

REINCARNATION OF THE MYTHS: THE EVOLUTION OF FAIRY TALES IN MODERN
LITERATURE

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

Department of English and Humanities

BRAC University

April 2023

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DECLARATION

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing 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.
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Approval

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Acknowledgements:

In the very beginning, I would like to express gratitude to Almighty Allah for blessing me with the patience and creativity to complete this paper.

Then, I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor, Professor Abu Sayeed Noman for his invaluable support and guidance throughout my thesis journey. His expertise, encouragement, and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping my research work and helping me achieve my academic goals. I feel fortunate to have had him as my supervisor, and I will always be grateful for the time and effort he invested in my thesis.

Secondly, I am extremely grateful to my best friend Sadman Hossain for his unwavering support and patience during my difficult times. He has been my rock, my support system, and my confidant throughout my struggles, and I cannot thank him enough for being there for me. His selflessness and empathy have made all the difference, and I cannot thank him enough for all that he does.

Next, this thesis is a testament to the fact that when there is a will, there is a way. I have faced numerous challenges, obstacles, and setbacks throughout this journey, but thanks to Allah, I have shown remarkable determination and grit to overcome them all. I am proud of my commitment, hard work, and dedication that has helped me understand that anything is possible with the right mindset and attitude. I congratulate myself for never giving up despite facing moments of self-doubt, exhaustion, and uncertainty. For me, this thesis will always stand as a testament to my inner strength and character.

Finally, I am immensely grateful to my parents for their endless prayers and support.

ABSTRACT

This aim of this thesis is to explore the transformation of fairy tales in modern literature. Fairy tales carry a rich history dating back centuries and have undergone significant changes as they have been adapted and retold across different cultures and time periods. The thesis examines how modern authors have re-imagined and reinvented classic fairy tales by illustrating the ways in which they have altered the traditional themes, characters, and motifs to reflect contemporary social and cultural issues. Through a close reading of the texts by Angela Carter and Nikita Gill and theories by Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva, the thesis argues that the modern retelling of fairy tales represents a form of cultural commentary that reflects the changing values and concerns of contemporary society. Ultimately, the thesis demonstrates that fairy tale and folklore retellings are not just another version of old stories, instead, they are a medium of exploring the postmodern complexities and nuances of society and giving new meanings to timeless tales.

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Discussed Literary Theories:

- Theory of Deconstruction – Jacques Derrida
- Feminist Theory- Julia Kristeva

Discussed Books:

- *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter
- *Fierce Fairy Tales: Poems and Stories to Stir your Soul* by Nikita Gill
- *Grimms' Fairy Tales* by Gebrüder Grimm and Jacob Ludwig Carl Grimm

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The fairy tale, which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales.”

- Walter Benjamin.

Storytelling has existed since the earliest civilizations and it is the act of conveying messages through a series of events, real or imagined. Fairy tales specifically developed from oral storytelling that is the practise of sharing stories through spoken narratives rather than writing in a book. This is an ancient tradition used for thousands of years in many cultures around the world. Oral storytelling can take many forms, such as myths, legends, folktales, and personal anecdotes. As oral storytelling has a long history, it led to a belief that such fairy tales carry moral messages that are universal and timeless. However, such an idea regarding the fairy tales is simply incorrect because of the strong patriarchy and female objectification that echoed in the earlier folk literature. Apart from that, there are several elements crucial for the growing up of children that are absent from such fables.

This thesis will consider how ancient fairy tales carried plots that demeaned women and wrongly taught the concepts of self-love and consent to the children. The area of problem will discuss how such inaccurate messages were spread all around the world through a brief discussion of world literature in terms of fairy tales and folktales. Later on, the main discussion will show how contemporary retellings are subverting the genre of fairy tales by focusing on selected books by Angela Carter and poems by Nikita Gill. It is because these retellings not only

show how the world has transformed in terms of societal values, but also the intentional editing and transformations of the fairy tales that emphasize meta-narratives, that is, the perspective of the villains. Thus, fairy tales alongside all its retellings should be considered a dynamic literary canon. So, this thesis shows that fairy tale and folklore retellings are not just another version of old stories, instead, they are a medium of exploring the postmodern complexities and nuances of society and giving new meanings to timeless tales.

The first chosen author for this research is British-Indian poet Nikita Gill. She is well-known for her powerful poems that explore themes of love, loss, and healing. Her unique background as a British-Indian woman has also influenced her work, as she often draws inspiration from her cultural heritage and personal experiences of navigating identity and belonging. As we live in the era of the digital media, Gill first gained recognition as a poet through her Instagram account, where she began sharing her poetry and prose with a growing audience. Her work quickly gained a following for its raw emotional reflections, poignant insights, and feminist themes, leading to the publication of her first poetry book titled *Your Soul is a River* in 2016. Since then, she has published many other poetry collections, including *Wild Embers*, *Fierce Fairy Tales: & Other Stories to Stir Your Soul*, and *Great Goddesses: Life Lessons from Myths and Monsters*. Gill's writing is characterized by its honest vulnerability and unapologetic exploration of the human experience using powerful imagery. Through her poetry and prose, she seeks to empower and inspire her readers, particularly women and people of color, to embrace their own inner strength and resilience. She is now considered as one of the most influential contemporary poet, and her work continues to resonate with readers around the world.

On the other hand, Angela Carter is an English novelist, short-story writer, and journalist who is widely considered to be one of the most influential writers of the 20th century. She is known for her bold and imaginative storytelling, feminist perspectives, and use of magical realism. Carter's works often challenge traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and identity, while exploring themes of power, desire, and transformation. Her writing style is known to have rich and evocative language alongside vivid imagery, and a willingness to push the boundaries of literary conventions. Throughout her career, she received numerous accolades, including the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Booker Prize shortlist.

To fulfill the aim of the research, the paper will apply a theoretical approach of feminism and deconstruction. To be more precise, the selected theories for this paper are the deconstruction theory by Derrida and feminist theory by Kristeva. Julia Kristeva is a prominent Bulgarian-French philosopher and psychoanalyst who has made significant contributions to the field of feminism. Her theory of feminism argues that women's unique experiences of marginalization, exclusion, and oppression were not just the result of patriarchal social structures, but also the result of symbolic structures of language. It is because traditional linguistic and cultural symbolic systems, such as the old folktales exclude women by constructing and reinforcing patriarchal norms and values. These symbolic systems also suppress women's ability to express themselves and to assert their own subjectivity. In order to challenge this exclusion, Kristeva calls for the creation of new symbolic systems inclusive of women's experiences and perspectives that are exemplified by the retellings of Carter and Gill.

Alternatively, Derrida's deconstruction is a critical approach to the interpretation of texts that seeks to reveal the inherent contradictions and ambiguities in the language. According to Derrida, language is not a transparent and neutral tool for representing reality, but rather a

complex system of signs and meanings that is always in flux and open to multiple interpretations. The central idea of deconstruction is that every text contains implicit biases and assumptions, as well as multiple and conflicting meanings. These biases and assumptions are often rooted in larger social, political, and cultural power structures, and they serve to reinforce existing hierarchies and power relations. By exposing these biases and assumptions, deconstruction challenges traditional interpretations of texts and exposes the power structures that underlie them.

One of the key concepts in Derrida's theory is that of "différance." This refers to the idea that meaning is never fixed or stable, but is always in a state of constant deferral. In other words, meaning is always shifting and evolving, and it is never fully determined by the text itself. This means that there is always a gap between what a text says and what it actually means, and this gap can be explored and exposed through deconstruction. Deconstruction is also concerned with the ways in which language is used to reinforce power relations. For example, traditional philosophical and literary texts such as the fairy tales often use language in a way that reinforces binary oppositions, such as the opposition between self and other, mind and body, and reason and emotion. Derrida argues that these binary oppositions are unnatural or inevitable, but are instead socially constructed, and that they serve to reinforce existing power structures. By exposing these binary oppositions and the power relations they embody, deconstruction challenges traditional interpretations and opens up new possibilities for meaning and understanding.

Hence, through the arguments of the above-mentioned theories, this thesis shows that fairy tale and folklore retellings are not just another version of old stories, instead, they are a

medium of exploring the postmodern complexities and nuances of society and giving new meanings to timeless tales.

1.1 History of Fairy Tales

The history of fairy tales reveals how men controlled this genre that led to the spread of whitewashed, patriarchal, and pedagogical narratives. As discussed earlier, fairy tales and folktales are a form of oral storytelling passed down through generations for centuries. They typically feature magical and fantastical elements, such as enchanted princesses, talking animals, and wicked witches, and often have a moral or lesson at the end. The history of fairy tales is rich and varied, with influences from cultures and traditions worldwide. The earliest recorded fairy tales can be traced back to ancient civilizations, such as Greece and Egypt, where stories featuring gods and goddesses, monsters, and heroes were told to entertain and educate. These stories were passed down orally, and evolved as they were adapted and retold by different cultures.

During the Middle Ages, fairy tales became increasingly popular in Europe, and were often used as a way to teach moral lessons to children. Many fairy tales that are still popular today, such as "Cinderella," "Rapunzel," and "Sleeping Beauty," originated during this time. These stories were passed down from one generation to the next, and were often adapted and changed to reflect the culture and values of the time. In the 18th and 19th centuries, fairy tales experienced a resurgence of popularity, thanks in part to the work of folklorists and anthropologists who collected and recorded traditional stories from all over the world. During this time, many fairy tales were written down for the first time, and were translated and published in books. The Grimm brothers from Germany published one the most famous

collection of tales which contains stories like "Hansel and Gretel," "The Frog Prince," and "Little Red Riding Hood". Of course, this version showed the contextual facts about their culture, however, they also reflected the authors' male agenda to promote patriarchy. This is why; the male control of the fairy tale genre has the need for strong feminist analysis, such as this thesis, as critiques of their narrowed perspective.

Today, fairy tales continue to be a popular form of storytelling, with new adaptations and retellings being created all the time. They continue to be a powerful medium for exploring universal themes such as love, sacrifice, and the triumph of good over evil. In the digital age, fairy tales are also adapted to movies, TV shows and video games, making them more accessible to a wider audience. In the contemporary era, specifically in America, Disney's versions of fairy tales have gained more popularity because of their engaging presentations. In his article titled "Breaking the Disney Spell", writer Jack Zipes says that, "... technology gains preeminence over the stories, and consequently, characters become mere stereotypes devoid of growth. Further Disney films erode the power of fairy tales as they are geared towards non-reflective viewing and therefore allow audiences to lean towards and consume a product without thinking about its moral messages" (352). In other words, audiences who are only aware of Disney's version of fairy tales will be ignorant of the complexity, paternalistic themes, and gender stereotypes of the previous versions. To illustrate, many elements from the Grimm's version of "Cinderella" are not present in the Disney's version. The Grimm's story lacks a fairy godmother and instead brings the spirit of Cinderella's dead mother. Also, in the Grimm's version the sisters chop off their heels and toes to fit into the shoe, which shows how extreme the patriarchal ideas were in the book that required women to go through self harm so that men would accept them. All these elements were excluded from the Disney's version. In this way, fairy tales continue to be a

powerful medium for exploring universal themes, and a source of inspiration and entertainment for people of all ages.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Area of Problem

Owned by the Walt Disney Company, Disney Princess is a media franchise that is centered on a bunch of female characters that portray the role of royal princesses. Disney princess stories, such as “Cinderella”, “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, and “Sleeping Beauty”, have been beloved by children and adults alike for decades. However, these stories have come under scrutiny in recent years for their problematic themes and messages.

One of the main issues with Disney princess stories is their portrayal of gender roles. The princesses are often portrayed as passive and dependent on a male saviour, who rescues them from their problems and provides them with a happy ending. This reinforces the idea that women cannot take care of themselves and need a man to rescue them. It also perpetuates the stereotype that men are the "protectors" and women are the "protected" which is a damaging message to send to young girls. The lack of sufficient diversity stands as another major problem with Disney princess stories. Most of the princesses are white, thin, and conventionally beautiful. This sends the message that only a certain type of person can be a "princess" and that people who do not fit that mold are not as worthy or valuable. This lack of representation can make it hard for children of different backgrounds to see themselves in the stories and can contribute to feelings of self-esteem and self-worth issues.

In addition, the stories often depict a narrow definition of love and romance. The princesses often fall in love with the first person they meet, and their entire lives revolve around finding and being with a romantic partner. This creates an unhealthy expectation that love should be the goal in life, and her relationship status determines her worth. Furthermore, the old tales hardly talk about pivotal concepts such as consent, mental health, body images, equality, or self-love, and soon despite these being crucial lessons for a child as they grow up.

In short, while all these fairy tales may be well celebrated and beloved by children all around the world, it is problematic in the way it highlights harmful stereotypes about women and traditional gender roles. It is important to be aware of these issues and to seek out media that offer more diverse and empowering representations of women and girls. It is also crucial to encourage readers to question the messages that these stories convey and to seek out stories that offer better perspectives. This is why in this postmodern era authors are going back to ancient children's literature and retelling them for the adults to highlight the flaws of the past literature. This paper seeks to recognize the issues with these types of stories, and analyze media that provides more well built representations of human lives through retellings.

2.2 World Literature in the Genre of Folklores

The ideas discussed in the previous section are only limited to some Western stories. However, the marginalization of women and their misrepresentation has been a common element in folktales all over the world. The following subsections will pick folktales from specific countries and cultures in order to show how marginalization of women has been a core part of ancient fairy tales.

2.2.1 Turkey, Arabic Folktale

The story of Scheherazade from the *1001 Nights* is one of the most famous Turkish folktales. This story is not inherently anti-feminist, but there are certain elements in the plot that can present it as such. Scheherazade was the wife of a Sultan named Shahryar who, out of the trauma of a past betrayal, married a new woman each night and executed her next morning before she could cheat on him. In this way, Sultan Shahryar made sure no woman could ever betray him for another man. The whole kingdom was afraid of the Sultan's wrath and feared to give away their daughters until Scheherazade volunteered to become his wife. As she was well aware of her fate, Scheherazade cleverly requested for one last wish, and that was to narrate a story. By the light of the moon, Scheherazade narrated a story so witty and captivating that when the dawn broke the story was only half said. The intrigued Sultan allowed her to remain alive for another night so that he could hear the rest of the story. In this way, Scheherazade spent 1001 nights telling stories that eventually helped Shahryar forget his anger and hurt.

One interpretation of this story is that it reinforces the idea of women being subservient to men and using their wits and charm to manipulate men in order to survive. While a man can rule in any way he wants, women are driven by their emotional psych as the story shows only the smartest women can co-exist in the society with them. This can be seen as anti-feminist as it holds patriarchal ideas and reinforces the belief that women must use their beauty and intelligence to gain the favor of men in order to survive. On the other hand, Scheherazade is a strong, independent woman who uses her intelligence and resourcefulness to outsmart a tyrannical king and ultimately saves herself and other women from a similar fate. In this interpretation, the story can be seen as empowering to women, showing that they are capable of

outsmarting and overcoming oppressive men in power. However, this interpretation too echoes the lurking patriarchy trope where the women need saving in a society that is ruled by a man.

2.2.2 Japan, Japanese Fairy Tale

The story of the "Crane Wife" is a traditional Japanese folktale bearing several anti-feminist elements. In the story, a poor man named Okina finds an injured crane and nurses it back to health. As a reward, the crane transforms into a beautiful woman named Uzume, who agrees to marry Okina. Uzume uses her powers of weaving to make beautiful fabrics and help Okina become a successful businessman. However, Okina becomes greedy and demands more and more from Uzume, eventually causing her to leave him.

This Japanese folktale presents the traditional gender roles that claim women only exist to serve men. Uzume is presented as a magical creature who is able to use her powers to make a man wealthy, but when she is no longer able to fulfill his demands, she is cast aside. This shows that women are only valuable for their ability to be useful to men, as well as how men are entitled to demand more and more from women. Additionally, the story also views women as objects to be possessed and controlled. Okina sees Uzume as a means to an end and becomes greedy in his desire to possess her and control her powers. Not only does this story glorify women being under the control of patriarchy, but it also supports the idea of women being punished for not fulfilling their traditional roles. It is visible in this folktale as Uzume is punished for not being able to fulfill Okina's demands by leaving him.

Another example of Japanese folklore that misrepresents women is the story of Princess Kaguya, a Japanese folktale also known as "The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter". In the story,

Kaguya is a princess who was discovered as a baby inside a bamboo stalk by a bamboo cutter. She is raised by him and his wife as their own child, and she grows up to be a beautiful and intelligent woman. Kaguya is pursued by many suitors, but she is ultimately forced to return to her true home, the moon, by her celestial parents. She is torn between her love for her mortal family and her duty to her celestial family. This story hints at the idea of women being forced to choose between their family and their own desires and happiness. Kaguya is forced to leave her mortal family and return to her celestial family shows how she is not allowed to make her own choice. This sends the message that women's desires and happiness are not important and that they should prioritize their family obligations.

2.2.3 Tamil India, Indian Mythology

This section discusses the story of story of Mohini and Aravan from Tamil mythology where Aravan is a warrior. He is chosen as a sacrifice in a battle against the demon king, Kali. However, he is granted a last wish before his death and he wishes to have a wife for one night. The god Vishnu, in the form of Mohine, agrees to marry Aravan for one night and spend his last hours with him. This story fortifies the idea of a woman figure being disposable and used for men's pleasure. Mohini is used as a means to fulfill Aravan's last wish, and her value is reduced to that of a temporary wife, with no regard for her own desires or feelings. Additionally, Mohini has no identity of her own, rather she is controlled by a male God Vishnu. Her lack of any intrinsic qualities or abilities shows how women are valued solely for their physical appearance, and that their other qualities and abilities are not important.

2.2.4 Ancient Egypt, Egyptian Mythology

The ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris, Set, and Isis is a story about the God of the afterlife, fertility and agriculture, Osiris, who is murdered by his own brother Set. Osiris's wife, Isis, goes on a quest to find and revive her husband and ultimately gives birth to Horus, the God of kingship, avenging her husband and restoring order to the world. The myth is a story of resurrection, fertility, and order in the cosmos, it's also a story of revenge, jealousy and betrayal. The myth has been celebrated in many rituals and festivals throughout the history of ancient Egypt.

The ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris, Set, and Isis can be interpreted as anti-feminist in the way it portrays the role of goddess Isis. Isis, despite being a Goddess, is dependent on Osiris for her own happiness and well-being, and must spend her time and effort to revive him and avenge his death. This shows no matter how powerful a woman might appear, her worth and happiness is tied to men, and that they are unable to stand on their own. In addition to that Isis's entire identity is tied to her relationship with Osiris, and she is defined by her role as his wife, lover and avenger. There is no sign of her actions and decisions as a Goddess. She is mainly depicted as a helper and a supporter of her husband, and not as an independent figure which reinforces the idea that women's worth is defined by their relationship to men, rather than their own individual selves.

2.2.5 Greece, Greek Mythology

The story of Oedipus is a classic Greek myth that talks about Oedipus who receives a prophecy from the Oracle of Delphi that he will kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus, in an effort

to avoid this fate, leaves his home and family, ultimately fulfilling the prophecy unknowingly. Oedipus then marries his mother Jocasta, and they have children together. When the truth of his actions is revealed, Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus blinds himself in despair.

This folktale emphasises the idea of women being passive and secondary characters. Jocasta is portrayed as a passive figure who is unable to control her own fate and is ultimately a victim of Oedipus's actions. This shows how women are secondary to men, and their fate is determined by men. Also, the story uses women as a means to an end. Jocasta is used by Oedipus to fulfill the prophecy and is then discarded when the truth is revealed. This reinforces the idea that women are disposable objects to be used and discarded by men. Jocasta's death is seen as a necessary event in the story, and her suicide is presented as an acceptable and even heroic act. Thus the story glorifies the idea that women's lives and well-being are disposable and not valuable.

2.2.6 Norway, Norse Mythology

The stories of Norse mythology, which include gods, goddesses, heroes, and monsters of Asgard can be interpreted as anti-feminist in the way they portray the role of women compared to the men and the way they are treated by the characters. The stories of this mythology depict men as powerful warriors and women as caretakers and nurturers. For example, the Goddess Freyja is often depicted as a goddess of love, fertility, and war, but her main role is still to be a mother and to care for her family. The Goddesses in Norse mythology are often associated with domesticity and motherhood, while the Gods are associated with strength, power, and violence. For example the Gods, such as, Thor and Loki are portrayed as powerful and immortal, while the Goddesses are portrayed as weaker and more vulnerable. The Goddess Hel, for example, is

punished for not fulfilling her role as a caretaker and nurturer by being banished to the underworld and associated with death and decay. Just like the previously discussed tales, Norse mythology too reinforces the idea that women who do not fulfill traditional gender roles should be punished as well as they are not capable of achieving the same level of power and strength as men.

2.2.7 Mexican Folklore, Latin America

The story of La Llorona, also known as "The Weeping Woman," is a traditional folktale from Latin American culture. The story centers around the character of La Llorona, a woman who is said to be the ghost of a mother who tragically lost her children and now wanders the earth, weeping and searching for them.

While the story of La Llorona is often seen as a tragic and eerie tale, many critics have argued that it is deeply problematic from a feminist perspective. The story shows that women are solely responsible for the care of their children and that they should be punished if they fail in this responsibility. La Llorona is punished for her failure as a mother by being doomed to wander the earth forever, weeping and searching for her lost children. Hence the tale limits women's significance to only being valuable for their role as mothers and their ability to provide emotional support to their children.

Furthermore, the story reinforces the idea that women are not capable of being strong and independent like men. La Llorona is portrayed as a weak and helpless character, who is unable to control her emotions or take action to find her lost children. Additionally, the story implies that women are only capable of achieving their goals through emotional manipulation and guilt

tripping others. La Llorona is said to lure children with her cries and when that fails, she is known to guilt trip them with her weeping.

2.3 Area of Research

From the above discussed history of fairy tales and folktales, it becomes very transparent that the genre was centrally controlled by men and the masculine control of the genre normalized stereotypes and unfair expectations of women that were found in these tales. It is because in many ancient cultures, men were considered to be the heads of households and held the majority of power and decision-making authority. This gender-based power dynamic was often reflected in the stories that were told, with men often being portrayed as heroes, leaders, and rescuers, while women were often relegated to secondary roles as damsels in distress or passive characters in need of rescue. Additionally, many ancient fairy tales were used as a tool for teaching children about societal norms and values, which in many cultures were heavily influenced by patriarchal ideologies. In these stories, women were often depicted as obedient, virtuous, and submissive, while men were depicted as strong, heroic, and in control. This can be seen in many fairy tales where the male character is the one that goes on a journey, fights the dragon and saves the princess, while the female character is the prize to be won, being passive and waiting to be saved. To illustrate, a little girl after reading the stories of Disney princesses, might start to believe her happiness depends on the arrival of a prince charming.

In her essay “An Autobiography of Scheherazade” author Julia Alvarez writes about the social expectations placed upon women by fairy tale stereotypes. She says, “The ready-made autobiography I was given by my parents, my aunts, and teachers was the age-old fairy tale-princess story: Cinderella, mixed in with lots of Sleeping Beauty and the Virgin Mary.

Once upon a time there was a sweet, pretty, passive, powerless, and probably blond (stay out of the sun!) princess who never played hooky from school or told lies about who broke the crystal ball in her grandmother's garden. The handsome (Catholic) prince of the land fell in love with her, married her, and she lived happily ever after as his lucky wife and the mother of his children.” (Alvarez 16)

From this passage it is evident how the stories put a pressure on young girls to have fair skin, long hair, alongside the emphasis on marriage as her sole aspiration. Therefore, it can be claimed that, fairy tales function as important cultural myths because they contain messages of social expectations that the young readers may internalize in their consciousness.

Today, many fairy tales have been reinterpreted and adapted to include more diverse and empowering representations of women and other marginalized groups, and many new stories are being created that challenge traditional patriarchal narratives. In this paper, selected few of such retellings by Angela Carter and poems by Nikita Gill will be discussed.

2.4 Research Methodology

This research begins by examining the historical roots and evolution of the fairy tale genre in the introduction where it traces its development from oral literature to literary and media adaptations. This is followed by a discussion of the folklores belonging to different cultures and countries to show where the area of problem stands globally. Later on, the study also examines how these retellings challenge and complicate traditional fairy tale endings and motifs, such as the "happily ever after" trope and the damsel in distress archetype, and how they provide new perspectives and interpretations of the stories. It is done by analyzing Carter's book *The Bloody Chamber* and Gill's poetry book *Fierce Fairy Tales* using the theories of Derrida and Kristeva.

The thesis also looks at the cultural significance of fairy tale retellings in contemporary society and its role in shaping popular culture and social awareness. Apart from feminism, this paper also briefly talks about the portrayal of nationalism, mental health, love, and occupation in fairy tales. It argues that the retelling of fairy tales is an important literary and cultural practice that allows for the exploration of contemporary issues through the lens of timeless stories, and therefore it can inspire critical thinking and social change. Lastly, the paper illustrates the function of traditional tales in media using the Barbie franchise and pop cultural music videos.

Thus, this thesis demonstrates that fairy tale retellings are not mere rehashing of old stories, but rather, they are a means of exploring the complexities and nuances of human experience and giving new meanings to timeless tales by analyzing selected books by Carter and Gill as well as using the ideas of Kristeva and Derrida for theoretical frameworks. Finally, several scholarly articles are quoted for literature review, which will be cited following MLA 7th edition of referencing.

2.5 Significance of this Thesis

This thesis adds to the existing literature as it explores some underrepresented cultural themes, such as self love and the role of consent. As well as, it targets audiences ranging from young-adults to adults through children's literature. Alongside the popular Disney princess stories, this paper also highlights some less discussed folktales that also require revision and shows how the folktale genre of literature was problematic as a whole. Lastly, this thesis also analyses lesser-known contemporary retellings by utilizing a unique combination of theoretical framework, that is, Derrida and Kristeva.

Furthermore, writing a paper on Nikita Gill and Angela Carter's role in subverting the fairy tale genre can be a fascinating and meaningful endeavor for several reasons. Firstly, their works challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Gill and Carter's retellings of fairy tales often feature female protagonists who are empowered and assertive, subverting the traditional portrayal of women as passive and submissive. Secondly, their works critique social norms and conventions such as beauty standards, class hierarchies, and gender expectations. Thirdly, their works showcase the power of storytelling as by reimagining traditional fairy tales. Gill and Carter demonstrate the transformative power of storytelling and the potential for literature to reshape our understanding of the world. Finally, their works are relevant to contemporary social and cultural issues with the presence of themes such as identity, power, and agency. As a result their works resonate with contemporary issues of gender, race, and social justice.

In a nutshell, writing a thesis paper on Gill and Carter's role in subverting the fairy tale genre can provide a rich and thought-provoking exploration of how literature can challenge dominant narratives and offer new perspectives on our world.

CHAPTER 3

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Understanding Derrida's Deconstruction

Derridean deconstruction is an attempt to re-evaluate what forms our consciousness. Most importantly, deconstruction aims to create a balance by eliminating hegemonies and biases. The founder of "deconstruction", Derrida, used this concept as a way of criticizing literary texts as well as politics and media. Naas says,

“He seems to have appropriated the term from Heidegger’s use of “destruction” in *Being and Time*. Although Derrida at times expressed regret concerning the fate of the word “deconstruction,” its popularity indicates the wide-ranging influence of his thought, in philosophy, in literary criticism and theory, in art and, in particular, architectural theory, and in political theory” (1).

In Derrida’s first Meditation he talks about Descartes whose ideas are like an old building where the foundation was made of few false beliefs. Hence, Derrida’s aim in his first Meditation was to tear down or deconstruct this old building. Even though his ideas were influenced by Descartes’ search for a “firm and permanent foundation”, Derrida’s idea of foundation is “... not a unified self but a divisible limit between myself and myself as an other” (Derrida 8).

In the book *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: a Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, he defines deconstruction in multiple ways among which three are crucial to this research. Firstly, he uses deconstruction to attack “Platonism” that says that existence is structured in terms of binaries. Derrida says, “The *first phase* of deconstruction attacks this belief by *reversing* the Platonistic hierarchies: the hierarchies between the invisible or intelligible and the visible or sensible; between essence and appearance; between the soul and body; between living memory and rote memory; between *mnēmē* and *hypomnēsis*; between voice and writing; between finally good and evil” (27). Even before Derrida, philosopher Nietzsche also criticized the Platonist hierarchies, and it is also criticized in a lot of twentieth century philosophies. Therefore, in Platonism, essence is more valuable than appearance. In deconstruction however, this is reversed, making appearance more valuable than essence.

The *second* definition is less metaphysical and more political. In *Force of Law*, Derrida says that

“deconstruction is practiced in two styles. These “two styles” do not correspond to the “two phases” in the earlier definition of deconstruction. On the one hand, there is the genealogical style of deconstruction, which recalls the history of a concept or theme. On the other hand, there is the more formalistic or structural style of deconstruction, which examines a-historical paradoxes or aporias” (23).

Derrida calls the *first* aporia, “the *epoche* of the rule” where he asks what freedom in our society is. Our society believes following the laws and norms will guarantee individuals their freedom but are these formulated laws truly just? As each event of action is different, Derrida says, “For a decision to be just, not only must a judge follow a rule but also he or she must “re-institute” it, in a new judgment. Thus a decision aiming at justice (a free decision) is both regulated and unregulated. The law must be conserved and also destroyed or *suspended*, suspension being the meaning of the word ‘epoche’” (33).

The third definition of deconstruction is taken from Derrida’s book called *Et Cetera*. Here Derrida in fact presents the principle that defines deconstruction:

“Each time that I say ‘deconstruction and X (regardless of the concept or the theme),’ this is the prelude to a very singular division that turns this X into, or rather makes appear in this X, *an impossibility* that becomes its proper and sole possibility, with the result that between the X as possible and the ‘same’ X as impossible, there is nothing but a relation of homonymy, a relation for which we have to provide an account.... For example, here referring myself to demonstrations I have already attempted ..., gift, hospitality, death

itself (and therefore so many other things) can be possible only *as impossible*, as the impossible, that is, unconditionally” (5).

From the above discussion we can see that the concept of deconstruction has been explored from multiple lenses yet it triggers a certain kind of thinking. It is a kind of thinking where justice never finds a resolution and therefore it is necessary to make justice possible in countless deconstructed ways. In other words, deconstruction identifies logocentrism and metaphysics in texts where there is a desire for instant access to the meaning. Deconstruction then defies this desire and seeks for the close reading of texts so that readers can register that any given text has irreconcilably contradictory meanings, rather than being a unified, logical whole. This paper will show how the contemporary retelling deviates from its earlier rigid versions as they provide multiple thematic elements under the umbrella of one fairy tale, in other words, how they have deconstructed the original versions.

3.2 Julia Kristeva’s Feminism

Alongside Derrida, Julia Kristeva was one of the first few people who worked to formulate the idea of post-structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s. The idea originated from the philosophies of Hegel and Nietzsche, as they rejected the notion of the self as a unified rational being. They considered such a view to be an illusion unfavorable to life itself. This thought was later reflected in Kristeva’s works that is known as ‘subjectivity’ which is an ongoing process that is never quite completed. According to Lechte, “Her works attempt to clarify the understanding of how subjectivity is formulated and how the subject who is already confronted with the ‘other’ within, might eventually come to terms with the ‘other’ in their midst” (23). Kristeva herself describes her views as, “My position was that mere structure was not sufficient to understand the

world of meaning in literature and other human behaviors, two more elements were necessary: history and the speaking subject” (Lechte 12).

What makes Kristeva’s ideas suitable for this research is her attempt to locate the structure taking place in storytelling by taking into consideration ‘the speaking subject’ and how the pressures of other hegemonic social structures come to influence it as well. These are crucial for this research for understanding how language can produce its own beings within the realm of oral literature that the listeners go through. Kristeva points out two concepts involved in the process of producing a speaking subject: the semiotic and the symbolic which puts forward her unique view of the subject as a divided being between the semiotic and the symbolic. This view had one drawback that stems from her strong focus on psychoanalysis theory. Oliver Kelly and Stacey Keltner describes as,

“This approach has been seen as problematic since her use of use of Lacanian and Freudian as well as Kleinian frameworks presuppose various phallogocentric statements such as the correlation of femininity and the maternal with castration. But it was through psychoanalysis that Kristeva thought to educate herself about the only continent we had never left: that of internal experience. The criticism against Kristeva was due to the fact that feminist theory in England and America addressed the political, cultural, and sociological practices and institutions that marginalized or oppressed women” (32).

Hence, Kristeva views femininity as a philosophy that is not a fixed sexuality specific to women, but as “a pre-conceptual psychic position through a chronological stage of experience preserved in the unconscious as a site of marginality to the Symbolic” (Kelly and Keltner 6). In simpler words, Kristeva analyzes the difference in how society constitutes men and women in the way

that we are forced in the symbolic realm. Woman is a metaphysical term, while masculinity and femininity are not necessarily binary oppositions, but coexist within each individual. For this reason, her theory provides a framework for this research that helps to examine the contributions of women, femininity and female specificity to symbolic structure in fairy tales.

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since fairy tales have long been a part of human civilization, they have had a profound impact on literature. In modern literature, fairy tales have continued to evolve and take on new meanings and interpretations. According to Rahman, “Fairy tales’ rich, imaginative stories for children — involving magical events and places, wondrous tasks or imaginary creatures — offer far more than entertainment and happily ever after. Studies have shown that fairy tales also provide important benefits to the development of young minds” (4). Furthermore, in his book *Modern Fairy Tale*, author Paul Jordan says, “Modern day retellings aid in emotional resilience by helping readers connect stories to real life. Fairy tales show that people face adversity, but, if they believe in themselves, they can overcome obstacles. Stories can help readers confront real-life fears and anxieties in a fantastical setting” (26).

One of the earliest examples of the evolution of fairy tales in modern literature can be seen in the works of the Brothers Grimm. The Grimm brothers collected and published traditional folk tales, many of which have become classics. For Zipes, “Two hundred years ago, two young German librarians by the names of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published a collection of tales that would become one of the most influential works of folklore in Germany, Europe, and eventually the world” (2). However, the Grimms themselves often edited the stories

to fit their own moral and aesthetic beliefs, and later adaptations of their work have continued to evolve the stories. In their article titled “Grimm Brothers,” Robert and Powell states that

“Between 1812 and 1857, seven editions of their tales appeared, each one different from the last, until the final, best-known version barely resembled the first. Given that the first edition has recently been honored in bicentenary celebrations throughout the world, it is perhaps a good time to reexamine what we think we know about the original tales of the Brothers Grimms. The Grimms thought the stories and their morals emanated naturally from the German people in an oral tradition, and they wanted to preserve them before the tales were lost forever. In gathering the tales, the Grimms made a unique contribution to folklore, and their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children and Household Tales)* is even listed by UNESCO in its *Memory of the World Registry*” (12).

The Grimm brothers started to collect these fairy tales when the Romantic poet Clemens Brentano asked them to gather all sorts of folktales so that they can add them as a collection for literature. About their aim for this collection, author Donald Hasse writes,

“What compelled the Grimms to concentrate on old German epics, tales, and literature was a belief that the most natural and pure forms of culture—those which held the community together—were linguistic and based in history. According to them, modern literature, even though it might be remarkably rich, was artificial and thus could not express the genuine essence of Volk culture that emanated naturally from experience and bound the people together. Therefore, all their efforts went toward uncovering stories from the past” (16).

Even in the preface of their book, the brothers wrote that,

“It was perhaps just the right time to record these tales since those people who should be preserving them are becoming more and more scarce. . . . Wherever the tales still exist, they continue to live in such a way that nobody ponders whether they are good or bad, poetic or crude. People know them and love them because they have simply absorbed them in a habitual way. And they take pleasure in them without having any reason. This is exactly why the custom of storytelling is so marvelous” (i).

In short, the Grimms' first collection was created as both an adult-oriented book and an academic excavation. That is why, these tales are not to be solely categorized as children's literature.

Another major influence on the evolution of fairy tales in modern literature was the publication of "The Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen" in the mid-19th century. Andersen's stories, which often featured darker themes and more complex characters than traditional fairy tales, have been adapted and reinterpreted by countless authors and filmmakers. Several contemporary authors credit him as the source of their writing inspiration. Regarding this Jane Aulen writes,

“Andersen wrote children's stories into which he carefully, skillfully embedded comedy, social critique, satire, and philosophy aimed at adult readers. Andersen pioneered this style, and writers like Barrie are indebted to him, as are numerous children's writers today — including Jane Yolen, Roald Dahl, Diana Wynne Jones, Philip Pullman, and J. K. Rowling -- whose works are beloved by adult readers” (23).

Many scholars have also linked Anderson's works with the Victorian literature by comparing him with the Irish poet Oscar Wilde. Author Regina Puleo considers their difficult upbringing as the source of this similarity as she writes,

“The two writers' tones of voice are sometimes indistinguishable. Naturally, this is most obvious in Wilde's fairy stories, where, like Andersen, he often uses animals, plants and inanimate objects to express the affectation of officialdom, the limited world-view of the literati, and (above all) the bitter-sweet and often unrecognized sacrifices of the truly sensitive soul. Perhaps a sense of victimization is what binds the two writers' work most closely” (5).

To this Malmkjaer also adds, “No doubt both Andersen's and Wilde's shadows express something of their authors' psychological depths, the sense they both seem to have had of another hidden and incipiently unmanageable self. This illustrates perfectly Andersen's seminal influence on another important writer” (56).

In the present era, Angela Carter is widely regarded as one of the most influential writers in the feminist reimagining of fairy tales. In the article “Angela Carter's Desire Machine” writer Robert Clark describes Carter as, “Carter was an abstract thinker with an intensely visual imagination. What she liked about the short story form was that sign and sense can fuse to an extent impossible to achieve among the multiplying ambiguities of an extended narrative” (20). One of the most notable features of Carter's work is her use of fairy tales to explore issues of gender, sexuality, and power. In her collection *The Bloody Chamber*, she retells classic fairy tales with a feminist twist, subverting traditional gender roles and exploring the complex psychology of her characters. For example, in the titular short story "The Bloody Chamber," she

reimagines the story of Bluebeard "... to create a more nuanced and empowering portrayal of the female protagonist, emphasizing the importance of female agency and resistance" (Benson 4). Hence, this book in general subverts traditional gender roles and explores issues of sexuality and power.

Carter's work has been influential in the feminist reimagining of fairy tales, which has continued to gain popularity in recent years. *The Guardian* magazine reviews this book as, "*The Bloody Chamber* is like a multifaceted glittering diamond reflecting and refracting a variety of portraits of desire and sexuality - heterosexual female sexuality - which, unusually for the time, 1979, are told from a heterosexual female viewpoint" (1). *The Bloody Chamber* has a total of ten short retellings. Stephen Benson reviews these stories as,

"The stories in *The Bloody Chamber* reverberate with deep and unmistakable imaginative pleasure. There is an astonishing extravivid materiality to this alternative world she invented, down to the last sensuous detail, like the candle which drops hot wax on to the girl's bare shoulders in "The Tiger's Bride". She loved to describe the trappings of luxury, to display rich scenery in rich language. Dialogue came less naturally to her" (15).

Carter's stories also carry some alignments with symbolism as Kaiser writes in her article that, "It comes as no surprise to find that she particularly admired Baudelaire and the 19th-century Symbolist poets, and also much 20th-century French surrealist and structuralist writing as *The Bloody Chamber* is packed with signs, symbols and signifiers" (21).

Overall, the evolution of fairy tales in Angela Carter's books reflects her commitment to exploring the complexity and diversity of human experience, particularly as it relates to issues of

gender, sexuality, and power. By reimagining traditional fairy tales and drawing on a wide range of mythological and cultural sources, she creates a body of work that is both timeless and relevant, emphasizing the transformative power of storytelling and the potential for resistance and empowerment.

From Carter's works it can be claimed that an important development in the evolution of fairy tales in modern literature is the rise of the fantasy genre. Fantasy novels often incorporate elements of traditional fairy tales, but they also create new worlds and characters that push the boundaries of the genre. Examples of this include J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series, which incorporates elements of traditional British folklore, and George R.R. Martin's "A Song of Ice and Fire" series, which draws on medieval history and mythology. Regarding this Harries writes, "In recent years, there has been a growing trend of retelling fairy tales in a modern setting. These adaptations often reimagine traditional characters and settings in contemporary contexts, exploring issues such as identity, race, and social justice" (32). Examples that support Harriet's claim for this research include Marissa Meyer's "Lunar Chronicles" series, which reimagines classic fairy tale characters as futuristic heroes, and Neil Gaiman's "The Sleeper and the Spindle," which retells "Sleeping Beauty" with a feminist twist. Hence, the evolution of fairy tales in modern literature has been a complex and multifaceted process, influenced by a wide range of cultural and literary factors. That is why, Gose writes that, "From the Brothers Grimm to Angela Carter to J.K. Rowling and beyond, fairy tales have continued to inspire and challenge authors, creating new worlds and characters that push the boundaries of imagination and storytelling" (8).

Lastly, the other selected writer for this research, Nikita Gill's poetry features use of fairy tale elements to explore modern themes such as feminism, mental health, and identity. For example, in her poem "Cinderella," she subverts the traditional narrative to create a more empowered and independent version of the character, emphasizing the importance of self-love and self-acceptance. To this, authors Fatema Latif and Amara Khan write,

“On the one hand, we have the age-old sexist fairy tales, riddled with gender stereotypes: beautiful, dainty princesses who need to be rescued from ugly, jealous female villains by heroic men who take all the glory. On the other; a stunning collection of stories written by Nikita Gill, a feminist reimagining of fairy tales that dismantle and overthrow old-fashioned tropes by introducing us to fearless and independent women” (2).

Furthermore Maria Nilson says that, “Gill begins by picking up individual fairy tales like the *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Peter Pan*, *Red Riding Hood*, *Alice in Wonderland* and so many more. It is fascinating to watch how the author takes up these traditional fairy tales to bend and twist them in ways we never imagined, weaving in all sorts of social lessons” (3). Gill's poetry often explores the darker, more complex themes present in traditional fairy tales. In "The Witch's Daughter," she tells the story of a witch who is ostracized by her community, emphasizing the isolation and discrimination that can be present in society. Similarly, in "Rapunzel," she explores the psychological toll of isolation and captivity, emphasizing the importance of agency and freedom.

Another notable aspect of Gill's fairy tale adaptations is her use of diverse cultural and mythological elements. In "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," she incorporates Indian mythology and imagery, highlighting the universality of fairy tales and the potential for cross-

cultural connections. Similarly, in "Little Red Riding Hood," she draws on the symbolism of wolves in different cultures to create a more complex and nuanced portrayal of the character and her journey. Regarding this Rosalind writes,

“The existence of such poetry has a huge impact on the younger readers, especially young girls. As children grow up listening to these age-old fairy tales filled with gender stereotypes, sexism, dismissal of mental health and so on. They grow up embracing these tales and either subconsciously or consciously, their values and impressions become ingrained in our minds. In addition to working on unlearning of misogynist and gender based ideals, Nikita Gill, through her poetry is giving children a platform to develop a positive outlook of their self image, drawing them away from the toxic and backward ideals that permeate the original fairy tales”(9).

Overall, the evolution of fairy tales in Nikita Gill's poems reflects her commitment to exploring the complexity and diversity of the human experience. By incorporating traditional fairy tale elements and adapting them to modern themes and cultural contexts, she creates a body of work that is both timeless and relevant. Her poetry emphasizes the power of storytelling to illuminate our shared humanity and the potential for transformation and growth.

CHAPTER 5

ANGELA CARTER

A critical examination of storytelling techniques and approaches to understanding myths, history, and even fairy tales has been a legacy of the ongoing postmodernist thought. According to Hutcheon, “Postmodernism uses parody to simultaneously justify and disrupt the subject of the

parody” (23). As well as for Nikolajeva “Postmodernism offers not only to illuminate new critical capacities but also to rethink history and to draw attention to present-day representations that are derived from earlier ones” (33). The postmodern reexaminations of traditional fairy tales provide a place for women in particular to deconstruct gender roles. The retellings present images of women as they were once considered the Other which slowly became a normalized cultural element. Postmodernism seeks to exploit this narrative as Kukkonen writes, “History like any other master-narrative is de-naturalised and re-evaluated in the present as another made up story and post-modernism activates this informing paradox of narrative” (45).

Angela Carter is renowned for her original and subversive retellings of conventional fairy tales that question the gender roles and themes present in these tales. She retells these stories in new ways in her work using postmodern tactics like intertextuality, fragmentation, and pastiche that are both familiar and jarringly unexpected. Carter uses intertextuality, or the citation of other literary works within her own, as one of the major strategies for subverting conventional fairy tales. For instance, she relies on a variety of materials for her story “The Company of Wolves,” which is a retelling of the “Little Red Riding Hood” legend, including folktales, mythologies, and intellectual works like Freud's theories of sexuality. By combining these several sources into her narrative, Carter develops a complex and multi-layered story that questions the original fairy tale's overly-simplistic morality. In addition, Carter breaks up and reassembles the linear framework of the original fairy tales in her retellings using fragmentation and pastiche. For instance, Carter combines gothic horror, feminist criticism, and eroticism to create the terrifying and empowering narrative "The Bloody Chamber," which is based on the “Bluebeard” tale. Hence, by contrasting these seemingly unrelated themes Carter develops a narrative that

questions the patriarchal assumptions of the original tale and presents a fresh interpretation of female autonomy and power.

The Bloody Chamber, Carter's short story collection, offers a more informal and amusing take on classic fairy tales by Charles Perrault, which are the inspiration for her book. This book was initially released in the UK in 1979 and was awarded the Cheltenham Festival Literary Award. The connecting thread that binds all the short stories in this book is their strong resemblance to fairy tales or folktales. Yet, Carter writes, "My intention was not to do 'versions' or, as the American edition of the book said, horribly, 'adult' fairy tales, but to extract the latent content from the traditional stories' (3). The anthology contains ten stories: "The Bloody Chamber", "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon", "The Tiger's Bride", "Puss-in-Boots", "The Erl-King", "The Snow Child", "The Lady of the House of Love", "The Werewolf", "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf-Alice". Among these, "The Bloody Chamber" is based on Bluebeard, "The Courtship of Mr Lyon" and "The Tiger's Bride" on Beauty and the Beast, "Puss-in-Boots" on Puss in Boots, "The Erl-King" on an adaptation of folklore Erlking, "The Snow Child" on various folklores mostly Snow-Child, "The Lady of the House of Love" on radioplay Vampirella, "The Werewolf", "The Company of Wolves" and "Wolf-Alice" on Little Red Riding Hood.

The "classic" fairy tale by Charles Perrault came to be accepted as the standard and was reintroduced into the oral tradition of the majority of European nations through translation, constant reprinting, and recounting. In his version of the "Little Red Riding Hood", the protagonist is sent to see her ill grandmother and on the way she encounters a wolf. The girl ends up engaging with him in a conversation, telling him everything about her grandmother and the location of her home, and then wastes time in the forest gathering nuts and flowers before

eventually finding her grandmother's house through a longer route. These acts were portrayed as scenes of transgressions by Perrault. The conclusion of the story is that young people, especially beautiful and young females, should avoid interacting with strangers because doing so could result in them becoming the target of the wolf, that is, the predators. Girls are cautioned about "wolves in lambs coats" since there are also subdued, lovely, seductive wolves. The warning is not just directed against strangers; it also implies that women should avoid being swayed by men. The narrative underlines the necessity to avoid gullibility while highlighting the intrinsic innocence that is expected of girls.

Its retelling by Carter presents a multifaceted view of the fairy tale. In contrast to Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood," the title of this story is "The Werewolf," which gives us a hint as to what lies ahead because in Perrault's version, the victim dominates the title. The story's opening is brief, as one would anticipate from a fairy tale. Nonetheless, the hyphenated sentences place more emphasis on the omissions and transformation. Carter writes, "It is a northern country; they have cold weather, they have cold hearts. Cold; tempest; wild beasts in the forest. It is a hard life" (13). The harsh way of life in the north has naturally rendered the people who live there cold-hearted. It is recognized later in the story that devils "have picnics" in the graveyards to which the witches are invited, but the Virgin is given a spot behind "guttering candle." This establishes the narrative's tone as satiric and makes the parody of the virgin girls' situation clear as they did not come out of their ages. Furthermore, before sending the protagonist to visit her grandmother, the mother hands her a knife and says, "You know how to use it" (Carter 16). This defies all the pretenses to her frailty from the original story as a member of the "weaker sex" as Carter shows her as a girl who knows how to fight.

Furthermore, contrary to Red Riding Hood in the Grimms', Carter's protagonist is dressed in a scruffy sheepskin, and while she does not fear the forest, she is alert and ready for the wolf to attack her. Carter forbids her protagonist from ever having a conversation with the wolf. She cuts off the scope for her being stereotyped as fragile and innocent by literally cutting off its paw. The narrative's use of a feminist lens up until this point appears to be following the conventional language of an empowered woman. Yet right after this point in the story, an element of shock is made when we see Little Red Riding Hood carefully wrap the severed paw in a handkerchief and carry it around with her. Carter's subversion piques the reader's interest by operating on multiple levels and deftly cutting through established tropes. When the protagonist arrives at her grandmother's home, she notices that she has a fever and pulls out the towel that the paw was wrapped in to use as a cool compress. But, the paw has changed into a hand that looks like her grandmother's, whereas instead of where the right hand should have been on her body, the grandmother has a bloody slump. When the girl, who has been traumatized, cries out for aid, the villagers rush in, identify the grandmother as a witch, and stone her to death. The lines "Now the child lived at her grandmother's house; she prospered" (23) seem foreboding as the story comes to a conclusion. The girl's innocence is called into question, leaving the reader feeling uneasy. The reader may wonder if Little Red Riding Hood in this story is a witch after Carter ends the story saying that the girl is still successful at her grandmother's house. The girl's control of her grandmother's home has confusing consequences, making it impossible to make a straightforward moral determination or provide an unmediated explanation as the story comes to a close. It also makes the text open to nuanced, intricate interpretations. So, Carter is not merely recounting the old fable in a patriarchal form; she is also conveying a perspective of how she perceives the gendered roles. In her narrative, she emphasizes a dynamic between two women.

By killing her grandmother, the child demonstrates that she is capable of breaking social norms while remaining unaffected by the experience. She also demonstrates her ability to deceive the entire village and still succeed.

In addition to that, Carter's short story "The Bloody Chamber," which is a postmodern retelling of the Bluebeard fairy tale also contains several elements that reflect postmodernism. Firstly, Carter draws on a range of literary and cultural references in the story, including fairy tales, myths, and literary works such as Marquis de Sade's *Justine*. The protagonist's father also gives her a copy of *Perrault's Fairy Tales* as a gift, which sets up the expectations that the story will take clues from traditional fairy tales. Secondly, the story is not presented in a linear or chronological manner, but rather jumps back and forth in time, which disrupts the reader's expectations of a traditional narrative structure. Additionally, the story is divided into sections that are titled like chapters, but the titles themselves are cryptic and often have little to do with the events that occur within them. Thirdly, the story blends elements of several genres to create a unique and hybrid narrative that is both disturbing and empowering. The story contains Gothic elements such as the mysterious castle, the secret room, and the sense of foreboding, but it also subverts traditional Gothic tropes by featuring a female protagonist who takes control of her own fate. Finally, "The Bloody Chamber" contains several instances of self-reflexivity, in which the narrator comments on the act of storytelling itself. For example, the narrator describes the protagonist as being "like a heroine in a book," and at one point, she acknowledges that she is telling the story of her own life.

Carter's retellings of classic fairy tales in "The Bloody Chamber" are relatable to Derrida's deconstruction theory in several ways. As discussed earlier, Derrida was a French philosopher and literary critic who is widely recognized for his contributions to the field of post-

structuralism. One of Derrida's most influential ideas is his theory of deconstruction, which he developed as a way of challenging traditional approaches to philosophy, literature, and language. At its core, deconstruction is a method of analysis that seeks to expose the hidden assumptions and contradictions that underlie texts and ideas. According to Derrida, all texts and ideas are constructed using a set of binary oppositions, such as good vs. evil, male vs. female, and presence vs. absence. These binary oppositions are not simply neutral categories that we use to understand the world, but rather are inherently unstable and prone to contradiction. Derrida argues that these binary oppositions are hierarchical, with one term being privileged over the other. For example, the term "presence" is often privileged over "absence," with the former being seen as more real and valuable than the latter. This privileging of one term over the other creates what Derrida calls a "metaphysics of presence," in which the goal is to establish a stable, unified meaning that is free from ambiguity or contradiction.

Deconstruction, then, is a way of challenging this metaphysics of presence by exposing the instability and contradiction that underlie it. Derrida argues that all texts contain what he calls "undecidables," or elements that resist easy categorization or definition. These undecidables disrupt the binary oppositions that structure a text, exposing the ways in which these oppositions are inherently unstable and prone to contradiction. For example, in his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida uses the example of the term "center" to illustrate his theory of deconstruction. He argues that the concept of a center is fundamental to Western thought, with the center being seen as a stable, unifying force that organizes our understanding of the world. However, Derrida argues that the concept of a center is inherently unstable, as it is defined in relation to its opposite, the periphery. The very idea of a center, then, is dependent on the idea of a periphery, which undermines the stability and unity of the concept.

Derrida's ideas of deconstruction can be used to analyze Carter's retellings of traditional fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* in a number of ways. First, Carter's retellings expose and subvert the underlying power dynamics and hierarchies that are often present in traditional fairy tales. By doing so, she challenges the binary oppositions, such as good vs. evil and masculine vs. feminine, that are often used to structure these stories. In the story "The Bloody Chamber," she writes, "Despite his innocence, Marquis was about to become a wolf" (19) which shows Marquis as a complex character who is actually capable of transformation. In Derrida's deconstruction theory, binary oppositions are viewed as inherently unstable and prone to contradiction, as one term is defined in relation to its opposite. Moreover, Carter also uses intertextuality, which is a key element of Derrida's deconstruction theory. Intertextuality refers to the way in which a text is shaped and influenced by other texts, both past and present. Carter's retellings of fairy tales incorporate references and allusions to a variety of literary works, from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard." By doing so, she highlights the way in which these stories are part of a larger cultural context, and draws attention to the ways in which the meaning of a text is shaped by its relationship to other texts. In addition, Carter's retellings often involve a destabilization of the traditional roles and gender dynamics present in fairy tales. For example, in "The Company of Wolves," the young girl ultimately asserts her own power and control over the situation, reversing the traditional roles of the hunter and the hunted. This subversion of gender roles and power dynamics is a key aspect of Derrida's deconstruction theory, which aims to expose and challenge the underlying assumptions and hierarchies that shape a text.

Overall, Derrida's theory of deconstruction is a powerful tool for challenging the assumptions and hierarchies that underlie language, culture, and thought. By exposing the instability and contradiction that underlie binary oppositions, deconstruction reveals the ways in

which meaning is never fixed or stable, but is always in flux. In the same sense, Carter's retellings of classic fairy tales in *The Bloody Chamber* are relatable to Derrida's deconstruction theory in their subversion of traditional structures and hierarchies, their use of intertextuality, and their destabilization of gender roles and power dynamics.

CHAPTER 6

NIKITA GILL

Nikita Gill is a British-Indian poet, writer, and illustrator who was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1992 is best known for her poetry and prose that explore themes of feminism, mental health, self-love, and empowerment. Gill started writing poetry at a young age and received immense popularity through social media. She has published several collections of poetry, including *Wild Embers Fierce Fairy Tales: & Other Stories to Stir Your Soul, Your Heart Is the Sea*, and *Great Goddesses: Life Lessons from Myths and Monsters*. Her writing has been described as powerful and evocative, drawing on mythology and folklore to explore contemporary issues. It often resonates with young women and has been compared to the likes of Lang Leav and Warsan Shire. In addition to her writing, Gill is also an accomplished illustrator, often incorporating her artwork into her poetry collections. Her unique style combines bold colors and simple line drawings to create striking visuals that complement her writing.

Gill's book *Fierce Fairy Tales: & Other Stories to Stir Your Soul* is a primary text for this research as it is a collection of re-imagined fairy tales. The book was published in 2018 and quickly became a bestseller, appealing to readers of all ages. The collection features more than 70 short stories that draw inspiration from old fairy tales and myths, but with a modern twist. Gill takes well-known stories such as "Cinderella," "Snow White," and "Rapunzel," and

transforms them into powerful narratives that challenge societal norms and celebrate individuality. Gill writes,

“What if Cinderella had an attitude problem
and Snow White just liked the idea
of strangers and poisons too much?

What if the Little Mermaid always enjoyed human company
more than her own kind’s and Sleeping Beauty
just liked her solitude more than human touch?

What if the only rabbit hole Alice ever fell down was
a terrible mistake with an awful substance,
never discussed as such?

What if they locked Wendy away
for hallucinating about Neverland
and a boy who never grew up?

What if fairy tales aren’t as innocent
as they sound and even princesses
aren’t perfect?

What if I told you that your damage
doesn’t define you and the way you survive
is no one else’s damned business?” (1).

Hence, the stories in *Fierce Fairy Tales* tackle a range of issues, including mental health, body positivity, and feminism. Each story is accompanied by a beautiful illustration, also created by Gill, which adds to the overall enchanting and captivating tone of the book.

One of the unique features of the book is the way Gill uses her writing to empower her readers. She re-imagines traditional fairy tale characters, often female, as strong and independent figures who overcome adversity through their own inner strength and determination. In "The Little Mermaid" for example, the main character refuses to sacrifice her voice for the love of a prince and instead, embraces her own power and freedom. Gill writes,

“I ask you now, as the granddaughter of Poseidon
who gave up her fins and voice for love,
not to trade in your magic for anyone.
Do not make sacrifice the ritual of your womanhood.
I teach my half-sea girls that their voices
are the most powerful things they can use,
to let the word ‘no’ become the charm
they need to help them take up space often.
Now the mermaids are becoming sirens,
for sirens are monsters who never feel compelled,
and monsters, unlike girls and mermaids,
know how to protect themselves well” (90).

Similarly, in "Cinderella," the protagonist is not rescued by a prince, but rather saves herself and finds happiness through her own efforts and determination. By learning to work with her hands and becoming a blacksmith, she also challenges gender stereotypes. Therefore, these tales exhort readers to put their own worth first and to withstand pressure to alter who they are in order to please others. It also contradicts the established hegemony that says women should sacrifice their own goals and identities for the sake of romantic love and social acceptance. Gill writes,

“There are so many ways to lose a voice.

An uncomfortable laugh, don't make a scene

what will people say about you

what will people say about us.

I ask you now,

do women pray to softer-spoken Gods

than men do?

Do men pray louder and more

unapologetically than women ever have?

We are taught not to speak and if we do

be pliant, be passive, be soft, be sorry.

You are better as water anyway” (90).

In short, Gill's stories challenge gender roles and the idea that women need to behave, and live in a certain way to be accepted by the society ruled by men. It encourages readers, particularly

young girls, to take control of their own lives and to recognize that they have the power to create their own happy endings.

In addition to empowering female characters, Gill's stories also address other important issues such as mental health and body positivity. For example, in "Rapunzel", the protagonist's long hair becomes a symbol of her depression and isolation. However, she eventually learns to love and accept herself for who she is, and is able to cut her hair and break free from her tower. Gill writes,

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, she began to rethink how and why she really let down her hair. For Rapunzel it was realizing that no one who truly loved her would use any part of her body, not even her hair, as a ladder. No one who truly loved her would hide her from the whole world in a tower. When toxic love is finally recognized for the painful, deep wound that it is, all of us must do the drastic and the painful to cut away the poison thread that binds you together.

So Rapunzel, Rapunzel, she cut off her own hair, she used it as a rope, climbed down from the tower and ran away to find her own freedom, to make her own fortune, like a bird finally free of her shackles and without so much as looking back" (94).

This story addresses the theme of mental health and the importance of self-care. It shows the readers the hollowness that can arise within a person when they emotionally invest on the wrong person. Gill ends the story saying, "No one is coming to save you, my love. No prince, no savior, no knight in shining armor. But don't you worry about a thing. You've already got what should save you, hiding inside the marrow inside your own powerful spine, your own bones" (94).

This encourages readers to seek help when they are struggling, and to recognize that self-love and self-acceptance are keys to healing. It pushes forward the idea of helping own selves instead of having multitude of expectation and dependency on others.

Furthermore, In Gill's retelling of "Snow White," the protagonist is not saved by a prince, but rather by a group of strong women who band together to defeat the evil queen which shows themes of sisterhood and the importance of female solidarity. This story portrays women as self-sufficient and breaks the traditional idea that women need to be rescued by men. It celebrates the power of female friendships and encourages readers to support and uplift other women. Lastly, In Gill's retelling of "The Little Match Girl," the protagonist is able to find warmth and love within herself, rather than from external sources by learning to appreciate the small moments of beauty and joy in life. This story addresses the theme of self-love and the importance of finding happiness within oneself.

Hence, throughout the book, Gill also incorporates elements of mythology and folklore, adding depth and complexity to her stories. Each story is accompanied by a beautiful illustration, also created by Gill, which adds to the overall enchanting and captivating tone of the book. Overall, *Fierce Fairy Tales: & Other Stories to Stir Your Soul* is a powerful and thought-provoking collection that challenges readers to question traditional fairy tale tropes and societal norms, while also celebrating the beauty of individuality and inner strength. That is why, Hart Stuart, the author of the research paper "The Poem: Lyric, Sign, and Meter" describes Gill's book as,

"*Cinderella's* stepsisters don't even go by their names, they're just "ugly." Physical attractiveness is also a central tenant of *Beauty and the Beast* (hence, the title). And

Princess Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty* is hardly even a fully fleshed character with human traits—her presence quickly fades into the background, while the plot focuses on the idea that only the power of a man can save a woman. Growing up watching and reading these stories, we don't question what we see; we're taught that these women are the feminine ideal, that their endings are happy ones we should aspire to in our own lives. In her book *Fierce Fair Tales* Nikita Gill wants you to question everything” (44).

With the above examples, Gill's *Fierce Fairy Tales: & Other Stories to Stir Your Soul* can be seen as following Kristeva's idea of feminism in several ways. Firstly, Gill's retellings challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, encouraging readers to embrace a more fluid and diverse understanding of femininity. Her stories also explore the complexities of feminine identity and experience, highlighting the ways in which women can be both vulnerable and powerful, both victims and agents of change. For example, Gill explores the concept of aging of the female body in the story “Baba Yaga” by saying that,

“When I tell you a woman becomes more erased, more faintly drawn than a human being, easier to ignore the older she gets, smile and remind them of me. I turned my wrinkles into badges of honour, welcome their labels of 'monster' and 'madness' with pride. My mane of silver hair is as good as a thousand soldiers swords because not a single man has the courage to face me alone, the woman who tames fires and snakes and savours bones. Remind each woman how empowering her age can be. Remind each and every girl out there that youth and beauty are not her shackles, nor her only currency” (96).

Further, Gill highlights how women are frequently body-shamed and made to believe that being thin-figures is the only correct way of existing by saying,

“Hunger: The Darkest Fairy tale
People ask questions,
but no one asks the right questions.
Who knew 'How are you so skinny?'
instead of 'When was the last time you ate?'
could be the difference between
getting help and nearly dying” (29).

These poems show how the stigma associated to female body victimizes women as well as make them the culprit too as they end up internalizing these ideas out of the fear of being ostracized.

Additionally, Gill's use of language and imagery in her stories reflects Kristeva's emphasis on the importance of language in shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Gill's stories often feature rich, poetic language and vivid, imaginative imagery, which serves to challenge and expand traditional fairy tale narratives and the ways in which women are represented in them. In this regard Kristeva can be quoted again as she says, “The feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a fundamental reordering of power. The imaginary is not formed in opposition to reality as its denial or compensation; it grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstice of repetitions and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the interval between words and images” (7). One story that illustrates the use of rich and vivid imagery of Gill's writing is “Why it Rains” that deals with racism against women. She writes,

“Girls with coverings that range from twilight to midnight have always felt hunted somehow in a world that says the night is full of terrors simply because of the colour of the sky, and she was no different. She learned this by watching her mother and grandmother deal with people every day. Somewhere between words like 'This isn't your country' and 'I don't see race', she saw them make their own place. She learned that women who are ember-skinned are made with so much strength inside them that even when the whole Earth tries to beat them into the ground, bury them in dirt made from their own bones, they still keep standing” (98).

This story shows how Gill uses sublime imageries of sky colors, ember-skin, and dirt to talk about racism and discrimination against female immigrants. Moreover, in “Lessons in Surviving Long-term Abuse,” Gill writes,

“She listened to the roar of the thunderstorm,

She fell in love with the fragrance of petrichor,

She searched the night sky for shooting stars,

She planted flowers on her meagre windowsill
to brighten up her attic room every evening.

She hid away books with words that would
touch her slowly fraying soul,

She took pleasure in the smell of fresh-baked
bread that she had just brought out of the oven.

She made friends with all the mice who lived inside

and all of the birds who nested outside
in little pots and shoeboxes
she had given them to reside.
She placed her trust in these little things
to keep her alive,
and this was how Cinderella survived” (40).

This poem is simply a retelling of the classic “Cinderella” story with a powerful emphasis on the abuse she faced and the aftermath of trauma. Gill’s use of rich imagery makes the poem more thought-provoking and striking. It helps the readers visualize how abuse gives birth to trauma using the story of Cinderella.

In conclusion, Kristeva's feminist perspective offers a valuable lens through which to analyze Nikita Gill's *Fierce Fairy tales: & Other Stories to Stir Your Soul*. Gill's work aligns with Kristeva's call for a rejection of fixed identity, exploration of feminine complexity, and the importance of language and culture in shaping our understanding of femininity. Through her retellings of classic fairy tales, Gill offers a powerful feminist message that challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, and encourages readers to embrace their own unique strengths and beauty.

CHAPTER 7

OTHER MODIFICATIONS

Apart from feminism, contemporary retellings have also shifted several perspectives that the traditional ones had misrepresented. Some of these transformations are discussed below.

7.1 Nationalism

Fairy tales are often used to promote nationalistic sentiments, and while they may contain elements that celebrate a particular culture or nation, they can also misrepresent nationalism in a number of ways. Several fairy tales advocate for a homogeneous national identity in which all members of a given country adhere to the same beliefs, traditions, and values. However as nations are made up of many groups of people with different origins and viewpoints, this is frequently not the case in reality. Promoting a singular national identity can exclude and marginalize those who do not fit the mold and result in obsession with a certain race of power. Regarding this Orwell in his "Notes on Nationalism" says, "The following are the principal characteristics of nationalist thought: Obsession. As nearly as possible, no nationalist ever thinks, talks, or writes about anything except the superiority of his own power unit" (23). For example, in the German fairy tale "Snow White," the seven dwarfs all work together to protect and care for Snow White, representing a unified and homogenous group. However, this portrayal ignores the reality that nations are made up of diverse groups of people with varying backgrounds and perspectives. That is precisely why they start attacking Snow White without a second thought when they first encounter her.

Moreover, fairy tales frequently include nationalistic heroes who are valiant, heroic, and moral, whereas outsiders are portrayed as antagonists or foes. This serves to support the notion that a nation is superior to others and that people from other nations are somehow beneath them which may result in the portrayal of racism. For example, in the English fairy tale "Jack and the Beanstalk," the giant who lives in the sky is portrayed as a menacing threat to Jack's village. This sends this message that those outside of one's own nation are somehow inferior or threatening.

Thirdly, fairy tales can also promote the idea of aggressive nationalism, where a nation must assert its dominance over others and defend itself against perceived threats. This can lead to wars, violence, and conflict, as well as a sense of superiority and entitlement over others. Orwell comments on such literature by saying, “Pacifist literature abounds with equivocal remarks which, if they mean anything, appear to mean that statesmen of the type of Hitler are preferable to those of the type of Churchill, and that violence is perhaps excusable if it is violent enough” (34). For example, in the Russian fairy tale "The Firebird," the young hero must travel to a foreign land and steal a magical bird from the king to save his own kingdom. This act of crossing boundaries and stealing for one’s own beneficial purpose is not only a criminally wrong portrayal but also perpetuates war related notions.

Overall, while fairy tales can be entertaining and offer insights into a culture's values and beliefs, they can also misrepresent nationalism and promote harmful attitudes towards those who do not fit into a particular national identity. It is important to be critical of these messages and strive for a more inclusive and equitable understanding of nationalism. This is where the contemporary retellings step in and play pivotal roles. There are several contemporary fairy tale retellings that subvert the issue of nationalism and offer more inclusive and nuanced representations of identity and belonging. *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* by Kelly Barnhill and *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* by Maggie Tokuda-Hall subvert the idea of a homogeneous national identity by featuring a diverse cast of characters from different backgrounds who come together to challenge oppressive structures and create a more inclusive society. Both of the books subvert the idea of aggressive nationalism by portraying the harms of imperialism and colonialism.

Cinder by Marissa Meyer is a retelling of "Cinderella" and is set in a futuristic world. Here nations have merged and people from different cultures and backgrounds coexist. The book explores issues of identity, prejudice, and belonging, challenging the idea of a singular national identity. Finally, the 2017 retelling of the Snow-White fairy tale *Forest of a Thousand Lanterns* by Julie C. Dao features an antihero protagonist who challenges the idea of a nationalistic hero. Author Dao writes, "I want to mean something to a great deal of people. I am tired of being no one. As Empress, I would have the right to choose for myself. Guma could not command me, and Wei would not own me" (323). This quote shows how the protagonist is an anti-hero as she demands to prove herself without any secondary label. Hence, this book explores issues of power, ambition, and identity, challenging the idea that one's worth is determined by their allegiance to a particular nation.

7.2 Occupation, Social Mobility, and Character Arch

In the postmodern era, authors are retelling old tales and giving the protagonist a new outlook. Gone are the days of story tellings where females are only limited to being passive princesses or domestic servants. In *Cinder* by Meyer, Cinder, the protagonist, is a skilled mechanic who is forced to work as a servant to her stepmother and stepsisters. In *The Stepsister Scheme* by Jim C. Hines, the step-sisters of Cinderella, actually work as her ally to rescue the male character. In this version, one of the stepsisters is a warrior, one is a sorceress, and they team up with Cinderella to rescue the prince from an evil sorcerer. The book *Ash* by Malinda Lo is a crucial example as the protagonist is a lesbian and falls in love with a female fairy instead of a prince. As well as the fairy godmother is replaced with a fairy who teaches magic and intelligence instead of experimenting with her beauty only.

Apart from that, in *The Mermaid, the Witch, and the Sea* by Maggie Tokuda-Hall the mermaid, named Flora, is part of a crew of smugglers who transport valuable goods across the sea. Flora's gender identity is explored in the story, and she becomes involved in a dangerous plot to overthrow a powerful empire. Lastly, Novik's *Spinning Silver*, which is a retelling of "Rumpelstiltskin" is set in a wintry, fantastical world. The protagonist, Miryem, is the daughter of a moneylender who is skilled at turning silver into gold. Her occupation involves managing her father's business and negotiating with clients. When she attracts the attention of a powerful and dangerous fae king, Miryem must use all her wit and resourcefulness to outsmart him and save her family.

By transforming the classical tales and by giving the protagonists a new lens, these above mentioned retellings have highlighted several key aspects of story-telling. Firstly, they show readers the importance of modernizing the story as any of the classic fairy tales were written in a different time and cultural context, and the occupations and roles of the characters reflected the social norms of their time. By changing the jobs of the characters in contemporary retellings, authors can update the story to be more relevant and relatable to modern audiences. Secondly, story-telling needs to explore new themes and perspectives that come with time. By changing the occupations of the characters, authors can explore new themes and perspectives that may not have been present in the original story. For example, in *Cinder* the protagonist's occupation as a skilled mechanic allows the story to explore issues of discrimination and oppression faced by cyborgs in a futuristic society. Lastly, contemporary storytelling also seeks to subvert expectations. With the changed social strata of the characters, authors can also subvert the expectations of readers who are familiar with the original story. This can create a sense of surprise and freshness that makes the retelling more engaging and memorable.

7.3 Mental Health

Mental health is an important topic in literature because it reflects the experiences and struggles of real people. Literature can help us to better understand the complexity of mental health conditions and to challenge harmful stereotypes and stigma. It can provide representation and validation for people with mental health conditions. When authors write about characters with mental health conditions, they can offer readers a way to see themselves and their experiences reflected in stories. Literature can help readers to develop empathy and understanding for people with mental health conditions. When readers are exposed to diverse perspectives and experiences through literature, they are more likely to develop compassion and empathy for people who may be different from them. Also, literature can raise awareness about mental health issues and the challenges faced by people with mental health conditions. With stories involving mental health, authors can help to educate readers and raise public awareness about the importance of mental health care and support. Lastly, literature can be a pivotal medium of removing stigmatization. It can help to challenge harmful stereotypes and stigma surrounding mental health. By portraying characters with mental health conditions as complex and multifaceted individuals, authors can help to break down the barriers of stigma and encourage greater understanding and acceptance.

The classic fairy tales painted a negative and toxic image of mental health. In many classic fairy tales, the villain was portrayed as mentally unstable or "mad." For example, in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the Queen of Hearts is portrayed as an irrational and violent character who frequently orders executions. This portrays a common and harmful stereotype that people with mental health conditions are dangerous and unpredictable. Also, characters with mental health conditions were often stigmatized or hidden away. In "Rapunzel," the titular

character is locked away in a tower by a witch, and her long hair is used as a way for the witch to visit her. This sends a message that people who are slightly different than others should be isolated and kept away from society. Additionally, mental health was often used as propaganda in some classic fairy tales to create tension or conflict in the story. For example, in "Snow White," the Evil Queen becomes jealous of Snow White's beauty and orders her to be killed. This presents mental health conditions such as insecurity as signs of corruption or evil.

According to a research by Hannah Tanner, certain Disney princesses portray some mental health disorders too. Tiana, the main character in the Disney movie *The Princess and the Frog*, is often interpreted as symbolizing workaholism due to her intense focus on her job and her strong work ethic. Tiana is depicted as a hard-working waitress who dreams of owning her own restaurant. She is so committed to her goal that she is willing to work long hours, save her money, and sacrifice her personal life to make her dream a reality. While Tiana's determination and work ethic are admirable qualities, some have criticized the way in which the movie seems to glorify overworking and devalue self-care and leisure time. Tiana is depicted as someone who is always working, even when she is sick or exhausted, and her friends and family repeatedly encourage her to take a break and enjoy life outside of work. At the end of the movie, Tiana learns the importance of balance and self-care and realizes that she doesn't have to sacrifice her personal life in order to achieve her goals. This can be seen as a positive message about the dangers of workaholism and the importance of taking care of oneself, but some argue that it is somewhat undermined by the movie's overall emphasis on hard work and achievement.

Moreover, some experts have also suggested that Ariel may have experienced a form of body dysmorphia, given her obsession with obtaining legs and changing her physical appearance

to fit in with human society. As well as, Alice's experiences in Wonderland as potentially resembling symptoms of schizophrenia, such as disordered thinking, delusions, and hallucinations. Alice experiences a distorted sense of reality, encounters talking animals, and engages in conversations with imaginary characters, which can be seen as resembling delusions and hallucinations.

These misrepresentations of mental health in classic fairy tales can contribute to negative attitudes and stereotypes about people with mental health conditions. Hence, the contemporary retellings recognize and challenge these harmful ideas, and promote accurate and compassionate portrayals of mental health in literature and media. Throughout the story of *Cinder*, Cinder's mental health struggles are portrayed with empathy and compassion, and she is shown to be a strong and resilient character despite the challenges she faces. Also, Barnhill's *The Girl who Drank The Moon* explores themes of mental health and trauma through the character of Luna, a young girl who has been traumatized by the loss of her family. Luna's mental health struggles are portrayed with sensitivity and understanding, and the story emphasizes the importance of empathy, connection, and community in healing from trauma. Also, *The Hazel Wood* explores themes of mental health and identity through the character of Alice, a young woman who is struggling to come to terms with her past and her family history. The story portrays Alice's mental health struggles with nuance and complexity, and emphasizes the importance of self-discovery and self-acceptance in finding healing and belonging.

7.4 Love

Classic fairy tales have often been criticized for misrepresenting love in a number of ways. For instance, they place a lot of importance on love at first sight. Numerous traditional fairy tales

depict love as something that can happen instantly, just by first spotting someone. This can be troublesome because it can cause people to have inflated ideas of what love should be like and drive them to ignore crucial elements like compatibility and shared values. Also, the characters have little control over who they fall in love with in many traditional fairy tales. Instead of being a decision based on passion and respect for one another, love is frequently depicted as something that occurs to people. Another troublesome aspect of these old-fashioned stories is the ideals of beauty. Traditional fairy tales frequently place a strong emphasis on physical attractiveness when choosing who is deserving of love. This can hurt those who do not meet conventional beauty standards and can support unfavorable assumptions about what constitutes attractiveness. In addition, many traditional fairy tales perpetuate traditional gender norms by depicting men as active lovers and women as submissive objects of love. This can be constricting for both sexes and contribute to negative gender stereotypes and power imbalances in relationships.

In the postmodern era, love has transformed in many ways due to changes in society and culture. Presently there is greater acceptance of diversity in terms of sexual orientation, gender identity, and relationship styles. This has led to a greater variety of romantic relationships and has challenged traditional notions of what love should look like. Also, technology has transformed the way people connect and form relationships. Dating apps and social media have made it easier for people to find potential partners, but have also raised new challenges in terms of authenticity and trust. Furthermore, postmodern society places a greater emphasis on individualism and self-expression. This has led to a greater focus on personal fulfillment in relationships, with people prioritizing their own needs and desires over societal expectations or obligations. Thus, postmodernism encourages the deconstruction of traditional narratives and hierarchies, including those related to love and relationships. This has led to a greater exploration

of non-traditional relationship structures and a questioning of traditional gender roles and power dynamics.

There are many contemporary fairy tale retellings that subvert the misrepresentations of love found in classic fairy tales. *Ella Enchanted* by Gail Carson Levine is retelling of "Cinderella" that features a strong-willed and independent protagonist who must overcome a curse that forces her to obey any command given to her. Throughout the story, Ella learns to assert her own agency and make her own choices, including who she falls in love with. Robin McKinley's *Beauty* is a retelling of "Beauty and the Beast" that features a protagonist who is admired for her intelligence and bravery, rather than her physical beauty. The relationship between Beauty and the Beast develops slowly over time, and is based on mutual respect and understanding. "The Lunar Chronicles" by Marissa Meyer is a series of books featuring the retellings of several classic fairy tales, including "Cinderella" and "Little Red Riding Hood." The series subverts traditional gender roles and portrays strong, capable female protagonists who take charge of their own destinies. Lastly *Ash* by Malinda Lo, which is a retelling of "Cinderella" features a lesbian protagonist who falls in love with the fairy godmother's apprentice, rather than the prince. The story emphasizes the importance of self-discovery and self-love, and portrays a more nuanced and authentic relationship than the love-at-first-sight trope found in many classic fairy tales. In this way, contemporary fairy tale retellings are often more inclusive and empowering than classic fairy tales, and can provide readers with a more realistic and nuanced understanding of love and relationships.

CHAPTER 8

IN MASS MEDIA

8.1 Barbie

Apart from the traditional Disney princesses, Barbie has also been a part of the fairy tales cannon. She is a pop-cultural icon and has been associated with several social and racial narratives. For Toffoletti, “She is a toy. A doll. Yet she has grown into a phenomenon. An iconic figure, recognised by millions of children and adults worldwide, she has remained a popular choice for more than six decades – a somewhat unprecedented feat for a doll in the toy industry” (33). Barbie, the iconic fashion doll, was created by Mattel in 1959 and it has been the subject of much controversy over the years. One of the main criticisms of Barbie is that she demeans feminism and reinforces harmful stereotypes about women.

Barbie is seen as anti-feminist due to her physical appearance. Barbie has an unrealistic and unattainable body type with a tiny waist, large breasts, and long legs. Lisa Orr writes in this regard, “The focus on play that imagined being grown up, with perfect hair, a perfect body, a plethora of outfits, a sexualised physique, and a perfect first love (in the equally perfect Ken) has been criticised over the years for perpetuating a different kind of ideal – one centred around body image, with dangerous consequences for girls’ mental and physical health” (83). Another study by Turkish researcher Yakalı-Çamoğlu found that “... exposure to Barbie dolls led to a higher thin-ideal internalisation, supporting findings that girls exposed to thin dolls eat less in subsequent tests” (45).

This creates a standard of beauty that is not only impossible for most women to attain, but also strengthens the wrong idea that a woman's value is based on her physical appearance. It sets a harmful standard for young girls, who may feel pressure to conform to this unrealistic ideal. Another issue with Barbie is that she is often portrayed in traditional gender roles, such as

a homemaker or a fashion model. This hints that women should be focused on their appearance and domestic duties, rather than pursuing careers or other aspirations. This is particularly harmful as it limits the aspirations and opportunities for young girls who can dream of pursuing multiple occupations. Finally, Barbie was not a very diverse character, she was always white, blonde, and blue-eyed, which may make it harder for girls from different racial backgrounds and who do not look like a Barbie doll to identify with her. This lack of diversity can contribute to feelings of self-esteem and self-worth issues among girls who may not see them reflected in the dolls they play with.

Having said that, Barbie has evolved significantly over the years in terms of representation and inclusivity, making efforts to become more equal and diverse. In 2016, Barbie introduced three new body types: tall, curvy, and petite, to represent more realistic body shapes and sizes. This move was a significant step towards body positivity and inclusivity. Barbie has also diversified its skin tones to represent different races and ethnicities. Later, In 2019, Barbie released its first gender-neutral doll, allowing children to style the doll's hair and clothing in a way that represents their own gender identity.

In recent years, Barbie has released dolls with different skin tones, hair textures, and facial features, such as afros, braids, and hijabs, to reflect the diversity of the world we live in. Furthermore, Barbie has expanded its range of career dolls to represent different professions and interests, from scientists and engineers to artists and athletes. This representation has helped to break down gender stereotypes and inspire young girls to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Collins says, “No longer is Barbie portrayed in roles such as the air hostess – or, when promoted

to pilot, still dressed in a feminine and pink version of the uniform. Modern pilot Barbie is more appropriately dressed, with a male air steward as a sidekick” (41). He also says,

“Such changes can have a remarkable impact on how young girls imagine their career possibilities, potential futures, and the roles that they are expected to take. Mattel’s move to honour 20 women role models including Japanese Haitian tennis player Naomi Osaka – currently the world number one – with her own doll is a positive step in bringing empowering role models into the consciousness of young girls” (45).

To conclude, these efforts by Barbie to become more inclusive and diverse are important steps towards promoting equality and representation. By embracing diversity and inclusivity, Barbie is empowering children to embrace their own unique identities and promoting a more inclusive and accepting society.

8.2 Music Videos

In addition to poetry, another form of art that bears many similarities with poetry is music. These two genres or two art forms have much in common. Both use language, whether it be lyrics or verse, to express emotions and ideas. Both also rely on rhythm and meter to create a sense of structure and flow. When any artist decides to create a video for their song, they transform the song from one medium to another and give their storytelling a new layer. It is because music videos become a medium that combines visual and auditory elements to create a unique storytelling experience. They have the ability to narrate a story in a way that is both engaging and memorable. For this reason several musicians have also retold fairy tale from their own

perspective through music videos. In this section, the main focus for music videos as a medium to retell fairy tales will be given to some selected songs by pop artist Taylor Swift.

Taylor Swift is renowned as a feminist icon due to her outspokenness on issues such as gender inequality, body positivity, and women's rights. Her music, fashion, and activism have all contributed to her status as a role model for young girls and women around the world. Swift's songs support feminism by highlighting the experiences and struggles of women, encouraging female empowerment and self-love, and calling out injustices and inequalities. Her music has become a powerful tool for women to connect with each other, find strength in their shared experiences, and demand change. Swift has released several music videos that draw on elements of ancient fairy tales to create a modern-day narrative.

Firstly, her music video for the much celebrated song "Love Story" draws on the story of "Romeo and Juliet," with Swift playing the role of a princess and her love interest playing the role of a knight. The video features medieval imagery, including a castle and a ballroom setting. It ends by showing that love does not need to be sacrificed due to political factors such as racism or nationalism and two people from different origins can unite together as they fall in love. This is in striking contrast with the original story where Romeo and Juliet could not unite due to their families being from different backgrounds, that is, the Capulet and the Montague. Further, her song "White Horse" is a modern-day retelling of the story of "Cinderella," with Swift playing the role of a young woman who is disappointed in love. The video features a fairy tale-like forest setting, as well as imagery of a horse and carriage. Next, the music video for "Mine" draws on the story of "Rapunzel," with Swift playing the role of a young woman who falls in love with a man she meets in a forest. The video features a tower-like structure, as well as a scene where the two lovers are separated by a river. From her album *1989 (2018)*, "Wildest Dreams" draws on

the story of "Tarzan," with Swift playing the role of a bold Hollywood actress who falls in love with a man living in the African wilderness. This is her way of retelling the character of Jane who is no longer a damsel in distress. Finally, her recent album *Midnights* (2022) contains a music video titled "Bejeweled" where she again retells the story of Cinderella with the Haim sisters playing the role of her evil step siblings. This song features empowering lyrics as Swift sings "I think I've been too good of a girl// Did all the extra credit, then got graded on a curve//I think it's time to teach some lessons//I made you my world, have you heard? // I can reclaim the land//and I miss you//but I miss sparkling" (Swift 3:08-3:27)

In this way in several of Swift's music videos, she uses imagery and storytelling techniques to create a modern-day fairy tale narrative. She draws on elements of ancient fairy tales, such as castles, knights, and forest settings, to create a sense of timelessness and magic in her videos. Additionally, Swift often plays the role of a strong female character who is able to navigate the challenges of love and relationships with grace and determination contrary to the protagonists of traditional fairy tale culture.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Fairy tales have been an integral part of literature for centuries. These stories often have a moral lesson and are used to teach children about the values and morals of their society. They are stories that have been passed down from generation to generation and have become part of our cultural heritage. This paper explores the role of fairy tales in literature and their impact on society through their retellings. One of the most important roles of fairy tales in literature is their

ability to transport readers to another world. They allow us to escape our everyday lives and immerse ourselves in a fantasy world where anything is possible. This escapism is particularly important for children who are still learning about the world around them. Fairy tales provide a safe and magical space where children can explore their imaginations and learn about the world in a non-threatening way.

As well as fairy tales teach us about the values and morals of our society. These stories are often used to teach children about right and wrong, good and evil, and the consequences of our actions. They provide children with a framework for understanding the world around them and the social norms that govern their behavior. These lessons are often conveyed through the characters in the story, who are often archetypal and represent different aspects of our society. Further, fairy tales also play an important role in helping us to understand our emotions. Many fairy tales deal with universal themes such as love, jealousy, and fear. By exploring these emotions through the characters in the story, we are able to develop a deeper understanding of ourselves and the people around us. This emotional intelligence is particularly important for children who are still learning how to manage their feelings and navigate social relationships.

In addition to their literary value, fairy tales also have a cultural significance. They are an important part of our shared cultural heritage and provide a link to our past. They have been passed down from generation to generation and have evolved over time to reflect the changing values and beliefs of our society. By reading and sharing these stories, we are able to connect with our cultural roots and develop a sense of pride and belonging. However, despite their many benefits, fairy tales have also been criticized for perpetuating gender stereotypes and promoting

unrealistic expectations. However, modern retellings of these stories have sought to subvert these stereotypes and promote a more inclusive and diverse representation of characters.

Fairy tales have been a staple of literature for centuries, and they continue to capture the imagination of readers today. However, as society has evolved, so too have our expectations of the stories we tell. Modern fairy tale retellings have emerged as a popular genre, offering a fresh perspective on classic stories and exploring themes that are relevant to contemporary audiences. That is why this research examines the role of modern fairy tale retellings in literature, and explores the ways in which they have evolved to reflect changing societal attitudes and values using the works of Gill and Carter.

One of the key roles of modern fairy tale retellings is to provide a voice for marginalized groups. Many traditional fairy tales center around white, cisgender, heterosexual characters, leaving little room for diversity and representation. By retelling these stories with a more inclusive lens, modern fairy tale writers are able to give voice to characters who have historically been excluded from the narrative. This can include characters who are LGBTQIA+, people of color, or people with disabilities, among others. By making these stories more reflective of the real world, modern fairy tale retellings are able to speak to a wider audience, and to offer a more nuanced and complex view of the human experience. Another important role of modern fairy tale retellings is to subvert traditional gender roles and expectations. Many classic fairy tales feature female characters that are passive and helpless, waiting to be rescued by a male hero. By retelling these stories from a female perspective, modern fairy tale writers are able to give agency and power to female characters, and to explore the ways in which gender affects our

perceptions of identity and self-worth. This can be seen in works such as Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and Gill's *Fierce Fairy Tales*.

To conclude, fairy tales are an important part of our cultural heritage, and retelling them ensures that they remain relevant to modern audiences. By adapting fairy tales to suit contemporary sensibilities, writers are able to make them more accessible to a wider range of readers, and to ensure that they continue to be passed down from generation to generation. Also, retelling fairy tales can offer a fresh perspective on familiar stories, and can challenge traditional assumptions and stereotypes as they can be a powerful tool for social commentary. By using familiar stories to comment on contemporary issues and challenges, writers can make their work more accessible and engaging to readers. This can be particularly effective for addressing difficult or sensitive topics, as it allows writers to explore complex themes in a way that is both relatable and engaging. Finally, retelling fairy tales can be a way of preserving cultural traditions and values. Many fairy tales are rooted in cultural and historical traditions, and retelling them can help to ensure that these traditions are not lost over time. By adapting these stories to suit modern sensibilities, writers can ensure that these traditions remain relevant and meaningful to contemporary audiences. Hence, this thesis shows that fairy tale and folklore retellings are not just another version of old stories, instead, they are a medium of exploring the postmodern complexities and nuances of society and giving new meanings to timeless tales.

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