

**Postmodernist Reshaping Of Fairy Tales, Myths And Folklores In The Novels
Of Margaret Atwood And Toni Morrison****1. V.Sharmila, MA,M.Phil.,****Email:sharmilasubramani2@gmail.com****Research Scholar in English****AVVMSriPushpamCollege(Autonomous),****Poondi,Thanjavur,India.***** 2.Dr.K.Sivakumar,****sivakumark1993@gmail.com****Associate Professor of English,****AVVM Sri Pushpam College (Autonomous)****Poondi,Thanjavur, India.****Abstract:**

Postmodern writers constantly engage themselves in a deliberate reshaping or deconstruction of myth and fairy tales largely by parodying them through theme, motif and characters. For instance, they turn the source tale's plot upside down, alter the closure, and employ unreliable narrator, negative heroes and magical realism. Myths, folklores and fairy tales are embedded in the narratives of Margaret Atwood and Toni Morrison, signify the two fold operation of postmodernism as an exploration of earlier art, culture and the impact of contemporary culture and society. This paper aims to unravel the cultural elements such as fairy tales, folklores, mythology and their functions in the postmodern aesthetics which deify the conventional perspective on them in the novels of Atwood and Morrison.

Keywords: *Postmodernism, intertext, reconstruction,sexual politics, parody ,allusion.*

A copious intertextual use of folklores, fairy tales and myths characterizes the novels of Atwood and Morrison as postmodern fictions. An intense incorporation or revision of fairy tales is found in Atwood's *The Edible Woman, Lady Oracle, Bodily Harm, The Handmaid's Tale* and *Cat's Eye*. Various sources such as Grimm's fairy tales, folklores, popular culture, history literature, Biblical and mythical tales offer prospective materials for the themes, motifs, plots and characterization of Atwood's novels. Atwood employs myths folklore or fairy tales all in a distinctly postmodern way, parodistic, serious, ironical all at the same time. Atwood, very frequently uses fraudulent narrators and narrating against resolution or closure. In her fairy Tale reversions Atwood uses the following techniques. She creates a scene in a novel reminding a fairy tale, then the reverse the gender of the identified mythical or fairy tale character. She often switches a serious reliable narration into an unreliable narration. Her techniques also include using parody as

subversive tool and the usage of defamiliarising language.

In *The Edible Woman*(E W) Atwood revises the fairy tale structure keenly focusing on food, revising the antique images, witches, wizards, giants and monsters that feed on human beings and refashions the ancient cannibalism in the novel. Wilson observes:

Preserved, baked in a witch's oven and eventually served as food, Marian is, by turns, Gingerbread Woman, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Rapunzel, Goldilocks, Alice in Wonderland, Little Red Cap, The Pumpkin Eater's Wife, Gretel, Fitcher's Bride and especially, The Robber Bride.(p.86)

Throughout the novel Atwood describes everything connoting food. Seymour Company, she works is described as a layered ice-cream in order to satirise the current social cannibalism. "The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle. (E.W,p.13)

Marian in *The Edible Woman* represents maiden goddess Diane who swears never to get married. This allusion stems from Marian's state of scepticism in her marriage prospects. Another allusion found in *The Edible Woman* is Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Marian finds the text Fish's analysis of Alice during a dinner with Duncan and his roommates. Atwood parallels the sexual identity crisis of Alice with Marian's encounter with social sexual roles. As Alice progress from innocence to maturity, Marian also undergoes conflicts of her identity. In the beginning of their journey both Marian and Carroll's Alice counter a crisis of the role she ought to play in their respective domain. This dilemma leads to a sudden metamorphosis in their innerself. Tandon finds characters parallel between these novels:

The other characters in the novel also resemble in Alice's tale. Peter resembles domineering caterpillar that make Alice conscious of her identity crisis. Mrs.Bogue resembles the horrible queen. The office virgins particularly Lucy looks like the cake with "eat me" written on it as if she wants men to gobble her up. Clara and her family resemble the Duchess with the pig of a baby and her med cook. Duncan seems to look like the Cheshire cat and combination of rabbit guide and mock

Turtle.(p.45)

Grimm's "The Robber Bridegroom" is another Fairy Tale undergoes subversive alteration in *The Edible Woman*. Robber Bridegroom is about a young woman who has a secret terror and distrust about prospective husband. On groom's compulsion, she visits him and his guests in dark forest. Suspecting the groom's intention she marks her way with peas and lentils. She was warned by the bird and old woman, of the impending danger that the bride would be murdered and chopped to be cooked and eaten. The young woman makes her escape. Williams find The Robber Bridegroom and its motifs takes place very conspicuously in *The Edible Woman*. Marian's eating disorder emerges from her fear of Peter metaphorical cannibalism. This fairy Tale and Atwood's novel have the similar element like distrust of the fiancé, path marking in a forest, journey, a visit to the bridegrooms place, warnings, hiding, passivity, drinking, communal eating, help of Godmother, and return to the society. But Atwood revises them comically and parodies the motifs from of The Robber Bridegroom. She further revises the motif of cannibalism by presenting her own body image or self as a food. Atwood in this novel grounds a tone both parodic and gothic by challenging the reliability of Marian's narration.

The mythic and Fairy Tale narrative and their radical reversion incorporated in *The Handmaid's Tale*(H T) is often allusive and fragmentary or rather parodistic. "There remains a mirror on the hall wall and myself in it like distorted shadow, a parody of something, some Fairy Tale figure in a red cloak, descending into a moment of carelessness that is the same as danger." (H.T.p.18)

Offred in a dystopian regime where dehumanization is unleashed in all aspects finds herself like a fragmented figure of Little Red Riding Hood. Apparently the Fairy Tale allusion is ironic and other symbolised as a grim parody as she on contrary to the tale, is going to be devoured by the wolf. Red Riding Hood allusion can be evidently drawn from Offred's guise of a cloak with a hood to accompany the commander to a brothel club. Offred's journey to a strange place where safety is not guaranteed is established through her attire

The Red Riding Hood tale interfaces in *The Handmaid's Tale*, sharing the motifs such as mother's separation from children, familial conflict, quest and initiation themes, the oppositions of house, green world, flower, fertility, path, cannibalism, dismemberment image, the red clothing, food and basket. Offred's innocence in her unreliable narration

resonates in Red Riding Hoods ignorance.

Persephone is another recurrent mythical reference in Atwood's narration. Offred embodies the Demeter condition of losing her daughter which constitutes her despair and misery apart from the external totalitarianism. Offred sees her daughter "holding out her arms to me being carried away." (H.T. p.85) Offred's mother who lives in her memory, a staunch feminist yet another Demeter figure making the myth as cycle. Her mother instills in her individualism but Offred rejects both her and her ideology. The physical and mental distancing from her mother leaves her in a Demeter condition.

Toni Morrison also employs various types of narrative techniques exploiting a great deal of resources in her native oral tradition, history, myths, folk songs, ballads and folklore. Her incorporation of oral quality in her text tends to manipulate the reader's mind to apply to her various stylistic forms. The black oral tradition has an inexplicable complex relation with Morrison's narrations. Like Atwood, Morrison also engages herself in revising and experimenting with these folktales and myths in order to challenge the sensibility of mythical patterns. Morrison like Atwood subverts the classical references by employing parodic tone. Being born and brought up in Lorain, Ohio, Morrison was introduced to the myths and folklores which feature prominently in her works. Her parents and her grandmother acquainted her with many ghost stories. Embedding the myths and folklores she heard during her childhood, Morrison designed her texts with a poetic language and unconventional structure of the oral tradition. She was commended by the critics for her curious fusion of fantasy and reality and her adept handlings of myth and folktales.

Many critics believe Morrison a 'myth maker and they identify the novel *Beloved* to be permeated with myth. Morrison on reading about Margaret Garner, avoided any further researches on the true incident in 1855, she accomplished a mythic revising of it in the novel *Beloved*, which challenged the black diaspora and the western imagination about slavery.

Beloved is based on the myth of rebirth and reincarnation. In Yoruba mythology - Abiku a child destined to premature death and rebirth to the same mother. These spirits return recurrently to torment their parents. *Beloved* emerges from water like Seth is giving birth to her again and she is baptized again.

Persephone and Demeter myth which worked predominantly for Atwood, also endorses Morrison's narratives to appropriate sexual victimisation of women. Rape as Morrison treats, a violent intrusion into psyche, Morrison too reshapes rape and molestation, the prevailing motifs of classic mythology. There are numerous accounts of sexual molestation in classic mythology viz IO, Callisto and Europa. The permanent estrangement between Demeter and Persephone as enacted in Pecola and Pauline, as Pecola was abducted not in a physical world but in a psychic world where she is irrevocably lost. The order of the happenings the rape, madness and silence resonate with the ancient myth of Philomela. In Thrace, Tereus rapes and mutilates Philomela who eventually turns into a nightingale. In this novel Pecola's innocence makes her shut her mouth.

The novel opens with Jane Dick primer describing the 'happy family'-fairy Tale Morrison reverses it with Pecola's abject childhood and her trauma. Further it draws on the structure of myth of seasonal changes which provides the structure of the novel. Pecola's dream about to turn beautiful like Shirley Temple or Mary Jane and loved by people by having Blue Eyes is a reversal of fairy tale motif. The impossibility of ugly duckling becoming a beautiful Swan parallels the condition of Pecola.

In the novel *Sula*, Harold Bloom recognises three oral sources to illustrate the structure of *Sula*. Firstly the opening of the novel enacts a resemblance of a typical Fairytale from Western culture. Secondly the novels structure modeled on the pattern of joking in African American communities and thirdly the novel itself evokes the form of The Ballad. As the novel progresses the readers can recognise the series of topsy-turvy reversals of the folklores fairy tales. A protective soldier scared of his own hands (Shadrack) fire that save Hansel and Gretel or the three little pigs that burns down first a Son (Plum cake) then the mother Hanna. Morrison breaks the connection between expectation and outcome, and defamiliarises our anticipation. Bloom interprets:

She undercuts any potential Fairytale outcomes by making Sula, her princess, a despicable user who needs rescue from no one by making Eva her fairy godmother important at the most crucial moment of her life (Hanna's burning) and of making Shadrack, the potential Prince, an outcast from the world where his services are most needed. None of these characters portents the "Happily Ever After" dimension of the formula, by novels end, The Princess is dead, The Prince has unwittingly led many of her adversaries to their deaths, the twin sister is almost crazy with grief, and the Kingdom is

slowly being destroyed.(p.107)

The character Sula's transformation and return to Medallion nurtures rumours that she is made into a witch, a typical Morrison way of progressing the superstition as a legend. As Beaulieu claims, "Morrison manages to simulate the ethos of folk communities and to saturate her novels with a folk aura intrinsic to the texturing of whole." (p.126)

Morrison's novels do not merely reflect elements folklores and oral tradition, but her delicate portrayal of folklore and superstitions practices represents their progress and evolution rather than their inertia.

Conclusion:

Both Atwood and Morrison had an avid acquaintance with fairytale and folklores and myths since their childhood. Both these writers inadvertently or self consciously engage in postmodernist revision or reversion of myths' folk Tales in their narratives. These revised fairy tale intertexts demonstrate a postmodern disruption of power and sexual politics and progress from dismemberment to Metamorphosis.

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