

# “Looking Glass upon the wall, who is fairest of us all?” The Curse of Beauty: Counter-narrating ‘Snow White’s Tale’

*Dr. Payel Dutta Chowdhury, Professor & Director, School of Arts & Humanities,  
REVA University, Bengaluru*

## ABSTRACT

Fairy tales have always been the most popular source of entertainment for readers worldwide irrespective of any age. These tales have always captivated young readers and formed a part of their essential reading material. An in-depth study of many popular fairy tales, however, showcases the use of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, which have been injected in the minds of young children from time immemorial. With the growth of revisionism as a literary genre, it has been seen that many contemporary authors have come up with alternate reading of popular fairy tales and folk tales, thereby, creating different perspectives than the traditional ones.

This paper is an attempt to study Gregory Maguire’s *Mirror Mirror* (2003) as an alternate reading of the popular Snow White tale, highlighting the author’s perspective of the stepmother figure in the story. Using the theoretical framework of Gender Studies, this paper will explore the concepts of the beauty myth, the stereotypical images of the stepmother figure in fairy tales and important symbols associated with the narrative of Snow White in Maguire’s book vis-à-vis the original narrative.

**Keywords:** Snow White, revisionism, fairy tales, beauty myth, gender, stereotypes, stepmother

Once there was a lovely virgin  
called Snow White.  
Say she was thirteen.  
Her stepmother,  
a beauty in her own right,  
though eaten, of course, by age,  
would hear of no beauty surpassing her own.  
Beauty is a simple passion,  
but, oh my friends, in the end  
you will dance the fire dance in iron shoes.  
The stepmother had a mirror to which she referred-  
something like the weather forecast-  
a mirror that proclaimed  
the one beauty of the land.  
She would ask,

Looking glass upon the wall,  
 who is fairest of us all?  
 And the mirror would reply,  
 You are the fairest of us all.  
 Pride pumped in her like poison.  
 Suddenly one day the mirror replied,  
 Queen, you are full fair, 'tis true,  
 but Snow White is fairer than you.  
 Until that moment Snow White  
 had been no more important  
 than a dust mouse under the bed.  
 But now the queen saw brown spots on her hand  
 and four whiskers over her lip  
 so she condemned Snow White  
 to be hacked to death. (Sexton 2001)

‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’ (in some translations titled ‘Little Snow White’), a well-known children’s narrative, was first published in 1812 by the Brothers Grimm in their collection *Children’s and Household Tales*. Written in German, the story was titled ‘Sneewittchen’. The story was revised again in 1854. It narrates the tale of a queen who while sewing, pricks her finger, and seeing the drops of blood on the snow, wishes for a daughter who would be “...as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window-frame.” (Grimm 1944) However, when the daughter according to her desire is born, the queen-mother dies. The king very soon marries a beautiful, but vain and wicked wife, who possesses a mirror and keeps asking it, “Looking-glass, Looking-glass, on the wall/ Who in this land is the fairest of all?” (Grimm 1944) Her ego is severely hurt when the mirror answers her one day that Snow White is the fairest in the land. Thereafter, the stepmother tries various ways of killing the girl, all leading to failures until she eats the poisoned apple and enters into a state of ‘suspended animation’. Her ‘death’ is severely grieved by the seven dwarfs, with whom she had been living in the forest. Ultimately, the arrival of a prince and his chance opening of the glass coffin, leads to the falling off of the piece of poisoned apple from Snow White’s mouth. She gains consciousness, gets married to the prince and lives happily ever after, and as a moral bonus, the wicked stepmother is forced by the people to wear red-hot iron slippers, dance until she dropped down dead.

Critics all over the world have been greatly intrigued by various symbols used in the story, particularly, the magic mirror, the comb, the poisoned apple, and the glass coffin. The story has also been adapted into a Broadway play, comic book series, several films, music videos, and television shows. With the growth of revisionist literature in contemporary times, many authors have been attempting to retell popular fairy tales from different perspectives. Looking at fairy tales from a feminist perspective, several critics have viewed the negative impact of the unnatural ways that women have been projected in such narratives. Throwing light on the several studies being conducted on the connection of fairy tales to feminism, Donald Haase reflects that the “(q)uestions about canonization and the male-dominated fairy-tale tradition would lead to the discovery and recovery of alternative fairy-tale narratives and to the identification of the woman’s voice in fairy-tale

production, from the earliest documented references to the present.” (Haase 2004) Highlighting the studies which have been conducted on fairy tales and their connection to gender and socialization, Haase gives the example of Susan Brownmiller’s book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) where the authors points out that fairy tales, such as, ‘Cinderella’, ‘Sleeping Beauty’ and ‘Snow White’ give negative training to young girls on how to become victims of rape. Haase gives another example of Mary Dale’s book *Gyn/ Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978) where the author highlights that the tale of Snow White itself is nothing less than a poisonous apple and the evil stepmother herself is another victim as well as the carrier of the venomous patriarchal plot against women. The deconstruction of the popular fairy tales in feminist terms have also led to the retelling of such tales from different perspectives. In the 1970s, many feminist psychoanalytic theorists like Jean Baker Miller and Nancy Chodorow challenged the stereotypical images portrayed in fairy tales and considered them as the products of the masculine psyche and patriarchal hegemony. Writers, such as, Angela Carter, Olga Broumass, Anne Sexton came to prominence with their revisionist versions of popular fairy tales and created alternate representations of traditional gender roles. The 1990s, marked by the second-wave of feminism, also saw the growth in the genre of revisionist fairy tales. The story of ‘Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs’ has been revised in various ways in different media and literary text. Marris Meyer’s *Winter* (2015) is loosely based on the story of Snow White, where Princess Levana, though stunningly beautiful, is dark complexioned. Gregory Maguire’s *Mirror, Mirror* (2003), a revisionist version of the tale of Snow White, counter-narrates various aspects of the fairy tale.

Set in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italy, this alternate narrative presents a Spanish man, Don Vicente de Nevada, and his beautiful daughter, Bianca who is looked after by the cook, Primavera, and a priest named Fra Ludovico, while Nevada is engaged in his works. Unlike the original tale, Nevada is a sensitive father, cares for his daughter’s well-being and does not think of remarrying after the death of his wife. Threat, however, comes in the form of the evil duchess, Lucrezia, and her brother, Cesare, who come to visit Montefiore, the farmhouse of Nevada, with a hidden objective in mind. Cesare forces Nevada to go on a wild goose chase to hunt for the remnant of the tree of knowledge. Nevada has to take a terrible decision to leave his daughter and is forced to leave Bianca under the guardianship of Lucrezia. Bianca grew beautifully and eventually drew the attention of Cesare. Lucrezia gets jealous of her and hires a hunter to kill her. The hunter left her in the woods and after several years of sleep, she woke up and stayed with the seven dwarfs who were looking for their eighth brother. Lucrezia, with the help of the mirror, discovered that Bianca is still alive and after failing twice in her attempts to kill her, finally poisons her with an apple. Bianca was placed in a coffin and the hunter came back in the woods and brought her to life with a kiss much alike the original narrative.

Even though Maguire’s story does not temper with the original plot of the fairy tale much, his book counter-narrates several aspects of the original text. It becomes imperative to look into Maguire’s portrayal of Lucrezia (his version of the stepmother figure), the detailed revision of the dwarfs, and the author’s perspective on the important symbols used in the original text. Moving away from the original narrative, this book focuses on Lucrezia (in this case, not a stepmother, but a temporary guardian) and relates her past. Her ancestors were known for their wicked ways. She was the daughter of a notorious and controversial

Pope, Alexander VI, and his mistress. In her growing years, Lucrezia was shifted from her mother's care to the guardianship of her father's new mistress, Giulia Farnese, who was her age. Lucrezia's emotions for Giulia were torn between being impressed by her beauty and a gnawing feeling of inferiority. Lucrezia "...impressed with Giulia Farnese's beauty, was cowed by it. Giulia was her own age, nearly, *and her father's lover*. The paradox of that!" (*Mirror Mirror*, 136). Being brought up in such an unnatural environment, Lucrezia had always been hungry for attention. She was the jealous type from her childhood and even her brother Cesare was aware of that. Maguire's book provides ample scope for the development of Lucrezia's character and as the story moves forward and backward from the omniscient narrator's perspective, sufficient space is bestowed to bring out the past of the evil duchess. Macquire's villain is a realistically drawn woman. She is intelligent and sharp and the author in a few words portrays her genius: "Study came easily to her. She spoke four languages well. Without much effort she could hear in the rhythm of foreign tongues a certain implied meaning, even when vocabulary and the nuances of grammar escaped her. For a child with spotty tutoring, she engaged in her own private trivium: not grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, the traditional roster of subjects, but glamour, intrigue, and power." (Maguire 2009) Very early in life, Lucrezia realized the power of her beauty and uses it to gain prominence in her stature. Also contrary to the expected behaviour in a patriarchal setup, she starts following the affairs of the court of the Pope very seriously, and once when the Pope is unwell, had managed the governance of the Church for a short while. Life provided continuous challenges to Lucrezia. Her marriages had been more for the sake of status upliftment and were political alliances offering her no real satisfaction. Three unsuccessful marriages, several pregnancies, and loss of children made her the bitter and jealous woman whom we come across in Maguire's book. Even though portrayed with a touch of sympathy, the author does not fail to highlight the evil side of Lucrezia's character which is essential for the development of the story. Maguire also revises the relationship between Nevada and Lucrezia. A marriage between them would have been unauthentic, given the portrayal of their different social status as well as Nevada's steadfast devotion towards his dead wife and his daughter, Bianca. Tired of the complications in her aristocratic life, Lucrezia, however, wishes many a times that she were married to the farmer, Nevada, and had been leading a simple and quiet life. Maguire also brings in a twist in their relationship. Nevada had been a witness to Lucrezia's attempt at killing her newborn child, her "mortal mistake" (Maguire 2009), and it is his timely intervention that saves the little one. Lucrezia is, therefore, caught in a dilemma and to amend matters, makes a gift of the farm, Montefiore, to Nevada. Further revisions are also done by the author in the relationship between Lucrezia and her brother, Cesare, who does not feature in the original text. A very complicated association, Maguire's portrayal of the duo leaves many unanswered questions in the minds of the readers. Hints of a deep emotional as well as sexual connection can be seen at the root of this relationship, and thus, Cesare's attention towards Bianca triggers off the jealousy in his sister. Whether it is her genes or her fate or a combination of both, Lucrezia turns out to be depraved and causes havoc in the lives of Nevada and Bianca. Within the ambit of a revisionist text, Maguire's villain has been provided with sufficient justification for her evil behaviour, jealousy and malice.

The title of the fairytale in the Grimm Brothers' version focuses on the importance of the seven dwarfs in the story of Snow White. The tiny people in the original tale are lovable

creatures who genuinely care for Snow White. Amidst the wrath and jealousy of her stepmother, their brotherly affection provides Snow White with much required solace. Maguire's presentation of the dwarfs is very elaborate and on a different level as compared to the original text. In Maguire's revision, the dwarfs are eight siblings and not seven. The author describes at length the weird appearance of the dwarfs, their behaviours and clumsiness. The 'little men' in the *Grimm's Fairy Tales* are quite eloquent and express their concerns in proper human ways. Maguire presents an aura of magic around his dwarfs, who utter guttural sounds and cannot be easily understood. Their relationship with Snow White is also complicated and not as simple as portrayed in the original text. Maguire's revision serves in creating a magical picture and lends authenticity to Snow White's story.

Fairy tales, over the ages, have played multiples roles across different cultures. Other than the primary aspect of being means of entertainment for children, these stories have been the foundation of building the morality of the society as well. The essentiality of young minds to absorb the idea of virtue and vice and the finality of a world where good people prosper and evil is doomed is a universal requirement. In a revisionist text, such ideal and stereotypical scenarios are challenged and looked from fresh perspectives. Maguire's story similarly raises certain contemporary concerns. The issue of the myth of beauty as a marker of ideal feminine characteristics is explored by the author. An analysis of the two hundred stories in the *Grimm's Fairy Tales* highlights the use of beauty as one of the most important marker of a virtuous woman and of course the sole credential of being desirable and feminine. Wherever there is a good and obedient girl or a virtuous woman in the stories, they are without fail, fair and beautiful. Several of the stories are directly about beautiful women and the challenges that they come across, mainly due to their astounding beauty. Cinderella, Rapunzel, Snow White, and all such women in fairy tales across cultures become the bait of jealousy and family politics. The myth of beauty as analyzed in detail by Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* (1990) gives us a clear indicator of how the image of beauty is used by the patriarchal hegemony to create a double standard for women and more importantly, employ it against women. Explaining the myth which surrounds the term 'beauty', Wolf says,

"The quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual, and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women's beauty must correlate to their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless." (Wolf 1991)

Such false beliefs lead to complications in the society and the creation of stereotypical images of women. The politics concerning the body came to the forefront in the 1970s during the second wave of the feminist movement in the United States. Debates about laws and woman's body sparked the interests of many groups of women who felt that government or institutional powers had unfairly exercised control over their bodies. Various fairy tales across cultures had been feeding young minds with the notion that white skin is beautiful. Many feminist critics saw that as an after effect of colonization as well. The subconscious desire to possess the complexion of the white masters and the connection of 'white' with power could not be overlooked anymore. In America, the slogan 'Black is

beautiful' heralded a moment in the 1960s when African Americans pointedly attributed positive values to black features. In Maguire's book, Bianca's polished white skin and her remarkable features cause extreme jealousy in Lucrezia, a woman probably in her mother's age group. Bianca's description of beauty, in keeping with the original fairy tale, is extraordinary where, of course, 'white skin' or fair complexion is synonymous to the concept of beauty. It is interesting to note that Marris Meyer in her version of the fairy tale, 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' titled *Winter* revises the concept of beauty being equated to fair complexion and thus, her heroine, Princess Levana, though stunningly beautiful, is dark complexioned. Maguire's evil woman, Lucrezia, is preoccupied with physical beauty right from her childhood days and learns ways and means of being a glamorous woman. Her hatred for Bianca mainly stems from her subconscious feeling of inferiority and in trying to gain the upper hand, she forgets that she is playing dangerously against a mere child. Similar preoccupation with beauty being the sole reason of jealousy also operates in the narrative of the Grimm Brothers, where the stepmother until being warned by the magic mirror, does not consider Snow White as a potential threat. Cesare's attention towards the young Snow White sets the alarm bell ringing for Lucrezia and she grows venomous. Considering such competitions between women, Naomi Wolf opines,

"Competition between women has been made part of the myth so that women will be divided from one another. Youth and (until recently) virginity have been 'beautiful' in women since they stand for experiential and sexual ignorance. Aging in women is 'unbeautiful' since women grow more powerful with time, and since the links between generations of women must always be newly broken: Older women fear young ones, young women fear old, and the beauty myth truncates for all the female life span."  
(Wolf 1991)

This kind of myths regarding beauty, forces women like Lucrezia to feel threatened and spiral down the normal set of behavior and conduct expected of someone her age and social stature. On the other hand, if beauty is to be regarded as the supreme marker of happiness, then Bianca's beauty leads her only to problems. Forced to live within the confines of her home by her father, who probably knows the risks that she may face in the patriarchal world outside, Bianca is prohibited to see the real world even though she craves to hear the noise of village life outside the farm. Beauty, thus, neither sets Lucrezia nor Bianca free from the clutches of the patriarchal notions of male dominance.

Media too creates and helps in sustaining such hypes about women's beauty. In the Indian context, the 'saas-bahu' (mother-in-law/ daughter-in-law) type soap operas that are aired on popular television channels highlight the various existing myths about beauty. We still witness how media sustains the myth of the connection between beauty and virtue. Fairness in skin complexion still is the most essential marker of being feminine. With the rise of social media, advertisements for various products, not only limited to beauty products, have led to the belief that fair skin is ideal, thus, most face cream is a fairness cream. The models used in the advertisements are usually very fair and pretty and grab people's attention and thus, add to more viewership. We have seen many advertisements where a dark skin girl is not loved by her friends because of her skin tone but after using fairness cream, she becomes fair and thus is loved by all. These type of stereotypical advertisements pave the path for gender politics in the society. In today's world, people are extremely conscious about their physical looks as media has been emphasizing the ideal

and promoting through advertisements, entertainment channels and movies, videos and so on. Such images of beauty lead today's youth to post their pictures on Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp and so on to get attention and they spend several hours in front of the mirror beautifying their looks. Several studies have been conducted on changes in behavioural patterns in youth as a result of the growing exposure to social media. The notion that a fair skin, whether naturally gifted or artificially sought with makeup, operate as strategies to gain social acceptance. Severe competition results from such narrow perspective on the image of beauty being limited to exterior beauty alone. Many young people want to be the most beautiful and are ready to go to any length to achieve that. Because of the advanced technologies in today's time, plastic surgeries can be done and facial features and body parts can be made perfect which is becoming a popular option. There are also makeup artists who can transform looks with makeup and these cosmetics are sold everywhere. Speaking about the negative impact of such narrow-minded concern, Naomi Wolf says,

“During the past decade, women breached the power structure; meanwhile, eating disorders rose exponentially and cosmetic surgery became the fastest-growing medical specialty. During the past five years, consumer spending doubled, pornography became the main media category, ahead of legitimate films and records combined, and thirty-three thousand American women told researchers that they would rather lose ten to fifteen pounds than achieve any other goal. More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves *physically*, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers.” (Wolf 1991)

Several studies have been conducted on the influence of media in creating and maintaining such myths related to beauty. The beauty myth, among several negative impacts, has caused a serious problem of eating disorder among women. In a study conducted on eating disorder and the role of media in the development and maintenance of such disorders, the researchers opine that “(t)he evidence that exposure to slender media images of women and perceived pressure from the media to be thin negatively affects body image and emotional well-being, has led researchers to evaluate factors that may lead some girls and women to be more vulnerable to the messages and images portrayed in the media.” (Spettigue & Henderson) The studies also show that there is no satisfaction even after all these. The Kardashians are the most influential in today's world as they are perfectly beautiful because of surgeries and thus, taking the world's attention through their reality shows. Today's teenage girls and women want to look like them to get attention and thus, turn to makeup and surgeries for solutions or to find happiness or satisfaction. Although various feminist movements, talk shows and other awareness programs have been educating the masses, women seem to be glued to the media-created image of beauty. In this scenario, it becomes imperative for today's readers to scrutinize the image of beauty in the story of Snow White vis-à-vis Maguire's projection. Lucrezia's obsession with being the most beautiful in the land showcases the psychological impact of beauty on her and its negative results. Brought up in a patriarchal setup, where she is discouraged to play an active role in the ministering of the Church, even though she has the required capability, she is pushed towards the glamour world, probably the only space offering her competition and challenge. Her brother, Cesare, carries forward the Church's religious quests after the Pope's death. Maguire, through his revision, creates an appropriate background to Lucrezia's jealousy

towards Bianca and her obsession to survive in the competitive patriarchal rat race where beauty is the only quality which can help her win.

In connection to the concept of the beauty myth, Maguire's book traces the significance associated to the mirror, the most important symbol in the *Snow White* fairytale. While introducing *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Padraic Colum says,

“The good traditional storyteller had a sense of pattern and prided himself or herself on knowing and keeping to it....They put a thing in the center of the story and it gave a pattern....The golden slipper on the stairway is what the incidents in ‘Cindrella’ lead up to and lead away from. And the gold of the slipper puts into greater obscurity the drably dressed girl crouched by the ashes. In ‘Snow White’ there is the looking glass of the wicked queen which is doubled in the glass coffin in which Snow White is laid by the kindly dwarfs.” (Grimm 1944)

The mirror in the original ‘Snow White’ tale as well as in Maguire's book is indeed at the centre of the story and provides a major link to the entire plot. However, Maguire twists the plot by changing the ownership of the looking-glass. Unlike the original tale, the mirror does not belong to the evil stepmother, but had been created by the little clumsy men, is lost by them and found by Nevada. Lucrezia gets to use the mirror while she is a guest at Montefiore in the owner's absence. Maguire's analysis of the functioning of a mirror comes through the words of the dwarfs who explain that it is to satisfy the inner thirst that “humans rely on the mirror, to get beyond the simple me-you, handsome-hideous, menacing-merciful. In a mirror, humans see that the other one is also them: the two are the same, one one. The menace accompanies the mercy. The transcendent cohabits with the corrupt.” (Maguire 2009) The dwarfs had made the mirror to understand this complex trait in human beings but had lost it and had been searching fervently for it as that would lead them to their eighth sibling who had gone on the trail of the looking-glass. If for the dwarfs, the mirror signifies a link to their lost brother, for Lucrezia it becomes a weapon of self-obsession. Even though the real owners of the mirror, the dwarfs, are hesitant to steal it from Nevada's home, until they are coaxed into action by Bianca. The dwarfs are well-aware of the power of the mirror and when Lucrezia sets her eyes on it for the first time, the eighth dwarf who was there comments,

“(t)he thing about a mirror is this: The one who stares into it is condemned to consider the world from her own perspective. Even a bowed mirror works primarily by engaging the eyes, and she who centers herself in its surface is unlikely to notice anyone in the background who lacks a certain status, distinction. Or height. Like a dwarf for instance. Or a young child.” (Maguire 2009)

True to the power of the mirror, Lucrezia gets absorbed in its prospect of showing off her most advantageous quality to Nevada but fails to draw his attention. In *Mirror Mirror* the focus of the writer shifts to Lucrezia's desperation and hunger for love and attention. The mirror serves as a tool for realizing her obsession to be the most desirable one. Maguire projects the slow transformation of Lucrezia from a beautiful, talented, glamorous and much-sought after duchess to a desperate woman in denial of the truth of her beauty. Even when truth dawns on her, she keeps looking at the mirror to see her former self but instead sees her aging beauty. Desperately she asks the mirror, ‘Who is fairer?’ knowing it very well that the mirror will not lie, but fervently hoping that the mirror says, “No one; you are beautiful as a legend.” (Maguire 2009) She is shocked to see the reflection of Bianca in the

mirror who “seemed like one who didn’t worry about what it meant never to be enough. The absence of such a care on her brow filled her with an unearthly beauty that I could neither achieve nor abide.” (Maguire 2009). Lucrezia sees Bianca in the mirror and witnesses that she has grown into a woman and she is jealous of not only her beauty but her satisfaction in who she is and what she has. Highlighting the trope of the mirror vis-à-vis the complicated relationship between women, specifically that of the mother and the daughter in fairy tales, Veronica L. Schanoes makes an observation on Tanith Lee’s book *White as Snow* (2000) and says:

“In Lee’s retelling of ‘Snow White’, the feminized magic, the witch-queen’s power, is generated by a neglected daughter’s adoration of her mother: the woman’s power and beauty, even her sense of self is triggered by her daughter’s desire. The powerful mother is not contained in one figure: she is distanced from herself, looking in the mirror; her reflection has the power of speech; her daughter looks in the mirror and sees only her mother....Just so, Lee uses a story whose themes naturalize misogynistic notions of feminity (competition between women over beauty, the notion that there can be only one who is ‘fairest of them all’, feminine power as evil witchcraft) in order to re-create it as a feminist tale.” (Schanoes 2014)

Lucrezia’s competition with the young Bianca drives her to craziness; in her desire to be the most beautiful lady of the land, Maguire projects her transformation from a talented woman to a witch-like character. Several studies have been conducted on the mother/stepmother figure in most fairy tales. The conventional image of the (step)mother portrayed as in the story of ‘Cindrella’ and ‘Snow White’ is that of a wicked, cruel and selfish woman. These stereotypical portrayals of powerful women with villainous traits in their characters have been severely criticized by feminist critics all over the world. The age-old relationship between women and mirror takes a different turn during the second wave of feminism and with the publication of Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*, various issues regarding women’s appearance took centre stage. The mirror became an important symbol/metaphor to understand the complicated relationship between the self and the other. With the rise of revisionism of fairy tales by Angela Carter, Tanith Lee, Anne Sexton, and others, the mirror assumed a prominent role in analyzing the traditional fairy tales from a feminist perspective. The mirror in Snow White’s tale as well as in Maguire’s retelling plays central role in provoking the jealousy in the evil stepmother/ guardian. Lucrezia’s brother, Cesare, is able to point out the exact reason for her dislike of Bianca and tell her, “You’re jealous because she’s lovelier than you.” (Maguire 2009) A jealous woman like Lucrezia spells danger, she is ready to do anything which will promote her and would make her rival fall. The patriarchal world makes her believe in a cunningly concocted dictum – ‘survival of the fairest’ - designed for her doom. Lucrezia too gets caught in this whirlpool of duality – the urge to be beautiful and the preservation of ethical and moral consciousness. The mirror becomes a metaphor for her existence amidst the cruel competitive world of patriarchy. Her self-confidence and self-esteem are deeply connected to the mirror and she fantasizes a prominent place for herself on the wings of unwavering beauty, the most important marker in a male-dominated society. The mirror, in this sense, does not act as a mere looking-glass, but as the reflection of feminine experiences as well as means of fantastic escape in a patriarchal world.

Maguire's revision of the tale of 'Snow White' brings out various concerns, prominently, the myth of beauty as a marker of patriarchal dominance and its disastrous impact on women. *Mirror Mirror* can be read as a counter-narrative of the traditional one-dimensional portrayal of women as we find in most fairy tales. Maguire's revision also provides space for Lucrezia's story to be told. Fairy tales, mainly designed for young readers, lacked in multi-dimensional characterization. Highlighting this aspect of traditional narratives for children, Marina Warner says, "(b)ecause complex characters are rare, and the distribution of villainy and virtue is not muddied by ambiguity, Red Riding Hood or Snow White have become rich symbols for psychoanalysts to gloss." (Warner 1995) Revisionists have provided with ample scope for (re)looking at these stereotypical representations and various symbols associated with social conformity. Maguire's *Mirror Mirror* fills in several gaps in the original text and attempts to offer fresh perspectives to archetypal images.

### Works Cited:

- ❖ Grimm, Jacob and Wilhem Grimm. (1944). *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*. (Translated by Margaret Hunt). Pantheon Books.
- ❖ Haase, Donald P. (2004). "Feminist Fairy-Tale Scholarship" in Donald P. Haase (ed) *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*. Wayne State University Press. (Kindle Edition)
- ❖ Maguire, Gregory. (2009). *Mirror Mirror*. Headline Review. (First published by ReganBooks in 2003)
- ❖ Schanoes, Veronica L. (2014). *Fairy Tales, Myth and Psychoanalytic theory: Feminism and Retelling the Tale*. Ashgate Publishing Limited. (Kindle Edition)
- ❖ Sexton, Anne. (2001). "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" in *Transformations*. Houghton Mifflin. (First published in 1971)
- ❖ Spettigue, Wendy and Katherine A. Henderson. "Eating Disorders and the Role of the Media" in *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*. Vol 13 (1). Web. 2004 February.
- ❖ Warner, Marina. (1995). *From the Beast to the Blond: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers*. Vintage Books. (Kindle Edition)
- ❖ Wolf, Naomi. (1991). *The Beauty Myth*. Vintage Books. (First published by Chatto & Windus in 1990)