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FROM PATRIARCHAL OBEDIENCE TO FEMINIST AGENCY: REWRITING LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD FROM GRIMM TO ROALD DAHL

Abdullah K. Shehabat^{1*}, Muneera M. Jaradat¹, Ali M. Alnawaiseh², Qusai A. Al
Debyan³, Elham T Hussein⁴, Thogan K. Tahat⁵, Yousef M. Tahat⁶

a.shehabat@jadara.edu.jo¹, m.jaradat@jadara¹, amanawai@mutah.edu.jo², qusai@hu.edu.jo³,
almashagbehhanan@gmail.com, t.tahat@gmail.com, yuoseftahat@yahoo.com

¹Department of English language and Literature, Faculty of Arts and Languages, Jadara University, Jordan

²Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Mutah University, Jordan

³Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, The Hashemite University, Zarqa, Jordan

⁴Department of English Language and Translation, Al Ain University, UAE

⁵Department of Professional Education, Amman Arab University, Jordan

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Abdullah k. Shehabat
(a.shehabat@jadara.edu.jo)

ABSTRACT

The current study investigates the Brothers Grimm's traditional version of "Little Red Riding Hood" and the British author Roald Dahl's modern poetic version in Revolting Rhymes from a feminist standpoint. It further examines how feminist thought has represented the agency of female characters in fairy tales. Through close reading and literary comparison, the study shows that the traditional version of the Brothers Grimm is fully influenced by patriarchal society, negatively depicting Red Riding Hood as dependent, submissive, and always in need of 'male' physical and emotional support to survive. It, however, presents a very empowered version of Dahl, reflecting the agency and power of second- and third-wave feminist values that strongly call for 'women's self-sufficiency in pursuit of self-actualization.' Thus, Little Red Riding Hood is presented as an independent, entertaining protagonist who undermines traditional gender roles and outsmarts the wolf without male support. Furthermore, this paper argues that Dahl's use of humor and irony aligns with a broader artistic shift toward depicting female figures in fairy tales. Ultimately, the study reveals the influential role of feminist dialogue in transforming literary prototypes and increasing young readers' awareness of masculinity/femininity, independence, and morality. By comparing and contrasting the two works, the study highlights the importance of storytelling as a technique for creating change.

KEYWORDS: Feminism; Little Red Riding Hood; Brothers Grimm; Fairy tales; children's Literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales play a significant role in shaping young people's attitudes and major life decisions. They have a significant impact on people, especially children and women, because, as historically proven, they mirror societal norms and ethical values and often reinforce assigned roles for women and children. We argue here that fairy tales have significant educational value, as they contribute to the formation of societal structures. Current literary scholarship shows that conventional fairy tales are not static remnants of history; they are vibrant texts that call for the realistic use of socially laden texts. Relevant scholarship further emphasizes that these tales can serve as significant sources for developing learners' skills, especially in fostering critical and creative thinking. This aspect could be especially significant when researchers use fairy tales as educational perspectives that question their conceptual foundations. Vučković and Premović (2024) note that integrating a model of constructive text while exploring how social potentials and matters of gender and heroic deeds are embedded in recognized high-brow works, thereby stressing the genre's educational value in "nurturing analytical awareness beyond surface plotlines" (Vučković & Premović, 2024).

In fact, fairy tales play a central role in understanding femininity and masculinity, as well as matters of identity and voice. Recent critical scholarship argues that fairy tales have long been accepted as harmless children's entertainment and can also serve as sites where masculine and feminine ideas are both replicated and questioned. Gul and Baig (2025) conducted a study titled "gender socialization through fairy tales" that argues that conventional narratives frequently depict masculine and feminine characters in traditional ways that echo momentous communal orders. Hitherto, this "recognition has implications for emancipation because it foregrounds what needs to change in narrative representation" (Gul & Baig, 2025). Moreover, the rise of "fractured" tales demonstrates how writers and educators present "transformative reinterpretations of familiar plots to challenge inherited norms and to promote reflective engagement with gender expectations" (Fractured Fairy Tales Research, 2025).

In addition to gender and educational perspectives, fairy tales are also recognized for illuminating broader socio-political issues, serving as creative universes where core customs and rules can be critically examined. Scholarly research on the socio-political aspects of fairy tales examines how

this art form has, throughout history, been used to address issues of injustice and human rights violations, thereby drawing harsh criticism. Jack Zipes (2023) explains that narratives from the late 19th and 20th centuries address socio-political matters, highlighting the fairy tales' power to critique "real-world power structures" (Zipes, 2023). The current study, therefore, supports the idea that the literary genre of fairy tales serves as artistic and educational material with the power to effect change.

2. RATIONALE AND THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The rationale of the current study is to compare two literary works set in the same setting and featuring the same characters, but spanning different time periods, to determine whether they share the same plot and morals or are intended solely to entertain or even to instruct. It further explores whether the major theme in the Brothers Grimm's work remains the same, even with the evolving powers of the second and third waves of feminism. In other words, it investigates the Brothers Grimm's traditional version of Little Red Riding Hood and Roald Dahl's modern poetic version in *Revolting Rhymes* from a feminist standpoint.

By means of resorting to close reading and literary comparison, the study shows how the traditional version of the 'Brothers' Grimm is entirely influenced by patriarchal society, negatively depicting Red Riding Hood as dependent, submissive, fully obedient, and always in need of a male's physical and emotional support to survive (Shehabat *et al.* 2025).

3. LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD AND HUNTSMAN: CRITICAL RECEPTION

Little Red Riding Hood and Huntsman, one of the most persistent anecdotes in Literature, has been particularly effective in expressing the notion of gender norms. The Brothers' 19th-century version depicts a submissive, lifeless, inexperienced girl driven into danger by her disobedience, thus highly dependent on the male gender to survive and be rescued. However, Roald Dahl's version, in the twentieth century, specifically in 1982 in *Revolting Rhymes*, redefines Red Riding Hood as confident, entertaining, and self-determining. This protagonist courageously and decisively rescues herself from any physical or mental support from males. This alteration reproduces larger advances in feminist thought, a radical shift from a whole emphasis on female virtue to an essentializing discourse that fully refutes virtue and women's search for morality, and fully incorporates them into matters through which

they can redefine themselves, considering independence, self-sufficiency, and confrontation.

Drawing on Jack Zipes' theoretical frameworks and the context of feminist literary criticism, this study explores how Dahl's retelling aligns with the second and third waves of feminism, thus empowering young readers, especially girls, with new models of agency. *Little Red Hood*, the Brothers Grimm version, has received considerable critical attention among well-known fairy tales and within the field of psychoanalysis. Researchers have repeatedly highlighted the tale's ethical instructive qualities, as well as its positive role in supporting the middle-class values that prevailed in the 19th century, particularly regarding compliance, gender issues, and social structure patterns. Bettelheim's influential psychoanalytic reading (1976) reviews the Grimm version as a representational narrative loaded with symbols of spiritual maturity, therefore depicting the wolf as an indicator of insentient and sexual danger, while Little Red Riding Hood's journey represents a developing ritual of route (Bettelheim, 1976). Even though Bettelheim's work has been widely cited, it has received much criticism for depreciating the historical specificity that underlies the text. Nonetheless, Zipes (2006) believes that the 'Grimms' version must be read within a socio-historical context, arguing that the work deliberately remodelled earlier oral traditions to foster middle-class principles and male-controlled beliefs. This analytical reception underscores the Grimm tale's significance not merely as a children's tale, but as artistically constructed content that upholds prevailing societal moralities. Critical reflections on Dahl's *Little Red Riding Hood* have primarily focused on the protagonist's revolutionary conflict with conventional, canonical fairy tales. Critics maintained that this version purposefully upends the inactivity and victimized image associated with the Grimm protagonist by depicting her as self-confident yet violent when required, thereby defying prevailing gender roles (Viñas Valle, 1999). Such a reversal is repeatedly read as a precise postmodernist tendency in 'children's literature that uses sarcasm to criticise "moral absolutism and narrative authority" (Tatar, 1999). While Dahl's version has been commended for its scholarly intellect, commentators and reviewers have also expressed concerns about violent segments and the use of a sarcastic tone. Nonetheless, scholarly reception situates Dahl's version as an expressive model of how modern rewritten fairy tales' question, yet ultimately undermine, the philosophical expectations of highly recognized tales.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fairy tales have, to a large extent, operated as cultural products that code and convey gender hierarchies. Feminist critics argued that fairy tales expose patriarchal compositions and/or authority in a way that "fantasizes female obedience and their suppression while praising 'males' heroic deeds and their righteousness" (Zhou et al., p. 1). Several experimental studies, around 600 fairy tales, conducted in Europe, demonstrate that women are often diminished, restricted to sexuality, morality, and minor roles, while masculine roles dominate decisiveness, authority, and decision-making positions (Zhou et al., 2022). In *Little Red Riding Hood*, the Grimm version, the protagonist personifies these restraints: She is compliant toward her mother, innocent when confronting the antagonist, the wolf, and finally saved by male interference. Feminist research considers this as exemplary of male domination and moralisation, where the female's offence is penalized while her morality is returned by virtue of patriarchal authority (Sparks, 2016). The Grimm version thus corresponds to the conventional economy of submission and defencelessness.

Contemporary feminist re-elucidations of fairy tales, nevertheless, aim to disrupt these archetypes and reconceptualise the work of feminine characters. Revisionists, e.g., Angela Carter, have reworked several canonical tales to focus on matters such as 'women's autonomy, irony, and agency' (Rodríguez Bonet, 2022, p. 22). As Marriott (2023) reflects, current re-narratives in young-adult Literature and/or children's literature employ feminist perceptions to "recover agency" and defy male-controlled rationalities of passivity and salvation. Likewise, El-Said (2023) argues that Roald Dahl's *Revolt Rhymes* (1982) employs postmodern feminist satire, deconstructing "female passivity, male superiority, and the belief in 'happily-ever-after'" (p. 8). In this version, in the form of poetic narration, the heroine, Little Red Riding Hood, not only conquers the antagonist without male support but also takes over the masculine symbol of power by plainly showing her power, i.e., putting on the wolf's skin as a trophy. This role-play between male and female roles transforms the current fairy tale into a satire of the collapse of patriarchal authority, thus aligning with second- and third-wave feminist ideals of sovereignty, independence, and self-actualization.

A fundamental term in feminist theories is agency, which can be defined as the role of female characters to "take an act, determine, and manage their outcomes instead of remaining passive recipients of male interference" (Farrar, 2023, p. 2). In

the Grimm classical narration, her inability to make a life decision renders her unresponsive. Contrarily, Dahl's poetic adaptation enables her with decision and empowerment. Farrar (2023) maintains that such self-reflexive tales compose a "specular Feminine-I," where heroines recognize their prejudice. This shift echoes with 'Elateek's (2025) analysis of revisionary narratives, from a feminist stand, that employ comedy, satire, and role-reversal to challenge and defy gender structures. In fact, ' the employment of rhyme and a comical tone does not undermine feminist ideals, but instead revises and restructures the genre, i.e., the fairy tale, to render empowerment through wit, eloquently turning laughter into critique.'

Empirical analyses additionally substantiate the claim of some feminists that old fairy tales normally reproduce gender-bias. In their study, Toro Isaza et al. (2023, p. 14) demonstrate that across studies of tens of tales, female protagonists are conventionally associated with passive verb patterns, all of which carry negative connotations, such as waited, cried, and married. However, male protagonists, in contrast, perform transitive action verbs with positive connotations, such as 'killed,' 'rescued,' and 'led.' This discourse, grammatical analysis reinforces an embedded style of male authority vs. female obedience. In the ' Grimm's version, this biasness exhibits linguistically: the girl "was eaten","while the hunter "cuts open" the aggressor, the wolf. Dahl's version, nevertheless, reverses the syntactic structure as: she "whips a pistol from her knickers"," cts on killing, and therefore takes over the scene. Such linguistic manipulation reflects a set of feminist hopes and ideals concerning agency.

Díaz-Faes, Ribeiro Murteira, and Ruskov (2024, p. 44) conducted a study that critically clarifies how values, especially the morality in European fairy tales, embrace obedience and traditionalism, despite having been feminized for a long time, over independence and self-direction. These moral structures reinforce Grim's moral depiction of obedience in *Little Red Riding Hood*. 'Revolutionary poetic narration, however, redefines moral virtue as self-dependence and intelligence, implying a shift from obedience to critical action. Rodríguez Bonet (2022) further explains that feminist rewritings normally "recover independent heroines who reject subordinate roles, "turning traditional moral didacticism into ethical pluralism" (p. 43). In short, the contrast between the two versions of Grimm and Dahl demonstrates how the fairy-tale genre shifts from a medium of social regulation to one of criticism and freedom.

In synthesis, it can be inferred that most scholarly articles and studies share one commonality: there is a consensus regarding traditional fairy tales, such as the Brothers Grimm's *Little Red Riding Hood*. They value patriarchal thoughts of femininity: compliance, morality, and dependency. However, modern feminist retellings, e.g., ' 'Dahl's *Revolt Rhymes*, redefine these works through humour, role reversal, and agency. Scholars in the field, e.g., Zhou et al. (2022), Toro Isaza et al. (2023), and Elateek (2025), constantly reveal how storytelling functions as a dynamic site of gender politics. By contrasting the submissive, rescued heroine of the Grimm text with the self-sufficient, gun-wielding protagonist of Dahl's poem, this study participates in an ongoing feminist discourse that views literary transformation as social critique. Storytelling, therefore, becomes both a mirror and a mechanism of change, eventually reflecting shifts from patriarchal dependence to feminist empowerment in the cultural imagination.

5. DISCUSSION

This study employs a qualitative methodological framework, using close reading and comparative literary analysis, supported by feminist literary theory, to examine how *Little Red Riding Hood* evolves from a male-controlled story of complete female obedience in the Brothers Grimm's first work to a female-controlled narratology in Dahl's narrative. Throughout the textual analysis, we interpret the Brothers Grimm's work as a product of the scholarship that prevailed in the 19th century, a period characterized by male dominance. This era, intensely structured within a household setting, is considered the most appropriate period in which women showed great submissiveness to men's authority and agency, thereby developing a moralized femininity. The way *Red Riding Hood* speaks to her mother to "behave herself on the way" (Grimm & Grimm, 1812/2014) frames submission as an ethical and/or moral value, while her nonconformity takes the protagonist straight to hazards, supporting what Jack Zipes recognizes as the "story's philosophical purpose in emphasizing obedience, passivity, and the need for male intervention" (Zipes, 1983, p. 34).

The ' hunter's saving scene further highlights *Red Riding Hood's* lack of intervention, placing patriarchal authority as salvation and rescuing the threatened female from male dangers. From a feminist perspective, such depiction echoes a wider communal device through which femininity is built and understood as helpless and inferior; as Simone de Beauvoir superbly emphasizes, ""One is not

born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 283), an argument that illustrates how 'Grimm's language turns his characters into passive performers. In contrast, 'version is examined as a cautious work of feminism that dismantles ingrained customs through satire, language inversion, and agency. For example, when Dahl's female protagonist tranquilly discloses that "she whips a pistol from her knickers" (Dahl, 1982), the text radically subverts the old-style power dynamics, thereby converting Red Riding Hood from a victimized girl into a functioning and violent actress. This transformation aligns with Judith Butler's argument that gender is "produced through repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (Butler, 1990, p. 33), indicating that Dahl's interference with the tale's repetition allows another function of femininity. By employing language as a ' " 'site of control, the current study reveals how Grimm's language highlights a male-controlled identity, while Dahl's playful yet revolutionary diction functions as a device of feminist criticism. This organizational approach lays the groundwork for the discussion, focusing on the following subsections: The Grimm Brothers: The Cult of Domestic Milieu, Roald Dahl and Feminist Reclamation, and Language, Power, and Theory: Tools of Feminist Critique.

5.1. The 'Grimm's Work: The Cult of Domestic Milieu

As was the norm at the beginning of the 19th century, the settings of most literary works, especially those targeting children and women, were domestic yet moral, peaceful universes like that of Grimm's 1812 version of Little Red Riding Hood. It was set in a milieu of morality designed by the patriarchal authority, claiming to protect the immature: women and children. With that kind of order, people's choice will always be governed by male dominants who claim to protect women and children due to their inability to make decisions and to survive alone. Described as "sweet and obedient," the protagonist, *Little Red Riding Hood*, defies these traditional patriarchal norms and strays from the path: She is tricked by the wolf, an ending that is not highly preferred by the audience. However, from Peter Hunt's perspective, the purpose is to instruct, rather than to entertain, children to obey their parents and never to talk to strangers. The tale climaxes in Little Red Riding Hood's redemption by a huntsman, a male character representing patriarchal authority and power, who plainly cuts her out of the wolf's belly, thus reflecting the way the work, overtly or covertly, values male intervention

while foregrounding female vulnerability. The story's moral is very distinctive: 'girls' disobedience will lead them into danger, and the best practice for them is to submit to male power.

Apparently, readers of both versions, the traditional as well as the modern one, will notice that these two versions align with different stages of feminism. The conventional version fully aligns with the first-wave feminist ideals, most of which focus on the "cult of domesticity, an ideology that highly depicted women as dependent, submissive, fully obedient, and always in need of male physical and emotional support to survive. In a broader sense, first-wave feminism, which evolved during the late 19th century and persisted until the early 20th century, primarily focused on women's human rights as citizens, with the principal goal of securing women's suffrage (Marino, 2024, p. 5). This movement also discussed excluding women from public and political life. The major figures representing this movement included Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in the U.S., and Emmeline Pankhurst in the U.K. These figures led movements for women's voting rights, such as ownership, education, and public acknowledgement (Lindemann, 2023, n.p.). In other words, they sought equality with their male peers because they had always felt inferior because of their dependence on male protection (U.S. Library of Congress, P. 12). This wave aligns with the *Little Red Riding Hood's* desire in the fairy tale when she seeks protection and support from the patriarchal authority, represented by the huntsman.

The following quote supports the previous argument. It reads "Wolf! Wolf!" cried Little Red Riding Hood as loudly as she could. Luckily, Grandmother's neighbor was outside planting in his garden and heard her crying. (n.p) Apparently, the instant when Little Red Riding Hood cries, "Wolf! Wolf!" and is eventually hoarded by a male working in an adjacent garden highlights the persistent theme of female passivity and dependence in this tale. Despite being the principal protagonist, Red Riding Hood is regularly depicted as inexperienced and submissive, lacking the power to defend herself. Her survival primarily depends on male interference, reinforcing the notion that women require male protection to escape threats rather than on their own thoughtfulness and resourcefulness. This incident underscores what some women activists critique as an archetype in classic stories where female figures are portrayed as unresponsive and submissive. Little Red Riding Hood's loud cries do not endow her with power; they stand for her powerlessness and her role

as a victim awaiting male protection to survive. Jack Zipes argues that a tale like the one in question always served to support male-controlled morals (1986). The story, therefore, functions as an instructive and/or cautionary tale: Little Red Riding Hood's defenselessness and trust in the wolf mirror the dangers of drifting from prearranged, passive gender roles; being rescued by a man reinvents the power-changing aspects that favor male power. Thus, even in difficult times, Red Riding Hood remains a symbol of feminine dependency rather than empowerment.

As Zipes notes, the Brothers Grimm edited their tales to reflect "bourgeois ideals of family and gender, erasing earlier versions in which girls were more cunning or where women were the ones who saved themselves" (1988, pp. 30–32). In other words, the prevailing setting for most literary works that tackle matters of women's and children's identity revolves around this cult, always presenting a sweet, girly-girl, obedient daughter being threatened by a risky predator and a male rescuer, creating what Al-Fawareh *et al.* (2023) term a basic "ecological awareness" (p. 783).

5.2. Roald Dahl and Feminist Agency

Published in *Revolting Rhymes*, Dahl's *Little Red Riding Hood* and *the Wolf* can be best described as a rebellious turning point in the history of feminism. His version of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf has brought about a radical change, particularly in the characters' attitudes toward others, especially toward the male supporter and rescuer. Women no longer need male protectors and have begun seeking their own success, independence, and equality in all aspects of life. In other words, they rebelled against all traditional ideals of domesticity and motherhood, moving from a submissive to a rebellious stance. This upside-down shift has consequently been reflected in 'characters' representations in fairy tales, reflecting the inner feelings of women at that time. Little Red Riding Hood has been transformed from a sweet, simple girly-girl into an empowered cowgirl. This radical change in her moral ideals, like the shift in prevailing feminist ideals in the West from the first wave to the third wave, has led her to move from innocence to experience and from simplicity to complexity. Once threatened by an external predator, the wolf, she no longer fears it; she shows no signs of horror or regret, and, most significantly, she does not need any male protection. Instead, she quickly draws a pistol from her knickers and mercilessly shoots him dead. To make the scene even more sarcastic and humorous, after killing the wolf, she makes a coat for

herself from its skin, thus reflecting her empowerment and desire to act maturely. The quote below is further analyzed. 'The small girl smiles. One eyelid flickers. She whips a pistol from her knickers.' This quote marks a shift in the portrayal of Little Red Riding Hood from a passive, submissive girl in 'Grimm's earlier version of the tale.' Dahl immediately describes Red Riding Hood as peaceful, self-confident, and calculating. The elusive physical sign 'one eyelid flickers' implies control and even sarcasm, sharply opposing the fear and defenselessness shown in 'Grimm's version.' The sudden act 'whips a pistol from her knickers' is both funny and dreadful, adding a sardonic twist to the 'story's ending.' Rather than being deceived or scoffed at, here Red Riding Hood is well-equipped and in command of her actions, with the pistol signifying her empowered status and agency, as well as her refusal to be victimized. 'Dahl's overemphasis of astonishment and irrationality critiques the traditional narrative and repositions Red Riding Hood as a character of power and enablement.

Another significant quote represents the same previous argument about the dissident depiction of Red Riding Hood in Dahl's literary work. The quote reads, " She straightened her clothes. She looked around and noticed something on the ground. It was the wolf's poor coat and hat. 'Thank you,' she said. 'I'll keep that.'" (Dahl, 1982, p. 25) In this conclusive moment, Dahl's heroine not only conquers the predator but also figuratively usurps his identity by tailoring his clothing into a coat. This act implies more than simple victory; it signifies the subversion of traditional patriarchal supremacy edifices. In the Brothers Grimm's version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, the heroine is depicted as defenseless and dependent on male figures (e.g., the woodsman) for survival. In contrast, Dahl reconstructs his narrative by equipping Red Riding Hood with independence, dominance, and autonomy, features feminist critics and scholars have long claimed are thoroughly denied to female characters in ancient fairy tales (Zipes, 1993, p. 2).

Choosing to keep the wolf's "coat and hat," the heroine not only declares power over her tale but also retrieves symbols of masculine supremacy. Clothing, in this context, is employed figuratively: the wolf's wear, on one occasion was a mask used for trickery, becomes a trophy of enablement and revolution. From 'Bacchilega's point of view, those tales "destabilize conventional gender roles and challenge the authority of the original tale" (1997, p. 61). The heroine's seizure of the wolf's clothes can thus be read as an act of symbolic confrontation, a denial of

victimhood, and a review of femininity as autonomous and confident. This representation aligns with feminist literary theory, which supports depictions of women that reject passivity or ornamental roles. Dahl's vision of Red Riding Hood not only wins without male interference but also becomes the slayer rather than the prey, suggesting a reversal of the gender power dynamics that dominate traditional tales.

Here, it is worth noting that Dahl's modern representation of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf strongly echoes second-wave feminist ideals of the 1960s and 70s, which emphasized sovereignty, self-reliance, and the rejection of traditional gender roles imposed by patriarchal society. Here, Red Riding Hood does not embody virtue or humility; rather, she is self-assured, humorous, and even vicious. The tale becomes a subversive feminist statement: women no longer need to be saved, and predators must be punished rather than keep bullying others.

In the context of these rebellious events in Dahl's version, it is important to reference some of the ideals and beliefs of second-wave feminism, which emerged in the 1960s, and align them with Dahl's female protagonist. Like all literary movements, the second wave of feminism has evolved in response to the confines of first-wave feminism, which hindered women's practices in life and prevented them from becoming active, social members of society, as they relied heavily on male support. This wave expanded the scope to include the major sides that felt misrepresented, especially given sociocultural and political inequities. Among the principal ideals and beliefs this wave of feminism sought to focus on were reproductive rights, equality at work, opposition to patriarchy, and, most significantly, challenging traditional gender roles, a key component in Dahl's work (Molony, 2017, p. 121). Leading figures like Betty Friedan, whose book *The Feminine Mystique* helped ignite the movement, and Gloria Steinem, a principal voice in journalism, shaped a very distinctive history for the movement, which supported the legalization of abortion, rejected all discrimination practices against women, and called for amending the equal rights between males and females (Mansbridge, 1986, p. 215).

Drawing on more rebellious discourse, the third wave of feminism emerged in the early 1990s in response to perceived inadequacies and exclusivity in second-wave feminism. This wave was the exact opposite of the first wave, especially in matters related to gender roles. While the first wave assumed that women always needed to be protected by men,

i.e., patriarchy, this wave fully rejected male practices against women, even when they were intended to protect them. It sought women's freedom, free will, and choice away from patriarchal authority. This wave also sought to empower and enable women, making them self-dependent. It encouraged the forging of individuals' national, religious, and sexual orientations. In other words, it included all the groups, ethnicities, colors, and religions that had been ignored and/or marginalized by both patriarchal authority and the first two waves of feminism. Its major ideals, which it fully embraced and fought for, focused on choice, autonomy, personal choice, sexual autonomy, and the deconstruction of fixed gender identities. Major figures who represent this wave include Rebecca Walker, who coined the term "third wave," and Kimberlé Crenshaw, who developed the concept of intersectionality (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacer, 2017, p. 884).

Here, we need to highlight some points relevant to the selected works and the themes readers might infer after fully comprehending them. A major inferred theme is that Little Red Riding Hood decides to take a risky action, regardless of the consequences, to forge her own identity, make her own choices, and pursue self-reliance without male support. From the authors' perspective, this does not align with the ideals of the culture in which these texts might be taught. Some of these cultures still value ideals such as male protection, family, and the 'female's need for support from males.' They believe that allowing their children to read the Brothers Grimm is better than opening their children's minds to Westernized thoughts and ideas that do not match their own culture and religion. As Zipes clarifies in critiquing Dahl, "The new fairy tale for children parodies the old one, turning it inside out so that the heroine no longer conforms to social expectations but rewrites the ending on her own terms" (2006, p. 147). In other words, Red Riding Hood vigorously yet humorously counterattacks the role assigned to her in the Grimms' fairy tale and, consequently, resists the traditional tale that sees women as powerless.

5.3. Language, Power, and Theory: Tools of Feminist Critique

Given the audiences and/or readers of these two literary works, both writers sought to convey their messages in different ways. They realized that children, the primary recipients here, need not be passive recipients of ideas, ideals, and parental thoughts. They also knew that the weight of critical language is always very burdensome for them, so

each author has resorted to their own style in presenting their feminist critique. While the Grimms resort to structured discourse and moralistic prose, Dahl uses rhymed verse, puns, and mockery (humor) to dismantle narrative conventions and defy gender roles. For example: "The small girl smiles. One eyelid flickers. She whips a pistol from her knickers" (Dahl, 1982).

Before delving into the close reading analysis of the phrase above, it is axiomatic to highlight two major ideas: one surface-level meaning and a profound meaning. The surface-level meaning is the negative impact it might have on the protagonist, Little Red Riding Hood, as a female, who is supposed to be very innocent at this stage in her life in line with the ideals of the first wave of feminism, as well as the societal and cultural values that prevailed in the 19th and early beginning of the twentieth century. Despite Dahl's comic and empowering style, the protagonist has been transformed from an innocent girl into a very experienced one by overthrowing the innocence stereotypically associated with her and becoming an autonomous figure. However, the profound meaning empowers the protagonist despite her age, thereby aligning her with the ideals of the second and third waves of feminism (e.g., intersectionality, playfulness, and subversion through popular media) (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

To elaborate, this moment of rebelliousness and dissidence is both comical and groundbreaking. Little Red Riding Hood has matured and is no longer a passive victim of predators; she has become a self-confident character who wields a weapon, thereby usurping a historical societal convention that equates wielding a weapon with being exclusively male. The choice of a pistol, concealed in an intimate and unexpected location, further challenges gender norms by turning a symbol of male dominance into a tool of female empowerment.

Moreover, Little Red Riding Hood's casual response to her act of violence underscores her autonomy: "The Wolf gave a hollow gurgle. / He lay dead. And Red said, 'Bother! That really is a bit of bother. / 'I'm going to miss that lovely fur.'" Rather than being traumatized or dependent on others, she is practical, unfazed, and self-reliant. Feminist critics might view this as a reimagining of female power, in which the girl is not only capable of defending herself but also reclaims the narrative space previously denied to women in traditional versions. Her emotional detachment can be interpreted as a critique of the expectation that women must embody softness or sentimentality. The use of rhyme and humor allows Dahl to disguise a thoughtful feminist

moral beneath his language, making it both acceptable and enjoyable to his main readers, i.e., children. In fact, the profound feminist critique could not have been identified within the humorous style Dahl employed. Drawing on this, Zipes (2006) highlights how humor has a dual function: it clearly criticizes patriarchal conventions while proposing "new narrative models" for readers (children) to engage with resourcefully (pp. 150–152). "Dahl's sarcasm guarantees that the reader is aware of the ideals and morals that exist in the Brothers Grimm story."

5.4. *Red Riding Hood: A Feminist Archetype*

In Dahl's narration, Red Riding Hood is not just a protagonist; she becomes a new prototype. She combines features of conventional manly supremacy (e.g., weapon, power) with customarily feminine qualities (e.g., style, wit). Once again, this amalgamation resonates with the third-wave activist movement, which values fluid personalities and identities but rejects binary ideals. In fact, not only does Dahl empower her, but he also allows her to forge an exceptional identity that rises above the dichotomy of victim vs. savior. Also, by masculinizing her, he intends to instruct and teach morals to female children that they need to be physically strong, not only emotionally, to be able to defend themselves in case they are opposed to external threats and predators. Also, he wants to mention that in modern times, innocence may not be helpful for survival. Everyone should seek appropriate protection.

Here, this archetypal presentation also raises key questions for 'children's Literature'. If traditional tales socialized females into passive figures, may the same effect that affected Red Riding Hood have a similar impact on readers of children's literature readers? From Zipes' perspective, fairy tales can shape "moral imagination" (1993, p. 36). For example, a young girl who sees Red Riding Hood taking powerful action without any male support or rescuers is given an alternative moral script, one in which girls can make their own choices, forge an identity, lead, and undermine the restrictions and limitations once imposed on them.

5.5. *Implications for Child Readers: Rewriting the Script*

The conflicting morals of the Grimm and Dahl fairy tales offer inferences that provide child readers, particularly females, with thought-provoking insights. The 'Grimms' tale preserves submission and dependency, supporting what Simone de Beauvoir

acknowledged as the "myth of woman" as the timeless child, submissive and always endangered (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 27). In contrast, Dahl reassures male and female readers to challenge gender roles and never accept these imposed, fixed roles. His protagonist, Red Riding Hood, challenges the potential; she surprises readers by willfully, yet against her feminine nature, taking revenge on her oppressor, the predator, by turning the gun back on him, thus ending the story sarcastically and victoriously wearing the predator's skin. Storytelling, accordingly, can interrogate central narratives about gender roles and the challenges that might arise in accepting the gender roles assigned by culture and community. Critics, such as Karen Rowe, have argued that the recurrence of narrative conventions not only teaches children how to "perform" gender from an early age but also informs them of the roles that suit their ages (p. 237-8). A tale like Dahl's *Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf*, which upsets those conventions, allows unconventional methods of identification. Males may learn to respect strong female figures; females may perceive themselves as active rather than passive recipients of male decisions.

6. CONCLUSION

Fairy tales have always functioned as vehicles for traditional values, moral teaching, and gender norms. *Little Red Riding Hood*, in its two versions, is an example of a tale that is densely laden with denotative representations of female-oriented themes, threats, and compliance. This study explores the gendered dynamics of two key versions of the story: the Brothers Grimm's traditional tale, *Little Red Riding Hood and the Huntsman*, and Roald Dahl's dissident narrative, *Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf*. Through a feminist lens, this analysis distinguishes between the representation of unresponsiveness and dependency in the Grimm version and the enabled, independent heroine in Dahl's version, evident in his sarcastic style and poetic language. Dahl's *Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf* is more than a satire; it is a feminist presentation that engages with and challenges the conceptual and ideological foundations of the traditional fairy tales. By transforming a submissive, inactive girl into a decisive protagonist, Dahl redrafts a story of fear and rescue into one of empowerment, enablement, and comedy. In doing so, he aligns with the themes of second and third-wave feminism, offering female readers, in particular, new prototypes and archetypes of independence, autonomy, resistance, and self-actualization.

The Brothers Grimm's fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood and the Huntsman*, in contrast, reflects the values of their era, presenting Red Riding Hood as a cautionary figure whose missteps are corrected by the dominant patriarchal power. This narrative, though being traditionally powerful, disseminates gender standards that have since been defied and redefined by feminist ideals. This version mainly aligns with the fundamental ideals of the first wave of feminism because it was in its early stages, so the primary ideal they sought was acceptance and acknowledgement by society. Also, they were focusing on their legal status as offspring to move ahead. As Zipes maintains, fairy tales are not immobile; they change with the cultures that tell them. Writers, like Dahl, have transformed them into means of resisting traditionalism and conventionalism, in the hope of inspiring new-fangled generations to enquire into the roles they are expected to perform and to write their fates, instead of living submissively.

To this end, the current study has proved that *Little Red Riding Hood* is a powerful text, with a powerful language, enabling it to become an influential cultural text where readers are informed of role reversals in terms of gender, in addition to shifting structures of femininity, supremacy, and agency that can be traced across this historical text. This has been reflected in creating a female identity that is female-controlled rather than male-protected. Throughout the methodology employed, i.e., close reading and comparative analysis, the Grimm Brothers' work appears as a chronicle tale that is deeply set in a male-controlled system that markets traits of submission, dependency, and female obedience as significant merits. Red Riding Hood's exposure, her inability to practice autonomy, and her decisive dependence on male authority reinforce Zipes' notion (1983) of "naturalizing patriarchal authority and social discipline.

Examining this text from a feminist perspective, it becomes clear that Grimm's Brothers' tale demonstrates how linguistic diction and plot collaborate to outline one-sexed prejudice, thereby affirming de Beauvoir's notion that femininity is "culturally produced rather than biologically inherent" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011). However, Dahl's *Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf* profoundly challenge this belief by presenting Little Red Riding Hood as a symbol of feminist revolution and resistance. Dahl's empowered heroine, who confronts and defeats the wolf without male intervention, challenges the regulatory repetition of submissive femininity described by Butler (1990),

offering an alternative performance of gender grounded in autonomy and self-determination. The study further reveals that Dahl's strategic use of parody and linguistic inversion not only undermines the moral authority of the canonical tale but also exposes the ideological mechanisms that sustain patriarchal narratives. By foregrounding language as a tool of power, this analysis underscores how feminist critique can transform familiar narratives into spaces of ideological contestation. Ultimately, the transition from Grimm's domesticated heroine to

Dahl's assertive protagonist reflects a broader feminist shift from repression to empowerment, demonstrating how fictional narratives can help revisit women's roles beyond submission and dependency. In revisiting Little Red Riding Hood through the lens of feminist theory, this study confirms the lasting relevance of such tales as cultural texts that both reflect and challenge dominant social structures, underscoring the necessity of feminist literary criticism to interrogate and reshape inherited narratives.

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