



Gender Socialization Through Fairy Tales: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Sahreen Gul¹ & Dr. Fatima Zafar Baig²

¹Ph.D Scholar, The Women University Multan, Email: Sahreengul3006@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, The Women University Multan, Email: Fatimabaig_84@wum.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received:	May	20, 2025
Revised:	June	18, 2025
Accepted:	June	27, 2025
Available Online:	July	01, 2025

Keywords:

Gender ideology, gender roles, fairy tales, Critical discourse analysis

Corresponding Author:

Sahreen Gul

Email:

Sahreengul3006@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

Early childhood stories are crucial for cognitive development in children. Fairy tales act as educational tools for children even before they step foot inside a school. Fairytales plant a significant seed in the minds of children and as children grow, these subtle concepts morph into their perspective of reality. Fantastical lives of princes and princesses, witches and ogres, giants and dragons are portrayed in fairy tales. Their magical power captures the imagination of young children. The paper focuses on the topic of gender roles in fairy tales and how the development of children and their understandings are affected by these outdated views about gender. These fairy tales provide children the false narratives of gender structures. It explores the gendered messages enfolded in the fairy tales. The objective of this research is to see gender, its construction, representation and the differences in the fairy tales. The data consists of ten most viewed or read fairy tales. Critical discourse analysis has been used to highlight the contextual and implied meanings of some utterances that eventually reveal the portrayal of male and female characters. The findings show that genders are presented in stereotypical ways; males are having authority and violent nature and females are obedient, polite and resisting somehow to save their lives through their intellect and witty tricks. The results are drawn based on this analysis, which show considerable use of stereotype and social beliefs with regard to gender in the fairy tales. This research has implication for the masses to change their traditional and stereotypical perceptions about gender roles and women's emancipation. The current research is helpful in showing the biased representation of gender in fairy tales for the young impressionable minds. Moreover, it is beneficial for teachers and story writers.

Introduction

In shaping perspectives and influencing behaviors, stories hold huge power especially among children. The stereotypes that are conveyed by these narratives often embed so deeply into the consciousness of young impressionable minds can become long-lasting truths. For instance, the beliefs and attitudes about gender may be permanently skewed if children are exposed consistently to the stories portraying females as either beautiful or ugly. Storytelling has long been a medium for communicating experiences and resolving social conflicts. As humanity developed speech, people began using stories to articulate and address conflicting desires and issues. Fairy tales often begin with conflict, reflecting the struggles of everyday life. According to Zipes (2011), storytelling serves as a way to navigate these challenges. Fairy tales typically include elements such as fairies, giants, witches, princes, princesses, magic, and enchantment. Sawyer (2011) defines a fairy tale as a narrative that embodies a person's desires and aspirations. The representation of gender ideology within fairy tales and children's literature has become a critical area of study, reflecting its impact on societal perceptions and individual development

Historically, in literature, often reinforcing patriarchal ideals the representation of women always been marginalized. As Virginia Woolf articulates in *A Room of One's Own*, "Looking glasses, possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size," represent how men are portrayed as superior, more proficient, and less prone to moral disintegration. Those who wield the pen shape societal norms, controlling the transmission of information and reinforcing gender ideologies.

This control is unambiguously evident in fairy tales. Simone de Beauvoir highlights how men perceive women as dangerous, a power that men are irrevocably excluded from due to the women's inherent connection to life and death. Consequently, reflecting broader societal fears and biases, women are often constrained within narrow roles in these narratives.

Gender Ideologies in Fairy Tales

Traditional fairy tales influence modern media and movies, by preserving these gender norms and by glorifying hyper-masculine men while objectifying and subordinating women. In the tales like *Snow White*, themes of female submissiveness and the prioritization of beauty centrally take place and are continuing to shape cultural expectations long after the stories end.

Fairy tales simplify human relationships into digestible binaries such as good versus evil. However, this reductionist approach often comes at the expense of exploring complex emotions and morality. Women in fairy tales are polarized: they are either innocent and virtuous or cunning and malevolent. These depictions enforce destructive social norms and restrict female self-expression, reinforcing oppressive gender roles.

Gender is defined by society and culture than by biology. The societal expectations of behaviors from males and females construct gender ideologies has been the focus of extensive research. Traditionally, women are expected to be caregivers while men are expected to be bread winners. This type of representation portrays women as subordinate and obedient. In traditional fairy tales "good" women are always passive and wait for rescue while powerful women are presented as "evil". Gender ideologies cast women as caregivers and homemakers, while men are expected to be breadwinners

Changing Representations of Women Roles

Since the 1980s, the restrictive portrayals of women have increasingly voiced and challenged. The character of sheherzad, from a tale “*One Thousand and One Nights*” exemplifies this shift. Shahrazade’s intellectual use of wit challenges her husband’s prejudices. She reshapes his views about women and also advocates for their basic rights. Her story represents the potential of woman to challenge stereotypes and inspire social change. Gender ideology, or gender roles, refers to the expectations of behavior of male and female within a society. According to Karoska (2007), “both gender identity and gender role ideology pertains to attitudes about appropriate roles, responsibilities, and rights of men and women”. Over the past few decades, scholars have progressively focused on exposing gender issues and discrimination present in language and literature. Meis (2007) asserts that unequal representation of gender roles in literature expressively influences “gender role development and socialization.”

Traditionally gender ideologies often portrayed women as caretakers and housewives while assigning men the role of breadwinners (Legge & Misra, 1998). Women were historically expected to be loyal, subservient, and obedient, with societal norms enforcing such behavior (O’Neill, 2012). In traditional fairy tales, a “good” woman is portrayed as submissive, patiently awaiting rescue by a prince, while powerful women are often depicted as evil and unattractive (Neikirk, 2009).

Fairy tales always served as reflections of human experiences. Conflicts are resolved through storytelling. As Zipes (2011) suggests, fairy tales always address the conflicts and desires of human life. These tales always offer insights into cultural ideologies.

Impact on Children

In children’s literature, the representation of gender in fairy tales plays a key role in shaping children’s understanding of themselves and their place in society. Psychologists Arlandis, Sergio, and Agustín Reyes-Torres witness that children’s literature often uses symbols like mirrors to reflect themes of self-identity and transformation. Such stories effect how children view their self-worth and their roles as boys or girls.

The importance of exposing literature that challenges patriarchal norms to children is emphasized by an expert of Gender studies Janice McCabe. Early exposure of children to gender-biased narratives can significantly shape children’s perceptions, highlighting the need for society to provide comprehensive and balanced storytelling. By doing so, literature can become a tool for empowering children and development equality in their developmental years.

In conclusion, fairy tales carry huge power in shaping gender ideologies. While historically rooted patriarchal norms, the paper efforts to challenge these biases by highlighting the potential of literature to change. Recognition of the influence of these fairy tales is crucial for creating a more equitable society.

Statement of the Problem

In the contemporary society, the persistent issue is that gender stereotypes impact negatively on women. In literature and in various aspects of culture, these stereotypes are deeply embedded. In both literature and children’s entertainment channels, fairy tales always hold an enduring place. Outdated social norms are often reflected in their narratives that perpetuate gender biases.

Classical story authors like Grimm and Perrault shaped different social issues of their time that are culturally different from the contemporary society. Consequently, that presented moral structures and characters portrayals are not aligned with modern ideals of inclusivity and equality. However, the dismissal of these tales would lose their historical and cultural value.

According to the researchers and psychologists, that by updating thoughtful characters and themes can positively influence the social perspectives of children. Classic tales can be preserved by devolving healthier social views among young readers. To make these narratives impactful and relevant such adaptations should be allowed and encourage a shift away from stereotypes while retaining their timeless appeal.

Significance of the Research

Fairy tales serve as a tool for moral learning, social understanding and creativity. These tales play a vibrant role in constructing and shaping the early and later developmental stages of children. Their significant purpose in fostering imagination and ethical growth should not be losing by removing them from cultural discourse. The solution lies in revising and modernizing these narratives instead of discarding them due to their stereotypical elements. The development of characters should represent all genders equally. The current research paper suggests that the cultural and educational value of storytelling should be promoted by modernizing these narratives.

Research Objectives

- To explore existing gender gaps in surroundings with correlation to the selected fairytale.
- To find out the social roles assigned to men and women through the plot structure of fairy tales.
- To bring forth the powerful role of fairy tales in construction and perception of gender biasness and women's emancipation.

In this regard, the following questions will be answered,

Research Questions

- What is the role of fairy tales in construction of gender ideologies?
- How power relations are portrayed in fairy tales through gender discrimination?
- How do the fiction writers enact their ideological assumptions through gender?

Literature Review

Literature review consists upon theoretical framework and related researches.

Theoretical Framework

Fairy tales also function as a discourse, a term defined by Fairclough (2001) as the use of "Language as social practice determined by social structures" (as cited in Siddique, 2014, p. 12). Discourse encompasses language beyond the sentence level, language in social contexts, and language as a thought process. Cook (1989) elaborates that discourse analysis examines how stretches of language become cohesive and meaningful within social, psychological, and textual contexts.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), as developed by Fairclough (1989, 2001), provides a framework for uncovering these ideological patterns and power structures. Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA consists of description, interpretation, and explanation. In the description phase, the

linguistic features of a text, such as vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures, are analyzed. The interpretation phase focuses on situational and intertextual contexts, examining participants' meanings and understandings embedded in linguistic choices. Finally, the explanation phase explores how linguistic features reflect particular theoretical orientations related to ideology and power. According to Fairclough (2001), the purpose of explanation is to identify assumptions about culture, identity, and social relationships that sustain or challenge existing power structures.

By applying CDA to selected fairy tales, the relationship between the powerful and the powerless can be critically examined to better understand embedded gender ideologies. This approach provides a lens through which the politics of power and representation in fairy tales can be analyzed, illuminating how these narratives shape and perpetuate societal norms related to gender.

Foucault's theory of knowledge and power provides further insight into the role of discourse. According to Foucault, discourse delineates the dynamics between the powerful and the powerless, highlighting struggles between oppressors and the oppressed (Siddique, 2014, p. 7). Dominant groups, such as men, often use discourse to represent marginalized groups, such as women, in ways that reflect their biases. This unequal power dynamic becomes particularly evident in conflicting situations where one group influences the actions and lives of another (SDPI, 2007–2008).

Fairy tales have long been considered a "powerful discourse" that shapes gender representation, as noted by Bacchilega (1999). These tales carry deep cultural significance, yet their depiction of gender roles often sparks debate. Bettelheim (1976) argued that some view fairy tales as unsuitable for children, as they fail to present a "truthful" picture of life. However, Louise (1996) counters this perspective, describing fairy tales as "the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes." Through these narratives, children identify and internalize cultural norms, including those related to gender identity. As Kukendal and Sturm (2007) point out, fairy tales often serve as a child's earliest exposure to gender roles, emphasizing the need for characters that are portrayed realistically to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

The impact of fairy tales on a child's psyche is profound, often surpassing other lessons in their formative years. While reversing gender roles in fairy tales might challenge traditional norms, Kukendal and Sturm (2007) caution that such adaptations may result in "fractured fairy tales" rather than truly feminist narratives. A feminist fairy tale, they assert, is one in which the main character is powerful regardless of gender, promoting equity rather than simply inverting stereotypes.

Related Researches

Literature serves as a powerful medium for shaping gender ideology and perceptions. Since the 20th century, many scholars have focused on the role of literature in challenging traditional and stereotypical gender roles. However, in many developing countries, these stereotypes, particularly regarding women's empowerment, persist.

Hess (1983) analyzed primetime television and reinforced the idea that women's roles are restricted. Wardetsky (1990) conducted a study. That involved 2,500 schoolchildren from the age eight to ten years. The research explored that the gendered themes are reflected in fairy tales and those themes influence children's perception. Fisherkeller (1997) found that sociocultural narratives from literature shape the identities of children. Eschholz (2001) analyzed the gendered roles in movies and identified that women's only value is due to their physical appearance.

Lincoln (2004) highlighted that traditional fairy tales emphasize only on female beauty. Cherland (2006) argued that the children's narratives need to be revised to change the social norms. Kuykendal and Sturm (2007) found fairy tales on gender identities influence children's socialization process. Novosot (2007) proved with evidences that children at the age of five years format the identities so fairy tales impact greatly at this age. Tsao (2008) referred to literature as "one of the homes of gender stereotypes." He further interpreted that females are portrayed weak and submissive while males as wise and strong. Patel (2009) stated that children's psychology is influenced directly from fairy tales compare to any other lesson. Ruterana (2012) noted that stereotypical portrayals of genders imposed on children through fairy tales. Al-Shaykh (2013) Observed that gender representations in narratives reflect men domination and women submissiveness.

Siddique (2014) Cultural and moral lessons are provided in fairy tales. By inspiring these lessons children adapt gender-based behavioral roles. Nanda (2014) Portrayal of women in fairy tales is emphasized and how females are presented in subordinate roles. The study suggests the need to reimagined narratives. Parsons (2014) investigated the contribution of *Cinderella* stories in constructing gender-appropriate behaviors in children and suggests the importance to rebuild gender norms in these stories.

Grzelka (2019) Grimms and Andersen s' classical fairy tales were analyzed and societal hierarchies were investigated under the traditional narratives. Meland (2020) explored the transformation of gender stereotypes and how these challenging traditional roles can affect children's mentality. The study emphasizes on childhood education and learning.

Gheorghe (2023) presented a research after postmodern analysis. The research focuses to understand the gender identities in fairy tales through a feminist lens.

These studies collectively highlight the transforming narratives in fairy tales. The current study specifically focuses on gender stereotypes in selected fairy tales and how the process of gender socialization takes place through these tales.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research aims to explore values, thoughts, social practices and processes. Since the current research aims to explore the embedded and implicit process of gender socialization so it is qualitative in nature.

Researcher selects five most read and viewed fairy tales. After selecting the data, critical discourse analysis of these stories is being conducted. Their language and terminology is also analyzed from gender perspective. Analysis carried out in this research is mainly based on critical discourse analysis. These criteria help examining the linguistic entities of the texts, which lead to uncover the ideologies lying behind these texts.

Data will be collected through purposive sampling. The main objective of a purposive sample is to produce a sample that can be logically assumed to be representative of the population. This is often accomplished by applying expert knowledge of the population to select in a nonrandom manner. Five most read and viewed fairy tales are selected for analysis.

So, for the current paper researcher adopts a combination of literary reading strategies and social science data analysis, the researcher closely analyzed the original text of novel, its character to understand how its parts interconnect and construct meanings about societal realities.

In summary, this qualitative study employs interpretative critical discourse analysis to analyze gender stereotypes in selected fairy tales.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Gender Roles in Fairy Tales from *Arabian Nights*

The socially constructed ideologies and their representations are explored in the current research. For this purpose two tales are selected from *Arabian Nights*: "The King Shahryar and His Brother" and "King Shahryar and the Vizier's Daughter Scheherazade". Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis is being employed for the analysis, it focuses on linguistic features and it also finds out their connection to gender issues. The study comprises on a detailed examination of vocabulary. The explanation and interpretation of underlying ideologies within the text are also explored.

Basically, these two tales are interconnected as one leading into the other:

"The King Shahryar and His Brother":

The two main characters in the story are two brothers Shahryar and Shah Zaman. They are ruling over India after their father's death. Shah Zaman kills his wife after discovering her infidelity. He then visits his brother Shahryar, he also witnesses the queen's unfaithfulness with a servant.

The brothers abandon their kingdoms and retreat to the forest, where they come across a young woman. She was imprisoned by a monstrous jinni (Ifrit). She reveals her story despite being locked in padlocks and she also reveals her history of illicit relationships with over 500 men, including the brothers. So, the brothers have a strong belief that all women in the world are unfaithful then Shahryar decides that he will never trust a woman again. He further decides that he will marry a virgin daily and will kill her on the following morning. So, he continues this practice for three years. This act of king spreads terror across the kingdom.

"King Shahryar and the Vizier's Daughter Scheherazade":

This story introduces the intellectual and courageous girl Scheherazade. She is the daughter of Shahryar's vizier. She determines to end this terror and the cycle of violence. She volunteers to marry Shahryar despite her father's warnings.

On her wedding night, Scheherazade makes a plan, she requests to king that she wants to see her sister, Duniyazad. She begins to narrate a captivating story after the king's permission. As dawn approaches, she requests to king Shahryar to spare her life because she has paused the tale. She prompts Shahryar to spare her life to hear its conclusion the next night.

Night after night, Scheherazade continues this pattern night after night. She weaves the stories that capture the king's imagination. Over time, she becomes the mother of his three sons. After 1,001 nights, she completes her final tale. She then asks for her life to be spared but by then, Shahryar has fallen in love with her and leaves his revengeful practices, making her his queen.

Gender Ideology and Representation

A dichotomy of virtue and vices reflects through the portrayal of women shaped by males' perspective in these tales.

Women are portrayed as unfaithful and deceitful in the first tale. The story represents the patriarchal ideologies leading to the brothers' misogynistic worldview.

In contrast, Scheherazade is the symbol of intelligence, courage, and moral fortitude.

She also challenges the king's prejudice. She uses the technique of storytelling. This is the tool for her to educate, reform, and humanize. Her actions symbolize a counternarrative to the earlier portrayal of women.

Linguistic Features in Tales

Moral judgment and power dynamics are emphasized in both stories by using significant vocabulary.

Negative connotations describe women's actions in the first tale. These connotations reinforce stereotypes of unfaithfulness while in the second tale wisdom and intelligence reshapes the women's roles and capabilities.

Interpretation and Explanation

A transformative journey from mistrust to redemption is highlighted through the juxtaposition of these two tales. Initially, shehryar believed that women are unfaithful but gradually as the story moves he dismisses his opinion.

Conclusion

A complex exploration of gender roles are presented in the tales of Arabian Nights. Stereotypes of female infidelity and male dominance are perpetuated in the first tale. While in the second tale, these notions are subverted through Scheherazade's agency and intellect. Hence it proved that the power of storytelling as a medium for social change as Shehersade's ability to change the perspective of Shaharyar can be taken as challenging patriarchal ideologies and redefining gender dynamics.

The provided text analysis delves into Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of a selected fairy tale, with a particular emphasis on vocabulary to explore gender representation is the main task of Critical Discourse Analysis. The selected fairy tales delves into critical discourse analysis. Fairclough model focuses on experiential, relational, and expressive values of words. It also analyzes the figures of speech like metaphors, similes, and symbols used to portray gender dynamics.

Gendered Virtues and Stereotypes in Snow white and the Seven Dwarves

The evil step-mother manipulates men in Snow White. It also includes the King and Huntsman. Snow White is portrays is 'white as snow'. She is the symbol of perfect beauty and innocence at the same time she is passive and gullible. Snow White has no motivation, no aim or ambition. She is like a blank slate, selfless and aimless. She can be easily manipulated by the male characters because she lacks identity. She merely operates in the tale as an image.

Indeed, as Gilbert and Gubar state, she has the 'snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead'. When Snow White is dead, she becomes the perfect symbol of beauty within the glass coffin. This is established through the Prince's reaction to her. He convinces the dwarves to give up ownership of her body by claiming that she will be his most prized possession, asking the seven men to 'let me

have it as a gift'. She is no longer a woman, but an 'it', a commodity that can be transferred from man to man without objection.

It has been proclaimed by many feminist commentators that patriarchal control is often demonstrated in our culture through destructive beauty standards. In 'Snow White', the stepmother's magical mirror serves the same purpose; it is the instrument of male power. Gilbert and Gubar claim, in their analysis of the mirror in 'Snow White', that 'To be caught and trapped in a mirror [...] is to be driven inwards, obsessively studying self-images' until there is nothing left but a reflection of your former self.

Fairy tales often represent a clear dichotomy of gendered traits. In these tales, men are always strong and authoritative. While on the other hand, women are beautiful, passive, and emotionally driven. In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, for instance, Snow White is a symbol of purity and innocence. She lacks agency or ambition. She portrayed as a mere object to fulfill male's desire. She culminates in her symbolic transformation into a lifeless and is idealized beauty within the glass coffin. According to Gilbert and Gubar's critique, her portrayal reflects an "insubstantial body upon which men can inscribe their desires." Such narratives motivates the young girls to give importance to their apparent beauty and faithfulness over independence and self-expression.

Traditionally, male characters like the Kings and Prince are always authoritative. Their authority shoes their inherent masculinity and proves they are born to rule. Even in aggressive roles, male figures maintain intervention. It often determines the fates of their female counterparts. So, the cultural expectation is reinforced through this tale that men must control and protect while women must yield and conform.

The gendered narratives in *Cinderella* and *sleeping beauty*

The portrayal of men and women in fairy tales has always served as a representation of societal gender roles for centuries. The role of woman in *Cinderella* and *sleeping beauty* reflects the time period in which they were written in eighteenth century. These tales have been rewritten many times but the role of the women timelessly remains the same. Both the tales emphasizes the perfect beauty of females. These beautiful women always receive their "happily ever after". In *cinderella*, she escaped from her stepsister and step mother because of her inner and outer beauty. In *sleeping beauty*, she sleeps helplessly for years in waiting a prince to awake her. So, the "beauty" is the only element in both stories.

The deep-seated gender bias in fairy tales can be seen clearly in the classic stories as *Sleeping Beauty*. Women are often defined by their beauty, passivity, and dependence on male figures for salvation in these tales. In *Sleeping Beauty*, for example, the heroine is passive, waiting for the prince's kiss to awaken her from her enchanted sleep. This narrative reinforces the idea that women are helpless, waiting for male intervention, while the male hero proves his masculinity through brave actions.

In *Sleeping Beauty*, the female villain often represent as an evil. This contrast strengthens the idea that older women are always harmful for society as they are disruptive; threatening the social order on the other hand young women are always beautiful and passive. Disney's stories present a dragon as the form of the "evil" fairy. The evil fairy associates with violence and aggression. Broader societal themes are reflected from this dynamic where older women are portrayed as dangerous and must be subdued.

The central message is very clear: women's primary value lies in their apparent beauty. They only have the capability to attract a male suitor, and their happiness is defined by their marriage.

Vocabulary Analysis

Linguistic choices reflect the author's experience of the social and natural world. It relates to author's experiential values. Gender stereotypes are evident in the selected tales. Words are not being used properly, such as the word "king" is used (94%) as compared to "queen" is used (5.8%). Societal biasness is reflected through this imbalance. Authoritative attributes of power and decision making are predominantly associated to males. Females are associated with less significant roles. For instance:

King: the word "king" represents dominance, authority, and governance.

Queen: the word "queen" symbolizes a supportive or secondary role; she is often marginalized to domestic or ceremonial duties.

Wife: the word "wife" Reflects societal expectations of women. She is always being submissive and nurturing and always confined to domestic responsibilities.

Relational Values

Relational values reveal how linguistic features reinforce social relationships:

Words like "**handmaid**", "**slave girls**", and "**damned whore**" reflect Power hierarchies are reflected through the words like "handmaid", "damned whore" and "slave girls". Women are objectified and are portrayed as subservient. They are morally judged based on their roles or actions.

Male-centric words such as "**knights**", "**horsemen**", and "**powerful**" are **malecentric words**. **These words** emphasizes on strength, valor, and dominance. These words also reinforce traditional gender hierarchies.

Expressive Values

Expressive values evaluate aspects of identity and emotional expression:

Males are attributed and highlighted with words such as "**brave**", "**pious**", and "**auspicious**". These attributes show their strength and moral authority.

Female are attributed with words like "**pleasant**", "**chaste**", and "**submissive**". These words emphasize societal expectations of fragility, beauty, and obedience. These descriptors reinforce a dichotomy. Women are valued for their passivity and appearance while on the other hand males are celebrated for their action and leadership.

Figurative Language

Metaphors

In the tales, gender dynamics and symbolic representation are presented through metaphors:

"The sun of beauty she to all appears": The idea of women as objects and of admiration and beauty is reinforced through this line.

"Take Yusuf for sample, 'Ware sleights and 'ware smarts!": Manipulation and alludes to deceit is often associated with female characters especially in the traditional narratives.

“She were the full moon when it shineth forth”: The line elevates feminine beauty to a heavenly ideal. She is often taken as underscoring aesthetic over substance.

Similes

For females characters similes create vivid imagery:

“Bright as though a moon of the fourteenth night she had been”: Radiant beauty is suggested as a defining trait of women.

“She paced forward like the rising sun”: Grace and allure is implied. Women are often compared to ornamental roles and their individuality is ignored.

Images and Symbols

To embed ideological constructions the text employs the imageries and symbolism:

“Coffer of crystal”: It is the symbol of purity and delicacy. It is always associated with woman.

“Seven padlocks of steel”: This symbol is implied for the restrictions imposed on female autonomy.

“Bride feast”: It represents traditional roles of women as brides. Ceremonial expectations are always highlighted.

Implications of Gender Perspective

The traditional gender stereotypes are emphasized by male dominancy and female submissiveness through the linguistic choices. These features and the patriarchal ideologies embedded in many classical fairy tales:

Males are presented as guardians, decision-makers, and active agents.

Females are portrayed as passive. They are always confined to ornamental roles and they always serve male interests or societal expectations.

This analysis emphasizes the need to critically evaluate such texts of fairy tales. It is the need of the time to identify and encounter the biasness prevails in the stories. Particularly, these stories influence cultural perceptions of gender roles from a young age. Such contributions should be more equitable and inclusive in literature.

The analysis of gender depiction in fairy tales reveals a rich interaction. These conventions, cultural norms are shaping societal expectations. These tales reflect and perpetuate gender biases through the lens of discourse analysis and feminist critique. Gender depiction in the fairy tales influence children’s understanding of roles, relationships, and power dynamics. This analysis involves exploration of key themes such as the portrayal of gendered virtues and the strengthening of patriarchal ideologies.

The Internalization of Patriarchal Ideals

Fairy tales play a great role in instilling internalized patriarchal values in readers. This is the most important aspect of fairy tales particularly in women. Societal pressures for self-surveillance are symbolized with the motif of magic mirror in Snow White. The symbol also confirms the male-defined beauty standards. The story tells us about the evil queen’s obsession with maintaining her

status as "fairest of them all". It illustrates that how women can become complicit especially in upholding these oppressive norms. This highlights real-world phenomena, such as the promotion of unattainable beauty.

Similarly, in *The Arabian Nights*, women are portrayed as unreliable and cunning. King Shahryar generalizes his wives' betrayals to condemn all women. This narrative nurtures a cultural discourse about women's perceived infidelity. Broader themes of male dominance and the objectification of women are presented through the imprisonment of Jinni of a young woman in a crystal coffer.

Modern reinterpretations of fairy tales, such as those by Angela Carter and other feminist writers, further this resistance by reimagining traditional narratives to foreground female empowerment and critique patriarchal norms. These typical narratives are presenting women as complex, multifaceted characters capable of agency and self-determination.

The Role of Fairy Tales in Social Development

The impact and importance these narratives on children's social development cannot be overlooked. The impact is profound. Outdated gender roles with the conflict with contemporary values are always presented in traditional fairy tales. Children's perceptions are always influenced by normalizing these patriarchal structures. Children make their own ideology by observing that what is possible and acceptable for men and women.

As societal norms evolve the efforts are increased to create and promote stories that encounter these stereotypes. Fairy tales can play a progressive role by developing a more inclusive understanding of gender roles.

Fairy tales are serving as cultural artifacts with their pop-up castles and elaborate costumes. These tales are doing more than entertainment. These narratives have historically strengthened patriarchal ideologies. These stories should be reexamine reinterpret and outdated norms should be challenged. Fairy tales 's enduring relevance in shaping cultural and social consciousness can be enriched with this approach.

This analysis represents that patriarchal narratives are embedded in traditional tales like *Snow White* and *Cinderella*

The Grimm brothers' fairy tales

These classical tales have long been criticized for their patriarchal views. These tales are portraying female characters with limited ambition. Women are presented as they do not have any individuality. These narratives are always introduced to children at an impressionable age. They internalize progressive social ideals.

Gendered Archetypes in Classic Fairy Tale

Snow White and *Cinderella* are very famous in children. These stories exemplify biased gender roles. These stories define women's worth through beauty and domesticity. In *Snow White*, the princess is presented as a helpless figure. She is just waiting for rescue. The story suggests that women are incapable of solving problems. "happily ever after" is delivered by a prince, reducing her identity to her marital status.

Similarly, *Cinderella* represents unrealistic beauty standards where the opportunities are tied to her appearance. She is symbolized by the glass slipper. The story implies the theme that only a man's acknowledgment can elevate her from adversity. The story also reinforces the idea that marriage is

the pinnacle of a woman's life. These tales conceptualize the women's dependence on male. It also discourages the pursuit of self-determination.

Maria Tatar highlights this domestication of women. For instance, *Snow White* in Disney's retelling is defined by her cheerful domestic labor. She is happily making household chores appearing as a woman's innate joy. As Tatar observes, such portrayals embed harmful stereotypes. Girls are always exposed to these narratives so they shape their understanding of societal expectations and their own potential.

Impacts on Children's Development

Children consume these stories particularly because they have impressionable minds. Fairy tales often serve as early blueprints for understanding social structures and relationships. These tales romanticize patriarchal ideals. These stories portray males as saviors and problem solvers. These stories inadvertently teach children that women's value is defined by their relationships with men, while men are portrayed as active problem-solvers and saviors. Young girls idolize these characters like *Cinderella* and *Snow White*. *They actually do not recognize* implicit gender biases.

These tales can reinforce and emphasize the traditional masculinity for boys. The conclusion perpetuates of stereotypes in contemporary society.

To convert fairy tales into valuable cultural and educational tool, these tales must shed the stereotypes, biases and embrace modernity. It is the need of time that stories must reflect modern world. Women should present as ambitious and intelligent. Empowering alternatives that celebrate intellectuality and individuality should be provided. The analysis of current research explores that how gender stereotypes are perpetuated and why modern reinterpretations are essential for more equitable understanding of gender dynamics.

The analysis of fairy tales and their gender depictions offers a detailed examination of how these stories have perpetuated gender roles and the need for their transformation.

Reimagining Fairy Tales: Gender, Power, and the Need for Change

Fairy tales served as a reflection to societal values. Children's understandings and the role of fairy tales in shaping the gender norms cannot be understated. Current research and modern adaptations can provide hope to transform these stories.

Angela Carter is known for her essential revisions of fairy tales, so the concept of reshaping the traditional fairy tales is not a new. She challenges the outdated representations of themes like power, and the subversion of gender norms. Carter's work, as well as that of other feminist writers, wanted to overturn the patriarchal depictions of women instead highlighting the capacity for modification within human nature. She viewed fairy tales as an ideal medium for challenging these deep-seated social structures, using them "with conscious radical intent" to question and transform the very gender norms they once reinforced.

Conclusion and Findings

Fairy tales need continues evaluation. It is essential for dismantling gender stereotypes to promote a more inclusive society. A conscious revision of these stories can help children to adopt healthier and more equitable models of gender roles. Fairy tales have potential to serve as instruments of empowerment and social change. Fairy tales can evolve a better reflection of equality.

The enhanced version of fairy tales can build the original and stronger connections between ideas. The analysis emphasizes the broader cultural implications of fairy tale narratives.

For shaping and representing the world language is a powerful tool. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) serves as a means to find out the stereotypes. It also analyzes the human relations and identities passed through language. Gender differences are also pointed out and how gender differences are portrayed in texts is also part of this analysis. By applying Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model, the analysis reveals that fairy tales often support stereotypical representations of gender. Male's portrayal is always authoritative. They always own violent tendencies. In the fairy tales, the narrative often depicts them as acting out of wrath; they are sometime shown as even killing their wives to maintain control. Females, on the other hand, are portrayed as submissive. They are always punished due to their disloyalty. Despite this, some female characters are intellectual and having wit to resist and survive. These types of examples are provided a rare but notable.

Fairy tales can have stereotypical representations and lasting effects particularly on children. These tales can shape an adopted, static, and inflexible understanding of male and female roles. These concepts can perpetuate gender biases and limit the ways in which children view their own potential.

Significant shifts are observed in this research in the course from the brothers Grimm to modern shifts. In classical tales there were male villains but as the time passed the character of male villains changed into older, jealous and unattractive female characters. Disney contributed to this as by visually idealizing beauty.

Through these revisions, fairy tales have continued to serve as a medium for reinforcing the prevailing gender dynamics, highlighting the need for a critical reassessment of these stories in modern society. The challenge remains to create narratives that challenge these outdated stereotypes and present more equitable representations of gender and identity.

References

1. Al-Shaykh, H. (2013). *One thousand and one nights: A retelling*. New York, NY: Random House LLC.
2. Bacchilega, C. (1999). *Postmodern fairy tales: Gender and narrative strategies*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
3. Bettelheim, B. (1976). *The uses of enchantment: The meaning and importance of fairy tales*. New York, NY: Random House.
4. Burton, R. F. (1985). *The book of the thousand nights and a night*. United Kingdom: Kama Shastra Society.
5. Cekiso, M. (2013). Gender stereotypes in selected fairy tales: Implications for teaching reading in the foundation phase in South Africa. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, 4(3), 201–206.
6. Cherland, T. (2006). Female representation in children's literature. *Eclectica*, 25(4), 284–290.
7. Cook, G. (1989). *Discourse*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
8. Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. New York, NY: Routledge.
9. Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). London, England: Longman.
10. Franz, M. (1996). *Interpretation of fairy tales*. Boston, MA: Random House, Shambhala Publications.

11. Haase, D. (2010). Decolonizing fairy tale studies. *ScholarSpace*. Manoa, HI: Wayne State University Press.
12. Hoffert, S. D. (2003). *A history of gender in America: Essays, documents, and articles*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
13. Jaru, R. (2005). The gender of the heroes, storytellers, and collectors of Estonian fairy tales. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore*, 29. <https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2005.29.gender>
14. Kuykendal, L., & Sturm, B. (2007). We said feminist fairy tales, not fractured fairy tales! The construction of feminist fairy tales: Female agency over role reversal. *Children and Libraries*.
15. Meis, J. (2007). Gender issues in children's literature. *Language and Learning: Issues Paper*. Neikirk, A. (2009). "... Happily ever after" (or what fairytales teach girls about being women). *Hohonu: A Journal of Academic Writing*, 7, 5–9.
16. Novosat, C. (2007). Almost missing Barbie: The oh-so-feminist Carrie Bradshaw. *MP: A Feminist Journal Online*.
17. O'Neill, S. (2012). My thoughts about the classic story *The thousand and one nights*. *Hub Pages*.
18. Patel, H. (2009). Gender roles indoctrinated through fairy tales in Western civilization. *Swami Sheriji*.
19. Ruterana, P. C. (2012). Children's reflections on gender equality in fairy tales: A Rwanda case study. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4(9), 85–97.
20. Samatar, S. (2014). *Teaching Arabian Nights in Wisconsin: A resource guide for educators*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin.
21. Siddiqui, S. (2014). *Language, gender, and power: The politics of representation and hegemony in South Asia*. Islamabad, Pakistan: Oxford University Press.
22. Tsao, Y. (2008). Gender issues in young children's literature. *Journal of Health Care Management*, 53(5), 108–114.
23. Zipes, J. D. (1986). *Don't bet on the prince: Contemporary feminist fairy tales in North America and England*. New York, NY: Routledge.
24. Zipes, J. D. (2011). *The cultural evolution of storytelling and fairy tales: Human communication and memetics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Endnotes

1. Beauvoir, S. de. (1953). *The second sex*. New York, NY: Knopf.
2. Carter, P. (1982). Snow White and the seven dwarves. In *Grimms' fairy tales* (pp. 219–234). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
3. Carter, P. (1982). Snow White and the seven dwarves. In *Grimms' fairy tales* (p. 232). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
4. Gheorghe, M. (2023). *Postmodern perspectives on gender identity and stereotypes in fairy tales: An analysis of Cinderella*. [DOI or source link if available].
5. Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (2000). *The madwoman in the attic* (p. 37). London, England: Yale University Press.
6. Gilbert, S. M., & Gubar, S. (2000). *The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*. London, England: Yale University Press.
7. Grzelka, M. (2019). Representation of disability in fairy tales from the perspective of the social model of disability: A case study of fairy tales by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Oscar Wilde, Charles Perrault, Giovanni Francesco Straparola, and Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. *International Journal of Pedagogy Innovation and New Technologies*, 6(1), 107–114.

8. Meland, A. T. (2020). Challenging gender stereotypes through a transformation of a fairy tale. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(6), [pages].
9. Nanda, S. (2014). The portrayal of women in fairy tales. *Valley International Journals*, 1(4), 246–250.
10. Simpson, H. (2006). Introduction. In Carter, A., *The bloody chamber and other stories* (pp. vii–xix). London, England: Vintage.
11. Simpson, H. (2006). Introduction. In Carter, A., *The bloody chamber and other stories* (p. xii). London, England: Vinta
12. Woolf, V. (2000). *A room of one's own*. London, England: Penguin.