



## PERFORMATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF FANTASTIC FAIRIES

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### Abstract

Fairy tales has fascinated human minds from time immemorial. It evolved as a part of the oral tradition of language. Every Nations' culture is best expressed through its fairy tales. The tales may vary from place to place and from time to time. But ultimately they are created to cater some basic social and individual needs. Fairy Tales are generally a cultural byproduct. Fairy tales have been loved throughout the centuries by children and adults alike. It is because they deal with ethical questions that affect people every day. And some of these stories belong to the great literature of the world because of how richly they put together the binaries, such as, good and evil, the strange and the ordinary, surface and depth, appearance and reality--opposites which we want to make sense of in our own lives. The paper entitled *Performative and Transformative Role of Fantastic Fairies* tries is to examine the cultural relevance of fairy tales by giving emphasis on popular culture, social identity, performativity, patriarchy, hegemony Gender and Feminism in selected Western fairy tales.

**Key words:** gender, feminism, hegemony, patriarchy, performativity, social identity, cultural relevance, popular culture.

Fairy tales are important cultural artifacts because they encompass human experiences. Fairy Tales accumulates the pulse of human existence, thoughts and expectations. These tales can work to uncover cultural trends, psychological aspects and moral values of the people who told them, as well as illustrate social expectations and norms in a particular group of people. Most of the tales ministers the showdown between good and evil, wisdom and ignorance, joy and suffering, love and anger, moral and justice, and so on. These tales can be analysed in different perspectives like structuralist, archetypal, psychoanalytical, and cultural/feminist/gender studies.

This paper intends to explain the cultural relevance of fairy tales by giving emphasis on

popular culture, social identity, performativity, patriarchy, hegemony, gender and feminism in selected western fairy tales.

Gender identities are constructed and constituted by language. In Judith Butler's words "Gender is a corporeal style, an act, a strategy which has cultural survival as its end" (139). Gender is created through repetitive performance of gender in different medium. Fairy tales being a cultural byproduct bears seeds of the gender identity. Performativity is not radical choice and it is not voluntarism, it has to do with repetition. Fairy tales reiterated the gender identities and the individual gradually assimilated to the pattern.

In fairytales, one of the common motifs used is the allocation of gender roles to the

characters. Females are usually depicted as feminine, submissive, weak and dependent upon the stronger males. They usually act as caregivers, enhancing the gender role ideology which suggests that women should be stationed “behind the scene”. The males in fairytales, on the other hand, are portrayed as masculine, authoritative and are usually introduced as heroes saving the female protagonists. Fairytales are an important socializing agent for propagating the gender roles in a society. Being consistently exposed to such motifs, people likely to view such gender role ideologies as cultural norms and subconsciously adhere to it.

R. W. Connell in his *Masculinities* (2005) has labeled traditional male roles and privileges hegemonic masculinity, encouraged in men and discouraged in women:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (178)

Fairytales were written when patriarchal society still dominates; they undoubtedly reflect the societal situation then and thus reinforce traditional gender roles of men and women. But this stance of fairy is challenged when it became a part of the popular culture.

Fairy Tales emerged as a part of popular culture because of the various interpretations and retellings produced by the massive readers. Thus it is widespread and become a common public text. As a part of this popular culture the tales transgress the boundaries of cultural power and it exposes the arbitrary character of cultural classification through challenging the notions of a high or low culture.

The digital revolution has significantly contributed to the adjoining of fairy tales to popular culture. The frequent use of fairy tale’s elements in the popular media ensures the genre in the public consciousness. Donald Hasse noted in the Greenwood Encyclopedia *Folktales and fairy Tales* (2016)

As a genre characterized by endless variations and adaptability, the fairy tale lends itself especially well to reinvention under these circumstances. As technology continues to advance and the visual experience becomes increasingly creative and interactive, it will be interesting to see how the production and reception of the fairy tale changes to take advantage of these new possibilities. (2)

Popular culture makes use of poaching and relevance, the two closely connected concepts to alter fairy tales. These two have heavily contributed to the development of a cultural formation known as the popular. In the words of Fiske “relevance requires connections between the text and the social experience of the reader, and if the relevance is absent, people will not be motivated to engage with such texts or gain pleasures from them” (186). In order to fill the gap of relevance readers adopt their own experiences to create relevance through poaching.

Poachers do not feel intimidated by the authority of the text, they select the parts that are meaningful and carry relevance for their experience and ignore the parts that are not. Fiske comments that by poaching “the essence and aesthetics of the text is ignored, its value rather lies in the relevance it can offer” (145).

These tales have served to legitimize the dominant gender system by highlighting the importance of the feminine beauty ideal. Apart from that, these tales portray that females need to be rescued by a man. It teaches women to rely on other people to save them, particularly men. Most of the tales represent women to be weak, obedient and passive. Continuing to portray female characters in this way results in people conforming to dominant norms and conceptualizations, including those related to gender, even if we question or reject these norms.

The reputed critic Barbara G Walker in *Feminist Fairy Tales* (1996) have commented on the traditional sexist roles women have played in fairy tales that

At a time when men and women are viewed as equals by much of the population, it is crucial that the stories children are exposed to reflect the variety of paths offered to them in real life. (92)

In this context emerges the idea of poaching. Women are no more ready to view the tales in patriarchal framework. They wanted to relate the story by giving importance to the female characters and ignoring the male characters and their roles overall. Poaching allows them to read selectively. They try to analyze the female characters as one whose presence is needed to fulfill the life of the male characters. It is the sufferings and patience of the female that necessitates the success of the male protagonist. Women in their reading highlight the role of women by abandoning the males.

Poaching in this context becomes a way to resist and claims relevance. Fairy tales become part of the popular culture as a result of the resistance from these subordinated people who resent their subordination. Thus the tales once functioned as performative become transformative because of its embracement to popular culture.

Re-vision- the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history. It is act of survival. Adrienne Rich

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