

Chapter III

***“Fiesta Feminina”*: Women in Fairy Tales**

The old patterns, no matter how cleverly rearranged to imitate progress, still condemn us to cosmetically altered repetitions of the same old exchanges.

–Audre Lorde “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference.”

“Fiesta Feminina” is a term that will be used in this chapter to describe women in fairy tales and feminist fairy tales and celebrate their impact through time on women and their indoctrination into the prevalent social codes. Fairy tales have a powerful influence in shaping the history of a society. Passed on from one generation to the other, it is an oral tradition which later became textual. Every culture has its own body of folk and fairy tales, and the canvas is an enchanted setting in an unspecified time and space. The tales present archetypal characters and magic to entune morals through varied mesmerising themes. Surrealism marks its make-believe world either through a myth or archetype. The form has undergone changes redefining socio-cultural contexts. From the story telling category, it has become part of the arts and culture of today and exists as an independent genre which has created a strong impact in literature, cinema, art, advertisements animation and life. Wish fulfilment and longing within a context of morals formed the basis of discourse by addressing issues of gender in this context.

The gendered attitudes and gendered versions of the traditional texts that eulogised patriarchy grafted feminine docility and gendered passivity. These normative texts subversive to female identity pronounced the inferiority of women. For instance, in “Cinderella,” “Red Riding Hood,” “Rapunzel,” “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” “Sleeping Beauty” and other such fairy tales, the heroines are subdued and wait for a male rescuer to emancipate them. This subaltern status of the women characters led to debates that women interrogated in the reworked tales.

The feminist texts implicitly and explicitly dealt with the upliftment of women to reiterate that women's mettle ought not to be undermined. The misconceptions of women's struggles voiced gender concerns by using creativity to make gendered pronouncements. For instance, the select texts reveal the role reversal of the female protagonists. In *Sweeping Beauties* by the Irish Fairy Tales for Feminist Collective, the tale, "The Fairy Godmother" by Elaine Crowley depicts how Kin, Phillipa's Dad, wants his daughter to get married and everyone go on to wish her well. The Fairy Godmother, however, warns her that she requires "A true value on [herself], independence of spirit and, the important one, being able to earn [her] own living." (9) This highlights the fact that the cumulative dynamics of the persistence of women to analyse the contestations of women as the "other" is to project woman as an independent entity and not as a cultural construct by male supremacy.

Gendered connections are refuted by feminist fairy tale writers by taking recourse to forgotten women's voices. The select authors explore the emotion of belonging by echoing their self-expression and sanity to address feminist issues with artistic excellence. These authors battle obstinate paradigms and syndromes of gendered notions in their restricted spheres of activity. They re-envision their writing to create a new ethos through symbolic configurations of literature and language. The relentless articulation of these literary voices against power play resisted stereotypes and gender roles dictated by male hegemony.

The inversions of the tales in *Sweeping Beauties* by the Irish Fairy tales for Feminist Collective, namely "The Fairy Godmother" by Elaine Crowley, "Revenge of the Sisters Grimm" by Cathleen O Neil, "Pygmalion" by Gerardine Meaney, "Alice in Thunderland" by Mary Kelly, "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" by Roz Cowman, "Snow-Fight Defeats Patri Arky" by Grainne Healy, "A Tale to Remember" by Anne Le

Marquand Hartigan, “The Budgeen” by Margaretta D Arcy, “Ms. Snow White wins Case in High Court” by Clodagh Corcoran and “Grainne’s Version of the Pursuit” by Rita Kelly are feminist re-writings that whisk the reader on high-spirited adventures.

Emancipation of women from being victims of the male gaze as in “Sleeping Beauty” are reworked to define the female gaze as in the upturn of the “Sleeping Beauty” tale which is against the essentialism perpetuated by men.

Gendered feminism is a quest for the quintessential woman who is trapped in the fundamental experience of domestic chores aspiring for liberation. In *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales*, the tales namely, “The Moon Ribbon,” “The Honey-Stick Boy,” “Rosechild,” “Sans Soleil,” “Somewhen” and “The Moon Child,” mirror a realistic picture where women work towards self-fulfilment, self-realisation, autonomy and self-actualisation. Thus the female protagonists assert their quest for identity to emancipate themselves from patriarchy and celebrate new definitions of space and freedom. The character of Sylva in *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales*, unlike the characterisation of Cinderella is a depiction of the unrealistic presentation of a selfless, compliant girl, victimised by her stepmother. She gets no emotional support from her father who is representative of the male hegemonic order.

The tale begins thus, “It was a strange ribbon, the colour of moonlight, for it had been woven from the grey hairs of her mother and her mother’s mother and her mother’s mother’s mother before her” (1). The child’s helplessness suddenly finds solace when the ribbon that she found, fell off her hair and “glittered “ and “seemed to ripple” and “changed the air” with “a woman’s sweet voice” echoing the words, “Silver ribbon, silver hair, Carry Sylva with great care, Bring my daughter home” (4). The ribbon progressed like a river taking its course and Sylva was taken through beautiful meadows, through the forests till she reached “the door of a house which opened to a hall with a crystal door that

emitted the colour of moonlight” (7). Inside at the fireplace was a woman “dressed in white “with hair” that “cascaded to the knees” and around her neck was a silver ribbon. “Welcome, my daughter,” she said, “Are you my mother?” Sylva asked wonderingly. “I am if you make me so,” was the reply. When Sylva asked, “And how do I do that? The reply was “Give me your hand.” (8). Thus, the female rescuer gives her the strength to overcome all odds and hold her head high and look forward to battling the storms of life.

The genre of Feminist Fairy Tale writing not only voices suppression, emancipation and empowerment of women, but depicts sexual differentiation and behavioural modes of masculine and feminine as culturally defined variables. This championing of the self towards equitable relationship between all genders is seen in the select feminist reworkings of Angela Carter as in the tales “The Bloody Chamber,” “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon,” “The Tiger’s Bride,” “Puss-in- Boots,” “The Earl King,” “The Snow Child,” “The Lady of the House of Love,” “The Werewolf,” “The Company of Wolves,” and “Wolf-Alice” which are compiled in the collection, *The Bloody Chamber*. The dark, sensual fantastic tales are interwoven with dreams, myths, metamorphoses and fairy stories which celebrate sexuality and redefine feminism and womanhood.

The select feminist fairy tale authors are subjective in understanding the subtle essences of human life. They take the personal microscopic truths of their lives and use them as a spyhole into a wide network of socio-economic, cultural and political edifices. This combats the web of social structures of male domination which entrap womanhood as in the reworking of the tales of Namjoshi as in *Feminist Fables*. The hundred fables are narrative discourses which range from the traditional to the modern, from heterosexual to homosexual and from the personal to the political. “From the Panchatantra,” “The Princess,” “Scheherazade,” “The Giantess,” “Troglodyte,” “The Dower,” “Experts,” “History,” “The Debt,” “Broadcast Live,” “The Derbyshire Fish,” “Heart,” and

“Plankton” are tales that are entertaining and enlightening. The themes of education, employment, reproduction, body image, rape, molestation, homophobia, compulsions of childbearing and child rearing, preference for a male child, female infanticide, women’s ambitions, heterosexuality, homosexuality, self-determination and power politics are expatiated.

Namjoshi breaks all boundaries to gain a universal voice in her revisionist fables, inverted fairy tales, reworked classical Greek and Indian mythological narratives. The intertextual allusions and references to release the marginalised from enslavement, the domination of the male over their female counterparts, whites over the blacks, heterosexuals over homosexuals, and man over the environment is discoursed from the point of race, class and gender. In an interview with Namjoshi, C. Vijayashree remarks, “In *Feminist Fables*, I wasn’t so much concerned with making feminist statements as with using the form to understand the imbalance of power and to question it . . . And it is worth considering that feminism in its broadest sense questions the roles the people assign to themselves in relation to the relatively powerless” (178-9).

“Broadcast Live” in *Feminist Fables* is of an incredible woman who “raged through the skies, lassoed a planet, set it in orbit, rescued a starship, flattened a mountain, straightened a building, smiled at a child, caught a few thieves, all in one morning, and then, took a little time off to visit her psychiatrist, since she is at heart a womanly woman and all she wants is a womanly life” (18). “The Grace of the Goddess” is the tale where the weak-minded child complains, “Children suffer, women are beaten and raped and killed” (19). “Heart” is of a woman who had a heart and helped and served everyone willingly, but was headless. “She cooked, she cleaned, she baked, she scoured and she was always kind and loving and gentle and never once complained of feeling tired” (27).

The feminist fairy tale authors project a hypothesis against gendered perceptions by asserting that feminist identity cannot be split up from the literary synergy of a woman. In “The Tale of the Skin,” in *Kissing the Witch*, Donoghue opines, “The stars looked down on me and laughed. Was this freedom, I wondered? Was this better than a throne?” (135). Donoghue expresses the silence of women in her tales.

At the balls he took me to, there were many beautiful young women who didn’t say a word. They answered every question with a shrug or a smile. If champagne got spilt down their dresses they only sighed; when the full moon slid out from behind the castle they watched it in silence. I could not understand it. Had they sold their voices too? Even their bodies were silent, always upright, never loosening their lines. They walked like letters on a page. (198)

The pejorative nuances associated with the word “woman” are foisted in *The Moon Ribbon and Other Stories* as in the tale, “The Moon Ribbon” which unravels the conflict between tradition and modernity. The reworked heroes and heroines, evolve themselves synthesising tradition and modernity with pragmatism. In “The Honey Stick Boy,” the wife is consoled by her husband who echoes, “A brave son,” “He gave his life to save me.” “Now once more we have no child” said the woman sadly, but she did not say it bitterly. For she had her husband safe, and she had her memories, and it was hard to say which she treasured more” (22).

Synthesising virtue in women on the basis of their gender and comparing it with the brashness of men as in tales like “Red Riding Hood” enable the feminist writers to write as an individual and not as a generic group. In “Revenge of the Sister’s Grimm” by Cathleen O’Neil, in *Sweeping Beauties*, the sister Grimm who was gifted with insight believed that ‘Gotcha’ happened the moment a female child was born. “This wasn’t always so, she said her insight told her about a time in the past when women ruled their

lives” (12). When men came to power, the sisters in disguise received the notion of wearing the new light-weight suits of psychic energy and the young sister Grimm expatiated that, “They will cover you with a powerful aura” (13). The tale ends with the lines “How mighty are the fallen, grinned the Grimms as the entire nation convulsed at the sight of the greatest ‘gotcha’ of all time” (14).

A study of the select texts reveals that a woman writer does not always have a narrowed focus of her gender. She may have varied forces like culture, art, history, science in contradiction or prioritisation of experiences and dilemmas in literature. The infusion of feminism may not be found in every feminist fairy tale and yet despite blinkers, women’s issues may surface as they are not just women’s issues, but issues of the society and humanity. The reworked tales like “Rose Child” in *The Moon Ribbon* by Yolen talks about the sorrows of a childless woman “who was neither widow nor wed.” She found a tiny babe “nestled in the petals of a wild rose” (25). “Quickly the old woman picked the child up between her forefinger and thumb, and wrapping it in her linen handkerchief, she brought it to her home. There she made for it a cradle from a walnut and lined the shell with soft wool. Then she sat back and wondered how to make the child grow (25). She asked many people as to how she would raise her Rosechild and tried to follow the advice of many, until there was none left to ask. Finally, when she cried out loud “Oh my, oh my, My Rosechild will die,” a small wee voice called out from the walnut shell, “Mamma.” This voice gives her the strength to raise the child all by herself.

In Yolen’s “The Honey Stick Boy,” the old woman is upset that the old parents have no idea as to how to raise the child. However, with great effort, she relies on herself and tries to care for the babe. She plucked the sticks up between her forefinger and thumb and cradled it to her cheek. She felt her love flowing out to the tiny child. And she loved it so much, it began to grow and grow and grow till it was old enough and big enough to

care for the little old woman. It fed her pieces of bread sopped in milk and honey and anything else she needed or wanted. And from that day on, the house was always filled with the lovely scent of roses (29). In “The Tale of the Needle,” in *Kissing the Witch*, the reworking is powerful. “I bent over the spinning wheel and set it back in its place. I sat down on the stool and said, Please show me how” (182). Thus, these inverted tales are not just feminist tracts, but are expressions of the self.

The mythical fairy tales and fables like the tales of Grimm, Andersen and Perrault were supernatural tales which subtly instructed human beings to codify their lives. The mythological personages and whimsical characters entertained and educated children. They communicate the quandaries of the people as in “The Emperor of New Clothes” and other such tales. Jack Zipes posits, “Any fairy tale in our society, if it seeks to become natural and eternal must become myth” (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 5). Thus, the mythical elements and practices unconsciously disciplined the audience and addressed moral precepts and impressions of an imaginary world of right and wrong, good and evil, beauty and ugliness that depicted a world of adult concerns. The supernatural fairy tale narratives like the tale of “Red Riding Hood” interrogates moral questions as bed time stories which transported children to a world of imagination and left an indelible mark on the psyche of children as they imparted virtues and values.

Traditional fairy tales consciously or unconsciously prescribed several do’s and don’ts to take children on what adults presumed to be the right path. They were warnings issued to children to abide by the laws and morals of society as echoed in the fairy tales like “Red Riding Hood,” “Hansel and Gretel,” “Rapunzel” and other such fairy tales. Children were forbidden to disobey adults and inspired to handle issues with maturity by resorting to psychological independence in the upturned tales. Internalisation of newer situations that signified varied psychological, sociological, racial and gender conflicts

were imaged as in traditional texts like “Goldilocks and the Three Bears.” In *Kissing the Witch*, in “The Tale of The Bird,” the theme of freedom and self-reliance is voiced. “It was a bird, that helped me when I was young, but it could have been anything: a stick, a stone, whatever happened by. The thing is to take your life in your own hands” (11). *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales* is an antithesis of the thematic instructions of fairy tales to redefine the heroines and rubrics of the text.

The emblematic symbolisation of love, quest, endurance, experience and aspiration in the traditional tales as in “Beauty and the Beast,” “Rapunzel,” “Sleeping Beauty” and “Hansel and Gretel” demarcated good and evil as symbolised by the protagonist and antagonist in a gendered manner. Virtue and vice were defined not by actions and circumstances, but by the personality, sex and emotions of the characters. Symbolically, the fairy tales like “Red Riding Hood” cautioned children about the harsh realities of life and initiated them to the rules of society by inculcating codes of behaviour like loyalty to the family, gendered respect to patriarchy and virtuosity of love and marriage. Most probably the early ideas of choosing a mate and monogamous marriage in primitive society might have had its foundation in these tales of social doctination. These symbols of good and evil may have been translated as beauty equal to goodness and evil equated to ugliness as is seen in “Beauty and the Beast.”

A feminist’s critique of how these texts destroy the self-confidence of a woman reiterates the need for maturity and stability in the female protagonists as addressed in the inverted tales. “Rapunzel,” “Red Riding Hood,” “Cinderella,” “Thumbelina,” and “Sleeping Beauty” were tales where women were stereotyped as passive and dependent good housewives adept at housekeeping. Female sacrifice and maternal duties like childbearing and child rearing were essential to every fairy tale. Keeping husbands happy was a symbol of eternal love. These tales indoctrinated young minds to oppressive social

codes and were also lessons in domestic and agricultural activities, harvesting and nurturing for women. Hunting and conquest in men were echoed through the folk and fairy tales as in the fairy tales like “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,” “Red Riding Hood,” and “Goldilocks and the Bears.” Jack Zipes in his essay “The Changing Function of the Fairy Tale” comments that “they were stories told to members of a tribe to explain natural occurrences such as change of seasons and shifts in the weather or celebrate the rites of harvesting, hunting, marriage and conquest. The emphasis in folk tales was harmony” (10).

The reworking of fairy tales by women writers as in “The Tale of the Skin” by Emma Donoghue in *Kissing the Witch* is an inversion. “The king came to my room at first light and spread the skin before me, still warm with blood. His grin hung in folds as he said, “Tomorrow shall be our wedding . . . All that day I stayed in my room. I clung to the blanket and said to myself, you’re a grown up girl now. Worse things happen in the stories. There must be worse husbands. The heroine realises the predicament and flees from the scene. She says, “I took with me three bright dresses, my mother’s wedding ring and the donkey skin, wrapped round me to ward off curious glances” (154).

Patriarchal ideology is central to this genre. Power is tied to gender, and violence masks itself as seemingly innocent. Violence is harmless whether it is the pricking of a needle, endless domestic chores, the accosting of a wolf in a forest, the grinding of a giant’s bones, the smile of a disguised wolf or the isolation of a princess shut in an ivy tower. Though this may not terrify a small child rapt in the wonder of the tale, when analysed, the naked violence of a frightening adult world can be seen as an example of patriarchal violence.

Patriarchal dominance and patriarchal regime are evident in all the select tales. Mary Gould Davis, in her introduction to the 1929 edition of Andrew Lang’s *The Blue*

Fairy Book describes the twentieth century readers of fairy tales. “Boys, who in their reading have found the natural transition from “Sleeping Beauty” to love stories and true romances and are still ready to tell you that they read the colour fairy books when they were little” (Davis vii).

In the tale, “Alice in Thunderland,” in *Sweeping Beauties*, the reworking is significant. The character, Alice could not contain herself any longer. She leaped to her feet and cried out, “Where is your justice, you stupid people? Why are you shrinking the femblies? If they shrink anything more there will be nothing left” (36). In “The Twelve Dancing Princesses,” Snow-fight defeats Patri Arky. Anne Arky a world-famous scientist, who knew cure for diseases and natural remedies, had collected all the wisdom of healers and anointed Snow Fight’s eyes and the women sang:

WOMEN ARE WE; SISTERS ARE WE,
 WE HAVE THE POWER TO HEAL OURSELVES.
 WE KILL NO BEASTS; WE POISON NO LANDS. THE POWER IS OURS;
 IT IS IN OUR HANDS. (45)

The trope of male aggression and female victimisation as cultural erasure is expressed in the portrayal of women who had no visibility to the products of their literary imagination as they were confined to domestic spaces that depicted a cross section of a cross-cultural community based on the ethics of care and dependence. Multivocality provided alternate realities to voice the plurality of voices of the past, present and future as in the feminist fairy tales like “The Tale of the Bird” in *Kissing the Witch*.

There was a man I had been taught to call father. He saw to the horses in the great stables, their bright mouths and metal chorus; his eyes never fell to my level.

There was a woman who called herself my mother. She wore an apron like a snow cloud; her hands blushed red as if ashamed. I could not imagine that I emerged

from her substantial flesh; it seemed more likely that she had found me caught in a cowpat, or behind the apple barrel or while cleaning out a mousetrap. (12)

In the same tale, the protagonist asserts the theme of individuality and freedom for women. “My life was in my own hands, now beating faintly, too small yet for anyone to notice. I cupped freedom to my breast, I would love it; it would grow big enough to carry me away” (24). In “The Twelve Dancing Princesses” by Roe Cowman, Snow-fight defeats Patri Arky and opines, “None of these women thought that they would live happily ever after, as the story goes, but they knew that they would live equally, and what could be nicer?” (45).

Fairy tales harped on gender and power as these attributes were the essential ingredients of fairy tales. In the feminist fairy tales of Namjoshi, the encroachment of gender politics depicts the representation of the gendered male moving to adventure stories or the outside world and portrays the gendered female being trapped amidst cinders or in a palace or castle. Goodness and passivity of women in contrast with chivalrousness and bashfulness of men are constructed with gender specific stereotypes as in Cinderella being described as “a girl of unpatrolled goodness and sweetness of temper, which she took from her mother who was the best creature in the world” (6). “Sleeping Beauty” in the wood is the tale of a new-born princess who is the recipient of magical gifts to churn her into being the most perfect woman ever born. The gifts that “she should be the most beautiful person in the world . . . that she should have the wit of an angel . . . that she should have a wonderful grace in everything she did, that she should sing like a nightingale, and that she should play all kinds of music to the utmost perfection” (13).

Girls are taught to impress men by being emotionally weak and naïve and they are tutored to wait to be rescued by handsome princes as in the tales like “Sleeping Beauty”, “Cinderella” and the other canonical tales. Heroes were eulogised, heroines

complimented and women in female antagonist roles were questioned. The rescuer in the fairy tale texts is male. On subversion, the roles are inverted and women are extolled by defining the strength of the heroines like Sleeping Beauty. Witches and beasts as the upturned characters are reverted in feminist fairy tales. Thus, the social and cultural transmission of the tales were male centric. In “The Tale of the Rose,” in *Kissing the Witch*, Donoghue echoes, “In this life I have nothing to do, but in my last it was my fate to be a woman. I struggled to guess these riddles and make sense of our story, and before I knew it, summer came again, and the red roses just opening” (40).

Feminist writers like Yolen exhibited rare talent by investing power in their heroines. Seemingly traditional and classic, the texts exhibit fairy tale fantasy and depict powerful authoritative heroines. Sylva in the tale of “The Moon Ribbon,” the old woman in “The Honey-Stick Boy,” the mother in “Rosechild” are undoubtedly powerful protagonists. Mona in “The Moon Child,” who was initially afraid of axes and fists and loved to stay back in the forests was mentally so powerful that she loved being alone and all by herself, far from humanity. Viga in “San Soleil” in *The Moon Ribbon* by Yolen says “Do not put your faith in such old wives tales”. The sun cannot hurt you. Put your faith in me” (36). Viga was a resilient, robust, self-willed and passionate woman. “She was determined not to lose her lover for a single day because of such a foolish tale” (37).

“The Bloody Chamber,” by Carter, is of the power of the woman as a saviour and her character is highlighted as the protagonist’s mother saves the daughter and empowers her. “On her eighteenth birthday, my mother had disposed of a man-eating tiger that had ravaged the hills north of Hanoi. Now without a moment’s hesitation, she raised my father’s gun, took aim and put a single, irreproachable bullet through my husband’s head” (40). In *The Moon Ribbon*, the power of maternal love is immense. It is heart-warming, emancipating, empowering and beatific.

Sylva felt the jewel warm and glowing in her hand and at its touch felt such comfort as she had not in many days. She closed her eyes and a smile came on her face. And when she opened her eyes again, she was standing on the meadow grass not two steps from her own door. It was morning and by her feet lay the silver ribbon, limp and damp from the frost. The door to her house stood open. Sylva drew in her breath, picked up the ribbon and went in. (13)

In “Pygmalion” by Gerardine Meaney, Rowenna “considered anything less, a waste of her talents and had parted company with the police force when it had tried to confine her to a desk in the fraud investigations decision” (17). In *Feminist Fables*, Namjoshi’s “From the Panchatantra” is the tale of the desire of a Brahmin for a son. “Of Spiders” is a tale that deals with the disapproval of the abilities of a female child. “The Lesson,” “Thorn Rose,” “The Little Prince,” “Bird Woman,” and “The Gods” sabotage female characteristics. Female protagonists and women were rendered voiceless and powerless when they dared to speak against the conventions of society. This silence is reworked in all the select tales. In “Woman and Man Started Even” in Virginia Hamilton’s *Her Stories*, the tale ajars thus,

God created Woman and Man. He made their house and all its doors. When Woman and Man talked together, they said the same number of words. When they fought, they also came out even. Woman was as strong as Man, don’t you know. She couldn’t win over him and he couldn’t beat her. That was the way it was. Just level. Man went to heaven, asked God for more strength and his wish was granted. When woman realised this, she asked God to take away the strength which God refused. (71)

According to the devils advice, she asked God for “the keys hanging by the left pearly gate” and locked the doors of the kitchen, the bedroom and children’s room and

this maddened Man. When he asked God to get back the keys, God refused and told him to ask Woman to open it. Man demanded the keys, but woman kept them. “She wouldn’t trade for Man’s strength. So that’s the way it is. Man is strong. But it is Woman who has the power” (71-72).

The appropriation of male and female roles and male and female spaces in feminist fairy tales were reworked. The male roles of the fairy tales were far fetching and the texts presented men as stoic, passionate unequivocal heroes. The princes in the French, German and Irish versions of Cinderella are ardent lovers. The hero in the Snow-White versions is presented as ideal and heroic. The heroes in the Sleeping beauty versions are daring and valiant. The female versions present women as docile. The Cinderella versions describe Cinderella as good, kind-hearted and docile. As a cinder wench, she is forced to do the household chores. The French versions, the German versions and Scottish versions attribute her obedience to goodness. The Snow-White versions present the heroine as stupid and naive. The Scottish and Italian versions focus on the helplessness of the heroine. The cruelty of the maternal symbol who wishes to eat the girl’s organs contrasts innocence with envy.

The Grimm versions harp on the child’s complexion being white as snow with lips as red as blood. The mirror on the wall is an important persona used to excite the jealousy of the step mother. The French versions depicted Sleeping Beauty as asleep for one hundred years and being woken by a prince who rescues her. The German version presents her as a woman with no identity of her own. In the Italian version, the heroine is raped in her sleep, but wakes up to live happily ever after. In the French version, the Prince realises that his ogre mother is not trustworthy. The female roles in fairy tales fall into a dichotomy of gender ideals unlike in Feminist Fairy Tales like “The Tale of the Handkerchief” in *Kissing the Witch* as in the lines “I’ve grown accustomed to this life.

The goose girl went on. I have found the fields are wider than any garden. I was always nervous, when I was a princess, in case I would forget what to do” (79). Donoghue adds her thoughts, “I thought of how both of us had refused to follow the paths mapped out for us by our mothers and their mothers before them, but had perversely gone our own ways instead and I wondered whether this would bring us more or less happiness in the end” (80).

The polarisation of women characters in fairy tales is unfair because the social constructions of physical appearance like concepts of beauty and ugliness are wrong messages which define male and female constructs as sexist in nature. An examination of sex roles depicts perpetuating stereotypical thoughts of subordinated and victimised heroines. While men pursue fortune, women attain fortune by marrying a prince or through magic or luck or by the granting of boons. Gender values discipline the child reader as in the presentation of the stereotypical heroine; Little Red Riding Hood is lauded as beautiful, smart and complacent. She is mocked for being vulnerable, gullible, disobedient and stupid. This is contrasted with the sensible woodcutter who is depicted as a saviour who saves the female protagonist from helpless and harmful situations. In “Sans Soleil,” Yolen describes the prince Sans Soleil as the name is synonymous to “sunless” as he was grown in the candlelit cave-castle until he was twenty. He was kept away from the sun as “it was prophesied at his birth that he would grow so handsome that his beauty would outshine the sun. That he might not be killed by the jealous star, he had to be kept in the dark, for it was said that he would die if ever a shaft of sunlight fell upon his brow” (31).

The tales of Virginia Hamilton also present gendered themes. From light hearted trickster tales, such as “Little Girl and Buh Rabby” to the enraptured bewitched world of “Mary Belle and the Mermaid,” the tales present a range of folktales, fairy tales and

legendary women. Annie Christmas, the notorious seven-foot-tall riverboat operator, shares the stage with Cat Woman, a New Orleans vampire; tiny fairy folk make an erratic entrance and the unforgettable Catskinella, a robustly inclined pretty lady outwits her father and goes on to win her prince.

Female gender role sexism echoed in fairy tales without questioning the sexist stereotypes from the feminist perspective as reflected in the select works. The female gender role stereotypes, presented as the princess, the temptress, the damsel in distress, the evil witch, the sorceress or angelic housewife is sacrificial, docile, naïve and forced to imbibe female gender roles. In the fairy tales, the heroines like Cinderella, Rapunzel, Gretel, and the Mermaid are demotivated from being aggressive, adventurous and strong.

The tales like “Sleeping Beauty,” “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” and other tales attempt to shape gender roles and enforce cultural norms to women to force them to adhere to patriarchy. Gender inequality is redefined in fairy tales and women are tutored to understand that education, career, success and pursuit of excellence are not as important as beauty, grace, innocence, homeliness, naivety or docility. It elucidates how the patriarchal paradigm that constructs the fairy tale genre naturalises the relegation and demotion of women in a male dominated society.

The entrenched nature of gender appropriate behaviour masks the fact that fairy tales are created and reproduced through an androcentric lens. The primary role of gender construction prepares the girls for romantic love and heterosexual practices. Evil ugly women or witches are pictured as stepmothers and shrewish witches, while beautiful princesses are trapped by hardships only to be rescued by a handsome prince. In the fairy tales like “Hansel and Gretel,” “Goldilocks and the Bears,” and “Red Riding Hood;” the binary polarization of women/men as good or bad, pretty or ugly contradict inner and outer beauty. This justifies the need for the reversal of gender role sexism in fairy tales.

In the tale of “Sans Soleil”, the daughter of the Duke, Viga, does not believe the tale of strange beauty and evil predilection. She tells the King, her father that the boy may be “too monstrous to behold.” Viga is fearless and pragmatic and beyond superstition. She boldly asserted at the court, “The sun is not harmful. It nourishes. It causes all things to grow. It will not kill the prince” (32). “She had a strong will and refused to believe that he would die even if a shaft of sunlight struck his brow. Viga vouched that she would not believe the tale. She told the king, “Old wives and young babes believe such tales. They should not frighten you, sire.” The king “liked her courage and admired her beauty and thought she would make his son a most suitable wife” (33). Even when the situation turns out to be antithetical, Viga is strong enough to face the confrontations that life offers her.

In *Sweeping Beauties*, the story of “A Tale to Remember” by Anne Le Marquand Hartigan, the tale ajars about a young energetic princess, buoyant in mind and body. “She spent many hours roaming the fields and hills, gaining knowledge and delighting in plants and animals. Her parents encouraged her in these pursuits, for they had a deep love of wisdom and wished their daughter to develop herself fully” (48). Thus, the tale topples gender norms and echoes the inversion of traditional gender role sexism.

Virginia Hamilton in “The Mer-Woman out of the Sea” narrates a flood in the city and the belief that a Mer-woman was on land. A woman screamed, “There is a mer-woman among us. Yes, A mermaid! Our city is drowned. The water will claim us all unless she is put back to sea” (79). A doctor’s assistant Asa believed the doctor was a beauty and that the doctor had shrunk her in a tall bell jar. The doctor denied and the mermaid was never found. The tale ends with the lines, “Still we know that men live and then they die. All the time. And maybe mer-women, mermaids do as well” (83).

The interrogation of the objectification of the female in terms of beauty versus ugliness or good versus evil projected itself as gender dynamics in the fairy tales. This, as

Naomi Wolf opines in “The Beauty Myth” worked against women. In the modern society, fairy tales victimise women on the basis of gender stereotypes and women are exploited for commercial purposes as in the Disney films. Wolf expatiates how the multi-billion cosmetic industry projected women as sexual objects in the arena of work, in the media and in the religious sphere by making an impact on men’s institutions and the power politics of women. In her work, *Vagina: A New Biography*, *Promiscuities*, *The Secret Struggle for Womanhood*, *Misconceptions* and *Fire with Fire*, womanhood, beauty, sex and a new female power are redefined. Wolf’s “empowering impassioned manifesto” fights “victim feminism” and champions a “power feminism” which celebrates female sexuality.

In “The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal” in *Children’s Fairy Tales*, Lori-Baker Sperry and Liz Grauerholz opine, “as women gain greater social status and independence, reliance on normative controls become more important to maintain gender equality at structural and impersonal levels” (181). Thus, the concept of beauty in gender dynamics in the characters like Cinderella, Red Riding Hood, Sleeping Beauty and other tales elucidates issues of beauty in terms of oppressing women as objects of beauty and thereby creates false gender identities. The depiction of beauty through gendered bodily imagery and metaphors where women’s bodies are pictured as bony, slim and beautiful are the reinforced messages of fairy tales that were rightly subverted in the reworkings. These concepts of beauty are questioned in the fairy tales, feminist fairy tales, the Disney versions and the revisionist Disney films.

Women are designed in fairy tale scholarship as objects of male gaze as in the canonical tale of *Sleeping Beauty* and this is redrafted in the feminist reworkings. Fairy tales that were created according to men’s fantasy by the masculine mind to influence children to suit a patriarchal society is subverted in the feminist texts. Many modern

feminist revisions and feminine versions of fairy tales as in the tales of Carter, Yolen, Namjoshi and many other feminist fairy tale authors are sabotaged to display a spectacle of the feminine fiesta of fantasy. In Angela Carter's "The Courtship of Mr. Lyon," the climax of the tale is nerve-racking as the author narrates,

Her tears fell on his face like snow and under their soft transformation, the bones showed through the pelt, the flesh through the wide tawny brow. And then it was no longer the lion in her arms but a man, a man with an unkept mane of hair and, how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, that gave him a distinct heroic resemblance to the handsomest of all the beasts. (51)

The tale of Mona is emotionally charged. The female protagonist is a strong self-willed girl who is quite adept at making her choices and living the life she loves amidst nature. In "The Moon Child", in *The Moon Ribbon and other Tales*, Yolen depicts how "Mona learned to play by herself, seeking out the few shady places in Solin. And on the day, she turned thirteen, forsaken by the children of her own age, she discovered the darkling woods" (48). In the text, *Sweeping Beauties*, in "A Tale to Remember" by Anne Le Marquand Hartigan, the message is "We must be watchful for ourselves and for our daughters, that sly enhancements don't take away our light" (49). In Virginia Hamilton's, *Her Stories*, the tales 'devoted to our mothers and grandmas, aunts and great aunts' is a lively spirited celebration of the metier, resilience, dreams and the exquisite gift of life and love from generation to generation.

Magic is a tool to resurrect the marginalised woman in fairy tales and feminist fairy tales. Magic, an important element in traditional fairy tales, is seen in a broad spectrum of fancy as including enchantment, spells, charms, visions and objects such as exotic food, enchanted castles, fantastic beasts, imaginative creatures and other such phenomena. Magic plays a pivotal role that is central to these tales. For example, magic is

seen in the tales of “Cinderella,” “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,” “Sleeping Beauty,” “Rapunzel” and similar texts. The passive female characters accost liberation not by free will, self-determination, kinship, law and justice or traits of character and good will, but by chance. The innocent child reader is thus gendered and deciphers that liberation comes through magic. Thus, the child enmeshed in patriarchal socially gendered norms cannot be rescued by the male hero except through enchantment which is symbolic of magic as is seen in the fairy tales. Day dreaming, magic, fantasy and transformation are rampant in these narratives. Men symbolised valour and heroism without magic.

The sexual symbolisation is discreet, but the presentation of romantic sexuality is repugnant as in “The Beauty and the Beast,” “Alice” and “The Frog Prince”. Magic is the paradigm of feminine wisdom in all the select feminist fairy tales. In *Sweeping Beauties*, in the tale of “Alice in Thunderland” by Maeve Kelly,” “The mambly rolled off the ring and down the hill and the deaferee followed him collecting raindrops as he went” (37). When the creature cried, “Mamba, famba, famba, mamba,” Alice, “slipped the creature into her pocket and followed everyone else out to the clearing” (37).

Food is life sustaining in fairy tales, but a subversion takes place where it is death dealing. The “poisoned apple”, “magical potions” and “sleep inducing soporifics,” introduced in the tales depict the subjugation of women who are made to appear foolish and gullible to food in these tales. In “Hansel and Gretel,” food, a metaphor that denotes safety is consumed by birds and leads to wilderness and danger. To the imagination of a child, the transformation of their everyday food into something dangerous and magical would have added an element of fear into their normal lives. Thus, fairy tales take up the normal and natural to transform them into the abnormal and hazardous. Yet in the

feminist fairy tales, food is depicted in “The Budgeen” by Margaretta D’ Arcy as a symbol of empowerment. Macha echoes,

Pull a cake, roll a cake
 Budgeen and thumb,
 I’ll bake you a cake
 As quick as they come. (51)

In the tale, “The Honey-Stick Boy,” Mellis lived with her parents and brought them berries and wine. “He lived with them happily for many days helping them to cook and gather food, watching for wild animals at night and singing softly to send them to sleep. And in all things, he was as human a son to them saves for these two. He did not eat, nor did he sleep” (19). He took care of his parents with food and care despite being the honey stick boy. Virginia Hamilton’s three true autobiographical stories provide readers with intimate personal accounts of events in African American history, from slave times to the present. *Her Stories* broaden our understanding of ourselves and others, our joys, fears and wishes as individuals and as a community. The stories, illustrations, and the author’s notes combine to create a remarkable book that honours hope and heritage.

Moulding children with consciousness of gender justice was iterated in the Fairy Tale and Feminist Fairy Tale genre. Fairy tales were pivotal in grooming children into civilised little girls and boys and termed the civilising process or the initiation into societal norms as “*femme civilizes*”. The civilised and the savage were two tropes that were endlessly debated in their salon by the aristocratic elite society. The savage was transformed intellectually, morally and physically by a series of deliberate changes in the fairy tales of Perrault, the Grimms, Andersen and many other fairy tale writers across the globe.

The traditional oral versions underwent changes in the varied fairy tale versions. Animals had central positions in these tales as in “Puss in Boots,” “Beauty and the Beast,” “The Frog Prince” and numerous other tales which portrayed animals accosting women and mocking at their stupidity. Human nature was castigated satirically in the guise of animals thereby escaping the tyranny of monarchs by self-censorship. In “Puss-in-Boots,” in *The Bloody Chamber* Angela Carter echoes,

For all cats have this particularity, each and everyone, from the meanest ally sneaker to the proudest, whitest she that ever graced a pontiff’s pillow- we have our smiles as it were, painted on. Those small cool, quiet Mona Lisa smiles that smile we must, no matter whether it’s been fun or it’s been not. So all cats have a politician’s air; we smile and smile and so they think we are villains. But, I note, this young man is something of a smiler himself. (69)

Fairy tales were a medium to convey gender politics and sexual exploitation without offence. The subliminal messages that were regarded closely depict the hierarchical French society where aristocracy is the pinnacle of female fantasy in society. *Femme civilise* had a strong foothold in the stories of Wilhelm Grimm in the 1800’s. As Zipes echoed, The Grimms collected folklore from the less privileged classes because they felt “it was important to share the rich story telling tradition with the bourgeois” (*Fairy Tale as Myth* 17).

The theme of ‘*femme fatale*’ became a symbol of the devious woman prepared to destroy the fabric of the family by arousing suppressed sexual desires. The evil witch, a female supernatural character, no longer believable in the enlightened France of the nineteenth century got transformed into a new character called, “*femme fatale*.” The ogress, the step mother, the shrewish witch, the beastly stranger were all getting transformed in new versions of fairy tale into the “*femme fatale*” or the “other.” This

gender construction of a helpless, disregarded and powerless female transformed to a vamp was a destruction of an ordinary female psyche. This underlines violence towards female sexuality.

The magical kiss or embrace as the transformation of a female from her docility to her sexual potential is a positive prerogative. Thus the male is depicted as life giving and life transforming and projected as the harbinger of all that is good and beautiful. In the feminist fairy tale, in “The Tale of The Brother” in *Kissing the Witch*, “Her smile was gentler than I could have expected. She opened her arms as wide as they would go and said, “Come in, come in.” (114). Virginia Hamilton in *Her Stories* broadens our understanding of ourselves and others, our joys, fears and wishes as individuals and as a community.

The concerns of gender identity in the fairy tales were addressed through subversion in the feminist reworkings. The fairy tale genre, like all other legendary and cultural products of the time was subject to much annexation and adaptation. It was deliberated as a genre of socialisation and product of moralisation. The appropriation of the classical conventions of the genre through feminist criticism marked the emergence of a new-fangled genre called Feminist Fairy Tales. The Fairy tales of Perrault, Andersen and the Grimm Brothers, questioned patriarchal debates and reinforced the subversion and transgression of patriarchal gender stereotypes. The fairy tales championed the voice of women in fairy tale literature, fairy tale scholarship and literary research on fairy myths and fairy lore. In “Rosechild,” the old woman wondered how to grow the child and boldly handled the issues of gendered identity as she was clueless as to how to raise the child. In *Feminist Fables*, in “Of Spiders” the disapproval of the abilities of a female child is voiced. The female characters presented in “Thorn Rose,” “The Little Prince,” “Bird Woman,” and “The Gods,” are silenced by patriarchy. Despite being princesses and

queens, they have not been able to rule. The girl in “The Lesson,” is silenced when she expresses her desire to be an emperor. The little princess in “Thorn Rose” is punished when she challenges her brother to a combat. “The Snow Maiden” eats snow to maintain her beauty in “Blood.” Rapunzel’s dream to marry a prince who would rescue her is upturned.

Feminist fairy tale theory critiques issues of gender identity in the fairy tale genre and reworks the representation of women in the primary fairy tale texts. The select feminist fairy tales question gender roles and reworks the representation of women in the primary fairy tale texts. The reworked tales query gender roles and patriarchal ideals to dismantle the androcentric assumptions of women to question domestic violence, sexual bias, sexual assault, sexual harassment and gender stereotyping in the portrayal of fairy tale heroines. The compliant heroines of fairy tales are reworked by a role reversal of characters like the character of Sylva in “The Moon Ribbon” and Mona in “The Moon Child.” In “The Tale of the Spinster,” the mother said, “Work will be your mother, she whispered; it will lead you through dark days; it will clear you a level place to rest at last . . . I begged her, for friendship, for sisterhood, to take all the gold I had but give me back my child The black river was sliding toward me, bringing who knew how many hardworking days, who knew which desires, which regrets” (13).

Gender stereotypes are overturned to redefine the heroines as strong women. The self-sacrificing and subservient female protagonists liberate themselves and battle women’s issues and problems. For instance, in “The Honey Stick Boy,” when Mellis is no more, the old woman tries to stay strong. “Now once more we have no child” said the old woman sadly, but she did not say it bitterly as she cherished her memories of the child with her husband beside her” (22). Thus, the gendering of critical discourse in fairy tales is critiqued by exploring male and female subjectivity. In *Her Stories*, Annie Christmas,

the infamous tarnished seven-foot-tall riverboat operator, shares the stage with Cat Woman, a New Orleans vampire; a tiny fairy folk makes a rare entrance and the unforgettable Catskinella, a strong-minded beauty, outwits her father and goes on to win her prince.

Motherhood and mother-daughter bonding are reworked in these texts as in the tale, "The Moon Ribbon" by Yolen. The tale ajars with Sylva cherishing a ribbon which was the sole possession that her mother left behind for her. The tale ends with Sylva plucking the strands of silver hair as she wove them into a ribbon and kept them in a wooden box. "When Sylva's child was old enough to understand, the box with the ribbon was put into her safekeeping, and she has kept them for her own daughter to this very day" (15). In Angela Carter's "The Erl-King," "A young girl would go into the wood as trustingly as Red Riding Hood to her granny's house, but this light admits of no ambiguities, and here, she will be trapped in her own illusion because everything in the wood is exactly as it seems" (85). Thus, fantasy, magic and intertextuality are used to subvert the plots of the traditional fairy tale texts.

Feminist fairy tale writers upturned old fairy tale plots by reversing gender issues, power politics and feminist anxieties as in Yolen's "Rosechild," a reworking of the tale of "Sleeping Beauty" in *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales*. In the select texts, women's concerns were discoursed. Feminist revisionist concepts in *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye: Breaking the Feminine myths and models* by Madonna Kolbenschlag and *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence* by Colette Dowling harped on this theme. Writers like Marina Warner critiqued fairy tales. According to Warner, "Fairy tales concern themselves with sexual distinctions, with sexual transgression, with defining differences according to morals and mores. This interest forms part of the

genre's engagement with the marvellous, for the marvellous is understood to be impossible" (133).

Alison Lurie opines that fairy tales told and retold are not necessarily representative of the genre. Rather, they are a consequence of silent revisions of subversive texts. In the feminist reworkings as in *Feminist Fables*, the princess in "Swayamvara" wished to marry a man who could whistle better than her. The princess in "Perseus and Andromeda" preferred to go with the dragon rather than the incompetent prince who was incapable of saving her life. Atlanta tried to escape her marriage as she was the swiftest runner and none could beat her. Hence weak and weeping women are juxtaposed with women who have the courage to confront hegemony. The girl in "Misfit," "Dragon Slayer," "Logic," "Broadcast Live," "Jack's Three Luck," "And then What happened" depict the liberated woman.

Strong female protagonists were created and crafted as bold stoic sheroes in the feminist revisionist tales. Feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Heather Lyons championed strong female protagonists. In Alison Lurie's article "Fairy Tale Liberation" she opines that the fairy tales of Lang are a good gift for a girl because of the subversive elements of the tale. She states "Often, though, usually in a disguised form, they support the rights of disadvantaged members of the population – children, women and the poor- against the establishment" (16). Marcia R. Lieberman, in her "Some Day My Prince Will Come" revisions the female characters in Lang's tales and points out how "beauty becomes a moral attribute to aspire to, and the girls who are singled out to win are those who are deemed 'the fairest of them all'" ("The Fairy Tale" 66).

Andrea Dworkin in her *Woman Hating* critiques that girls are brought up to fear men as well as their own kith and kin and opines, "The lessons are simple, and we learn them well. Men and women are different absolute opposites. The heroic prince can never

be confused with Cinderella or Snow White or Sleeping Beauty. She could never do what she does at all, let alone better Where he is active, she is evil and must be destroyed” (47-48). This is akin to Andrea Dworkin, who in *Woman Hating* expresses that good-looking docile women are rewarded for being passive and ugly while robust women are dubbed as bad tempered.

In the feminist fairy tales as in “The Moon Child,” Mona is victimised as a child shunned by her parents and all the other children. She was enfeebled in daylight and forced to be on her own. Swartwood was a dark dense forest feared by all Solinians of Solin, the land where the sun and daylight was worshipped. Mona on her thirteenth birthday ventured through the “soft mosses,” “ferns” and the pool, naming plants and rocks, prefixing the word ‘moon’ and collecting pretty blossoms as she savoured every day amidst Nature. When the other children discovered this and questioned her, she said “There is a place deep in the wood where it is neither night nor day, where sunlight and shadows meet and dance together in ever-changing ways.” The people of Solin who worshipped the sun chased her with axes believing her to be dark like the forests and she escaped into the bower. There she made herself happy making meals with ferns, dived through pools and meadows, moonstones and moonflowers. Years later when the children tried exploring the forest to find her, she bravely moved to the “place in the darkness where the sunlight and shadows met and danced together in ever-changing ways.” (54).

The feminist apprehensions of identity politics are echoed in *Feminist Fables* where the philosophies of a unitary self are discarded. The concept of plurality, shifting selves and transmigration of souls are endorsed to deconstruct hierarchisation of the living species in the broad spectrum of Namjoshi’s writings on the marginalised. “The Tiger’s Bride” echoes how the heroine ransoms into a glorious tiger who is a proper mate to the beast who will not disguise as human, but be true to himself. Puss-in-Boots is about

Figaro, a cat who loves a young man who is in love with a woman and in love with the young woman's cat and arranges their fortunes and those of the lovers. A sinister Erl king seduces a maiden whom he wishes to imprison. The maiden murders him before it is too late. "The Snow Child" is of a Count who wishes for a child as "white as snow" and echoes the importance given to the complexion of women. When the girl tries to pick a rose and is pricked, the count rapes her corpse and the cadaver melts with blood stains, a black feather and the rose she picked. Thus, the tales echo identity issues.

Feminist concerns that are addressed within a feminist framework depicts that the tales are sites of competing historically and socially framed desires. Bacchilega opines that these tales "make the mirroring visible to the point of transforming its effects" (10). In the work of Ellen Cronan Rose, *Through the Looking Glass: When Women Tell Fairy Tales*, three works by feminist authors are looked at with the purpose of understanding "what happens when the mirror reflecting the patriarchally defined identity is broken and women strike out independently to find their own identities" (203). In *Her Stories*, in "Annie Christmas" by Hamilton, the heroine who is described as "coal black," "tree-tall," "seven feet barefoot weighing two ninety nine pounds" was the strongest keel-boat operator on the Mississippi river who knew "New-Orleans town like the back of her hand." The description is interesting. "She dressed like a man, in harsh men's clothes. She had a moustache too. She could make fists hard and she would fight boatmen by the dozen and beat them down every time. Oh, Men were stone scared of Annie because she was tough!" (84) When the Mississippi rolled and the boat hit a sandbar, she was calm behind the captain and asked for a hug. When he hurt her, she got out of the boat into her paddle boat and presumably was drowned and washed to the shore and even the men she overthrew in hand wrestling and fist- fighting came to see her coffin where her son was in

black splendour. The barge vanished and the black folks of Orleans believed that Anne is “sitting on her own wood grave, singing a river tune to the thundering sky” (85).

The larger-than-life characters, like the epic plots are evocative as they journey together, get tricked, combat different experiences and use gender to express the gendered relations of the tale as in the depiction of brave Sylva in “The Moon Ribbon” and Mona in “The Moon Child.” In “The Tale of The Needle,” in *Kissing the Witch*, we discern, “I bent over the spinning wheel and set it back in its place. I sat down on the stool and said, Please show me how (182). Hamilton also provides readers with intimate personal accounts of events in African American history, from slave times to the present. The deconstruction of gender roles and the subversion of feminine images in the reworked tales lay bare the feminist apprehensions of not only the male and female characters, but also the apprehensions of the depictions of sex roles, sexuality and gender in the new genre. As Jack Zipes opines, “The fairy tale has not only been conceived and exploited to manipulate children and adults; it has also been changed in innovative ways to instil hope in its youthful and mature audiences so that no matter how bad their lives are, they can still believe that they can live happily ever after” (*Happily Ever After* 6).

The rearrangement of gender roles, gender inequality, autonomy and power in the reworkings upturn the traditional fairy tale plots and characterisation. The plots of the feminist fairy tales like “The Snow Child” in Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber* discussed issues of gender inequality, subjectivity, autonomy and power in fairy tales. The power imbalance and the questions of female identity in the traditional gendered scripts are critiqued as in this tale. The Count on his riding sojourns ardently wishes he had a girl as “white as snow and red as blood” and as “black as a feather” and before he completed his description, “a girl with white skin, red mouth and black hair” who was “stark naked” appeared in front of him and his wife. The Countess angrily tries to get rid of the girl and

gives her arduous tasks. When she is asked to pick a rose, she “pricks her finger on the thorn; bleeds; screams; falls” (91-92). When the dead girl is sexually hurt by the count, he was finished and there was nothing left of the girl, but a feather that a bird might have dropped, a bloodstain and the rose she had pulled off the bush. “The Count picked up the rose, bowed and handed it to his wife; when she touched it, she dropped it. “It bites!” (92).

The unequal gender norms in patriarchal structures are reworked by envisioning alternatives to gender stereotyped roles as in the select feminist tales. Role reversal is dealt with differently in the fantastic texts. Rosemary Jackson argues in her description of fantasy about the subversion in literary works. She states,

Each fantastic text functions differently depending upon its historical placing, and in different ideological, political and economic determinants, but the most subversive fantasies are those which attempt to transform the relations of the imaginary and the symbolic. They try to set up possibilities for radical cultural transformation by making fluid the relationship between these realms, suggesting or projecting, the dissolution of the symbolic through violent reversal or rejection of the process of the subject’s formation. (91)

The conflict between good and evil has been discoursed differently in fairy tales and feminist fairy tales. According to Lochhead, the conflict between good and evil-absolute evil in which “the child heroes of fantasy are caught up and taxed to the limit of their endurance has become a common theme” (qtd. in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 154). The power of good fairies is juxtaposed with evil witches and cruel step-mothers as in the tales like “Sleeping Beauty” and “Cinderella who refuse to speak back or empower themselves. In the traditional tales, evil is associated with powerful women who are normally wicked step mothers. In the Grimm version, the queen in

“Snow White and the Seven Dwarves” is wicked because she plans the murder of her step daughter. In Carter’s version, this trait saves the heroine from death. In the traditional tales, the goodness of the heroine is associated with obedience and docility.

Emma Donoghue in *Kissing the Witch*, in the story of “The Tale of the Handkerchief,” challenges the subservient roles that society has thrust on them. In “The Moon Ribbon,” Sylva escapes the evil makings of her stepmother by clinging on to the moon ribbon of her mother. In “The Moon Child,” Mona realises that she is a moon child in a land when the Sun God is revered and worshipped. Unable to bear the sunlight and feeling pale in the daylight, she boldly enters the dark, dense forests. She apprehends that she is detested by her parents, the other children and the society around her. She moves towards the thick woods to revel in the natural beauty of the forest and is one with nature.

The select feminist fairy tales dissected the canon of feminist fairy tales to depict the strong protagonists for voicing gender concerns. Namjoshi’s *Feminist Fables* is manifested by crafty transgressions and ironic visualisations of intense introspection which helped her to transgress generic conventions through realistic symbolic and allegorical presentations. The use of fantasy in the feminist subversion of the generic constructs is a technique of defamiliarisation in *Feminist Fables* to provide fictional space for unfolding chronicles of feminist and lesbian desire of experience. Namjoshi opines that compulsory heterosexuality as a repressive social structure subordinates women as ‘the other’ in the patriarchally dominated socio-cultural system. Judith Mitchell in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* contextualises, “Behind everyone there is a woman- the mother, both for the boy and the girl, the man and the woman” (119).

Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, discourses on “the reproduction of mothering” (1) and analyses mother-daughter bonding. Female identification is based not on fantasied or externally defined characteristics and negative identification, but on the

gradual learning of a way of becoming familiar in everyday life, and exemplified by the person with whom she has been most involved. The final role identification of a girl is with her mother” (52). The tensions between mothers and daughters are described in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* by Adrienne Rich, who states,

Thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted. . . . Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother’s bondage to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in us, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform a radical surgery. (235-236)

Female camaraderie in mother-daughter relations is ephemeral. Feminist fairy tales discuss mother- daughter-relationship and mother-daughter bonding as different from the traditional tales. In the feminist tales, Hamilton, Carter and Yolen echo the theme of female camaraderie. In the fairy tales, procreation and nurturing were associated with mothering, but in feminist fairy tales, the themes of birth and maternity are explored to point out that motherhood can be accepted or rejected by women. Adrienne Rich explains the same dynamics of the internalisation of motherhood in *Of Woman Born*. “Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has laid in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has laboured to give birth to the other.” She concludes “The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement” (226).

Feminist fairy tales question the reason why women are silenced in fairy tales. In Andersen's "The Little Mermaid", the mermaid who falls in love with a prince is willing to exchange her tongue for a pair of human legs. The theme of silence is apparent in Grimm's "The Twelve Brothers," "The Six Swans," "The Iron Oven" and "The Glass Coffin". Cinderella is quiet in the house and the ballroom due to fear. Sleeping Beauty is silent due to the curse of the babe. Ruth Bottigheimer in *Fairy Tales and Society*, states that "Sexual vulnerability also permeates tales of muteness" (129).

Feminist fairy tales rework the conventions of the genre to encode discourses that contradict or challenge patriarchal ideologies that are increasingly viewed as anachronistic in today's society. In Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables*, the author redeems the dignity of women as in the tales of "Owl," "The Doll," "For Adrienne Rich," "The Mouse and the Lion," which highpoint the abilities of women as rational beings. Other fables in *Feminist Fables* like "Anthropoi" present women being threatened by patriarchy. Thus women's voices as empowered individuals are portrayed as against silenced voices in feminist fairy tales. As Lieberman in "Some Day My Prince Will Come": Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale" suggests, "Millions of women surely have formed their psycho-sexual self-concepts and their ideas of what they could accomplish, what sort of behaviour would be rewarded and of the nature of reward itself, in part from their favourite fairy tales" (197).

The gender roles assigned to women depicted the female protagonists as weak and incompetent stereotypes who could not exist on their own. As Kay Stone in "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us" opines,

Within this socio-political and historical perspective, early feminists (1950's and 1960's) examined the roles of women embedded in the folk lores and fairy tales that have survived. They were found to be "an unfortunate source of negative

female stereotypes . . . [and] . . . one of the many socialising forces that discouraged females from realising their full human potential. (229)

In the feminist fairy tales of Yolen, Sylva breaks the silence by following the moon ribbon. Rosechild echoes the word “Mamma” and receives unconditional love; the old woman cherishes the memory of the honey stick boy in delight. Viga overcomes her sorrow of losing Sans Soleil and is pragmatic as she echoes, that sometimes, “what we believe is stronger than what is true” (39). The feminists who championed the retelling of tales “saw women as artificially separated from and wrongly considered unequal to men.” (Stone 234). New paradigms for female consciousness are redefined in the feminist fairy tales. Kay Stone further critiques the presentation of the female stereotypes and heroines thus,

Feminist writers have been attracted to the *Marchen* by its popularity as a genre of Children’s Literature. Initially, it was viewed in its form as the well-known fairy tale (primarily from the selected tales from the Grimms, Charles Perrault, Hans Christian Andersen and Andrew Lang) as an unfortunate source of negative female stereotypes. The passive and petty heroines who dominate fairy tales offer narrow and damaging role-models for young readers, feminists argue. Thus such writing has been a sharp critique of the genre. (234)

Feminist fairy tales portrayed the problems of women due to a wide variety of roles including the gendered roles of mothering, child rearing and nurturing. The feminist tales like “The Moon Ribbon” echoes the sorrow of Sylva being ill-treated by her step mother after her mother’s death and father’s remarriage. The distress and grief of Mona in “The Moon Ribbon” where she is detested by her parents evokes sorrow and sympathy. In “The Tale of the Cottage” in *Kissing the Witch*, female consciousness is echoed as in

the lines, “I watch him run through the trees. Snow begins falling over tracks. I lean head in door, wait for woman to wake” (141).

In *Feminist Fables*, gender roles are inverted and brave women are projected. In the tale, “In the Forest,” the distorted version of the fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel” depicts Gretel as “stronger, more daring and empowered than her brother.” Gretel is applauded as she is braver than her brother. In “Thorn Rose,” (10) the little princess is not “lady like and wore men’s clothes,” but challenges her brother to a fight to settle him. In “The Three Bears,” Goldilocks is depicted as a timid girl. “He makes such a sweet and good girl”. Namjoshi brilliantly inverts all situations. In “The Little Prince,” the stepmother brought up her daughter without curbing her spirit, and her stepson likes a woman who is “shy, docile and gentle” as she wanted the girl to reign alone.

The canon of fairy tales was rewritten by re-examining the genre of feminist reworking of fairy tales based on gender polemics, sexuality and identity to understand the ideologies of power. The tales like Carter in *The Bloody Chamber* are based on fairy tale motifs and the novelette is “more than twice the length of any of the other stories and more than thirty times the length of the shortest [the vignette ‘The Snow Child.’]” “The Lady of the House of Love” is of a vampiress who intends to feed on the soldier and accidentally cuts herself on entering the bed chamber. The soldier kisses it, but wakes up to find her dead and returns to the battalion. “The Company of Wolves” is the tale of a strong woman who escapes death and the threat is to be killed by the male predator by proceeding to seduce him. The last lines are “See! Sweet and sound she sleeps in granny’s bed, between the paws of the tender wolf” (118). “Wolf-Alice” is the tale of the sojourn towards subjectivity and self-awareness from the standpoint of a feral child. The nuns try to civilise her by teaching her social graces and the girl realises her own identity as a human being. The tales thus voice gender rights, gender equality and gender dynamics by

reinforcing gender stereotypes and gender appropriate roles to the gendered scripts by challenging gender inequality and female sexuality to subvert the patriarchal paradigms of a sexist society.

In *Feminist Fables*, Namjoshi includes tabooed topics to throw light on the cultural, social and political life of the times by rendering voice to the voiceless. She champions the voice of the muted marginalised individuals. The tales are a plea to the suppressed individuals to search and establish their identity. “No Frog in her Right Mind,” “The Monkey and the Crocodile,” “The Oyster Child,” “Further Adventures of the One-Eyed Monkey,” “Complaint,” “The Amazon,” “The Fabulous Beast,” and “Scheherazade” caricatures the androcentric society which dominates women. “A Room of One’s Own,” “And then what happened?” “The Fisherman’s Wife,” “The Ugly One,” “Legend,” “Of Mermaids,” and “The Milk White Mare,” assert the need to break the shackles of domination. *The Moon Ribbon and Other Tales* discard patriarchal bias and overthrow stereotypes.

The feminist tales, namely *The Bloody Chamber* critique the binary polarisation of women/men, good/bad, pretty/ugly, emotional/rational, inner/outer beauty and rework the quintessential fairy tale heroine to contest against the genderisation of female gender roles in fairy tales. In *Feminist Fables*, in the tale of Goldilocks, the little prince is born male, but the upbringing is conventionally feminine and distinguishes the concept of sex and gender in reading fairy tales and feminist fairy tales. Feminist fairy tales, like the tales of Virginia Hamilton critique the presentation of fairy tales as gendered and sexist in their plot and characterisation.

Feminist apprehensions were challenged in feminist fairy tales as mediators of social change. Women’s issues though disparate in diverse countries and cultures reverberate how the basic issues of liberation and emancipation are the voices of women

across the globe. Women's domination based on race, class, gender and sexism are questioned in the texts. All the feminist tales vouch that woman cannot be dubbed as docile because regardless of their sacrifice and work, they mother children, nurture them and work endlessly for the family and society to combat all odds.

Feminist Fables reflect how women and women's labour have been ignored by patriarchy and present women as victims of male abuse. "The Woman in Heart" is a conventional mother who after being widowed, works the entire day for the comfort of the family without any economic support. In "The Giantess," Namjoshi represents the need to battle stereotypical roles of women in a male dominated society. In Hamilton's tales, the patriarchal statuesque is challenged through reworking the old tales and re-discovering women from the women centred point of view. The select texts echo that male physical power must not be a reason for male domination over the female. For instance, in the feminist texts of Hamilton, the quest for identity and redefinition of the forte of the heroines in feminist fairy tales to alter the fate of a female cultural life is envisioned.

Androcentric theories that devalue women's status in a patriarchal sex-gender system are addressed in the select texts in a subtle manner.

Most men suffer from Myopia, and our own vision can be corrected by adjusting our lens to include a feminist view point. There is a moral imperative behind such an adjustment just as there is a moral to all art especially to feminist fairy tales and feminist criticism. Neither male nor female morality in American and English society is superior to the other. Yet we have governed our lives and continue to govern our lives according to 'male' norms as though they were moral and superior. (62)

Feminist fairy tales analysed gender stereotypes of the twentieth century from the point of view of gender and sexuality. Kay Stone's "Things Walt Disney Never told us" discourses on docile heroines. Cinderella, she argues, thrives because of her unwanted kindness and patience (88). Heroines like Sleeping Beauty and Snow White are so submissive that they have to be reawakened to life by men, and blameless heroines like the Goose girl and the six swans are victims of conniving and ruthless wicked women. This American role model of fortitude, kind-heartedness and inactivity is reinforced by Walt Disney. Feminist fairy tales are subverted through a re-telling of the tales of the characters of Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella and other fairy tale heroines by placing them in modern times. They overthrow the shifts in 'Once upon a time' and 'happily ever after'.

The self-sacrifice and subservience of women characters are mentioned in *Sweeping Beauties*, in the tale of "The Budgeen" as Macha took off, Old Morrigan said, "You already have one gift, the gift of fearlessness: I give you two more- the gift of speed and the gift of the budgeen recipe" (53). As she flew past rivers and lakes, she saw an unhappy man, Crunnchu with a miserable budgeen and in a few minutes she baked a fine shiny brown one and he was happy he needn't go to the king anymore. They lived happily ever after and after a while the King mentioned that the land was cursed without noses and Crunnchu let the cat out of the bag. He was scared Macha would be killed but Macha knew she had the gift of speed to protect her. So she asked for the king's horse to race with hers. She galloped, "swallowed the king, right out of his saddle. She kicked her legs, danced; shot the king from her thighs and the king fell off the dust and told him that she has a new one in the sack on her back" (54). How the women laughed to see him crawl to put it on! "If men steal women's work," she said and "claim it for their own, I will not

just swallow one, but the lot of you!” And the men never dared pull such a stroke ever again” (54).

Feminist revisionist myth making is well presented by Namjoshi. *Feminist Fables* reworks socio-cultural myths that embody patriarchal perspectives according to women’s perceptions to emancipate women to overthrow patriarchal dominance and ensure gender justice to feature revisionist myth making. Namjoshi’s fabulations evoke entertainment and magic as in *Feminist Fables* which encompasses ninety-nine stories to deconstruct the patriarchal world from the feminist stance. Nursery songs, rhymes, tales from *Panchatantra*, *The Tales of Aesop*, and the tales of Perrault, Grimms and Andersen, as intertexts reconnoitre themes from human existence and humanity to cross-examine conformist structures of thought and ethics to look at life and experience the universe from a different perspective.

The feminist fairy tales of the select authors gradually overthrew the “Once upon a time” fairy tale which concluded with “happily ever after” endings. Feminist fairy tales critiqued stereotyped representations of women in the male authored texts by subverting fairy tale texts and resisting the patriarchal designs of the male authored texts. The images of androgyny in the traditional fairy tale texts fail to liberate the power of the feminine from the discourse of patriarchy.

Feminist fairy tales depict the need to endow strength to empower women as heroic so as to unfetter women from being gendered stereotypes. Showalter in her gynocritical project “has focussed on the multiplying signifying systems of female literary traditions and intertextualities” and this holds true for feminist writers of fairy tales too (“A Criticism of One’s Own” 363). Liberation of the feminine from the constraints of patriarchy through *écriture feminine* was the solution to champion women. Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which Is Not One* states that woman is indefinitely other in

herself, so that another meaning could always be seen weaving itself. To rescue women from author centred empiricism, they considered sexuality as a writing effect of the texts and not as works assigned by biologically determined females.

In *Feminist Fables*, “From the Panchatantra” tells the tale of a poor Brahmin who prays to lord Vishnu for a son. The disappointed brahmin is blessed with a daughter, but manages to teach her all that he knows.” Though only a woman, she was a brahmin, so she learned very fast . . .” (1). The Brahmin prays again and the Lord assures that his desire will be granted the next time. The Brahmin in the next birth becomes a woman and bears eight sons and wonders if it is a boon or a curse? The Brahmin girl requests for a human status and the Lord appoints a committee. Namjoshi laughs at the idea that Gods are prey to gender hegemony and caste discrimination.

The androgynous poetics in the feminist fairy tales of Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*, like Showalter’s *A Criticism of One’s Own* identifies several phases: “an androgynous poetics” denying the uniqueness of a female literary consciousness and advocating a single universal standard or critical judgment before the Women’s Liberation Movement. There was a “feminist critique” of male culture and a “Female Aesthetic,” celebrating women’s culture in the 1960’s. The new phase of gynocritics in the 1970’s, the ‘gynestic’ or poststructuralist feminist criticism dealing with the “feminine” in philosophy, language and socio analysis in the late 1970’s and gender theory took new turns. On the lines of *Thinking about Women*, by Mary Ellmen and *Towards A Recognition of Androgyny* by Carolyn Heilbrun, voices against sexual polarisation were raised in the feminist fairy tales. The “female aesthetic” celebrated an intuitive female consciousness in the interpretation of women’s texts. The select feminist writers in their writing concentrated on subversion in *avant-garde* literature. Namjoshi, as a lesbian and diasporic writer exhibits the polarities of power dynamics in her radical

retelling of feminist fables where the revisionist fables and myths are inverted as subversive, volcanic and transformational. The inversion is evident in *Kissing the Witch* as in “The Tale of The Voice,” where the author narrates that at the balls all the young women were silent. “Had they lost their voices too? Even their bodies were silent, always upright, never loosening their lines; they walked like letters on a page” (198).

Gynocriticism and women writing on gender and genre began to be identified as a central subject of feminist criticism and literature in the female literary tradition. With Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, gynocritics were made visible and “the analysis of the female talent grappling with a male tradition” pronounced the female literary text and the feminist critical test as the sum of its “acts of revision, appropriation and subversion” . . . and its “differences of genre, structure, voice and plot” (Abel, 2). In *Feminist Fables*, Namjoshi addresses gender bias by sanitising the patriarchal content and hegemonic views in the work.

The house made of candy, the witch wicked; but now that they are outcasts and must live in the forests, to whom can they turn? Gretel takes charge. She is braver and wiser. Besides it is distinctly possible that in this wild witch’s world she stands a better chance. She tells Hansel to wait behind a tree and walks up the path and knocks on the door. The witch lets her in. Hansel is frightened. The house of candy has swallowed her up. After a while the door reopens. Gretel calls out. ‘It’s all right, little Hansel. You can come in now.’ But the witch frightens him. He runs back to his wicked stepmother. When he grows to be a man, he will fight them all. Gretel doesn’t, she stays on. (93)

The leitmotif of sexism, sexuality and homosexuality in fairy tales, the subversion of false gendered identities, the reversal of gender roles, the concept of motherhood and mother daughter-bonding, the male gaze, sisterhood and bonding, intertextuality and

decolonising the feminine mystique are feminist concerns in the reworkings. Thus these feminist fairy tale women writers rewrite female sexuality by challenging the societal norms and the literary conventions which domesticated women in the literary motifs presented by the male writers.

The intention of these select women writers is to understand the socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts in the evolution of fairy-tale literature. It comprehends how the reception of the genre has been well received and how women have shaped and represented the identity of women in the subverted texts to create a feminist fairy tale scholarship. In *Feminist Fables*, “The tale of ‘The Gods,’” is of a childless couple who blessed with a daughter pray for divine blessings for the child every day. The child excels in academics, music and all arenas, but the expectations of femininity are interrogated as she is a woman. “To be so dammed good is after all, ‘not womanly’” (37).

The feminist fairy tale writers critiqued stereotyped representations and upturned the male-centred fairy tale plots as mediators of social change by inspiring the readers to rethink the theme of inversion of sexism, sexuality and homosexuality. As Simone de Beauvoir opines, “Everything still encourages the young girl to expect fortune and happiness from some prince charming rather than to attempt by herself the difficult and uncertain conquest” (126). The tales of these select writers taken up for study overthrow the notions of sex roles and male domination. Jack Zipes in his introduction in *Don't Bet on the Prince* says,

Or to put it in another way, a woman's life is far from that of a fairy tale and feminist fairy tales depict the struggles women undergo to define their lives in opposition to the daily lives. The idealisation of motherhood to define the myth of motherhood as pristine and ideal and the truth that motherhood is not always perfect bliss and young mothers suffer anxiety, frustration, lack of empathy and

intellect which result in cruelty meted out to children is a socio-biological explanation they experience. (2)

In *Feminist Fables*, the little princess is more accomplished than her brother because she wins the tests of tennis, hunting, drinking and mathematics, but the king who is disappointed when her son lets the daughter rule. Yet male power is redefined when people bring the prince back to power asking for restoration of order. In “The Tale of The Kiss” in *Kissing the Witch*, Donoghue echoes, “What I found instead was power. I never sought it; it was left out for me to stumble over” (209).

These feminist fairy tales mock male centric ideas and are therefore a lens through which power imbalance is sorted out by subversion. A radical understanding on how to unearth the issues of freedom of women is voiced. The feminist fairy tales of Namjoshi comprehend female expressive behaviour to study the complexities of human culture from varied perspectives through this genre. Subversion is not mere substitution of the feminine in the masculine space and place, but rewriting the myths through role reversal as in the character of Andromeda asking for a change of roles to turn into a monster leaving the prince behind.

Namjoshi in the *Feminist Fables* reworks the patriarchal narrative of Perseus by liberating the princess and the dragon from the constraints of the conventional constructs. As a feminist fairy tale author, she rewrites the ‘happily ever after’ Cinderella tale with the query as to what happened thereafter. The feminist fairy tales inverted ‘male dominance’ and ‘female subordination’ to redefine the socio-cultural definition of gender. The pervasiveness and persistence of the feminine beauty ideal of the fairy tale is presented as a normative feminine beauty ideal and a cultural product.

The feminist tales reconceptualised sexuality in terms of subjectivity and identity on the basis of Freudian, Derridean and Foucauldian theories as is comprehended in the

texts of Yolen, Carter, Namjoshi, Feminist Fairy Tale Collective and Hamilton. The psychological repression of women is fought out in the select feminist tales by resentment against male domination and treachery or male sexuality to interrogate the sexual promiscuity of the male and re-define power relations and power structures.

Feminist fairy tales and feminist fabulation thus create a new future for women and attempt to invite women to blur gender boundaries. The select feminist fairy tales included in this study appropriates a wide variety of genres to erase patriarchal literary canons and chalk out new territories by crafting women centred talks and tales told from a woman's perspective. The alternative narratives offer correctives to patriarchy's problematic depiction of humanity which are pronounced as feminist fabulations. The use of the fantasy of utopia and dystopia in order to efface the projection of women stereotypes in the male canonical texts and a critical re-evaluation of power, politics and combating of ego is perceived in all the select texts.

The exploitation of the female body in the name of compulsory heterosexual relationships is pictured in the select texts. These feminist reworkings re-echo voices from the old texts to articulate feminist and gendered viewpoints to project a feminist vision of feminist fabulation. This is done by questioning patriarchal laws which relegate the marginalised to a secondary role, comprehending fantasy as a subversive literary form to empower the marginalised. The fantasy narratives overthrow conventions of presentations of gender stereotyping, gender identities and gender roles by projecting feminist visions of future in utopia/utopian tales that deconstruct the existing socio-cultural systems. This exposes the arbitrariness of all such social constructs and creates paradigm shifts regarding human relations through metafictional devices to unmask the constructed nature of patriarchal reality.

The feminist utopian tales like speculative fictions employ post-modernist techniques like self-actualisation to promote the hegemony of the female in a male dominated world and rework myths to question conventional systems of thought and morality to present gender justice. All the select feminist fairy tale writers champion gender justice by challenging and deconstructing diasporic and feminist narratives of culture to critique culture through universal paradigms. Myths embodying patriarchal perspectives are considered an inhospitable terrain for women writers who invert myths that eulogise male characters, Gods, heroes and damsels in distress. The fabular world of female upliftment in the feminist fairy tales, rework the fabular world of fantasy and deconstruct the fabrication of the vicious male imagination in all the select tales. Thus, the construct of patriarchal narratives in the tales are reverted by reverting the patriarchal designs of gender hierarchy and male hegemony.

The characters of feminist fairy tales intrude the male space and patriarchal territories by role reversal to emancipate the “New Woman” who magnifies into heroic dimensions by candid expressions as a satire where women’s issues are presented. For example, in the feminist fairy tales as in *Feminist Fables*, The Loathly Queen Guinevere decides to take up the “Women’s Question” but finds no enthusiastic women. The king sends a knight who comes back with a loathly lady and is changed into a beautiful lady overnight. Everyone is excited that the woman’s question is solved by exposing the confessions of patriarchal male supremacy. Women refuse to be objects of sexual gratification in male and female discourse and explore complex emotions and riddles of the mind and body with an artistic vision that is conscious of the cultural milieu. “I would ask her to come live in my cave and learn all I knew and teach me all I didn’t. I would give her my heart in a bag and let her do with it what she pleased. I would say the word love” (*Kissing the Witch* 227).

The creation of a contemporary feminist ideology and female literary tradition address the reconceptualisation of heterosexuality as a norm and question how the crucial nomenclatures for lesbianism can be othered. Thus, the androcentric culture is reworked to give a subversive twist through an imaginary rewriting and reconstitution of the text. The re-reading of canonical texts enforces rejection of patriarchal ethos. In *Sweeping Beauties*, Ms White complained that her life was ‘like a bad fairy tale’ for the past ten years. However, the spokesperson for the Irish Council for Civil Liberties confirmed in the Court of Justice that “it was exploring the setting up of a Working Party to look at the implications of this case for all gold-diggers” (59).

Kissing the Witch, comprehends, “There are some tales, not for telling, whether they are too long, too precious, too laughable, too painful, too easy to need telling or too hard to explain. After all, after years and travels, my secrets are all I have left to chew on in the night” (225). Thus, the equest narratives dismantle the humanist paradigms of singular and definitive identity by juxtaposing dream and reality, fact and fiction, myth and metaphor. The imaginative inventiveness of this anti-canonical counter discourse through subversion dethrones identity markers as arbitrary symbols of patriarchal discourse.

Problematizing gender subverts and opens up new vistas of the subordination of the marginalised in contemporary studies on gender. The nuances and idioms of gendered writing vary from text to text, but the theorisation of women’s subjugation evocatively expresses the systematic organisation of male hegemony that suppresses female articulation. Namjoshi, in “Her Mother’s Daughter” in *Feminist Fables*, refuses to see the point in her feminist daughter’s argument that women had all along been relegated to a secondary position in the man-made world. She believes: “that’s how it should be” (96).

The appropriation of women's bodies and challenging phallogocentric definitions of women in the feminist reworkings are revolutionary voices in the wilderness. In *Sweeping Beauties*, in the tale of "Ms Snow White Wins Case in High Court" by Clodagh Corcoran, Ms Justice Good Bye outlined the duties which Ms White was expected to perform. She was forced to get up two hours before any of the seven men and prepare their breakfast. At the same time, she had to gather wood to light the fire and ensure that the house was clean by the time the seven decided it was time for them to get up. She herself did not get anything to eat until they left" (57).

Each and every text selected for study is stunningly attractive snippets and critiques of characters portrayed with courage and strength. They project how the female body has transformed itself into being an instrument of power. The normativity of heterosexual love has been scoffed in these tales. The feminist fairy tales of the select writers recreate the utopian recuperation of a female wholeness entrenched in literary and cultural constructs. The select texts are encoded by patriarchy in the distinctive teleology of the feminist fairy tale genre. Female sexuality in the select texts explores interstitial spaces of heterosexual borders and challenges body politics to cross borders of sexual territories. They sculpt a subversive idiom free from the lustful snare of gendered chimerical realms of the dominant gender. The select texts and their authors thereby resurrect the canonical texts to carve an independent niche for themselves in this modern posthuman world that envisions gender equality, gender justice and gender harmony.