



The Girls Story And The Boys Story: Through The Lens Of Gender Theory Little Women And Don't Bet On The Prince - A Collection Of Feminist Fairy Tales

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ABSTRACT:

The issue of gender in children's literature is a complex one. Children's books, like all texts are culturally coded - consciously and unconsciously, implicitly and explicitly. Gender has played a fundamental role in commercialization of children's literature and in underpinning and reflecting the social codes and customs. This article highlights about the girls story and the boys story: through the lens of gender theory little women and don't bet on the prince - a collection of feminist fairy tales.

Keywords: Girls, Boys, Story, Gender, Collection.

INTRODUCTION:

William G. Summer and Edward G. Salmon remark in 1878 and 1886 respectively about a newly evolving trend in British and American Juvenile literature - the growth of specific categories of literature written specifically for boys and specifically for girls. Such a bifurcation may seem usual and obvious to a modern reader who has grown up reading Nancy Drew or the Hardy Boys, Malory Towers, Trixie Belden or Danny Dun, the Baby-Sitters' Club or Encyclopedia Brown. The swing from a homogenous body of literature for 'boys and girls' such as John Newberry's Pocket book both for Girls and Boys to a body of juvenile fiction divided by gender was regarded as an innovation in the second half of the nineteenth century. It gained further impetus in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s with the contributions of such well known authors as Louisa May Alcott, Horatio Alger, and Mark Twain and by the persistent efforts of the publishers in the fields of gender specific periodicals, dime novels, and series books.

DISCUSSION AND EXPLANATION:

The study of two Nineteenth century American writers Louisa May Alcott and William T. Adams ('Oliver Optic') (1822-97) exemplify how 'writing for boys, and

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writing for girls, became professions in themselves' (Behold the 190). A side-by-side analysis of these two writers and their juvenile series reveals that Louisa Alcott was responding to the suggestion of publisher Thomas Niles of Roberts Brothers to write novels specifically aimed at juvenile girls as against Oliver Optic who wrote popular series for boys. In May 1868, Alcott wrote to her father:

Father saw Mr. Niles about a fairy book. Mr. N. wants a girls' story, and I begin 'Little Women'. Marmee, Anna, and May all approve my plan.

Alcott scarcely knew that the publication of her novel - Little Women (1868) addressed specifically to the young girls of her times, would gain her unprecedented fame and become instrumental in defining, shaping, reinforcing and revising the qualities, interests, and aspirations of the young girls of her times who comprised that market. The recognition of boys as a separate audience had come quite early with the rise of imperialism and the adventure novels for boys such as Robinson Crusoe and Coral Island. Another reason for the recognition of boys as a distinct audience well before girls was that the boys market was seen as including girls, while the girls' market apparently excluded boys. It was a common view that boys required a separate body of literature. Girls, on the other hand, could enjoy both the domestic tales as well as adventure stories addressed to male audience. Alcott was well acquainted with this literary fact and she depicts this in Little Women. She presents Jo as reading boys' books, and even delicate Beth is " glad that she had read one of the boys' books in which Jo delighted" (152).

The incongruity between boys' and girls' literary status reflects the divergent roles of boys and girls in the Victorian society. Ann Scott MacLeod observes that the nineteenth century novels accomplish the task of socializing the young and imparting values to them through plot as well as characterization:

Where the boys' books increasingly revolved around a young man's encounter with the outside world - in the army, in the West, in the city - and around active, extroverted adventure, girls' novels focused on character and relationships, as, of course, girls' lives did as they approached womanhood (MacLeod 14).

Salmon's 1886 article, 'What Girls Read' overtly instructed how juvenile literature should groom British children for their future roles as grown men and women :

Boy's literature of a sound kind ought to build up men. Girls' literature ought to help to build up women.

Alcott's entrance into the unexplored arena of realistic fiction for girls marked a significant move in the social function of girls' reading. Responding positively to the gradual expansion of the female sphere and increase in the opportunities for

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females, *Little Women* and its sequel recognize girls as more than future wives and mothers, promote education and career opportunities for women and acknowledge the individuality of spirited, intellectual, self-determining young women. The adolescent Victorian girls for the first time started thinking about pursuing a career for themselves like the two March sisters, Jo and Amy, who become a writer and an artist respectively in their adulthood. Like Adams, Alcott with her novel ushered in a significant development in the history of juvenile literature by creating a new type of fiction specifically directed towards adolescent girls as opposed to the specific fiction for boys and distinct from the conventional models of femininity depicted in previous fictions. Sarah A. Wadsworth observes :

Ultimately, however, the impact of Adams and Alcott extended beyond the books they wrote to the audience who read them. For, in recognizing the changing roles of boys and girls in American society and their still-tentative presence in the maturing literary marketplace, they (and their publishers) effectively brought these segments of the juvenile fiction market into existence (Wadsworth 40).

Wadsworth pronounces that Alcott's books for girls are both "genre-defining and audience-defining and that the two functions are, in fact, interdependent" (Wadsworth 47).

The publication of *Little Women* in 1868 undoubtedly began the transatlantic phenomenon of 'fiction for girls' and a dawn of the myth of the American girlhood and contributed significantly to the genre of the 'girl story' and 'family story'. *Little Women* narrates the story of a family of four girls and their mother and how they grow up during the American civil war and its repercussions. *Little Women* is written in a realistic mode.

It is a story strongly based on Alcott's own memories of her childhood and adolescent period. The March sisters - Meg, Beth, and Amy in the novel represent Alcott's sisters and tom-boyish Jo is a depiction of Alcott herself. Alcott draws heavily from the reminiscences of her childhood games, pastimes, family conflicts, her intellectual father as the head of the family and their family home in Concord, Massachusetts. Alcott herself remarked, it was, "not a bit sensational, but simple and true, for we really lived most of it; and if it succeeds that will be the reason of it" (Journals 167). *Little Women* was followed by its sequel *Good Wives* (1869), *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886). However *Good Wives* was initially published as *Little Women Part-2*. Today both the parts of *Little Women* are generally published together and two volumes are regarded as a whole, especially in American critical tradition. Mostly the covers of the illustrated editions of *Little Women* depict a mosaic of girls gathered around their mother revealing overtly that it's a novel about girls together. It is unique in its celebration of female bonding - between mothers and daughters or between

sisters and in its implicit depiction of the heterosexual love relationships not as a choice but as a necessity and compulsion of the Victorian society and a threat to the family bonding. Writing a 'girls story' at the request of her editor, Alcott created a female-centered society in *Little Women* with the male characters (Mr. March, Laurie and John Brooke) hovering on the margins.

Little Women by depicting the struggles of girls mediating the conflicting demands of growing up into women, gave rise to teen fiction before there were teens. It initiated a string of girls story in North America - What Katy Did series, Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, the Pollyanna stories and the Anne of Green Gables series - as Nicola Watson remarks "all of which combined domestic detail with tomboyish girls striving to overcome their natural indiscipline to find a place in society and a husband without compromising their own personalities" ("Louisa Alcott: Introduction" 15). Alcott ascribed the success of *Little Women* to its realistic depiction of girls' lives but it cannot be denied that though the three girls Meg, Beth and Amy's characters invariably confirm to the conventional female models of their times, Jo - the central character - comes across as an exceptional example of nineteenth century girlhood. Undoubtedly Alcott's portrayal of Jo defies the traditional role model of the Victorian literary heroines - an epitome of beauty, style and decorum. However some critics have recently argued that in the later part of nineteenth century tomboyism was prevalent among young American girls who were forced to abandon it as they reached to their teen years. These enthusiastic girls time and again enjoyed the sports as well as rough and tough activities like their brothers between thirteen to fifteen years of age. But as they grew up they were compelled to succumb to the societal demands and relegate to the role of young gentle ladies. *Little Women* has succeeded in capturing the imagination of the young women of all times including the women writers. The feminist Simone de Beauvoir, writing about her identification with the tomboy Jo, states : " I identified myself passionately with Jo.... [s]he was much more tomboyish and daring than I was, but I shared her horror of sewing and housekeeping and her love of books" (Alberghene and Clark xvi). The identification of many women writers with Jo's role as a writer led to an outburst of critical interest in the novel. This overlapped with the rise of American Feminism in literary studies in the late 1970s which resulted in the reevaluation of the works of women writers like Alcott and an interest in the autobiographical elements and the portrayal of female characters especially female writers in their works.

The *Little Women* opens on Christmas eve with the four March Girls - Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy clustered around the fire and eagerly awaiting the return of their mother - 'Marmee'.

All the girls wish to buy presents for themselves from the little money they have,

but after a while they undergo a change of heart and they decide to buy a gift for their mother, Marmee, who is a kind and 'tall, motherly lady' with unselfish devotion for others. She is the model little woman who teaches her daughters the Christian values of hard work and compassion by advocating them to read Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* which would be their guiding light for living a good life. As Marmee enters the house she greets her daughters and fills the room with her exuberance and cheerfulness : "'Well, dearies, how have you got on today?... Has anyone called, Beth ? How is your cold, Meg? Jo, you look tired to death.'" The cheerful greeting is followed by an emotional letter from girls' father who is away at the borders to serve his country in the civil war. The father urges his daughters to understand the importance of 'self control' : " to conquer themselves so beautifully that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women"'(12). After finishing their day's work of sewing without grumbling, they gather again at nine and sing songs together - a household custom initiated by Marmee, whose lark like voice was "' the first sound in the morning ... and the last sound at night"'(14). The significance and value of self-renunciation and empathy for others is further emphasized in second chapter when the girls have to sacrifice their breakfast to the Hummels, a poor family in the neighbourhood. The girls learn the lesson that the bread and milk and the feeling of having helped others make the best breakfast ever and that one should strive to fight with their innate selfishness, discontent, bad temper and desire for materialistic living. As Judith Fetterley observes, "Conquer oneself and live for others are indeed the watchwords of this women's world"'(21). The question that one may ask here is : " is the book matriarchal and subversive or does it encourage patriarchal assumptions that endorse submissiveness, repression and self-renunciation for women ?"

There is no doubt about the presence of ambivalence in Alcott's book - the conflict between its overt messages and covert messages - between the initial rebellion and the later accommodation in the part-2 of the book . This is well exemplified in the study of two chapters of *Little Women* - one is 'Castles in the Air', which comes in the middle of the part-I and the other one is the final chapter of the part-2 - 'Harvesttime'. In 'Castles in the Air' each girl expresses her life's dream. 'Harvesttime', making reference to the earlier chapter, compares the ambition of the girls with what they have achieved in the end. I am to be mistress of it, and manage it as I like, with plenty of servants, so I never need work a bit"' (140). Meg's dream, centered on home, is almost fulfilled. Thus, she says in the end, "My castle was the most nearly realized of all"'(472). However, the lives of Amy and Jo take a very different turn from their castles in the air. Jo's and Amy's ambitions are not domestic. Amy wishes "'to be an artist and go to Rome, and do fine pictures, and be the best artist in the whole world,'" whereas Jo dreams to, "' write books, and get rich and famous"'(141). Later, in Rome when Amy strives

hard to fulfill her ambition, she realizes that she has the talent of a good artist but not of a genius. She decides to satisfy herself by being a patron and support the work of other artists. She seeks happiness in her conjugal life with Laurie and remembers her mother's dictum, "to be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to a woman"(95). However Amy does not completely abandon her art, she continues to pursue it for home and family. In the final chapter, she says she has started to "model a figure of [her ailing] baby, and Laurie says it is the best thing I've ever done. I think so myself, and mean to do it in marble..."(472). Jo's journey is similar to Amy's. In the final chapter, she recalls her dreams and says, " the life I wanted then seems selfish, lonely, and cold to me now. I haven't given up the hope that I may write a good book yet, but I can wait, and I'm sure it will be all the better for such experiences and illustrations as these" (472-3) and 'these' here refers to her husband, Prof. Bhaer, her children and the family scene around her.

In the first part Jo had diligently applied her burning genius to writing but she is not successful. She breaks down and says, "I've no heart to write, and if I had, nobody cares for my things," but Marmee motivates her, "We do. Write something for us, and never mind the rest of the world" (419). So Jo, encouraged by her mother, continues to write a story as her mother wants. It is sent for publication by her father to a popular magazine against Jo's wish. The story becomes a great success and Jo is bewildered, she says, " If there is anything good and true in what I write, it isn't mine; I owe it all to you and Mother and to Beth"(420). This resonates what Alcott had said about her books. Judith Fetterley observes: " Jo has gone from burning genius to a state where what she writes isn't even hers "(Fetterley 22). She is gradually moving towards the final role of a little woman that her father and mother have envisioned for their daughters.

Little Women is often looked upon as a fantasy of a 'happy family' - the domestic and feminine counterpart to Hemingway's all male American literature or the British imperialist literature. Fetterley notes, " At the heart of the fantasy family is, of course the fantasy Mom ... [However] Being Marmee's child is one thing; being Marmee herself is another. Resistance to growing up abound in Little Women and suggest attitudes in conflict with the overt messages on the joys of little womanhood "(Fetterley 23). The novel sometimes explicitly and often implicitly contrives in making the girls into Little Woman : and much of the story can be looked upon as a series of lessons designed to teach March sisters, especially Jo, the attributes of an ideal womanly character. Amy remarks, " Women should learn to be agreeable"(285) because they are economically and emotionally dependent on men. Marmee's advice to Meg covertly reflect upon the politics of marriage: "John is a good man, but he has his faults, and you must learn to see and bear with them, remembering your own ... peace and happiness

depend on keeping his respect" (269). While Marmee instructs Jo to control her anger by tightening of the lips, she advises Meg to bear with John's anger because his anger is male and theirs is female which can be suppressed. Jo yearns for economic independence; when she first meets Laurie, she introduces herself to him as a "a businessman - girl, I mean".

Little women get married under the societal and family pressures because they not only lack economic options but emotional options as well. Besides it is the fear of old maid hood which motivates Jo to become a little woman. " An old maid, that's what I'm to be" (424). At the beginning of the book Jo harbors hatred for love and a dislike for romantic relationship between men and women. She scarcely desires to marry unless it be to her sister.

Jo's initial dislike for heterosexual relationship has led few critics to analyze the novel in terms of lesbian theory and queer performances. Roberta Trites argues that gender is not a biological construct but a social one. Trites remarks :

Jo's most blatant act of non conformism is her rejection of socially inscribed heterosexual gender roles; the text often describes her 'performances' in masculine terms to express her androgynous nonconformity. In Jo's refusal to perform her prescribed gender roles lies a critique of heterosexuality that can be read as a strong affirmation of lesbian politics ("Queer Performances"139).

However Trites further remarks that critics like Elain Showalter regard Little Women as a paean to "egalitarian" heterosexual marriages ("Queer Performances"140). The novel provides many instances which supports this view. Jo invariably insists on considering boys as her equals and she wishes to play cricket with them. In the final chapter 'Harvesttime' she is happily married and is confident that her husband would help her in all her projects if she proposes (575).

One of the major difficulty that Alcott encountered while writing Little Women was to get a suitor for Jo to marry. Jo cannot be married to Laurie. She rejects his proposal for marriage because she cannot love him. There cannot be a love relationship between them because they are alike in status and too equal. In fact Laurie is Jo's inferior. Unfortunately the little woman has to marry up and not below or across her. Therefore Meg is married to John Brooke. Laurie is married to Amy, who is like a child for him. And similarly Jo gets Professor Bhaer, an intellectual, authority figure, who can counteract Jo's vivacity and talent. The process of adopting the role of little woman is complete for Jo and she is placed securely in the arms of wise Papa Bhaer who, we are told in future when Jo made queer mistakes, " steered her safely into calmer waters" (467). Alberghene and Clark rightly sums up the critical reflections of the critics of the novel:

Some argue that Jo provides a model of independence, even if she ultimately capitulates to marriage; others, that she embodies a sense of connectedness with a community of women. Some argue that she submits to prevailing cultural norms; others, that she contests them; others still, that she negotiates among competing norms (Feminist Imagination xvii) .

The ambivalence of Little Women replicates the situation of the nineteenth century American woman writer who experienced from all sides the pressure to compromise her vision. It is evident from what Alcott annoyingly wrote when pressurized for 'happy ending' to her novel : " Girls write to ask who the little women marry, as if that were the only aim and end of a woman's life. I won't marry Jo to Laurie to please anyone" (Journals 167).

Thus, in marrying Jo in the end, Alcott, who herself remained an economically independent single woman and who preferred to "paddle her own canoe", failed in giving Jo the reins of her own destiny.

However with time attitude to gender gradually changed and over a passage of hundred years, the feminist writers of the twentieth century, strongly defied and deconstructed the conventional patriarchal notions of femininity in their works by portraying strong, independent, self-determining women who had the power to chart their own destiny. In the late 1960s many women writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone, Elizabeth Janeway, Adrienne Rich, Robin Morgan, Sheila Rowbotham, Betty Friedan, and Juliet Mitchell began writing books which challenged the gender stereotypes and had feminist concerns at the centre. Along with the feminist movement children's literature criticism also made significant progress during the second half of the twentieth century. The currently prevalent approaches and theories of children's literature criticism came to life in the 1970s the same time that the second wave of feminist theory became popular. Not only did both the literatures make significant development in the second half of the twentieth century but they also exerted considerable influence on one another. Roberta Seelinger Trites in her feminist evaluation of children's writings observes, " no organized social movement has affected children's literature as significantly as feminism ...The majority of novels about girls no longer focus so pointedly on socializing girls into traditional femininity as books..." (Waking Sleeping ix) for girls in the past did.

Children's stories invariably influence our thoughts and attitudes and shape our identity. The fairy tales that we read as children undoubtedly leave considerable imprint on our minds which continue to influence us consciously or unconsciously even in adulthood. Marcia Lieberman in her feminist analysis of fairy tales in her article "Some Day My Prince Will Come": Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale' (1972), observed that most fairy tales portrayed rigidly

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defined gender roles which endorsed the subordination of women. She notes that most of the heroines were beautiful but passive, subjugated, and weak, and they await a daring prince to come and rescue them from adversity. As it has never been proven that there is such a thing as a biologically determined role for women, she argued that fairy tales which promote distinct gender roles for male and female characters are harmful in the character building of young people (Lieberman 38395).

Most feminist critics confirm Lieberman's view that the traditional fairy tales spread false notions about sex roles.

Robert Moore in his essay, "From Rags to Witches: Stereotypes, Distortion and Antihumanism in Fairy Tales" similarly focuses on the gender biases and racist features of the tales: (1) Females are poor girls or beautiful princesses who will only be rewarded if they are endowed with passivity, obedience, and submissiveness. (2) Stepmothers are invariably wicked (3) The best woman is the one who is efficient in managing the house. (4) Beauty is the highest virtue for women. (5) Males should be aggressive and shrewd. (6) Money and property are the most sought after goals in life. (7) Magic and miracles are the means by which social problems are resolved. (8) Fairy tales are covertly racist because they often liken beauty and virtue with the colour white and ugliness with the colour black. (Don't Bet 5).

Therefore the feminist writers like Heather Lyons engaged themselves in re-assessment and rediscovery of matriarchal features in folk and fairy tales. Lyons analyzed a variety of tales with feminist connotations in her interesting essay 'Some Second Thoughts on Sexism in Fairy Tales' (1978). She also reflects upon ways in which traditional tales can be altered. Similarly, Jane Yolen, a fairy-tale writer, in her essay "America's Cinderella" (1977), illustrates how an active and strong heroine was transformed into a meek and submissive girl. She investigated different European folk versions of Cinderella and concluded that the original Cinderella had never been 'catatonic'. Actually the old Cinderella had always fought against injustice and untruth. At the end of seventeenth century it was Perrault who transformed the heroine Cinderella into a docile and obedient young woman. Perrault's adaptation paved the path for the Grimms and many American authors who produced petite and prudish Cinderellas to lure the masses in the nineteenth century. This finally culminated in the production of the Walt Disney's film on Cinderella in 1949, which presented Cinderella as beautiful, patient, ill treated, submissive and defenceless young woman, awaiting her 'prince charming', who would save her from all her misfortunes (Yolen 294-306). Yolen in her critical essay also attempted to rectify history and suggest substitutes to our common picture of Cinderella so that fairy tales can be revised to bring about a positive change in the society by breaking the conventional

gender stereo types.

A dominant tendency in feminist literary criticism was to accelerate the movement towards autonomy - women should be the arbitrator of their own destiny and pen their own history. And this paved the way for the rise of feminist retellings of the traditional fairy tales such as Madonna Kolbenschlag's book, *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-*

Bye: Breaking the Spell of Feminine Myths and Models (1979), and Jack Zipes' collection of Contemporary feminist fairy tales - *Don't Bet on the Prince* (1986), which portrayed its heroines as autonomous, assured and self-determining as against the passive and subjugated female characters of conventional fairy tales.

It attempts to map and overcome the negative features in the role models of Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, Cinderella, Goldilocks, and Beauty. Kolbenschlag is more concerned in investigating the habitual manner in which women are compelled and influenced to adopt particular roles and identities. Secondly, she remarks that the contemporary confrontations between men and women are indicative of the feminine need for autonomy that is thwarted by men and society. She advocates the annihilation of the traditional feminine identity in Kant's sense of uncompromising imperative. She asserts "what is a given for men- the capacity for self-realisation which is reinforced by the socialisation process and cultural education- should be a given for women as well, but for the most part they must seek, grasp and appropriate this capacity in ways that are often painful and traumatic"(Don't Bet 8). Kolbenschlag's book endeavours to instigate both men and women to think about alternatives to the conventionally accepted gender role models in our lives. According to Zipes fairy tales themselves are not responsible for the creation of these roles. Rather they are the symbolical forms which reinforce self-destructive social and psychological patterns of behaviour in our daily lives (Don't Bet 8). Colette Dowling in her well known book - *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence* (1981) also maintains that the fairy tales attempt to depict how women are exploited and how they allow themselves to be exploited. Dowling observes:

personal, psychological dependency- the deep wish to be taken care of by others- is the chief force holding women down today.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their noteworthy study, *The Madwoman in the Attic* focus on fairy-tale motifs to examine the socio-psychological situation of women writers carved in the dominant male discourse of the nineteenth century. Snow White, specifically serves for them as the typical model of a male-maneuverd conflict between two types of females, the witch and the angel, who are placed one against the other.

In a lecture on 'The Beast, the Mermaid and the Happy Ending' delivered at the MLA Meeting in San Francisco 1980, the novelist Carolyn See investigated the role of the 'Beauty and Beast' motif in contemporary literature. which is well exemplified in Alix Kate Shulman's *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, and Alison Lurie's *The War Between the Tat*, which depict 'beautiful' women who fall in love with 'beast-like' men to discover that the men do not turn into princes while they, the women, give up their lives for them. In the the women in these stories either cut off their relations with these men and take control of their fate in their hands or yield to a bitter fate. Thus, See remarks that the novels disclose the patriarchal lie of the 'happy end' in the traditional fairy tale. Karen Rowe's interpretations from her essay 'Feminism and Fairy Tales' (1979) are akin to See's reflections on the fairy tale patterns in certain contemporary novels:

romantic tales exert an awesome imaginative power over the female psyche- a power intensified by formal structures which we perhaps take too much for granted.

The twentieth century feminist writers questioned these gender stereotyping of the traditional fairy tales and attempted a redressing of these tales by deemphasizing physical beauty and marriage, or by writing new tales, using folklore motifs with less conventional endings. Jack Zipes' book *Don't Bet on the Prince*. 'Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales is a similar work - a collection of feminist retellings of fairy tales by such reputed authors as Margaret Atwood, Jane Yolen, Angela Carter and Tanith Lee. These authors through their works not only challenge traditional patterns of gender, socialization, and sex roles, but they also chart out an alternative aesthetic ground for the fairy tale as genre to open up new avenues for readers and writers alike. Zipes in the introduction to his collection wrote,

I want to focus on those tales that reveal the manifold ways in which present-day writers have rearranged familiar motifs and characters and reversed plot lines to provoke readers to rethink conservative views of gender and power. The aesthetics of these tales are ideological, for the structural reformation depends upon a non-sexist (and non-racist, I might add) world view that calls for a dramatic change in social practice (*Don't Bet* 13).

The contemporary feminist fairy tales writers have also been influenced by a rich tradition of feminist stories of Victorian writers Mary De Morgan, Mrs Molesworth, and Evelyn Scharp and twentieth century writers like E. Nesbit, L. Frank Baum, and Catherine Storr, who wrote *Clever Polly and the Stupid Wolf* (1955), which reverses the motif of the traditional Red Riding Hood tale by having a smart and intrepid girl continually outwitting a bumbling wolf.

Zipes' collection comprises of feminist fairy tales written both for young and old. The first part is especially addressed to young readers, which includes interesting tales like - Princess Who Stood On Her Own Two Feet by Jeanne Desy, Prince Amilec by Tanith Lee, Petronella by Jay Williams, The Donkey Prince by Angela Carter, ...And Then the Prince Knelt Down and Tried to Put the Glass Slipper on Cinderella's Foot by

Judith Viorst, Snow White - The Merseyside Fairy Story Collective, The Moon Ribbon Jane Yolen, Russalka or The Seacoast of Bohemia by Joanna Russ, and A Fairy Tale for Our Time by Jack Zipes. In this chapter part-II has not been discussed as it includes fairy tales for old readers, which does not come under the purview of this thesis.

In the fairy tales for younger readers the most significant change in the narratives is related to the female protagonist who ardently seeks to search for autonomy, and her self autonomy determines the plot. As the heroine attempts to complete this task, conventional fairy-tale topoi and motifs are transformed to specify the necessity for gender rearrangement and the use of power for gaining equality. For instance, in the first story of Zipes' collection - The Princess Who Stood on Her Own Two Feet by Jeanne Desy seeks to confront the atavistic nature of many classical fairy and folk tales which covertly perpetuate gender stereotyping. Desy's tale is about a princess "tall and bright as a sunflower. Whatever the royal tutors taught her, she mastered with ease" (Don't Bet 38). However, she is unhappy because she had all the gifts except love. The court wizard, a sensitive and amusing figure, gifts her an amazing talking 'Afghan hound' as companion. Still, a dog is a dog and not a Prince, and the Princess longed to marry despite the dog's constant companionship, wise counsel and compassion for her. She falls in love with a prince, "who casts his dark, romantic gaze upon her"(Don't Bet 40). After the initial romance, the prince cannot tolerate the fact that she is taller and more talented than he is. The hound explains to the princess "it's your height '...' men liked to be taller than their wives" (Don't Bet 40). The prince humiliates her many a times and wants her to learn the attributes of a woman - " 'Didn't anyone ever tell you,' he said coldly, 'that ladies ride side saddle? '...' ". 'Haven't you ever heard that women should be seen and not heard?'"(41- 42). The princess' dog sacrifices his life out of love for her because the prince didn't like him. This makes the princess sad and furious and she asserts her individuality by rejecting the prince - " Looking down at him, she said, 'I'm talking. The better to tell you good-bye. So good-bye.' And off she went. She could stride too, when she wanted to."(46). Thus the princess snubs the insensitive and pompous prince and finds someone who accepts her as she is and doing this the writer parodies the patriarchal notion of achievement and the male quest for power.

In the similar way in *Petronella* by Jay Williams, the patriarchal ideas about gender roles are questioned and an attempt is made to respect the talent of women and disclose the male follies and also alter the assumption that it is not the prince who is always the best suitor. *Petronella*, a princess is the youngest of the three children of the king, her two brothers being elder to her. When the two princes grow up they decide to go out and seek their fortune. *Petronella* too against the wishes of her parents and brothers embarks on her mission - " 'If you think,' she said, 'that I'm going to sit at home, you are mistaken. I'm going to seek my fortune, too'"(55). When her brother tells her to wait at home for the prince as per the convention, she retorts back, " 'I'm going with you,' she said. 'I'll find a prince if I have to rescue one from something myself. And that's that.'" In the end she does rescue a prince by her bravery, talent and kindness, but he comes across as dull and lazy. Therefore instead of the prince she decides to marry the magician who turns out to be as brave, talented and polite as her. Though it may be argued, that females are much more interesting than the males in William's tales, he does not degrade the male characters. Some are talented and adept like the magician, whom *Petronella* chooses to become her husband, some are powerless like the prince, while others are chauvinistic and bungling power-seekers.

Angela Carter's *The Donkey Prince* is another tale which ends in marriage but it indicates that gender roles are not biologically constructed and that power can be used for the freedom of both sexes. Daisy, a young working girl, who is clever and knows a trick or two, aids Bruno, the enchanted donkey prince, to recover a magic apple in the Savage Mountains. Carter here also celebrates the 'egalitarian' hetero sexual relationship by showing Daisy and Donkey helping one other in their mission: 'May I ride on your back?' she [Daisy] asked. 'My legs are getting weary.' Nobody had ever ridden on Bruno's back before because he was a prince. But he did not hesitate, for he saw her feet were bare and the road was very rough. 'With pleasure,' he said. She climbed on his back"(65) . Daisy also with her courage, intelligence, and ability, helps Hlajki the wild man and Bruno to encounter a dangerous mission. In the end she is married to Bruno, who is transformed into a human due to her kindness and conduct. Carter's tale is a quest for identity with a humanising note: the donkey prince who was a beast becomes human and humane and the hard work of a common working girl is recognised and duly rewarded and appreciated. Bruno while praising her efforts in securing the apple " 'Daisy did all the hard work,' said Bruno. 'A donkey finds it hard to cope with human beings'"(71) also acknowledges the wisdom and talent of women. Carter ironically remarks that " 'But all this happened long ago, in another country, and nothing is the same now, of course'"(72) and in saying so she projects it as a Utopian model for which we all must strive.

Joanna Russ's tale *Russalka or The Seacoast of Bohemia*, which is a critical

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adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, points out in a touching manner how a man's love ultimately kills a woman, especially when it is devoid of true understanding. No doubt, Russalka is also at fault for not recognising her true spirit in this tale - as is the mermaid in Andersen's tale. However, like Anderson Russ does not support passivity. Instead she is angry at women who sell themselves for a 'romantic' vision of love. Zipes remarks "Her [Russ'] tale of self-betrayal and self-denial ends on a tragic note because it is intended to serve as a warning to her fictitious heroine Kit in her novel and to her readers as well. In a man's world love can be poison, and the walls of life can feel like a prison (Don't Bet 18).

In numerous feminist fairy tales female bonding and female nurturing is at the centre in contrast to the female conflict between the 'witch' and the 'angel' depicted in the conventional fairy tales. In the Merseyside version of *Red Riding Hood*, a timid girl and her great-grandmother together confront and overcome a wolf without the help of a male hunter. In another version of *Red Riding Hood*, a touching poem titled *Little Red Riding Hood*, the poetess Olga Broumas very poignantly depicts the deep affection and a never ending connection between the mother and a daughter and of women with women :

"and when you said,

'Stick to the road and forget the flowers, there's

wolves in those bushes, mind

where you got to go, mind you get there,' I minded. I kept to the road, ... and with other women who might be walking the same road

to their own grandma's house, each with her basket of gifts, her small hood safe in the same part. I minded well"(119).

This is also an underlying tone in Jane Yolen's remarkable version of *Cindrella* in the tale entitled *The Moon Ribbon*, in which a young woman, Sylva is gently guided and protected by her dead mother. Her dead mother makes her realize that she has to learn to stand up for her own self, nobody can harm her or take away her right - "No one can take unless you give.' 'I had no choice.' 'There is always a choice,' the woman said"(85). She paved the road of independence for her daughter but the daughter will have to walk on her own, alone on that road.

Thus as Jack Zipes observes, the different contemporary feminist fairy tales in his collection:

emanate from a basic impulse for change within society, and though the writers have reacted to this impulse on different levels, they share the same purpose of

questioning socialisation, have influenced one another to some degree, and have been stimulated by feminist criticism to rethink both fairy tales as aesthetic compositions and the role they play in conditioning themselves and children" (Don't Bet 14).

CONCLUSION:

Louisa Alcott through her novel *Little Women* inaugurated the myth of American girlhood and subversively provided a model of female independence and individuality to nineteenth century adolescent girls. This concern for change in the status of women gained further impetus over the passage of years as more and more women writers defied the rigid gender roles in their works for young girls. With the rise of second wave of feminism and the increase in the importance of children's literature in 1970s efforts were made to confront the problem of gender inequality at the grass root level - that is through the children's literature and especially through the retellings of fairy tales. Thus with the change in the perception of gender, new approaches and theories are developed or is it the other way round? However what is most desirable is the creation of harmonious relations between all human beings - irrespective of race, gender, caste ,creed, childhood or adulthood.

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