CHAPTER TWO

FEMINISM AND FAIRY TALES

Fairy tales, the stories of magic and transformation are one of the oldest known forms of literature and also one of the most popular and enduring. Even today they are a central part of our imaginative world. Most of us have been entertained by fairy tales that have left indelible childhood impressions on us. We still recognize ‘the hundred years sleep’. We speak of a ‘Cinderella existence’ or ‘the forbidden door’. Innumerable fairy tale characters like Red Riding Hood, Sleeping Beauty, Snow-White, Cinderella, Goldilocks and so on are very popular. This indicates how much more deeply fairy tales have penetrated our general consciousness, than any other book-based memories. Fairy tales are loved and cherished by people all over the world irrespective of creed or colour. Not only children, but adults too are equally under its charm. Even today fairy tales have not lost their appeal 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)

The fairy tale survives because it presents experience in vivid symbolic form. Sometimes it is necessary to have the truth exaggerated and made more dramatic, even fantastic, in order to comprehend it. ‘Hansel and Gretel’ for instance may dramatize the fact that some parents underfeed and abandon their children physically and/or emotionally, while others, like the witch, overfeed and try to possess and devour them. ‘Beauty and the Beast’ may suggest that a good man can seem at first like a dangerous wild animal or that true love has the power to soothe the savage heart. The message will probably be different for each reader, that is one of the great achievements of the fairy tale – traditional or modern, and therein lies its literary value. Further, Jack Zipes in the preface to his Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical theories of Folk and Fairy Tales says:

From birth to death we hear and imbibe the lore of folk and fairy tales and sense that they can help us reach our destiny. They know and tell us that we want to become kings and queens, ontologically speaking to become masters of our own realms in touch with the projects of our lives and the self-projections to stand upright as makers of history. Folk and fairy tales illuminate the way. They anticipate the millennium. They ferret our 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. (Zipes ix)

The magical power of folk and fairytale lies in the fact that they do not pretend to be anything other than fairy tales. It is precisely this that gives us the freedom to see what path we must take to become self-fulfilled. They leave it to us to take decisions of reality and at the same time provoke us to think about the way we live. Einstein was aware of this and it is not surprising that he had such a high regard for folk and fairy tales. Once an anxious mother who wanted her son to become a successful scientist approached the famous physicist Albert Einstein and sought his advice on how to raise her son to become an eminent scientist like him. Replying to her query Einstein said that the kind of books to be read to her son were fairy tales, more fairy tales and even more fairy tales! Everywhere fairy tale motifs pop up like magic. Fairy tales by Tolkien, Hesse, the Grimm Brothers, Anderson, C.S. Lewis etc., abound in bookshops; Operas, films, plays are based on fairy tale themes; fairy tale scenes and figures are abundantly employed in advertisements, window decorations, T.V. commercials, restaurant and club signs; even banners, posters, tea-shirts, towels etc are plastered with fairy tale designs. Further public interest in fairy tales has been rekindled in quite an astonishing manner in recent years. Fairy tales have won new adherents among both youth and adults alike. This phenomenon has nothing to do with nostalgia, or signal a
flight from a technically rational world into a neo-irrational one. In the introduction to *Fairy tales and Society* Lutz Rohrich says: “More and more people are recognizing that fairy tales are essential and substantial stories which offer paradigmatic examples of conflicts in decisive life situations.”(Bottigheimer 1) Naturally, writers with social commitment were attracted to these popular genres and made creative use of them for their own purposes, in the modern age.

Fairy tales have been in existence as oral folk – tales for thousands of years and first became literary fairy tales towards the end of the 17th century. In the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries aristocratic and bourgeois writers appropriated the folk-tale that soon evolved as a new literary genre – the fairy tale. Generally folk and fairy tales are taken as make-believe stories with no direct reference to a particular community or historical tradition that account for its universality. Initially, there was a time when folk tales were part of the communal property narrated by gifted story – tellers who gave vent to the frustrations of the common people and embodied their needs and wishes in these tales. Today the folk tale as an oral art form has given way to the literary fairy tale and other mass mediated forms. Studies have revealed that the folk tale originated as far back as the Megalithic period. Gerhard Kalto has pointed out that the majority of folk tale motifs can be traced back to the rituals, customs, and laws of primitive societies. Acts popularly seen in folk tales like cannibalism, human sacrifice,
banishments, stealing or selling of brides, transformation of people into animals or plants, intervention of beasts etc. were based on the social reality and the common beliefs of primitive societies. Each historical epoch and community altered the original folk tales in accordance to its needs as they were handed down from generation to generation over the centuries. But by the time they were recorded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as literary texts, they retained many primitive motifs but basically they reflected late feudal conditions. The fairy tales in the eighteenth century excluded the common man and addressed the concerns of the upper classes and dealt with figures and themes that catered to the tastes of an elite class.

The rise of the fairytale in the west coincided with the decline of feudalism. As such it lost its function of affirming absolutist ideology and experienced a strange development at the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century. Folk and fairy tales were condemned amoral by the dominant conservative bourgeois groups who, did not uphold the virtues of order, discipline, industry, modesty, cleanliness etc. Particularly they were labelled harmful for children as “their imaginative components might give young ones crazy ideas” and suggest ways “to rebel against authoritarian and patriarchal rule in the family.” (Breaking the Magic Spell 12) The tales’ implicit and explicit critique of utilitarianism was the reason for the firm resistance that the fairy tale met with
during the period of the Enlightenment. The great emphases in these tales are alternative forms of living, pursuing dreams, striving for the golden age that challenged the rationalistic purpose and regimentation of life. Therefore it was imperative for the bourgeois establishment to condemn the fairy tales as immoral, trivial, useless and harmful. Consequently, the writing and printing of fairytales were opposed by the majority of the middle class, who preferred didactic tales and family romances. Several progressive writers even within the bourgeoisie developed the fairy tale as a form of protest against the utilitarian ideas of the Enlightenment. In the United States too a similar opposition can be observed in the differing attitudes toward the fairy tales.

However, towards the latter part of the nineteenth century when capitalism had established itself, the fairy tale did not meet with stiff opposition as during the Enlightenment period. Beset by a changing world, to the Victorians, the fairytale offered an escape from the brutalizing effects of socialized and working reality. Zipes agrees with Michael. C. Kotzin in his book Dickens and the Fairytale regarding the Victorian's attitude to the fairy tale:

[T]he Victorian could find stability in the ordered, formulary structure of fairytales. He could be called from his time and place to a soothing other world by the faintly blowing horns of Elf land. He could be taken from the
corruption of adulthood back to the innocence of childhood; from the ugly competitive city to beautiful sympathetic nature; from complex morality to the simple issue of good versus evil; from a different reality to a comforting world of imagination. (qtd Zipes 28)

Certain significant tendencies regarding fairy tales were noticeable in the nineteenth century. The Grimms made their first collection in 1812 and established authentic versions; folk tales were rewritten reducing the violence, crudity and fantastic implications, so that it would not make a harmful impact on children; new fairy tales were composed to amuse and distract audiences and make money. Fairy tales were also made use of for criticizing social conditions and expressing the need for change. Over the centuries the appeal of folk and fairy tales has not decreased. On the contrary, they persist in exercising an extraordinary hold over our real and imaginative lives from childhood to adulthood that accounts for its popularity to this day.

The term 'fairy tale' is a bourgeois coinage as it indicates the emergence of a new literary form which utilizes elements of folklore to address and criticize the aspirations and needs of a newly emerging bourgeois audience. The folk tales, from which fairy tales emerged, were oral narratives and contained popular motifs, which were thousands of years old. These tales were not conceived for children.
The basic nature of the folk tales was connected to the objective situation and dreams of the narrators and their audiences in all age groups. In *Marchen, Phantasie and Sociales Lernen*, Richter and Merkel observe that these tales, “retain hope for improving conditions of life” and the fantastic elements of miracles and magic “function to bring about a real fulfillment of the desires of the protagonists who were often underdogs or victims of social injustice” (qtd Zipes 28). This element of the fairy tale explains the choice of the form by the feminist writers like Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi for their specific literary purposes.

The literary fairy tale was first developed in salons by aristocratic women as a type of parlour game by the middle of the eighteenth century. Women were responsible for some of the earlier fairy tales and fables, nursery rhymes and didactic tales. The term ‘fees’ (‘conte-de-fees’) and faerie derive originally from the Latin ‘fatum’, the thing spoken and ‘fata’, the fates who speak it. As Katherine Briggs in ‘An Encyclopedia of faeries’ cites:

[T] he derivation from the Italian Fatae, the fairy ladies who visited the household of births and pronounced on the future of the baby. These Italian, French and English derivatives from the Greek and Latin compel us to see the origin of fairy as closely related to female acts of birthing.
nursing, prophesying and spinning - as ancient myths make plain. (qtd Bottigheimer 63)

Edward Shorter, a historian of popular culture documents how in the veillies, those weekly gatherings of farm families, the women would gather together to spin, knit or darn to keep their own family’s clothes in shape but also to tell stories and recite the old tales, or maybe to gossip. The veillee in some parts of France became sex-segregated, often a gathering of women with their marriageable daughters in which both generations carded wool, spun or knitted. As Abel Hugo, one of Shorter’s nineteenth century antiquarians portrays it:

[T]he women, because of the inferiority of their sex, are not admitted at all to the conversation with their lords and masters. But after the men have retired the women’s reign begins...Within the shared espirit of these late evening communes, women not only practiced their domestic crafts, they also fulfilled their role as transmitters of culture through the vehicle of ‘old tales’ inherited from oral tradition or the filtered down versions from the Bibliotheque bleue, those cheaply printed, blue-covered penny dreadfuls sold by travelling colporteurs. (qtd Bottigheimer 63)

As in the French Veillees, so too German folk tales according to Bottigheimer were assumed to have originated in the Spinnstube, where women
gathered in the evening and narrated tales to keep themselves awake as they spun. Thus it was in the privacy of the Veillee or Spinnstube that these women full of knowledge found an arena through which to articulate the silent matter of life. As Bottigheimer illustrates in her essay ‘Tale Spinners: Submerged voices in Grimms’ Fairy tales :

The durability of the appellations Mother Goose, Mother Bunch, Frau Holle and of their pictorial representations suggest how deeply embedded in our cultural consciousness are the intricately woven threads which bind together the concept of wisdom presiding over the hearth, the art of spinning literally and figuratively and the imaginative telling of cultural truths through fairy tales as powers vested in the hands, voices and domestic province of women. (68)

To regard the Grimm Brothers as the father of modern folklore or fairy tales is to forget the maternal lineage, the ‘mothers’ in French Veilles, English nurseries, in court salons and the German Spinnstube, who were in reality the originators of these tales. While the Grimm Brothers were merely the appropriators who re-shaped the tales that they could not comprehend. Karen Rowe rightly points out:
Only for women does the thread, which spins out the lore of life itself, create a tapestry to be fully read and understood. Strand by strand weaving like the craft practiced on Philomela’s loom or in the spinning of Mother Goose, is the true art of the fairy tale – and it is, I would submit semiotically a female art. (71)

So there has all along been a close link between women and fairy tales.

Ovid’s account in *The Metamorphosis* of Philomela and Procne, which in western tradition can serve as a type for the narrative power of the female, capable of weaving in tapestry the brutal story of rape that leads to the enactment of a terrible revenge. Based upon this paradigm the lineage of women as taletellers may be explored in a complex history that stretches from Philomela and Scheherazade to the raconteurs of French Veillees and Salons, to English peasants, governesses and novelists and to the German Spinnernan and the Brothers Grimm. The story of Philomela highlights the analogy between weaving or spinning and tale – telling. The semiotic relationships are far more complex, because in Greek culture poets metaphorically referred to their art as ‘weaving’ or ‘sewing’ words. This intimate connection literally and metaphorically between weaving and telling a story establishes the cultural and literary framework within which women transmit not only tapestries that tell stories but also later folklore and fairy tales which represent the silent matter of their lives. According to ancient practice
spinning is the main stay of a woman’s domestic life. Later too, the Biblical portrait of the virtuous woman is the model of a woman who spins, as found in the Bible in the book of Proverbs 31: 10 – 31. *Superficially The Arabian Nights tales* appear to be primarily masculine adventures. But a closer scrutiny reveals that the frame story identifies Scheherazade as the tale spinner and the purpose as a double deliverance of virgins from slaughter and of an aggrieved king from his mania. Thus women as taletellers not only entertain but also instruct through their tales. Women not only formed certain social codes through tale telling but also actively presided over courtship rituals. Karen E. Rowe reports it thus:

In the Gatine district where the evening spinning often turned to dancing. It was reported that ‘the fellows…. show up to visit their girl-friends (maitresses). The young shepherdess lets her spindle fall to the ground in order to see who’s interested. This rural version of Sleeping Beauty implies traditional expectations of women – that they be expert spinsters, judged suitably marriageable by virtue of their skill. (63 – 64)

This intricate relationship between spinning, tale-telling and courtship explains why women as frame narrators or raconteurs, are often considered *les sages femmes*, which in medieval French means midwife. But in its extended meaning, it signifies wise women who transmit culture, whether by presiding over
Gatine courtship rituals or by spinning tales that counsel the young through a combination of entertaining stories with moral and social instruction.

According to Ruth B. Bottigheimer, in the German tradition the spindle is an essential characteristic of wise woman, as well as all women. And especially in the Germanies from the Middle ages to the nineteenth century it was the identifying mark of diligent, well-ordered womanhood, the ideal that French Vielles and German Spinnerinnen sought to inculcate continually. In German ‘spinnen’ also means to ‘fantasize’, a suitable talent for one who not only spins cloth but also tales. As in the French Veilles, folk tales were assumed to have originated from the Spinnstube. Women gathered in these veilles and spinnstube in the evenings and told tales to keep themselves awake as they spun and “found an arena and form through which to articulate the silent matter of life” (64).

An increasing plenitude of illustrations, particularly frontispieces of published fairy tale collections testified to the perceived position of female story-tellers in European cultures. These frontispieces depict a gathering of grandmothers, mothers, nursemaids and governesses, children gathered at homely hearths to listen to the tales. Such illustrations both reflect and foster the identification of fairy tales with the predominantly female realm of domesticity.
The most popular and widely circulated collection of the folk tales is that of the Brothers Grimm, who stylized and transcribed them from the dialect form into High German. These Marchen were recorded during the first decade of the nineteenth century and were told in dialect mostly by servants, housewives, watchmen and other inhabitants who dwelt in towns and small cities. Whatever may be the different concerns of bourgeois or aristocratic writers, they all agreed on the fact that a new world had to be formed out of chaos. Therefore the main impulse of fairy tales was primarily revolutionary and progressive, not escapist as has been very often suggested. Although Wackenroder, Tieck and Novalis were the inaugurators of the radical romantic fairy tale, it was E.T.A. Hoffmann who best demonstrated the revolutionary and utopian possibilities of fairy tales. The romantic fairy tales have very often been misinterpreted particularly by Georg Lukacs who criticized fairy tales “as having imitated irrationalism and a literature of flight and fancy in the German tradition” (Zipes 39). The fairy tale, in its candour and imaginative use of folklore has proved itself to be a characteristic national form, seeking to express the need for greater justice and more rational alternatives to oppose the arbitrary socio-political repression. Therefore, it is not surprising, that reputed writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, like Morike, Gottelieb, Hofmannstal, Hesse, Kafka, etc have resorted to the fairy tale not only to seek refuge from the German ‘misere’ but to comment on it and suggest that the misere need not be, that change is possible in reality.
Fairy tales are not mere ‘entertainers’ as many hostile critics have invariably remarked. They are in fact serious literature and have innumerable uses, and serve specific purposes. In Zipes’ opinion the genuine fairy tale writer is a seer of the future. The fairy tale in fact showed the way toward self-realization or the alternative path history could take if human beings actually took charge of their destiny, a significant message for feminist writers. Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi, in their re-tellings have exploited this utopian potential of fairy tales to offer a counter paradigm stressing female power. The girl in Carter’s “The Werewolf” (BC 108-110) is able to slash off the wolf’s paw easily for “wolves are iess brave than they seem”. (109), and in “The Company of Wolves” (BC 110-118) the girl realized that “her fear did her no good, she ceased to be afraid” (117). The third sister in Atwood’s “Alien Territory” (BAM 103-116), disobeyed Blue beard because she “wanted to cure him. She thought she had the healing touch” (111). Cinderella in Namjoshi’s “And Then What Happened” (FF 118) simply quits her marriage after a squabble.

Benjamin in The Storyteller: Illumination particularly praised the folk tale as the highest form of narrative, “which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story.” (101) He sees the folk-tale as a quasi-magical mode of connecting the people with their
nature and history. The folk tale was a model of narrative art that pointed the way toward the making of real history. Both Bloch and J.R.R. Tolkein employed the fairy tale as a vehicle to articulate deeply felt philosophies and project Utopian visions of better worlds. Their primary interest lay in defending fantasy. In Bloch’s opinion what makes the old folk tales and the new fairy tales vital is their “capacity to harbour unfulfilled wishes in figurative form and project the possibility for their fulfillment” (Zipes 138).

Bloch’s defence of the fairy tale is in fact a defence of popular culture that embodies utopian elements- the needs, wishes and dreams- that have been repressed by reason and authoritarian rule. In his view dissatisfaction is a major source that ignites the Utopian drive. The fairy tale gives full expression to the dissatisfaction of the common man, which explains why it remains such a powerful cultural force among them. Bloch remarks:

[T]he fairy tale is the most vital artistic expression of ordinary people: the projection of how they want themselves to change and transform society ... It plays upon the imagination not to open it up to escape into a never – never land but to make greater contact with reality. The escape is estrangement or separation from a defeating situation which induces a feeling of possible liberation. (140-141)
Tolkein too takes a philosophical view of the fairy tales. A fairy tale is one which touches on or makes extensive use of fairies, whatever its primary purpose maybe—satire, adventure, morality, fantasy. According to Tolkein the value of fairy tales depends on their function—estrangement. Tolkein in his ‘The Tolkein Reader, states:

The fairy tale is a sub-creation of truth. If creation is the world and the creator God, then the artist as sub—creator believes in his or her own creation which transports us to another world from which we can view and perhaps better grasp the primary forces acting upon us. (qtd Zipes142)

Tolkein did not believe that by entering the realm of fairies we were in fact entering a false or make-believe world. Max Luthi is of the view that fairy tales are not untrue but on the contrary reflect essential development and conditions of man’s existence. In Tolkein’s opinion the four factors which account for the magic power of the fairy tale are fantasy, recovery, escape and consolation. Further, all fairy tales should have the happy ending. The sad endings of these modern fairy tales fail to provide the escape and consolation essential to fairy tales. Man’s greatest fear is what in psychoanalysis is called separation anxiety; and the younger we are the more excruciating will be our anxiety when we feel deserted.
Therefore fairy tales that have the element of consolation, greatly allays these fears in a child. Consolation is the greatest service the fairy tale can offer a child; the confidence that in spite of all the tribulations he has to suffer such as the threat of desertion by parents in “Hansel and Gretel”, jealousy on the part of parents in “Snow white” and of siblings in “Cinderella”, the devouring anger of the giant in “Jack and the Beanstalk”, the nastiness of evil powers in “The sleeping Beauty” – not only will he succeed, but the evil forces will be done away with and never again threaten the child’s peace of mind. Further, Tolkein defending fairy tales takes issue with those traditionalists, who have relegated the fairy tale to the realm of children and the domain of trivial art. According to Tolkein fairy tales by moving to another world enables the readers to get a clear view of their situations as “the placing of objects from our everyday world in a luminous estranged setting compels us to perceive and cherish them in a new way.” (143).

It was secularization of religion that resulted in the similarity of Tolkein and Bloch’s views of fairy tales. Tolkein was convinced that the essence of Christianity could be conveyed to human beings in secularized form and to a great extent this was achieved through fairy tales. The fairy tales highlight virtues that are generally rewarded and vices that are often punished. In Bloch’s view the fairy tale was “a kind of light beacon of socialism” (158). But to Tolkein it was “artistic compensation and a healer of the injuries which human beings had to bear” (158).
For centuries fairy tales and folk tales have served the church as an integral part of sermons and as a secular means of instruction.

Any discussion on fairy tales can hardly ignore the psychological significance of fairy tales for children. It is this psychological function of fairy tales that has attracted women writers to attempt the retellings of fairy tales to suggest alternate paradigms. Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi have exploited this psychological value in their re-tellings. They have attempted to offer new dimensions to women to liberate their repressed wishes and gain psychological independence and sexual confidence through an imaginative depiction of healthy human development where women are able to fully realize their self-worth. This has been amply illustrated in Carter’s “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (BC 41-51), where Beauty is able to talk to the Beast as if she had “known him all her life” and she “no longer felt the slightest apprehension at their nightly interview with the Beast” (48), and in “Ashputtle or the Mother’s ghost” (AG 110 –120). Ashputtle is able to marry the prince as her foot “fits the shoe like a corpse fits the coffin” (116); her mother’s ghost had made sure that it would fit. In “Weight” (WT 177-193). Molly is depicted as a resourceful advocate who has the transforming power of Beauty for “any toad could be turned into a prince” (182) if kissed by her. Similarly in Namjoshi’s “In the Forest” (FF
95), it is Gretel who “stands a better chance” in the “wild witch’s world” (95). But Hansel will fight only when he grows to be a man.

For centuries, theologians, educators, literary critics and psychologists have debated the pros and the cons of reading fairy tales to children. The basic questions they constantly ask is whether children should be exposed to cruelty; violence and superstitions of make-believe worlds. Today, as in the past ages, the most important as well as exacting task in raising a child is helping him to find meaning in life. Many growth experiences are needed to achieve this. The child must gradually learn to understand himself better, and understand others better and eventually relate to them in meaningful ways. To find deeper meaning, one must transcend narrow limitations of a self-centered existence and believe that one can make significant contributions to life. Fairy tales help the child to find this deeper meaning and relate to others in meaningful ways. These tales entertain him and arouse his curiosity, stimulate his imagination, develop his intellect, clarify his emotions; attune his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties and simultaneously offer solutions to the problems that perturb him. Bruno Bettelheim in Uses of Enchantment observes that in short, fairy tales must simultaneously “relate to all aspects of his personality”, without “ever belittling but, on the contrary, giving full credence to the seriousness of the child’s
The most common charge made against fantastic literature is that it is 'merely entertainment' or that it offers 'escape'. Rabkin in his *Fantastic Worlds* points out:

There is nothing, however wrong with escape. If one is imprisoned, the desire to escape is sane and valuable. If the real world oppresses a reader by the fact of mortality or the ambiguities of sex, a fantastic world that handles his fears for him or, at least for the time of reading, clarifies his confusion in a world that offers not escape but liberation...Entertainment is not 'mere'; it is the effective engagement of a text with issues of fundamental importance to the audience. (Rabkin 23)

Certain vital questions seem to have occupied the human mind since prehistoric times. Where did the world come from? How can one explain the feelings of awakened sexuality? Why must there be death? Is there an after-life? Rabkin believed that the fantastic worlds dramatize answers to these real questions for the ease of the questioners. He further explains the social and cultural significance of the fairy tales thus:
In their oldest forms, these answers are the myths that cultures live by, in somewhat more modern forms, these answers become the folk tales by which cultures entertain themselves; and in yet more modern forms, these answers become the fairy tales through which cultures amuse and thereby educate their young. (5)

On an overt level, fairy tales rarely deal with specific conditions of life in this modern age, as these tales were written long ago and clearly reflect the pre-industrial age. But surprisingly, they continue to survive, accommodating themselves with very few basic changes and much can be learned from them about the inner conflicts of human beings, and of the right solutions to their predicaments in any society than from any other type of children’s story within a child’s comprehension. It is this psychological value of fairy tales that Bettelheim highlights. Through fairy tales the child is able to master the psychological problems of growing up by “over-coming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, sibling rivalries, becoming able to relinquish childhood dependencies, gaining a feeling of selfhood and of self - worth, and a sense of moral obligation “ (Bettelheim 6). It is imperative for a child to understand the workings within his conscious self, so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious. This understanding is achieved not through a rational comprehension of his unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out day -dreams.
Thus fairy tales have un-equalled value, as “they offer new dimensions to the child’s imagination which would be impossible for him to discover as truly as his own” (7). In other words, the fairy tales liberate the child’s subconscious, so that he or she can work through the conflicts and experiences which would otherwise be repressed and perhaps result in psychological disturbances. According to Bettelheim, most tales are an imaginative depiction of healthy human development which help children understand the motives behind their rebellion against parents and the fear of growing up and “present existential dilemmas in a clear-cut manner so that the child can easily grasp the underlying meanings of the conflicts” (Zipes 161). The conclusion of these tales “portrays the achievement of psychological independence, moral maturity and sexual confidence” (161). This aspect of fairy tale form again comes handy for the feminist writers.

Fairy tales play a tremendous role in the development of a child. Unlike any other form of literature, fairy tales direct the child to discover his identity and calling and also suggest what experiences are required in the development of his character for “fairy tales intimate that a rewarding good life is within one’s reach despite adversity – but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity” (Bettelheim 24). These tales make it clear that if a child dares to engage in such struggles, benevolent powers will help him succeed. Simultaneously the tales also, “warn that those who are
too timorous and narrow – minded to risk themselves in finding themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence if an even worse fate does not befall them” (24).

Like millions of children throughout the world, Charles Dickens was deeply enchanted by fairy tales. He stated that ‘Little Red Riding hood’ was his first love. He felt that he could have married Little Red Riding Hood, and he would have known perfect bliss. Dickens acknowledged the profound impact that fairy tales had had on him and his creative genius He had great scorn for those, who deprived their children of fairy tales. Dickens realized the great importance of fairy tales that help children more than anything else in their most difficult task of “achieving a more mature consciousness to civilize the chaotic pressures of their unconscious” (23). There are several approaches to fairy tales but it is primarily the psychological approach, which reveals the hidden meanings of the tales and the importance in the development of the child by applying the psychoanalytic model of the human personality. It has been rightly observed in Uses of Enchantment that, “fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the pre- conscious and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time” (Bettelheim,6), and thereby aid the child’s psychological development. Psychoanalysis enables man to accept the problematic nature of life without being defeated by it or giving in to escapism. Freud maintains that, “only by struggling
courageously against what seems like overwhelming odds can man succeed in 
wringing meaning out of his existence” (8).

This is precisely the message that fairy tales put across to the child in 
myriad forms - that a struggle against harsh difficulties in life is inevitable; it is an 
intrinsic part of human existence – but that if one does not shy away but 
steadfastly meet unexpected and often unjust hardships, we can master all 
obstacles and eventually emerge victorious. Real or true to life stories do not 
generally aid child development, because they tend to impinge upon the 
imagination of the child and act repressively as would the rational interference of 
an adult. On the other hand, the fairy tale transforms reality in such a way that 
children cope with it. The fairy tale allows freedom for the free play of the child’s 
imagination in that it deals at first with a problematic real situation, which is then 
imaginatively transformed. It is precisely this freedom for the free play of the 
imagination that Carter, Atwood and Namjoshi have exploited in their re-tellings 
to stress the necessity for a re-ordering of the established gender arrangements. 
This has been amply illustrated in tales like “The Bloody Chamber” (BC 1 – 41) 
where the bride’s mother dramatically comes to her daughter’s rescue and takes 
revenge on her son-in-law, “as if she has been Medusa, the sword still raised over 
his head as in those clockwork tableaux of Blue beard that you see in glass cases at 
fairs” (40). In “Blue Beard’s Egg” (BE 131-164), Sally compares Ed to the egg in
the story, “Ed isn’t the Blue beard: Ed is the egg. Ed Egg, blank and pristine and lovely. Stupid too. Boiled, probably” (167), but it is much later she realizes that the egg is alive. Namjoshi in “Mother Goose, Sister Goose and the Market-led farmer”(SF 96-97) makes the Goose – sisters rebel against farmers.

The fairy tale may be considered a psychoanalyst in the way it operates on a child. The tale opens up unexplored realms of experience to the child who learns to order his inner world by following the fantastic sign posts of the tale and by identifying with the hero or heroine who becomes the ruler of the kingdom i.e. the ruler of the self. A characteristic feature of fairy tales is to state an existential dilemma briefly and precisely, which, enables the child to come to grips with the problem in its most basic form, where a more complicated plot would only confuse matters. Further, the fairy tale simplifies all situations for him and a picture is vividly drawn with all unnecessary details eliminated. Though these tales depict both vice and virtue, the fairy tale characters are not ambivalent as in reality. This polarization of character in fairy tales enables the child to easily comprehend the differences between the two, which he would not be able to recognize so easily in real life situations. In Bettelheim’s view, adults should not attempt to explain the fairy tales to children, as that would destroy their magic. However, it is important that adults should tell the tales because that shows approval of children’s imaginative play. Or else children may tend to feel guilty in indulging in it for in
fairy tales internal processes are externalized and become comprehensible as represented by the characters and events of the story. Bettelheim believes:

In traditional Hindu medicine a fairy tale giving form to this particular problem was offered to a psychically disoriented person for his meditation. It was expected that through contemplating the story the disturbed person would be led to visualize both the nature of the impasse in living form which he suffered and the possibility of its resolution. From what a particular tale implied about man’s despair, hopes and methods of overcoming tribulations, the patient could discover not only a way out of his distress but also a way to find himself, as the hero of the story did (25).

The importance of fairy tales lies in something other than teaching about correct ways of behavior in this world. This knowledge may be easily obtained from religion, myths and fables. The therapeutic value of fairy tales does not lie in the fact that these tales do not pretend to describe the world as it is, nor do they tell what one ought to do. As Bettelheim puts it:

The fairy tale is therapeutic because the patient finds his own solutions, through contemplating what the story seems to imply about him and his inner conflicts at this moment in his life....The unrealistic nature of these
tales is an important device because it makes obvious that the fairy tale's concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner processes taking place in an individual (25).

Naturally, the feminist writers chose this medium of the fairy tale to capture the inner turmoil and conflicts experienced by the oppressed class—'women'.

As far the child is concerned, his unconscious processes may be clarified for him only through images, which speak directly to his unconscious. The images evoked by fairy tales do this. The fairy tale seldom confronts us directly or tells us outright what choice we must make. Instead it helps children to develop the desire for a higher consciousness through what is implied in the story. There is a general belief that myths and fairy tales speak to us in the language of symbols representing unconscious content. Their appeal is to our conscious and unconscious mind; to all the three aspects—id, ego and super ego. Freudian psychoanalysts generally show what kind of repressed or unconscious material underlies myths and fairy tales and how these relate to dreams and day dreams. Fairy tales are of immense help to the child in resolving his oedipal conflicts. It can show the child the way through the thorniest of thickets, the Oedipal period—from the ages three to six or seven. During this period the child's experiences of the world is chaotic. The child like the adult experiences a welter of contradictory
feelings. But while adults have learned to integrate them, the child is overwhelmed by these ambivalences within himself, as Bettelheim in “Bringing Order out of Chaos” states:

Through simple and direct images the fairy story helps the child sort out of his complex and ambivalent feelings, so that these begin to fall each one into a separate place, rather than being in all one big muddle. As he listens to the fairy tale the child gets ideas about how he may create order out of chaos, which is his inner life (74-75).

What the child needs most from the age of four to puberty is to be presented with symbolic images which reassure him of the possibility of a happy solution provided he is prepared to slowly work himself out of them. This reassurance can be easily given through fairy tales, which offer “fantasy materials that suggest to the child in symbolic form what the battle to achieve self – realization is all about and guarantees a happy ending” (39). So fairy tales are of the utmost value to the growing up child, as “these psycho-social crises of growing up are imaginatively embroidered and symbolically represented in them”. (39) The strange events that the fairy tale hero experiences do not necessarily make him super human. According to Bettelheim, “this real humanity suggests to the child that whatever the content of the fairy tale, it is but fanciful elaborations and exaggerations of the
tasks he has to meet and of his hopes and fears” (40). Though fairy tales offer fantastic symbolic images for the solution of problems, generally the ones represented are ordinary ones, like sufferings of a child from the jealousy and discrimination of his siblings, as in “Cinderella”. This again prompted women writers with their cry for social change to use the fairy tale as their choicest medium.

Unlike myths, the fairy tales tells us the story of every man, people very much like us, but when typical characters like Beauty and the Beast, The Little Prince, The Ugly Duckling etc appear they are not proper names but general or descriptive ones. Children normally tend to favour stories like “The Three Little Pigs” over realistic tales. “The Three Little Pigs” teach children in the most interesting form that we must not be lazy and take things for granted, for if we do, we may perish. Intelligent planning and foresight combined with hard toil will make us victorious over our most ferocious enemy – the wolf. This fairy tale makes a greater impact on children than Aesop’s fable “The Ant and the Grasshopper” that deals with the same theme. Bettelheim in “Pleasure versus Reality”, analyses the reason for it:

The fable always explicitly states a moral truth; there is no hidden meaning, nothing left to our imagination. The fairy tale leaves all decisions up to us.
It is up to us whether we wish to make any application to our life from a fairy tale, or simply enjoy the fantastic events it tells about. (43)

Both myths and fairy tales alike serve to answer the eternal perplexing questions like 'What is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I truly be myself?' But unlike myths, fairy tales provide suggestive answers: the messages may imply solutions but it never spells them out.

Adult or child, only a story conforming to the principles underlying our thought processes carries conviction for us. Some people have a tendency to condemn fairy tales as senseless, fantastic, terrifying and totally incredible; particularly those adults who have been deprived of fairy tales in their childhood or have repressed these memories. But an adult who has been able to integrate the rational order with the illogic of his unconscious will realize the potential that fairy tales have for this integration, as fairy tales reveal truth about mankind in general as well as oneself. Adults object to fairy tales since these tales offer fantastic answers than real live ones. But these adults fail to understand that realistic explanations are usually incomprehensible to the child because it lacks the abstract understanding required to make sense of them. What these people fail to realize is that fairy tales do not try to describe the external world and 'reality'. Nor do they recognize that no sane child ever believes that these tales describe the world realistically.
Fairy tales are of immense value to the child as they offer figures onto which the child can externalize what goes on in his mind in uncontrollable ways. They show the child how he can embody his destructive wishes in one figure, gain desired satisfaction from another, identify with a third and have ideal attachments with a fourth and so on. Bettelheim states in “The Importance of Externalization”:

When the entire child’s wishful thinking gets embodied in a good fairy; all his destructive wishes in an evil witch; all his fears in a voracious wolf; all his jealous anger in some animal that peels out the eyes of his arch-rivals – then the children finally begin to sort out his contradictory tendencies. Once this starts the child will be less and less engulfed by unmanageable chaos (68).

But on the contrary, as he points out in “The Fear of Fantasy” the opposite is true:

Complex as we all are – conflicted, ambivalent, full of contradictions - the human personality is indivisible. Whatever, an experience may be it always affects all the aspects of the personality at the same time. The total personality, in order to be able to deal with the tasks of living, needs to be backed up by a rich fantasy combined with a firm consciousness and a clear grasp of reality (118).
This is precisely what Namjoshi in her *Feminist Fables* attempts. Namjoshi well aware of the necessity for a combination of fantasy and reality has clearly reflected this intermixture in her re-tellings in her *Feminist Fables*. In fables like “Jack Three’s Luck” (FF 101), “In the Forest” (FF 95), and “The Three Bears” (FF 39), Namjoshi makes use of fairy tale characters in very real settings to provide an alternate paradigm to the present male-dominated one. Jack Three in “Jack Three’s Luck” agrees to marry the giantess and do the house-keeping, saying, “that he felt honoured, that pleased the giantess” (101). Gretel puts on a brave front and encounters the witch, she walks up the path and “knocks at the door”. The witch, “lets her in” (95). Goldilocks in “The Three Bears” (FF 39) is an eight-year-old boy, who cries when the Bears get angry. They relent as he is “after all a pretty little boy” (39).

People who condemn fairy tales as useless point out to those people who withdraw from the world and spend most of their days in the realm of imagination. This may mistakenly suggest that an over-rich fantasy life interferes without coping successfully with reality. But the rich and variegated fantasy life offered by fairy tales also contain a variety of real issues that provides the ego with an abundance of material which can prevent the child’s imagination from getting stuck with a few narrow preoccupations.
The unconscious as well we know is the source of the raw materials from which the ego erects the edifice of our personality. Our fantasies are the natural resources that provide and shape this raw material utilizing it for the ego's personality building tasks.

Moreover, the challenges that women confront in day to day life are too overwhelming to solve and the fantasy satisfactions in fairy tales help them not to give up in despair. The exaggerated hopes and fantasies of future society can help them to plod on. As soon as they are able to fantasize a proper solution to the social evils, with the promise of hope, the existing problems are no longer insufferable.

To cut short, "while the fantasy is unreal, the good feelings it gives us about ourselves and our futures are real and these real good feelings are what we need to sustain us" (125).

Children must necessarily acquaint themselves with stories that reverberate with the agonies of sibling rivalry, desperate feelings of rejection, feelings of inferiority, sense of inadequacy. This will give them the conviction, that after all their labours, a wonderful future is awaiting them. Only this belief can give them the strength to grow up well, securely, with self-respect and self-confidence to confront the innumerable problems of life and help them to overcome them.
priceless fairy tales. This potential for externalization has also been exploited by Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi. In their tales the depiction of strong female characters with a great sense of self worth like the bride in “The Bloody Chamber” (BC 1-41), Blue beard’s wife in “Alien Territory” (BAM 103-116) and Gretel in “In the Forest” (FF 95) who are able to outwit the male characters, offer a moral boost for women.

Although superficially fairy tales are generally associated with children’s literature and primarily intended for amusement; they have been invariably employed for very serious purposes and have catered to an adult readership. Several writers and philosophers have extolled the use of fairy tales. Plato advised the future citizens of his ideal Republic to begin their literary education with the telling of myths, rather than with mere facts of rational teachings. Even Aristotle, master of pure reason has observed that, the friend of wisdom is also a friend of myth.

Fairy tales seem to be very popular with women writers who have rewritten traditional fairy tales to give expression to feminist views. Novelists like Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison, Anita Desai and Suniti Namjoshi have drawn exhaustively on fantasy and fairy tale elements in their works to put across their ideas of feminism. Feminist writers have been greatly attracted to the Marchen by its popularity as a genre of children’s literature. Tales like
“Cinderella”, “Little Red Riding Hood”, “King Thrush beard” and “Rapunzel” are decidedly biased against females, and are an unfortunate source of negative stereotypes. Feminists vehemently argue that these passive and pretty heroines who dominate popular fairy tales offer narrow and damaging role models for young readers. Fairy tales, in early feminist writing was considered as one of the many socializing forces that discouraged females from realizing their whole potential. Betty Friedan and Simone de Beavoir, refer to “generalized ‘Cinderellas’ and ‘Sleeping Beauties’ who are urged to wake up and take charge of their own lives rather than wait for ‘Prince Charming’ to act for them” (Bottighiemer 230).

A more recent book Fairy tales and Female Consciousness by Barbara Waelti- Walters, insists that future generations must be protected from the negative effects of fairy tale stereotyping. Marcia Lieberman insists that fairy tale romance, the ‘happily ever after endings’ have been made the repositories of the dreams, hopes and fantasies of generations of girls. In Karen Rowe’s view such tales are problem creating rather than problem solving. In the critiques and rewritten tales Marchen women were set in irreconcilable opposition to male characters. Thus the Marchen was regarded as no longer a romantic tale about living happily ever after but instead about the inner development.
The Women’s Movement in the past decade, in particular has sharpened the view of the role of feminism in fairy tales. Completely new perspectives have resulted. Concepts like the ‘Cinderella complex’ or the ‘Sleeping Beauty syndrome have entered general parlance. And as feminist commentators contend, there are astonishing role constraints in connection with gender from the patriarchal realm. While the man performs heroic deeds, the woman generally plays a menial role. Negative female stereotypes reveal themselves in the female antagonistic roles of a wicked stepmother or a witch. Therefore, Lutz Rohrich in the Introduction to Fairy Tales and Society questions:

Can tales which pass on such material continue to lay claim to a legitimate place in the modern world? Or have these tales perverted children’s sense of reality, leading parents to rear their children with unrealistic dreams? And will such reading cause children to see a witch in every old woman? (Bottigheimer 5)

Women themselves have started to write and publish women’s fairy tales, which accentuate previously hidden active female qualities. In these fairy tales the emphasis is on the active heroines who are portrayed as wise and resourceful. In the earliest times aristocratic ladies like Countess d’Aulroy, Madame de Villeneuve, Madame de Beaumont, Mademoiselle De Heritier and Madame de
Mural wrote fairy tales. A few women writers have rewritten traditional fairy tales and have made use of fairy tale motifs extensively. Feminist preoccupations and concerns are particularly noticeable in the works of Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi. These writers in their short stories have made extensive use of fairy tale motifs and have re-written traditional tales from the female viewpoint.

Alison Lurie suggests that fairy tales are perhaps the first real women’s literature being “unique parables of feminine socialization and graphic examples of a cultural consciousness that predates the emergence of women into their full stature.” (Kolbenschlag 4). Besides challenging gender stereotyping through critiques, feminist writers have also responded by offering more aggressive and resourceful heroines. In the “Practical Princess” and “Petronella” by Jay Williams; we meet princesses who slay dragons and rescue spoiled princesses from magicians. Some writers offer traditional tales in which heroines assume dynamic roles, which as Kay Stone feels “would counter balance stereotype passive princesses and offer a new paradigm for female consciousness”. (Fairy Tales and Society 230) According to Marta Weigle women are by nature separate as they perceive and react to the world differently. Feminists have favoured the spinning image for its link with the traditional female occupations and of its images of connecting and creating positive patterns. Weigle and others opine that though the feminine voice is indeed different from the masculine it is not only limited to
women. We make the error of equating female with feminine and male with masculine. Recent feminist writers insist that new perceptions of female and male are needed by all human beings if we are to break the magic spell of gender stereotyping.

The battle over the significance of fairy tales has been raging in various forms for some time and recently it has spread to a new front namely the issue of sexual stereotyping, which writers in recent times have given clear expression to in all forms of literature. Simone de Beauvoir is of the view that “everything still encourages the young girl to expect fortune and happiness from some Prince Charming rather than to attempt by herself their difficult and uncertain conquest” (De Beauvoir 126).

Another view of women has emerged in feminist writings of the late 1970s. Though women are separate from they are not inherently antagonistic to men. As Marie-Louise Von Franz's adopting Jung's idea of 'anima and animus' points out in her Problems of the Feminine in Fairy Tales that women must inevitably “come to terms with their masculine force” and “the dark side of their feminine force” as “it is precisely this dark side that women have been taught to ignore and repress, according to many feminist writers”. (qtd. Bottigheimer 232)

Men too must develop familiarity with their feminine forces. Von franz and other Jungians feel that, ‘full individuation for both females and males is encouraged by understanding myth and Marchen and other forms of archetypal expression such as dreams.”(232) This potential of fairy tales, for the full individuation of both females and males has been realized by Atwood, Carter and Namjoshi in their retellings. Madonna Kolbenschlag in her Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good bye, a more radically challenging examination of femininity and fairy tales, sees the need for both men and women to understand their conflicting feminine and masculine forces. In her concluding chapter, “Exit the Frog Prince” she warns, “if the feminine voice continued to be silent or unheard when spoken, then women will have to separate themselves from men in order to develop fully” (233). According to Kay Stone three different assumptions have underlain the development of feminist writing in general and in their approaches to Marchen and myth:
The earliest feminists saw women as artificially separated from and wrongly considered unequal to men; the next generation of writers insisted that women were naturally separate from men and rightly superior; and many recent writers consider both men and women as naturally separate but potentially equal – if men shape up. The Marchen has been examined from all three approaches, and feminist reactions have ranged from sharp criticism to firm support of the images of women presented in them. ("Feminist Approaches" 234)

Recent feminist criticism and feminist fairy tales have attempted to confront the 'real problem' which lies beyond and around fairy tales. Feminists attempt our gaze and challenge our perspectives with regard to literature and society and particularly to the factors, which contribute, to the exploitation of women. Several women's liberation movements one could argue have made women's lives qualitatively easier. Yet this ease has brought with it more subtle forms of oppression, and the daily lives of women are fraught with harassment and obstacles that men rarely experience. Jack Zipes in his introduction to his Don't Bet on the Prince states his view:
Or, to put it 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 they experience. (Zipes 2)

Robert Moore in his political essay “From Rags to witches: stereotypes, distortion and anti-humanism in fairy tales” (1975) emphasizes the negative features of the traditional fairy tales. In Moore’s view there is very little in the traditional fairy tales which may be considered positive and worthwhile in the interest of a humanist education. This stresses the need for a change. More attention should be given to the dark side of the tales.

Kay Stone confirms the existence of another folk tradition in America and England, which portrays women in folklore as aggressive, active, clever and enterprising. Unfortunately these tales have been suppressed in literature. Stone interviewed about forty women in different age groups in North America to find out whether they were aware at the “other tradition”. The majority of women was not aware of it and was even surprised to hear that there were tales about independent, resourceful women to which they could relate in a more satisfying manner. This has led to a historical re-examination and re-discovery of matriarchal features in folk and fairy tales by feminist writers like Heather Lyons and Jane Yolen. Most feminist critics argue that the traditional fairy tales are unacceptable today because of their atavistic notions of sex roles and their
ideology of male domination. Therefore, many women writers have rewritten
traditional fairy tales. Angela Carter’s *The Donkey Prince* and *The Bloody
Camber and Other Stories*, Harriet Herman’s *The Forest Princess* and *The Return
Of The Forest Princess*, Jane Yolen’s *The Hundredth Dove, Dream Weaver* and
*Sleeping Ugly* and Ann Tompert’s *The Clever Princess* are the best examples.

Feminist precedents were set in the literary fairy tale tradition by the end of
the nineteenth century. Victorian writers like Mary D. Morgan, Mrs. Molesworth
and Evelyn Scharp wrote tales depicting strong heroines who rebel against
convention – ridden societies. In the beginning of the twentieth century, E. Nesbit
in tales like “The last of the Dragons” and “The Nine Whirlpools” depicted
resourceful women. Later L. Frank Braun wrote his Oz Books and Catherine
Storr, “Clever Polly and the stupid wolf”, which reverses the traditional Red
Riding Hood into a smart girl. As Jack Zipes in his introduction to *Don’t Bet On
the Prince*, points out:

[T]he contemporary feminist fairy tales have drawn upon rich tradition of
feminist tales or tales with strong women which may not be widely known
but have nevertheless provided models and the impetus to challenge the
dominant male discourse. (13)
Thus feminist fairy tales emanate from a basic impulse for change within society and in the conventional gender-arrangements and they seek to break boundaries with a view to the rearrangement of gender and social roles. In most feminist fairy tales for older readers the patterns and themes are also designed to stress liberation and transformation. In some cases the writers are outright pessimistic, for instance, Anne Sexton, one of the first writers to use fairy tales as a vehicle to comment on the plight of women in a male dominated society, portrays her heroines as prisoners or commodities. In her book *Transformations* (1971), she has adapted sixteen of the Grimm’s fairy tales in verse form to demonstrate the multifarious ways in which women are circumscribed by language and custom in daily life so that the possibility for them to attain self-expression and free movement is curtailed. Sexton, who is never considered a feminist, does not pose the possibility of sexual rearrangement, but she does nevertheless question the present arrangement in a radical way.

Discussing the significance of the feminist fairy tales Jack Zipes in his introduction to *Don't Bet On The Prince*, observes that, “it lies in their Utopian function to criticize current shifts in psychic and social structures and to point the way towards new possibilities for individual development and social interaction” (32). The structure of most of the feminist tales is based on the self-definition of a young woman in social interaction with others. This is evident in the re-worked
tales of Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Suniti Namjoshi. The young women in Carter’s tales like the bride in “The Bloody Chamber” (BC 1-41), Beauty in “The Courtship of Mr. Lyon” (BC 41-50) and “The Tiger’s Bride” (BC 51-67), the girl in “The Werewolf” (BC 108-110) and “The Company of Wolves” (BC 110-118) are generally young women who have established a self-identity and are able to interact with the other characters as individuals in their own right. They are unlike the stereo-typed docile female in a patriarchal set up. Similarly in Atwood’s tales we find female characters like Molly, the smart female advocate in “Weight” (WT 177-193), Sally, the smart wife of “stupid” Ed, in “Blue beard’s Egg” (BE 131-164), and the proud Princess Prunella in “Princess Prunella and the Purple Peanut.” Namjoshi too in her re-tellings depicts young women with a self-identity, contrary to the traditional notion. Female characters like Gretel in “In the Forest” (FF 95), Cinderella in “And Then What Happened” (FF 118) and the giantess in “Jack Three’s Luck” (FF 101) are apt examples. These tales experiment with the language, motifs and characters of the traditional tales in pursuit of encouraging the self-worth of an individual.

To write fairy tales from a feminist perspective is not simply an act of symbolical writing for self-gratification, but also a political act based on their experiences with male brutality and general social violence which is a legitimation of male control. In this context, Zipes observes:
To write feminist fairy tales is to write with the hope that future generations will not adopt the atavistic forms and ideas found in traditional tales, but that they will arrange their lives in response to non-sexist social conditions and the different options presented in the feminist fairy tales which are still seeking to prove their humanitarian value. (33)

Suniti Namjoshi’s objective in retelling the traditional fairy tales from the woman’s point of view, is also a similar one. In her fable, she attempts to question the marginalization of women in a patriarchal set-up and prompt women to struggle for self-identity.

A close study of the treatment of girls and women in fairy tales reveals certain patterns, which indicate the limitations that are imposed by sex upon a person’s chances of success in various endeavours. The question that naturally arises is whether those truths that have been described as feminine have a biological or cultural basis; what is inherent in our nature and what has become ours through the process of acculturation. Feminists accept nothing as a ‘given’ about the nature of female personality. Most women have formed their psycho-sexual self-concepts, their ideas, the right sort of behaviour, attitudes from their favourite fairy tales. As Marcia. K. Lieberman in “Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female acculturation through the fairy tale” remarks:
These stories have been made the repositories of the dreams, hopes and fantasies of generations of girls. Certain premises and patterns emerge of which only the stereo-typed figure of the wicked step-mother has received much general notice. The beauty contest is a constant and primary device in many of the stories. *(Don’t Bet On The Prince 187)*

It is a psychological truth that as children and women, girls fear homelessness and this fear is a major source of anxiety, diffidence and convictions of inadequacy and inferiority among women. It is also a source of envy and discord among them. Psychoanalysts from Freud and Jung onwards have observed myths and fairy tales often both state and enforce culture’s sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated literary texts. Fairy tales are no longer merely entertaining fantasies but powerful transmitters of romantic myths, which encourage women to internalize only the aspirations deemed appropriate to their ‘real’ sexual functions within a patriarchy. Recent studies such as Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* and Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, have exposed the historical conditions which subordinate women in all areas from the procreative to the political. With progressive suffrage and liberation movements of the twentieth century and radical re-definitions of sexual and social roles, women are challenging both precious mores and those fairy tales, which inculcate romantic ideals. Although lingeringly attracted to
fantasies, many modern women can no longer blindly accept the promise of connubial bliss with the prince.

The treatment of fairy tales in literature has significant implications for feminist theory and literary criticism as they provide the expressions of that which is lacking in actual life and highlight the possibilities of alternatives. In this context, the re-telling of fairy tales has gained immense significance and the tendency to belittle them is baseless as any reader, who knows the traditional tale or the brilliant variations on their themes, will realize that fairy tales are not merely childish entertainment set in an unreal and irrelevant universe. It is true that they do entertain children and adults, but they also seriously tell us about the world we live in. Carter Atwood and Namjoshi have fully realized this, which has prompted them to re-write traditional fairy tales opposing the cultural construction of gender.