

Abstract

“Fiesta Feminina”: Blurring the Boundaries of Gender in Select Feminist Fairy Tales

The Feminist Fairy Tale genre as an inversion of the fairy tale genre, celebrates the innate strength of women re-envisioned in feminist post cultural thought. The reworking of the cultural norms and shared beliefs of the traditional gender roles and patriarchal values crafted by the male authored European canon of fairy tales which is part of children’s literature is analysed. The present study “‘Fiesta Feminina’: Blurring the Boundaries of Gender in Select Feminist Fairy Tales” challenges the objectification of women in the select fairy tales of Perrault, Grimm and Andersen through the reworked genre. It attempts to showcase the inversion of gender constructs using the template of gender as a prism of analysis to subvert the gendered socio-cultural frameworks imposed on women in the traditional tales. The objectives of the thesis are to contextualise the subversion of gender roles, to dismantle gendered norms through deposing patriarchal dominance and to express how culture naturalises as normative, certain hegemonic practices through powerful discourses. The thesis addresses the dynamics of power and gender to redefine the construct called ‘woman’.

The thesis showcases how similar gender concerns are addressed by the select feminist authors who hail from different geographical nations across cultures. All the texts celebrate women, gender and ‘beyond gender’ in feminist fairy tales to blur the boundaries of gender. The thesis focuses on the intersection of feminism and the feminist reworkings through theoretical readings on women’s writing and gender studies by throwing light on how men and women were seen as binaries due to gender polarization in a patriarchal social order. An investigation into the feminist perspectives of gender and sexuality in the select works namely, *The Moon Ribbon* by Jane Yolen, *Feminist Fables* by Suniti Namjoshi, *The Bloody Chamber* by Angela Carter, *Kissing the Witch* by Emma Donoghue, *Her Stories* by Virginia Hamilton and *Sweeping Beauties* by the Irish

Feminist Collective addresses the context of gender and genre of the postmodern feminist fairy tales by combating the prejudices of sexism and gender. The feminist fairy tales were neither identified as a genre nor discoursed as a subject of debate of comparative study across cultures involving the select authors in feminist fairy tale scholarship or in fairy tale studies in World literature. They were not subject to close analysis to explore the plains of gender subversion, motherhood studies, emerging new woman identities, the disillusioned feminine mystique, and the emerging intersectionality of the genre. The thesis is divided into six chapters which includes introduction and conclusion. The core chapters depict how the genre is re-imagined and contextualised by celebrating women and gender by blurring the boundaries of gender.

The thesis presents an overview of women studies, feminist ideologies and gendered reworkings. It juxtaposes the fairy tale and feminist fairy tale corpus and addresses the gendered and sexual identities and patriarchal paradigms of the genre. The study introduces the texts and the writers taken up for analysis, underscores the need to interrogate the “happily ever after” of fairy tales from feminist and gendered standpoints. The male-controlled tyrannical expressions of patriarchy in the male authored texts question the socio-cultural literary aesthetics. The research breaks the myth of the self-sacrificing woman and redeems children’s literature by comprehending the ambit of gender and genre. The objectification of the female and the victimisation of the feminine as cultural erasure inspire the discovery of a new feminine ethos by presenting the intersection of gender and genre in the select feminist fairy tales. The thesis celebrates gender in the select works and champions the ‘New Woman’, ‘the feminine mystique’, ‘performativity of gender’, ‘matricentric feminism’ ‘self-actualisation’ and ‘intersectionality’ to weave a tapestry to efface the hegemonic aesthetics of the patriarchal paradigms of the sugar-coated tales to emancipate women. The conclusion sums up the study with the major findings, limitations and scope for further study. The study re-vision the enrichment of children’s literature and society by the academia, through gender positive initiatives of social relevance to envisage a world beyond gender.