Fairy Tales and the Shift in Identity Poetics from Modernism to Postmodernism

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By

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INTRODUCTION

Fairy Tale, Modernism, History, Postmodernism, Identity – although picked up from different conceptual fields (genre theory, period terms and the vertical axis of change in politics/poetics along history), are revealed to be related in an explanatory narrative of changes over time in poetics and in its interface with politics even in art phases considered to be exclusively focused on aesthetic form and the autonomy of art, such as modernism. The stage metaphor used is justified by the belief that concepts have a framing effect, that by employing a certain critical vocabulary we already place ourselves on a certain theoretical position in this study of fairy tales, folklore and their carving of identities in the transition from modernism to postmodernism, with all the implications of the transformative process undergone by fairy tales to fit new contexts.

One main objective is to show how important the aesthetics of the time is in the interpretation of fairy tales, in the way they are viewed, perceived, felt, and assimilated. In their turn, the philosophy of art and its signifying practices are often (always, according to Michel Foucault in his *Order of Discourse,* 1971) shaped by the historical context in a very broad sense, that is, including characteristic political ideas, movements, agendas, ideologies, power relationships, social theories, philosophical, aesthetic, or scientific ideas, actually the whole discursive field in which the literary work is embedded. This embedding of discourse in all forms of social activity is the effect of institutionalization. It is various institutions that "impose ritual forms" on discourse, that give it relevance and power. (Foucault 197: web)

Reimagining language was crucial for the imagining of modernity. Language is no longer perceived as a transparent medium for conveying the world. The ways of speaking and writing *construct* social classes, genders, races and nations making them seem real and enabling them to elicit feelings and justify relations of power.

In 1927 Martin Heidegger elaborated upon a distinction between *Sein und Zeit* (Being and Time), which has had a powerful influence on the critical theories that have emerged since then. Time, as measured by the clock, knows of no difference. It is the various outlooks on the world reified as cultural objects that can free the self from the universal death drive and allow it a life of election in the intersubjective order shared with other creative selves (*Mitsein*- being with others in the world). Being (*Sein*) is

revealed as modalised presence (*Dasein*, being there, before a reflective subject, is interpreted as *Sosein*: "being such-and-so"). The self appears in something that makes itself known – a reified subjectivity which is inflected for space and time. Unlike temporality, which is irreversible, historicity means continuity:

> Here, by "history", we have in view that which is past, but which nevertheless is still having effects. Howsoever the historical, as that which is past, is understood to be related to the 'Present' in the sense of what is actual 'now' and 'today', and to be related to it, either positively or privatively, in such a way as to have effects upon it. Thus 'the past' has a remarkable double meaning; the past belongs irretrievably to an earlier time; it belonged to the events of that time; and in spite of that, it can still be present-at-hand 'now' - for instance, the remains of a Greek temple. With the temple, a 'bit of the past' is still 'in the present'. What we next have in mind with the term "history" is not so much 'the past' in the sense of that which is past, but rather derivation [Herkunft] from such a past. Anything that 'has a history' stands in the context of a becoming. In such becoming, 'development' is sometimes a rise, sometimes a fall. What 'has a history' in this way can, at the same time, 'make' such history. As 'epoch-making', it determines 'a future' 'in the present'. Here "history" signifies a 'context' of events and 'effects', which draws on through 'the past', the 'Present', and the 'future'. On this view, the past has no special priority. Further, "history" signifies the totality of those entities which change 'in time', and indeed the transformations and vicissitudes of men, of human groupings and their 'cultures', as distinguished from Nature, which likewise operates 'in time'. Here what one has in view is not so much a kind of Being-historizing-as it is that realm of entities which one distinguishes from Nature by having regard for the way in which man's existence is essentially determined by 'spirit' and 'culture', even though in a certain manner Nature too belongs to "history" as thus understood. Finally, whatever has been handed down to us is as such held to be 'historical', whether it is something which we know historiologically, or something that has been taken over as self-evident, with its derivation hidden. If we take these four significations together, the upshot is that history is that specific historizing of existent Dasein which comes to pass in time, so that the historizing which is 'past' in our Being-with-one-another, and which at the same time has been 'handed down to us' and is continuingly effective, is regarded as "history" in the sense that gets emphasized. (Heidegger 1962:430-431)

Heidegger is here anticipating the double vision of **New Historicism**, a school of critical thinking which emerged around 1980. Looking backwards from the present moment, the past will always have a metonymical presence, will be "a bit" of the lived experience of the past generations. The past is filtered through a different sensibility, or, on the contrary, with the

sense of joy that something of present interest was already lurking in the matrix of old times, offering reasons for trust in its validity over time. On reading this passage, we felt tempted to test Heidegger's historicizing view against what seems to go against it: the archetypal imagination feeding into mythical narratives or fairy tales. Is it true that myths are just facts of language that are still being created in our times, for instance, by the fashionable industry or the consumerist culture? (Roland Barthes: *Mythologies,* 1957)

Do fairy tales written at various times display an immobile structure and timeless poetics, or are they written in keeping with changes in poetics/politics that can be traced across the canonical works of a cultural phase? The latter is the case with significant changes occurring in the ideological agenda, the construction of characters, the trajectories of plots, etc. even within the century known as late modernity (modernism and postmodernism). As the fairy tale was a genre created by Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy in the dawns of the Enlightenment, a look backward to the manifold of ideas that accompanied its birth is necessary in order to look into the initial data or the ideological-aesthetic matrix out of which it has evolved and which was modified in significant ways by subsequent exercises in rewriting the plots to meet the expectations of new generations of readers.

Looking Backward

As pointed out by Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs (Bauman & Briggs 2003: 197) modernity developed through two distinct projects: 1. John Locke's project of a purified language, freed from relationships with society, relying solely on its rationality and intelligibility, and 2. J.G. Herder's project of nation states, which could be realized through the recognition and promotion of characteristic national features. He saw tradition as a source of social order and political strength, and language as something deeply embedded in the life of the social collectivity and defining for families, communities, regions and nations.

The existence of well-defined features in a people's character seems to have been an idea derived by Herder from a copy of Michael Denis' *Die Gedichte Ossians, eines alten celtischen Dicters*, which was a translation of Macpherson's *Poems of Ossian* (Wilson 2004: 821). The edition contained the notes written by Melchiorre Cesarotti for the Italian translation of Macpherson, in which Herder discovered Vico's philosophy of history in light of which there is continuity from one historical phase to another, but, at the same time, each phase displays features shared in common by all the components of the social and cultural order. Herder saw a people's character rooted in landscape, in the geography of the space it inhabits, and reinforced by language, traditions, customs, etc.:

> Those peculiar national characters, which are so deeply implanted in the oldest peoples, unmistakably manifest themselves in all their activities on earth. As a spring derives its component parts, its operative powers, and its flavor from the soil through which it flows, so the ancient characters of nations arose from family traits, from the climate, from the way of life and education from the early transactions and deeds peculiar to them. The customs of the fathers took deep root and became the internal prototypes of the race. (Herder 1967: XIV, 84)

Herder's modernity peopled territories with national citizens and the globe with nation-states. The Grimm Brothers followed his agenda, publishing fairy tales reflective of the German spirit as well as studies in German mythology. They embraced Herder's nationalist project and provided it with a linguistic and textual base. Their published collections, including the one entitled *Kinder – und Hausmärchen* – perhaps the most

famous "folk" texts of all times – are Herder's attempt to revitalize German literature. The Brothers Grimm assimilated provincialism and nationalism as their discursive foundation.

Thus, two divergent and influential models of language and modernity were available to writers and politicians in Europe. Both perspectives contributed to the shaping of social order and the blueprints to produce it.

One cannot fail to notice the relationship between the imperialist politics of the nineteenth century and the corresponding upsurge of nationalist movements, or the interest in the construction of a national identity among peoples fighting for independence (such as the ones at either end of the continent: the Irish and the Romanians).

On the contrary, the process of globalization in the postwar period, the massive migration and the emergence of new political concepts, such as imaginary community (one bounded not by language, common past, national literature, racial features and origin but by allegiance to the Constitution), political correctness, multicultural society, etc., have led to a different poetics in the treatment of the fairy tale as a generic form and as a carrier of ideology. The study of this phenomenon helps us understand something of the nature of the relationship between art, politics and history, aesthetic change (which is not merely a question of taste), and generic change (using fairy tales as a case in point).

Here is a later, postwar Heidegger, who not only revised his 1927 *Being and Time* – a change noticeable from the title: *Time and Being* – but also shifted his emphasis from self-revelation (phenomenology of both self and Being as their coming out of hiding) to institutional control of knowledge and cognition. In a chapter of his *Holzwege (Off the Beaten Track)*, "The Time of the World Picture" (1958), Heidegger states bluntly that the scholar shut up in his library has been displaced by the researcher with a project born of collaborative work with peers at international conferences or with editors who most often than not commission the book he is going to write:

> What is taking place in this extending and consolidating of the institutional character of the sciences! Nothing less than the making secure of the precedence of methodology over whatever is (nature and history), which at any given time becomes objective in research. On the foundation of their character as ongoing activity, the sciences are creating for themselves the solidarity and unity appropriate to them. Therefore historiographical or archeological research that is carried forward in an institutionalized way is essentially closer to research in physics that is similarly organized than it is to a discipline belonging to its own faculty in the humanistic sciences that still remains mired in mere erudition. Hence, the decisive development of the modern character of science as ongoing activity also forms men of a

different stamp. The scholar disappears. He is succeeded by the research man who is engaged in research projects. These, rather than the cultivating of erudition, lend to his work its atmosphere of incisiveness. The research man no longer needs a library at home. Moreover, he is constantly on the move. He negotiates at meetings and collects information at congresses. He contracts for commissions with publishers. The latter now determine along with him which books must be written. (Heidegger 1977: 125)

Later in the century the picture was completed with wealth of arguments by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991), who alleges that "modernity must be understood on an institutional level", as institutions "undercut traditional habits and customs and [have a] global impact."

The paradox of the new identity construction resides in the buzz word of the day, that is actualization (the full realization of an individual's potential) but the reflexive project of the self is inspired and monitored by the control systems of modernity. The individual does what his therapist, counsellor, doctor, couch, designer, etc. tell him to do. The role models, including those disseminated by books, movies and games for children, have been displaced from local contexts, they no longer expressing the character of communities, from villages to nations, instead, they are standardized and globally accepted. Under the circumstances, social relations lose the hallmark of specific locales recombining across indefinite time-space distances. By breaking away from their folk-lore, local knowledge and wisdom, individuals get separated "from the moral resources necessary to live a full and satisfying life" (Giddens 1991: 9).

It is true that the rewriting of fairy tale plots in postmodernity is pretty predictable: they become narratives of the emancipation of the once marginalized groups of people: racial others, women, children, servants. It never happens the other way round (the affirmation of hierarchical relationships). Nevertheless, they are closest to what Gibbons understands by a moral frame for the self-reflexive projects of both individuals and communities. We may laugh out heartedly when would-be Caesar gives would-be Brutus a bag of crispy pizza to taste, accompanying his gift with the famous words, "And you, Brutus?" but we won't fail to get the message that modern comforts and trade are better than civil wars or wars of conquest. No matter how odd it might sound, now, at the end of modernity, the way fairy tales have been rewritten, with a transformative ideological agenda in mind, has rendered them closer to a presumable return to realism:

At the same time, our culture retains many of the themes and concerns that exercised writers of earlier generations; there is little sign of a radical literary avantgarde sweeping away the old to make way for the new.

Postmodernism might not be as emphatically over as some critics like to claim, but it does seem to be in retreat. Its devices have become so commonplace that they have been absorbed into mainstream, commercial and popular culture. Postmodernism has lost its value in part because it has oversaturated the market. And with the end of postmodernism's playfulness and affectation, we are better placed to construct a literature that engages earnestly with real-world problems. This new literature can, in good faith, examine complex and ever-shifting crises – of racial inequality, capitalism and climate change – to which it is easy to close one's eyes. (Gibbons 2017: web)

The usage of fairy tales at two different stages of what is known as "late modernity": modernism and postmodernism is quite different. In the early modern period, of the Enlightenment, fairy tales were seen as the roots and the mirror of every people. They were thought by Herder, Goethe, Charles Perrault, the Grimm Brothers, or the British pre-romantics to nourish people's spiritual hunger and complete their national identity, becoming thus a mark of identity. On the contrary, with the passage of time and the concomitant historical changes, in the postmodern period the perception of the fairy tales as a provider and keeper of any kind of identity or unity is lost, they becoming only a pattern to be re-symbolized, a fragment of a wider and different design, an excuse for something else, a stage on which other plays are performed, keeping up with change, with postmodernist ideas concerning their use and meaning.

Fairy tales are a "tool" often neglected in the study of identity poetics. It is true that identity is no longer seen as an "ever-fixed mark" which "looks on tempests, and is never shaken" (as Shakespeare writes of love in *Sonnet* 116), but as a fluid concept better looked at through the lens of combined disciplines, while fairy tales have been perceived since the publication of Vladimir Propp's influential book on the *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928, translated into English three decades later) as immobile structures of a limited set of functions. Following the shift in identity poetics which links the two stages of late modernity, modernism and postmodernism, we set out on a path which links fairy tales to society and its civilizing process. We see fairy tales as a mark of unity, spirituality and an identity maker in the first stage of modernism, while shifting towards a more fluid identity in the second stage of late modernity – postmodernism – based on internationalism and multiculturalism.

This is not the first association of fairy tales with epistemological change. It is with full awareness of the premises and assumptions of structuralism and functionalism that Propp pities the latter, whose representative he declares himself to be, against the former, criticizing the Antti Aarne (1867-1925) and   the   Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt (1832   -

1920) classification of folk tales according to theme or other descriptive element. The "division into genus, species, and varieties" fails to account for the elements that function across the categories:

> The fairy tales comprise, according to Aarne, the following categories: (1) a supernatural adversary; (2) a supernatural husband (wife); (3) a supernatural task; (4) a supernatural helper; (5) a magic object; (6) supernatural power or knowledge; (7) other supernatural motifs. Almost the same objections pertaining to Vólkov's classification can be repeated here. What, for instance, of those tales in which a supernatural task is resolved by a supernatural helper (which occurs very often), or those in which a supernatural spouse is also a supernatural helper? (1968: 10)

Propp's conclusion, supported by references to the pre-existing classifications of the structuralist school, installs another table of invariants with the difference that this time the criteria for divisions are not themes, motifs or geographical and historical distribution, but the limited set of functions from an otherwise similar ahistorical and non-contextualized perspective:

1. Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental components of a tale.
2. The number of functions known to the fairy tale is limited. (1968: 21)

Propp dismisses the notion of identity (the existence of stable features characteristic of some tale or other) with schemes cutting across all the tales: elements that they share in common. The dramatis personae are nothing special if they are taken separately; they are defined by actions shared in common, by what they do, by the function they fulfill in a universal scheme. If we want to continue our exercise in the dynamics of fairy tale perception, it is enough to compare Propp's functional classification with the guidebooks written on the issue of gender identity, which has become a matter of personal option.

With Propp, identity is relative to the overall structure, whereas the postmodern blog is hooked into current ideas about the self choosing its identity marks while being possessed of a body that has become animal, in the sense of being free from pre-determined features, and which can be written over into whatever category of performance (performing as male, or female, for instance, as in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* or *Gut Symmetries*).

Within the context of modernism, the fairy tale as subspecies of folk literature, the countryside (see the pastoral poetry written either by

Octavian Goga, Lucian Blaga and many others in Romania, or by Anne de Noailles in France) and the national language (see the replacement of classical studies with English Studies in the old British universities of the early 20th century), the inroads into the mythical past (See Mihail Sadoveanu's *Creanga de aur* – The Golden Bough, or Blaga's reassessment of our pre-Roman foundations) were called upon to serve as a mark of identity for a specific culture in the context of the collapse of dynastic rules and the rise of independent nation states. The study of folklore coexisted with emergent romantic nationalistic movements in which scholars searched the folk traditions record not just in order to see how people had lived in by-gone ages, but to discover historical precedents on which to model the present and build the future. Here are Herder's words, quoted in Robert Reinhold Ergang's *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism*:

> Methinks, I see the time coming when we shall return in earnest to our language, to the merits, to the principles and goals of our fathers and learn therefore to value our own gold. (Herder apud Ergang 1966: 222)

The selection, as case studies, of two collections of fairy tales produced by an Irishman associated with Ireland's search for identity and independence from England: *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* by William Butler Yeats and *Povesti Basarabene* by Simion Teodorescu-Kirileanu, underwritten by an agenda of cultural unification of Bessarabia with the rest of Romania.

In this way, the adaptability of fairy tales as a living and mobile aspect of society takes centre stage.

The deconstruction of the national specificity of fairy tales in postmodernism, is exemplified with writers situated again at the antipodes: Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and some of Cezar Baltag's poems suggestively entitled or subtitled *"pattern de basm"* (fairy-tale-patterns) which are selected from various cultures.

The significance of the present study resides not only in the contextualized approach to fairy tales bespeaking the idea of identity characterising two different phases of late modernity, modernism and postmodernism, using relevant examples, but also in a comparative approach meant to highlight the shift in poetics. This comparative study also reveals the importance of fairy tales as a remedy for a society in distress: the great role they played as a mark of national identity in the period of Bessarabia's union with the Mother Country (Simion Teodorescu Kirileanu's *Poveşti basarabene* recorded by the folklorist in March 1918) or as a mark of identity serving Ireland's independence

(*Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Pesantry* by W.B. Yeats). The two fairy tale collections *Poveşti basarabene* and *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* are related by their ideological agenda, each, in its culturally distinct context, marking the passage towards new developments in their nation's history.

The adaptability of the fairy tales is also revealed by Angela Carter's rewriting of some of them in her collection of stories, *The Bloody Chamber,* where she subverts gender identities and the patriarchal society, refilling a new content.

The attempt to relate the concept of identity to fairy tales and the imaginary resides in the consideration of fairy tales as an ideological tool.

In revealing the shift in poetics from one stage to another, we intend to grant fairy tales their well-deserved place and unveil their bearing upon the shaping of identity and the patterning of human experience eroded by random historical transformations. We are also trying to reveal their power to "play" with our minds, engaging them in enigmatic or allegorical plots, sometimes – especially in their postmodernist guise – of remarkable ingenuity.

This analysis does not aim to favor one period over the other, but to unveil certain meaningful terms of comparison, contrastive features or negotiations between each other.

CASTING THE ROLES AND SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE "ACTORS" OF OUR SCRIPT: FAIRY TALE, MODERNISM, HISTORY, POSTMODERNISM, IDENTITY

People all over the world have been telling stories since the beginning of time. A fascination with the past in the search of origins, roots, identity and the desire to be entertained during leisure time allowed oral tradition to survive from one generation to another.

The observation that *printing and gunpowder have frightened away Robin-good-fellow and the fairies* (Benjamin, F. Fisher, 2010: web) is the metaphorical expression of the powerful impact of the passage from a manuscript culture with limited dissemination to the public sphere of print. It was the *great divide* between past and present that could be bridged via tradition as a continuum of reiterations by which language, and thereby thought of the past survives into the present and paves the way for the future. Oral tradition or manuscripts converted into printed texts provided a link between a remote past and modernity, triggering a problem of de-contextualization and re-contextualization, in which the author was invested with *author-ity*, the word *author* becoming a word of power in that it could take embodied forms, at the origin of social transformations. The poststructuralist deconstruction of the author as an autonomous subject and source of illocution (Roland Barthes: *The Death of the Author*, 1967) or even as embodied instance beyond its purely discursive function (Michel Foucault, *What is an Author?* 1969) was reversed by the New Historicist turn of the 80s when text and world started to be seen again as mutually influential (texts reflecting on reality and reality being generated by texts). A recognition of the fact that "narrative is central to the representation of identity, in personal memory and self-representation or in collective identity of groups such as regions, nations, race and gender" (Currie 1998: 2) is an argument that *identity* is not within us, it exists only as narrative: "…we learn how to self-narrate from the outside, from other stories, and particularly through the process of identification with other characters. This gives narration at large the potential to teach us how to conceive of ourselves, what to make of our inner life and how to organize it." (Currie 1998: 17) To put it otherwise, identity is relational, it does not

reside inside a person, but brings the other into question, it is not a matter of substance but of difference.

Fairy tales change over time, whether it is from being passed along through an oral tradition, or from being consciously updated to better reflect the norms and values of a given time.

Between "once upon a time" and "happily ever after" lies a timeless, ever-changing world, where everything is possible. Originally, stories were passed orally from generation to generation. With the rise and spread of print, the tales became somewhat less mutable for a time. At present the images we see on the movie screen have shaped and implanted themselves into our minds, supplanting the originals which delighted children in the age of print. More significant than the changes themselves, however, is what the evolution of the fairy tale reveals about us and our changing society. The mutable fairy tale has always been both an unrelenting influence on society and a mirror of society. From oral tradition, through the literary fairy tale in print form, and now to cinema or virtual space there is a trajectory spawned by the effects of changes in the historical world, in the medium of production, channel of dissemination, as well as in the historical world or in aesthetics.

The name was first ascribed to fairy tales by madame D'Aulnoy in the late 17th century. Although the fairy tale is a distinct genre within the larger category of folktale, its definition is a source of considerable dispute. One consensual matter is that fairy tales do not require fairies. The term itself comes from the translation of Madame D'Aulnoy's *conte de fées*, first used in her collection of 1697. The English "fairy tale" is a literal rendering of the French *contes* which often included fairies.

The purpose of fairy tales has changed since their origin. Originally, they were morbid tales told by men to other men, that is, palatable stuff for grown-ups. Around the turn of the 17th century, France was already using fairy tales to educate children and adults, whereas Germany reserved the tales for adults who wished to subvert the social and government systems. Germany's view of fairy tales prevailed until the 19th century, the century of realist poetics, when writers and readership turned to fairy tales as a way to educate children and free their imagination from insubstantial fears and apprehensions. This approach to fairy tales is still present today when the gothic, supernatural paraphernalia is modulated into parody and commercial advertising.

The fairy tale, told orally, is a sub-class of the folktale. Many writers have written in the fairy tale genre. These are the literary fairy tales, or *Kunstmärchen,* which show considerable refurbishing from the oral form.

The first collectors who attempted to preserve not only the plot and characters of the tale, but also the style in which they were told, were the Brothers Grimm, who collected German fairy tales. The work of the Brothers Grimm influenced other collectors, both inspiring them to collect tales and leading them to similarly believe, in a spirit of romantic nationalism, that the fairy tales of a country were particularly representative of its character, being less exposed to cross-cultural influences. Fairy tales tend to take on the color of their location, through the choice of motifs, the style in which they are told, and the depiction of character and local color.

As Bruno Bettelheim argues in his *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), fairy tales are very much the result of common conscious and unconscious content having been shaped by the conscious mind, not of one particular person, but as the consensus of many regarding the universal human problems and the accepted, desirable solutions, which ensured their survival as a carrier of tradition handed down from generation to generation.

As a transitional genre, a carrier and holder of the collective imagination, the fairy tale lends itself to a re-creation and re-shaping of the present and future through the past. Fairy tales, embedded in their context, cultural, historical, etc. reflect back on it via *mirror* as a metaphor. But fairy tales are never innocent; more often than not, they are made to serve specific power relations.

Fairy tales are also shaped or refurbished according to changing epistemic notions and norms or conventions of representation put forward by the expressed or implied poetics of the age. They construct identities in different ways in modernism and postmodernism, for instance, when the mirror that throws back real life scenes in tales, such as those written by Ion Creangă, becomes a trope for the mind or for art (Oscar Wilde), whereas, in the later twentieth-century the mirror is the space of the production of the 'subject', of the formation of the 'I', of the infant's sense of full autonomy before entry into language, the symbolic order which reduces his selfhood to merely a metonymical presence as allowed by society's laws and conventions (post-Lacanian theories).

Postmodern fairy tales are intent upon revealing their predecessors' complicity and compliance with exhausted, out of date narrative and gender ideologies, interpreting them anew. It is the adaptability and evolution of fairy tales that have ensured their survival, as they were shown to capitalize on new meanings of interest to the new generations.

Modernity was shaped by the development of modern industrial societies, urbanization, the rapid growth of cities, followed by the horrors

of WWI (with the nation states freed from dynastic rule as the only fortunate outcome). The Enlightenment – another name for modernity – relied on reason, science, logic, objectivity of truth, freedom, the central role played by the human subject. Reason was the key to a correct understanding of the world in opposition to the medieval idea of cognition as knowledge of divinity. Modernity focused upon the human subject and his ability to save himself by reasonable inquiry. Descartes thought of the individual as a subject observing the world and himself as object of inquiry, with reason no less than his ontological ground ("I think, therefore I am").

Modernism, in a broader sense, is the practice of breaking away with the rules, traditions and pre-existing ways of writing practiced by earlier authors. Modernism departs from the ideology of realism, relating to the past through flashback, recapitulation, and incorporation. This rebellious attitude flourished between 1900 and 1930, the message conveyed being the rejection of European culture for having become too corrupt and artificial. This dissatisfaction led modern thinkers and artists into exploring alternatives, especially primitive cultures. In literature, 'modernism' was a negative reaction to realism and naturalism. Tradition was no longer regarded as a purely aesthetic phenomenon but as a depositary of established religious, political, and social views, which carried the responsibility of not having been able to prevent the outbreak of the recently concluded world conflagration. The rise of relativism and quantum uncertainty in physics had spawned the belief that there is no such thing as absolute truth. All things are relative. The emphasis on objectivism legitimated by positivist philosophy (A. Comte, J.S. Mill) was superseded by the priority of the self and of subjectivism. Championship of the individual through the celebration of inner strength is one of the most prominent characteristics of modernism. The notion of being *modern*, irrespective of a particular phase – early, high or late – always implies a need for change, a trust for the better, for progress and perfection, or, as Stuart Hall explains in *Modernity: an Introduction to Modern Societies*:

> What is quintessentially 'modern' is not so much any one period…so much as the fact that a society becomes seized with and pervaded by this idea of ceaseless development, progress, and dynamic change; by the restless forward movement of time and history; by what some theorists call the compression of time and space. (Hall 1996: 17)

In his turn, Brian McHale defines modernism and postmodernism as a list of questions ranging from modernity's inquiry into self-identity and cognition:

> How can I interpret the world of which I am part? And what am I in it? ... What is there to be known? Who knows it? How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty? How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability? How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower? What are the limits of the knowable? (Brian McHale 1992: 32-34,146-47)

Whereas, in modernism, the appeal of and to history and the revisiting of tradition is of utmost importance for shaping a well-defined identity, in postmodernism the expulsion or absence of history and tradition reveals a fragmented identity or even the lack of something in the way of a set of recognizable traits. While modernism focused rather on time, postmodernism focuses prevailingly on space and metaphors of space.

Post-modernism is the term used to suggest a reaction or response to modernism and especially to early modernity in the late twentieth century. It is both a critique of modernism, as well as an applied, extended modernism. The late 20th century brought about scientific and technological progress, on the one hand, and instability and terror, on the other. Words such as: ideology, world-war, cold-war, genocide, nuclear-war, petrol-war, options for the poor and the marginalized, alternative identities, … became part of the current vocabulary in use, while the world was caught between poles of power.

The critique of the Enlightenment and of its meta-narratives had already started in the dawns of modernism. Darwin's theory of evolution was countered by narratives of regression, degeneration and entropy (W.B. Yeats, Oscar Wilde, the aesthetics of decadence); Marx's idea of social progress and historical teleology leading to the triumph of the working class yielded to theories of the unknowable nature of historical agency (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*), a pessimistic view of history being meaningless (James Joyce: a nightmare); Freud's probing into the workings of the unconscious invalidated modernity's cult of reason, Nietzsche's theory of the *Übermensch* – a sort of superman above norms, morality, religion – exploded the eighteenth-century sermons of the moralists. The idea of *identity* based on Descartes' rational, stable, self-sufficient subject, which had been at the roots of Western rationalism and belief in human progress, had to be reconsidered on a new basis.

Brian McHale in his *Postmodernist Fiction* presents postmodernism as an artefact, which has been constructed at the level of discourse by readers, authors, critics, and theorists:

> Postmodernist? Whatever we may think of the term, however much or little we may be satisfied with it, one thing is certain: the referent of 'postmodernism', the thing to which the term claims to refer, does not exist. […] There is no postmodernism 'out there' in the world any more than there ever was a Renaissance or romanticism 'out there'. These are all literary-historical fictions, discursive artefacts, constructed either by contemporary readers and writers or retrospectively by literary historians. […] we can discriminate among constructions of postmodernism, none of them any less 'true' or fictional than the others, since all of them are finally fictions. (Brian McHale 1992: 4)

The canonical modernist discourse claims that truth is not mirrored in the human understanding of it, but is rather constructed, as the mind tries to understand its own personal reality. In conclusion, facts and falsehood are interchangeable. Postmodernism rejects such ideas, beliefs, culture, and norms; it dwells on the exterior image and avoids drawing conclusions or suggesting underlying meanings associated with the interior of objects and events. It sees human experience as unstable, internally contradictory, ambiguous, inconclusive, indeterminate, unfinished, fragmented, discontinuous, "jagged," with no one specific reality possible. The postmodern writer creates an "open" work in which readers are called upon to supply their own connections, to work out alternative meanings, and provide their own (unguided) interpretation. There are no pre-determined rules, well-established and long-term principles. Events, activities, thoughts, manners do not exist for a long time in postmodernism. It is a very contested term which resists definitions. In an encyclical, entitled "*Fides et Ratio*", Pope John Paul II actually used the word *postmodernism* to condemn extreme relativism in values and beliefs, acute irony, scepticism toward reason, and the denial of any possibility of truth, human or divine, as it is mentioned in Ihab Hassan's presentation of the concept *From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: The Local/Global Context.* (Hassan 2000: web)

One of the prominent theoreticians of *postmodernism,* Ihab Hassan, fuses the concepts of *cultural indeterminacy* and *technological immanence* so as to cast some light upon the period term that mostly resists and defies definitions in a refusal to "stand still" for analysis. He uses *indeterminacy*, or *indeterminacies*, to mean:

[…] a combination of trends that include openness, fragmentation, ambiguity, discontinuity, decenterment, heterodoxy, pluralism, deformation, all conducive to indeterminacy or under-determination. The latter concept alone, deformation, subsumes a dozen current terms like deconstruction, decreation, disintegration, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, delegitimation, decolonization. Through all these concepts moves a vast will to undoing, affecting the body politic, the body cognitive, the erotic body, the individual psyche, the entire realm of discourse in the West. In literature alone, our ideas of author, audience, reading, writing, book, genre, critical theory, and of literature itself, have all suddenly become questionable- questionable but far from invalid, reconstituting themselves in various ways. (Hassan 2000: web)

He goes on to explain the term *immanence,* used:

without religious echo to designate the capacity of mind to generalize itself in symbols, intervene more and more into nature, act through its own abstractions, and project human consciousness to the edges of the cosmos. This mental tendency may be further described by words like diffusion, dissemination, projection, interplay, communication, which all derive from the emergence of human beings as language animals, homo pictor or homo significant, creatures constituting themselves, and also their universe, by symbols of their own making. Call it gnostic textualism, if you must. Meanwhile, the public world dissolves as fact and fiction blend, history becomes a media happening, science takes its own models as the only accessible reality, cybernetics confronts us with the enigma of artificial intelligence (Deep Blue contra Kasparov), and technologies project our perceptions to the edge of matter, within the atom or at the rim of the expanding universe." (Hassan 2000: web).

It is, thus, up to the human mind to perform, to transform the world via language and also to construct identity by naming and by attaching normative connotations to the names.

The importance of postmodernism resides in its mutation into postmodernity as our global/local condition, alleges Ihab Hassan, as well as in its use as a hermeneutical tool, a way of viewing the world, which is a challenging one, difficult to interpret because, in it, anything goes.

Our period of history and the mindset that applies to this period, one of major social, economic and political changes have modulated the meaning of knowledge to fit new contexts, precisely the *Age of Knowledge* which turned the tables on the Industrial Age. The Knowledge Age is a new, advanced form of capitalism in which knowledge and ideas are the main source of economic growth (surpassing land, labour, money, or other

'tangible' resources). New patterns of work and new business practices have developed, and, as a result, new kinds of workers, with new and different skills, are required. The "liquid modernity" of today, as Bauman (2007) describes its dynamic character in his *Liquid times: Living in an age of uncertainty,* reflects its diversity, rapid pace, fragmentation, discontinuity, pragmatism, multiplicity and networks of connections.

Consequently, postmodern narratives will draw upon science-fiction, pornography and a multitude of other genres previously considered sub-literary in an attempt to close the gap between elite and mass culture.

At present, the fairy tale has to carry an unprecedented burden of significance, and it is not surprising that modern versions, re-plotted plots, like Angela Carter's, produce a darker, more complex, less resolved narrative environment.

In conclusion, fairy tales are fluid. Over time many different stories will be created out of the reinscription of precedents. The variations have increased to the point where ridiculous changes are becoming acceptable. With the introduction of the movies, fairy tales are morphing rapidly into stories that are ever-changing. If stories continue to evolve to fit people's desires, they will last forever.

Identity is a very complex, slippery concept, difficult to pin down. It changes with time, playing the chameleon with historical contexts: material goods and immaterial values, space, time and critical theories.

The Etymology Dictionary Online traces the origins of the word *identity* back to the late 16th century Latin *identitās,* equivalent to Latin *ident (idem)* meaning repeatedly, the earlier *idem + -itās* -ity, also in the sense of "sameness, oneness, state of being the same," from Middle French *identité* (14c.), from Medieval Latin *identitatem* (nominative *identitas*) – "sameness," In former times, the word in English was *idemptitie* (1560s), from Medieval Latin *idemptitas*. The term *identity crisis* was first recorded in 1954; *identity theft* was coined in 1995, while *identity politics* has been in use since 1987. The last one refers to the tendency to base one's politics in a sense of personal identity, such as gay, Jewish, Black, or female.

The dictionary definition in the quoted source reads like this:

"noun, plural – *identities"*
- the state or fact of remaining the same one or ones, as under varying aspects or conditions: *The identity of the fingerprints on the gun with those on file provided evidence that he was the killer.*
- the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another: *He began to doubt his own identity.*

- condition or character as to who a person or what a thing is; the qualities, beliefs, etc., that distinguish or identify a person or thing: *a case of mistaken identity; a male gender identity; immigrants with strong ethnic identities.*
- the state or fact of being the same one as described.
- the sense of self, providing sameness and continuity in personality over time and sometimes disturbed in mental illnesses, as schizophrenia.
- exact likeness in nature or qualities:*an identity of interests.*

In the Oxford Dictionary: web, it is defined as follows:

- the fact of being who or what a person or thing is: *he knows the identity of the bomber*
- the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is: *he wanted to develop a more distinctive Scottish Tory identity.*
- *as modifier* (of an object) serving to establish who the holder, owner, or wearer is by bearing their name and often other details such as a signature or photograph: *'an identity card'.*
- a close similarity or affinity**:** *an identity between the company's own interests and those of the local community.*
- Mathematics – a transformation that leaves an object unchanged. An element of a set which, if combined with another element by a specified binary operation, leaves that element unchanged.

We notice that the dictionary definitions do not cover the sense of *national identity* or *ethnic identity*, failing to grasp our present concept of identity. Not only will a dictionary render an atomistic grasp on an entity, but it will not relate it, either to consciousness (the self's awareness of having an identity) or to the social environment or historical context.

What we understand nowadays by identity derives mainly from psychologist Erik Erikson's concept of "identity crises" as defined in *Webster's New World Dictionary*: "the condition of being uncertain of one's feelings about oneself, especially with regard to character, goals, and origins, occurring especially in adolescence as a result of growing up under disruptive, fast-changing conditions." (Webster's New World Dictionary 1979: 696).

The term is, thus, getting more and more complicated – a fairly recent social construct, meant to embrace the fast-pacing world of today.

Identity became a focus point for anthropologists beginning with the 1970s social movements and ethnicity related issues reinforcing the dual relationship between individual and society – showing how the individual is affected by and at the same time contributes to the social context he inhabits. It gained ground becoming the core of debates concerning the

identity politics of race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, that is, it took shape from the intersection of physical body, ideology and subjectivity. Identity is articulated at the trysting place of biology (our sense perceptions) and culture (the total sum of social practices that insert us into the life of some particular social formations. The way we are perceived by social others is determined by ideology – society's sense of what is valuable or objectional about our presence in the intersubjective/ communication roll order. Unlike Descartes, who rooted personhood in one's personal reasoning, the present school of Identity Theory takes a pragmatist view of the issue. To a considerable extent, we turn to our peers for an assessment of our social relevance, for a statement about what they see in us.

As pragmatism employs a double vision – self-knowledge and reflection of the self in others – its notion of identity is multilayered. In *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I (1890, pages 279-283, 287-288, and 314-316), William James exposes his theory about the discontinuous nature of selfhood or of the self's knowledge of his make-up. The core of the self is enveloped in the material self, representing our need of possessions as outward prop of our inwardness which is objictified in order for us to be known by others. Jean Baudrillard, in his 1968 *System of Objects*, would reduce identity to this form of objectification, which is to be understood in the context of the consumer society. Next comes the social self, which is the appreciation we get from others. This theory served Henry James, the philosopher's brother, in the construction of his characters. There is not a single portrait of each but an array of impressionistic portraits, that is, as many versions of the self as there are characters running into him. The individual depends on his peers for his honour, for prestige. We see the protagonist in Joyce's "Grace" (a story in *The Dubliners*) being saved from dejection and drunkenness by friends who revive in him a sense of worth and dignity, whereas, on the contrary, Beckett's Malone' demise is caused by his dwarfish image in a rival's eyes.

Around 1900, Romanians felt that their national character was embodied in folklore which offered both a folk costume for the Queen and each lady in waiting and a collection of folk tales for foreigners interested in national character.

A new theory about identity set in after World War II. Cognitivist psychologist Ulric Neisser identifies "Five Kinds of Self-Knowledge: *the ecological self* (perceived with respect to the physical environment); *the interpersonal self* (manifest in emotional rapport and communication); *the extended self* (personal memories and anticipations); *the private self*

(appears when children first notice that some of their experiences are not directly shared with other people); *the conceptual self* or the 'self-concept' draws its meaning from the network of assumptions and theories in which it is embedded. (Neisser 1998: 35-59)

Ulrich Neisser exposes his theory of the self in *Five Kinds of Self-Knowledge* – the title of his 1988 book – which are responsible for our making into the speaking and acting instance we represent.

Jonathan Culler, Jacques Lacan, Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, to name just of few of postmodernist thinkers, define the self as signifier in the intersubjective order: writing instance, he who says "I" (position in discourse), a signifier to be read by others, a narrative about oneself.

Even characters in fairy tales, which have something of a prototypical character, are seen as mere signifiers that can be assigned other meanings. Whereas, for the luminaries or for modernists, fairy tales guaranteed authentic representation of essential character, postmodernists engage in rewriting them in order to promote their own ideological agenda. We see here epistemology, ideology and the body of the world inextricably bounded up in a common process of cultural fabrication of meaning. It is this trinity – ***body + ideology + subjectivity*** – that Identity Studies focus upon.

The phenomenological psychological perspective as an approach to psychology acknowledges the social nature of embodiment, turning to embodied experience as a major focus for psychological understanding and identity studies for it is through the body that we relate to other people and the world around us. Our body is the vehicle for communicating with others and for carrying out our everyday lives. It is impossible to separate our bodies from who we are and what we do in the social world. At all levels – individual, relational and cultural – the body becomes entangled in a network of social relations. Thus, the individuals need to be viewed in a broader picture encompassing the biological, the psychological and the social, for:

> The sense of personhood we possess is at least partly based on the feel we have of our own bodies, as much as in the symbols which define our unique social identity … if the body is not the person, then what is the person? The body image and self-image we develop is based on the sense of being embodied and the way in which this experience is mediated by culture. (Connell 1987:84)

The bodily experience becomes a 'life-history-in-society' in which larger societal areas, such as relationships, ideology, and language, also play their part.

The body as observed by others and with "its own eyes" comes under dual scrutiny. The self-scrutiny and the reflexivity implied in the project of the self (Giddens, 1991) reflect a shift in social conditions, in terms of work and leisure, consumerism and commodification. Bodies become both subject and object, project and projected upon. According to Giddens, since the self is an identity-project, we can "create" ourselves; become the masons of our own identitarian construction. To Giddens, then:

> The body was a 'given', the often inconvenient and inadequate seat of the self. With the increase invasion of the body by abstract systems all this becomes altered. The body, like the self, becomes a site of interaction, appropriation and reappropriation, linking reflexively organised processes and systematically ordered expert knowledge... Once thought to be the locus of the soul... the body has become fully available to be 'worked upon' by the influences of high modernity... In the conceptual space between these, we find more and more guidebooks and practical manuals to do with health, diet, appearance, exercise, love-making and many other things. (Giddens 1991:218)

The fact that we can 'do' things with our body and present or display ourselves in different ways suggests that our identity is not entirely fixed or determined by our bodies. People have the freedom (at least in some parts of the world) and can make a conscious decision to change their bodies through surgery, dieting, drugs, exercise and the clothes they wear. As people change their bodies in these ways, you could say that they also change how they feel about themselves and their roles in society, and how they are perceived by others (all of which are aspects of identity), as Roseneil and Seymour argue:

> Questions of identity, individual and collective, confront us at every turn … We are interpellated and interrogated by a multiplicity of voices to consider and reconsider our identities. How we think of ourselves … is up for grabs, open to negotiation, subject to choice to an unprecedented extent. (Roseneil and Seymour, 1999:1)

Illustrative in this sense is the case of the pop singer Michael Jackson who insisted on changing his body. In his autobiography *Moonwalk* (Jackson, 1988) he confesses that he was deeply unhappy with his appearance, in particular with his wide nose and dark skin. Although he denies all the surgery attributed to him, his body was radically altered. Jackson turned his body into an active project, seemingly designed to blur his identity in terms of sex, race, ethnicity and age. Increasingly, medical and technological advances offer the means for more extreme