims of Abuse",

The majority of child sexual abuse occurs in the context of a relationship usually marked by power differentials; indeed, there is general agreement that child sexual abuse "is above all a power-based phenomenon, involving the inappropriate use and expression of power in a sexualized form and manner" (Pilkington & Lenaghan, 1998, p. 185). The vast majority of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by men, with estimates of male perpetrators varying from 80 to 95 offenders. (Moane, 341)

The abusers in cases of child sexual abuse are often people who the children know and even trust. It is because these people are so close to the children that they can exploit the children. Moane states in her article that significant amounts of research in clinical and epidemiological settings show that, abusers are known to the victim in as many as 90 out of 100 cases. The estimate indicates family members as half of the abuse perpetrators, with the rest being people in positions of power and authority over the victims: teachers, religious leaders, youth leaders, etc. (Marshall et al.) (Moane, 341)

In cases of intra-familial child abuse, the child is often used as a scapegoat for other issues that may exist within a family or the parents themselves. For such cases, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories on id, projection, and displacement can be used. Using these theories, one can dissect these fairytales and look further into the actions taken by the tale's

characters. The motive behind the mother's abuse from *The Fairy*, the parent's abandonment from *Little Thumb*, and the king's greed from *Donkeyskin* can be elaborated on via Freud's theories.

In *The Fairy*, the widowed mother and the eldest daughter are similar people with haughty personalities who mistreat the youngest daughter. Even though they are both her daughters, the mother actively chooses to prioritize one while abusing the other. The relationship between her late husband and the widow is not elaborated upon in the tale, but it can be one of the causes for the widow's actions toward her youngest daughter as the child is the picture of her late father. Jealousy towards the youngest daughter is implied as one of the reasons for the abuse she faces at the hands of her family. The mother here seems to project her insecurities and pain towards her youngest as well as encourages the eldest to do the same. According to Freud, projection is a defensive mental practice that allows someone to direct their own thoughts and actions to another. In *Totem and Taboo*, he elaborates on his thoughts on the relationship between the survivor and the dead as he says,

The defense against it takes the form of displacing it onto the object of the hostility, onto the dead themselves. This defensive procedure, which is a common one both in normal and in pathological mental life, is known as a '*projection*'. The survivor thus denies that he has ever harboured any hostile feelings against the dead loved one; the soul of the dead harbours them instead and seeks to put them into action during the whole period of mourning. In spite of the successful defense that the survivor achieves by means of projection, his emotional reaction shows the characteristics of punishment and remorse, for he is the subject of fears and submits to renunciations and restrictions, though these are in part disguised as measures of protection against the hostile demon. (Freud, 61)

By projecting her ill intentions to her youngest daughter, the widowed mother is alleviating herself of any guilt. She is projecting her issues and insecurities on her daughter and mistreating her. The youngest child is blamed for any household issues, all the household chores are done by her and even when the eldest daughter is cursed by the fairy due to her bad behavior, the mother blames the youngest. The daughter escaping the house in fear of her mother's beating shows that this is not the first time her mother has beaten her. She was beaten before. Here the mother is displacing her anger towards her misfortune onto the youngest. Freud's theory of displacement talks about displacing one's emotions towards something onto something completely different. For instance, a parent can take out the anger they have towards their partner onto the child. Freud writes, "At the root of the prohibition there is invariably a hostile impulse against someone the patient loves—a wish that that person should die. This impulse is repressed by a prohibition and the prohibition is attached to some particular act, which, by displacement, represents, it may be, a hostile act against the loved person. (Freud, 72)".

The abuse she faces causes the youngest daughter mental anguish. She is afraid of her home, there is no place for her to seek safety except for the forest that has wild animals. Even wild animals are not as threatening to her as her mother is. The article, "Early Child Maltreatment, Runaway Youths, and Risk of Delinquency and Victimization in Adolescence: A Mediation Model", states, "Evidence suggests that running away from home and living on the streets during adolescence increases the risk of becoming involved in delinquency and victimization, although studies have yet to determine (with adequate replication of findings across studies) the extent to which running away fully or partially accounts for the overlapping occurrence of child abuse. (Kim et al, 20)"

In *Little Thumb*, the themes of projection and displacement are also present. The faggot-maker couple abandons their children as they are worried about starving to death themselves.

Their poor financial situation, along with the father's resentment towards the children results in this situation. In their article, "Parental Resources and Child Abuse and Neglect", Christina Paxson and Jane Waldfogel write,

Our hypothesis is that children are more likely to be maltreated if their parents have fewer resources. We use a broad conception of "resources." It encompasses not only income but also parental time and the quality of parental time. For example, a low-income working single mother may be short on resources needed to parent not only because she earns a low income, but also because she may not have the physical or emotional reserves to care for her children properly at the end of the day. Likewise, an unemployed father may provide less than adequate parenting not only because his income has been reduced, but also because of the depression and loss of self-esteem that may accompany unemployment (Arthur Goldsmith et al., 1996). (Paxon and Waldfogel, 239)

The father and mother are both abusive towards Little Thumb, but they are neutral towards the rest of them. Here, the theme of blaming one child for the misfortune the family faces is present again. The piece of text that is the most shocking is not Little Thumb's achievements but the fact that after the first time the couple abandons the children, they get golden crowns from their king as a gift. Despite that, they do not go back for their children. Even after the mother expressed sorrow over not having the children with her, the father verbally abuses her, and threatens to beat her if she continued to bring up the children. It is Little Thumb who brings back him and his siblings. Then again, when they return from the forest, they are so afraid of their parents that they do not go inside but sit outside. Their home is not a safe place for them, but they also have nowhere else to go.

Another point to consider is that the children are the first to be blamed and abandoned when the family faces financial issues. Even after the king gives the family golden crowns, the couple does not manage that wealth properly. They go back to their poor financial situation in a few days. And then they abandon the children again. They displace their issues and punish the children for it every time they face difficulty. The abuse only stops when Little Thumb starts bringing them consistent earnings. The cases of abuse do not stop here though, as *Donkeyskin* shows the realities of a child experiencing sexual abuse or the threat of it at the hands of their parent.

Perrault's *Donkeyskin* tells the tale of a daughter trying to escape from the fate of becoming her father's bride. Even though she was once a beloved daughter and princess, once the king gives in to his desire, he does everything in his power to make her his wife. It is not as though the princess does not try to stop him by asking for tasks such as presenting her with dresses in the colors of the moon, the sun, and the sky. She even asks him to kill his beloved donkey that excretes gold, but regardless of how impossible the task may seem it is his desire that drives the king to complete the tasks regardless of his means or consequences. He chooses to sacrifice the donkey that litters the gold needed to sustain his country. Even when his ministers and courtiers try to dissuade him, he has already given in to his desires. Nothing else mattered anymore. In Freudian words, his id (desires) had completely overtaken his ego (rationality), and superego (moral judgment). In Freud's book, *The Ego and the Id*, he talks about the differences between the ego and the id as he says that the ego is the tool that brings the world's ideas and influence as an answer to the id. This allows the id, where the pleasure principle is rampant, to filter the actions it tends to cause. The perception of the world plays an integral role for the ego, where instinct runs free in the id. While the id contains a person's passion, the ego counters it with reason and common sense (Freud, 19). The id represents the

unrestrained desires of people, which can only be kept in check by the ego and superego. And in the case of *Donkeyskin*, the king has completely given into the id.

Another Freudian theory worth mentioning is the Electra Complex. Freud himself did not use the term; it was coined by Carl Jung, one of Freud's earliest followers. Charlotte Nickerson writes in her article, "Overview Of The Electra Complex In Psychology", "The Electra Complex, the female equivalent of the Oedipus Complex, is a term in Neo-Freudian psychology that refers to a daughter developing a love for her father and jealousy and blame toward her mother for depriving her of a penis" (Nickerson). The theory prevalent in the context of *Donkeyskin*, though, is the theory of Id. Saul Mcleod writes in his article, "Freud's Theory of Personality: Id, Ego, And Superego", "The id engages in primary process thinking, which is primitive, illogical, irrational, and fantasy-oriented. This form of process thinking has no comprehension of objective reality and is selfish and wishful in nature. The id operates on the pleasure principle (Freud, 1920), that every unconscious wishful impulse should be satisfied immediately, regardless of the consequences. (Mcleod)".

The king would rather commit the crime of marrying his daughter to fulfill the desire to marry a princess as beautiful as his late wife. The same disregard for morals and rationale can be observed in real-life cases of intra-familial child sexual abuse. A few specific aspects of these cases are the perpetrators often being either parental figures, caregivers, or other relatives, and the imbalance of power between the abuser and the victim that exists in the family dynamic. At times such crimes are completely disregarded as class and race come into the equation. Nancy Whitter states, "...[P]revailing discourse about the risks of girls' sexualization is shaded by ideas about race and class. This includes the idea that incest occurs mainly in marginalized families and that it is mainly disreputable strangers who threaten children." (Whitter, 98-99).

The princess was betrayed by her father and there was not much she could do to stop him. She was born into royalty, and even then, she was powerless in her situation as her father but also as her ruler. He had absolute power over his subjects. One of the themes that can be observed in the tale is that regardless of how much she tries, the princess is never able to outright go against him. She sets impossible tasks for him but is never able to directly confront him. Because her place in society does not allow her to stand against her father. Dorothea Nolde and Celia Britton write in "Sexual Violence against Children. A Report on Current Research.",

Having analyzed cases of father-daughter incest through trial proceedings in Bologna at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, Didier Lett observes that the judges apparently considered this relationship less serious than other sexual crimes, because they began from the principle that affection and attraction, including of a sexual nature, existed naturally between father and daughter...The emotional link between father and daughter, especially, was idealized, and it was precisely this idealization that masked the potential for abuse towards underage daughters and stepdaughters that this relationship offered. (Nolde and Britton, 152-53)

Social connotations take away a lot of the severity present in intra-familial sexual abuse cases. That is the same in cases of child sexual abuse. Whitter notes, "Children and adolescents are individuals whose rights and social, economic, and political power are limited. As a result, they are vulnerable to assault and exploitation by adults, who have more power on all these dimensions." (Whitter, 99).

When the perpetrator is someone much older and especially the caregiver, such as the father or the mother, the child is rarely allowed to even be given the option to fight back. Especially in society, be it now or hundreds of years ago, disobedience towards parental figures is seen as the crime of the child. From an early age, children are taught to obey their parents in



all things and this, in worst-case scenarios ends up with a child enduring abuse because they are not taught to fight back. Even the fairy godmother of the tale gives ideas to the princess to escape, but none that could directly anger her father, the king. Violence at the hands of a parental figure or a caregiver is often not seen as a legitimate crime. Nolde talks about anthropologist Heather Montgomery's approach as she says,

Montgomery's approach lumps together illegitimacy and violence. In this perspective, only acts labeled as illegitimate by a given society can be considered as violence. This amounts to ignoring the very many acts which were tolerated without being legitimized and also acts which were considered legitimate while being undoubtedly violent. In some cases, legitimacy even becomes a totally obsolete criterion, for example in the case of sexual violence towards enslaved children or wartime rape, since what is then considered legitimate is defined completely unilaterally, and is dictated by the power relations present. (Nolde and Britton, 161)

The power that the parent holds in a parent-child relationship is supposed to be used to guide the child to learning values and morals, that power should be used to ensure the child's safety and security. But in the cases of *The Fairy*, *Little Thumb*, and *Donkeyskin*, the parents are the ones who have actively taken away their children's safety and caused them harm.

## Chapter 4

### Victim Abuse in Society

Society does not treat disruption kindly, be it a good one or a bad one. An abuse victim seeking justice is a disruption to the peace society tries to hold together with so much conviction. The treatment an abuse victim faces in society is a topic of debate even in contemporary times. It was even worse in the past. Geraldine Moane, in the article “The Victims of Abuse”, writes,

The impact abuse has on its victims is given little attention when abuse is discussed. This has resulted in the impact getting devalued and misunderstood. Society treats these cases with taboo and caution. That, along with the complex psychology behind the impact of abuse has made this topic harder to discuss. Exposing these cases causes permanent disruptions in the family, the community, and the institutions that run on their backs. Which leads to the perpetrators doing as much as they can to hide their crimes (Moane, 340).

It is rare for victims of abuse to be treated kindly by society. They are seen as lesser than others, they are ostracized and even berated at times for 'airing the dirty laundry'. In the three fairytales discussed in the thesis, this phenomenon cannot be seen directly but there are subtle references to it. A post-structuralist reading of these texts, however, allows for a way to connect the elements of the stories to society as a whole. Derrida quotes Levi Strauss in *Writing and Difference*, on myths, "In fact, the Bororo myth, which I shall refer to from now on as the key myth, is, as I shall try to show, simply a transformation, to a greater or lesser extent, of other myths originating either in the same society or in neighboring or remote societies. I could, therefore, have legitimately taken as my starting point any one representative myth of the group. From this point of view, the key myth is interesting not

because it is typical, but rather because of its irregular position within the group.'" (Derrida, 361). Folktales and fairytales are representative of their origins, the values of their community, and their community's actions. For *The Fairy* and *Little Thumb*, there is not much representation of society. However, there are still a few examples that can be brought forward.

In *The Fairy*, the youngest sister gains freedom from her abusive family, but the eldest does not. The eldest is cursed with frogs and snakes to come out of her mouth. She has no ambition to have her sister's gift but she goes because her mother wanted her to do so. Even though it is her fault to an extent, the widowed mother does not try to help her eldest daughter when the latter gets cursed. With her object of aggression gone, the mother turns on her eldest daughter and kicks her onto the streets. The daughter wanders from door to door but no one agrees to help her due to her curse. Here, the eldest daughter's curse is a metaphorical reflection of the scars abuse leaves on a child's mind and body and the lack of help she gets, which results in her death is how society refuses to acknowledge or help abuse victims.

Moane writes that,

Acknowledgement of the impact of abuse had been hampered in the earlier decades of the twentieth century by the blanket of secrecy and silence which surrounded abuse (Masson, 1984; Pilkington and Lenaghan, 1998). The use of phrases such as 'breaking the silence' and 'it couldn't happen' in early work on the topic is indicative of the difficulties that clinicians and researchers faced in attempting to bring the reality of abuse into the public domain, even in medical and scientific circles (Herman, 1992). (Moane, 339)

In *Little Thumb*, Little Thumb was treated horribly by his family, and they only gave him love and affection when he became of use. No one actively helped Little Thumb and his siblings

when their parents abandoned them. Even when they took shelter at the ogre's house, the ogre wanted to eat them even when he had an abundance of food. This is a metaphorical representation of how neglected children are often treated badly by society or fall prey to dangerous people when they get no support or safety from their own homes. Christina M. Rodriguez writes in the article, "Parental Discipline and Abuse Potential Affects on Child Depression, Anxiety, and Attributions", that child maltreatment being detrimental to victims is backed up by evidence as it can cause harm to a victim's cognitive and psychosocial abilities; both short-term and long-term. This is why behavioral problems, depression, withdrawal from society, fearfulness, etc. are more noticeable in abused children than in children who have not faced any abuse. (Rodriguez, 810). It was not until Little Thumb was of use to his kingdom that he was rewarded and gained fame. Much like how society does not help anyone unless the community benefits from it.

The treatment of a sexual abuse victim by society when they choose to try to escape or seek justice is a topic of debate today. The shame that is forced upon them, the labels that they are given, is a phenomenon also found in *Donkeyskin*. Here there are no direct one-on-one examples to draw from the tale, but the text can be dissected further to draw the examples. Post-structuralism allows a piece of work to be deconstructed so that it can be further understood and meaning can be found in contexts that otherwise would not be apparent at first glance. For instance, the way the princess is treated while she escapes and then takes shelter on the farm can be seen as a representation of how a victim is treated by society once they try to speak up or seek justice regarding the abuse they have faced.

According to Jacques Derrida, "The very idea of institution — hence of the arbitrariness of the sign — is unthinkable before the possibility of writing and outside of its horizon. Quite simply, that is, outside of the horizon itself, outside the world as space of inscription, as the

opening to the emission and to the spatial distribution of signs, to the regulated play of their differences, even if they are “phonic.” (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*)”.

A piece of writing cannot be seen just as a sole existence, it is connected to its author, the time it was written in, and the society it was written into. It is not as though a piece of writing cannot be viewed as an individual piece, but any text that has ever been produced carries the mark of the writer's psyche and the society it was written in. As previously stated, to Derrida, writing is a system that encompasses all aspects of human life; spirituality, the human psyche, society, and the world (Derrida, 285). The happy experiences recorded in fairytales are a reflection of the good in society, and cases of abuse in fairytales are also representative of real-life abuse cases. So, the tale of *Donkeyskin* can be considered a metaphorical representation of society and its treatment of child sexual abuse victims.

The princess is treated as someone less than her due to her appearance and the donkey skin she wears. She is not given shelter, barely given food, and even when she finds work, she is constantly ridiculed and insulted. Even when she is the only girl left to try the ring on in the whole kingdom and is subsequently called to try it on, the tale goes as such,

"You have not brought that Donkey-skin, who made me the cake," said the Prince.

Everyone laughed and said, "No," so dirty and unpleasant was she.

"Let someone fetch her at once," said the King; "it shall not be said that I left out the lowliest."

And the servants ran laughing and mocking to find the goose-girl. (Perrault, 135)

She is considered to be the lowest in society. This can be a metaphor for how society treated abuse and rape victims. This is one of the many instances where the spotlight of the violence

shifted from the perpetrator to the victim. Rather than ensuring the victim's safety and sanctity it dehumanized them by shifting the blame onto them.

Often, the victims are the ones who have lost their honor in society's eyes. Rather than pointing the finger at the perpetrators, the shame is given to the victim to bear. Girls are often considered 'fallen' or 'impure' because she has been raped. Boys are not even taken seriously most of the time. Noted by Dorothea Nolde and Celia Britton,

The credibility of girls was more likely to be questioned when they came from lower social milieux. In the eyes of a number of their compatriots, the sexually abused girls had not only been sullied by the sexual contacts but had also lost their childhood innocence. They had been "corrupted", they represented a danger to other children and had to be placed in specialized institutions for "fallen girls"... (Nolde and Britton,156)

Society starts questioning the victim's behavior, clothing choices, and past decisions. But the abuser is rarely subjected to the same scrutiny. Victims are chided that they are trying to shame the family if intra-familial sexual abuse comes to light. The folktales here depict society's animosity towards the victims as well as the value of keeping the peace of seeking justice. This can be observed in the tale as it is the princess who goes through humiliation while her father is barely held accountable for the anguish he had brought upon his flesh and blood. A symbolic example of the shame and guilt she carries would be the donkey skin she wears and the mud she covers her face with to disguise herself. Here the skin would act as the label society has quite literally given her, and the mud is her hiding her true self due to her experience.

## Chapter 5

### Perpetrators and Society

The perpetrators of abuse cases always seem to get away with getting barely any punishment for their crimes. Society as a whole seems to protect the perpetrators rather than the victims, even more so in cases of intra-familial child abuse. In all three of Charles Perrault's fairytales, not one parent faces any repercussions for the abuse they have inflicted upon their child.

Geraldine Moane writes,

Additionally, perpetrators often have exceptionally strong resources for concealment. First of all the adult perpetrator is in a position of considerable power vis-a-vis the child victim of abuse. In a family situation, this involves parental power or other forms of emotional power. The adult is able to intimidate the child with threats of physical assault and even death, damage to the child's mother or other members of the family, or the break up of the family. In an institutional context, threats of severe consequences, but most importantly, loss of security, abandonment, and other emotional threats act as severe impediments to children taking action against the perpetrator of abuse. (Moane, 340)

The mother in *The Fairy* faces nothing, even though she is the one who actively abuses the youngest daughter. Instead, the eldest daughter is the one who got cursed, got kicked out of the house, and died miserably. Not a finger was pointed at the mother. In a family, the parent is the absolute power. No matter what happens, the child cannot challenge the parent. Even if a child comes forward with their experiences, society does not take them seriously. Moane further notes, that accounts of intra-familial child abuse were either not taken seriously in the past or they were deemed as lies (Moane, 339). The denial of the abuse they face results in

children being discouraged from seeking help, which then allows their perpetrators to get away.

In *Little Thumb* as well, despite the abuse Little Thumb faces at the hands of his parents, they face no repercussions. Little Thumb showers them with gifts and gets his father and brother good work. There was no justice for him. And in *Donkeyskin* as well, the King faces no punishment for how he treated his daughter. The lack of punishment is evident in the tale as the king gets no repercussions for lusting after his daughter. He still has his kingdom, gets remarried, and is living a peaceful life.

There is no retribution for the mental anguish and physical suffering the princess goes through. This mirrors the very real cases observed throughout history where abusers have gotten very minimal to no punishment when it comes to sexual abuse, even more so in intra-familial child sexual abuse. Cases are rarely filed and even when they are they do not garner much attention as other crimes do. Even if perpetrators from a lower tax bracket may be punished, if the perpetrator is someone established in society, the law is much less inclined to give them harsher punishments. Dorothea Nolde and Celia Britton state that during the early modern period, any form of sexual violence against children was rarely brought to court, and even when they were, there was no guarantee that the victim could get any form of justice. They say,

In the cases brought to the attention of justice, one does indeed find numerous mentions of fondling or sexual relations with children, sometimes dating from years or even decades before the court case. What is more, the legal proceedings and the outcome of the trials often depended on the social status of the victim and his or her parents, as well as that of the accused. Thus, the status of the clerical and secular



authorities – in the case of priests, doctors, teachers, lawyers, and indeed mayors – protected them extremely effectively from legal proceedings. (Nolde and Britton, 150)

Class distinctions also play key roles in this scenario as Nolde states that, "In the view of doctors and lawyers, men from the bourgeoisie were excluded from the circle of potential abusers" (Nolde and Britton, 158).

This is exactly what happens in *Donkeyskin* as the king gets away with lusting after his daughter. He is the highest power in the tale's setting and his kingdom, so pointing the finger at him, and questioning his morals, and decisions is questioning the kingdom itself. He is king in fantasy-medieval Europe, where kings were akin to God. And pointing the finger at someone who as considered holy by everyone, was completely out of the question in the context of *Donkeyskin*. Even the priest who was ordered to convince the princess for the marriage chooses to side with the king due to ambition and greed. This is no different when it comes to the reality of today. Folklore here also depicts this greed and lack of proper justice that actively resides within the society. Law has since come a long way from the olden days, as Nolde and Britton write,

The main changes which marked nineteenth- and twentieth-century attitudes towards violence against children can be found in these studies, notably the creation of campaigns for the protection of children, the recognition of the rights of the child, the influence of medicine and sexology, the establishment of the category of pedophilia, and also the reaction of the law and the media to female victims, considered to be "fallen women", stigmatized as future prostitutes and declared to constitute a danger to society. (Nolde and Britton, 156)

Even with these cases getting more attention, severe punishment rarely befalls the perpetrators of such crimes. In Bangladesh, according to The Penal Code, 1860 (ACT NO. XLV OF 1860),

chapter XVI, titled "OF OFFENCES AFFECTING THE HUMAN BODY", "Whoever commits rape shall be punished with 2[imprisonment] for life or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine, unless the woman raped is his own wife and is not under twelve years of age, in which case he shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both."(Laws of Bangladesh). The ten or two years and fines are nearly not enough compared to the severe physical and psychological trauma the victim goes through nor does the zero repercussions faced by the king in *Donkeyskin* fair to the princess who had to endure so much due to his actions.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

To conclude, from the above discussion, we can observe that folklore is one of the many mediums of society that showcases both its values and depravity. The target audience for these tales is mainly children but these artfully written tales not only teach lessons but also showcase society's good and bad decisions through generations. Charles Perrault's *The Fairy*, *Little Thumb*, and *Donkeyskin* sheds light on the intra-familial child abuse present in fairytales and how society responds to such cases. The power imbalance present in a caregiver-child setting is one of the reasons why the king was so confident in announcing his decision to marry his daughter, the princess in *Donkeyskin*, why the mother was able to mistreat her daughters in *The Fairy*, and why Little Thumb went through so much abuse at the hands of his parents in *Little Thumb*. The parents are the antagonists in these tales. They abuse their children, but the shame is for the victims to bear. In the end, none of the parents face any consequences for their actions, which exposes the reality of how numerous perpetrators have gone free or given minimal punishment throughout history. The analysis of Perrault's fairytales with the help of Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Derrida's theory of post-structuralism, helps to show the themes of familial power dynamics and society's treatment of abuse victims and their perpetrators. It suffices to say, that the folktales and fairytales that have been passed down through generations are the reflections of issues that have yet been eradicated in today's time. They are a reminder that unless society, as a whole, acknowledges and protects its victims, crimes, such as intra-familial child abuse, will continue to be rampant.

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