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1

**Analyzing “Snow White” and “Goldilocks” in *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* from Eco-critical and Feminist Perspectives**

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*Gaia, the Great Mother who bore all*

*Greener Cleaner Healthier*

*Now Withering Filthier Ailing*

**Abstract:**

Keeping literary and cultural modifications in mind, the aim of the present paper is to analyze Garner’s deliberate interlacing of feminism and eco-criticism in the classical tales like “Snow White” and “Goldilocks”. In this journey we witness how with his restructured version and by visiting the tales with a green perspective, Garner tries to rupture the unyielding pyramids that define and confine gender to stereotypes. The paper scrutinizes whether Garner is able to dissolve the hierarchal structure or he becomes a victim of another mesh of essentialism by playing with the absence-presence opposition and by giving a dominant space to the Nature and women characters in his tales.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Eco-criticism, Politically Correct, Binaries, Stereotypes, Essence

**Aim of the paper:**



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

2

An emphasis on promotion of equal rights for women by women groups, followed by the rising female workforce, altered not only the customary male-oriented social set-up but also economic, political and cultural structures along with literatures across the world. An ever evolving cognizance concerning women's issues accelerated the surveys of literary depiction with a strong masculine predisposition ostracizing women. Feminists have been trying to discover, comprehend and question the inherent limitations inflicted upon women characters as reflected in various art forms and literature. The Progressive Era (early twentieth century) not only witnessed a striking transformation in women from being modest, delicate and reproductive creatures to independent professionals but also in the form, content and context of women's writing with a significant emphasis on redefining or de/reconstructing their identities. The narratives focusing on pretty and passive damsels in misery, waiting to be rescued by their prince charming and often made more wretched by the witchcraft of the unattractive female antiheroes were disagreeable to many. As the notion of independent female agency made headway, the fairytales, magical stories and even children's favorite bedtime yarns came under the scanner. Another change emerged with Dr. Seuss who initiated greening of children's literature in 1971 with *Lorax* (a grumpy little creature) warning Onceler (the greedy industrialist) against cutting down trees. Since then his successors have been propagating global issues, concern for the non-human environment and questioning humanity's interaction with it through children's ecological books.

With the abovementioned literary and cultural alterations, James Finn Garner's *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* (2011) becomes a title compelling enough to be read and pondered over. By prefixing "Politically Correct" with the bedtime stories, Garner infuses the traditional tales with contemporary spirit and exhumes out details no longer in sync with our times. "Once upon a time there was a.....and they lived happily ever after" is the usual opening and ending of classic fairytales. Garner also begins the tales conventionally, proceeds refreshingly but ends unconventionally. Reworded to represent a supposedly (politically correct) mature world, Garner grafts the juvenile world with informed characters, offbeat role reversals, advocating ubiquitous



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

3

rights for humans and animals. In this context Dijana Vučković's words seem very meaningful as she appositely mentions in her paper, "Most often, a fairy tale in education is treated as a story that simply distinguishes good from evil, but the structure of many fairy tales cannot be reduced to the black and white morality. This is especially true if we interpret a fairy tale at deeper significance levels" (309). Therefore, Garner's intentional braiding of feminism and eco-criticism in the classical tales calls for an analysis of the aforementioned themes in detail, which we attempt in the present paper.

### **A brief look at Garner's *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*:**

Garner aptly remarks in the introduction to the book that the classic tales serve the "purpose-to entrench the patriarchy, to estrange people from their own natural impulses, to demonize 'evil' and to 'reward' an 'objective' 'good'" (vii). With his modernized version, Garner tries to puncture the rigid hierarchies and classifications. He has visited the tales with a green perspective "free from bias and purged from the influences of its flawed cultural past" (viii). The prefix "Politically Correct" in the title and the satirical portrayals of political correctness in the stories give us much needed hope that the readers of future generation acquire an inclusive representation to grapple with the prevailing issues.

Like race and sex, nature is also a cultural construct existing both authentically and figuratively. Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* (2015) says, "I will be reading culture as rhetoric, although not in the strict sense understood by rhetoricians, but as the production, reproduction and transformation of large-scale metaphors" (8). This model helps us to comprehend the metamorphosis our culture, the citizens, their psyche and consequently our environment have undergone. As ecofeminist Vera Norwood says, "Nature and culture are interactive processes: human culture is affected by the landscape as well as effecting change on it" (qtd. by Garrard 84). Culture constitutes certain norms and values that define the people occupying that particular geographical space vis-a-vis the distinctiveness of the territorial



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

4

boundaries and also imparts a sense of belongingness to the community inhabiting that particular space.

For present-day readers, Garner conjures a world with equal rights for all species where human animals are ordinary denizens with non-human animals. He also introduces afresh the existing themes and motifs with a newer vocabulary to raise uncommon questions in the common tales. To be a part of a different sphere, Garner uses alternative spellings and concepts like, “womyn” instead of “women”; gender-neutral “person” compound “woodsperson” and “chairperson” for woodcutter and chairman respectively; “young person” for Red Riding Hood to do away with linguistic discrimination; “economically disadvantaged” rather than poor; “specially abled” or “differently statured man” instead of physically disabled; woodcutter-person as “log-fuel technician”; coining a new term “prewommon”, a bias free and politically correct synonym for a girl; and change of fairy godmother to “fairy godperson” or “individual dietary proxy” along with a change in appearance “a man dressed in loose-fitting, all-cotton clothes and wearing a wide-brimmed hat” to discard conventional labeling (32).

Garner’s female characters like Snow White, Cinderella, Goldilocks, Esmeralda, Rapunzel and Red Riding Hood form alternative households, resist male interference in their lives, claim their reproductive rights, set up birth control clinics, defend themselves against economic and social exploitation and discard uncomfortable clothes for practically comfortable ones. The wolf in “Little Red Riding Hood” puts on Grandma’s nightclothes and crawls into bed “unhampered by rigid, traditionalist notions of what was masculine or feminine” (Garner 3). This cross-dressing tendency is Garner’s attempt to obliterate socially constructed boundaries of which gender is one. Red Riding Hood’s gift of “fat-free, sodium-free snacks” to her Grandmother as a gesture to salute her “role of a wise and nurturing matriarch” is a recognition of domestic work meticulously accomplished by homemakers which often goes unpaid and unacknowledged (3). Garner’s non-human animals are environmentally enlightened and uphold eco-friendly practices. For instance, the three educated pigs “lived together in mutual respect and in harmony with their



## A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

5

environment” in houses built with native material such as sticks and creeper vines (9). In “The Frog Prince”, the young princess dreams of “queendom” instead of kingdom and ponders over “the role of eco-feminist warrior in her era” (63).

Furthermore, Garner extensively employs politically acceptable catchwords, inflexible straitlaced discourse, inserts modern concepts like health spas, mineral water, time-share resort complex with snorkeling and dolphin shows in the retold stories. He also replaces the organic worldview with a mechanical one. The readers are introduced to terms of contemporary relevance as car-sharing and ecological footprints highlighting the shifting times. Throughout the tales, Garner suggests various alternatives keeping in mind the current issues: be it the pigs setting up a model socialist democracy; the emperor’s politically correct robes as a clothing-optional lifestyle; the non-polluting industries, the Department of Public Biodiversity and a Third-World Refugee Reorientation Centre in the town of Hamelin; or a sustainable economy “based on human capital and not the mere exploitation of physical resources” (77).

Garner also derides current lifestyle, values and its degradation through ‘lookist’ bias of the society. He criticizes beauty pageants and instead promotes science fairs and blood drives. The modern outlook steering the text prompts us to scrutinize the tales from feminist and eco-critical perspectives particularly “Snow White” and “Goldilocks”. Therefore, with the feminist and eco-critical lens we have tried to probe questions like — how are women and nature represented in the text? Is ecology central to the theme of the text? What is the relationship between human beings and animals? Are women and nature empowered or oppressed? How do cultural habits affect regional ecology? Where are women and environment placed in the power hierarchy? etc.

### **Theoretical Background:**

Feminism formerly began in the early nineteenth century as a western political movement when in 1840’s a group of women urged for the principles of liberty and equality. In the



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

6

beginning, this movement was only an activist faction and towards 1920's women went back home after having won, among other things, the right to suffrage. From 1920 to 1960, the feminist voice was not audible much. In the late 1960's and the beginning of 1970's commenced the Second Wave Feminism when the struggle became more academic and literary with feminists like Kate Millett, Simone de Beauvoir, and Betty Friedan. The Second Wave continued for ages despite the materialization of sub-groups, new groups and much resistances and revolts within the association. Women of the Second Wave who achieved economic and professional powers and their daughters brought and helped in the flourishing of Third Wave Feminism in mid-1990's and enthusiastically devoted themselves to support whosoever was working towards gender issues, economic and social justice, along with redefining ideas about womankind, sex, sexuality, femaleness and maleness etc. Feminist criticism is rich and plural as it scrutinizes the experiences of women of all races, cultures, castes, classes, regions and religions. All feminists in general, raise an objection to the stereotypes and definitions prearranged and developed by the male dominated culture. Their agenda is related to power, authority, supremacy, control, exploitation, struggle, confrontation and resistance to hegemony.

It is well established by now that sex may be biological but gender is social and political. It has always been "imbricated in the matrix of power, exploitation and resistance. . ." and hence, feminism promoted women's efforts to combat essentialism and sexual tropes (Lewis and Mills 20). The agenda has always been to make woman an object of possession, the reversal was natural, and some women rose to counter the attack of the dictating and commanding patriarchy and change the position of the so-called, second sex. So, "Feminism in a 'postcolonial' frame begins with the situation of the ordinary women in a particular place, while also thinking of her situation in relation to broader issues to give her the more powerful basis of collectivity" (Young 116). The effort of feminists is to destroy the myth of woman's inferiority and to fight against the foundation of subjectivity, the male dominating enterprise and the existing authoritative constitution of cultural codes. Throughout history, women have "always been subordinated to men, and hence their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change – it was



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

not something that occurred” but something that has been forced through the social structure (Beauvoir xlvii).

In comparison to feminism, a relatively older concept and theory, the term Ecocriticism was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism”. It did not become popular until the 1989 meeting of the Western Literature Association, when Cheryll Glotfelty employed the word as a part of the vocabulary for a critical approach to study nature writing. In the collection, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), Glotfelty explains that “Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its readings of the texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies” (xviii). Ecocriticism is one of the youngest critical theories and is a part of the academic discourse as well. Ecocritics believe in symbiotic relationship between all life forms and consider the entire ecosphere as one. Thus, the interaction and the intersection between man and the environment and the resulting consequences are the prime focus of this approach.

Another ecocritic, Simon Estok argues that ecocriticism is more than “simply the study of Nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function—thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise—of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds” (16-17). Ecocriticism is an innovative umbrella term comprising not only the nature and the natural world but also the sensibilities and idiosyncrasies of the people inhabiting that space, the beliefs they uphold and the traditions they practice in relation to that space. As Greg Garrard puts it, “Indeed, the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

8

itself” (5). Ecocriticism questions the notions of development and advocates environmental activism bearing the new consciousness “earth first.”

Richard Kerridge in *Writing the Environment* (1998) sums up, “Most of all, ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis” (qtd. by Garrard4). It is not only the text that lies embedded in ecology but also the ecology that is ingrained in the text. Ecocriticism is a very comprehensive and an interdisciplinary approach which caters to new challenges posed by environmental destruction and consequent disasters like pollution, scarcity of resources, conquest of space, extinction of species, etc. Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher who introduced the phrase “deep ecology” dwells a step further and writes, “Ecologically responsible policies are concerned only in part with pollution and resource depletion. There are deeper concerns which touch upon principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness” (95). Since ecosphere is interconnected, human actions and living impact the environment both favourably and unfavourably. Ecocritics promote that human practices should co-exist with ecological values and wisdom. In common parlance, ecocriticism is generally dubbed as “green studies”, “ecopoetics” and “environmental literary criticism”.

### **Analysis of “Snow White”:**

Ecocriticism advocates ethical concerns along with biocentric equality, sweeping along broader issues of race, class and gender. Such questions prickle us in “Snow White”, where Garner himself comments in the beginning of the story, “Her nickname was Snow White, indicative of the discriminatory notions of associating pleasant or attractive qualities with light, and unpleasant or unattractive qualities with darkness” (43). The concept of beauty is associated with a particular disposition. Here, Garner exposes the colourist consciousness ingrained in patriarchy and how particularly the female sex becomes an effortless target of this outlook. Social conditioning authenticates our biased attitudes and enables us to conveniently categorize everything in dualities. Even Snow White’s mother of step is a victim of patriarchal mind set.



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

She is conscious of and judges her self-worth on the parameters of outer appearance. “Physical beauty was the one standard she cared about now, and she defined herself solely in regard to her personal appearance” (Garner 44). By accepting the socially acceptable definition of beauty, Snow White’s mother of step bargains her freedom to be herself. Her insecurities have a negative impact on her psychology and make her an incomplete personality. Even her royal title and riches cannot assuage her self-doubts.

Queen’s narcissism prompts her, time and again, to seek confidence in the magical mirror. The mirror here is symbolic of unfulfilled internal aspirations vindicated through external channel. The queen’s is a make believe world, which when comes into contact with slightest of reality, breaks. Once when the mirror answers otherwise, complimenting Snow White, the queen maliciously indulges in “an adopted masculine power trip” (Garner, 45). Garner’s remark carries a pun on the male-centered world view. There are certain traits associated with male sex like aggression, dominance and power and the opposite of these with female sex and commingling of these traits is unacceptable. The queen’s discretionary behaviour indicates as if she has outstepped female jurisdiction, which she shouldn’t have. It again raises question mark on how earnestly different roles are devised for men and women and how strict adherence to it is must.

The queen orders the royal woodsperson to kill Snow White, cut out her heart and bring it to her, thus eliminating all bonds of sisterhood. The woodsperson, a humble being in proximity with nature, cannot obey the queen’s cruel orders and asks Snow White to run away into the deep woods. He also gets a heart made of candies to satisfy the queen’s vanity, which she devours quickly “in a sickening display of pseudo-cannibalism” (Garner 46). The contrast between the two is prominent and it also shows how the civilization has corrupted one and how the association with nature has humbled the other. Garner himself writes about the woodsperson, “...his connections to the earth and seasons had made him a kind soul” (45). These two contradictory characters bring out the nature-culture dualism where the woodsperson stands for qualities like purity and reinvigoration and the queen for deceit and animosity.



## A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

10

Garner's modified diction speaks for his impartial stance on disability discrimination as he prefers to call the seven dwarfs, the seven "vertically challenged men" (46). Though the vertically challenged men are uncomfortable with Snow White's presence and plan to kill her; at the same time they are responsive enough not to degrade the ecology by drowning her in the river. Garner's characters are aware of their cultural habits having an impact on the regional ecology. As Greg Garrard asserts, "The fundamental problem of responsibility is not what we humans *are*, nor how we can 'be' better, more natural, primal or authentic, but what we *do*" (79). Anthropological activities always impact the environment. The key lies in integrating environment and collective responsibility towards it by following a proactive and a transformative approach.

The seven vertically challenged men have named themselves as "Seven Towering Giants...towering in *spirit* and so are *giants* among the men of forest" (Garner 48). Earlier the giants used to earn livelihood by digging the mines. True to their spirit, the altered perception convinced them, "that such a rape of the planet was immoral and short-sighted", so they are now the "dedicated stewards of the earth and live in harmony with nature" (48). Ecocritics advocate bioregionalism, which is learning to adapt oneself to the limits of a particular region and using its resources sustainably leaving them for future generations. Through his characters, Garner educates us about environmental ethics to maintain equilibrium between socio-economic development and environmental protection. Now the giants have established retreats for those who "need to get in touch with their primitive masculine identities" (48). The giants' new establishment reminds us of the pastoral tradition and its significance for environmentalism specifically the literary tradition, involving a retreat away from the dirt and squalor of city to the bliss of countryside. From feminist perspective, the giants are denying women the opportunity to be a part of such retreats. Also the presence of "seven remote-controlled TV's" in the giants' cottage signifies that "civilization and its unhealthy influences" have already sneaked into the natural world (46). The natural sounds in the forests are replaced by voices from the popular



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

11

culture. The advent of scientific principles and technological advancements has altered the face of natural world both traditionally and symbolically.

The giants also grumble about Snow White's "Female preoccupations" and her complaints of not keeping their beds tidy (Garner 47). They firmly set the rules of the house and convey it to Snow White, "No dusting. No tidying up" (50). Garner discards division of labour where sword is for men and hearth for women. This sort of gender equality is not seen in classical tales where women's sole concern is to be adept in household chores and qualify to get married into a wealthy family to upscale the social ladder. According to conventional mind-set, "an emphasis on domestic chores shows the importance of female roles in the traditional societies" but Garner's Snow White dismantles the power structure by taking away from woman the eternal role of homemaker (Stringham 639). The focus of his retelling swings away from 'the beauty' of the maiden in distress and falls on her abilities and capabilities.

Entrenched in patriarchy, the giants behold Snow White's presence as a disruption in their "strong bond of brotherhood" (Garner 46). They call her "a flighty wommon" and a "corrupting feminine presence" in their territory (46, 49). With such prefixes, Garner shows how strongly negative labels are attributed to the second sex and also simultaneously, exposes the giants' hypocrisy in wanting to keep Snow White around to compare and contrast their progress. In treating her as 'the other', the giants negate Snow White's identity. But she asserts herself staunchly, "I resent being kept around like an object, just a yardstick for your egos and penises!" (50). Garner sketches a liberated and a new age fairy tale heroine who is a human first with a strong voice of her own. By subverting the giants' patriarchal imaging of Snow White, Garner extracts her out of the codified pattern of gender behaviour. Snow White declines to be the appendage of the Giants by professing herself as a sovereign being capable of finding her path through trial and error method. With an inclination to relate to the dilemma of women who are discriminatorily or arbitrarily marginalized and rendered invisible, Garner is critiquing a society based on imbalanced gender roles.



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

12

Unlike the traditional royal women, the queen is flirtatiously occupied reading fashion magazines and gulping “three whole pieces of chocolate without purging” (Garner 50). She reminds the readers of Victorian fickleness and vanity which characterized women of that era. On learning that Snow White is still alive, she furiously plans to kill her again and disguises herself as a poor woman selling apples. Years of patriarchal conditioning has turned the queen into an anxious woman who is unable to discern the ethics of right and wrong. On the other hand, Snow White presents a contrasting picture to the queen. Amidst the woods, in proximity to nature, she is meditating calmly. Once again Garner highlights the nature culture duality. Snow White’s new dwelling in the forest has a healing effect on her and later in the concluding part of the story we see how the queen’s short stay in the woods brings in her a change of heart. Like the pastoral tradition, the concept of wilderness too has many connotations. The Romantics have seen it “as a place for reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city. Wilderness has an almost sacramental value: it holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth...” (Garrard 66). Garner’s narrative is full of subtle reminders of what mankind has lost and how we ought to retrieve it.

Snow White’s beauty and fair complexion, again patriarchal yardsticks of measuring beauty, make the queen suffer from pangs of “envy and self-revulsion” (Garner 52). On being questioned about the secret of her beauty, Snow White replies to the disguised queen, “beauty comes from inside a person” (52). Deep within, the queen knows the answer but is not ready to believe it. Snow White explains to the queen her meticulous work-out regime and invites her to join for meditation and aerobics. After exercise, both of them eat the “chemically and genetically altered” apple and fall into comma (52). The adulteration of food signifies adulteration of land by anthropological activities bringing out a clash in economic and ecological values. This degradation is the consequence of stretching out the ecological carrying capacity and putting undue pressure on the limits of what earth can sustain. While the prince feels pangs of sexuality on seeing Snow White, the vertically challenged men see an economic opportunity arising out of it. They want to display Snow White in a glass box and advertise their retreat as a cure for



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

13

impotency. Garner hints that female body is possessed, enslaved and exploited by men for their sensual gratification. The prince's remark about the queen when offered for his treatment, "she's not high enough *caliber* for me," makes him a classist, though he specifically says he doesn't want to sound so (55). But the manifest destiny of the imperialistic oppressor is overturned when he is expelled from the forest along with the giants.

On regaining consciousness, the queen shouts at the giants for offering them "around like pieces of property!" bringing forth their sexist nature (Garner 55). She revolts against the women's right over their bodies. The giants accuse the ladies for breaking into their property, to which the queen angrily replies, "This forest is property of the crown. You are the ones who are trespassing!" (56). The capstone occurs when the queen has a "personal awakening", wherewith she casts away her insecurities and decides to dedicate her life to heal "the rift between womyn's souls and their bodies", to help them "accept their natural body images and become whole again" (56). From feminist point of view, this is being in sync with one's biology. The ugliness or the not so charming face of a female character is either less visible or less articulated in the fairy tales. Many times, she is the constant companion of a beautiful maiden but in a negative form.

Critics point out that fairy tales have been rewritten and reproduced "by a cultural industry that favors patriarchal and reactionary notions of gender, ethnicity, behavior, and social class" (Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales*, 2). Since times immemorial biological beauty is assigned to women asymmetrically, of course, by patriarchy. While the male power is exhibited through force, the female worth is flaunted in beauty. The emphasis on appearance, physical beauty and sexuality has kept women captive of patriarchy. Garner shatters the glass ceiling when Snow White's step mother finally redeems herself and women like her dismantle these patriarchal constructs by accepting and celebrating the unconventional forms of beauty. She resists and revolts against the pressure to conform to the socially and culturally constructed definition of 'the beautiful'. And in acting such, she also defies the correlation between the ugliness and evil. By shunning body



## A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

14

modification and her obsession with physical beauty, she successfully overcomes the female body objectification and oppressive constraints.

Both Snow White and the queen freely assert their wills and decide to live a life of their choice. They resolve to “build a womyn’s spa and conference centre...where we (they) can hold retreats, caucuses and ovariums” (Garner 56). Such personal spaces like caucuses and ovariums, where women are comfortable in their own natural image and are not adjudged by a criterion of beauty determined by others, recognize them as individuals and also gives them freedom to take decisions as to what to do with their bodies. As a social construct, women are conditioned to adopt mannerisms appropriate to their gender which puts them in a double bind. If they behave in a feminine way, they are excluded from certain positions and if they don’t, they are labeled unfeminine. Together Snow White and her mother of step form a strong bond of sisterhood and are lauded for their contributions worldwide. We have been hearing of terms such as brotherhood or bromance but with Snow White and queen’s bond, Garner triumphantly sketches new age women enjoying sisterhood and independence.

### Analysis of “Goldilocks”:

In Garner’s “Goldilocks” also, as in the classic tale “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” one reaches the deep woods through a thicket across the river. Unlike other characters in the fairy tales who live in reciprocal reverence and in synchronization with their environment, Garner’s Goldilocks is deficit of such traits, alienated from her own self and her natural surroundings. Colin Johnson’s phrase “Terminal Grey Culture” from his *Green Dictionary*, aptly describes the modernized lifestyle and culture which is growth oriented, consumerist and environmentally destructive and it is aptly personified in Goldilocks. This is an unsustainable view of development, taking the planet at our disposal and the non-renewable resources to be inexhaustible.



## A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

15

Also, unlike the traditional ones, the bears in Garner's tale have a human form, and their natural habitat has been replaced with an "anthropomorphic cottage" (Garner 39). The reference to the Bears living together "anthropomorphically in a little cottage as a nuclear family" indicates complexity and change in postmodern ecology and mankind's intrusion into natural space (39). It is also a direct reference to feminist developments where joint family is seen as a source of enslaving women by the patriarchs and the matriarchs. The nuclear set-up seemingly gives independence of thought and movement to women. Furthermore, to puncture the rigid sexist roles, Papa Bear has been made to help Mama Bear in the household chores. To avoid the essential qualifiers, which effectively disqualify women from positions of power and authority, their offspring has been given the non-gender-specific name 'Baby'. Papa Bear prepares "all-natural porridge" indicating contamination of the environment, threat of toxins and the consequent requirement of organic food items (40). Similarly Garner's use of techno-laced words like "thermally enhanced" porridge "straight off the stove" to simply express that the porridge was too hot to be eaten, hints at the technical advancement which is exhausting our natural resources coupled with the looming energy crisis (40).

Garner introduces Goldilocks as a "melanin-impoverished young wommon", revealing the colourist bias of society (40). The bears' harmonious living is disrupted by Goldilocks who has expansionist ideas. Metaphorically, she stands for geographical and cultural colonization of the natives and their land. The simple maiden Goldilocks, changes into an aggressive biologist with a "masculine approach to science" which ultimately leads to her dismissal from the university (40). From feminist point of view, the particular allusion to Goldilocks' masculine approach indicates how certain domains are male prerogatives only. Goldilocks wants to use the natural world for her selfish ends to show the "twerps at the university the kind of guts it takes to do *real* research"(41). It is indicative again of the conquest of space and utter disregard for animal rights. The eco-feminists point out the associated closeness between women and nature and illustrate how values such as reciprocity, nurturing and cooperation are attributed to both women and nature; and how they are both united through their shared history of oppression. According to



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

16

Val Plumwood, “This polarization, or ‘hyperseparation’, often involves a denial of the real relationship of the superior term to the inferior”(qtd. by Garrard 28). Whether it is anthropocentric (mankind/nature) or andocentric (man/woman) dualism, the logic of domination is implicated in both, conferring superiority to one over the other.

From eco-critical view, Goldilocks also acts as an agent of change for she is tearing apart the rural idyll and unbalancing the harmony that once existed between humanity and nature. Goldilocks’ dream to infiltrate through the thin veil of nature to reach its secrets leading to her dismissal from the university could be seen as a distant hint that she was ousted by an ecologically enlightened society against environmental degradation. Her wish to collar the bears embodies the struggle between powerful and the powerless; man and nature. The collar can be defined as man’s efforts to overwhelm the natural world. With her scientific espionage like “radio transmitters” fitted in the collars of these bears and lacing the porridge bowls with “tranquilizing potion”, Goldilocks plans to encroach upon the natural world disrespecting its inhabitants and exploiting their space (Garner 40-41). Garrard points out the argument put forward by the Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham who suggests, “cruelty to animals was analogous to slavery and claimed that the capacity to feel pain, not the power of reason, entitled a being to moral consideration” (Garrard 146). Perhaps, that is why, Garner replaces the word animal with non-human animal to obliterate the fixed hierarchies.

Garner also reverses the roles and shows, if man has acquired the power to rule over nature, the natural world too is not inactive or passive. The bears smell the sweat, dirt and squalor prevalent in the city while Goldilocks is hiding in their house. Baby Bear says, “It smells musky and sweaty and not at all clean” (Garner 42). Human encroachment leaves its mark on the natural world and places the non-human dwellers of natural habitat, that are comparatively clean, in conflict with the urbanite. When the bears sit at the table to relish the all-natural porridge, they readily sense the addition of some un-natural chemical in their food. They begin to look for the intruder and find out Goldilocks sleeping in a corner of their bedroom. When she wakes up, Papa



## A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

17

and Mama Bears hold Goldilocks with a swing of their paws and gobble her up. On seeing this, the Baby Bear comments that he thought that they were vegetarians, to which Papa Bear wittily replies, “Flexibility is just one more benefit of being multicultural” (42). It shows that the bears are more open, adjusting and liberal than humans.

If seen from feminist point of view, Goldilocks represents a woman who goes against the norms of the patriarchal world and is outcast by the traditionalist society for stepping out of the threshold. From eco-critical point of view, the left over bits of Goldilocks’ yellow hair indicate the strength of nature to protect itself and its inhabitants and also to take revenge from trespassers and raiders. The bears are mindful of the diverse local resources. Through anthropomorphic characters, Garner is making us realize the duties we all have towards our ecosphere. Under the influence of current eco-critical thought, Garner radicalizes his pastoral and enables it to function as a literary answer to the assumption of human dominance and control. Just as women show the potency to resist patriarchy and the empire writes back, Garner’s nature too has been imbued with the force to contend with the man.

### **Hypothesis:**

Garner’s primary concern is, thus, to speak for nature and women. Anthropological activities and cultural habits adversely affect not only our ecology but also womankind. Eco-critic Wendell Berry’s metaphor of “marriage” of culture and nature unifies the social and the ecological concerns. But if we glance at the hierarchy, nature and women have the power to avenge. On the basis of the analysis of the above mentioned fairytales, Garner may be called a modern naturalist and a feminist who is conscious of the degradation of the environment and the second sex. Instead of being an infantile longing for a mythical Golden Age, *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* reflects Garner’s pastoral nostalgia or a state of epistemological innocence. It can also be seen as an allegory about human alienation from the natural world. Garner may not have demonized the urban completely yet he idealizes the pastoral. By adding the prefix



## **A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh**

18

“politically correct” with the bedtime stories, Garner brings out social disapproval, marginalization and exclusion implied in the classic tales.

Although while rewriting the stories, Garner indulges into an advertent omission of “any sexist, racist, culturalist, nationalist, regionalist, ageist, lookist, ableist, sizeist, speciesist, intellectualist, socioeconomicist, ethnocentrist, phallocentrist, heteropatriarchalist, or other type of bias”, yet his narrative reinforces and reconstructs a new set of binaries (Garner viii). Referring to the traditional stereotypes and binary oppositions like association of males with reason, self-restraint, action, rationality and power and females with eccentricity, inactiveness and unreasonableness, Zipes says, “the male acts; the female waits” (Fairy Tales 25). And thus, in accordance, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Red Riding Hood and Goldilocks were the ideal embodiment of passivity in the traditional fairy tales. On the contrary, Garner’s females exhibit qualities of heroism challenging the hegemonic masculinity and biological essentialism. In re-sketching classical characters from a contemporary perspective, Garner does full justice to Hilary Crew’s argument (although used for some other writes), that retelling of fairy tales “encode[s] discourses that contradict or challenge patriarchal ideologies that are increasingly viewed as anachronistic in today’s society” (77). Almost all the heroines of Garner, like Snow White and Goldilocks analyzed above, aren’t rigidly passive anymore but are strongly progressive beings who if willingly want to be homemakers would be criticized.

Garner’s women protagonists tear away the confining veils recognizing the reality behind the ‘essence of femaleness’. And as Toril Moi writes in some other context, here Garner too demonstrates that his women are females which does not guarantee that they have to be feminine too, as expected by the patriarchy (Moi). We as readers do support Garner’s claim to be objective and impartial in his narration. On the other hand, it is paradoxical that the demystification and reinterpretation of the roles of classic fairy tale heroines after the feminist hue and cry no doubt, rejected the negative attributes attached with women, but also substituted them with new ones. The essence and the trap remain intact with a shift in boundaries. Garner’s work seems to



## A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

19

perpetuate a new identity, singularity and linearity. The women of his stories do not want to be 'the man' but they still remain the other and this time the other to 'the norm'.

Similarly, nature too is silently pinned at the backdrop as a decorative feature in art forms and literature. Like his open-minded characters, Garner's natural world too strongly resonates with power and authority to defend itself and its indwellers. It seems as if nature actively campaigns for its sustainable use, suggests alternatives and promotes accountability for human actions. The hegemonic oppression is a dominant streak in Euro-American thought perpetuated through social, political, cultural, religious institutions, ideas and norms. No doubt, Garner has tried to subvert or problematize the entire metaphysics of women and nature by dismantling the binary thinking, yet a new essence seems to have been reproduced through the context and the concept. Outdoing such views Garner plays with the absence-presence dichotomy and tries to dissolve the hierarchal structure by giving a dominant space to the nature and women characters and does full justice in redrafting the tales.

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20

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