CHAPTER ONE
CHAPTER- ONE

A ‘FAIRY TALE’ INTRODUCTION

“The genuine writer of fairy tales is a seer of the future. (With time, history must become a fairy tale- it will become once again what it was at its inception.” (Novalis 506).

Fairy Tales serve a very crucial function in our daily lives cutting deep into our minds and shaping our ideas about ourselves and the world around us. These tales over ages have acquired ‘mythical connotations’; at times, even surpassing the popularity of myths. They have now become part and parcel of what Jung called the ‘Collective Unconscious’; their residues still residing at the ‘lumber room’ (Carter 49) of common human experience. Human civilization over the ages have assimilated and internalized fairy-tale motifs, patterns and archetypes, without being aware of this fact. Folk and Fairy tales retain such extraordinary allure and magnificence that their cultural importance can be held analogous to mythology. A superficial look at the role fairy and folk tales compels people to regard them as non-serious, non-realistic modes of entertainment. But if we attempt to look behind the magnificence and wonder of these tales we can discern them to be full of worldly wisdom and realism. They are in fact, a vital link that connects us to our past, providing glimpses into the lived experiences and aspirations of our forefathers. Their importance in our lives have been commented upon and highlighted by people like- Albert Einstein, to Ernest Bloch to Tolkein, etc. Tales or fairy tales are as vital as history itself. They cannot be discarded or belittled as ‘idle fantasizing’. Even with the advent of technology this traditional form of entertainment have not lost its allure and magnetism as “the fairy tale is a poetic vision of man and his relationship to the world, a vision that for centuries inspired the fairy tale hearers with strength and confidence because they sensed the fundamental truth of this vision” (Luthi 19). Tales or Fairy Tales or, “tongue meats” (Warner) have been there from the beginning of human civilization. Defining these tales and tracing their origin is nearly impossible, as they have been edited, curtailed, modified, tempered with, by their collectors; who didn’t write them verbatim with their virgo intacto.
In the Introduction of *Angela Carter’s Book of Fairy Tales*, which Carter herself edited few weeks before her death, she defined the genre as:

the term ‘fairy tale’ is a figure of speech and we use it loosely, to describe the great mass of infinitely various narrative that was, once upon a time and still is, sometimes, passed on and disseminated through the world by word of mouth- stories without known originators that can be remade again and again by every person who tells them, the perennially refreshed entertainment of the poor. (Carter xi)

Fairy tales are ‘purveyors of cultural and social values and beliefs’, apparently intended to educate and indoctrinate young children and audience in general. The term ‘fairy tale’ conforms to the written tradition; earlier, tales were reserved to the oral tradition, and were seldom written. These oral tales in the words of Jack Zipes: “reflected the customs, beliefs and rituals of the ‘tribe’, and were stories told for adults as well as children” (Zipes xii). Since time immemorial tales- both folk and fairy tales have been used to socialize and acculturate children, even before they conceive the knowledge of the world around them. Exposure to this means of entertainment especially, fairy tales from a nascent age leaves an indelible mark on the minds of their listeners. This ability to capture and enthrall the minds of the audience to such an extent bestows greater significance on this seemingly trivial, ‘nonsensical’ genre. The human civilization for centuries has been thriving on listening and telling stories and tales; lending expression to their dreams and aspirations, sometimes de-familiarizing the common place experience in order to infuse it with wonder and marvel. Commenting upon the indispensable worth of folk and fairy tales Zipes says: “Folk and Fairy tales illuminate the way. They anticipate the millennium. They ferret out deep-rooted wishes, needs, and wants and demonstrate how they all can be realized. In this regard folk and fairy tales present a challenge, for within the tales lies the hope of self-transformation and a better world.” (Preface, 1979 ed. xi)

Tales are not only limited to the arena of entertainment, as Zipes asserts in the Preface of his anthology of feminist fairy tales- *Don’t Bet on the Prince* that: “…stories and fairy tales do influence the manner in which children conceive the
world and their places in it even before they begin to read” (xii). With the inclusion of these oral tales in the literary framework, they got reserved to the province of children only, who were guided and taught to imbibe the prescribed gender roles and social functions that these tales promoted. With the advent of education, this ‘entertainment of the poor’ (Carter xi) caught the fancy of literate middle-class; who now wrote them down in the parlors and salons of seventeenth-century France, for the entertainment of the bourgeoisie. These middle-class transcribers/collectors of fairy tales infused their moral and didactic impulses in the tales to reaffirm and establish the status quo, leaving no space for revolutionary and emancipating possibilities. The popularization and circulation of these tales in French salons and parlors has been termed by de Vos and Altman as a ‘fashionable renaissance’ (1752). The flexibility and viability that this oral tradition carries attracted the attention of the now-educated ‘enlightened’ middle-class who saw in these tales the space to accommodate their moral vision of the world. The transition from oral to literal has been interpreted by fairy tale critic Jack Zipes as,

As a written, innovative, privately designed text which depended on the technological development of printing and the publishing industry, the fairy tale in the eighteenth century excluded the common people and addressed the concerns of the upper classes. It was enlarged, ornamented, and filled with figures and themes which appealed to the furthered and aesthetic tastes of an elite class. (Magical Spell 13)

That is how this seemingly trivial, ‘childish’ and ‘fantasy’ corpus gained such a grand impetus in the salons of France and later on in other parts of the world. Every country has had its own corpus of fairy and folk tales, which can now be claimed as part of their ‘cultural heritage’; preserving which is as significant as anything. Tales or Fairy tales showcase the repressed, marginalized and sidelined paraphernalia of the common human experience hence, to be able to glimpse through the narrative threads can lead us towards a better knowledge and understanding of our past; that we otherwise cannot go back to.
Though folk and fairy tales have been continuously the target of critics and writers alike as having no connection with the real conditions of living; hence like opium dazzling and numbing the minds of the listeners with dreams of ‘faraway lands’, some people have been able to find through the fantastic web, the door into reality. The value system and the social structure that these tales contains are reflections of the society that these tales were ‘born’ into. The lack of a specific time and of geographical boundaries in these oral narratives renders them universal; true representative of all human experience. Fairy tales should not be confined as merely fantasy, aloof from reality of everyday experience; the flights of fantasies and dream-sequences are always wedded to a firm and astute consciousness of place, time and social context. The traditional and oft-quoted fairytale dictum “Happily ever after” is an elusive, ever-fading state but, indispensable and crucial to sustain the human existence. We can say that fairy tales are truths disguised as lies, sugar-coated realities of our material existence. One such person is Marxist thinker Ernest Bloch, who sees the utopian impulse behind this fantastic genre. Commenting on the positive and life-sustaining thrust of these tales he says:

Despite the fantastic side of the fairy tale, it is always cunning in the way it overcomes difficulties. Moreover, courage and cunning in fairy tale succeed in an entirely different way than in life, and not only that: it is, as Lenin says, always the existing revolutionary elements that tie the given strings of the story together here. While the peasantry was still bound by serfdom, the poor protagonist of the fairy tale conquered the daughter of the king. While educated Christians trembled in the fear of witches and devils, the soldier of the fairy tale deceived witches and devils from beginning to end- it is only the fairy tale that highlights the “dumb devil.” The golden age is sought and mirrored, and from there one can see far into paradise. But the fairy tale does not let itself be fooled by the present owners of paradise. Thus, it is a rebellious, burned child and alert….This is not to say that mere wishing and the simple fairy-tale-like means of achieving a goal are not mocked. But this
mockery is enlightened, and it is not discouraging. In times of old, thus begins the fairy tale about the frog prince, when wishing still helped- the fairy tale does not presume to be a substitute for action. Nevertheless, the smart Hans of the fairy tale practices an art of not allowing himself to be intimidated. The power of the giant is painted with a hole in it through which the weak individual can crawl through triumphantly. (169-70)

The psychoanalytical and therapeutic value of fairy tales is a well established fact. In the garb of marvels, fairy lands, wonders, magical spells, these tales provide some respite, some sort of ‘momentary’ escape from the humdrum of otherwise barren existence. Though they seem to look back upon a glorious past- ‘Once upon a time’ motif but, in their simplicity they confer upon the tellers and listeners alike the vision, the will to transcend and defeat all human troubles and obstacles and strength to strive towards attaining a ‘happy ending’. These tales are stories of the insatiable thirst for adventures, through defeating all ‘dragons’ ‘witches’ ‘cruel tyrants’ in order to bring peace and harmony to the world. These stories reek of man’s undefeatable pursuits to change his world and the world around him. The visionary power that folk and fairy tales are infused with, have been pointed out by critic Cristina Bacchilega in her book *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies* (1997) “…the stories we produce and find us in the past, and enable us to live through the present’s uncertainties by projecting us into the future” (24).

With the emergence and popularity of theoretical schools like- Formalism, Structuralism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Feminism, the fairy tale corpus became a highly debatable ground. Writers and critics alike arguing, highlighting and mostly criticizing the narrow, escapist, fantastical nature of these tales. Some perceive them as carriers of universal human archetypes, some as vehicles of bourgeois values and ethics while some see them as spokesperson and manifestoes of biased and exploitative patriarchal history.

Keeping in tandem with these aforesaid theoretical advancements, the Althusserian concept of ‘Interpellation’ comes into play. Althusser talked about ISAs i.e. Ideological State Apparatuses which he described as- “a certain number of
realities, which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions.” (96) These institutions because of their ideological fervor and thrust propel the masses into the state of voluntary submission. Such biased representation of reality under the garb of ‘naturalness’ and ‘obviousness’ distorts and manipulates the audience at large. Looking closely at this ‘oral heritage’ we realize that folk and fairy tales are no different than ‘ideologically-stained cultural apparatus’. These tales in their most naïve, child-like allure have been used as a means of ‘interpellation’, so that the majority of the tellers and listeners of these tales are manipulated to see the path in dark with ‘no light at the end’. Tales carry a certain ideology, ideology mostly favoring the creamy strata of the society; keeping the masses to their place. The ideological nature of these tales appears trans-historical, immutable and universal. Althusser comments that, “Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects” (115) that individuals are turned into ‘subjects’ voluntarily under the influence of Ideology. Under the influence of interpellation, the prevalent ‘orders of things’ appear as the only and the ‘natural’ order of things, which cannot be changed or transcended at will. Fairy tales, because of their seemingly a-historical, immaterial nature become an easy tool to divest them of their real meanings and infuse them with the vested interests of a particular section of society. What makes these tales so significant is the fact that these tales capture the population at a very young, naïve phase; where their mental and rational faculties have not developed yet, and drums into their ears ‘a false and distorted version of reality’. What appears at that time as the ‘ideologically-purged’ articulation of universal human experience is in essence the ‘ideologically-driven’ vehicle of a group of people, who base their domination by enslaving the minds of the population at large.

Moving ahead from analyzing fairytales as ‘ideologically marked cultural heritage’, we come to discuss their role as preservers of what Marxist thinker Gramsci called ‘Hegemony’. As tools of ‘interpellation’ folk and fairy tales perform a very crucial role in the social and culture sphere of human experience. Interrelated to this is what Gramsci defined as “…‘Cultural, moral and ideological’ leadership over allied and subordinate groups.” (423). In this way folk and fairy tales popularized and produced by the intelligentsia in the salons of France appear as an act of ‘Hegemony’; establishing their vested interests, their perception of the world as the universal viewpoint. In doing so, these literary tales provided the masses with some ideal figures of
both men and women for the people to aspire for. Those who followed these clichéd, outmoded stereotypes were accepted as ‘natural’ and those who resisted to fall in these patterns were labeled as ‘wicked’. The group of people (writers and transcribers of fairy tales) who dominated the masses did this manipulation with such skill and stealth that the masses serenaded against this domination willingly. Popular fairy tale figures like the ‘the wicked stepmother’, ‘the passive and chaste maiden’ and the ‘valiant hero-figure’ became the ready-made ideals for the masses to aspire for.

To criticize fairy tales of gender and sexual bias is to view them in isolation, in a separate sphere, estranged from their contextual and socio-cultural framework. It is equally important to pay heed to the socialization, canonization and institutionalization of fairy tale corpus. This traditional means of entertainment and instruction sometimes contradict but, mostly seem to re-establish or pamper the status quo. The social institutions and practices provide the arena and framework where these biases are preserved and perpetuated. In the patriarchal setup the medium of ‘tale-telling’ became the tool to refrain and control women from taking autonomy and circumcising their aspirations and psyches. Charles Perrault was not the only one who wrote them down, there were many women writers, whose tales were subdued and neglected keeping in tune with the patriarchal conventions of the times. These women writers were overlooked and scorned by male transcribers like Grimms as mere ‘imitators’. Critic Elizabeth W. Harries points out in her book the fate these women story writers ‘conteuses’ met in their society. She records:

Many, indeed most, of the early writers of fairy tales in the 1690s in France were women. (They produced more than two-thirds of the roughly seventy tales written and published during the 1690s). Yet the only names from this group most readers still know is Charles Perrault, and the only tales that are still endlessly reproduced are Perrault’s (Harries 21-22).

Male collectors of these literary tales deliberately omitted tales that showed strong, competent and courageous female characters. The sexually explicit and disturbing contents of the original tales (tales of Basile and Straparola are examples of this) were embalmed and toned down by the male ‘middle-class’ transcribers to suit the minds of little children. Hence, this so called fantasy literature could be employed
by feminists to expose the subjugation, suppression and silencing of the female ‘voice’; entrapping both men and women in their archetypal figures of predator/prey, master/slave and oppressor/oppressed.

These written tales, whether of Perrault’s or Brother Grimm’s or Andersen’s, very subtly glorified and literalized female subjugation to male dominance. The contours of the fairy tales got curtailed, to fit into the patriarchal paradigms of hierarchical framework. The tales of the classical fairy tale canon like ‘Snow White’, ‘Cinderella’, ‘Beauty and the Beast’, ‘Hansel and Gretel’, etc. to name a few, rewarded women who were passive, silent and submissive who were not inquisitive and curious. These tales taught the virtues of female beauty and passivity and reprimanded, punished or even ostracized women who did not conform to these prescribed codes and mannerism. Women in the popular tales have been placed in oppositions to women hence, fixing them in arbitrary and antagonistic positions of Step Mothers and Witches. Highlighting the demeaning and exploitative dual models of women in fairy tales critic Andrea Dworkin comments:

There are two definitions of woman [in fairy tales]. There is the good woman. She is a victim. There is the bad woman. She must be destroyed. The good woman must be possessed. The bad woman must be killed, or punished. Both must be nullified…. [the ending of these tales] tells us that happiness for a woman is to be passive, victimized, destroyed, or asleep….It tells us that the happy ending is when we are ended, when we live without our lives, or not at all. (48-49)

Such bifurcation of women into hierarchical binaries of angel/witch, passive/active, pure/wicked, beautiful/monstrous, in turn reaffirms the patriarchal status quo. Tales like ‘Snow White’, ‘Ashputtle’, ‘Beauty and the Beast’ have acquired a quasi-religious dimension in the popular imagination. Highlighting the atavistic, nefarious and misogynistic framework and values of traditional male-penned tales, critic Jack Zipes quotes that the traditional tales “have been structured according to the subordination of women…” (xi).
Fairy Tale study is an interdisciplinary or, we should say a multidisciplinary field interwoven with various strands ranging from literary to psychological to sociological to philosophical to spiritual. A lot has been done to trace and foreground the works that has been going on in this faculty. Feminist scholars have approached classical canon of fairy tales using a wide spectrum ranging from historical to biographical to deconstruction to psychoanalysis; rejuvenating and bringing to the centre, what these tales have marginalized. Writers like Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Jane Yolen, Anne Sexton, Tanith Lee, Olga Broumas, Emma Donoghue, and Marina Warner, etc. have attempted to revitalize the genre by portraying “a multicolored spectrum of female characters” (qtd. in Hasse 7). The writings, rewritings of these writers reflect and give voice to women’s social and psychological development, offering pathways to debunk and further, reconstruct gender and sexual fixities; that traditional tales presumes. The feminist re-workings of the classical canon attempts to redefine, reassess femininity through a critique of male-history; a bold sojourn into a field termed essentially male-centric.

Alison Lurie’s emphatic and ground-breaking article “Fairy Tale Liberation” (1970) and its sequel in 1971 entitled- “Witches and Fairies” encouraged and demonstrated that how this traditional and often neglected mode of education can be deployed to showcase and reaffirm feminist concerns that were gaining significance in the wake of feminist movement of the late sixties and seventies. Lurie’s essay initiated the beginning of appropriation and re-appropriation of the classical form of entertainment and education. Marcia E. Lieberman argued against Lurie’s debate that popular tales were promoting liberating women ideal. According to Lieberman there was an obvious and overt gap between enacting cultural change and adhering to the far-from-reality and beguiling fairy tale ideals.

Critic Karen E. Rowe points out that these traditional and now literary tales “encourage women to internalize only aspirations deemed appropriate to our ‘real’ sexual functions within a patriarchy” (Rowe 211). This popular form of entertainment was altered into tool of perpetuating controlling and socializing function. The traditional tales which had women as their narrators, “Mother Goose, Gammer Gretel etc., after their usurpation by male collectors, became biased and suspicious of women characters; dividing them into bad and good, evil and pure and such
dichotomies. Explaining this seismic shift in the narrators of these tales, Blackwell quotes:

The wise women were happy to help them [by telling them their tales], but when the brothers wrote down the tales, they omitted some of the magic words, and they jumbled up parts of the plots…they left the wise women out of the stories they told, or changed them to be wicked, bossy, and ugly (162).

Fairy Tales or, as they have been generally known as- Old Wives’ Tales have been commonly considered women’s prerogative; women who worked them out, told them, shaped them and circulated them. In this churning and spinning process these tales assimilated features, values and beliefs of the then contemporary societies. This attribute differ them from all other forms of entertainment; they kept on slipping, changing, and modifying their forms and finally as Marcia Lieberman asserts, became the medium to “acculturate women to their traditional social roles” and presented “ways of learning behaviors, value systems, and consequences” (Lieberman 185). The feminists of the second and third-wave feminism recapitulated this genre; that was traditionally aligned with women. These writers revised and reworked and refashioned the traditional canon of fairy tales. These female writers with their ‘politically’ aware mind-sets tried to reclaim the territory of fairy tales to expose and criticize the extent to which these tales have been used as a means of enforcing women and men to traditional stereotypes with their bifurcation intact. Thus, dissatisfaction with the values that traditional male-authored tales preached, gave impetus to the rise of ‘feminist fairy-tales’ as a separate branch of study. This rewriting and revision of the classical/tradition tales sparked off a cultural debate over gender and sexual politics that has been seeping into the genre from its formation or, ‘reformation’ to be more specific; from oral to literal. The usurpation of the traditional tales by the male transcribers has been commented upon by Marie, L. Franz when she remarks: “For years the classical literary tales were mainly articulations and representations of a male viewpoint” (qtd in Zipes xii).

Feminist reclamation and re-capturing of the fairy tale territory was an attempt to redefine and rearrange the narrative framework of traditional, inherently
misogynistic tales to suit the feminist mindsets of the contemporary society. These feminists found that the tales comprising the classical fairy tale canon were unappreciative and discouraging of the empowered or strong women characters. The voice of these strong, courageous female were subdued and exceptionally, submerged with male narrator/author’s voice. These revisionists of traditional fairy tales challenged and flouted the established presumptions and conventions regarding gender, sex roles and the nature of socializing process; with a vision and refurbished zeal to chart an “alternative aesthetic terrain” (Zipes xi) for the fairy tale to flourish and modify. These revisionists attempted to redesign the traditional tales along with a non-sexist or, sometimes counter-sexist line. Breaking away from the tradition of glorifying female passivity, these feminists highlighted the female virtues of nurturing, female agency and female experience. They sometimes reworked, sometimes wrote the latent content of the traditional tales with a reawakened consciousness. Such writers, revisionists were able to perceive the pervasive cultural mythology of the popular fairy tale corpus and employed the genre as a heuristic device to unravel, re-analyze, reinterpret and reconstruct the psyche of women; as the genre exert “an awesome imaginative power over the female psyche” (Rowe 218). Feminist rewritings of fairy tale genre was aimed at exposing, analyzing and rejecting the cultural, social, and racial parameters that have been holding women back, in the passive position; colluding intentionally but, mostly unconsciously in the re-inscription of the patriarchal status quo.

Before moving ahead to perceive and analyze Angela Carter’s role as a fairy tale revisionist, it is crucial to grasp her literary significance on the global literary platform. Carter’s pyrotechnic, provocative and notorious works conferred upon her many sobriquets, for instance, her critic Merja Mekinen called Carter “the avant-garde literary terrorist of feminism” (2), notable author and her friend Salman Rushdie remembered her as “the benevolent witch queen” (5) and Margaret Atwood hailed Carter as the “fairy-godmother” (61), to name a few. She got posthumous fame, and resurrected after her death like Freud’s ‘return of the repressed’. Carter in the trope of biblical Lazarus, rose from her grave, Paul Barker’s words after her death echoes similar understanding of Carter’s life: “She dies untimely,…The obituaries give her better notices than anything she ever wrote received in her lifetime…She has arrived. But she is dead” (qtd. in Gamble, 8). Carter’s friend and critic Lorna Sage reckons the
importance of Carter in the contemporary post-modern academic circle when she cites Carter as “the most fashionable twentieth-century topic” (7).

She was born as the “Dunkirk fell”, in the year 1940 to a British mother (Olive) and Scottish father (Hugh) in Eastbourne, England. Her family moved to South Yorkshire to her maternal grandmother’s house, to escape the War period. She worked as a journalist in Croydon Advertiser in the initial years of her carrier and disrupting the ‘simple’ routine of her life; she got married at the age of 20 to Paul Carter, whose surname she willingly inherited after their divorce in 1972. She gained a degree in Medieval Literature from Bristol University in 1965 and published her first novel Shadow Dance in the subsequent year. During the short span of her writing carrier she wrote voraciously and provided nine novels, four short-story collections, radio-plays, three collections of non-fiction, edited two anthologies of fairy tales for Virago Press, wrote screenplay for the movie adaptation of her story The Company of Wolves, wrote pieces of journalism, reviews and social commentaries on the ongoing scenario. In the Introduction of Flesh and the Mirror, an anthology of essays on Carter’s works, Ali Smith makes a profound plea in appraisal of her œuvre, which can be viewed as a measurement of Carter’s significant and pivotal place in the literary scenario, Smith says: “Go out tomorrow and get Carter. Get all her fiction, all her fact, read it from its beginning all the way to its glorious open end… The world will be the same, yet absolutely altered” (qtd. in Sage 19).

Her initial two novels The Magic Toyshop (1967) and Several Perceptions (1968) won literary accolades: John Llewellyn Prize and the Saumerset Maugham Prize, respectively. Saumerset Maugham prize enabled her to fly away to Japan, away from the British literary scene and the emotional turmoil of her failing marriage. This stay in Japan armored her with a fierce consciousness of the breach that exists between appearance and reality and reality and fantasy. This ‘exotic’ excursion in Japan, ‘Empire of Signs’ (to use Barthes’s phrase) had a profound impact on her writings and hauled her into the maturing progress, as Carter herself ascertain: “I learnt what it is to be a woman and became radicalized” (Nothing Sacred 28). It took her a long time to re-establish herself in the British literary scenario after her return from Japan in 1972. It was the publication of her revision of Charles Perrault’s fairy tales The Bloody Chamber in 1979 that gathered the attention of both critics and
readers alike. Its publication marked the initiation of serious, academic discussion of Carter’s works. Analyzing the impact and significance of Carter’s highly intellectual but mostly neglected/undermined writings on contemporary literary scenario Ali Smith remarks, her strangely dark, comic, savage, bawdy, intellectual oeuvre “revolutionized the literary and intellectual landscape and made unthinkable heights possible” (qtd in Sage 3).

She has been constantly praised as the one of the most original writers of her times. Her works have been approached from a myriad of angles; they have been diversely lauded, applauded and denigrated by both academicians and critics. She did not get a Booker Prize during her lifetime but, soon after her death in 1992, in the words of Paul Barker “She becomes the most read contemporary author on English university campuses” (14).

A successful journalist, a highly ambitious author, a reviewer, a critic, a dramatist, an editor, a writer of children’s literature, a self-proclaimed social-feminist and a demythologiser, Carter dons many hats with an amazing verve and panache. Her untimely death in 1992 marked a surge in the interests of both readers as well as critics in what was later going to flourish as ‘Carter Studies’. Her highly intellectual and fantastical body of work attracted attention of several critical and academic disciplines ranging from gender studies, cultural theory, film studies to philosophy and literary theory. She was what this thesis would try to assert a ‘didactic entertainer’, for whom the function of literature was not merely confined to amuse and entertain; it was equally a springboard to launch her ideas and beliefs. The baroque and mellifluously rich language of her prose is punctuated with her love of ideas. One layer of meaning keeps on tapering into another in her writings, which can be analyzed and enjoyed at many levels, as she herself remarked on the nature of her writings: “I do put everything into a novel to be read- read the way allegory was intended to be read, the way you are supposed to read Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight- on as many levels as you can comfortably cope with at the time” (qtd. in Haffenden 36).

Carter’s critic Sarah Gamble argues in her book Angela Carter: A Literary Life, that her half-British and half-Scottish lineage made her revel in contradictions and paradoxes with a sense of comfort. Gamble remarks, Carter possesses “an ability
to be comfortable with vacillation, paradox and contradiction” (22). She like Shakespeare mixes high seriousness with ribald sarcasm, high art with low, intellectual with nonsensical, laugh with a mockery of all that seems essential or natural, and feminism with pornography. All her works carry a disdain for all sorts of authority, ideology and mythology. There can be sensed an undercurrent of subversion and deconstruction in all her works, which are marred with a consciousness of what they are attempting to achieve. Carter was, in her own words, in the “demythologizing business” (47), who tried to break away from all sorts of essentialism; be it, historical or cultural. Her works can be read and analyzed as critiques of established views. She was in a sense, engaged in literary grafting, borrowing material from Shakespeare to Poe to Borges to Sade to Baudelaire and reworking it and making it entirely her own. Highlighting the poetics of revision, rewriting in Carter’s works Britzolakis suggests that her work resonate with attraction towards the:

Rhetoric and iconography of a prominent, largely male-authored strand of European literary history, which runs from the mid-nineteenth century through Baudelaire, Poe, Sade [sic], much of French symbolism, the Decadent writing of the fin de siècle and Surrealism. Carter’s readings of these texts unerringly focus on their metaphorization of femininity in its most fetishized and spectacular forms (49).

Given below is a brief discussion of Carter’s representative fictional works, which will set the tone of further arguments in the chapter. Carter’s main themes and approaches, her relation to feminism and fairy tales will be analyzed very briefly with a cursory glance at her problematic allegiance with the Marquis de Sade, whom she applauds as well as satirizes in her polemic treatise The Sadeian Woman (1979).

Marc O’ Day’s classification of Carter’s three novels- Shadow Dance (1966), Several Perceptions (1968) and Love (1971) as ‘Bristol Trilogy’ (qtd. in Gamble), put these three novels in a separate zone; rooted in the history of England and the emerging countercultural ambiance. Bristol is the name of the city where Carter moved in 1962. Though, these works have been labeled as ‘gothic’, ‘magic realist’ or
even, ‘surreal’, they are more or less realistic, truly depicting the nihilism, spiritual vacuity, hysteria, erotic violence and bohemia of the 60s. Here Carter’s characters whether Honey in Shadow Dance, Lee in Love or Joseph in Several Perceptions, emerge out to be caricatures, surreal, bizarre, disturbing or even repulsive, nothing more than mere shadows, lacking substance; ready to become shadows again at any moment. Elizabeth Wilson’s definition of a dandy befits most characters of these novels when she outlines dandy as “ambiguous rebels whose rebellion never is a revolution, but instead a reaffirmation of the Self” (qtd. in Gamble 62). All these novels with their scathing mockery and jibe at the lunacy and madness of nihilistic atmosphere of counterculture of late 60s, resonate the ‘authorial rage’ (Gilbert and Gubar) of Carter’s beginning years. These novels with their ‘cultural notations’ (Barthes) abound in narcissism, solipsism, animalism, self-mutilating, self-victimization of the countercultural mood. In these novels Carter’s fictional world is chilling, sensual, erotic, blasphemous, dangerous, bloody, surreal, gothic, but in the end, as real as life itself. She plays with ruins and rubrics of decayed culture, forgotten history, and willing socio-cultural amnesia in order to expose and lacerate the deadly and alluring violence that such cultural flux undermines.

The Magic Toyshop (1967) which was the recipient of John Llewellyn Prize is a powerful critique of the social, economic and physical subordination of women. Melanie, the protagonist of the novel is forced to migrate to her uncle’s house in ‘gothic’ South London. There Melanie and her two siblings are forced to get rid of their bourgeois tastes and life-styles, and live in forced austerity. Melanie especially, is made to submit to the whims of her uncle and forced to feel guilty of her budding sexuality, made to recognize a ‘lack’ that, only a man can satisfy. Uncle Phillip, who is her maternal uncle is a puppeteer (a leit motif in Carter’s fictional corpus) attempts to choreograph Melanie’s life. Her aunt Margaret is an example of the extent to which patriarchal, authoritarian attitude can exploit and subordinate the female class. Initially, she emerges out to be a ‘living doll’ with no voice (she is dumb and deaf) to resist and rebel against her husband’s tyranny. But, in her incestual relationship with Frankie (her brother) rests the subversive resistance to her husband’s autocratic authority. Melanie is forced to fit into the role which patriarchy have assigned for women like her, since time immemorial, i.e. of the helpless maiden, a passive victim, at the mercy of her master. The novel concludes with Melanie and Finn standing at
the top of the house; the shop down below burning to ashes. The novel puts an end to an insane, narcotic world of authoritarianism; the future that the novel indicates is equally uncertain. Carter, here seems to materialize the idea that refusal and debunking of both archetypal masculinity and femininity is necessary in order to arrive at a ‘new beginning’.

In *Heroes and Villains* (1969), Carter deliberately deployed the ‘gothic’ elements, being irritated and infuriated by classification of her initial novels as ‘Southern Gothic’ (John Bowen 1967). The novel is set in a dystopian world, reminiscent of a post-apocalyptic, post-holocaust world. The dystopian society is divided into Professors and Barbarians, the former group engaged in retrieving the knowledge of the bygone past and the latter excavating the ruins and debris of wreckage of the Bomb. The novel depicts and charts the relationship of a couple—Jewel a member of the tribe of the Barbarians and Marianne a Professor girl. But, this relationship is not romantic in any sense, rather portrays kidnapping, rape and enforced marriage. The novel ends with supplantation of barbaric patriarchal rule (Jewel’s death) with the female usurpation of the role of the ruler.

*The Infernal Desire Machine of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) which was written during Carter’s days in Japan can be considered her ‘lost marvel’ as Carter herself described it a “magnificently commercially unviable book” (qtd. in Gamble 118). The novel explores abstract and untenable trajectories of reason on one hand, and passion on another. It’s surrealistic and bizarre fictional locale appears both disturbing as well as alluring. Doctor Hoffman is the inveterate, mad genius who is striving to unleash ‘ferocious artillery of unreason’ (Hoffman 11-12), to submerge the world into sensual impulse bereft of reason. In Hoffman’s world there are no obstacles between fantasy and its manifestation. Whatever one thinks of or fantasizes about has the potential of turning into reality, and that’s a horrific and unsettling notion in itself. Hoffman wants to reinstate the world which he calls ‘Nebulous Time’. The protagonist Desiderio has been sent on a mission to counter Hoffman’s absolute sensual regime by the Minister of Determination who wants to abolish passion altogether. Desiderio is also implored by the urge to seek his love interest Albertina who is Hoffman’s daughter. In this picaresque form of narrative adventures, the protagonist seems to be walking on a tightrope like ‘Cockney Venus’ of Carter’s later fiction *Nights at the Circus*. On the one hand, he is a rival to Hoffman’s sensual world and on the other; he is anticipating
a union with Albertina (he seems to be a part and parcel of, what he has been appointed to abdicate). Carter does not promote any of these neither reason nor passion, in its absolutist form. The novel ends with Desiderio killing both Hoffman and his daughter in order to spare himself the existence of fluctuating mirages where everything is changeable and malleable. This book though seems opaque, bizarre, and dystopian but, is equally informed and punctuated with ideas; and that’s too highly intellectual ones. The novel keeping in tune with the postmodernist norms offers numerous possibilities of interpretations.

Next come Carter’s magna opus The Passion of New Eve (1997) which attracted not only critical attention but also scathing array of criticism. As is indicated in the title of the work, it deals with the genesis myth but, obviously in a Carteresque fashion. Carter’s fantastic as well as nightmarish journey back to the origin of things, left both readers as well as critics baffled, with their jaws dropping in awe and wonder. The protagonist Evelyn who is a chauvinist is captured by a tribe of desert dwellers and surgically transformed into Eve. H/She is forced to undergo and experience all sorts of indignation that a woman in a patriarchal setup is supposed to experience. In this outlandish fictional realm Carter seems to literalize Simon de Beauvoir’s dictum- “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (6). Carter intended this novel to be a ‘feminist tract’ (47) in which she could unabashedly assay the ‘social creation of femininity’ (ibid). In its highly speculative narrative space Carter presented both men and women not as antagonistic polarities that are frozen in their timeless metaphors, here these timeless symbols became mutable. Carter denying the idea of Mother Goddess portrayed this notion as an illusion, a chimera. The myth of the ‘Mother’ Carter shows is a construction as is the case with the myth of the Father God. The protagonist is sketched as an alienated being, (nor fully man, not woman either) trying to get back to the origin of things, the root of the tree. As was Carter’s belief, myths create and provide falsity and it was her intention to discard all sorts of mythical consolation: “I’m interested in myths- though I’m much more interested in folklore- just because they are extraordinary lies designed to make people unfree” (47 original emphasis). Superseding the feminist expectations of her contemporary society, Carter presented the myth of the ‘Mother’ as a social and cultural construction, an ideology that would merely supplant the myth of Father God, if given a chance but, in reality would be a hoax, an illusion.
Last come Carter’s last two novels- *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *Wise Children* (1991). Both these novels mark a seismic shift in the manner and tone in Carter’s authorial voice. Unlike her previous fiction, these last novels are marked by their lambent and hilarious tone. They are no less intellectual but, the love of idea is married to a lightness and jocularity in tone and manner in which Carter present these ideas. The former work fictionalizes the much lauded Victorian ideal of ‘angel in the house’. Here, Carter presented her readers with a half-bird, half-woman for a protagonist- Sophie Fevvers. She is hatched not born, underlining her ‘mythical’ nature. Her male counterpart in the novel journalist Jack Walser has also been delineated on the lines of traditional male archetypes- inquisitive, suspicious of Sophie’s mythical origins. In the novel as in her rewritten tales in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) Carter continued with her idea of change and transformation. Commenting on the rather mild and humorous tone of these last two works critic Paulina Palmer quote:

Here she (Carter) treats themes relating to liberation and change, in the organization of personal life and the social formation. Acts of resistance against patriarchy are represented. The deconstruction of femininity and masculinity is explored,…A re-evaluation of female experience takes place and the emergence of a female counter-culture is celebrated. The image of the puppet is no longer central to the text. It is replaced by the images of Fevvers’ miraculous wings…and the egg from which she claims to have been hatched. These images represent ideas of liberation and rebirth; they evoke, in Cixous’ words, ‘the possibility of radical transformations of behavior, mentalities, roles, and political economy. (179-80)

Writing in the wake of Feminism, she was much ahead of her times and has been considered a thought-provoking and iconoclastic intellectual, a provocateur, who was as ‘literary’ as she was a ‘cult figure’, steeped in and a connoisseur of Pop-culture, Music, Hollywood, Folklores, Socialism, Politics, and at the same time Mythology. ‘Pastiche’ is the mot juste for her writings- amalgamating, reworking and
refashioning every material from myths, fairytales, folklores, movies, music, and pantomimes to paintings. Her narrative style defies classification and categorization as she is many things in one person: a magic-realist, a realist, a fabulist, a surrealist, a symbolist, a socialist, a journalist, a critic and most remarkably a ‘teller of tales’. Analyzing the all-comprising content and thematic range of Carter’s work critic Morrison comments:

Carter’s writings…are fundamentally inter-textual…constantly engaged in the quotation, appropriation and subversion of other texts…she makes good use of eighteenth-century forms, especially the picaresque and the gothic. Her texts are patterned with iconic references to the history of European art, from the ancient Winged Victory of Samothrace to the modernist nudes of Toulouse Lautrec…there are all sorts of witty references to popular songs, film iconography, variety and music hall…frequent drawings from critical philosophy, ranging from the Marxist Louis Althusser, in the early work, to the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan later on. (157)

One of the main thrust of her writing was on decoding and ciphering the fiction of sexuality and how its cultural and social construction is attained and perpetuated. As Critic Jago Morrison concludes on the nature of Carter’s feminism: “Digging through the legacies of culture, she is concerned to lay bare the origins and operations of controlling myths about woman” (Morrison 156). By impregnating her feminist concerns with the notions of sadism and masochism, she was not eroticizing sexual exploitation of women, rather was trying to make a seismic shift in the dominant and omnipresent understandings of gender and sexuality, especially that of the female milieu. She was, in a vehement fashion unhinging the female sexuality from traditional, stultifying moulds; making us shudder at the naked display of power-relations that choreographs and sanctions women’s sexuality as aberration. Critic Sally Robinson argues that in her writings, Carter evolved and promulgated “her own brand of gender politics, which separate ‘woman’ as biological entity from ‘woman’
as cultural category” (107). Carter’s works blatantly dismiss mythology and historicizing of both masculinity and femininity. Instilled with a demonic energy, her works do not engage in re-inscribing the patriarchal status quo; rather, they lay threadbare the mechanism that sanctions the subordination and subjugation of female ‘Other’ as essential. Carter engages in a stringent interrogation of asymmetrical power relations that dominate man-woman relationships.

All her writings are committed to eradicate clichés regarding female passivity and male dominance. Her polemic treatise *The Sadeian Woman* lays the foundation of her un-orthodoxical, path-breaking and unique brand of feminism, in which she rebuffs patriarchal notions of female subordination as well as expose women’s complicit roles in their own submission and exploitation. This work showcases her deep connection with and advocacy of feminist goals with a far-sightedness which was her signature mark, she denies any sort of mythical consolation that feminists of her times were trying to achieve. This work was the outcome of her problematic allegiance with the ‘Machiavellian misogynist’- the Marquis de Sade. This complicated mingling of feminism with Sade’s brand of sadomasochistic eroticism, made Carter’s readers and critics wary and suspicious of her feminist concerns.

Tracing Carter’s feminist roots, critic Sarah Gamble asserts: “it was sexual liberation’s failure to iron out all the inequalities between men and women that eventually brought her to feminism” (Gamble 77). Her extremely brutal and disturbing portrayal of women’s sexual exploitation and victimization aims to undermine the masculinist fantasies that she stretches to their extremes, rendering them bestial and inhuman. Commenting on the nature of Carter’s flamboyant, radical refusal of patriarchal fetishizing of women, Christina Britzolakis claims: “she writes like an unabashed female fetishist” (Britzolakis 46). Carter in her unique manner use fire to extinguish fire, employing the tools that male authors have used; to undercut and rebuff the schism between essential male ‘sadism’ and natural female ‘masochism’. In all her writings established notions of gender, sexuality, masculine and feminine have been re-defined, rearranged and refashioned. In this sense, Carter establishes herself not only a feminist but a post-feminist writer; an anachronism for her times, when mostly women writers with engaged with voting and contraceptive rights only.
What stood her apart from the other feminist writers of her generation was the fact that she denied and refuted any sort of compromise and consolation that the cultural history and mythology extended to her. Critic Charlotte Croft’s summation of Carter’s poem *Unicorn* (1966) befits the astounding and adamant attempt of her oeuvre at understanding and exposing the constructed nature of gender, Carter “radically challenge notions of gendered identity by drawing attention to the constructedness of both masculinity and femininity” (qtd. in Gamble, 151). Beginning with her first novel *Shadow Dance* to her last *Wise Children*, such feminist concerns are couched in gothic and surreal overtures, fantastic overtones; exposing the machinery that perpetuate institutionalization and internalization of gender representation, envisaging loopholes and opportunities to deconstruct these stereotypes of masculine and feminine.

In this regard Carter becomes a member of, what critic Patricia Waugh calls “society of outsiders”, who as Waugh explains “…resist assimilation into patriarchal structures by rewriting the plots and stories, who are self-conscious mimics and ventriloquist, but who can speak in tropes and walk in sensible shoes” (Waugh 191). Carter is a conscious mimic, a ventriloquist who put on the mask of male impersonator to dig into the psyche, the dark abyss of collective unconscious, to cut off the root of all discrimination that has receded into our psyches with time. This thesis would argue that not Sade, but she is the ‘moral pornographer’ who analyses, critiques, evolves ideas about female sexuality through placing her viragoes in an allegorical framework, unbinding them from all shackles and fretters that history, culture and mythology proposes. Carter’s problematic and titillating alliance with the arch misogynist- Marquis de Sade allowed a flurry of debates and vehement criticism around her works. In her iconoclastic and polemic treatise on Sade’s heroines *The Sadeian Woman* (1979) she envisioned the notorious role of the ‘moral pornographer’; describing whom she writes:

The moral pornographer would be an artist who uses pornographic material as part of the acceptance of the logic of a world of absolute sexual license for all the genders, and projects a model of the way such a world might
work. A moral pornographer might use pornography as a critique of current relations between the sexes. His business would be the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequent revelation, through the infinite modulations of the sexual act, of the real relations between man and his kind. Such a pornographer would not be the enemy of women, perhaps because he might begin to penetrate to the heart of the contempt for women that distort our culture even as he entered the realms of true obscenity as he describes it. (19-20)

She possesses a unique and very robust acumen to envision her women characters with wings- like Sophie Fevers in *Nights at the Circus*, with an untamed and alive sexual prowess like- Red Riding Hood, etc. It becomes very problematic to separate Carter the ‘writer’ from Carter the ‘woman’, as both identities intermingle and are inseparable. She is not solely the author of feminist texts; she is a woman writing about her immediate surroundings and her own version of disparaging and damaging effects of patriarchal culture on the lives of women. Time and again Carter has voiced the reason behind the feminist streak in her fiction. In her famous and oft-quoted essay ‘Notes from the Front Line’ she records that her feminism evolved as a result of, “my own questioning of the nature of my reality as a *woman*. How that social fiction of my ‘femininity’ was created, by means outside my control, and palmed off on me as the real thing.” (Original emphasis 47)

Commenting and appreciating Angela Carter’s role of a fairy tale revisionist Stephen Benson remarks: “If we accept that Carter is, in whatever sense, a quintessential contemporary writer, it would thus appear that her relation with the fairytale lies at the core of her contemporaneity” (30). Carter who was a medievalist found the genre appealing and befitting to foreground and promote her ideas about repressive, mutilating effects of patriarchy that these stories were promoting. With her ‘political incorrectness’ Carter stripped away the layers that the male hegemony imposed on these tales. She ventures to reclaim the territory and “put old wine into new bottles” (Carter 46); instilling and infusing these tales with her fierce irony and rebuttal of ubiquitous patriarchal control, with ideas about active female sexuality;
independent from male control. We might say that from being the object of Carter’s satire and criticism, fairy tales becomes her means, to unravel the unimaginable and lay bare its misappropriation. The task of rewriting the canonical texts in Carter becomes part and parcel of a postmodern strategy to reassess issues of gender and sexuality. Combining her feminist concerns with her predilection for fairy tales, she sought to unveil the role of tales as a means of violence against women and to classify as derogatory those archetypal representations which eroticize male domination and aggression.

Carter denied any strict categorization and labeling of her works, she deployed this genre to posit against the inherited and deeply embedded iconography of female subordination, shrugging from the veneer of natural ‘femininity’; rendering it as a cultural and social commoditization of female strata of social structure. The multiplicity and diversity of these oral narratives renders them malleable and fluctuating, with their allegory-like structure they can be read and analyzed and reworked. Carter “edited, translated, rewrote and analyzed the fairy tale tradition…” (Smith 3) She perceived the significance of the oral narratives and employed it fiercely to promote her feminist ideals, eschewing monolithic views of female sexuality that have been traditionally defined, solely in relation to men. Her revisions of the traditional corpus palpitate with the consciousness of the social and psychological caused by gender and sexual distinction. With a bravado and witchy charm Carter slash down the bodies of patriarchal myths concerning women and hangs them as dead carcasses on her fictional stage; so that readers can smell the stench and miasma hovering about these decayed myths. Carter’s provocatve at times uneasy retellings of traditional tales seem to disrupt the internalized and institutionalized confined fates of women characters of these tales. Her revisions are not simply amplification, a mere ‘gloss’ over the thematic content of the traditional texts, they carry an exotic aroma of post modernity; concocting all the prevailing ingredients from sexuality to sadism to masochism; upsetting even the feminist minds of her times. Her sharp, wry, sexual, sensual retellings rips apart and breaks the ‘magic mirror’ of the traditional tales and dispose of the archetypal images of both men and women that this mirror reflected.
This brings us to the conclusion of the discussion about fairy tales and Angela Carter’s penchant for fairy tales. The present thesis aims at reclaiming this so called ‘children literature’ from falling into the clutches of non-serious literature. Keeping in mind the revolutionary and emancipatory spirit of the traditional tales it becomes crucial to break the strictures of hierarchy that have been imposed on this means of instruction and entertainment. The potential of these tales have to be utilized in order to grasp a better understanding of the world. Further, the present study undertakes the task of reassessing Angela Carter’s stance of fairy tales and feminism by reading *The Bloody Chamber* (Carter’s magnificent “adult tales”) in relationship to the feminist debates on gender and sexuality that began in the late 60s and continue to the present. In order to arrive at a new beginning the old needs a new interpretation, so this re-visiting the old world will strengthen our ties with our present as well as our future. Casting away of and stripping down the mystique that pervades these tales becomes necessary so that we can see through the deceptive and beguiling uses of entertainment. To achieve the aim theoretical strands like Feminism and Psychoanalysis have been deployed, keeping in tune with the multidimensional nature of this oral tradition. Commenting upon and stressing the value that these tales carry, critic Zipes maintains, “…the fairy tale records the breakdown of an old world structure, chaos, confusion, and the striving to attain a new world…the fairy tale is multi-dimensional, hypotactical, and open-ended.” (Magical Spell 41).
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