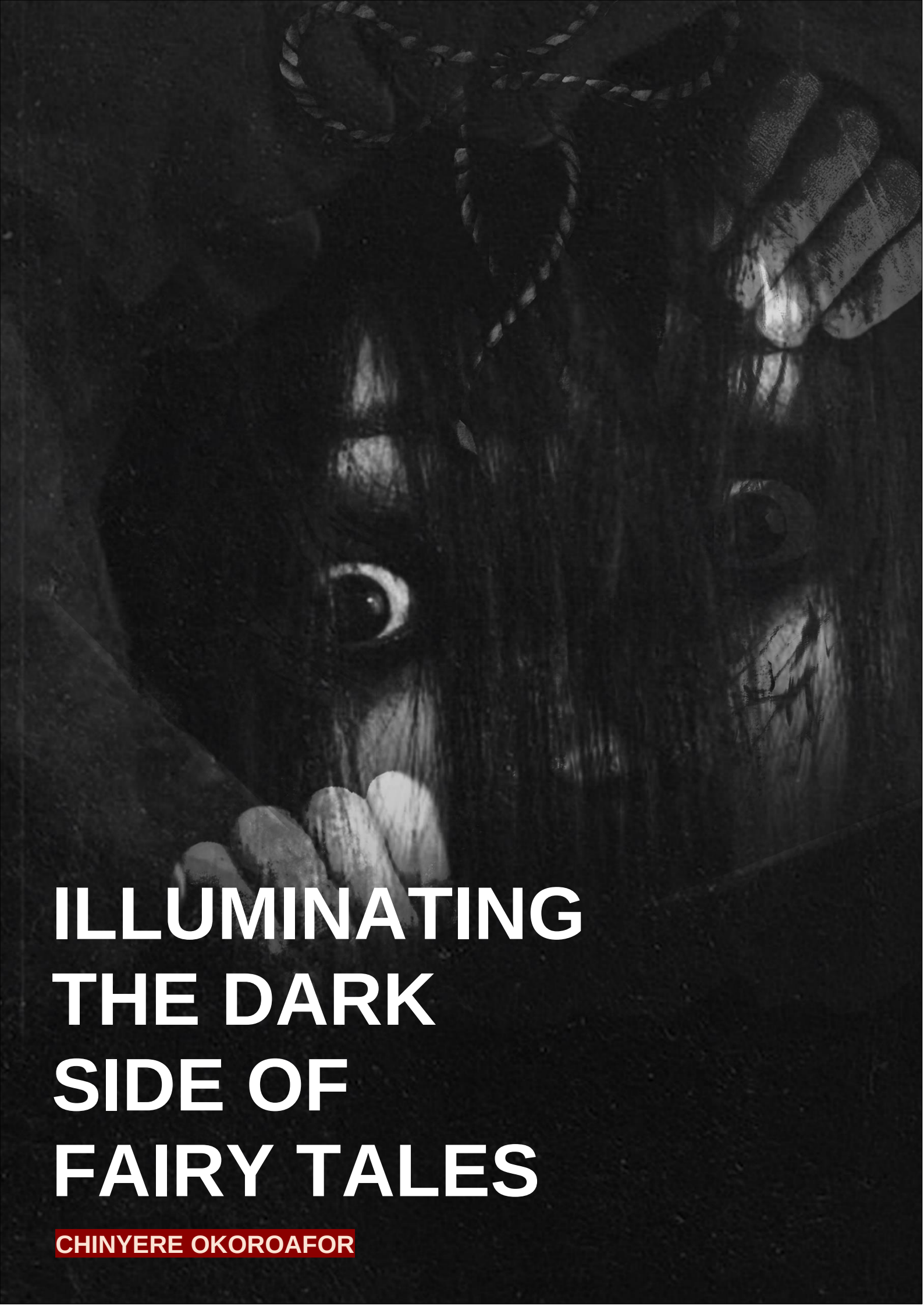

# ILLUMINATING THE DARK SIDE OF FAIRY TALES

CHINYERE OKOROAFOR

# ILLUMINATING THE

# DARK SIDE OF FAIRY TALES

## THE RELEVANCE OF HORROR FAIRY TALES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of

Philosophy
in Film and Television Research

By

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# PREFACE

I, Chinyere Okoroafor, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

All the work described in this thesis was carried out in the Department Arts and Humanities– Brunel University London, under the supervision of Dr Caroline Rudell. This dissertation is my own work and contains nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration with others except as specified in the text and summarised in the Statement of Contributions.

This dissertation is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or is being concurrently submitted, for a degree or diploma or other qualification at Brunel University London or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed 60,000 words, excluding references, filmography.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Lastly, I would like to give special thanks to my fiancé, Alex Bailey, for being a constant source of strength and encouragement throughout the process of writing this thesis. Without you none of this would indeed be possible.

# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work, except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at Brunel University or other institutions.

Name: Chinyere Okoroafor

Date: 31/08/23

Signature: 

# ABSTRACT

Contemporary cinema has seen the return of horror in fairy tales. Filmmakers employ various cinematic elements such as genre, style, subversion, visual elements, and historical and cultural details to craft captivating narratives. This study seeks to discover and understand the relevance of Horror and Fairy tales in portraying social behaviour, traditional beliefs, and gender roles and their influence on contemporary media and popular culture. Investigating how filmmakers subvert traditional fairy tale narratives, creating new and thought-provoking stories that challenge genre narrative conventions. This thesis focuses on select post-90s films that feature young protagonists in their narratives. This research identifies key themes, motives, and symbols in both genres and examines how they intersect and inform one another. Utilising a postmodern, psychoanalytic lens, the research delves into unconscious desires and fears represented through symbolism and archetypes in horror and fairy tale narratives. Furthermore, historical and cultural contexts are examined to comprehend their significance and relevance to contemporary social issues.

# CONTENTS

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales, with their enchanting narratives and fantastical elements, have been a prominent part of human storytelling for centuries, transcending cultural and temporal boundaries. The roots of fairy tales can be traced back to oral traditions across the world, with tales accompanying adult audiences in the Middle Ages that were filled with violent instances and bawdy episodes. The interpretations that followed in the late 17th century to early 19th century, from Perrault to Brothers Grimm, originally carried the traditions of folklore with their gory literary retellings that were later sanitised to versions that meet general standards of what was said to be appropriate for children. In his book *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*, Jack Zipes suggests that the reason why fairy tales were not approved for children had to do with the overt symbolism presented at the time, and because of its multifaceted nature that could be read on different levels, they were considered somewhat dangerous (Zipes, 1987). The fear of exposing vulnerable children to the rather unpredictable and inapt environment, which somewhat reflects the society we live in today, is what distinguishes the content and themes of the original folkloric text, and it is this element of fear that creates the horror in these tales. He states that "…social behaviour could not be totally dictated, prescribed, and controlled through the fairy tale, and there were subversive features in language and theme" (pp. 107-110).

Over the years, fairy tales have evolved and been adapted for different audiences; contemporary retellings often push the boundaries of traditional conventions. In recent decades, there has been a resurgence in fairy tale films incorporating horror elements. Characterised by movements such as Postfeminism and Postmodernism, filmmakers blend elements of fear, terror, and suspense together, blurring the line between fantasy

and horror. The return of horror in fairy tales has drawn significant attention in the field of film studies, with scholars such as Jack Zipes, Pauline Greenhill, Catherine Lester and many others exploring how filmmakers have employed genre and style techniques, subverted traditional narratives, and employed visual and cultural elements to craft unique and inventive tales. Scholars have long explored the interplay between horror and fairy tale genres, exploring how these seemingly disparate genres shape and influence one another. Additionally, academic scholars have explored the cultural significance of fairy tales and their representation in modern media, as well as their psychological impact on audiences. Tatar (1987), Bettelheim (1976), Zipes (2012), and Jones (1995) have all contributed to the socio-historical and psychological discourse of fairy tales. This phenomenon raises intriguing questions about how these two genres intersect when depicted on film; how do they engage in the discussion of social behaviour and traditional beliefs and challenge gender roles?

## 1.1 THESIS QUESTIONS

This thesis seeks to investigate the factors contributing to this phenomenon by offering a comprehensive understanding of horror in fairy tales through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates film studies, cultural analysis, and psychoanalytic theory. More specifically, this research seeks to:

1. Examine how filmmakers subvert fairy tale themes by adding horror elements and analyse the techniques and strategies employed in this process - from classic adaptations of fairy tales to contemporary film narratives.

2. Recognize the key themes, motives and symbols found in both horror and fairy tale genres and examine how they intersect to inform one another in reimagining fairy tales with horror elements.

3. Investigate the role of visual elements like cinematography, set design, and special effects in crafting horror-infused fairy tale narratives and consider their aesthetic and emotional effect on these stories.

4. Examine the historical and cultural elements used in reintroducing horror into fairy tales in order to gain a greater insight into their cultural significance as well as their relevance to contemporary social issues.

5. Use a psychoanalytic lens to explore the unconscious desires and fears that drive horror and fairy tale narratives and how they are represented through symbolism and archetypes.

Therefore, this study aims to delve into the connection between horror and fairy tale stories, employing various theories and research methods to provide insightful interpretations of horror-fairy tale films.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF METHODOLOGY

To comprehend how horror and fairy tale narratives interact, a comprehensive analysis of literature from both genres seeks to blend the paths of these two storytelling traditions. Taking a holistic perspective, the thesis aims to trace the historical and critical development of the Horror and Fairy Tale genre, placing their origins within wider cultural contexts while highlighting their significant influence on storytelling. Attention is directed towards the sociopolitical undercurrents that have influenced discussions on gender roles, power dynamics and the regulation of narrative content in these genres. We will consider their cultural significance and role in shaping our worldview; additionally, briefly discuss Walt Disney's impact on popular culture in the 20th century, along with any associated criticisms. Academic works from appropriate sources will also be cited when discussing censorship issues and gender criticism in fairy tales. Our focus will be on key concepts, theories and ongoing discussions within the field while acknowledging areas where further research is needed.

Integral to this thesis is the multi-dimensional exploration of the term "horror" in fairy tales, with the aim to shed light on its different forms and underlying workings. Central to this investigation is the application of psychoanalytic theory along with frameworks from structural psychoanalysis, cultural studies and film theory to analyse the appeal of horror and how it fits into fairy tale narratives. The term "horror" is delineated within

the scope of this research as a genre characterised by its ability to elicit reactionary emotions like fear, terror and unease while allowing for exploration of themes that are often considered taboo in a fictional setting. This definition covers both traditional horror motifs and modern variations seen in horror-fairy tale films.

By applying psychoanalytic theory, the study will investigate how horror narratives act as outlets for addressing existential fears, societal worries and suppressed desires. The concepts of repression outlined by theorists like Sigmund Freud (1919) and Jacques Lacan (1979) in psychoanalysis form the basis for understanding how horror functions. Ideas such as the return of the repressed, the uncanny and the symbolic order are examined to show how horror works on subconscious levels and challenges societal norms. Freud's psychoanalytic theories, those concerning repression and the subconscious mind, form the basis of much academic conversation around horror. His ideas, such as the id, ego and superego, offer a structure for comprehending the psychological underpinnings of horror narratives. Freud's concept of repression, where distressing or unacceptable desires are pushed into the subconscious, is particularly relevant when analysing horror-fairytale films since these narratives often confront and symbolically reveal fears and desires.

We will also explore theoretical viewpoints from scholars like Barbara Creed (1986), Carol J. Clover (1992), and Andrew Tudor (1989) as their analyses provide insights into how horror elements in films emerge and contribute to our comprehension of psychological dynamics. Creeds' investigation of the monstrous feminine, Clover's examination of the final girl trope, and Tudor's exploration of the cultural significance of horror all present valuable frameworks for scrutinising the psychoanalytic aspects within horror-fairytale narratives. When delving into horror-fairytale film texts, it is essential to identify key characteristics of horror to contextualise and interpret the thematic and stylistic elements evident in the case studies that will be explored. Scholars like Robin Wood (1978), Christian Metz (1982), and Krin Gabbard, along with Glen Gabbard (1999), have made significant contributions to enhancing our comprehension of horror films and their defining features. Wood's concept of the "return of the repressed" in horror cinema emphasises how the unconscious mind influences the narrative and imagery in these films. He suggests that horror stories

often mirror societal fears and hidden desires through the portrayal of monsters and supernatural events. On the other hand, Metz delves into semiotic analysis to explore how visual and narrative techniques convey meaning and evoke emotional responses in horror cinema audiences. His research underscores the significance of scrutinising aspects like cinematography, editing, and sound design in understanding their psychological impact on audiences. The Gabbard's study of psychoanalytic film theory offers insights into how psychology intersects with cinema. Their examination of horror-fairytale films considers how these narratives tap into archetypal symbols, primal fears, and psychological conflicts by interpreting their deeper meanings through a psychoanalytic lens.

Integrating the perspectives from these scholars, such as those mentioned above, with insights from psychoanalytic theory, we gain a deeper understanding of the symbolism interwoven within horror and fairytale stories. By exploring the hidden meanings and symbolic representations within the discussed realms, this theoretical framework provides a structure for understanding the latent meanings and allegorical representations embedded within the selected case studies. Thus, by contextualising horror and fairy tale narratives in cultural, historical, and psychoanalytic contexts, the study aims to uncover various theoretical perspectives like feminist theory, genre theory and psychoanalytic theory to enhance the analysis of the films examined in the thesis. This section establishes a foundation for the chapters of the thesis.

## 1.3 THESIS STRUCTURE

The forthcoming chapters will adhere to a thematic layout.

The selection of case studies across all three chapters is deliberate in its aim to enhance our comprehension of how horror and fairy tales intersect. The research will particularly focus on how young protagonists in these films serve as channels for exploring complex thematic elements. Focusing on young protagonists or the "child" characters, we will delve into deeper discussions surrounding themes such as coming of age, trauma, loss of innocence and their significance within horror and fairy tale

narratives. Given Disney's seminal role in children's entertainment, critically examining contemporary films encapsulating the essence of both horror and fairy tale narratives becomes imperative. Especially when considering movies that appeal to both children and adult audiences. Crucially, adopting a postmodern lens is a key aspect of this investigation. By embracing the ideas of postmodernism, these chapters aim to break down conventional narrative paradigms and interrogate established tropes in horror and fairy tale genres. This is done to identify narrative patterns, stylistic elements and recurring themes within both genres. Such an approach facilitates a nuanced examination of how these contemporary films navigate and challenge traditional conventions, providing new perspectives on the changing landscape of storytelling. Through this analysis, this study aims to uncover the factors contributing to the success of these cinematic works, shedding light on their effectiveness in capturing the essence of horror and fairy tale narratives.

**Chapter 1: Beyond Tradition: Postmodern Retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood***

This chapter looks at reinterpretations of *Little Red Riding Hood* from a feminist perspective, focusing on themes of female empowerment, trauma, gender-based violence and coming of age. Through an in-depth investigation of case studies, *Freeway* (1996), directed by Matthew Bright, and *Hanna* (2011), directed by Joe Wright, we centralise girlhood and demonstrate how these postmodern films creatively blend fairy tale and horror elements within the thriller genre to challenge conventional gender roles and narrative structures.

In this chapter, we critically assess how these films disrupt established assumptions about retelling classic fairytales through the lens of postmodernism and intertextuality. By exploring genre hybridity, we analyse how *Freeway* and *Hanna* weave in aspects of horror and fairy tales despite being categorised primarily as thrillers. Exploring how they push the boundaries of genre conventions and offer fresh interpretations that resonate with contemporary audiences.

The analysis will discern how these films engage with horror and fairy tales, using techniques such as assemblages and collages of character, motifs, and signifiers, along with setting and narrative choices, to convey their intended message effectively.

While *Hanna* (2011) may not overtly resemble the traditional *Little Red Riding Hood* story, I argue that it can be interpreted as a modern retelling of the tale, showcasing the flexibility and adaptability of the narrative motif.

This comprehensive analysis seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how postmodern filmmakers reimagine classic fairy tales and analyse the cultural relevance of horror-fairy tale films in light of contemporary societal concerns.

**Chapter 2: Deconstructing Childhood: Postmodern Perspectives in Children's Animated Films**

This chapter adopts a multi-perspective approach to investigate the depiction of childhood in animated children's films through the lens of postmodernism and psychoanalytic theory. Postmodern animated films depart from traditional animation by featuring nonlinear narratives, surreal visuals, and unconventional themes.

Through case studies of *Frankenweenie* (2012), directed by Tim Burton, *Coraline* (2009), directed by Henry Selick and *The Wolf House* (2018), directed by Cristobal Leon & Joaquin Cocina, we will delve into the postmodern techniques these animated films utilise. How they blend elements of fairy tales and horror to create unique works of art that challenge our perceptions and push the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable in animation. A central aspect of this chapter is how these animated works tackle themes like trauma, isolation and mortality. By taking an approach that draws from folklore studies, psychology and cultural analysis, we will critically evaluate how postmodern animations question traditional ideas of childhood innocence and move into more complex subjects often considered off-limits in children's animation.

Through theoretical frameworks such as Fusion and Fission, the theory of Metamorphosis and the concept of the Uncanny, we aim to explore how animation serves as a medium for processing psychological trauma. By examining how animation can help process trauma, this thesis seeks to gain a deeper understanding of its impact on mental health and identity development. Furthermore, we will investigate animation's symbolic form, process-oriented characteristics, sequential structure, and

temporal aspects, including potential patterns of repetition and manipulation through editing techniques.

This chapter adds to discussions on horror, fairy tales and animation studies by examining its visual appeal, narrative methods and thematic elements. It sheds light on the worlds depicted in postmodern animated films and how they influence our views on childhood and storytelling in today's era.

**Chapter 3: Reality Meets Fantasy: An Analysis of *Pan's Labyrinth***

This chapter delves into *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), directed by Guillermo del Toro. We examine how it merges reality with fantasy elements and tackles themes like trauma, fascism, war and loss of innocence. This chapter draws from political and historical references along with psychoanalytic insights as we uncover how this film conveys emotional conflicts and reflections on national traumas.

Following Chapter 2, we shall expand on the analysis made in the case study *The Wolf House* (2018), which commences my departure from Hollywood and acts as a link to *Pan's Labyrinth* as we explore horror-fairy tale narratives within a global cultural context. Specifically, the importance of the cultural landscape both films provide, for instance, how *The Wolf House* draws inspiration from Chilean folklore and history and, subsequently, *Pan's Labyrinth* interwoven Spanish history and folklore, which offers a poignant commentary on the nation's tumultuous past. Both stories share a theme of exploring the loss of childhood innocence amidst national upheavals but present them through distinct narrative styles and visual aesthetics.

This shift is an effort to underscore the relevance of psychoanalytic frameworks and theoretical perspectives across cultures while also acknowledging the unique cultural nuances that shape each narrative. *The Wolf House* serves to contextualise and deepen our understanding of the themes and motifs present in *Pan's Labyrinth* while also highlighting the versatility of horror-fairy tale narratives across different mediums. Examining how animation and live-action cinema intersect in their exploration of psychological and societal issues, we gain insight into the broader implications of horror-fairy tale storytelling and its significance within contemporary cultural discourse.

By analysing the narrative structure and thematic elements of *Pan's Labyrinth*, I aim to elucidate the potential of the horror-fairy tale genre to break barriers within genre cinema and offer emotionally compelling approaches to storytelling.

# 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 THE INTERSECTION OF HORROR AND FAIRY TALES

In the scholarship discourse on horror and fairy tales, striking parallels suggest both are reactionary in their intentions yet revolutionary in their possibilities. Psychoanalytic analysis and cultural theorists have highlighted how both genres shape and reflect shifting social conditions and expectations. The horror genre taps into some of our deepest fears, seeking to stir emotions in its audience that are connected with dread of the unknown, an intense danger, or simply "disdain over its expected fallout" emerging from the fulfilment of that danger (Weaver & Tamborini, 1996, pp. 11-15). Jessica McCort's edited collection *Reading in the Dark: Horror in Children's Literature and Culture* explores why horror matters and emphasizes the importance of being frightened. McCort (2016) uses this expression to describe texts for younger readers that use tropes not just to scare but rather to create reader agency and excitement. Maria Tatar refers to this as the "pedagogy of fear" used in early works for children, such as Grimms' fairy tales, which used horror tropes to frighten children into socially acceptable behaviour (Tatar, 1992, p. 22). Smith notes that many horror stories written for younger audiences tended to be "ghostly rather than horrific" (Smith, 1996, p. 88), sugar-coating certain scenarios in order to make them seem less frightening. Twitchell (1985) views horror films as modern morality tales that can educate adolescents about appropriate sexual conduct. He states that 'horror myths establish social patterns not of escape but entry', serving to maintain such institutions as monogamy, marriage and the nuclear family (p. 7). Fairy tales have long been seen as moral teachings, with Bruno Bettelheim noting they provide a means of dealing with confusion, inner turmoil and certain drives which the pubescent ego must learn to control. Thus, fairy tales

serve an explicitly moral purpose. However, their morality does not necessarily draw readers in; rather, these texts offer opportunities to challenge existing conventions (Bettelheim, 1976, p. 73).

Scholarly discussions have explored the relationship between fairy tales and horror films as distinct but interconnected genres, revealing shared artistic forms and cultural functions. Horror's cultural traditions, featuring monsters of myth and legend such as devils, vampires, ghosts, and ghouls, can be traced back to ancient times; its legacy of fairy tales also endures today. In fact, the gothic movement of the eighteenth century in literature, marked by supernatural shocks, bodily horror and gore-filled scenes, shares many similarities to contemporary horror film elements. Early horror film adaptations of gothic novels, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, were brought to life onscreen between the 1910s and 1920s. Horror films made a major breakthrough in the early 20th century when films such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *Nosferatu* (1922) and Universal Pictures productions in the 1930s established iconic conventions that would become staples within this genre. Subsequently, technological and scientific-themed horror films like *Them!* (1954) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) emerged, reflecting society's rapidly advancing scientific and technological developments at that time. In the 1970s, horror cinema saw a rise in slasher films and an emergence of horror auteurs. Films such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978) inspired feminist criticism, contending that these works reinforced conservative views of women through victimisation and framing techniques. Female characters, often depicted as sexually active young women, were frequently the victims of monstrous figures. Carol J. Clover popularised the term "Final girl" to describe a young woman who emerges as the sole survivor and faces down the film's monster, often experiencing an internal transformation from passivity to agency, from victim to hero (Clover, 1992). For instance, Jamie Lee Curtis portrays Laurie in *Halloween*, embodying this archetypal Final girl figure.

Fairy tales and horror have several elements in common, including the possibilities and pleasures offered by a fictional realm where many rules no longer apply. According to Selbo (2011), horror fans are drawn to the exploration of evil that pervades our

everyday lives. The genre offers viewers a safe space where they can confront their most intense fears emotionally and physically without fear of judgement or punishment (p. 18). Both genres have similar settings. Fairy tales often occur in isolated settings like woods or palaces, similar to horror films, which frequently depict wilderness locations and haunted houses. While horror films may also take place in urban settings, they often depict marginalised spaces like *Candyman* (1992) or *Attack the Block* (2011), which are set in government housing complexes. Mikel Koven's research into film, folklore, and urban legends has identified four basic plot structures shared by both genres. The classic "Little Red Riding Hood" narrative follows a hero/heroine into the unknown, only to be met by an evil monster. Conversely, "Hansel and Gretel" involves heroes entering into a wolf's den where they confront horror on its home turf. The "Bluebeard" plot line follows when our hero/heroine discovers that someone they had trusted is more sinister than they thought. Finally, "Beauty and the Beast" illustrates this notion where someone or something previously considered to be a monster ends up becoming more human than those around them (Koven, 2008). These categories help break down complex horror films and fairy tale plotlines into digestible pieces.

Horror narratives often employ "complex machinery" to create an atmosphere that sets it apart from other film genres (Lema, 2015, p.17). Like other genres, horror often explores human needs and desires as defined by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Horror can be seen as an ambiguous tale, similar to fairy tales in its lack of separation between reality and fantasy. It draws us into another realm that may be beyond human comprehension or understanding. Dégh (1991) refers to fairy tale films as "shape shifters and medium breakers" (p. 70) they draw from older oral tales, Perrault's, The Brothers Grimm, as well as more modern Walt Disney versions. Horror can be described as an alternate reality where elements from fairy tales linger, though in a different context. Horror stories typically feature monstrous creatures that Noel Carroll notes are both grounded in fear and both embrace this element of the unknown. He highlights a distinction between horror stories and fairy tale monsters: monsters in horror tales are extraordinary creatures living in an ordinary world, while fairy tale monsters typically originate from an extraordinary realm (Carroll, 1987, p. 52). However, it should be noted that this distinction may vary depending on the specific storyline as contemporary horror narratives often feature monsters who do not necessarily fit this traditional dichotomy. Carroll (1987) suggests that horror as a genre

seeks to elicit specific emotional responses from viewers by manipulating characters within the narrative, creating an unsettling sensation of anxiety and unease (p. 52). Popular horror films like *Halloween* (1978) and *Friday the 13th* (1980) demonstrate this phenomenon, where unpredictable plotlines and suspension of disbelief create an atmosphere of unease for their audiences. Lisa Chinitz's *Fairy Tale Turned Ghost Story: James's The Turn of the Screw* examines how fairy tale elements are combined with Victorian ghost story elements to create an uncanny crisis of reality. Henry James' novel *The Turn of the Screw*, published in 1898, epitomizes Victorian horror. It paints an intense picture of an unknowable child with endless questions that remain unanswered. A world seemingly normal is transformed by supernatural events, creating a haunted atmosphere filled with ghosts, strange noises, and an eerie setting for the uncanny to emerge. James achieves this with his version of the uncanny, an ambiguous portrayal of characters combined with ghostly allusions that serve as a doppelganger to the fairy tale which they are mimicking (Chinitz, 1994, pp. 265-268). Freud described the concept of doppelgangers, which can be traced back to fairy tales, as a repetition of childhood fantasies or beliefs that have been abandoned or suppressed (Freud, 1919). Jack Zipes' work on *Little Red Riding Hood* further illuminates Freud's concept of doppelgangers through fairy tales and horror. *Little Red Riding Hood* depicts the female child's sexual awakening as she enters the forest and encounters an older male figure, the wolf, symbolising predation and serving as a counterbalance to Little Red Riding Hood's perceived innocence (Zipes, 1993). Todorov (1975) highlights literature and film's role in challenging our perceptions of reality while exploring the complex relationship between conscious and unconscious minds. In his work, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre*, he explores Freud's concept of the uncanny, caused when something that should be familiar is somehow altered into something alienating or uncomfortable. Stating that this feeling can be used to create horror in literature and film, as well as explore psychological themes like suppressed desires or anxieties (pp. 92-150).

Horror can instil fear in viewers through both subconscious and conscious means, drawing them into the storyline. Bettelheim (1976) asserts that children read fairy tales because they identify with the young protagonist, comparing and contrasting their experiences to those of the characters. In tales such as *The Turn of the Screw*, readers

experience sadness, confusion and fear alongside its characters. It also features two deceitful, uncanny child figures who exert complete control over both the story and their own lives. Horror and fairy tales share another common element: the protagonist's struggle with emotional turmoil. This ultimately determines both their story's outcome and that of its audience. Grimms fairy tales often undergo changes that promise a happier ending; stories like *The Turn of the Screw* illuminate these darker elements through cannibalism, abuse, gore and apparitions. With its inherent ambivalence between good and evil, horror fiction seems to emphasise the darker aspects of fairy tales more - an extension of their traditions.

The tradition of fairy tales is rooted in oral culture and has become deeply embedded in popular spoken culture passed down through generations to impart knowledge about people's culture, customs, and behaviours. Before the invention of writing and record-keeping, stories were communicated through spoken words. Stories have long been used as a form of oratorical entertainment, with mothers tucking their children into bed with a sweet melody and minds wandering free in search of tales to amuse their offspring. Our need for connection with the world has inspired countless artistic expressions throughout history. Samuel Johnson famously said, "The seeds of knowledge may be planted in solitude, but must be cultivated in public," underscoring the communal aspect of storytelling (Johnson et al., 1977, p. 215). Scholars have attempted to define oral tradition in various ways. Jan Vansina succinctly described it as "documents of the present" that convey a message from the past (Vansina, 1985, xii). Turner places it within the field of literary studies, noting that its scope extends back to include the crucial period in human prehistory when biological evolution met cultural evolution (Turner, 1986, p. 68). Rosenberg (1987) describes it this way: "Oral tradition is the transmission of cultural items from one member to another or others. Those items are heard, stored in memory, and, when appropriate, recalled at the moment of subsequent transmission." (p. 80). This brings us back to stories' central role in oral tradition. Stories often unfold in a nonlinear fashion. Different versions of events exist, and questions about their accuracy arise. Narratives told by individuals may be altered or embellished due to human memory's capacity for falsification; therefore, we should exercise caution when recounting stories from others. Due to a lack of written records, fairy tales in oral tradition tend to be fluid and variable. Despite these difficulties, patterns can be observed in the rise of dominant oral practices like

legends, myths, folktales, folksongs and proverbs. According to Burke (1993), different social groups use various varieties of language; it reflects the society or culture in which it is used and shapes that language in poetic form or rhyme, story form, proverbs or other forms. Analysing some of these concepts further reveals the possibilities for different interpretations in relation to time, space and language. Different 'characters', 'places' or 'times' may exist depending on socio-cultural values and traditions. Oral tradition tells not only a story from the past but also portrays contemporary social, cultural and linguistic structure within society (Burke, 1993, p. 7).

To further illustrate this point, we utilise the term “Folk” to refer to any group of people with at least one common characteristic. Therefore, folklore, as a verbal representation of popular history and literature, offers insight into questions of power and transmission from a localised perspective that explores how oral traditions in various communities have been affected by external factors (Cooper, 1996). African folklore often features the *Trickster* figure as someone who challenges authority through wit and cunning, reflecting the improvisational nature of oral storytelling traditions (Gates, Jr.,1988). Japanese folklore features supernatural creatures known as *Yokai*, which exhibit human-like qualities and emotions. Examples include the *Yuki-onna* - a beautiful but deadly spirit symbolising cultural fears about women's sexuality and desire (Hearn, 1971). South American folklore tells of *La Llorona*, or "weeping woman," who symbolises cultural expectations that women be nurturing mothers. She is depicted as a grief-stricken ghost who drowned her own children (Bueno, André, & Agosín, 2012). These examples demonstrate how cultural and historical contexts influence folklore themes and motifs. Folkloric expression not only helps to preserve culture but also provides a channel for suppressed social feelings. Ziolkowski (2002) notes that fairy tales were often orally told by people from lower economic strata, such as illiterate or poor individuals. Ancient depictions of fairy-tale tellers in art and literature often show them as debased creatures: drunken old women serving criminal outcasts (p. 90-95). Folklorists such as Pierre Jakez Helias noted the poverty and neediness of many fairy-tale tellers he encountered, labelling them "des necessiteux, des mendiants" (impecunious ones, beggars) (Helias, 1990, as cited in Silva, 2010, p. 402). Bengt Holbek's analysis of empirical evidence leads to the conclusion that fairy tales were mostly told among the poor (Holbek, 1987, as cited in Silva, 2010). Nonetheless,

folklore acts as a link between non-literate and literate societies, providing communication and cultural transmission (Ziolkowski, 2002).

Folklore and fairy tales have experienced a major transformation in terms of both audience and purpose. With the rise of class and institutionalised religion, the historical reception of these narratives underwent negative modifications due to aesthetic norms, educational standards, and market forces. Nowadays, it can be difficult to differentiate between folktales and fairy tales and comprehend how their impact stems from imaginative grasp and symbolic depictions of social realities. Drawing upon Walter Benjamin's (1936) *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* theory that stories became obsolete with the rise of mechanical production in societies, we can use "aura" as a key concept to comprehend the evolving nature of folk and fairy tales. Benjamin described the aura of a work of art as being comprised of symbolic qualities that give it independence (Benjamin & Underwood, 2008), and Jack Zipes elaborated on this idea in his writing. Zipes (2002) suggested that folklore's aura is determined by how well its creators express and fulfil their needs through symbolic acts and imaginative works. This interpretation emphasises how folklore contains content and narrative themes rooted in specific places and times, with deep connections to a specific community of interest. However, in modern times, folktales have been commercialised and taken out of the cultural contexts where they once thrived. Modernised editions of folktales are highly publicised, while literary fairy tales and other mass-mediated storytelling forms have taken over, leading to the loss of aura for oral arts such as folktales. This commercialization and commodification has severed their connections with communities and contexts from which they originated, turning them into products meant for consumption (p. 6-7). Folktales have undergone a profound shift, impacting how they are understood and received. Market-driven approaches have often distorted their original messages to fit consumer desires or follow current fashions; as a result, modern adaptations often dilute or eliminate symbolic elements once found within folktales in favour of commercial success at the expense of cultural authenticity. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on aesthetic norms, educational standards and market conditions in the reception of folktales has led to the homogenization of these narratives, erasing their diversity and complexity. Folktales from different cultural traditions are often homogenised to fit mainstream expectations,

perpetuating stereotypes and discrediting their rich cultural heritage (Greenhill, P., & Matrix, S.,2010).

The advent of mass-mediated storytelling, such as literary fairy tales, has dramatically altered the relationship between folk/fairy tales and horror. The institutionalisation of fairy tales and growing concern over their potential negative effects on children intensified censorship and modification throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. This period marked a turning point in how fairy tales were used as didactic moralising tools. Fairy tales' transition from oral tradition to print media profoundly affected their audience. From being strictly adult entertainment, they became more of a staple genre within children's literature. Maria Tatar's book *Off with Their Heads* (1992) examines the moralistic violence inherent in fairy tale adaptation for child audiences. She addresses the omission of details regarding sexual acts, anti-religious sentiment and other sensitive subjects; however, she emphasizes that violence was used as a teaching moment for readers; "Rather than disguising it or erasing it completely," they preserved and often intensified it when scenes of physical suffering or mental torment could be linked to higher moral purposes" (Tatar, 1992, p. 5). In many cases, however, moralising stories were a motivation for increasing violence. According to Tatar (1992, p 11), recording and collecting moral lessons often permitted authors to emphasise or exaggerate descriptions of punishment and death in their accounts. *Cinderella* by the Brothers Grimm is an example of this change; between its first and second editions, there was an increase in violence with respect to the storyline of the stepsisters and what their actions ultimately resulted in. In the first edition, they are horrified and turn pale; however, after becoming "a big hit with children", the second edition escalated the violence even further by having pigeons peck out their eyes, leaving them blind (Tatar, 1992, p. 7). Tatar asserts that these tales are much gentler than expected, considering the level of cruelty and violence present. By the turn of the 19th century, parents and educators began to express concern about the potential harm that fairy tales could have on children. Many believed these tales to be too violent, sexual, or frightening for young readers and should be altered or censored to remove such elements. This led to increased censorship within several tales, including Grimms' collection, which led to its removal.

In the Grimms' original version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, for instance, the girl is not saved by the woodsman but instead devoured by the wolf. Later retellings changed this ending to make it less violent and more morally uplifting. In *Cinderella*, stepsisters cut off their toes and heels in an effort to fit into the glass slipper; this detail was often left out later in retellings. Additionally, their version of *Snow White* contained some gory details, such as having the queen dance in red-hot iron shoes until she dies. Alison Lurie notes that despite Perrault and the Grimms' efforts at socialising and sanitising fairy tales, some parents and educators still objected to their heavy-handed justice and violent content (Roberts, 2001, p. 516). As fairy tales gained popularity during the 19th and 20th centuries, censorship and modification of these tales continued. The Walt Disney Company, in particular, was known for producing sanitised versions of classic fairy tales like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) or *Cinderella* (1950), which removed much of the violence or sexual content found in original tales. The suppression of horror elements in films rated for children has a long-standing tradition. For instance, the Hays Code (1930 to 1968), an extensive set of guidelines that guided Hollywood movie content, had strict regulations about what could and couldn't be shown in children's films (Smith, 2005). Due to conservative moral and religious convictions, film producers often toned down horror and violence in films. A notable example was *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), which was rated G for general audiences. In L. Frank Baum's original book, the Wicked Witch of the West was much more terrifying and sinister than her portrayal in the film. To make the film more suitable for children, producers deliberately toned down her appearance and actions in the film. In the UK, there were instances of censoring horror elements in films rated for children. The British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), established in 1912, had strict guidelines regarding content exhibited to audiences under 16; these classification guidelines were based on the idea that children are impressionable and thus require protection from potentially damaging or disturbing material (Smith, 2005). An example of this is seen in the 1954 British film adaptation of *Hansel and Gretel* by John Paul. The film included a scene where Hansel and Gretel meet a witch who attempts to cook or eat them; this scene was deemed unsuitable for children, and before its release, the BBFC recommended that the film make cuts in order to obtain a certificate. This advisory approach aimed to ensure the film’s content met the BBFC’s standards for classification and could be safely viewed by the intended age group. These instances

of conformity raise concerns about censorship and limitations on filmmakers' ability to fully explore certain themes or depict scenes as originally intended, potentially hindering the impact or message of a film. It also leads to discussions of the artistic integrity of films and freedom of expression within the film industry.

Folk/Fairy tales and horror are constantly evolving, shaped by historical reception, cultural norms, and market forces. While the commercialization and commodification of folktales may have diminished some of their original horror elements, contemporary adaptations and retellings continue to explore and reinterpret the darker aspects of these stories, reflecting the ongoing fascination with horror in modern society.

## 2.2 PSYCHOANALYTIC INTERPRETATIONS OF HORROR IN FAIRY TALES

Spanning in its stories, fairy tales have long been the subject of significant scholarly exploration, with scholars such as Max Lüthi and Bruno Bettelheim proposing theoretical frameworks to comprehend both narrative and formal patterns, as well as psychoanalytical and sociohistorical elements of the genre. Lüthi identified peculiar stylistic features like formulas/repetitions, parataxis, characters' flatness and absence of internal focalisation, space and time indefiniteness (Lüthi, 1986). This helped explain why fairy tales remain popular today despite their unique structure and literary techniques employed, contributing to their timeless appeal and recognizability.

Psychoanalytic theory offers a fascinating explanation for the horror elements often present in fairy tales. According to psychoanalysis, these stories bring out unconscious desires from within us, which then manifest as feelings of fear or unease. When it comes to horror and fairy tales, looking through psychoanalytic interpretations sheds light on the connection between horror and fairy tale narratives and the human psyche. When discussing horror and psychoanalysis, this has led theorists to explore why horror is so appealing in popular culture and what psychological factors drive this

appeal. Andrew Tudor, in his book *Why Horror? The Unique Pleasures of a Popular Genre* (1997) argues that considering psychoanalytic perspectives is crucial for grasping the genre's allure. By examining Freudian theory, particularly the concept of repression and delving into the uncanny, horror narratives unveil deeper meanings that resonate with audiences at a subconscious level. Tudor (1997) suggests an approach to dissecting horror that incorporates psychoanalytic elements alongside a broader social and textual analysis. He highlights how the genre relies on Freudian concepts like the repression model to delve into characters' psychopathology and motivations. Within horror narratives, characters often struggle with suppressed childhood traumas, manifesting in unsettling and uncanny scenarios. Freud's (1919) idea of "the uncanny," representing something once familiar but now repressed, provides a framework for understanding the eerie and disturbing aspects found in horror narratives. Horror narratives serve as a medium to address and delve into these repressed aspects of our psyche, offering a cathartic experience for the audience. The allure of horror lies in its ability to elicit emotions ranging from fear to intrigue. According to Twitchell (1998), horror tales act as myths that tackle societal fears and uphold social standards. By bringing suppressed thoughts to the surface, horror narratives provide a context for discussing taboo topics and unexpressed desires. Whether through counterphobic responses, sublimated desires or serving as a rite of passage, horror narratives offer a controlled environment for engaging with repressed effects and cultural anxieties (Twitchell, 1998, p. 85). On the topic of the return of the repressed, Robin Wood's concept of surplus repression underscores how repressed desires are influenced by social and cultural contexts, especially regarding sexuality and primal fears (Wood, 1978). He further emphasises the role of the horror genre as a vehicle for the representation of culturally marginalised groups, particularly through its treatment of monsters. Wood (1978) asserts that the horror genre captures the conditions under which a dream can become a nightmare, where a repressed desire becomes so terrible and loathsome in consciousness that it must be rejected yet still holds power to create serious danger. In his 1979 essay, *An Introduction to the American Horror* Film, a common theme emerges from his analysis of horror films: the challenge to normalcy posed by the monstrous. Wood defines normalcy as conformity to dominant social norms. Arguing that monsters threatening these norms tap into an unconscious desire to return to a carefree existence outside societal boundaries (Wood, 1979, pp. 7-28).

However, other psychoanalytic film theorists propose an alternative view, arguing that horror films actually represent repressed and unpleasant aspects of early childhood. Krin Gabbard and Glen Gabbard (1987) argue that horror films trigger infantile fears but offer enjoyment to viewers by allowing them to master and alleviate these fears. Twitchell (1985) notes that distortions of real-life situations as depicted in horror films serve as a form of instruction, helping individuals retain rather than overcome their repressions. Clover (1987) proposes that horror films simultaneously depict pleasurable and unpleasurable childhood elements, catering to viewers' desires to relive pleasant experiences while overcoming unpleasant ones (p.95).

Creed's 1986 work in *Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection* dissects the horror genre through structural psychoanalysis influenced in part by feminist film theory and further provides valuable insights into the subconscious elements portrayed in its cinematic representations. Structural psychoanalysis enables an examination of how fear is constructed in horror films by dissecting its cinematic techniques and visual elements. This interpretive method uncovers complex meanings through close textual analysis, revealing the inner workings of our unconscious minds and beliefs. In her research, Creed (1986) focuses on how femininity is depicted in horror films, drawing upon Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection inspired by Lacanian theory, through the representation of monstrous feminine figures, such as the witch or the femme fatale, which often evoke feelings of fear and repulsion as they disrupt normative notions of femininity and maternal nurturing. This framework sheds light on how audiences confront what is considered repulsive before reinforcing boundaries between human and non-human entities. It emphasises the role of horror films in questioning and redefining societal standards, providing audiences with an emotional release that teeters between fascination and revulsion. Creed's analysis goes beyond looking at individual characters to examine the broader thematic elements of horror narratives, such as death, transformation and the uncanny. Uncovering the symbolic importance of these portrayals that showcase how horror narratives address cultural fears and societal taboos surrounding femininity and maternal figures (Creed, 1986, pp. 52-55). This highlights how horror films serve as a space for dialogue and change by challenging established norms and encouraging collective exploration of human emotions. Horror films often delve into themes like death and monstrous feminine to

ultimately confront and uphold societal norms, especially focusing on the mother figure and her associated universe. Clover's (1992) structural psychoanalysis of horror films centres on the sadistic/voyeuristic gaze prevalent in these horror films, particularly regarding how female characters are portrayed. Clover (1992) suggests that certain horror films provoke both an aggressive and a sympathetic view from their viewers, stating it as an “assaultive” and “reactive” gaze. The “assaultive” view, further developed by Laura Mulvey in its gendered aspect, aligns with the sadistic/voyeuristic gaze associated with identifying with the camera, as seen in scenes featuring predatory killers. On the other hand, the “reactive” view involves emotionally connecting with characters, where audiences experience the terror rather than participating in it. This emotional connection dominates the visual regime of horror, contributing to its immersive and unsettling nature (Clover, 1992, pp. 205-229).

The insights shared by Barbara Creed, Carol J. Clover and other theorists regarding the aspects of horror in cinema are relevant when examining horror in fairy tales. Applying psychoanalytic frameworks to analyse fairy tales can provide a deeper understanding of their underlying themes, patterns, and appeal. The concept of the feminine, as discussed by Barbara Creed, can be applied to fairy tales to explore how female characters are depicted. Numerous fairy tales showcase mysterious and occasionally menacing female figures like witches, stepmothers, or magical entities. These characters embody qualities that evoke fear as well as fascination and ambivalence. Delving into these depictions from a psychoanalytic lens, we can start to unveil layers of meaning concerning gender roles, power dynamics and societal expectations. Furthermore, Clover’s analysis of the gaze in horror films can be expanded to fairy tales to delve into the dynamics of spectatorship and identification. In fairy tales, audiences often sympathise with the protagonist as they navigate through trials, encounters with monsters and confrontations with the unfamiliar. By considering how audiences connect with fairy tales through empathy and identification, we better understand these narratives' emotional and psychological significance.

Fairy tales serve as gateways between fantasy and reality, offering a safe space to explore their unconscious desires and anxieties without judgement or confrontation. They often explore and express these desires symbolically through characters, events,

and themes. In the book *Playing and Reality*, psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott popularised the concept of “transitional objects” and “transitional phenomena”. Transitional objects are physical items like stuffed animals or blankets that children use to move from subjective experience of their mother's body to objective reality of the outside world, while transitional phenomena refer to imagined experiences and play activities which assist children in making this transition from primary maternal dependence to relative independence (Winnicott, 2005). The concept of transitional objects and transitional phenomena can serve as a useful framework in the horror-fairy tale genre. It can be seen in the relationship between the audience and the horror-fairy tale genre itself. Winnicott (2005) suggests that fairy tales' vivid imagery and archetypal characters could serve as transitional phenomena for children. Many fairy tales feature scary elements such as witches, monsters and dark forests; this may help children cope with transitioning between phases in their development. Bettelheim's work, The Uses of Enchantment, further expresses the sentiment that fairy tales serve as symbolic representations of the human psyche, providing individuals with an accessible way to connect to the story and understand complex emotional experiences in a developmentally appropriate manner (Bettelheim, 1976). It is essential to comprehend the developmental stages individuals go through as they mature and develop in order to analyse horror elements present in fairy tales. Different age groups interpret fairy tales differently, and the themes and symbols within these stories may be understood based on the developmental stage of the listener. Young children may not fully comprehend the symbolic significance behind certain elements in a fairy tale, while older children and adults are more likely to interpret the story at an in-depth level. Fairy tales often depict different stages of development, such as oral, anal, and phallic stages. For instance, in Freudian interpretation, the fairy tale of *Hansel and Gretel* can be interpreted as a representation of the anal stage, where children find pleasure and satisfaction in controlling and eliminating bodily waste. The witch who intends to cook and eat Hansel and Gretel could represent fear of punishment associated with performing bodily functions.

Bettelheim (1976) cites Freud's concept of the Oedipal complex as applied to fairy tales. This complex describes an unconscious desire that children have for their opposite-sex parent as well as feelings of jealousy or hostility towards that same-sex

parent. Many fairy tales explore these themes through the relationships between parents and children, especially in tales where the main character seeks love from a parental figure. This complex is illustrated in fairy tales such as *Cinderella*, where the protagonist yearns for her father's affection but must compete with her stepmother. The stepmother represents a same-sex parent, and this rivalry serves to reinforce how much children desire to rid themselves of this bond (Bettelheim, 1976, pp. 456-462). Ben-Amos (1994) contends that Bettelheim's psychoanalytic approach to fairy tales is overly simplistic and fails to consider the cultural and historical context in which they were created and transmitted. He criticises Bettelheim's emphasis on the oedipal complex and parental involvement in children's development, contending that his focus on the psychological aspects of fairy tales neglects their social and political implications. He asserts that fairy tales are not only about individual psychological development but also reflect cultural values and societal norms (Ben-Amos, 1994).

Psychoanalyst Marie-Louise von Franz's work offers an example of a trans-cultural psychoanalytic approach that takes into account the cultural and historical setting in which fairy tales were created. Von Franz (1977) examined Grimm's tale *The Girl Without Hands* within the context of the Protestant Reformation and Calvinism's rise in Europe. She suggested that it reflects anxiety and guilt associated with predestination, a core Calvinist doctrine. In the tale, the protagonist is born without hands as punishment for her father's covenant with Satan - signifying that one's fate can be predetermined through one's ancestors' sins. Von Franz's approach emphasises the significance of comprehending both the cultural and historical setting in which fairy tales were created and acknowledging their universal psychological themes (Von Franz, 1977).

The symbolism in fairy tales is further supported by the theory of collective unconscious proposed by Carl Jung. Jung (1991) posited that the collective unconscious is an expansive pool of psychological experiences shared by all humans, regardless of their individual histories. Fairy tales offer us a window into the collective unconscious through archetypal characters and themes found throughout numerous stories. Archetypes such as the hero, villain and trickster serve to illustrate universal human experiences and desires that are shared by all people. For instance, the fairy tale *Little*

*Red Riding Hood* can be interpreted as a metaphor for sexual awakening and desire, with the wolf representing unconscious desires within the protagonist who both loves him and fears him. The woods where the wolf lives symbolise both unknown territory and unfamiliarity, symbolising both dangers and rewards associated with sexual awakening (Jung,1991).

Psychoanalytic approaches can also use cultural and historical context to explore the deeper meanings behind folklore tales. Carl Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz have studied the *Trickster* motif in African folklore as well as other cultures, suggesting it represents an archetypal energy from within our collective unconscious. They contend that the *Trickster* figure embodies human creativity, mischief-making, and transformation; its appearance in folklore serves to reflect this universal human trait. Von Franz (1994) and Jung (1991) also examined Korean folklore to explore the figure of the *Tiger*, which often appears as a powerful yet dangerous creature that must be tamed or defeated to bring peace back into society. Jung and von Franz interpret the *Tiger* as a metaphor for the collective unconscious, signifying its raw power that must be harnessed and integrated if individuals and communities are to thrive. Von Franz (1994) explores the symbolism of the *Tiger* in Korean folklore in her book *The Way of the Dream*. She observes that this animal is often associated with femininity and symbolises both instinctual and wild aspects of one's personality. She suggests that the *Tiger* can represent repressed aspects of one's personality that need to be brought into consciousness. Jung (1991) also discussed the symbolism of the *Tiger* in Korean folklore in his work on archetypes. He observes that the *Tiger* is often depicted as a metaphor for the shadow or dark and repressed aspects of one's personality which are projected onto others. He suggests the *Tiger* may symbolise the animus, the masculine aspect of a woman's soul, and serve as a reminder of our ongoing quest for individuation. Okuhara (2000) describes other instances of the *Yokai* in Japanese folklore, noting that their presence could be seen as a reflection of Japan's isolationist policies during the Edo period (1603-1868) when contact with foreign cultures was strictly limited. Foster (2014) argues that the *Yokai* represents a range of psychological anxieties and desires, such as fear of death, sexual desire, and social conformity. Additionally, he discusses how these characters have developed over time in Japan's

changing cultural and historical context, including Western cultural influences and World War II experiences.

The study of fairy tales from cross-cultural perspectives shows their deep importance as sources of shared wisdom and psychological understanding, especially in relation to horror elements. These stories offer ways to grasp complex emotional journeys and horror, often portrayed through monstrous beings, strange yet familiar settings and supernatural events. We also delved into the significance of placing them within their historical context by highlighting the common psychological themes found in horror fairy tales across different cultures to understand their subtle social and political meanings. By exploring fairy tales, including folk stories from cultural viewpoints, we can reveal deeper meanings behind symbols and themes that shed light on essential truths about human experiences, such as our deepest fears and worries. Through this examination, horror fairy tales emerge as powerful narratives that go beyond cultural borders, providing profound insights into the complexities of the human psyche and the collective unconsciousness.

**The Dual Nature of Horror-Fairy Tales: Positive and Negative Emotional Effects**

Academic researchers have discussed the positive and negative emotional effects of exposing children to the horror-fairy tale genre. On one hand, horror elements in stories can be thrilling and exciting, providing viewers with a sense of catharsis and release. Exposure to such elements helps individuals face their fears and anxieties in a safe and controlled manner. Conversely, these same elements can be frightening and traumatising for younger children who lack the cognitive capacity to interpret the symbolic nature of horror elements. Psychotherapist Joanne Cantor believes that exposure to frightening media may cause long-term anxiety, nightmares and phobias in children who tend towards fear or anxiety (Cantor, 2010). Research conducted by psychologists Brad Bushman and Craig Anderson in *Media and the Well-being of Children and Adolescents* (2018) demonstrated that exposure to violent media can increase aggressive behaviour in children and adolescents. Krishnamurti (2018) believes that early exposure to graphic violence and horror can desensitise children to violence, promote aggressive behaviour, and ultimately lead to desensitisation to real-life incidents of harm. Elizabeth Young in *Horror: A Literary History* (2016) contends

that this genre encourages patriarchy and heteronormative attitudes, as well as gender stereotypes which promote negative views toward women and other marginalised groups. Other scholars contend that exposure to horror-fairy tale stories can be beneficial for children's cognitive development, as it helps them decipher complex narratives and interpret symbolic significance more readily. Furthermore, reading aloud to children provides them with an opportunity to develop critical thinking skills as they analyse the plot, characters, and themes of a story. Jack Zipes (1987), Maria Tatar (1992), Kay Turner and Marina Warner (1994) are among those who believe the horror-fairy tale genre can have positive effects on children. They argue that such tales encourage emotional intelligence and resilience in children and promote critical thinking and moral reasoning while providing a safe space to express fears and anxieties.

Young (2016) discussion of gender stereotypes in fairy tales has sparked an animated debate among scholars in the field of fairy tale studies. While some laud her analysis for illuminating pervasive gender norms present in traditional fairy tales, others criticise it for various reasons. Young's analysis overlooks the many subversive retellings and adaptations of fairy tales that have appeared in recent years. These contemporary works strive to challenge traditional gender roles and promote more inclusive, empowering narratives. Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* and Neil Gaiman's *Snow, Glass, Apples* have both been cited as examples of fairy tale adaptations that challenge gender norms and explore complex topics like sexuality, power, and agency. In these retellings, female characters are often reimagined as active agents rather than passive objects of male desire, and traditional gender binaries are destabilised or subverted altogether.

Critics suggest Young's analysis may not consider these progressive adaptations and thus fail to provide a complete understanding of fairy tales' evolving nature and potential to challenge gender stereotypes. Critics of Young's analysis also contend that her approach may be too deterministic, presuming all readers or viewers will uncritically absorb gender stereotypes presented in fairy tales. Many scholars and readers alike hold that individuals can actively interpret and engage with these stories in personally meaningful and politically subversive ways, regardless of their gender

identity or cultural background. They insist that fairy tales can be read critically so readers can question and challenge any gender norms or stereotypes present within them. Rebecca Munford's essay *The Problem of Susan: Elizabeth Young and Feminist Nostalgia* in 2018 contends that Young's focus on subverting gender stereotypes in adaptations overlooks the fact that many original fairy tales were inherently patriarchal and misogynistic. Therefore, rather than trying to redeem problematic texts through adaptation, acknowledging and critiquing their problematic elements would be better. This perspective emphasises the significance of critically engaging with fairy tales' problematic elements while not glossing over the historical and cultural contexts from which they were created. Zipes (1979) contends that while it is essential to address problematic elements in fairy tales, such as gender roles, it is also vital to maintain their subversive nature. He maintains that fairy tales have always served as vehicles for social critique, and this function should not be lost in modern adaptations. Zipes (1979) advocates for a nuanced approach that acknowledges both their problematic aspects and appreciates their capacity to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles and norms.

In conclusion, the debate surrounding Elizabeth Young's assertion about gender stereotypes in fairy tales is intricate and multifaceted. Some scholars criticise her analysis for several reasons, such as failing to account for progressive adaptations and being overly deterministic; on the other hand, some back her focus on challenging traditional gender roles in fairy tales. This debate illustrates the ongoing research and discourse in fairy tale studies as scholars continue to delve into the changing nature of these tales and how they might affect gender norms or stereotypes. Additionally, it emphasises the significance of critically engaging with the historical and cultural contexts in which fairy tales were created, maintaining their subversive spirit while acknowledging problematic elements.

## 2.3 GENDER CRITICISM IN THE EVOLUTION OF FAIRY TALES AND THE RISE OF FEMINIST RETELLINGS

The Walt Disney Company has had a major influence over the popular culture of fairy tales, particularly through their cinematic genre of fairy tale films. By the turn of the nineteenth century, fairy tales had become socially institutionalised literary genres in most western countries. Adaptations were popular not only in books, but also theatre and schools which used them as teaching material. These performative adaptations were enjoyed not only by children but adults as well. With the birth of cinema, fairy tales were seen as the ideal model to be adapted for television (Greenhill et al., 2010). These were adapted in both live action movies and animation forms to form a new cinematographic genre known as "fairy tale film". Film took fairy tales to new heights, bringing us their magical contents in motion. Characters were recreated and we got a truer sense of the atmosphere created by these tales found both orally and literarily.

In the late 20th century, animation gained in popularity. Walt Disney was one of the leading animators within this field. His work was inspired by oral sources as well as literature; he would craft his own versions of fairy tales to appeal to a wider audience, employing charming cinematic innovations in order to bring them alive on screen (Dundes, 2019). Over time, this became a standard formula, becoming an alternative name for the fairy tale itself. Which is why many scholars recognize Disney's significant contribution to the genre of fairy-tale films; they adapted several tales from Brothers Grimm and Perrault for their films. Stories such as *Puss in Boots*, *Cinderella* and *Jack and the Beanstalk* became iconic within the cinematic genre. In the 1930s, Walt Disney realised his iconic character 'Mickey Mouse' through production of *Silly Symphonies*, a musical cartoon series featuring Mickey Mouse characters. These short animations served as a test bed for Disney's full colour and sound feature-length version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, released in 1937. Since its release, Disney has enjoyed enormous success - its growth continuing today. Jack Zipes’s historical analysis of the evolution of Disney films states that all the early shorts produced by Disney were highly experimental, open-ended and inventive; they expressed surprising vigour and original use of animation art and technique. These all took place in Twentieth-century America and often featured underdog heroes who often resembled Disney or his aspirations (Zipes, 1997). Unfortunately, by the 1930s many aspects of these stories' ideology had been transformed into conservative patriarchal moral worldviews altering their formal significance.

Disney's 1937 success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* marked a turning point in their technical and narrative mode of operation - one which would be applied to every new production thereafter. As Justnya Deszcz (2002) asserted, these stories are used as illusions by Disney company to spread false messages of naive hope while further increasing their own sales as they gain greater popularity (Deszcz, 2002, p.83). Disney faced criticism among scholars during the Great Depression of the 1920s for using fairy tales on screen to portray an all-American perspective. These films often looked back to historical myths; princes, black magic, sword fights providing viewers with a temporary distraction from their worries about the future and an opportunity to focus on what made them unique in society. Disney created feel-good motion pictures, yet their stereotypical portrayals of major issues in America only served to further compound these already existing difficulties. Gender inequality was still widespread in America, with women often restricted to household tasks or becoming solely wives and mothers. Disney only reinforced these stereotypes, further cementing the idea that women were subordinate to men. Henry Giroux notes that gender identity in Disney animated films is one of the most contentious issues. Female characters often possess narrowly defined roles (Giroux, 2002). Elizabeth Bell famously noted that film has the power to permanently imprint images of certain faces and bodies on our minds (Bell, 1995). Disney's popularity makes it easy for children who watch women perform specific tasks or roles to assume that this is the ideal norm for women, leading them to grow up with this ideal in mind.

Feminist scholars have debated the impact that fairy tales have on children's perceptions of gender roles and sexuality. Feminism and Fairy Tale Studies first gained momentum during the 1970s. Donald Haase (2004) highlights several projects at the intersection of feminist studies and fairy-tale studies: research into gendered socialisation, interventions into the editorial history of Grimm's tales, and reclaiming a female fairy tale tradition. He examines the publication of feminist and woman-centred folk and fairy tale anthologies, the use of fairy tales in female-authored literature, and the revisionist project of retelling fairy tales for a feminist audience. Haase (2004) emphasises the logical connection between feminist fairy tale scholarship and fairy-tale studies, asserting that "the agenda for feminist fairy tale scholarship closely mirrors" that of fairy-tale studies itself. Feminist fairy tale scholarship began with

studies of female representations. Alison Lurie's 1970 article *Fairy Tale Liberation* saw fairy tales as providing strong female role models, both traditional tales and those marginalised due to sexist editorial practices. Her second book Witches and Fairies elaborates on this idea, suggesting that strong female characters such as those depicted in classic fairy tales can also be found in lesser-known tales (Lurie, 1970). Her most significant qualification was that these empowering women stories were often obscured by male-dominated factors in the selection, editing and publication of fairy tales. This article sparked several provocations, such as Marcia R. Lieberman's 1972 rebuttal *entitled Some Day My Prince Will Come: Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale*, Lieberman (1972) did not share Lurie's view that fairy tales often featured strong female characters. She dismisses the assertion of male dominance in fairy tales as "beyond the point," noting that feminist scholars such as herself were more focused on exploring contemporary processes of female acculturation. One of her arguments was that only popular stories, ones that everyone has read or heard, or those popularised by Disney, truly impact children in our culture. For many children, classic tales like *Cinderella*, *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty* have replaced mythic figures like ancient Greek or Norse gods, goddesses and heroes. Lurie's publications and the more obscure folk tales found in Andrew Lang's later collections cannot be considered sufficient to fully explore the significance of fairy tales to women (Haase, 2004). Lurie and Lieberman's publications illustrate the beginnings of feminist fairy tale research as well as modern fairy tale studies, which emphasise the genre's socio-political and sociohistorical contexts. Both arguments focus on gender-based scholarship, including its effects on fairy tale contents as well as the process of canonization and institutional control over classic fairy-tale collections. These questions of male-dominated fairy tale traditions lead to further exploration of alternative narratives, allowing for the identification or recovery of female voices in fairy tales from early documented references up until modern times. Returning to the debate over fairy tales' effects on children and women audiences requires an examination of their relation to socialisation processes, the development of classical fairy tales, and documented studies on both audiences' responses to them. By exploring the nuanced relationship between gender and fairy-tale, as well as discussing its history and analysis of production and reception, this research provides a context for exploring the vast corpus of fairy tales and the responses they elicit.

As seen in the Lurie-Lieberman debate, early feminist criticism of fairy tales focused on their wider effects on gender identity and children's behaviour. Lieberman (1972) will conclude that stories with their descriptions or classical attributes of "Femininity" could leave an impact on children for life. She further asserts that these stories were key sources of psychosexual identity, with many scholars agreeing with Lieberman's assertion that fairy tales served as repositories for dreams, hopes, and fantasies in generations of girls. They form their psychosexual self-concepts and ideas of what they could or could not achieve, along with how this behaviour will be rewarded, including the nature of said reward. In 1974, Andrea Dworkins noted how popular fairy tales often showcased sociocultural myths and mechanisms which oppress women by depicting them as wicked, beautiful, and passive while depicting men as good, active, and heroic figures. Susan Brown Miller (1975) analyses the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* as a metaphor for perpetuating rape, contending classic tales like Cinderella, sleeping beauty, and snow white teach women to become victims. Additionally, Mary Daly's 1978 *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* highlighted fairy tales as toxic patriarchal myths used to deceive women.

> *The child who is fed tales such as Snow White is not told that the tale itself is a poisonous apple, and the Wicked Queen (her mother/teacher), having herself been drugged by the same deadly diet throughout her lifetime ... , is unaware of her venomous part in the patriarchal plot (Daly, 2006).*

When the Grimms' fairy tales were published at the turn of the 19th and early 18th centuries, patriarchy had become entrenched in European society. Like many other writers of their era, the Grimms were deeply affected by prevailing gender roles and social norms of their time; their tales served to illustrate these attitudes. Grimms' fairy tales were originally intended as stories for adults, but quickly gained a following among children. As more children read them, the tales became an effective tool in teaching morality, social norms, and gender roles. The patriarchal values of the time

are evident in several of Grimms' fairy tales. Many female characters in these tales are passive and submissive, while their male counterparts are active and dominant. Women are frequently depicted as helpless victims who need saving by men, and their value is often measured according to physical appearance or ability to bear children. The Grimms' tales also convey the idea that men should be the natural leaders of society and women should submit to them. Jack Zipes' 1979-1980 article entitled *Who's Afraid of the Brothers Grimm? Socialisation and Politicization Through Fairy Tales* provided a comparative analysis of different versions of tales collected and edited by the Grimms. He illustrated how these tales were altered to promote patriarchal bourgeois values, as this was believed to be part of the socialisation process. Zipes (1983) explored how fairy tales had been appropriated within a larger social history of the fairy-tale genre. Zipes delves into the socio-historical context of folk tales, exploring its later adoption by European and American writers as a discourse of sociocultural values that should inform children's socialisation processes; both in its modelling of gender-specific identity and behaviour. Ruth B. Bottigheimer conducted a further investigation from 1980 to 1985, exposing the editorial interventions made by the Grimms that weakened female characters and introduced a male perspective into these stories. She believes this to be in keeping with the social values of their time, specifically the nineteenth-century social trends which elicited a treatment of gender by the Grimms. Bottegeimer did not simply confirm Zipes' assertion about the imposition of bourgeois values onto folktales through Brothers Grimm editorial revisions but rather discovered that within these stories she encountered competing views on gender and kindred values from centuries past. Bottigheimer asserts in the essay *From Gold to Guilt: The Forces Which Reshaped: Grimm's Tales* that the portrayal of women in these tales was partly due to Wilhelm Grimm's increasing reliance on misogynistic folktales from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She seeks to address claims that these magic tales were simply the voice of the bourgeois speaking loudly; rather, she believes it is through adopting folk values such as restrictive values that emerge from folk versions of these tales that produce "Domestic tyranny, female silence, and isolation" within them (Bottigheimer 1988).

Maria Tatar used the male and female characters from Grimm's tales as her starting point for studying Fairy tales. Tatar revisited the topic of sex and violence in fairy tales

in *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1980), further delving into how textual editing and attitudes related to gender roles are reflected in these tales. Tatar's study of sex and violence draws upon not only editorial history but also folklore, structuralism, and carefully chosen concepts from psychoanalysis. By organising her interpretations of heroes and villains according to gender, Tatar was able to bring alive the distinctions between male and female characters while using gender as a primary lens through which to view sex and violence (Tatar 1980). Fairy tales' relationship to social values had opened the door for more nuanced discussions about gender roles in literature. According to Bottigheimer (1988), restrictive values from folk sources contributed to creating a negative image of women within the Grimms Collection's sources. Romantic idealisation of women through Grimm's editing had the opposite effect, yet still perpetuated a restrictive stereotype. Karen E Rowe (1979) noted the role of romantic tales in shaping female attitudes toward self, men, marriage, and society. Rowe highlights how fairy tales with idealised romantic patterns are widely available in mass-market reading materials marketed to adult women, such as erotica and gothic fiction. It appears that the romantic paradigms embodied in fairy tales have an ongoing influence, not only on children but even adult women who, according to Rowe (1979, p.222), "internalise romantic patterns from ancient tales" and continue tailoring their aspirations and capabilities according to these same paradigms". Rowe (1979) made a poignant observation about modern women and how, since feminists exposed those fairy tales that instil romantic ideals, there has been an increased awareness or consciousness of the disconnect between romantic ideals and reality: all men are not princes. Rowe contends that fairy tales no longer provide mythic validations of desirable female behaviour and that with the growing distance between social practice and romantic idealisation, they had lost their power to inspire. Women readers experience this tension between adhering to deceptive ideals of fairy tales and striving for cultural change, which Rowe claims exerts "an amazing imaginative power over the female psyche" (Rowe, 1979, p. 218). Rowe emphasises the power of imagination a fairy tale offers and how this can contribute to creating equality between men and women. But she stresses that for this process to truly take root, it must first undergo rejuvenation to fully realise its idealised romantic fantasies. Rowe laments that women in contemporary society are caught between maintaining values and accommodating changing mores, between romantic fantasies and everyday realities. But one question

remains unresolved: do we have the courageous vision and energy to cultivate a newly fertile ground of psychic and cultural experience which will grow fairy tales for human beings in the future? (Rowe 1979, p.223).

Horror has its share of oppressive moments. Laura Mulvey, a British feminist and film theorist, coined the term 'Male Gaze Theory' in her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. This theory held that audiences always witnessed action through the perspective of heterosexual men, leading to sexualisation and objectification of women even when they were depicted in dangerous scenarios. Horror genres often utilise objectification through shot, angle, and casting in order to allow male viewers to identify with the protagonist, see themselves as its hero, and thus increase their pleasure. Mulvey (1975) addressed in her essay how high-angled shots in films create an aura of dominance or superiority for male characters, while low-angled shots used to depict female characters reinforce traditional gender roles that emphasise male dominance over female submission. Mulvey (1975) further noted that depictions of women wearing revealing clothing could further add to their objectification and vulnerability, turning them into objects for the male gaze and reinforcing the idea that their value is determined solely by physical and sexual attractiveness. She asserts that these visual techniques perpetuate a conservative and sexist view of gender relations and undermine equality for women by promoting an antifeminist ideology that encourages the subordination of women. An example of this can be seen in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). In *Vertigo*, the character Scottie's obsessive fixation on the female lead, Madeleine, epitomises the objectification of women as symbols of mystery and beauty, reinforcing societal norms that define women in relation to men. The film's cinematography and narrative structure further emphasise this viewpoint by depicting Madeleine through the male protagonist's gaze, highlighting her visual allure while obscuring her inner psyche.

As society moved into the 1980s, women's roles in the media expanded. According to Jeremy Tunstall's 1983 publication Media in Britain, women are exclusively presented as consumers, wives, domestics, or sexual objects, an idea that stems from an ideological belief that women were less authoritative than men and therefore should only be shown (orally or visually) in forms which benefit a man. They could become domestic goddesses, wife material objects designed solely for sexual pleasure, or

consumers. One horror movie which does adhere to Tunstall's theory is *Poltergeist* (1982). Though the gender divide had been narrowing since the 1980s, an ideological belief still held that women were inferior to men. It wasn't until the 1990s that respectable representation of women in more independent and dominant roles became more widespread.

In 1992 Carol J. Clover published *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* which proposed that a new presentation of women had emerged within horror cinema; with one last survivor being female. This theory became especially popular within the slasher sub genre during this decade. The Final Girl theory explained what made a female character eligible to survive a killer: She must come from middle-class background, be well-educated, and career-driven; have no interest in boys; often without makeup on, and often look rather bland. Contrast this with foil characters of similar age who are sexually promiscuous, rebellious, or disrespectful and often become victims themselves, reinforcing gender ideologies; women can be heroes but only if their traits resemble those associated with men which Clover asserts. Films such as *Halloween* (1978), *Scream* (1996), and *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) all feature final girl characters with gender-neutral names that meet these criteria. *Alien* (1979) serves as another example outside the slasher genre where Ripley remains the sole survivor. All these female characters possess gender-neutral names and match these criteria perfectly. Many critics noted the rise of female protagonists with power during a time when the women's liberation movement gained momentum and several social changes were implemented. Clover (1987) claims that the rise in female-headed households and working mothers during the 1960s and '70s made it more plausible for horror writers to focus on sufficient female figures. Pinedo (1997) contends that the second-wave feminist movement that emerged in the early 1970s brought about social transformation and an expansion of female agency, power, and self-determination. Pinedo asserts that horror films speak both to and about women, validating female anger in the face of male aggression. Clover (2015) sees how this genre positively addresses gender, noting Stephan Kings' remarks that women's movements created fear of female equality in the future which heavily influenced movies such as *Carrie (1976)*. Clover further explored cross-gender identification within horror genres by using this concept as a starting point; asserting that what has been most at issue in

horror over recent decades has been what she called 'threatened masculinity'. Wood (2003) notes that female characters must confront and take action against specific threats while equipping themselves with the capacity and self-assurance to do so, often challenging established gender norms and expectations.

Feminists from across the world have come up with new concepts on how fairy tales could draw upon today's abundant psychic and cultural experience. Literary scholar Carolyn G. Heilbrun proposed in 1979 a radical transformation of Myth, Tale and Tragedy through bold interpretation to accommodate the experience of women as emerging identities. Heilbrun (1979) references Rowe's essay which uses the Grimm's fairy tales as an example of cultural texts which female self-hood could adopt and reinterpret for their own quest for identity. She advocates for not restricting female imagination to female models, citing Bettelheim's example of male children using the female model of helplessness in fairy tales to reduce their anxieties and fears. Young girls can gain inspiration to strive for greater daring and adventure by studying these male role models in fairy tales. Madonna Kolhenschlag's *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye: Breaking the Spell of Feminine Myths and Models* (1994) adds to Heilbrun's social commentary by incorporating psychology and religion. Her approach tries to reconcile the cultural specificity of fairy tales as "parables of feminine socialisation", viewing these tales as a means to encourage women toward an awakening and spiritual maturity. Colette Dowling's 1981 volume *The Cinderella Complex: Women's Hidden Fear of Independence* explores how classic fairy tale stories can reflect women's psychological and social attitudes. Further shared by Ronda Chervin and Mary Neill through their personal reflection in the *Tale: A Journal of Inner Exploration* (1980). They mention that popular classics such as *Rapunzel*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Cinderella*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and Snow White and Rose Red should be used to encourage women to reflect on their responses to the stories and their inner spiritual journeys.

A recent wave of fairy tale collections has sought to promote more diverse female-centred narratives in order to celebrate and elevate women's role within these timeless classics. Works such as those by Sigrid Fruh (2000) sought to present a broad spectrum of strong, active, loving women and tales with female characters who could be classified under edifying rubrics like Saviours, Helpful and Faithful, Clever/Cunning

Warriors/Rulers Fates Great Mother Goddesses (Fruh, 2000) Ragan also gave priority to tales where main characters were female and worthy for emulation". Also, feminist retellings of fairy tales strive to combat representations of women as passive princesses, Lieberman (1972) highlights this as a dominant mode for explicitly addressing gender representations in fairy tales for decades. Contemporary literature and film have showcased this trend, from self-identified feminist projects such as Attic Press' *Fairy Tales for Feminists* series in the 1980s and early 1990s to young adult novels like Gail Carson Levine's *Ella Enchanted* which was adapted into Film in 2004 featuring a cursed heroine who must learn how to act for herself after being made captive. Jack Zipes offers his own critical take on classic fairy tales in *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* (1986), asserting that both movements have been "co opted" by mass media to create a commercial project of pseudo-feminism that emphasizes individual successes of gender equality divorced from reality while accepting dominant ideologies (Zipes, 1986). Although some fairy tale retellings promote great feminist ideas, we must mention the underlying "Faux feminism" found in some of these retellings. Linda Pershing and Lisa Gablehouse (2010) analyse Disney's 2007 Film *Enchanted* in light of this idea of "Faux Feminism", specifically the pro-girl fairy tales depicted in popular culture which often present a monolithic vision of female strength that ignores the variety of feminist perspectives present within academic and political circles. Furthermore, this popularised representation of feminism in fairy tales does not accurately reflect the range of responses fairy-tale fiction and film have had to feminist theory. This suggests a disconnect between how feminism is conceptualised in commercial products like fairy tale fiction and film, and its representation within academia and studies on fairy tales.

Gender issues cannot be singularly solved; contemporary theory offers us a fresh perspective on gender and narrative that was prevalent forty years ago. Audiences can ask different questions about gender because our understanding of it has evolved since the early feminist retellings. Referring to Judith Butler's work with gender performativity and undoing can provide useful guidance here. One of Butler's key points in *Undoing Gender* (2004), which builds upon their earlier works such as *Gender Trouble* (1990/1999) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), is that gender is a relational

category; one which we construct through recognition from others (Butler, 2004). We become "gendered for others" through this recognition process (Butler, 2004). The body is not simply private; it has a public dimension and is socially and politically constructed through recognition. Furthermore, sexuality and gender are not isolated attributes belonging to an ego but are part of how we relate to others. Butler (2004) defines gender as "the apparatus through which the production and normalisation of masculine and feminine characteristics take place, together with all associated hormonal, chromosome, psychic, and performative forms that gender assumes". They state that gender is an act of “doing”, the repetition and application of norms within a socio-political matrix. Gender can also be an "undoing," as assigning a gender defines and limits an individual, while simultaneously restricting other people's options for gender expression and identity. Butler emphasises the significance of gender conflation, noting how it's evidence of how the binary has become naturalised as male/female. They goes on to explain how violence against those perceived as "otherwise gendered" stems from a desire to maintain this binary intact and “natural”. These theories have real consequences and are deeply connected to the human experience: the processes of doing and undoing gender involve violence (Butler, 2004).

Fairy tales' popularity and adaptability make them particularly alluring to feminist and postmodern writers, according to Stephen Benson (2008): "Fairy tales provide fiction with an abundance of images and plots about gender relations, class conflicts, sexuality issues, and ethnic dramas that can be explored and overturned through a contemporary ideological agenda dedicated to upturning traditional norms of inequality and restriction". Fairy tales often reflect shifting ideologies, which is evident through revisions to suit new beliefs and appropriations by writers wishing to challenge established views. Postmodern retellings of fairy tale form and conventions, such as Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), use parody to address contemporary ideological and social issues rather than mocking the genre itself. Carter's views are deeply rooted in sexuality, with her opposition to the one-dimensional characterisation of women. In her first folktale collection *The Old Wives' Fairy Tale Book* (1990), Carter’s highlighted the multiple identities that female heroines take on within these tales. Carter writes in her introduction that all novels feature a female protagonist; no matter

her ability or bravery, or whether she be good, evil, sinister or awesomely unfortunate, she remains centre stage and larger than life. Furthermore, Carter seeks to restore the multifaceted life of women including their sexuality which male editors had suppressed. Carter's second collection *Strange Things Sometimes Still Happen: Fairy Tales from Around the World* (1992) suggests that Carter's work never leads to any traditional form of feminism and instead challenges misogyny itself, with cautionary folktales creating new values about strong, outspoken sexual women who cannot be held down, thus dispelling any fear or dislike previously held against women. Contemporary horror emphasises the need for independence. This aligns with Bettelheim's (1991) observation that fairy tales often contain themes such as resistance against parents and fear of growing up which can aid in character development. Horror narratives provide us with important opportunities to express and analyse our anxieties and desires regarding female identity and aspiration, by challenging many of our assumptions and expectations in the process. Allowing female characters to express certain desires and ideas, gives female audiences a sense of discontentment which many can identify with. Though these characters ultimately suffer for their longing to express deep desires and wishes, attention is still paid to the specific hopes and fears they harbour, the obstacles encountered, and how these factors combine to transform a seemingly idyllic vision into a living nightmare.

In Chapter 1, we will examine the current market of Fairy Tale retellings, where strong individual women achieve equality through personal actions that do not aim to challenge or alter society's underlying patriarchal structure but instead offer a mass-mediated version of feminism through these roles. Through these diverse works, we can examine literature through the lens of literary, psychological, sociological, and cultural analysis and how they promote self-conscious and critical engagement with classic tales providing women with tools to imagine new identities as noted by Newman (2000), fairy tales could prepare children for women's liberation.

# 3 CHAPTER 1: BEYOND TRADITION

## 3.1 POSTMODERN RETELLINGS OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

*Little Red Riding Hood*'s folkloric origins remain shrouded in mystery. Traces of her tale can be found across Eastern Europe. Mothers and nurses would often relay it as a cautionary tale for young ones (Tehrani, 2013, p. 2). Joy (2003) suggests that the tale "may have roots in Nordic tales that are over 900 years old" (p. 3). Two prominent literary versions emerging in the 17th and 19th centuries were Charles Perrault's 1697 rendition from his collection *Contes du Temps Passe* (Tales of Olden Times) and Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's 1812 collection *Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales) (Bonner, 2006, p. 3). Although audiences are more familiar with the adaptation created by the Grimms, Perrault has the distinction of popularising the first written version of the story. Zipes (2000) believes that Perrault's tale emanated from sewing societies in the south of France and north of Italy. Perrault's version of the tale has been subsequently translated and conflated with different literary versions. "what had formerly been an oral tale of initiation became a type of warning fairytale" (pp. 218-302). Particularly, The Brothers Grimm version *Rotkappchen* (Little Red Cap) in 1812, eliminated the sexual innuendos provided in Perrault's tale and added a happy ending. The core narrative elements still remain: Little Red Riding Hood is sent by her mother with a basket of treats for her grandmother's house, with advice to remain on the path and not wander off during her travels. Red Riding Hood encounters the Big Bad Wolf while travelling through the woods, who quickly learns where she is headed and races to reach it first. Upon arriving at her grandmother's house, the Big Bad Wolf devours

her as bait and dons her clothes in an attempt to deceive Red Riding Hood. As soon as Red Riding Hood arrives, the wolf maintains his tactic with the intention of eating her. When Red Riding Hood arrives, she and the wolf exchange famous lines such as: "Grandmother dear, what big teeth you have" and "All the better to eat you with!" (Perrault 1697, as cited in Perrault, 2009, p. 28). There, her fate is thus sealed - whether she be eaten (as per Perrault) or saved (as per the Grimm Brothers). Both stories tend to teach lessons of subservience and punishment based on interpretation.

The story of *Little Red Riding Hood* has been subjected to many film, animation and musical adaptations. Modern film technology throughout the 20th century have contributed significantly to the growth of visual fairy tales, resulting in wider dissemination of stories like Little Red Riding Hood (Hayton 2011, p. 39). The language and themes embedded in fairy tales have become ingrained in culture, shaping lifestyle choices by influencing behaviours, values and attitude through moral lessons and their depiction of gender roles and expectations. They also have the power to influence consumer trends through product placement and marketing strategies. Companies may use fairy tale characters and themes in their advertisements campaigns in order to tap into people's nostalgic or emotional associations with these stories, such as using fairy tale imagery in ways which demonstrates the significance of standardisation processes as mentioned in the literature review. Success in adapting fairy tales from text to audio-visual form relies on using ideologies and tropes that mirror those in the original tale. Simply including a ‘Big Bad Wolf’ character and a version of the iconic red hood is often enough to establish the presence and impact in the original tale. As opposed to literary versions, which require time and active interpretation to derive meaning, film adaptations provide a straightforward assembly of images. Hayton (2011) states that the image of a red hood invokes associations in viewers' cultural unconscious, instantly reminding them of the classic fairy tale (p. 39). The ease with which viewers identify with these motifs bypasses any need to comprehend complex histories or multiple versions that have contributed to its meaning over time; still despite changing historical contexts, these recognizable conventions persistently endure.

The history of fairy tale retellings is an intricate tapestry, as the ever-evolving nature of fairy tales is characterised by their recurrent remaking and global travels across cultures and time periods. This perspective is proposed by Christina Bacchilega in her

book *"Fairy Tales Transformed?: Twenty-First Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder"* (2013), where she contends that all fairy tales are essentially “adaptations” as they continuously search for an original text or "hypotext", even if this may prove impossible to identify. Bacchilega (2013) challenges the notion that fairy tales are static accounts with one definitive version, emphasising instead their ever-evolving character. Fairy tales have an intricate oral tradition spanning across cultures, time periods and media platforms that makes it hard to identify one single text as its original source. Bacchilega's perspective underscores the fluidity, adaptability, and transformative power of fairy tales; suggesting they are not static replicas of one original text but constantly changing through cultural, social, and artistic contexts in which they're told or adapted (Bacchilega, 2013).

Translation plays an integral part in the establishment and growth of fairy tales as a literary canon, contributing to their dynamic nature. Writers from various cultures have translated tales from other cultures through translation, leading to "necessary" changes as fairy tales are taken out of their original socio-political spaces and introduced to new audiences (Bacchilega, 2013). Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl Tomlinson’s seminal work *Essentials of Children's Literature* (2008) defines "retold tales" as adaptations of traditional tales which have been altered to modernize or enhance them in language and plot to provide fresh perspectives on familiar narratives. As such, fairy tale retellings or revisions involve translating existing stories, changing character names for translation purposes, adding or subtracting elements, all with the aim of altering and recontextualizing the tale according to one's personal perspective, revising its story arc accordingly. (Lynch-Brown & Tomlinson, 2008). With the advent of globalisation and increased cultural exchange, fairy tale retellings have become a universal language to enable cross-cultural communication and understanding. Authors from various cultures have reinterpreted classic tales with their own cultural sensibilities and perspectives, creating new interpretations. These fairy tale retellings not only introduce readers to different cultural traditions but also challenge stereotypical representations and promote cultural diversity. Tatar (2002) states that “Through the process of reworking the tales, authors can translate them into new contexts, retaining the original structure but transforming the narrative details. (…) creating new versions that speak to a contemporary audience” (p. 27).

By means of their non-static nature, fairy tales continue to adapt and transform over time with shifting socio-cultural environments. Contemporary retellings often inject fairy tales with modern sensibilities and focus on current social issues such as gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and diversity, reflecting changing cultural norms and values of their society of production.

Zipes work in *Fairy Tales and The Art of Subversion* examines the ways fairy tales reflect history and defines "subversion" as the imaginative use of fairy tale discourse to comment on social problems or liberate forms for progressive ends. He notes how fairy tale retellings aim to shift traditional tales in radical and subversive ways (Zipes, 2006). Similarly, Bacchilega (1997) contends that fairy tale retellings often disturb linear and predictable narrative structures of traditional tales - an assertion she further explores in her book "Post Modern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies" which discusses these changes and transformations occurring in the genre of fairy tales during the postmodern era (p. 26). Postmodernity, which emerged during the late 20th century, is characterised by its rejection of grand narratives, its suspicion towards metanarratives, and an emphasis on individual subjectivity and cultural diversity (Smith, 2007). These postmodern sensibilities have had an influence across various forms of artistic expression from literature to film to fairy tale retellings. In classical fairy tales clear-cut binaries between good and evil, male and female roles, and other polarities often present themselves. However, Bacchilega (1997) suggests that postmodern retellings subvert or blur these binaries presenting more complex and nuanced portrayals of characters, relationships, and gender roles. One key area in Bacchilega's analysis is the focus on gender representations in postmodern fairy tales. As discussed in the literature review, feminist writers used fairy tales as an avenue to challenge and transform traditional gender roles and societal expectations; French female authors such as Madame de Villeneuve utilized fairy tales to subvert male-driven norms that celebrated passive or illiterate female characters; this feminist reinterpretation continued into the 20th century with second wave feminist writers using fairy tales as vehicles to challenge and shift social codes. Feminist literary criticism raises important questions about how men have historically used literature to reinforce social and cultural norms related to male dominance, superiority and patriarchy. Feminist criticism attempts to deconstruct traditional representations of female

characters produced by men while challenging idealised and passive images often found in fairy tales. Feminist literary criticism first emerged as an approach in the late 1960s and early 1970s with pioneering authors like George Eliot, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf were precursors for first wave feminist writing. (Humm, 1994)

Gender criticism, more commonly known as the second wave of feminism, gained prominence with the publication of seminal works like those by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970). Throughout the late 20th century, women writers such as Anne Sexton, Olga Broumas, Angela Carter, and Margaret Atwood emerged with their interpretations of fairy tales, pioneering feminist literary criticism. Anne Sexton's *Transformations* (1971) and Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) are two prominent feminist retellings of Grimm fairy tales by these authors. Sexton's retellings included horror elements such as vivid and disturbing imagery, psychological and emotional turmoil, and depictions of women as complex individuals defying traditional gender roles. Through these horrifying elements, Sexton challenges the traditional notion that women in fairy tales are passive characters but instead presents them as active agents who take charge of their fears, desires and vulnerabilities to bring balance into her work (Sexton, 1971).

Feminist retellings of fairy tales often explore diverse themes, which depend on both the perspective of the retelling agent and their sociocultural context of production. Male-authored retellings may differ significantly from those written by female authors. Feminist fairy tale retellings often explore themes like mother-daughter relationships, female subjugation and oppression, enforced passivity, limited choices, sexism, sexual abuse, sexual freedom violations such as rape or abuse cases, sexual orientation bias, social roles; patriarchy; or forced marriages. Jarvis (2000) emphasises other themes found in feminist retellings, including voicelessness, the commodification of women, gender relations and female education as crucial aspects. Furthermore, Jarvis questions redemption motifs such as marriage as salvation for women while simultaneously criticising other social issues and gender inequalities within patriarchy (Jarvis, 2000, pp. 155-156). Works like Broumas' *Beginning with O* (1977), Bachmann's *Der Fall Franza* or *The Case of Franza* (1978), and Atwood's *"Bluebeard's Egg"* (1983) all explore themes related to female autonomy, sexual agency, and the

dark and oppressive aspects of patriarchal societies. These works use horror elements such as suspenseful and chilling atmospheres, psychological intensity and unnerving revelations to subvert traditional fairy tale narratives and explore gender discrimination and violence against women. These retellings offer alternative narratives to empower female characters and advance feminist ideologies. Laura Campbell's 2009 thesis *Feminist Fairy Tale Retellings: A Genre of Subversion*, details three types of feminist fairy tale retellings: (1) revitalising underrated fairy tales that feature female empowerment; (2) crafting entirely new fairy tales with intended feminist messages; and (3) revamping existing tales so as to empower female characters while furthering feminist ideology. Campbell believes the third category is most effective and inclusive as they address current female stereotypes, critique culture and engage in feminist debates (Campbell, 2009, p. 6-7). Feminist writers use fairy tales as an effective platform to critique and transform social norms and values, making them culturally relevant to contemporary feminist discourse. Examining fairy tales through a feminist lens provides unique insights into how traditional fairy tales serve to uphold and reinforce gendered norms; an invaluable perspective when analysing the case studies such as those presented in this chapter.

In his 1993 work *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood,* Jack Zipes explores the complex nuances of the fairy tale. His analysis unveils its rich symbolism as well as how it reflects society's attitudes about gender, identity and sexuality. Zipes (1993) asserts that fairy tales reflect changing social, cultural, political contexts at different points throughout time; as evidenced in *Little Red Riding Hood'*s many interpretations by 19th century authors as well as contemporary adaptations. For instance, Brothers Grimm's collections of Little Red Riding Hood portray her as a resilient and courageous girl who deftly outwits the wolf. Instead of reinforcing an atmosphere of inherent weakness and incompetence in women, the Grimms offer up an independent and resourceful heroine who gradually emerges throughout 19th-century narratives. Notably, Grimms' tales often include references to incest, torture, emotional and sexual abuse. According to Zipes, Grimms 1882 anthology called "Household Stories" depicted Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother as being eaten by a wolf who then has to be skinned alive before they could be found alive again inside. Charles Perrault's late 17th-century writings feature Little Red Riding Hood as

an innocent embodiment of children's sexual desires, serving to warn young girls to steer clear of strangers. Perrault's other works feature similar themes of sexual desires, abuse and female rivalries which can be observed within their narratives for instance *Cinderella* or *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. Here too these elements remain hidden until closer examination of these works. Perrault's storytelling is undeniably adept, yet also denigrates women by suggesting their inferiority. As time has progressed, English and American storytellers have refined German and French versions of fairy tales by taking primitive versions and adding their own touches, such as stripping away more sinister elements and tailoring it for children, such as seen in film adaptations and children's books by Disney. Disney in particular has deviated significantly from original fairy tales by leaving out violent deaths or sexual undertones from its narratives. Zipes notes that in modern adaptations of this tale, Red has a varied portrayal, often tailored specifically for different audiences. Adult audiences may encounter her as sexually assertive; wanting a sexual encounter with Wolf. This depiction fits with the archetype of a *femme-fatale*, who breaks established social norms through sexual agency. Red is often depicted as a doll-like young girl needing patriarchal protection, often from hunters or lumberjacks as seen in The Brothers Grimm's version. This dichotomy of Red's character is emblematic of a paradigmatic shift within the tale itself wherein she transitions from being an innocent girl at its beginning, to eventually succumbing to temptation at its conclusion. These adaptations represent shifting societal attitudes regarding female sexuality and agency.

Throughout the history of cinema, from Georges Melies' pioneering works of appropriating *feerie* in the early 1890s to today's visually stunning and technologically advanced adaptations, revising and adapting fairy tales has always been an integral component of this genre. As elucidated by Maria Tatar in her 2002 book *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, Tatar distinguishes between traditional tales with "compact" narratives and other types of adaptations, noting that traditional tales may appear deceptively simplistic at first glance, yet still contain layers of meaning which make up their complexity. These tales often shed light on deeper themes, social commentary or cultural criticism. These short tales may be modified or adapted for various audiences, contexts, and purposes while retaining their essential characteristics and themes (Tatar, 2002). Also, adaptations of fairy tales are increasingly referred to as "retellings" rather than simply as "fairy tales," further emphasising their versatility and depth of

interpretation. Fairy tale adaptations often defy genre boundaries, incorporating elements from other genres such as romance, fantasy, horror, comedy or historical fiction to form unique narratives that go beyond traditional fairy tale tropes. Angela Carter is known for her innovative and genre-defying adaptations of fairy tales, often adding elements such as gothic romance, fantasy, or horror into them in addition to traditional fairy tale tropes. *Freeway* (1996) directed by Matthew Bright and *Hanna* (2011) directed by Joe Wright which we shall examine in this chapter, also employ this hybridity of genres. Galster (2005) explores how genre hybridity is utilised by fairy tale adaptations to demonstrate their dynamic qualities and distinguish themselves from conventional narratives and their uniform worldview. By transcending genre boundaries, fairy tale adaptations distance themselves from monotonous storytelling narratives with only one voice being present in them. This approach broadens their potential audience, as it appeals to viewers of both genres involved in hybridization. Kraidy (2005) stresses the role of hybridity as the driving force of globalisation, as contemporary cultural productions highlight how different genres and influences converge and overlap to shape each other. Genre hybridity in cultural productions challenges established norms and expectations associated with genres, producing innovative works that defy easy categorization while opening up opportunities for cultural dialogue, exchange, and negotiation. Stam (2000) notes that adaptations in literature and film are affected by many different influences such as market demands, commercial preferences, aesthetics and censorship; often leading to the creation of hybrid forms containing elements from different species or genera. Hybridization allows adaptations to exist at the intersection between genres, styles and discourses to produce compelling storytelling which draws from diverse influences. Rozario (2004) defines hybridization in fairy tale films as the use of pretextual material to produce new works. This may involve mixing multiple versions of an existing tale together or even producing entirely original films. This approach goes beyond simple adaptation of existing fairy tales and seeks to craft new narratives using existing fairy tale elements. Even though hybridization in fairy tale films was present well before the late nineties, this observation highlights their ongoing evolution as adaptations that cross genre boundaries and can be enjoyed by audiences of all ages and interests. Fairy tale retellings may present new twists, yet do not represent an entirely unique product. This underlines the intertextual relationship between fairy tales and their retellings, whereby

each adaptation draws from both elements and perspectives of original tales while adding something entirely new. Zipes (2011) suggests that filmmakers often adapt fairy tales for their own vision and goals, leading to debates about fidelity to the original source material. He asserts that such debates are irrelevant as adaptations should reflect a filmmaker's personal interpretation and style.

Intertextuality is an essential concept in Postmodern culture when discussing retellings or adaptations of fairy tales that feature intertextual references. Julia Kristeva famously coined the term intertextuality in her 1969 book *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* to highlight how all texts, whether written or spoken aloud, formal or informal, artistic or mundane, interrelate and interact. No text exists alone in isolation from its surrounding texts (Kristeva, 1969, as cited in Kristeva, 1980). Intertextuality challenges the notion of originality as writers often draw inspiration from or make reference to works from other works, making complete originality impossible. Kevin Paul Smith's book, *The Postmodern Fairy Tale: Folkloric Intertexts in Contemporary Fiction* (2007) provides an analytical framework for understanding intertextual references within fairy tales. Smith (2007) identified eight elements of intertextuality, such as *Allusion*, *Retelling*, *Adaptation*, *Revision*, *Parody/Pastiche*, *Intertextual dialogue*, *Metafiction and Cross-cultural Intertextuality. Allusion* refers to a direct or indirect reference to specific fairy tales or their themes within a narrative i.e., referencing specific characters, events, settings from another text. *Retelling* alters or revises those same tales; these retellings can range from faithful adaptations to radical reimaginings of the original story. *Adaptation* refers to the reworking of existing fairy tales into other mediums or genres, such as film, play or poem. *Revision* involves subverting or deconstructing traditional elements from fairy tales in order to challenge established assumptions or expectations. *Parody* and *pastiche* are two forms of humorous or satirical imitations of fairy tales used for critical analysis or commentary. Parody takes elements or styles from multiple fairy tales and incorporates them into a new narrative. *Intertextual dialogue* entails weaving multiple fairy tales or other texts into one narrative, creating a conversation between different stories. Metafiction refers to the use of fairy tales that acknowledge their fictional nature often breaking the “fourth wall” by acknowledging its own fictionality. Finally, the last element is *Cross-cultural Intertextuality,* which draws upon multiple cultural traditions and artefacts, often blending or juxtaposing them to create new meanings and perspectives (Smith, 2007,

pp. 3-4). These elements serve as a framework for exploring how fairy tales are utilised and referenced in postmodern fiction such as films or other forms of storytelling. Intertextuality highlights postmodern elements by emphasising their multiplicity of interpretations, both *Freeway* and *Hanna* use a form of intertextuality to further its narrative. Smith (2007) also draws upon Bakhtin (1981) “chronotope” concept and fairy tale “architext”, further developed by Smith, to gain insight into how postmodern adaptations of classic fairy tales alter their settings and conventions to reflect contemporary cultural reflection and intertextuality. Smith (2007) describes a fairy tale “chronotope” as the environment or world in which events unfold, including both magical elements and temporal/spatial characteristics that shape narrative. He employs the term fairy tale “architext" to refer to the key characteristics, conventions, and tropes that characterise fairy tales including magical elements, archetypal characters, moral lessons or didacticism, which define them. Smith emphasises how fairy tale “chronotope” and “architext” can be leveraged as tools of subversion, deconstruction, and intertextual dialogue for postmodern storytellers to challenge presumptions while crafting narratives that capture contemporary culture (Smith, 2007).

John Stephens and Robyn McCallum explore adaptations through their scholarly discourse on fairy tale adaptation and intertextuality. They uncover how these narratives are not only affected by intertextuality but also by conservative metanarratives; subtle or overt ideologies, systems or assumptions which pervade societies globally, shaping knowledge and experiences for people around them. At the centre of their analysis is "metanarratives", an expansive narrative structure which transcends traditional narrative forms to have an outsized influence in shaping modern-day stories. The authors illuminate two uses of "meta," as used in modern scholarship: "metafiction," which refers to narratives surrounding them, and "metaphysics," which goes beyond them. Their thesis employs metaphysics as an umbrella term to refer to metanarratives which go beyond conventional narrative structures forming larger narrative structures (Stephens, & McCallum, 2013 as cited in Cutchins, Krebs & Voigts, 2018, pp. 245-256). This concept is particularly pertinent in understanding how narratives shape perceptions and ideologies in society, since both groups and individuals are continually in flux. Stephens and McCallum argue that metanarratives

are "teleologically osmotic," or embedded within all forms of storytelling, seeking to influence audiences by altering their perceptions and assumptions. Drawing upon Louis Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation, they assert that ideology can be spread via state apparatuses like media texts that create state propaganda to influence individuals into adopting certain ideologies or world views. The authors explore the role of metanarratives in fairy tale adaptations, particularly within the context of fairy tale film cycles that centre around young female protagonists and cater to an "Knowing" female audience, as defined by Hutcheon (2012). Their research argues that the pleasure and attraction of adapted texts for this informed audience lies in experiencing an ambiguous sense of wonder when being aware of alternate versions and watching as they change with current adaptations. These films demonstrate how visual cues from other fairy tales, such as objects or settings that reference other tales, become intertextual cues for audiences, creating a transposable magical mise-en-scene that connects fairy tale filmographies. Steve Neale's (2000) concept of genre as "instances in repetition and difference" explores this sentiment within fairy tale films, suggesting that audiences experience joy from these subgeneric adaptations through their "repetition in difference." The knowing audience finds metatextual pleasure from watching films that signal their own "adaptive moments," or provide "difference in repetition" of a familiar genre mode, for instance when expected narrative is disrupted or plotlines deviate from its expected course, addressing specifically the 'Knowing' audience (Neale, 2000, pp. 94-98).

Utilising metanarratives in fairy tale adaptations, particularly within the context of fairy tale films, can highlight their wider ideological and political ramifications for contemporary culture. Stephens and McCallum offer insightful analyses that illuminate how metanarratives influence narratives, ideologies and perceptions within society and how metanarratives become interwoven into fairy tale adaptations to create rich tapestries of intertextual references and palimpsestic pleasures for an informed audience to decode and enjoy. These analyses serve as a theoretical foundation for the following case studies which will investigate the subversive nature of fairy tale retellings and the application of genre hybridity. The study will be conducted through close readings of two postmodern retellings of *Little Red Riding Hood*–Matthew Bright's 1996 film *Freeway* and Joe Wright's 2011 film *Hanna*. Each variant of the films will be examined such as the plot, characters and themes. We will discuss how the films

employ unconventional narrative techniques such as fragmentation, intertextuality, metafiction to challenge the traditional notions of time, space, and narrative. Reflecting the postmodern sensibility of questioning established norms and challenging traditional storytelling conventions. Through a feminist lens we will also investigate the portrayal of female characters, discussing gender construction within postmodern fairy tale retellings. Through various subtexts that explore female fantasies, desires, trauma and gendered violence by centralising on girlhood, we can gain insights into how postmodern films challenge and redefine traditional gender roles and representations within the genre.

## 3.2 "PLAYING WITH WOLVES": GENDER PERFORMANCE AND SUBVERSION IN POSTMODERN RETELLINGS

### 3.2.1 *Freeway* (1996)

*Freeway* (1996) directed by Matthew Bright is a postmodern retelling of the *Little Red Riding Hood* story and uses fairy tale elements to comment on social issues like poverty, abuse, and the justice system. The film is typically considered a crime/thriller film although we can see the practice of genre hybridity in aspects of the narrative. During the 1990s, there was a continued growth of critical crime films, breaking down the traditional generic conventions in filmmaking, and creating new genres that reflected the socio-political shifts taking root. Crime films of the 1990s reflected and refracted a variety of trends including rising levels of anxiety about crime and economic insecurity, growing levels of disparity between the wealthy and poor under neo-liberal economic policies, and a fast-rising prison population in the US in the wake of punitive sentencing policies (Garland, 2001). Film historian Drew Todd traces the emergence of postmodern crime films in the 1990s, signalling "a rejection of linear storytelling, of expectations of genre conventions, and of easy distinctions between right and wrong" (Todd, 2006, p. 51). Most crime films of the 1990s maintained the tried-and-true

formula and moral structure of mid-century North American filmmaking; crime must ultimately be punished. However, cultural spaces for considering alternative perspectives on crime opened up and even within films apparently reflecting the traditional pattern of evil defeated and morality restored.

Several new subjects for crime films emerged at the end of the 20th century. One notable emergence was the popularity of the serial killer narratives in the 1990s. These narratives became cultural icons, portrayed and marketed across various media platforms and cultural expressions (Jarvis, 2007). Further, the rise of the serial killer as a staple of 1990s crime films reflected a general fear of random violence, even though rates of violent crime were falling in most Western nations (Garland, 2001). All the while, crime films continued to reflect and at times challenge common sense understanding of problems, policies and practices. These works can therefore be understood as a sort of popular criminological discourse that reveals much about the place of crime in contemporary culture as well as its moral, ethical, and philosophical dimensions (Rafter, 2007). They include films based on ATU 333 tale type "The Magic flight" in which the hero or heroine must escape from pursuers with the help of a magic object or a helper. Rewritings of *Little Red Riding Hood* usually maintain an underlying structure focusing on nurturers vs aggressors; victims vs rescuers (Ghesquiere, 2006). Sometimes individual characters take both sides of these semiotic oppositions. This doubling and overlapping of figures form an essential element of *Little Red Riding Hood* crime films works that reference the plot and/or central images of the tale and relate them to some aspect of law-breaking and/or criminality. Since the 1990s, this narrative structure and imagery has offered film makers and viewers a critical metaphorical tool, a malleable cultural referent to engage often critically with crime and criminal justice. The familiar narrative of wolves and innocents, predators and victims, villains and heroes provide means for filmmakers both to subvert audience expectations for storybook endings, and to critique accepted wisdom about the causes and consequences of crime.

Bright's *Freeway* (1996) turns into a retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood* that purposely reflects this offence by setting the film inside the conventional type of horror cinema with elements of crime/thriller. In picking this mode, Bright somewhat re-establishes the fairy tale to its original purpose, once existing as a folktale loaded with high drama

and violence, yet goes further, condemning the text of 'known pattern' and upgrading it to a story where an innocent female endures an onslaught of events and restores her own equilibrium: basically, deploying the “Final girl” trope that is common in slasher films (Clover, 1992). *Freeway* utilises its versatile status to drastically re-evaluate the source text, inciting its oppositional attack through a classification generally fit to disruption. Through literary examination, this section looks at how Bright saddles the capability of the cinematographic medium through a twofold collaboration, one that not just permits a coded opening of the inner, intertextual space of the Fairy tale retellings, yet in addition, an antagonistic encounter rooted in the context of horror cinema.

Freeway begins with an animated opening credit. Through this sequence the audience is being made aware of its place as a retelling. Images, a subcategory of “Architextuality” as briefly mentioned earlier when discussing the methodology framework proposed by Kevin Paul Smith, is the presence of objects or images that create an intertextual link with the images/objects of the previous tales. The montage showcases cutthroat illustrated images of girls, girls mostly in red. A colourful whirl of large graphic cells as if lifted from a comic book bearing two-dimensional girls encountering a wolf. The details are highly unsettling as the camera animates the frame, hanging tight on one element before releasing to reveal the static content of the painted image hence giving motion to its storybook pictures. The final sequence ends with a close-up shot of a pair of white knickers on display, belonging to a hidden girl with short vermillion dress. We then see a reveal of the portrait of the Big Bad wolf, with a long reach to grasp what’s on display, bulging eyes and tongue rolling. This image of the wolf shows a perverted sexual predator erect with excitement. The close-up of the girl places the audience in a voyeuristic position: as the wolf comes into view, we recognise that what we have been focusing in on his ‘meal’, remaining complicit as his gaze hunts further (and lower). We are so allied with the wolf’s point of view that when a frame begins with a hand atop a furred protuberance, we are invited to conjecture that this may be the wolf’s phallus. Pull back to reveal a hairy arm. We are fulfilling the wolf’s wishes on his behalf. The final sequence ends with another colourful whirl. This variant of *Little Red Riding Hood* is being recycled into something else, spun into new proportions.

The next scene is set in school, a classroom filled with disinterested pupils. The camera pans across the room before making its way to a teenage girl tasked by the sentence written on the blackboard that reads "Cat drinks milk". This presents a young lady, Vanessa Lutz (played by Reese Witherspoon), as a youthful grown-up with a pre-school level of proficiency, yet it additionally presents the composed word as a hindrance, something tricky. The fantasy consecrated by Perrault and the Brothers Grimm in literary form is by and large additionally shed, for this retelling of the story will be communicated through audio-visual means - the teacher prompts Vanessa by making a "Miaow" sound and signals consolation through motion. From the beginning, Freeway repositions itself as a retelling not a rewriting of a Fairy tale, characteristic of Propp's conviction that " in its origin folklore should be likened not to literature but to language...which has neither author nor authors" (Propp, 1984, p. 379).

After the classroom sequence, we follow a trail of Vanessa riding her bicycle through seemingly empty streets, she is wearing a bright red jacket. Here, we are carried back to the familiar territory of the fairy tale, using motifs like the red jacket which Vanessa wears throughout the film, this serves as a visual reminder of her connection to the fairy tale. Vanessa is the Little red riding hood of this tale, and she is about to embark on a journey. Although Vanessa is not basked in a red hood walking in the forest by foot, the broad essence is recognisable. This comes back to the element of "architextuality" that deals with the similarities of a given work. On her arrival at home, we are suddenly confronted with the harsh reality of her situation unlike the assumption of a happy family life of little red riding hood in the sanitised tale. Here, the setting changes to depict Vanessa's mother Ramona (played by Amanda Plummer), turning tricks on a street corner, covered in heavy makeup and salacious clothing. Furthermore, her stepfather Larry is introduced to the scene as a slim figured, overly tattooed, beer-swilling drug addict seeking dominance over his stepdaughter. "I'm getting ready to take a big shit right on that pointy little head of yours," he threatens: an amplified rendering of the ATU 311 tale type "wicked stepfather" that desires to destroy their youthfulness, in this case by means of extreme scatological degradation. Larry pushes it further by trying to make sexual advances on Vanessa as she quietly sits on the couch watching a cartoon on television (of Looney Tunes' Little Red Walking Hood, adding to the mosaic of the retelling). Surprisingly Vanessa doesn't act passive

as one may expect of the fairy tale figure, she charges at him, beating him and issuing him with the exhortation, "Now you just behave!" Just as she can discipline when her stepfather gets excessively riotous, so she can assuage her mom whenever she is in a tough situation such as the following scenes when Ramona gets arrested for soliciting. During the exchange, Ramona pleads for a cigarette whilst being cuffed on the ground. Vanessa holds a cigarette for her, regulating it like it were a baby's bottle. The 'glorified' family dynamic of the known fairy tale is here switched through what Saunders has coined a "mechanism of defamiliarization, inviting us as readers or spectators to look anew at a canonical text that we might otherwise have felt we had 'understood' or interpreted to our own satisfaction" (Saunders 2006, p. 99). This cycle compels us to recollect the fairy tale and to re-decipher the "Known pattern". The composed text of the Brothers Grimm variation expresses that "it was the grandmother that loved her most of all" and any variant of the story asks an inquiry. Why was the girl left alone to venture out to the dangerous woods? Perhaps we assume we know the whole story and what if the narrative was slightly more unhinged and Little Red Riding Hood was ultimately lacking care and love in her household which led to situations where she is forced to become the supportive backbone of the family. *Freeway* directly calls into question the stability of the girl's family unit, it also incorporates other fairy tale elements, such as the use of archetypes like the wicked stepmother and the fairy godmother. Vanessa's mother, for example, is portrayed as abusive and neglectful, while her parole officer (played by Brooke Shields) takes on a more nurturing and protective role.

After her mother is arrested again, instead of foster care, Vanessa sets out to join her grandma as an alternative. The journey of the girl into the unknown can be seen as an escape to find a new, more sympathetic home. Campbell (1996) concept of "Hero Journey" demonstrated the hero myths of many cultures as following the same basic pattern of *separation*, *initiation* and *return* (p. 28). These three steps represent the process of self-discovery which is at the centre of the Hero's journey, which typically includes the symbolic death and rebirth of the hero. Prior to leaving on her journey, Vanessa is seen taking a short visit to see her boyfriend Chopper Wood to ask if he would be able to accompany her. Unable to, she ends up wishing him a farewell for now. He gives her an automatic gun for protection and waves goodbye, his hazy figure

seen in the cinemascope frame of Vanessa's rear-view mirror, dwindling in significance. Shortly after she drives away, Chopper is gunned down in a drive by, having left himself unarmed. This signifies to the audience the lack of the traditional saviour as he has been neutralised leaving Vanessa completely alone on her journey, not dependent on a male to come to the rescue. The path of the journey is one cut through the wild open country of America, the Freeway. Like the forest of the fairy tale, the highway is a huge public region populated with obscure space, loaded with vulnerability and risk. In practically all variations of the story, Little Red Riding Hood either wanders off the way or picks a less challenging course at a crossing point. Both are introduced as purposeful decisions the young girl makes.

*Freeway's* approach is quite forward you might say, a tale of the dangerous, modern-day America. A balancing portrayal that could mimic the serial killer era of the 70s in America with tragic stories that start off with the clueless hitchhiker and resembling wolves that scattered through cities using charm to lure its victims. A scene in the film shows Vanessa watching the news where they are broadcasting the case of the 1-5 serial Killer. Panic surges through the neighbourhood when the killings reveal a pattern, there's a big bad wolf in town and they're running rampant. In our heads, this figure is truly a sight, deranged, animalistic, doesn't belong in the little suburban town but as we begin to learn, they're harder to spot, maybe there just like the rest of us. This is the case of Bob Wolverton (played by Kiefer Sutherland), a well-dressed, well-off professional with a fairly decent job as a psychological counsellor in a school for troubled boys. Such irony in its description but the perfect disguise. This manifestation is unsettlingly loaded because he not only inhabits the world of the spectator but holds a position of professional authority within it, someone who has private access to children throughout his everyday life. Endorsed by state and society, his metier is to earn the trust of vulnerable youngsters. By incorporating elements of horror such as the character of Bob Wolverton, who is a sexually sadistic serial killer preying on young women; this antagonist can be seen as a twisted version of the Big Bad Wolf character from the *Little Red Riding Hood* Fairy tale. This Big Bad Wolf is far more threatening because he is so recognisable, both as a figure that exists in the real world, and in the danger he represents through not only the folkloric memory of the story, but within the frame of horror cinema.

This is seen in the scene where along her journey, Vanessa's car suddenly comes to a halt due to engine exhaustion. For the wolf the coercion is easy, Vanessa is another clueless hitchhiker that wears the 'troubled girl' well. As they share a car ride, Wolverton encourages Vanessa to open up and share her family problems, further along the journey he also treats her to a roadside dinner. The centrepiece of *Freeway* is through the prolonged interaction between Wolverton and Vanessa and how we watch him slowly gain his next target's trust. The exchange that occurs first is predominantly shot in long take, tracking the two of them walking parallel to the main road at night. The sequence is uncomfortable, partly because of what Vanessa is describing, a troubled upbringing in foster care of sexual abuse and violence, but also because of the unhurried length of the unbroken camera move. The single take draws us into Wolverton's space as he steers the conversation, permitting us ourselves to fall prey to his methods of confidence trickery. Because the scene is allowed to play out without any technical interference (edits, music), we temporarily forget that this is a retelling and are sucked into its apparent reality. As Wolverton's line of questioning becomes more insidious "Did your step-father ever molest you?", the image subtly cuts to a reverse angle, the camera slowly pushing in on the two of them as Wolverton gradually moves closer to her, reaching out in comfort. The scene ends on a tight medium shot of the pair, the closest we have been to them since they exited the diner, Wolverton standing right against her shoulder. "You're going to have to let me in," he says, a weighted comment that reframes our involvement with the scene, itself a reference to the fairy tale *Three Little Pigs*, bringing us sharply back to the text as a retelling and the predatory threat of Wolverton. His probing questions become more lurid and twisted unable to contain his psychosexual urges any longer as he suddenly proceeds to cut off her ponytail with a straight edge razor, causing her to realise who he is. "I've absolutely reached my limits with people like you Vanessa... garbage people... You're already a master manipulator of men." He furiously states. The Big Bad Wolf embodies a dual nature: as a literary device, it symbolises moral retribution, but in the explicit tale, the wolf is depicted as a cunning villain with a predilection for young girls. This duality is evident in Wolverton's portrayal of the wolf, who serves as both the antagonist of the story and a manifestation of Grimm and Perrault aim to teach way-ward girls a lesson. Wolverton's interpretation aligns him with those who perceive Little Red Riding Hood as a temptress, thereby offering commentary on the cultural

significance of the wolf and the critical analysis that surrounds the character (Kloda, 2016)

Following the interaction, Vanessa remembers that she has a gun and hits Wolverton on the head with it. This Little Red Riding Hood no longer wants to be viewed as a passive individual who can be used and dominated through retellings inflected with bourgeois morality (Kloda, 2016) Given all the mistreatments she has experienced in her life, Vanessa repositions herself as courageous heroine. She then confronts him about his crimes and asks if he accepts Jesus as his saviour before shooting him. Afterward, she heads to a nearby truck stop for breakfast, seemingly unfazed by the experience. After Vanessa suffers a setback, it emerges that Wolverton survived their previous altercation despite suffering severe injuries inflicted upon him by Vanessa. Injuries he sustained have turned him into an outward manifestation of a monster he always was, yet authorities and media still refuse to acknowledge this fact. Instead, television portrays him as a victim while his wife appears distressed by him. Vanessa is quickly arrested and imprisoned upon being located; however, she manages to engineer a violent escape with other inmates. While travelling towards her destination, an initially sceptical police officer starts believing her story. At the scene of the crime, an officer finds Vanessa's severed ponytail at which Wolverton has been hiding the girls' bodies, as well as several more they had hidden in a shed nearby. Wolverton's pursuit by all cast members leads them all to gather at Grandma's trailer park, filled with inflatable giraffes and plastic lawn ornaments. Vanessa confronts an impostor "grandmother," already deceased after having committed a fetish-style sexual crime; Wolverton manages to overpower Vanessa who then knocks him unconscious before police arrive on scene and inspect the scene, leaving Vanessa standing outside with relief at having overpowered Wolverton; police arrive later and assess what has transpired until they arrive to survey what has transpired before leaving Vanessa standing outside while overwhelmed at her triumphant victory.

Bright's narrative of *Little Red Riding Hood* takes place within the impoverished communities of southern California and offers an original perspective. Catherine Orenstein writes in her book *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of Fairy tale* (2002) that the film uses vibrant comic strip-like colours to satirise lives of the underprivileged while emphasising how these ideals stand in stark

contrast to harsh realities in today's society. Vanessa, as the protagonist, represents marginalised youth as she embarks upon her journey. Her clothing, typical of social underclass clothing, distinguishes her from Los Angeles mainstream society, while her boyfriend Chopper Wood, an inner-city gang member from Chicago with a distinctively shaven head and powerful physique, sets them apart further. The film's narrative emphasises the risks present in urban environments, including gangs, guns and wolves. Vanessa's hairy stepfather who uses drugs, an overly enthusiastic police officer and middle-aged men seeking sexual encounters all serve as real threats that she must navigate around (Orenstein, 2002). Vanessa serves as a point of view character who gives audiences a lens through which to view the plot. It explores sexual abuse by highlighting conditions and assumptions which render adolescent girls from lower socioeconomic statuses vulnerable targets for such abuse. Orenstein (2002) suggests that Vanessa and her fellow inmates' violent behaviour is perhaps best understood, even if not excused, as an emotional reaction to living conditions which are overpowering them. The narrative also subverts conventional fairy tale tropes and characters while challenging dominant cultural assumptions regarding social class, race and gender. Vanessa's boyfriend Chopper Wood epitomises this inversion through both his character and function in the story. Orenstein (2002) highlights Chopper as a strikingly modern embodiment of an inner-city gang member, undercutting the heroic archetype associated with goodly woodchopper in Grimm's fairy tales and serving more as an helper or donor, providing Vanessa with all necessary means for success. Wolverton stands as a stark inversion of the modern Prince Charming archetype (Orensten, 2002). An educated white middle-class psychologist by profession, Wolverton represents privilege and influence before ultimately turning out to be I-5 serial killer. Bettelheim (1976) presented fairy tales as a safe landscape for children to explore their inner fears and desires. Psychologists are perceived as trusted confidants, but by casting a psychologist as a villain, *Freeway* turns modern psychology on its head. This subverts conventional fairy tale conventions while challenging cultural assumptions regarding psychology and social class. *Freeway's* heroine, Vanessa, further subverts conventional fairy tale narratives by being her own rescuer rather than being passive and needing rescue from others. Vanessa is an antihero whose self-reliance and violent capabilities subvert traditional moralities. Ultimately, Freeway directs its moral outrage not at Vanessa or Wolverton

but at society itself for creating tragedy. Freeway's critique of false fairy tales and the system that promotes them exposes marginalisation of women and girls along with systematic mistrust of poor people.

In portraying the content of *Little Red Riding Hood* to a dangerous, modern-day America, the retelling becomes a dynamic two-way intertextuality, using the contemporary to; in this case literally, revive the older narrative whilst at the same time distancing itself through a modernisation of setting. George Kubler believes essential to lived experience: "Human desires in every present instance are torn between the replica and the invention, between the desire to return to the known pattern, and the desire to escape it by a new variation" (Kubler, 1962, p. 72 as cited in Hutcheon 2006, p. 173). Hutcheon talks about the "pleasure" of adaptation that could further describe these desires, "The comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change" (Hutcheon 2006, p. 4). Reviving these early themes, the film highlights both the development and lasting significance of fairy tales while drawing parallels between literary canon and its legacy messages. Freeway deftly manipulates audience expectations, creating a meta-plot that provokes viewers to reconsider standard characters and themes within fairy tales as well as laws by which they survive and adapt; all providing an irreverent approach to fairy-tale conventions for deeper engagement with and contemplation on its long history.

Fairy tales are not just intrusive in their structure, they take into consideration numerous varieties and translations. Children can experience stories of murder, child abuse, cannibalism etc through its content. Bright intentionally reflects this by setting *Freeway* inside a nonexclusive sort of ghastliness, creating a story that is a test to the mainstream taste, loaded up with coarse vain behaviours, sexual savagery all tempered with indelicate humour. In speaking of unsettling topics and erotic elements, *Freeway* conquers the topic of rape particularly through its heroic insertion of fulfilling rape-revenge elements, what's crucial is the films use of this motif as a liberating frame of reference. We see the exploitation of reality to an extreme, offering something disturbingly parabolic, nothing new to the cinematic standpoint of horror. Although this is a hardly a tale of supernatural creatures with big waddling teeth and howling monsters in the wood, Bright restores *Little Red Riding Hood* through the comfort of

standardised horror & crime-thriller to its origin as “a folktale full of earthy humour and high melodrama... (before being) transformed into a heavy-handed narrative with a pedagogical agenda designed by adults.” (Kloda, 2016).

#### 3.2.1.1 *Hanna* (2011)

In a cabin in the Arctic wilds, Erik (played by Eric Bana), a rogue CIA agent, trains his young daughter, Hanna (played by Saoirse Ronan), to be an assassin. Hanna is being trained to kill Marissa Wiegler (played by Cate Blanchett), another agent with whom Eric shares a dark history. Saoirse Ronan's character plays cat-and-mouse with Cate Blanchett's venomous CIA operative. The bulk of the film sets off as a heart-pounding chase across Africa and Europe in which the question of who is hunting who remains a mystery until the very end.

*Hanna* (2011) directed by Joe Wright is an exceptional example of a hybrid film that explores themes of empowerment, agency, gender performance and subversion. According to Smith (2007) intertextual framework, *Hanna* would likely be classified more as a Fairy tale revision rather than a retelling. *Hanna* is a dark and suspenseful action thriller film featuring a teenage girl as its central figure, creating an exciting cinematic experience by mixing genres and styles to form something completely original. It is an intriguing narrative, borrowing heavily from such works as those by *Brothers Grimm*, *Frankenstein*, *David Lynch A Clockwork Orange*. It also bears some similarity to the series of films built around Robert Ludlum's "Jason Bourne" both follow an ex-CIA asset who seeks both freedom and revenge against them. *Hanna* follows this young heroine through her journey, encountering danger, deceit, and violence all the while using familiar fairy tale tropes and motifs to challenge traditional gender roles and expectations.

The film divides its storyline, following the parallel treks of Hanna and her father, Erik, as they attempt to infiltrate society individually on their journeys toward reunion. Hanna has spent much of her life living in isolation in Finland's hinterlands. The pair lived like recluses all of Hanna’s life, away from prying eyes such as the CIA. Learning from her

father how to become an elite assassin. Erik's teaching methods can be seen as harsh and unforgiving; day in and day out he trains Hanna in all aspects of killing, from martial arts to using knives and guns. Home schooled in their little cabin, she used only an outmoded encyclopaedia and a small copy of Grimm's Märchen's fairy tale from when she was an infant as books to learn her lessons. Hanna reading reveals a page featuring an illustration of *Little Red Riding Hood*, alluding to how closely linked her story and film adaptation are. This application can relate to Stephens and McCallum's theory of metaphysics as well as Hutcheon's "knowing audience" demonstrating how visual cues become intertextual cues for audiences. Hanna appears untouched by life; Erik's affective education of Hanna appears stunted. Hanna longs to know "what music feels like" clueless as to modern society and its ways. The contrast between her rustic cabin and Marissa's sleek urban apartment towards the beginning of the film does a great job of setting up the theme of how little Hanna knows of modern technology. As part of her training, she memorises a series of false tales about herself to use "when the time comes". However, with half her teenage years behind her she decides she is ready to enter society. Once Hanna completes her training, she flips a switch on a geo tracking device which alerts the CIA of her presence. Hanna then sets out on her mission: infiltrating a secure U.S. government installation in Europe in order to kill Marissa Wiegler who caused Hanna's mother Johanna's death. In a flashback scene, Weigler chases Erik, Johanna and two-year-old Hanna, she ends up shooting Johanna, who whispers to Weigler upon her death, "She'll never be yours." Meanwhile Erik escapes with young Hanna.

Erik flees after Hanna alerts the CIA, intending to return home after "killing off the witch." Before parting ways with his daughter, Erik shares some parting words and reminds her about their overriding edict, "Adapt or Die." He advised her to remain aware and think for herself even while sleeping. Soon afterwards, heavily armed troops from a helicopter arrived and surrounded the cabin area. After brief resistance, Hanna is captured and taken to a CIA redoubt under the sands of Morocco. Wearing now an orange jumpsuit and held in an interrogation room, there, she learns that Erik betrayed and then left the agency, becoming an imminent threat to American security. Hanna requests to meet Marissa Wiegler as the first step of her mission. Because Hanna was captured too easily, Wiegler sends a body double instead. When a woman interrogator

enters the room, Hanna begins asking questions related to where their relationship with her father started and other pertinent matters. Hanna weeps in sorrow after hearing about their relationship, as she embraces ‘Marissa’, but then abruptly twists her head around, snapping her neck. Hanna's plan goes as expected once her interrogator authenticates her identity; however, what Hanna encounters instead is an impostor. As Marissa watches from afar, Hanna dispatches a guard and grabs his weapon before swiftly shooting out all surveillance cameras. Mackintosh (2004) describes *Little Red Riding Hood* as an example of "something similar to being dressed as an evil character" (p. 161). Here, the wolf is clearly disappointed that the idyllic impression of the child was so far from the truth. Clover supports this assertion when she discusses gender roles in horror narratives by acknowledging both sides of a story: "We are both Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf; the horror is in knowing both sides" (Clover 1992, p. 131). Marissa did not expect such a level of violence from a young girl, which captures Marissa with shock in this scene.

Once Hanna manages to escape her secure location where she had been taken for interrogation, the scene dramatically shifts into subjective narration as Hanna disappears among a sea of CIA agents looking for her. Operating through subjective narration, the camera pans across the figures of the agents, who, in a reversal of power dynamics, are suddenly the object of Hanna’s fantastically projected gaze. Hanna can then be seen crawling through a maze of ventilation and sewage pipes before emerging onto the surface, dodging other trucks of soldiers searching for her. Wright uses camera techniques such as spins to demonstrate how disorienting chase scenes are for his characters. Soon after, Hanna makes friends upon landing on the Moroccan desert, quickly befriending a precocious teenage girl named Sophie (played by Jessica Barden), whom she met taking pictures near a highway. Sophie takes an immediate liking to Hanna's odd behaviour and finds her fascinating. Hanna experiences many firsts with Sophie, as the scenes between them show a functional and fulfilling friendship. Meanwhile, Wiegler attempts to destroy Hanna by hiring Isaac, an event club owner/bounty hunter to track Hanna down while she pursues Erik whom she thinks may be in Germany. David Lynch's *A Clockwork Orange* casts its shadow most forcefully over Isaac (portrayed by Tom Hollander), whose joyously sadistic behaviour is at times darkly comic. Wright notes that for this scene set in a Snow White-inspired

strip club, he asked musical duo The Chemical Brothers to develop a "fairy tale theme" which Isaac could whistle throughout the movie. Wright found inspiration from early, darker works of fairy tales; "I found fairy tales to be an effective gateway into one's subconscious in much the same way Jung used archetypes," Wright states (cited in Greco, 2011).

Hanna attempts to escape Isaac and his trio of CIA-hired killers by hiding in Sophie's family van. Later on, Hanna is discovered by Sophie's free-spirited hippie parents, after not much convincing, the family welcomes Hanna as part of their travel plan to Spain. The hired assassins of the CIA are still relentlessly pursuing Hanna, with Marisa in close proximity.; audiences begin to worry if their hospitality may eventually backfire on them. As Hanna flees across Europe and eventually arrives in Berlin to reunite with Erik, tension mounts to a climactic confrontation between Hanna and the CIA killers in an abandoned amusement park. In time, Hanna's reasons for pursuing Weigler, and the circumstances of Erik's wife's demise become known. Marissa Weigler with the CIA conducted an experiment that convinced pregnant women wanting abortions to participate in a study designed to give their foetuses increased intelligence, strength, agility and tolerance for violence. We later learn Hanna's mother was part of this experiment as well.

*Hanna* stands out among action films for its focus shown towards women characters, even though directed and written by men. *Hanna* features realistic female roles who don't become oversexualized throughout its run time. In the film, Hanna is presented very much as a child, both visually and in the costuming, taking control of her destiny while challenging societal norms. This ability forms one of *Hanna's* core themes of empowerment and agency. She is an extraordinary and resilient character who employs her training as an assassin to fight back against injustice and seek justice for herself and her family. Her strength can be seen through her physical prowess, intelligence and determination to survive in an unpredictable world. Hanna shows that rather than passively accepting her circumstances, she takes charge by using her agency to challenge and overcome barriers in her path, showing a level of independence that defies traditional gender roles. Hanna quickly establishes her strong and independent character in the very first scene when she hunts a deer alone in the wild. When her father provokes her into attacking him, Hanna immediately fights

him off with all her strength. Hanna's decision to engage in a fistfight with someone twice her size appears as an act of courage, while her strength can also be seen when she drags a 200-lb reindeer across snowy ground, kills a line of men, or races across Berlin landscape. Hanna proves to be a fearless young lady with appropriate survival skills that she utilises during perilous situations, an impressive accomplishment for any teen female hero. Hanna constantly hops from fence to fence while remaining a loyal and sensible daughter for her father who can also become violent when necessary. Hanna is no helpless child who requires protection from another. In fact, Hanna stands in opposition to the traditional gender roles; she presents an androgynous personality who doesn't act in a gender specific way.

*Hanna* challenges traditional notions of gender performance through her actions; thus, showing a more fluid understanding of gender performance. In the film, she is neither hyper-sexualized, mentally vacant nor a one-note villain/heroine unlike most female-driven action movies such as *Cat Woman* (2004) and *Sucker Punch* (2011) framed from a voyeuristic, objectifying male gaze that ogles the female body in action as sexual rather than powerful, holding power through sexual attraction. We can observe this from the start of Hanna's story, she dons a thick winter coat before being placed into a holding cell where she receives a bright orange suit, sans additional cosmetic enhancement or alteration to her appearance. She manages to escape her cell in Morocco where she steals an old robe from one of the women doing laundry near a riverbank, using this loose attire as she explores and becomes acquainted with her new surroundings. As soon as Hanna meets Sophie, their images become instantly dissimilar; Hanna doesn't wear anything appealing in contrast to Sophie who clearly adheres to patriarchal culture. Hanna wears only a supposed “unattractive” robe while Sophie dons skimpy short clothing. As part of her attempt at being a good friend to Sophie, she agrees with Sophie's idea to go out on a date with someone they don't know. Still, she dresses modestly without trying to appear sexually attractive, opting for a knee-length dress while adding jeans underneath and a jacket on top. Before travelling with the family caravan, she slipped on baggy sweatsuits that clearly belong to a unisex genre of apparel. Wright describes Hanna's personality as one who does not rely on having a male partner (cited in Greco, 2011). Hanna is an unconventional heroine, not sexualized but still powerful in terms of her abilities, bringing a feminist

interpretation to this specific genre. As such, *Hanna* feels more like a coming-of-age story than traditional action cinema. Jennifer Stuller *in Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (2010) asserts that Hanna stands out as an ideal feminist icon due to her remote upbringing rather than her impressive killing skills alone: Hanna was raised alone in a cabin deep within the forest and according to Stuller "She is taught by her father and relies solely on an encyclopaedia and Grimm's fairy tales for education. These texts form her world view." Soon enough, she found herself forced to flee in order to survive in this new reality that is far removed from what she knows of. Here she realised just how different life could be between fairy tale world and real-world living. Here lies Hanna's true power as an embodiment of female strength. Empowerment may come not through physical ability, training or lethal skill, but from her ability to adapt and learn. When seen this way, the film becomes not so much a revenge thriller but more like an exploration of growing up (Stuller, 2010).

In the scenes with the two teenage characters, Hanna becomes further fascinated with Sophie. The scenes represent an interesting contrast in personality between Hanna and Sophie; thus, providing us with two distinct models of teenage girls raised under two separate environments. Sophie is fast-talking, intelligent yet quirky; completely immersed in pop culture. Though often appalled at her hippie parents' unconventionality, Sophie still participates when singing songs together while travelling on their camper van down the highway. Hanna, however, has never experienced gender sexual politics and does not know what lip gloss is or how to differentiate platonic feelings from romantic ones. She is also known for not passing judgement, having an open outlook on life and society as a whole. Wright told NY Times in an interview that the characters can teach viewers philosophically about contemporary society (Lim, 2011). Contrast between Sophie's proactiveness and Hanna's silent gaze makes for an engaging plot point, especially during one evocative scene where Hanna sits next to Sophie on a bed and pecks her on the lips. Here, the film offers something rarer still: an exploration of female friendship and intimacy free from any male attention or heteronormative romance. Sophie's younger brother's emotional reaction is illuminating in this scene, it shows why such scenes and recognition of female intimacy in general remain so rare. Threatening male-defined hetero patriarchy. The brother's

reaction reinforces patriarchal fears of female sexuality and is an embodiment of Creed's concept of *monstrous feminine*: *femme animale* as Hanna becomes an empowered individual and challenges male-defined hetero patriarchy (Creed, 1993, p. 5). As she develops sexual maturity and rejects traditional gender roles, the experiences she has with Sophie begin to re-shape her characterisation. Kelly Oliver in *Hunting Girls: Sexual Violence from The Hunger Games to Campus Rape* (2016) asserts that coming-of-age stories about sixteen-year-olds typically depict abuse and violence tied to sexual awakening and desires for sexual fulfilment. For Hanna and other teenage protagonists in Oliver's novels, their transition into womanhood is marked by violence and their first sexual desires come with accompanying danger. For instance, Hanna's first kiss serves as another interlude on Hanna's ongoing chase by CIA agents (Oliver, 2016, p. 47).

The film itself is an engaging blend of action and fairy tale that deftly intersperses action scenes with references to ancient tales. Fairy tale imagery abounds throughout this film, Hanna herself can be seen as an embodiment of multiple fairy tale heroines, such as Andersen's tale type 408 "The Little Mermaid". Hanna shares many characteristics with this figure as she too longs to leave her forest home and experience real girl culture (Oliver 2016 pp 123-24). Wright characterises Hanna as the little mermaid who discovers the harsh reality of life: "*The Little Mermaid* is the story of Hanna. The idea that she grows up under the surface and imagines the world above as this beautiful, romantic place. And of course, she gains legs, and they are painful, and she discovers the world is quite cruel" (as cited in Greco, 2011). Erik also portrays the "wise old king", or ATU 990 tale type "Wise Ruler", while Marissa may be seen as depicting an evil stepmother; ATU tale type 709 "The Jealous Sisters", covers stories wherein a jealous woman or an emotionally abusive stepmother mistreats or attempts to harm young girls. Marissa can also be seen as the embodiment of the classic wicked witch trope (ATU 325 "Magic Flight"). Wright's vision for Marissa as the "Wicked Witch of the Story" consisted of having red and green as her predominant colours," as described by costume designer Lucie Bates. There are also parallels with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; Hanna can be seen spying upon Sophie's family as they engage in normal activities, which resembles Frankenstein's confusion in adapting to their new environment; Hanna, however, remains unaware of what constitutes normality for

Sophie and is unaware of how normal everything really is in Sophie's family unit. On one occasion, she is overwhelmed by modern technology (fluorescent lighting and television), experiencing music for the first time - with severe panic evident. Horror coded narrative strategies re-emerge in *Hanna*, depicting its heroine "caught in a world of objects" which have "repressed anxieties and emotions" (Elsaesser 1991, p. 84). Horror genre narrative strategies reify this anxiety as an object-sublimated into objects; yet its source lies within contemporary tension (Elsaesser, 1991, p.83). This tension is created through cinematic cycles aimed at young female audiences that target them cinematically as consumers while narratively framing those desires as potentially dangerous and constructing the girl heroine as at risk (Griffin, 2004, p. 35). *Hanna* in some ways represent nostalgia for an age without technology, "technology interrupts nature and brings chaos to the seeming natural order of things" (Oliver 2016, p 124)

Wright uses fairy tale spaces, objects and motifs scattered throughout the film to convey themes of empowerment, agency and gender subversion. The director leaves breadcrumbs leading us back to its fairy tale theme throughout. "Wright's use of dark fairy tale aspects was often almost subliminal" (Greco, 2011). Iconography in this film is quintessentially German: snow-covered villages appear prominently as in its opening shot; this motif conveys the national spirit and folklore associated with German folklore, underscoring gender or national identity myths that span generations. With a cinematic swooping crane shot over a snow-covered mountain, the film invites us into its "expressive visual codes of mise-en-scene providing an imaginary space on screen that transports viewers into an old-fashioned fairy tale setting." Production designer Sarah Greenwood credits Hans Christian Andersen with providing inspiration for their cabin in the woods, though they drew upon tradition by adding their own twist, including Hanna's collection of Grimms' fairy tales in their home library. Even the image of a terrifying wolf's head covering an amusement park tunnel serves to remind us of the dark side of fairy tales (as cited in Greco, 2011). Grimm's Fairy Tale Theme Park in Berlin serves as a symbolic setting in the final fight scene, symbolically depicting how fantasy meets reality and vice versa. The giant wolf's head at *Hanna's* climax and seven swan boats that form her name are key set pieces that conjure familiar fairy tale imagery. The material and visual aspects of *Hanna* become emblematic of various tales and is made evident by the recurrence of certain objects, settings and spaces.

In the final fight scene, Hanna escapes through an empty fairy tale-themed amusement park, leaping across seven-swan boats and narrowly escaping Grandmother's house turned funhouse, only to come upon an unexpected sight deep within the woods. Hanna soon discovers an abandoned rollercoaster track leading into a tunnel shaped like the huge, open mouth of a 10-foot-tall wolf's head; it looms above her like a monstrous beast. In a terrifying zoom shot, Marissa appears out of the darkness of the tunnel dressed like the character from *Little Red Riding Hood's* tale. Dressed in her grandmother's clothing, Marissa presented an alluring facade of motherly care while concealing a gun. "The Wolf" motif highlights Marissa as an embodiment of deception clad in grandmotherly apparel, her true nature being revealed within its sharp jaws of deceitful wolf's heads. This illustration clearly depicts Hanna and Marissa's connection to "the wolf". Tension mounts as Hanna and Marissa face off within the wolf's head; Hanna shoots an arrow while Marissa fires her gun simultaneously. Both Marissa and her foe collide, creating an unforgettable scene resembling that found in *Little Red Riding Hood*; with the wolf and the girl engaged in a deadly confrontation. Both being engaged in an exchange that ultimately ends in fatal wounds for Marissa; her bloodied hand appearing like that of a wounded wolf paw. Ultimately Marissa succumbs to her injuries on the rollercoaster track where she lies dying against its tracks. In a medium shot, Hanna gazes expressionlessly down the lens while holding Marissa's handgun in her possession. With a cold and stoic demeanour, Hanna declared: "I just missed your heart," as she pointed Marissa's gun directly at her as well as at the audience. This scene employs the fairy tale trope of mirror image bookending sequences. At the start, Hanna kills a deer; at the end, she sees another one and kills Marissa. Hanna's journey has come full circle as both her first and last lines echo this sentiment: 'I just missed your heart.' A shot rang out and Hanna's name filled up the screen in huge white letters, an emotionally fulfilling conclusion of Hanna's adventure away from childhood.

This ending is significant within the context of *Little Red Riding Hood* fairy tale revision. It affirms Hanna's "wolfishness" as narratively satisfying but also essential for her survival as a heroine. "Red" and "Wolf" as one emphasises Hanna's elusive character, reflecting her many forms of transformation and thus becoming one form of Creed's *monstrous feminine:* the *femme-castratrice* (Creed, 1993, p. 444). It marks a departure from the traditional depictions of girlhood found in fairy tales on screen. Hanna came

of age by embodying both Red and Wolf, disproving traditional roles assigned to girls in fairy tales and upending audience expectations by challenging the damsel-in-distress trope and rewarding Hanna's transgressive actions rather than condemning them. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's literary depiction of *Little Red Riding Hood* warned against little girls wandering away from the path in the woods. Yet Hanna's journey into adulthood as depicted in the film stands in stark contrast. Hanna found herself fighting to survive against a forest backdrop on her own without help from woodcutters or huntsmen, without losing her innocence in an unsettling manner. Yet Hanna's journey into adulthood created unnerved confusions. At that moment, she became a monstrous figure who unexpectedly aligned the audience with Marissa as an antagonist in the film. Tamas Nagypal in the *essay Monstrous Children and Childish Monsters: Essays on Cinema's Holy Terrors* criticises *Hanna* as being problematic as she blurs boundaries between adults and children. Nagypal contends *Hanna* illustrates contemporary disassociation from trauma due to media oversaturation, with Hanna herself not feeling fear due to being genetically engineered by the CIA. Hanna pushes the limits of childishness through her relationship with Marissa (CIA agent) (Nagypal, cited in Bohlmann et al, 2015). While Nagypal's arguments are insightful, they fail to acknowledge Hanna's psychological complexity or her experience living in an alienating modern environment.

As we search for our identities, we often look beyond what exists to envision what could have been. *Hanna* explores this phenomenon and perfectly captures the nostalgia and beauty of youth by juxtaposing its nostalgia and beauty against her violent (though necessary) upbringing, her natural innocence displayed through her weaknesses, family members, and one true friend Sophie. Another important aspect in *Hanna* is how it allows viewers to connect with a young girl on screen. *Hanna* is an epic tale of redemption, self-discovery and identity exploration with an important political message about how our modern world binds us in its embrace with dominant ideologies, such as gender conformity and consumerism. While Hanna hopes to see the world, it appears to her to be moving at 100 miles an hour, quickly and chaotically; as represented in fast-paced, intense action scenes with heart-pounding chase sequences. Yet Hanna fulfils her role of being an empowered yet un-objectified female hero with ease.

### 3.2.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the juxtaposition of *Freeway* (1996) and *Hanna* (2011) highlights the diverse ways filmmakers can engage with genre subversion performance and intertextuality to breathe new life into classic narratives while reflecting on contemporary issues. Both films engage with fairy tale narratives, particularly *Little Red Riding Hood*, to comment on contemporary society and explore the young characters' personal growth. While distinct in their approach, the films converge in their exploration of gender roles, agency and socio-cultural aspects of society. *Freeway* uses crime and horror genres to critically engage with issues such as abuse, inequality, poverty, and justice. The film critiques the accepted knowledge about crime and criminal justice, challenging the viewer's perspective on predators, victims, heroes, and villains. *Hanna* explores a young girl's journey to self-discovery. It embeds its protagonist's story within the larger tradition of fairy tales. They are showcasing the potential of intertextuality and gender performance to create a fresh perspective on fairy tales and coming-of-age narratives. The film's portrayal of female friendship and the absence of male objectification showcase a subversion of typical cinematic portrayals of women in horror films, offering a refreshing alternative to the male gaze prevalent in many action-driven films. Both films embrace the subversive potential of fairy tales and horror through their retellings. They exemplify how genre hybridity can be harnessed and serve as powerful tools for storytelling, inviting audiences to question established conventions and expectations in cinema today.

# 4 CHAPTER 2: DECONSTRUCTING CHILDHOOD

## 4.1 THE IDEA OF CHILDHOOD

As Philippe Ariès wrote in *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, “Our world is obsessed by the physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood. “He also argues the existence of the concept ‘childhood’ as being a contemporary culture’s concern.

> *This preoccupation [with children] was unknown to medieval civilization because there was no problem for the Middle Ages: as soon as he had been weaned, or soon after, the child became the natural companion of the adult. […] Medieval civilization failed to perceive this difference [between children and adults] and therefore lacked this concept of transition. The great event [leading to the “discovery” of childhood as a concept] was therefore the revival, at the beginning of modern times, of an interest in education. (Aries, 1960)*

Childhood can be seen as an artefact of culture, while "children" represent a fluid demographic with physical and physiological characteristics that vary across time. Luddy and Smith (2009, pg. 438) address these differences between childhood and "children". They assert that the study of children and childhood is still at an incipient stage, with much historical research focused on adult perceptions of children as well as the cultural shaping of childhood. Luddy & Smith (2009, pg. 76) notes how adults often attach symbolic and psychological meanings to an imagined child. This perspective illustrates a dual cultural and social ambiguity towards children, simultaneously viewing them as both innocent and vulnerable, yet potentially hazardous. This discrepancy led to institutionalization as it revealed a gap between adult conceptualizations of children's lived experiences and those envisioned in adult conceptualizations of them.

Jans Qvortrup et al (2011, pg.1) assert in *The Palgrave Handbook of Childhood Studies* that childhood studies' foundation lies in its critique of adult ideological perspectives and its pivotal inquiry: How is the child coming into being? This question goes beyond traditional depictions of children to examine how society facilitates child observability. Prior to the 20th century's sociological shift and the rising influence of mass culture and advertising, childhood was often defined in terms of its deficiencies in terms of knowledge, experience and moral development (Luddy & Smith, 2009). As children were engaging in both agricultural and factory labour, this muddied the boundaries between childhood and adulthood further. Vicky Lebeau in *Children and Cinema* (2008) emphasizes this change, noting how the notion that children differ from adults is central to modernity (Lebeau, 2008, pg. 108). Conceptions of childhood have undergone dramatic shifts since the late eighteenth century, often coincident with the Romantic movement's rise. Romanticism popularized an idea of childhood as being inherently innocent and connected to both imagination and nature (McCallum, 2018, pg. 34). Romanticism's influence on children's literature during the 1850s can be seen through its growing interest in child rearing with key references such as 'The Image of the Romantic child'. Romantic ideologies held by William Wordsworth and Jean-Jacques Rousseau romanticize children as "blank", natural, pre-social beings. At its core is the Romantic notion that childhood is “the sleep of reason”, which persists into modern assumptions that view children as unknowable vessels where anxieties and ambivalence accumulate (Rousseau, 2007, pg. 80). Such characteristics help cement children's subordination within families as a formalized process of socialization - all while serving as remnants of formative ideologies of childhood development.

The revolution brought with it intense discussions on childhood construction and modernity. Social and political reform had an enormous influence on how concepts of childhood were formed; their effect can still be seen today in children's literature and film. Kirkland (2017) asserts that modernity's crucible was the creation of contemporary childhood. Herein, its imagined figure became symbolic of many contradictions, anxieties, and aspirations inherent to modernity's very era when its development took place. As adults progress from what are perceived to be simpler, more natural, more innocent ways of being, they often believe they have left all aspects of childhood behind them - which in fact provides a repository for everything that was once part of who they

are. Children act as conduits for adults' feelings of alienation from modernity and their anxiety over how quickly social, cultural and technological change is taking place. This distinction proves useful when discussing contemporary culture's resistance to maturity and how perceived gaps form between childhood and adulthood. As soon as childhood was recognized as an independent life stage from adulthood, sociological research on children and an increase in popular mass culture gave rise to the concept of an "American generic child". At the heart of this construct was innocence: an incomplete state of intellectual and moral development necessitating protection from possible corrupting influences to preserve childhood's inherent innocence (Zornado, 2001). This notion propelled extensive research on the effect of media on children, evidenced by the Payne Fund Studies that examined Films' influence on child behaviour (Wojcik-Andrews, 2000).

This perspective became the cornerstone of contemporary discourse regarding media's purportedly detrimental effects on children's innocence, juxtaposing ignorance with the potential loss of innocence (Buckingham, 2000). This rhetoric continues, reinforcing a belief that adults must shield children from exposure to potentially damaging content. An invocation of moral values and safeguarding of innocence, "think of the children" quickly became a staple phrase used in discussions surrounding media censorship involving violent or explicit material. Rhetorical devices often employed to highlight children's vulnerability are targeted towards protecting them from perceived danger; calling for content restrictions and censorship restrictions as means to do this (Rose, 1984). As such, childhood isn't one unifying entity but instead is determined by adult perceptions enforcing adult-defined codes and norms (Rose,1984).

Kirkland (2017) views media for children as the product of cultural modernity and modern methods of reproduction where tensions are expressed, negotiated and reconciled symbolically. Annette Kuhn's article in *Cinematic Experience, Film Space, and the Child's World* explores this complexity of childhood within a cinematic context, providing a thorough examination of how film spaces reflect this notion of childhood in their construction and representation of it. Her analysis explores how cinema represents and responds to adults' alienation from modernity as well as their anxieties regarding social, cultural and technological change. Kuhn's work falls within the realm of constructivism, which asserts that childhood is an artificial construct formed from

cultural, historical, and ideological influences (Kuhn, 2010, pp 82-98) This perspective recognizes that childhood isn't an unchanging or universal process; instead, it emerges from specific cultural and societal circumstances. Kuhn highlights how cinema's role in shaping childhood enables society to form its perceptions and expectations around it. Children and cinema have always intertwined, with animated adaptations such as *Ginx Baby* and *Child Pictures* representing an important point in this relationship (Lebeau, 2005, pg 10). This interaction has resulted in what's known as "normative childhood," an artificial construct created by adult perceptions about what childhood should entail. Baudrillard (1994) introduced simulacra, an imaginary world composed of images and signs detached from reality which influences perceptions of childhood including its depiction in movies.

Film depictions of childhood often present it as an ongoing process, linked with adult projects in progress rather than as an independent state of being. According to Olson and Scahill (2012, pg. 9), this perspective creates a narrative marked by its failure; childhood is seen as incomplete in comparison with adulthood; adults thus gain control of children while simultaneously shaping and defining "natural" childhood boundaries and norms. Such construction creates a stark dividing line between normative and deviant behaviour in childhood, with those who don't fit within normative expectations often cast as "deviants," unable to conform to predetermined norms set by adults. Films as cultural artifacts reflect and reinforce cultural ideas. Every culture has its own set of beliefs, values, and norms that define what it means to be a child. These cultural representations shape people's understanding of childhood while reinforcing dominant notions about what constitutes an "ideal" or "normal" childhood experience. Emma Wilson's *Cinema's Missing Children* examines the depictions of children in cinema, particularly how they are shown as missing or lost. Wilson (2003) suggests that cinema's depictions of missing children reflect our cultural anxiety over childhood innocence being lost and the threats they face as children grow up in a dangerous and uncertain world. She further elaborates that the lost child metaphor can be used to explore larger societal issues such as social and political unrest and how these affect vulnerable members (Wilson 2003). Children's films generally adhere to paradigms rooted in morality, social science, culture, feminism and ideology that are heavily intertwined with politics (Wojcik-Andrews, 2002). Children's films must meet certain

social and cultural constructs when dealing with childhood; social constructions it have established norms and conventions against which their films should be assessed. Brown (2017) asserts that films targeted toward children that elicit surprise or dismay may indicate that their form must adhere to widely held conventions and be understood accordingly. He suggests that these conventions include the reaffirmation of family and community, foregrounding childlike figures and minimization of adult content or situations, and broad negation of ambiguity (Brown 2017, pages 13-16). Given that children's films frequently address difficult, sensitive, or "taboo" subjects it begs the question of genre censorship and genre classification.

Kirkland (2017) identified three general approaches in media for children. One prominent and widely recognized approach involves returning to an earlier era that represents childhood outside modernity. As evidenced by several animated fairy tale films featuring trapped princesses, beanstalks, and trap-filled dungeons that often assume some form of "neo-medievalism", the child customers are transported into an imaginary world away from modern society. Exploring this landscape, one literary genre such as fairy tales can provide an invaluable window into both adult reality and children's dreams. Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) places fairy tales within the realm of fantasy, where Alice stumbles upon an eccentric universe full of unusual inhabitants. A fairy tale, as an expression of adult perceptions of childhood, creates a space where children are seen as pre-rational and pre-social beings, bound to nature but susceptible to emotional outbursts. Fairy tales provide children with an imaginative world where their personal subjectivity and sense of separation from adult authority is fostered and amplified. Although Fairy tales serve as metaphorical constructs, shaping childhood in an imaginary sphere apart from reality, paradoxically adults craft this imaginative world for children as an effective method for controlling ontological growth. For example, adults tend to think violent content in children’s stories may disconcert young minds, causing limitations in the interaction between violence and fairy tales. Yet recent research counters this perception and suggests children might not find such violence distressing as adults do (Dunlap 2012). Another prominent animated film example is Iris Shepard (2010), which explores why there are no child protagonists in Pixar features while emphasizing their didactic relationships with adult characters. These relationships focus on "growing up," often depicting adults as protectors guiding children toward adulthood while protecting their

innocence. Instead of encouraging kids to experience diversity through exploring multiple experiences, such films often prioritize protecting innocence over giving children agency and assigning secondary roles for themselves.

Kirkland (2017) asserts that the second approach used in children's media acknowledges and attempts to address an unsatisfactory relationship between modernity and children while trying to find solutions for it. An epistemological debate ensues from such circumstances concerning the essence and necessity of childhood. Buckingham (2000, pg. 4) emphasizes how much intrusion there has been into the once sacred realm of childhood while Holt (1974, pg. 27) sees it more like imprisonment than freedom. As was noted earlier, cinema and other forms of media contribute to perpetuating an idealized version of childhood. Disney films in particular may contribute to creating this view that childhood is both natural and inborn. Disney has come under intense critical analysis regarding their promotion of innocence. Many have debated the didactic intent of Disney films, with many concluding they serve as mere propaganda to persuade young viewers into accepting restrictive ideologies and conformity models. Henry Giroux's book *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* suggests that popular perception of "innocence" within Disney films was mostly an illusion (Giroux, 2010). Whitley (2013) argues that these sentiments are too simplistic since audiences' interpretation of Disney animation appears more nuanced and complex. Reconsidering in part how innocence particularly that of child characters has been depicted across literary and dramatic traditions. Whitley uses Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* as an illustration of how child innocence may be both passive and yet profoundly moving. As a way of evaluating film language, he refers to Paulina's suggestion in Act 2 that Leontes might soften and become more reasonable with time after seeing his baby daughter for herself. "Silence can often speak louder than words" she asserts, concluding: "it persuades when speaking fails." (Shakespeare, 1653, pp 37-39). Thus, children are often seen as primal figures who transcend language through sheer innocence (Whitley, 2013, pg. 77). This makes their image an effective means of persuasion that outstrips even the most persuasive arguments (Whitley 2013). Adorno's notion of coercive ideology provides further insight into popular culture and ways of assessing film narratives. He argued that popular culture, often produced and consumed on a mass scale, promoted an ideology that discouraged critical

thought while encouraging conformity (Adorno & Horkheimer 1997). Adorno (1997) asserted that the cultural industry's commodification of art led to a homogenized and standardised culture that hindered true human expression and creativity. From this perspective, mass culture serves as part of a hegemonic means of social control by cultivating "passive compliance" through its superficial pleasures. This perspective focused on the effect of capitalism and media manipulation in shaping individual values and behaviours. When reviewing children's films, this perspective encourages a careful consideration of the content and themes presented, to ensure that it promotes constructive values rather than reinforcing harmful stereotypes or consumerist tendencies. Bloch (1986), however, took an optimistic stance towards popular culture. According to him, popular culture contained "anticipatory illuminations", fragments of utopian desires and aspirations that hinted towards an improved future. Bloch (1986) saw these elements as potentially transformative, offering glimpses into a world beyond our current reality and suggesting that children's films can act as vehicles for utopian ideals and imaginative possibilities. His perspective provided a way to engage with popular culture beyond its "coercive" aspects, emphasizing its ability to inspire hope and change - something particularly evident in forms derived from oral narrative such as fairy tales or folktales. Crandall's *The Fairy Tale in the 21st Century: Shrek as Anticipatory Illumination or Coercive Ideology* draws upon Bloch's theory of "anticipatory illumination", which states that since alternative societies and worlds remain possible despite being negated, fairy tales provide insight into them while offering hope for change (Collins & Ridgman, 2006).

As Leo Braudy noted, innocence "just is"; innocence doesn't express any specific intent and cannot be controlled by institutional forces because it does not seek control (Braudy, 1998, pg. 301). This illustrates an inherent duality in how innocence is perceived, not simply as a form of adult nostalgia but embracing its transformative power that makes its study and understanding vital for understanding its foundation. Whitley (2013) notes that in many of the most significant narratives featuring child protagonists, both adult and child learn from one another. As children films serve an educational function for both age groups, both age groups should recognize its educational role. This suggests various means of comprehending Children films as agents of cultural work and agent of change. Braudy (1998) asserts that popular films act as an auditorium to channel audience concerns into meaningful expression. He

suggests that "there is an inherent relationship between film and fiction storytelling and journalism, on television news broadcasts, casual conversation and classroom settings. Many of these stories go beyond straightforward political statements to convey deeper cultural disquiet. Disquieting narratives speak directly to audiences' fears as well as desires through large, vague concepts like nature and innocence--at once embodying both ideals and critique. Genre hybridization allows these narratives to do exactly this, engaging their readers directly.

Unfortunately, however, they often fall far short. Whitley (2013) addresses concerns over Disney films' use as vehicles for adult agendas and ideologies; asserting that films employing this underlying structure may appear more multilayered and richer if we consider more fully the playful or poetic qualities animation can bring. Animation often brings with it a feeling of nostalgic comfort, often associated with fairy tale adaptations or visits to the cinema as children. But animation also holds rebellious and subversive qualities because of its departure from photographic representation and traditional forms of storytelling. Animation initially emerged from modernist and avant-garde artistic pursuits; however, its usage quickly extended into advertising and propaganda (Leslie, 2004, p 9). Animation may sometimes be perceived as being solely targeted towards young audiences (Mittell, 2003); however, its appeal remains widespread among audiences of all ages. Disney remains one of the primary influences on American animators and scholars (Wells 2002, p. 45). The symbolic child is often used by adults to manage adult anxiety about modernity and to navigate uncertainty about modernity. He or she occupies a space between past and future, embodying both nostalgic yearnings as well as optimism for the future (Kirkland 2017). Wells (2002) noted the tensions between regression and progress as being prominent themes within animation culture. Animation films stand out as multimodal creations, blending together various elements such as moving images, narrative components, colors and songs with engaging characters and vibrant narratives. Wells (2013) states that animation serves as a versatile form of expression for storytelling and emotional expression, setting the stage for various functions animated films can serve. As a dynamic and multifaceted genre, animated film provides an avenue for exploring postmodernism as well as exploring childhood's relationship to cinema. Regarding how modernity and childhood might interact, horror elements in animated films provide new opportunities

to examine how childhood, concerns about violent content and experiences are all interlinked. Children have long been drawn to horror cinema, which may pose unique concerns. Yet despite these worries, an inherent link exists between children and the genre of horror cinema; indeed, it reverberates throughout children's culture, including literature, fairy tales, and gaming. Reviewing the history of children in horror cinema, its thematic focus is clear. A prominent embodiment of this is the Horror genre "evil child" motif. Mervyn LeRoy's 1956 film *The Bad Seed* provides an early example of this motif as it transforms from family drama into horror, with a malevolent child providing the catalyst (Jackson 1986). *The Bad Seed* demonstrated children's notion of innocence, having an immense effect on subsequent horror films centred around "evil child" themes, including *Rosemary's Baby* (1967) by Roman Polanski and Richard Donner's *The Omen* (1976). This trope developed into an altered concept of childhood, where children served as agents for evil forces. This tension between innocence and malevolence created within children characters persisted throughout the 1980s. However, tension shifted slowly during the 1980s, with child characters becoming more nuanced, challenging simplistic dichotomies between innocence and villainy. Films such as *The Shining* (1980) and *Poltergeist* (1982) provide clear examples of this shift. By the early 2000s, the “uncanny child” motif from 1980s American horror had become a universally understood trope that altered perceptions of childhood. Horror in these child characters lies not simply in their deceptively innocent facades but rather in their darkened interiors, their complex interactions between familiarity and alienness, vulnerability and threat, innocent innocence and dangerous indecipherability. As we stepped into the 21st century, conceptual shifts of childhood coincided with tightened restrictions and surveillance on horror genre material. As more slasher and torture horror films were produced during the 2000s, their widespread release necessitated an unconventional children's horror subgenre (Lester, 2016). Reappropriating and adapting horror tropes so as to meet child audiences while engaging with adult themes was required in order to establish this subgenre successfully. Horror in children's films offers the potential of creating an alternate version of reality while blurring boundaries between adults and children, thus inspiring media literacy among young viewers (Livingstone & Helsper 2006). Children's animated horror presents an interesting environment for child characters, where certain restrictions on child behaviour can be relaxed due to its characteristics. Animation provides a unique platform to explore

children's fears, anxieties, and creativity while maintaining a safe and controlled environment. With an increase in reimagined horror and fairy tale films for children, animated movies marketed for them explore ways in which horror tropes, conventions, narratives, characters can be altered so as to allow interaction between children and adult audiences. Reimagining filmic space becomes a site for negotiation and calls into question long-held assumptions about what defines an "adult" and a "child". Many of these films venture into uncharted waters of horror, from films that combine childlike aesthetics with adult dark humour to those that explore deeper myths of childhood innocence with hopes to subvert or dismantle it. Images depicting children living difficult lives often explore themes like grief, trauma, memories and much more. Animation film's open and flexible medium allows it to tell transformative and often subversive tales that resonate across demographic boundaries. This shift in children's animated horror marks a departure from earlier depictions of children in film, such as those produced by Pixar, which either ignore or depict them negatively. Children's animated horror enables child characters to act as active agents, experiencing violence and responding to threats without falling into an adult-child hierarchy. Without overprotective caregivers in these narratives, child protagonists can take matters into their own hands without undermining parental responsibility and child innocence norms.

This transformation in children's animated horror can be seen through characters such as Coraline Jones from *Coraline* and Norman Babcock from *ParaNorman*; both postmodernist characters that manage danger by taking measures to safeguard their communities while accepting diverse experiences that broaden their world view without prematurely thrusting them into adulthood.

Finally, I want to touch on Kirkland last approach in which children's culture embraces modernity with all of its frantic ambivalence, portraying childhood as the epicentre of our modern era (Kirkland 2017). Modernity appears in childhood stories both past and future. Childhood's ambiguous relationships echo modernity's inability to define its boundaries; its definition eludes it. As previously discussed, films from different historical periods provide insight into changing conceptions of childhood across time, while reinforcing power dynamics, ideologies related to authority, gender roles and social roles. Foucault's theory of power highlights this power imbalance; films

contribute to framing childhood as subordinate status, undermining children's agency while reinforcing adult control (Foucault, 1979). However, it is essential to critically analyse these depictions, taking note of the variety of childhood experiences and children's agency within modernity's framework. Childhood, according to Steedman, is more than simply an age, it represents a time span both distinct from and intersecting with adulthood. "Family life serves as a temporal category that unifies disparate aspects of human life and provides adults with an effective framework through which they can navigate the complexities of modernity." Child figures embody numerous discourses and narratives regarding self, evolution and progress; all linked by childhood itself. When we consider what children gain from films, one answer must include what role innocence still has in today's increasingly sceptical society. Cinema provides adults with an effective means of engaging with the many facets of modernity through the symbolic figure of children. Contemporary filmmakers are now challenging these representations to offer new and diverse views of childhood identities. This strategic narrative manoeuvring seeks to evoke an emotive response in adults, leading to a new understanding of childhood that transcends conventional divisions (Wilson, 2005, pg. 331). Whitley (2013) states simply, that rather than adults imposing their fixed agenda on credulous children, film narratives that feature more reciprocal interactions between adults and children tend to yield better didacticism - although deconstructing power structures and expanding children's agency remain ongoing initiatives.

By investigating the difficulties posed by shifting conceptualizations of childhood and contextualizing changes to horror representations in animation films. The subsequent section takes an eclectic approach, examining how children's animation, horror and fairy tale genres intersect in three animation films by Tim Burton: *Frankenweenie* (2012); *Coraline* (2009) by Henry Selick; and *The Wolf Hous*e (2018) directed by Cristobal Leon & Joaquin Cocina. Through these case studies, we will learn how animated films explore childhood experiences. Analysis of how horror narratives, fairy tale motifs, postmodern literary or film techniques and animation techniques are used to depict characters or entities living in ambiguous, transformative or uncanny states, while their portrayals relate to larger issues of modernity, secularization, and cultural norms. The focus of my analysis will be how these animation films explore more sensitive issues such as death, trauma and isolation, topics which could otherwise be

taboo in animation films intended for children. According to cultivation theory, the media has a powerful influence on children, shaping their beliefs and attitudes through exposure to TV, Films, and other media forms. These animated films, intended for young viewers, play a significant role in shaping children's behaviour and values. Additionally, Erik Erikson's developmental theory emphasizes the impact of media on children's psychological development, aligning media experiences with different stages of growth to promote emotional and social growth. We shall look at how the films in question employ visual aesthetics, narrative techniques and thematic exploration to offer fresh perspectives on media representations of childhood.

Animation, commonly associated with childlike qualities, paradoxically serves as a medium to explore dark and transformative stories. *Frankenweenie, Coraline & The Wolf House* embrace genre hybridity and postmodern elements to push these boundaries. Furthermore, the incorporation of handcrafted aesthetics in the films, as discussed by Kirkland, highlights how animation interacts with different age groups. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to contribute to scholarly conversations on horror, fairy tale and animation studies by exploring the intricate worlds found within contemporary animated films and their influence in shaping our perceptions of childhood and storytelling in today's society.

# 4.2 POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVES IN CHILDREN'S ANIMATED FILMS

## 4.2.1 The Uncanny in *Coraline (2009)*

*Coraline,* released in 2009, marked the entry of Laika Studios into the world of feature-length animated films. The story revolves around a girl who relocates with her family from a bustling city to the secluded "Pink Palace Apartments" situated atop a mountain. Dealing with her parent's preoccupation with work and missing her friends, she explores her surroundings. Everything changes when she stumbles upon a secret passage behind a child-sized door in the living room. With persistence and some persuasion from her mother to help her open the door, Coraline manages to open the door. Disappointed, she finds an unexpected obstacle—a solid brick wall.

This incident sets off Coraline's journey of discovering the individuals living nearby. One of them is Mr. Bobinsky, who keeps rats and advises Coraline against going through the door. She also encounters Ms. Spink and Ms. Forcible, theatre stars whose glory days are now behind them, and Wybie—a socially awkward kid who appears to be around Coraline's age. Despite being warned, Coraline's curiosity drives her to venture through the secret passage, leading to a parallel dimension that eerily mirrors her reality. The liminality of this corridor, concealing the portal to an alternative dimension, encapsulates the crux of Coraline's transcendent experience. Upon entering this corridor, Coraline encounters a vibrant, luminous world with transfigured inhabitants. In this world, she comes face to face with versions of her parents, referred to as the "Other" Mother and Father. This parallel reality mirrors her desires and represents her longing for a different existence. However, the distinctiveness of this realm is evident through noticeable differences, such as the replacement of the resident's eyes with black buttons—materialising an uncanny spectacle.

Similarly to fairy tales and fantasy narratives, *Coraline* adheres to a Proppian narrative structure. It involves the progression from a state of lack or villainy toward protagonists embarking on a quest for resolution. These stories typically include encounters with donors or helpers overcoming tasks, facing villains and ultimately achieving triumph (Propp, 1968). As discussed by Bengt Holbeck in *Interpretation of Fairy Tales: Danish Folklore in a European Perspective,* these narratives often entail growth or an improvement in social status for the main characters (Holbeck, 1987, p. 347). *Coraline's* distinguishing features, highlighted by Zolkover (2011), set it apart within its genre. Zolkover reveals that Coraline takes a unique approach in contrast to fantasy stories like Tolkien's *The Hobbit* or Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*, which often involve epic journeys far from home. Rather than whisking characters away on grand adventures, the focus remains on their domestic lives and familiar surroundings (p. 67). Director Selick skilfully captures the essence of the two dimensions in *Coraline*: the real world and the "other" world. As Coraline moves between these realms, we notice the contrasting characteristics of each. The "other" world allows Coraline to indulge in her fantasies and bring her desires to life.

The opening sequence of *Coraline* takes us into the workshop of the "other" mother, setting a gothic tone that foreshadows the dangers Coraline will face in this alternate reality. Through close-ups and a carefully chosen colour scheme, this scene creates an eerie atmosphere. Though there is no dialogue during this moment, it features haunting chanting in the background. The narrative starts with a scene where the audience sees a pair of hands creating a stuffed doll that looks remarkably like 11-year-old Coraline. Interestingly, before the doll is finished, Beldam, who we later learn is the "other" mother figure, briefly joins in on the chanting. It is important to note that we see Beldam's metallic hands instead of just human hands. This imagery adds to the sequence's eerie feeling right from the film's beginning. The use of colours and mise-en-scène in *Coraline* effectively enhances its gothic atmosphere and adds depth to the narrative. The film cleverly uses colour palettes and visual styles to highlight the contrast between Coraline's real world and the "other" world. In scenes following this, Coraline feels lonely and neglected due to her family's move and her parent's constant work distractions. The real world is depicted with frigid tones that create an ominous and lifeless atmosphere. Coraline's home appears to lack warmth.

In contrast, warm hues depict the "other" world, bringing a sense of familiarity and comfort. The careful consideration given to the choice of colours represents the emotions the character experiences in each realm. The introduction of the "other" mother, who symbolises suppressed aspects of Coraline's subconscious, takes the narrative into deep psychological exploration. The "other" mother's ability to fulfil Coraline's desires is transmuted into reality, which aligns with Freud's (1913/1965) theories in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which links dreams with unfulfilled desires, which is relevant to Coraline's story. The concept of "wish fulfilment" becomes evident as Coraline sees her longings come alive in the "other" world. Freud's analysis of dreams involves three stages: condensation, displacement and secondary elaboration (Freud, 1965, pp.122-255). All of this is reflected in Coraline's journey. Condensation represents blending ideas and images into coherent constructs (p. 122). Coraline's interaction with the physical world, processing these experiences and then encountering their recreation in the "other" world, mirrors the dynamics of condensation. An example is when Coraline explores a door in her home and then finds a similar door in the "other" realm, showing how her curiosity and adventurous nature are integrated into one manifestation. A form of her curiosity is symbolised by the repeated checks on that little door even after seeing just a brick wall during her first attempt.

That night, Coraline first encounters the mysterious "other" world when she awakens to the scurrying sounds of black rats. It is as if Coraline starts to dream of witnessing the rats transforming into leaping mice like those in Mr. Bobinsky's circus. Earlier, Coraline had met her neighbours, Ms. Forcible and Ms. Spink, along with Mr. Bobinsky, who had mentioned his circus mice. These real-life experiences are embedded in Coraline's memory and recreated in her dream world. The condensation of her real-life experiences takes centre stage as they manifest in her dream realm—a blend of sensory impressions and cherished memories leading to her transition into this mysterious alternate reality. Coraline has a moment of realisation when she discovers that the corridor portal has taken her back to her home but with some noticeable changes that make it more comfortable and inviting. As she enters the "other" world, the camera pans out to reveal a room that resembles their old drawing room but with a softer glow and warm colours. The fireplace casts a flickering light, creating an inviting atmosphere. This visual transformation symbolises Coraline's desires and

longings. As Coraline becomes more familiar with her "other" parents in this alternate reality, she starts to feel a growing fondness for them, strengthening her connection to this magical world. Coraline's fascination with her "other" parents reflects her longing for warmth, care and attention, which starkly contrasts her ordinary life.

To add to this image, the "other" mother lavishes Coraline with food like mashed potatoes, roasted turkey, and mango milkshakes served uniquely under a chandelier. There is also a special gravy choo-choo train. Director Selick pays attention to the visual details using colours, composition of shots and character design to evoke specific emotions. Even the tiny elements have an impact. For example, the "Welcome home!" cake made by Coraline's "other" mother exemplifies Selick's meticulousness. The warm tones and intricate decorations reflect the "other" mother's desire to provide comfort. Selick even adds a hint through graphology by omitting a double loop on the lowercase "o" in "home ", symbolising Coraline's genuine yet precarious welcome to the "other" world and foreshadowing the challenges that lie ahead for her. This experience contrasts with Coraline's memory of her reality where she had chicken from packets or frozen, resulting in dry meals. This comparison makes Coraline appreciate the gastronomic delights she received since arriving in this world as a sign of motherly love and care, without realising that these efforts are part of an elaborate plan by the "other" mother to ensnare her as the next victim. It is also interesting how this story follows the fairy tale motif of "do not stray from the path." It reminds us that there are established paths and norms, for reasons such as wandering off can lead to encountering malevolent beings getting lost or facing other unfavourable outcomes. This cautionary message can be interpreted as a parallel to the need for Coraline to exercise caution in her interactions with the "other" parents. Despite being warned by her neighbours to stay away from the little door, Coraline's curiosity and desire for excitement lead her to disobey, triggering a series of events in the story.

Similarly, certain films featuring young protagonists use enchanting banquets to entice their characters into the realm of the supernatural. The banquet-style dinner scene in *Coraline* resembles a moment in Guillermo Del Toro's 2006 film *Pans Labyrinth*. In both cases, these scenes capture the allure of indulgence and charm while hiding sinister motives.

Coraline's engagement with her 'other' parents reflects Freud's concept of displacement (p. 137), where emotional investments are redirected toward subjects or entities. Through displacement, Coraline reimagines her parental connections within the "other" realm, revealing an emotional void that needs fulfilment. In the physical realm, Coraline's mother justifies her lack of involvement in cooking by highlighting that Coraline's father takes on that role while she focuses on household cleaning tasks. However, Coraline is still unsatisfied with her father's cooking as she finds it lacking flavour. As a result, she continuously urges her mother to take over the duties. Coraline's involvement in the alternative reality goes beyond just making decisions; her desires magically come to life. Coraline could not go outside when it rained in the real world due to the possibility of bringing mud into the house. However, her "other" mother does not mind mud and embraces its benefits. Whenever Coraline mentions no rain, thunder instantly strikes down from the sky. This act demonstrates that whatever Coraline wishes for or attempts in the "other" world becomes a reality. The accumulated impact of parental neglect drives Coraline's longing and compels her to imagine "other" parents who fulfil her desires and understand her emotional needs. In the real world, Wybie leaves a doll for Coraline on her front porch, with a note saying, "Hey Jonesy, look what I found in Gramma's trunk; look familiar?" This doll, which is a replica of Coraline in terms of appearance and clothing, plays a significant role as it becomes a means for Coraline to express her displacement dynamics. In dreams, dolls can symbolise childhood innocence and nostalgic feelings. As proposed by psychoanalysts such as Carl Jung, Dream analysis emphasises how dream imagery often taps into archetypal symbols that hold deep emotional meaning. Dolls, representing our child or suppressed emotions, can play a prominent role in dreams as symbols of innocence or agents of disquiet (Jung, 1969, p. 47). In *Coraline*, the doll metamorphoses into a symbol that captures Coraline's hidden desires. It represents the realisation of her wishes within the alternate reality. The doll embodies a version of Coraline where wishes become tangible, creating a mysterious interplay between reality and fantasy.

Furthermore, the doll carries significance within the cautionary elements woven into the narrative. In the film, the "other" mother uses the doll to spy on Coraline and cater to her wants and needs in the real world. By design, it represents the "other" mother's watchful gaze and attentive ears.

In *Coraline,* there is a scene where she discovers a room filled with ghostly children hidden beneath. The encounter with one of the children reveals something chilling—that Beldam, also known as the "other" mother, purposely targets children who are sad and dissatisfied. This dark undertone adds depth to the story, weaving together themes of surveillance, wish-fulfilment and impending danger into Coraline's tale. Dolls often fall within the uncanny realm; they are familiar yet unfamiliar at the same time. Freud delves into this concept in his essay *The Uncanny*, explaining how objects like dolls can create unease by resembling humans while having subtle and unsettling differences. Lifelike dolls that lack real-life vitality evoke a sense of uneasiness by tapping into our fears of the unknown and unnatural (Freud, 1919). In Joana Rita Ramalho's article *The Uncanny Afterlife of Dolls; Reconfiguring Personhood through Object Vivification in Gothic Film* (2020), she explores the significance of dolls in horror movies, emphasising their embodiment of uncanniness through their ambiguous movements and human-like appearances that unsettle us and their ability to blur traditional subject-object boundaries. These dolls, often associated with childhood innocence, are corrupted in gothic and horror narratives. Films like *Dolly Dearest* (1991) and *Child's Play* (1988) depict these dolls as conduits for evil forces challenging societal norms and expectations to create a more substantial emotional impact on viewers.

Finally, the last stage posited by Freud, known as secondary elaboration, is a complex interplay between conscious and unconscious processes (p. 244). Coraline's interactions with her apartment neighbours reimagined in the "other" world exemplify this stage. These interactions mirror real-life encounters and are transformed into idealised versions that embody the dreams and desires of their neighbours. Unbeknownst to Coraline, watching her neighbours perform in the "other" world reveals their hidden hopes and aspirations. During Ms. Spink and Ms. Forcible's performance, the characters are introduced as their real-world selves, arguing over who takes centre stage before revealing their younger, more harmonious personas in the "other" world performing together. In contrast to the real world, Ms. Forcible and Ms. Spink are constantly at odds with opposing viewpoints on everything.

In another instance, Coraline and Wybie observe the performance of their neighbour, Mr. Bobinski, as he showcases his talented dancing mice. These mice dance and sing

harmoniously, fulfilling Mr. Bobinski's desires in real life. However, in reality, Mr. Bobinski expresses disappointment as his dancing mice fail to sing in tune and meet his performance expectations. This alteration illustrates how Coraline's subconscious creates a modified version of reality where the shared dreams and aspirations of those around her come to life.

#### 4.2.1.1 Negotiating identity in *Coraline*

*Coraline* revolves around how individuals navigate their place in the world and discover their identity. Coraline exists in a state of uncertainty where she must define and develop herself. Erikson's (1950) stages of psychosocial development provide a framework for understanding how people face different challenges and tasks at various stages of life. The stages of Identity vs Role diffusion, Intimacy vs. Isolation and Ego Integrity vs. Despair highlight the influence of media representations on shaping one's sense of self, relationships and reflections on life experiences (pp. 227-231). Coraline's journey encompasses elements from Erikson's (1950) stages as she explores her identity, seeks meaningful connections and grows through difficult experiences. In the "other" world she discovers, Coraline is confronted with different roles and choices—a reflection of Erikson's concept of Identity vs. Role diffusion, where adolescents strive to establish a clear sense of self amidst social expectations and various roles. Within these discussions, Jacques Lacan's theories of the mirror as it relates to the concept of the self raises fundamental questions about Coraline's identity; "Who am I? What do I desire? What are others expecting from me?" In this context, Jacques Lacan's "mirror stage" holds significance regarding the "ego development and the imaginary". The "mirror stage" represents a moment in a child's "natural" existence to one laden with divisions, predicated on recognising the self and the other, acknowledging absence or inadequacy and substituting self-reliance for dependence on the mother. This stage holds the promise of self-mastery and control, compensating for any deficiencies and marking the emergence of one's desires and an awareness of oneself within one's surroundings (Lacan, 2014, pp. 94-98).

According to Lacan's (1949/2014) perspective, the "mirror stage" is driven by the child's desire to fill their anatomical incompleteness. It signifies their entry into the "real" order, which establishes fundamental desires and orders that precede ego development. The "real" order remains elusive and cannot be directly perceived; instead, it is inferred through symbolic representations and imaginative constructs (p. 96). When Coraline moves with her parents to the Pink Palace, she soon realises that this universe will prevent her from fully embracing her identity or sense of self, conforming to her "ego" or "I". This denial manifests in various ways, starting with the constant frustration caused by the mix-up of her name—being called Caroline instead of Coraline. Additionally, Coraline's only friend, Wybie, questions the purpose and meaning of his existence. In contrast, the "other" world offers him a sense of fulfilment and validation to develop his identity. A notable example is when Mr. Bobinsky's mice accurately spell their names during the "other" world performance.

Lacanian theory's "mirror phase" aspect centres around a child's recognition of their image on a reflective surface. This recognition transforms the reflected image from the "other" into the "me", igniting the process of constructing identity through self-images and reflected concepts. Coraline undergoes a "mirror phase," where she experiences a separation from her maternal being and begins to see herself as an independent individual through the motif of physical mirrors and mirrored realities. This journey is deeply personal, like when Coraline traverses between two different worlds using the little door and navigates her evolving sense of self based on these contrasting realities. It is interesting to note that Coraline is the one who can move between different worlds, except for a cat that acts more like a companion to the little girl. This character adds an element of the category of "Animal helper or "Magical animal" (ATU 333) in fairy tales. They serve as someone to confide in and share thoughts with the protagonist. At the Pink Palace, Coraline discovers her emotional shortcomings and attempts to fulfil them by seeking attention from her parents. There are instances where she tries to capture their focus, but they are often preoccupied with their job, completing a botanical guide. The constant longing for love leads her into this "other" world. In a scene from the film, Coraline insists on buying yellow gloves while her mother stocks up on dark uniform clothes for her new school; "But mom, the whole school will be wearing those boring clothes... No one will have these gloves!" When her mother

requests that she leave them there, Coraline replies, "My other mother would buy them for me..." She believes that her "other" mother satisfies her affective demands and guides her Ego-forming process. Coraline will soon go through a castration complex, as both of her mothers act as figures who prevent her from obtaining what she desires. This desired object that is satisfying her affective needs will be denied from her by both mothers for different reasons: the real mother because she has other responsibilities besides being a maternal figure and the "other" mother because immediate obligations constantly force Coraline to postpone her emotional interests. The "other" mother is a subject who wishes to possess Coraline's "I" and intends to sew buttons onto her eyes. The buttons and needles symbolise Coraline's fears—a morbid anxiety that Freud associated with the dread of castration (Freud, 1919, p. 7). The connection between the eyes directly represents the individuality of the subject.

According to popular beliefs, the eyes are often called the window to the soul. They also play a role in a child's development during the mirror phase, allowing them to recognise their reflection as their own and develop their sense of self. When faced with this threat of castration, Coraline rejects the allure of the "other" world and instead focuses on building her personality through suppressing such desires. When Coraline returns to the real world, her parents have gone missing. Coraline soon realises Beldam has kidnapped them and decides that she must rescue them. She is forced to return to the "other" world, where she is imprisoned behind a mirror as retribution for rejecting Beldam's gifts. Behind the mirror, she meets the ghostly souls of three children from different eras lured and entrapped by Beldam. The ghostly children warn her about the consequences of letting someone else control their eyes by saying, "We let her sew buttons on our eyes, and she ate our lives." Confirming the danger of relinquishing control over one's own identity.

Both maternal figures in *Coraline* operate on levels within Lacanian theory; one represents the real, while the other is at the imaginary level. Eventually, Coraline realises that neither can genuinely fulfil her desires, leading her to understand that true growth requires rejecting these figures and re-establishing a connection with her father. Although considered a secondary character in the story, Coraline's father plays an essential role in her journey towards maturity. There is a scene where he playfully tries

to grab Coraline's nose, which prompts her to assert her independence, exclaiming, "Dad! I'm not five years old anymore!"

Additionally, in the ending scenes, as Coraline prepares to toss the key that unlocks the little door at the bottom of a well, she finds solace in singing a familiar song her father used to sing when she was just a little girl—liberating herself from the presence of the "other" mother. Towards the final act, we witness how Coraline, an independent individual, still retains traces of her childhood when interacting with her father. Despite not being a child who plays with stuffed animals, she recreates that nostalgic innocence as if wearing a mask. As Coraline distances herself from the maternal figure, her sense of self is more pronounced, and her real mother is no longer viewed as an oppressive force. The family order is restored once Coraline lets go of the key and relinquishes control over the "other" mother. Furthermore, her father plays a role in reinstating this equilibrium by creating an environment where Coraline can regress into playfulness and reflect on her newfound identity.

In this way, the mirrors play a role as metaphors in Coraline's exploration of selfhood, identity and subjectivity. Bonnet (2002) suggests mirrors hold meanings beyond being passive reflectors alone. The author emphasises the power embedded within mirrored images, highlighting how they go beyond simply replicating one's physical appearance. Looking into a mirror is an act that stirs up a sense of longing. People are naturally drawn to confront their reflections and contemplate their sense of self. This desire goes beyond physical attraction; it encompasses a deep intellectual and emotional yearning to comprehend one's identity and existence. Ruddell (2013) delves into the significance of mirrors in films that revolve around the theme of identity. Mirrors serve as a cinematic device, signalling to viewers that there is more to a character's identity than what meets the eye. In these films, mirrors take on symbolic roles, often representing power, mystery, doubles and exploring themes such as alienation or psychological complexities. Through representation, these films convey the experience of fragmented identity in tangible ways. They portray fragmentation through supernatural or unconventional means, sometimes visually depicting a divided or split body. Mirrors also evoke the concept of "body staring," where characters contemplate themselves narcissistically or introspectively, seeking strength or understanding from their reflection. According to Ruddell (2013), these films employ literal representations of

fragmented identity to escape societal pressure to maintain a coherent, independent and controlled sense of self. They often explore themes of enchantment and power, especially in fantasy and horror genres. These films provide insights into society's anxieties surrounding the vulnerability of one's identity and the loss of control (pp. 2-4). The mirrors Coraline interacts with within the film represent aspects such as self-perception, self-deception, identity and alternate realities.

Ultimately, Coraline's journey towards subjectivity and self-identity is influenced by the complex interplay of Lacanian theories of the mirror, parental dynamics, and her interaction with the two worlds. The resolution of the film and Coraline's character development align with Erikson's (1950) Integrity vs. Despair stage, typically experienced in adulthood. Although Coraline is not a grown adult, her journey involves facing challenges and making significant choices that contribute to her personal growth. By overcoming the trials presented by the "other" mother, she gains a deeper understanding of herself and recognises the importance of her real-world relationships. This reflection of her experiences aligns with themes such as integrity, self-reflection and coming to terms with the complexities of life.

### 4.2.2 Mortality in *Frankenweenie* (2012)

In the animated film *Frankenweenie* (2012), directed by Tim Burton, the exploration of death is intricately depicted through the lens of children's horror. Jennifer L. McMahon's essay titled *It's Uncanny, Death in Tim Burton's Corpus* delves into the pervasive presence of mortality in Burton's films and how they contribute to existential authenticity, prompting viewers to confront their mortality while engaging with the essence of being human. According to McMahon (2014), Burton's films contribute to the existential goal of authenticity by raising awareness about mortality and its profound implications. This heightened awareness can increase engagement with life's more profound meaning and a greater sense of moral responsibility (p. 215). To achieve this heightened awareness, Burton employs the uncanny, which generates a

disorienting feeling of anxiety. This feeling aligns with Martin Heidegger's concept of "being toward death," where anxiety evokes a sensation that reveals our existential inevitability regarding mortality. Heidegger explains that this uncanniness exposes itself through the state of angst. Although uncomfortable, this feeling compels individuals to confront the reality of their own limited time on Earth. Heidegger further describes how society often attempts to suppress this anxiety through distractions and superficial pursuits (Heidegger, 1996, as cited in McMahon, 2014, pp. 220- 221). The uncanny nature of Burton's works, however, disrupts these defence mechanisms, creating an unsettling and discomforting experience for viewers. This feeling of uncanny, combined with Burton's focus on death, encourages audiences towards a deeper engagement with their mortality. *Frankenweenie* aligns with Burton's exploration of death by examining the boundary between life and death through the story of a young protagonist named Victor Frankenstein, who revives his deceased dog Sparky, inadvertently setting off a series of unintended consequences. As Edwin Page puts it, Burton's works are "like fairy tales, communicating to us on a symbolic level, speaking to things far deeper in our conscious and subconscious minds than most films would dare to delve" (Page, 2006, p.7)

*Frankenweenie* tells the story of a grieving boy. The film subverts the child and dog narrative by introducing the death of Victor's beloved pet dog, Sparky, in a pre-title sequence. This sequence aims to establish the bond between Victor and Sparky using traditional small-town sensibilities and sentimental attachment to the dog. However, Sparky's sudden tragic demise is portrayed through a shock-cut technique that evokes a visceral emotional response. Claire Parkinson’s essay, titled *Too Dark for Disney; Tim Burton, Children's Horror and Pet Death*, offers a thought-provoking framework to analyse how the film handles themes of death and grief, particularly concerning losing a beloved pet.

Parkinson (2021) explores how the horror genre typically portrays graphic scenes of death, which differs from *Frankenweenie*. In contrast, the film uses shock cuts instead of explicit visuals, diverging from horror films' usual graphic nature (p. 98). Despite not showing Sparky's dead body directly, this sudden shift in perspective intensifies the emotional impact. The scene unfolds as Sparky chases after a ball onto the street. From his point of view, we see a car approaching rapidly, leading to a series of rapid

cuts and Victor's anguished scream. This abrupt transition and Sparky's subjective viewpoint create emotional and physical impacts.

Moreover, the film taps into the emotional dynamics surrounding grief for pets. Parkinson (2021) observes that while Sparky's death is an affecting event that triggers sorrow and mourning, society often downplays or dismisses grieving for companion animals (p. 100). Tulich (2012) argues that children may first encounter death by losing a pet—an experience that teaches them how to cherish memories of departed loved ones. *Frankenweenie* captures the essence of this dynamic by showcasing Victor's emotional reaction to Sparky's passing as a natural response for a child.

Burton's primary focus is to create a narrative that delves into human experiences such as loneliness, grief, guilt and frustration. *Frankenweenie* explores these themes and emotions through the lens of a child. The film effectively portrays Victor's perspective by its use of camera angles. When Sparky dies, his parents try to console him with clichéd phrases. Victor's poignant and emotional response to his mother, who tells him that departed loved ones live on in our hearts, reveals his understanding of complex concepts like death, loss and grief. He expresses his desire to have his loved one present rather than just in his heart. It showcases him as a child who is both intelligent and takes things literally. In contrast, the parents struggle to address these profound subjects. The film serves as a reminder that children often encounter death at that age through the loss of an elderly family member or a cherished pet.

Victor's character embodies a transformation that defies the traditional perception of an innocent child. He understands life's darker aspects, challenging established beliefs and questioning whether children should be excluded from experiencing horror cinema. The narrative further portrays Victor as someone who actively consumes and creates horror material, breaking away from the portrayal of children as passive media consumers. This reimagining of childhood innocence becomes evident when Victor eagerly shares one of his monster movies with his bewildered parents. Through this act, the narrative empowers Victor by acknowledging his active participation in exploring the horror genre and connecting it directly to his role within the narrative.

Additionally, *Frankenweenie* delves into the recurring theme of the "othered child" in cinema. Those characters feel like outsiders in the adult world and exist outside

societal norms. By highlighting their vulnerability and dependency, this concept challenges ideas of childhood innocence. It goes beyond separation and encompasses unfamiliarity and strangeness within child-adult relationships (Jones, cited in Olson & Scahill, 2012). Tim Burton, renowned for his distinctive style and fascination with dark themes, frequently incorporates the motif of the "othered child" trope in his works, especially within the horror genre. This narrative device portrays children as individuals distinct from societal norms due to their extraordinary abilities, appearances or circumstances. Throughout Burton's films, we often encounter characters who embody this motif, highlighting their struggles to find acceptance, comprehend their identities and navigate a world that perceives them as different. In horror, the motif of "othered child" children serves multiple purposes by blending elements of fear, empathy and social commentary.

Burton's utilisation of this motif aligns with his inclination to explore societal norms and the often-complex human relationships. Some notable examples of his works that incorporate this motif include *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Beetlejuice* (1988), and *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993). Burton's use of the "othered child" motif extends beyond individual characters to create fantastical and eerie atmospheres. Within these settings, the boundaries between reality and the supernatural blur seamlessly. It further intensifies the sense of otherness in a society that adheres to norms while embracing unconventional ideas. Gothic productions are well known for their imagination and emotional impact that goes beyond rationality, often pushing the boundaries of norms and moral standards (Botting, cited in Olson & Scahill, 2012). Burton's films blend elements of Gothic and Romantic representations of childhood, drawing inspiration from his upbringing. Through his films, he delves into themes such as abnormality, loneliness, grief and the search for identity. His cinematic world resembles Edgar Allan Poe's stories and B-grade horror films, acting as a medium for him to confront the demons stemming from his childhood experiences (Schober, 2012). Burton masterfully weaves Gothic and Romantic elements in his narratives that oscillate between fantasy and darker realms. This convergence of ideologies within Burton's films highlights that these contradictory concepts can coexist harmoniously. It reflects the duality present in every child—a combination of lightness and darkness that reveals the complex nature of the human psyche.

In *Frankenweenie*, suburban American life is juxtaposed with gothic imagery that emphasises the absurdity of a mundane society while challenging societal perceptions of what constitutes darkness or threat. The town portrayed in the film 'New Holland' is relatable to viewers because it resembles their familiar surroundings. The audience can easily connect with the setting through a combination of memories and school experiences due to its generic nature. Burton's upbringing greatly influences this relatability in a suburban area, where most of his neighbourhood conformed to a regulated and preserved pattern of life, creating feelings of conformity and limitations (Hockenhall & Pheasant Kelly, 2021). Another example where gothic imagery intertwines with other elements is the pet cemetery featured in the film. It incorporates aesthetics while presenting statues of animals and pets that defy the typical expectations associated with cemeteries.

Regarding character aesthetics, Burton does not solely focus on creating disturbing images; instead, he emphasises making his characters endearing and charming. By portraying personalities within his created universe, Burton enables the audience to experience a wide range of society within the imaginary town of New Holland. The film utilises character archetypes that contrast with human characters like Victor, Elsa, Bob, Nassor, Edgar and other adults. For instance, the character Nassor bears a resemblance to Frankenstein's monster. Without bolts or stitched skin, of course. Despite being a child, Nassor's clumsy movements and eerie voice evoke memories of Boris Karloff's iconic creature. Edgar has a lisp, a hunched back, misaligned teeth and a maniacal chuckle that aligns him with the archetypal sidekick seen in classic horror films. On the other hand, one of the classmates embodies the "mysterious girl" trope and aims to evoke fear in the audience through her vacant gaze; her attire and hairstyle resemble the twin girls from *The Shining* (1980).

As these characters are descendants of American horror monsters, their stories recycle mythical creature plots deeply rooted in popular culture. Burton strategically incorporates these aesthetics and styles to enrich his storytelling while expressing his perspectives on conformity. The film's historical references showcase its intertextuality within its narrative. *Frankenweenie's* aesthetics beautifully reflect the period of the 1950s and early 1960s horror cinema. The grayscale colours symbolise that era and immerse viewers in images associated with that time frame. During those years, there

were distinctions between gender roles. Men primarily focused on labour while women took care of household chores. In *Frankenweenie*, it is observed through the costumes and hairstyles of the adult women characters and the furnishings and decorations within Mr. and Mrs. Frankenstein's home. In the scene where Victor is showing his horror movies, he introduces one of his creations made using Super 8MM film—a technology introduced in 1965.

Furthermore, there is a scene in which Mr. and Mrs. Frankenstein are seen enjoying the classic horror movie *House of Dracula* (1958) in the comfort of their own home. Although this might not be something commonly witnessed by today's audiences, it retains its recognition due to the incorporation of popular culture styles prevalent during the 1950s and 1960s (Troutman, 2015). *Frankenweenie* adheres to the conventions of horror films by utilising black-and-white visuals that effectively capture specific angles and set pieces. Jameson's (1991) theory on how people perceive history aligns with this concept. According to Jameson (1991), "Nostalgia films restructure pastiche by appropriating a past…filtered through changing fashion trends and emerging generational ideologies" (p. 19). The film cleverly incorporates references within its animation to construct a fictional world that seamlessly connects the present with the past. Notably, the film also includes another relatability language in certain scenes; for instance, during a parent-teacher conference discussing the curriculum, an apprehensive parent questions the inclusion of content stating that Pluto is no longer considered a planet after NASA's announcement in 2006. The film cleverly merges elements of other periods by adopting a postmodern approach that blurs the line between past and present.

The film's intertextual references to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* add depth to its exploration of themes of life, death and the uncanny. Parkinson (2021) explains how the film pays tribute to Frankenstein's story, with Victor's experimentation on Sparky's body representing a subversion of the traditional boy and his dog storyline (p. 101). Victor conceives the idea of resurrecting Sparky after witnessing his science teacher dissecting a frog and using electricity on it. Despite unsettling his classmates, Victor is fascinated. He asked his teacher for more information about the process. The teacher advises approaching a dead body from a scientific standpoint. This scene sets up the fantastical elements that follow in the film—a scientist creating artificial life, drawing

inspiration from horror film framing devices. However, unlike Shelley's creature made of body parts, Sparky was initially a living dog before his death and subsequent revival (Quinn, 2014, p. 151). While both Shelley's creature and Sparky exhibit subjectivity when brought back to life, only Shelley's creature becomes a being capable of learning and experiencing emotions. Parkinson (2021) explains this as the process of petification, where animals are imbued with domestic and childlike qualities, serves to address children as a horror audience (p. 103). Regarding the film's horror elements for children, Sparky's transformation into a monster after being brought to life contrasts with the sentimental story of the boy and his dog narrative. This approach turns the resurrection of Sparky into a fantasy where love conquers death. In discussing grief, Parkinson (2021) references Judith Butler's ideas about "grievable" life, highlighting how irreplaceability, unpredictability and embodied loss play significant roles in understanding grief. The multiple resurrections of Sparky align with these aspects, reflecting the conditions under which a body becomes "grievable" (Butler, 2004, cited in Parkinson, 2021, p.101). Mary Shelley's 1818 novel and James Whale's 1931 film adaptation explore the quest for immortality by exploring death. In both works, overcoming mortality becomes a driving force fuelled by fear and curiosity. However, Burton's adaptation approaches this theme from a perspective of grief and love. The film suggests that Victor's love and memories of Sparky keep him true to his nature after being reanimated. When some of Victor's classmates learn about his experiment, they attempt to do the same with their pets, but unfortunately, their efforts result in their pets transforming into different creatures. According to the film's narrative, these characters resurrect their pets out of curiosity, greed and envy, reminiscent of Shelley's Frankenstein. These sentiments ultimately lead to the distortion of their animals into monstrous beings. The film further challenges expectations when Sparky is reintroduced to the neighbours, who react with fear and aggression. A significant aspect of the film revolves around its portrayal of monsters. As Lester (2016) argues, monsters in horror stories represent the tension between what society considers normal (humans) and our suppressed fears (p. 29). Wood (2003) also suggests that the concept of "the Monster endangering normality" is central in this genre. This idea delves into the dynamics surrounding "normality," which encompasses monogamy, family units and societal institutions such as the police, church and armed forces that support and safeguard them (p. 71).

In the context of *Frankenweenie*, the "normies," or those who represent normality, are contrasted with the monsters. These monsters cross the boundaries of our world. Pinedo (1997) suggests that this transgression is manifested in two ways: violence against living beings and through features that disrupt their form (p. 21). However, in horror stories for children, violence often replaces deformities or peculiarities associated with monstrous bodies. It blurs the line between life and death. Whether these monsters are defeated or not, their mere existence challenges our perception of reality as we know it. Caroll (1990) associates characteristics and elements with monsters in horror as needing to be intimidating and dangerous. They instil fear, desire to destroy the world or establish a new society and possess impurity (p. 42). Additionally, Caroll explains the concept of “fusion” where these creatures defy boundaries such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine (p. 43). In *Frankenweenie*, Sparky is portrayed as normal, although he defies these boundaries. It is only when the others in the town discover him amongst the other classmate's creatures that fear consumes him. Carroll (1990) identifies four plot structures in horror that explore the function of monsters: onset, discovery, confirmation and confrontation. The “onset” occurs when the monster is first revealed to the audience, often coinciding with the character's realisation in the film. 'Discovery' occurs when the film's characters become aware of the monster's existence (p. 45). For instance, in *Frankenweenie*, Victor's friend Edgar witnesses Sparky's reanimation at the same time when Mr. And Mrs. Frankenstein encounter Sparky. Sparky is suddenly perceived as a monster, and this revelation causes a skewed perspective of Sparky. Especially during a scene where everyone in the town is celebrating New Holland Dutch Day, the public associates him with other chaotic monsters created by his classmates. According to Caroll, the next structure is the “confirmation stage”, where characters provide evidence of the monster's existence to authorities. In *Frankenweenie*, although there is no authoritative figure per se, Victor takes on this role as he is the one who initiated the entire reanimation process in the first place. That is why when his classmates create their monsters, they all seek out Victor to reveal this discovery. Lastly, we reach the 'confrontation' phase, where groups of characters unite and try to defeat the monster.

The film's final act focuses on Sparky's death and revival, where after realising that Sparky is harmless, the townspeople come together to help bring him back to life. This scene combines elements of horror with themes of companionship and overcoming death. According to Parkinson (2021), Burton's touch in the film is coupled with a broader commentary on how society views animals, portraying Sparky as a connection between the monstrous and the child-friendly (p. 103). *Frankenweenie* skilfully explores the concept of death in animated horror films for children through its subverted narrative, impactful editing techniques, and exploration of grief. Tim Burton's filmmaking style, characterised by its trans-generic nature, provides a solid foundation and structure for developing narratives in his films. By incorporating elements from genres like horror and Gothic into animation often associated with fairy tales, Burton creates a cohesive yet diverse cinematic experience that resonates with audiences on multiple levels.

### 4.2.3 Materialising Trauma in *The Wolf House* (2018)

*The Wolf House* (2018) is a stop-motion animation film indicative of the boundary play between 'adult' and 'child', a fable by every means through its use of language and context within the film. A young girl, Maria, escapes from a German colony in the south of Chile. On her journey, she finds solace at an abandoned house she discovers in the woods, where she is met with a pair of pigs. The story follows Maria and her intent to improve the pigs ultimately, and the narrative slowly displays her state of being unravelled in time. The film is inspired by the Colonia Dignidad, also translated as *The Dignity Colony*, a commune of Nazi German immigrants situated in the south of Chile. Colonia Dignidad operated as a walled-off parallel society founded by Paul Schäfer in 1961 that acted as a German settlement for the people of Chile. This small fascist model state with cult-like subjugation soon became the site for countless atrocities—a bubble of shattered familial bonds, spiritual cleansing, and sexual deviancy. For decades, Schäfer and his followers consecutively abused, tortured, and raped

generations of children while acting as a front for a secret alliance with the dictator Pinochet of Chile during his regime.

The film does not explicitly critique the Colonia Dignidad; instead, it is told as if it were made by the colony and directed by Paul Schäfer. A sort of indoctrination weaponising the moralism of fairy tales to bring new victims. The prologue starts with an artificial documentary-style footage of the Colonia Dignidad, one presented in the form of propaganda. It is a satiric infomercial play where an avatar of Schäfer celebrates the secluded and pure nature of the colony. It is an idealised version of the colony projecting a deceitful outlook to the public by portraying seemingly positive aspects of the commune. This tight-knit, happy community strives for hard work and connection to nature and agriculture. Director Joaquin Cociña explains these opening scenes as the romanticised and pacifist appearance of the commune, a way to not only give context to the film but to replicate the idea of the once-existing archives made by the colony for the Chilean media (Haliç ÜNiversitesi, 2021).

As we follow the film, these opening images become highly unreliable; the viewer is told one thing, yet this contradicts the truth. During Pinochet's military dictatorship in Chile, anyone who disobeyed the commune was punished for 100 days and 100 nights of silence. This punishment is what the protagonist Maria will face after being caught playing with animals, causing three pigs to escape. Refusing to face such psychological and torturous punishment by the colony led to her escape. The film shifts to animated stop-motion in the immediate scenes after the brief archival material. We hear the howls of a wolf as we watch Maria find sanctuary within a dilapidated house in the middle of the forest, housing two lone pigs. Instinctively, Maria plays the maternal role of mother to these pigs; the reasoning for this further becomes apparent later in the film as we hear her reminiscing about how her happiest moments were when she would play with the animals in the colony and pretend to be their mother. This attempt at idyllic homemaking is played out throughout the film, with the pig's hooves growing hands and feet and changing entirely to human form when Maria gifts them with clothing on Christmas Day. Initially having black hair, they eventually develop blonde hair. The directors stated that the Colony residents often called Chileans "pigs."

*The Wolf House* dismisses facts and didactics, instead embracing fables and folktales that combine elements of *Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs* and *Snow*

*White* in its storytelling. This experimental film utilises its writing style to shed light on one of the darkest and most controversial episodes in the history of a South American nation. It delves into themes of trauma, isolation and the yearning for escape. Trauma, as defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) in their Dictionary of Psychology (2023), refers to any distressing experience that leads to fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion or other disruptive emotions. According to Van der Kolk (2014), trauma is inherently "unbearable and intolerable" (p. 21). He further explains that trauma goes beyond events and encompasses the lasting impact it leaves on mental, neurological and physical well-being (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 21). The effects of trauma can vary depending on one's perception. Symptoms may include memories, nightmares, flashbacks, anger, and emotional detachment. Trauma can occur at any age. Be passed down through generations or be caused by various experiences affecting individuals or communities (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013).

Throughout history, fairy tales have subtly addressed the impact of trauma. However, their exploration has been constrained by the genre's style and its association with innocent childhood (Jorgensen, 2021, p. 2). Early tales by authors such as Straparola and Basile and popular ones by Charles Perrault, the Grimms and Hans Christian Andersen include notably violent elements. Jorgensen (2021) delves into how fairy tales contain traces of trauma. If a character does not experience the loss of family or parents in their journey, they are less likely to undergo a traumatic event later in the story's structure. On the other hand, if a villain faces a particularly traumatic form of punishment (as depicted in the Grimm's tales), it is portrayed as justified retribution. These acts of violence are rarely explored from an internal perspective but remain connected to each tale, concluding functions as fitting consequences for false brides, wicked stepmothers and antagonists (p. 3). Lüthi (1982) states that "mutilations call forth no expressions of physical or psychological suffering. Tears are only shed if it is important to the development of the plot" (p. 13). He provides examples, like the Grimm's *The Seven Ravens*, where a sister severs her finger to save her enchanted brothers. According to Lüthi (1982), characters in fairy tales often appear devoid of any psychological distress, as if they do not experience any agony. This lack of depth suggests that their pain is suppressed. Wood (2006) argues that Hans Christian Andersen's "dark" tales convey pain and sadness while allowing both adults and

children to acknowledge the suffering within (p. 204). These "dark" fairy tales are labelled as such because they resemble horror stories. Tatar (1987) characterises Anne Sexton's poems in "Transformations" as a blend of fantasy and horror, touching on themes such as child abandonment and the Holocaust.

Concerning Children and Trauma, when children grow up, they quickly adapt to their surroundings, causing their responses to trauma to imprint on their developing brains. These imprints can persist into adulthood. Children who have experienced trauma from caregivers or the environment learn not to expect care and struggle to identify its source. They internalise blame, assuming it is their fault and fostering feelings of inadequacy It leads to the emergence of shame stemming from unsettled early attachments. Their sense of self-worth becomes compromised, which is reflected in their behaviour (Gorman & Diaz, 2012). In the movie *The Wolf House*, the main character, Marie, showcases the consequences of trauma and how it manifests in her present life. Her past experiences have profoundly affected her mental well-being and perception of people and the world around her. As a result, she unintentionally causes harm to herself and those close to her. In the film, Maria attempts to lovingly nurture two little pigs who progressively transform into more "Aryan" figures as the story unfolds. However, a haunting voice-over intermittently interrupts us as viewers, which Maria refers to as 'the wolf.' This voice, though seemingly soft-spoken, exudes a serenely intimidating presence throughout the film without ever appearing, injecting itself into the narrative by spurting passive-aggressive criticisms of Maria's attempts to create a home. Marias' voice-over is an artistic element that captivates viewers with its hypnotic nature and adds a sense of tension and mystery. Although it may occasionally become incomprehensible, this only enhances the hallucinatory effect of the intrusive thoughts that the film aims to convey. It resembles the timeless tale of *The Three Little Pigs*.

Director Joaquin Cociña describes this as a type of role-playing game. The wolf symbolises a force opposing Marias's pursuit of freedom from the colony. To Maria, the presence of the "wolf" represents the colony's attempt to draw her back into their influence rather than being a literal wolf. This relentless "wolf" intrudes upon Maria's life and tries to undermine her efforts, serving as a means of control, as though to propose that those residing freely are ultimately destined for failure. This notion is

evident in the film as we witness Maria struggling to maintain the lifestyle she has built with her two pigs, Pedro and Ana, facing challenges such as food scarcity, dissilience, and the need to protect them from outside threats. As these difficulties arise, Maria becomes increasingly controlling, uncertain whether the "wolf "is outside or has managed to breach their walls. The narration by the "wolf" creates an atmosphere of uncertainty for Maria, who is trapped between haunting memories and recurring echoes from her past throughout the film. The narration opens the space between the reality Maria perceives and the one in her mind. Unfolding a densely packed narrative of the pressure of the maternal role, the harrowing experiences endured in Colonia Dignidad and the lasting effects of Pinochet's dictatorship. Transtemporal qualities of Fairy Tale are also present here as they represent an experience that transcends borders and brings back memories of the colony—inviting a collective discourse even from those who were not physically present. Maria's journey through the house can be seen as a metaphor for her quest to escape from her past and flee from the cult that relentlessly pursues her. As Edmundson (1977), drawing upon Freud, suggests, "the psyche...is centrally the haunted house of terror" (p. 32). Moreover, within this film, the house symbolises an unpredictable world where appearances deceive; despite Maria's intentions, even pigs suddenly morph into human tormentors embodying corrupt and manipulative forces seeking to control her. This film provides an opportunity for introspection on how trauma is transmitted and processed beyond the affected as it continues to haunt present-day realities in various ways.

The film encompasses dimensions worth exploring. Notably, it captivates with its profoundly sensual layer rooted in masterful filmmaking techniques. *The Wolf House* delves into the tormented psyche of a victim of an oppressive regime portrayed through a richly textured animated single-shot sequence set within the film's central house. The house seems alive, with its rooms in a state of transformation, expanding and contracting as if breathing. In this changing environment, Maria, the protagonist, takes on different forms. Sometimes, they appear as drawings on the walls, other times as sculptures made from everyday materials like masking tape or papier mâché that sprout from the floor. The animation technique skilfully embodies Maria's state by combining abstract and stop motion sequences to create an illusion of movement. The film employs a collage approach with fragmented scenes, sudden appearances and subtle messages woven together seamlessly.

From start to finish, each shot flows continuously as the camera moves effortlessly between rooms, highlighting the significance of materiality throughout. As time passes, characters undergo metamorphosis, transitioning from paintings to objects or sculptural figures often destroyed or altered. This constant back and forth poses a dreamlike structure, creating delirious scenes that bleed in, out and through each other. Aylish Wood explores spatial transformation in animation in her article titled *"Re Animating Space."* She points out how animation can draw attention to changes in space and transitions, especially when countering feelings of claustrophobia. Unlike stagnant portrayals of space, these animations bring it to life by emphasising shifts and alterations (Wood, 2006, p. 135). She introduces the concept of space as an entity that undergoes reverberation processes. This idea envisions space not as a backdrop for events but as a fluid and diverse entity oscillating between familiarity and uncertainty, ultimately embodying chaos and potential mystery. Wood (2006) argues that animations that challenge conventional norms offer experiences of space that go beyond narrative limitations. These animations manage to evoke captivating spatial sensations while also conveying meaning. They employ strategies to create unexpected progressions in space that directly engage the viewer's imagination. This involves defying spatial constraints such as walls appearing in mid-air or figures morphing between dimensions. An example mentioned is the cartoon *Pigs in a Polka* (1942), directed by Friz Freleng, where the upper levels of the brick house extend beyond what was established in scenes challenging viewers' expectations. Additionally, in Caroline Leaf's *The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa (*1977), artistic techniques include sand on glass, oil paint on glass and scratching on film stock. These techniques enable the visual representation of images, objects and figures to emerge and dissolve onscreen, contributing to the feeling of shifting spatial dimensions (pp. 136-138).

Film phenomenologist Jennifer M. Barker claims that when film draws attention to a sense of corporal discontinuity, such as with stop-motion, this can evoke feelings of bodily vulnerability within the spectator because it encourages them to recognise that the unity of the film – its body – is actually constructed of fragile, individual elements and the failure of any of these could threaten the existence of the whole (Barker, 2009). Such effect is not only suggested in *The Wolf House* through the staccato temporality

but also through the unravelling and metamorphosis of each figure, which encourages us to consider how our body could be torn to pieces or changed by external forces. When exploring the materiality of memory, Honess Roe (2013) highlights two terms that could be applicable to *The Wolf House*. The first is "Fullness", used in describing the density of the animated materiality of sequences filled with detailed backgrounds of the characters exhibiting a dense image. Whereas sequences derailed and lacking in features, with mere outlines stricken against bland backgrounds, lack this fullness in terms of their materiality. This concept is functional in scenes where Maria cares for the pigs, feeds them, reads bedtime stories, or plays with them. Before such scenes, the figures of the characters are slowly being rebuilt to replicate their movements; the once lacking details of facial features, hands begin to interact in 2D and 3D forms, blurring the boundaries between the two and creating fullness in the bonding scenes. Sketchedness is another term drawn upon in the film; it consists of the line type, either rough or sketched outlines, that possess hand-drawn qualities of characters and objects. Lack of Sketchedness starkly contrasts the image, suggesting to the spectator its incompleteness in their perception of the lived world, hence mobilising an understanding of the materiality of memory. We see this when Maria narrates between scenes without the children (pigs), where we understand Maria's state of mind. Linework and scribbles are formed against blank backdrops, and paintings on walls are utilised here, while space is intelligently used to capture a sense that nothing is truly permanent or safe. The film expresses this in what Fleming (2010) calls 'visual voices', a new way of speaking that outwardly is dissimilar to real life. The variant of textural surfaces presents a plurality of visual voices that speak about the turbulent effect of remembering and reveal the difficult relationship between a traumatic experience and the process of memory. They uncover a doubt about the image as a teller of truth rather than welcoming us to ponder the connections between the various voices (visual and oral) they project. Roe (2013) suggests that in autobiographical works, animation functions.

> *…as an alternative way of 'accessing' the past. Through animating personal, collective, and post-memories, this aesthetic approach becomes a way to comment on the ephemeral nature of both history and, importantly, memory. (Honess Roe, 2013, p. 142).*

The differentiation in fullness and sketchiness throughout the film illustrates this "ephemeral nature" of memory as referred to by Honess Roe.

In his book *Nightmare and the Horror Film: The Symbolic Biology of Fantastic Beings*, Carroll (1981) introduces the concepts of "fusion" and "fission" to explain how horror monsters are formed through the combination and separation of elements. Fusion occurs when distinct entities merge to give rise to a being. This often involves blending fears or anxieties into a monstrous entity in horror films. For instance, a vampire combines the fear of death with the dread of being drained of blood. On the other hand, fission entails splitting an entity into multiple parts. This can happen when a monster is dismembered, or a single entity assumes form. For example, in John Carpenter's *The Thing (1982)*, the monster can divide itself into replicas of its victims, creating an atmosphere of paranoia and mistrust among those who survive. He contends that by employing fusion and fission, horror films create monsters that are simultaneously recognisable and unfamiliar. They draw upon our existing fears while also introducing something new and terrifying (Caroll, 1981). *The Wolf House* incorporates techniques that align with Carroll's theory of fusion and fission. For instance, the changing house, where rooms appear and disappear and friendly pigs transform into monsters. The dreamlike imagery, with distorted perspectives and unusual camera angles, establishes a disorienting atmosphere that intensifies each scene. In line with Carroll's argument that horror is closely related to nightmares and dreams, this film exploits that association to create an ambience of dread and uncertainty to experiencing a nightmare. It offers a space that transcends reality while focusing on the workings of memory, trauma and its emotional impact. Wells (1998) argues that animation's unique ability lies in its capacity to delve into the aspects of our consciousness – the ability to evoke internal spaces and depict the invisible (p. 122). Through animation, abstract concepts and unimaginable states can be visualised; it becomes a revelatory tool that uncovers hidden conditions or principles beyond the viewer's comprehension. *The Wolf Hous*e is an example of how horror elements fused with fairy tale motifs can give rise to a narrative that delves into complex themes of trauma and survival—exploring the unsettling facets of the psyche.

## 4.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, exploring childhood experiences and innocence through the intersecting lenses of horror and fairy tale genres in children's animation is a multi-faceted journey that sheds light on the complexities of human emotions, development, and societal influences. The films *Coraline (*2009), *Frankenweenie* (2012), and *The Wolf House* (2018) each offer unique insights into how animation can be used to convey sensitive and taboo themes and challenge traditional notions of childhood innocence. These films collectively traverse the complexities of identity, loss, trauma, and the journey of self-discovery, redefining the boundaries of animated storytelling for audiences of all ages. In animated films, the films stand out as remarkable examples that utilise the unique qualities of stop-motion animation to create a distinct combination of horror and childhood experiences. Given that animation often foregrounds the subjective, with its handmade quality and ability to resist photographic traditions of representation, the medium can help encourage different types of narrative techniques and structures. Stop-motion as an animation technique lends itself perfectly to the horror genre, particularly foregrounding embodiment whereby material, non-human forms provoke the feeling of bodily sensations in the spectator.

*Coraline* (2009) defies traditional fairy tale narratives by delving into the journey of self-identity and growth within the haunting ambience of the uncanny. The film's inventive use of stop-motion animation enables the seamless blending of the real and surreal, allowing viewers to explore the dualities of the human experience—both familiar and unfamiliar. In her analysis, Mihailova (2021) delves into the relationship between stop-motion animation and the thematic elements present in *Coraline*. As emphasised by Mihailova, the "other" world, with its uncanny and dream-like atmosphere, becomes a canvas where the application of stop-motion animation amplifies the surreal and eerie quality of the narrative. The juxtaposition of externally applied movements and familiar real-world forms creates a disquieting effect. The "other" world, replete with animated puppet characters, mirrors the stop-motion puppet forms that represent them. These characters, such as the "other" mother and father, possess distinct characteristics and movement patterns that distinguish them from their real-world counterparts (Mihailova,

2021, pp. 198-200). Through this visual dichotomy, the film effectively captures the unsettling and creepy essence of the uncanny.

Moreover, Mihailova (2021) states that the act of character replacement within the film's plot resonates with the very process of animation itself. For example, the encounter Coraline has with the doppelganger doll is a tangible representation of the animation process of character replacement. The meticulous construction and alteration of the doll mirror the techniques used in stop-motion animation, where movement and form are crafted separately and then brought together to form a whole (p. 101). Additionally, Mihailova(2021) suggests that themes in the film extend to the idea of multiplicity and instability. Coraline's experiences in the "other" world, including the impressive stage performances by Ms. Spink and Ms. Forcible, reflect the concept of cognitive dream imagery, where disparate elements are woven together seamlessly (pp. 100-109). They align with the inherent multiplicity within stop-motion replacement animation. The use of stop-motion animation also challenges perceptions of horror aimed at children. As Troutman (2015) suggests, films like *Coraline* allow child characters to take on heroic roles instead of being portrayed as passive and vulnerable. The animation style, combined with an uncanny narrative, empowers child characters and disrupts the boundaries of childhood mythologies.

In *The Wolf House* (2018), stop motion highlights the imagination that informs memory through its frame-by-frame production, with sculptures or objects invoking strong visceral effects for the audience. Boudlin (2004) notes that, despite animation's material differences from our lived world, we still experience it through our flesh. She explains that animation "extends the possibilities of the viewer's embodied responses" in such a way as to allow us to explore experiences of interiority, fantasy, dreams and memory in a tangible, material manner. In discussing animation in *The Wolf House*, phenomenology comes into question as one considers the physicality of the subject or subjects and the perceptual and performative aspects of animated film. The work of Edmund Husserl on transcendental phenomenology is a somewhat helpful approach that proposes temporarily 'bracketing out' or 'epoching' (Husserl, 1998, pp. 59-60). The methodology that Husserl describes as the Epoché focuses on excluding and parenthesising "any single mental processes of whatever consciousness," during which "the single facts, the facticity of the natural world taken universally, disappear

from theoretical regard" (Husserl, 1998, pp. 65-67). In this sense, it offers such a space that goes beyond and yet beside a physical reality that focuses on interiority, specifically on the conscious process of memory and its effect. Furthermore, Wells (1998) suggests that animation is often adopted by those who wish to make a film that illustrates an experience of life led in a distinctive and potentially unknown way to others.

> *… animation in [this] penetrative mode thus becomes a Mediator of possibilities, offering as close to a visceral revelation of the condition as a medium of expression can offer. Narrative in this mode is very much determined by the intention to reflect the immediacy of sensual experience as it characterises the ability to conduct everyday lives taken for granted by others. (Wells, 1998, p. 122)*

As Wells continues to explain, animation is not necessarily concerned with physical reality but rather the metaphysical: the meaning we attribute to our experience of reality (Wells, 1998, p. 11). However, such meaning does not have to be epistemological; instead, animation can work in what Wells (2002) calls the "primal mode" –a state that explores the senses and consciousness. Within its idiosyncrasies, mixed media and stop-motion animation in *The Wolf House* balances the right tone of horror and fable. It emphasises subjective reality and explores a person's emotional responses to trauma.

*Frankenweenie* (2012) challenges conventional representations of death in children's animation by openly addressing the loss of a beloved pet. Through the character of Victor, the film empowers children as active participants in understanding and confronting complex themes. The film navigates the realms of childhood and adulthood by intertwining elements of the horror and fairy tale genres. At the same time, its depiction of monsters prompts reflections on societal norms and the boundaries between the familiar and the unknown. In Christopher Holliday's essay *Tim Burton's Unruly Animation*, he explores two main aspects of the unruliness in Burton's animated bodies. The cultural and highly gendered values of unruliness applied to his animated characters and the unique unruliness of stop-motion aesthetics. In *Frankenweenie*, Holliday (2022) states that the 'undead' characters challenge confinement and control. They occupy liminal spaces as they resist domination and draw attention to the

construction of identity through forms of reanimation (p. 43). *Frankenweenie* showcases a distinctive stop-motion style marked by intermittent control, staccato and stuttering movement. The film characterises Burton's inclination to gothic and German expressionism films that usually revolve around insanity, chaos, and death. Burton uses deep shadows, chiaroscuro lighting and angular sets in the stop-motion of *Frankenweenie.* Holliday (2022) describes the restless, troubled, and exaggerated drawing style that springs from a pictorial lineage with surrealist influences and levels of nightmarish creativity as how Burton's unruliness is defined in the context of the film (p. 44).

Collectively, these films transcend the notion of animation as solely a medium of light-hearted entertainment aimed at children. Instead, they demonstrate the potential for animation to serve as a thought-provoking conduit for exploring the depths of human experience and emotion. By intertwining horror and fairy tale elements, these films question conventional portrayals of childhood innocence and empower young viewers to engage with complex themes, reflect on their own emotions, and navigate the complexities of growing up. In essence, *Coraline* (2009), *Frankenweenie* (2012), and *The Wolf House* (2018) stand as a testament to the transformative power of animation, breaking boundaries and challenging stereotypes to provide a platform where children's experiences are explored with depth, sensitivity, and artistic innovation. As they manage to captivate audiences of all ages, these films invite us to embrace the richness of childhood emotions and the journey from innocence to self-discovery.

# 5 CHAPTER 3: REALITY MEETS FANTASY

## 5.1 ANALYSIS OF *PAN'S LABYRINTH* (2006)

In 2006, Guillermo del Toro created a film called *Pan's Labyrinth* that skillfully blends the allure of fairy tales with the depths of horror. The film tells the captivating story of Ofelia, a young girl who seeks solace from the harshness of reality by immersing herself in a world of fantasy and imagination. *Pan's Labyrinth* is far more than a fairy tale through its use of postmodern storytelling techniques and its exploration of dark and complex themes. The film's narrative offers commentary on pressing societal issues like war, fascism and the loss of innocence. The film unfolds in Francos, Spain, 1944 and juxtaposes fairy tale elements with the reality of wartime atrocities. Set during the Spanish Civil War, Captain Vidal emerges as an antagonist, leading his soldiers to fortify their base against the guerrilla forces.

Meanwhile, in the north of Spain, near the French frontier, Carmen—recently married to Captain Vidal—and her young daughter are relocating to the remote village in the woodlands as part of their new life together. Much to the daughter's dismay, the young girl is now thrown into the heart of her stepfather's rule, confronting the horrors endured during Franco's reign in Spain. The cinematic world of *Pan's Labyrinth* weaves together two storylines around the central character, ten-year-old Ofelia. The first plot unfolds in Franco's Spain, where Captain Vidal controls a fascist regime. Simultaneously, the film crafts a fantasy world centred on the tale of Princess Moanna and her quest to reclaim her kingdom. The film commences with a haunting melody that echoes the whispers of our young protagonists' fading breaths. Unlike horror films that start dramatically with sound effects here, we only hear Ofelia's deep breathing and a soft lullaby humming in the background.

The opening title sequence sets the stage by providing details about the film's story. Aural elements grow as a whisper of wind transitions into rhythmic breathing. The lighting portrayed in this scene is dark, with contrasts of grey, green and red colours.

These details convey the tragedy; the cold stone is represented by grey, and the damp grass is red, symbolising blood, death and pain. We then see a close-up shot of Ofelia's face looking towards the camera, but slightly off-frame, blood streaming from her nose. The camera then rotates to reveal that her face is on the ground, with her left hand reaching towards the corner of the frame, her breathing growing louder. It becomes apparent that the shot is in reverse as the blood starts retreating into her nose. As a voice-over begins, Ofelia adjusts her gaze to look directly at the camera. The camera's rapid movement focuses on Ofelia, allowing us to empathise with her as she gasps for her last breath. As we delve deeper into this scene, an eerie feeling surrounds us; these breaths defy normalcy as they take a path—instead of flowing outward from her nose, they seem guided inward by some temporal mirror. It becomes clear that Ofelia is not embarking on a journey towards death but venturing into a realm of undeath.

An uncanny twist of fate occurs as the young protagonist, Ofelia, appears not to be departing this world but rather retracing her steps through the threshold of life (Kérchy, 2011). The film's structure reveals a narrative encompassing Ofelia's "doubled" existence, shifting between life and death. The film begins to narrate the story of Princess Moanna, who originates from the Beneath World. Longing for the world above, she inadvertently finds herself on earth, losing her past and eventually meeting her demise. She leaves behind her spirit wandering among humans. This tale of a transition and crossing between realms mirrors Ofelia's life journey. Princess Moanna's story embodies themes of death and rebirth that reflect Ofelia's path well. This narrative unfolds like a timeless folk tale involving Princess Moanna, the labyrinth, the faun and a sacrificial path.

Ofelia embarks on a journey in the archetypal fairy tale woodland setting to reunite with her stepfather, a military captain, in a rural area. Her mother, Carmen, experiences some discomfort during her pregnancy, which causes a halt in their journey. Curious, Ofelia decides to explore the woods and stumbles upon an interesting object on the ground: A stone eye. Intrigued by it, she carefully places it back into a figurine nearby and unexpectedly summons a supernatural creature resembling a praying mantis. As the story unfolds, Ofelia's passion for exploring leads her to encounter a faun who bridges the two realms. The faun reveals that Ofelia is Princess Moanna reincarnated,

and her true desire is to return. However, she must complete three specific tasks before the next full moon to do so safely.

However, for her journey home to be safe, she must complete three specific tasks before the next full moon. The audience is drawn into a journey through various realms as we witness the blurred lines between reality and imagination. As this ambiguity grows more potent in the film, we are left in a state of uncertainty. In Tzvetan Todorov's book, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, he explores the concept of "intrusion fantasy", which provides insights into the dynamics portrayed in this story. Intrusion fantasy revolves around the disruption of reality by the sudden appearance of fantastical elements or beings. These intrusions catch the protagonist off guard. Disturb the established order, compelling them to confront extraordinary occurrences within their ordinary lives. According to Todorov, hesitation and uncertainty play a role in the fantastic genre, blurring the boundaries between supernatural and natural (Todorov, 1973). Intrusion fantasy serves as a means to explore themes like transformation, disruption and the clash between extraordinary phenomena. It evokes feelings of unease and curiosity among audiences as they grapple with unexplainable events unfolding in familiar settings. The narrative in *Pan's Labyrinth* is shaped by uncanny discourses drawn heavily from Freudian psychoanalytical perspectives and the concept of "the double." Freud associated doubles with reflections, shadows, guardian spirits and fear of death. In this context, it illustrates how doubles transform from symbols representing immortality into harbingers of death. This idea anticipates Freud's development of the death drive, an innate desire for a state of non-existence juxtaposed with pleasurable experiences. In *Pans Labyrinth,* the story begins with Ofelia, the character seemingly dying. However, her transformation reveals an everlasting encounter, indicating a pattern of deaths and rebirths. For instance, in the opening scene of Princess Moanna's tale, uncertainty is introduced that challenges our perception of reality within the film context. It raises questions about what is possible and pushes the boundaries of the known world. There is a question of the subtle, blurred distinction between pathology, fantasy and the magical. Kérchy (2011) states that viewers are continually compelled to question whether the depicted events belong to the imagination or a form of psychological disturbance due to strategies destabilising and unfamiliarizing us.

Psychoanalysis and surrealism form the foundation for Del Toro's narrative. They resonate with Bataille's concept of "counter surrealism," which creates a fascination with the grotesque and uncanny. This fascination with elements and uncanny experiences serves as a gateway to exploring the depths of our modern unconsciousness. Within this framework, Bataille offers insights into fairy tales that take on a darker tone. Surrealism, which emerged as a response to the trauma of World War I and the rise of fascism, plays a role in shaping the themes of the film. Led by André Breton, surrealism connects politics with elements, while Tzvetan Todorov highlights the close relationship between the marvellous and the uncanny. The film's narrative intersects with themes found in surrealist works, such as the double, connections between castration and loss of sight and the resurgence of suppressed elements. Similar to Freud's perspective, Bataille suggests that "we are all haunted houses" (Royle, 2003). This representation of the unconscious as a concealed cellar, an attic, or a netherworld emerges as a recurring motif in *Pans Labyrinth*. As the film's narrative unfurls, each task Ofelia undertakes on her quest occurs within variations of this realm filled with "obsessions, phantoms and spectres." After relocating from the urban milieu to rural surroundings and meeting her malicious stepfather and his military group aiming to suppress local resistance forces, Ofelia undergoes a significant displacement. Suddenly, she undergoes a transformation. She becomes the offspring of a repulsive figure, turning the familiar aspects of her life into something strange and unsettling. Her certainties become doubts, adding to her turmoil as she tries to protect her pregnant mother while fulfilling her mission by the faun. Ofelia sets out on a journey filled with themes of longing, peril, sacrifice and mortality. Her quest begins in the forest —a place that bridges her reality and the enigmatic realm she enters. Amidst the increasing cruelty of her stepfather's regime, Ofelia finds solace in fairy tales as a form of escapism. In his essay on mimesis, Caillois's (1984) introductory quote: "Beware, one becomes the phantom one plays at being!" This statement raises pertinent inquiries regarding the demarcation between reality and imagination and the boundary between wakefulness and slumber (Caillios, 1984, p. 19). It speaks to our ability to blend in with our surroundings and introduces the concept of repeating destructive patterns tied to our instinctual drive towards death. This theme manifests in Ofelia's refusal to conform to Captain Vidal's ideology; instead, she embraces the uncertainties of her world over his authoritarian rule. The conflict between the authoritarian elements

is represented through the characters of Captain Vidal, who serves as her stepfather and Mercedes, a supporting character who embodies defiance while navigating a flexible role. Mercedes, employed as a housekeeper under Captain Vidal's command, secretly aids the guerrilla forces in their escape. Her actions stem from kindness and extend to supporting Ofelia in her struggle against her oppressive stepfather. Like the mantis-fairy, Mercedes bridges two worlds: the human world and the magical. Her ability to shift between these realms parallels surrealism's exploration of the uncanny. The mantis fairy plays a role in symbolising guidance, "in-between-ness", and suppressed sexuality. Its ability to appear and disappear echoes Freud's concept of the uncanny repetition compulsion, which Freud links to the death instinct (Kérchy, 2011). Bataille's exploration further solidifies this connection between sexuality and death, where the uncanny coupling of sexuality and death crystallises within the mirrored personas of the mantis and Mercedes, emblematic of the primordial sorceress. Intriguingly, Captain Vidal and his cohorts appear oblivious to Mercedes's fatal allure; they fail to recognise her subversive potential due to their objectification of her based on gender. Surprisingly, Vidal's cold and threatening sexuality, combined with his treatment of Ofelia, her mother and the captive resistance fighters, drive Mercedes to assume the role of a dangerous woman. Despite being in subservient positions like servitude, Mercedes and the mantis fairy possess hidden powers that can bring either life or death. This discussion challenges structures of gender and power by rendering their supposed irrevocable hold through the interplay of desire and mortality. The mantis takes on multiple roles imbued with uncanny connotations in the film's symbolism. It is a herald of the fairy realm, encapsulates Ofelia's liminality and existential conflict, and symbolises a suppressed, perilous sexuality destined for resurgence. As Ofelia encounters the mantis in the woods, which subsequently reappears in her bedroom, her dialogue with the creature transforms into a fairy form, resonating with her imaginative references to fairy tales. Thus, fantastical elements become realities within her imagination.

### *5.1.1* National Identity in *Pan's Labyrinth*

In the book *Childhood and Nation in Contemporary World Cinema: Borders and Encounters*, written by Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Emma Wilson, and Sarah Wright (2017), a deep exploration of how children, nations and cinema intersect unfolds. It provides insights into how individuals navigate notions of identity, history and place in today's ever-changing global landscape. Central to their discourse is "national cinema", referring to films that represent a nation and contribute to shaping its collective identity and narrative. The authors delve into the articulation of the nation within the cinematic medium, inquiring into why the question of the nation, often referred to as 'the state of the nation,' has held significance for filmmakers over the past few decades. The overarching theme of brutality and oppression under the fascist regime is the cornerstone of *Pan's Labyrinth.* Director Del Toro fearlessly depicts the horrors inflicted by human cruelty against the backdrop of Spain's historical context, making it both an artistic contribution to national cinema and historical commentary.

Del Toro's film aligns with a standing tradition in Spanish cinema that explores historical events, particularly those related to Francoist Spain. According to Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan Tamosunas (1998), many films produced since the 1970s have focused on Spain's Second Republic, the Civil War and Francoism. Zipes (2008, pp. 23) argues that *Pan's Labyrinth* endeavours to counterbalance and comment on individuals' harrowing ordeals during the Franco regime's dark period. He suggests that the film delves into society's spectacle, which not only glorifies but also conceals the corruption and pathology inherent in positions of power. Del Toro intends to unveil life in its reality, urging us to reflect on how we perceive things and strive for clarity and understanding.

In terms of war, Donald, Wilson, and Wright (2017, pg. 2) explain that filmmakers adopt diverse approaches, either aligning with established national narratives or using a child's perspective to challenge notions of national unity. They argue that children serve as mirrors reflecting moments of national stress and upheaval, highlighting psychosocial, economic and political vulnerabilities that may be overlooked in broader national discussions. *Pan's Labyrinth* explores the interconnected dynamics between childhood, nationhood and cinema to demonstrate how the symbolism and role of children within cinematic narratives shape national ideals. The fluidity of childhood in cinema allows for the exploration of themes like belonging, encounter, agency, representation and diverse experiences across different cultural backgrounds. While actual childhood experiences vary greatly, the symbol of "the child" holds importance for the nation-state, ethno-national groups and those who either uphold or challenge national histories and collective memories (Donald et al., 2017, p. 2).

In *Pan's Labyrinth* specifically, the child's experience is captured through a series of encounters within an unconventional narrative framework influenced by fairy tales. Lury (2010) suggests that while fairy tales do not inherently capture a child's experience completely, their temporal gaps, economic intricacies and symbolic depth are utilised to reflect the child's perspective. When faced with the world's indifference, revealed through the cataclysmic lens of modern warfare, Ofelia is compelled to adopt a perspective that goes beyond human-centric thinking. As discussed earlier, the dual narrative structure of *Pan's Labyrinth* underscores Ofelia's passage between reality and fantasy. As she navigates her complex life, she is guided by echoes from an ancient tale. Through her trials and tribulations in both the natural and fantastical worlds, Ofelia becomes more than just a protagonist; she becomes a symbol of resilience and defiance in the face of adversity.

#### 5.1.1.1 Ofelia and the Hero’s Journey

As we follow Princess Moanna's story, subsequent scenes show Ofelia deeply engrossed in reading or seemingly lost in a dream. This moment occurs while she is on a car ride with her mother towards the woodlands. The exact nature of this engagement can be interpreted differently; however, it becomes clear that Ofelia immerses herself in the fairy tale narrative. In essence, she takes ownership of the story. Adapts it to confront powerful forces. Her mother, Captain Vidal and the chaotic aftermath of the Civil War. Which cast their shadows over her life (Zipes, 2008). The story takes place in a fairy tale setting, where the main character gains the strength to resist the cruelty inflicted by individuals in her real life. A mysterious faun gives Ofelia three complex tasks within her fairy tale narrative. Her first challenge involves obtaining a key from a toad and saving a dying tree from a grim fate. Then, she must display her bravery as she goes on a quest to acquire a dagger from a creature known for devouring children and fairies despite being blind. The peak of her trials arrives when the faun demands that she sacrifice her brother's life within the mysterious labyrinth.

The creatures go beyond characters in the film and symbolise complex ideas that reflect personal struggles and broader societal issues. This symbolic dance occurs on two levels; one is closely connected to Ofelia's journey, and another represents Spanish society and political allegory. For example, Ofelia's first encounter with the fantasy world is through a being disguised as a praying mantis.

The creature's transformation into a fairy reveals layers of meaning, highlighting its seemingly harmless appearance in contrast to its predatory nature. According to Poulsen (2013), this represents how Ofelia perceives her brother's impact on her mother, where his apparent harm is overshadowed by the chaos he brings. On another level, the creature also symbolises Ofelia herself, contrasting her outward appearance with the inner turmoil she experiences. The metamorphosis into a fairy, a symbol often associated with childhood innocence, showcases the film's blend of a fairytale realm and the harshness of reality. A crucial aspect of Ofelia's journey involves a trial where

she feeds magical stones to a toad within a dying fig tree. This process unveils a hidden key found inside the creature's body. Kérchy (2011) suggests that this transformation of the toad amidst insects and slime signifies a transition from order to disorder, reflecting the film's underlying themes. The toad's enigmatic presence within the tree also carries symbolic meanings. Resembling a uterus in shape, it also serves as a symbolic link to Ofelia's unborn sibling. As the toad drains the tree's life force, reflecting how the brother exhausts their mother, it also goes beyond representation and becomes a powerful symbol of the greedy Spanish aristocracy. The toad, symbolising elites, consumes resources while neglecting the less fortunate, illustrating social inequality (Poulsen, 2013). When Ofelia emerges from the tree covered in mud after retrieving the key from the toad, it symbolises how disorder can disrupt environments. According to Lury (2010), in films, children caught up in war often find themselves covered in mud, soaked by rain and overwhelmed by forest fires and burning buildings. Lury (2010) explains that these essential elements like mud, fire, forests and rain play a role in shaping interactions between a child's tangible reality and their surrounding environment. The mud serves a purpose; it acts as an obstacle that hinders young protagonists' progress while also metaphorically representing their struggles. Getting muddy is similar to being drawn to the warmth of a fire; it captures those pleasures that come with youth.

However, the child's emotions or intentions do not influence mud, fire and earth. They exist independently of the child's experiences. While mud may seem animated, its restraining effect and uncanny ability to penetrate every body crevice stem from its nature rather than conscious will. It reveals the reality when the balance of the world is disrupted, causing the child's limited understanding of society to crumble. This encounter with lifeless matter heightens the child's perception of the world, creating a tangible feeling of being face-to-face with the earth itself. This visceral experience happens without mediation, parental presence, or societal norms. It allows for a connection between the child and their surroundings, free from external influences. (Lury, 2010). The film's second task centres around a character known as The Pale Man, drawing inspiration from Hoffmann's tale *The Sandman*. In this scene, Ofelia must enter a chamber by creating her entrance using chalk provided by a magical faun. This scene takes us back to our childhood, reminding us of the drawings and games we used to play, like hopscotch, with its rules and rituals. It introduces us to the Pale

Man, a character who is bound by rules and enjoys inflicting pain. The Pale Man is depicted as eyeless and unclothed with sagging skin resembling folds and sits before a feast. The faun has warned Ofelia, similar to the warnings we find in fairy tales, not to eat anything – a crucial caution for her survival.

Notably, the Pale Man's plate holds his eyeballs, as Kérchy (2011) points out, which is a grotesque parody of St. Lucy. St. Lucy is known as the patron saint of people who are blind and associated with the winter solstice; she is often depicted holding her mutilated eyes on a tray in artwork. The chamber walls in the room are adorned with frescoes telling the story of the Pale Man. These images carry visual symbolism reminiscent of Gilles de Rais's narrative – a historical figure notorious for his monstrous crimes against children. The Pale Man remains powerless until Ofelia breaks one of the rules set by her fairy companions. Despite their guidance, she chooses to unlock one door out of three using her key and goes against her instincts by eating two grapes from the table filled with tempting food. Although it may seem trivial, this act violates a necessary prohibition within the fairyland; eating anything from there represents a significant transgression. In a twist on the childhood game of "hide and seek," the monster takes the eyes from his plate and chases after Ofelia with the eyes embedded in his palms. This unsettling image reflects Freud's exploration of the connection between the eye and male sexuality as seen in dreams, myths, and fantasies, notably expounded in his analysis of Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. Del Toro acknowledges the similarities between the Pale Man chamber and Captain Vidal's dinner table, characterised by abundance and overseen by figures. By defying the Pale Man, Ofelia asserts her identity and opposes patriarchal authority. The consequences of her rebellion within the monster's lair are severe. Although she manages to escape, the faun expresses his disappointment at her failure to comply with the established rules. In this context, the Pale Man represents Captain Vidal and the adult world; his insatiable actions resonate with Ofelia's perception of Vidal's ruthlessness, equating it with a devouring of innocence.

Del Toro's meticulous crafting of the fantasy world plot imbues it with the structure typically found in fairy tales. However, he cleverly weaves in elements and characters from real-world plots that evoke a sense of enchantment akin to fairy tales. The fusion of themes in this story goes beyond the child protagonist and involves the adult

characters. It creates a blending of imagination and reality. By delving into the characters' worlds, the film builds a connection between truth and fantasy, immersing adults in narratives that shape their lives. This merging culminates in a tapestry of storytelling where fantasies intertwine with individuals, guiding them towards their deepest subconscious desires.

Captain Vidal, who serves as the antagonist, goes beyond being a mere representation and embodies a malevolent force reminiscent of *Coppelius* from E.T.A. Hoffmann's tale. He represents Freud's concept of the "disturber of love, "inserting himself into Ofelia's life, taking over her father's role and attempting to replace him (Freud, 1985, p. 353). On the other hand, Ofelia resists transitioning from innocence to maturity by rejecting Captain Vidal as a 'false' father figure. The film contrasts Vidal's rule with a magical realm that defies his authority. There is one scene where Ofelia tries to help her mother as her illness worsens throughout the film. The faun comes to her aid by providing a talisman made from mandrake root, which she must place beneath her mother's bed. Ofelia calls upon an agent to safeguard her mother from Vidal's threats. This leads to a pivotal moment when Vidal finds the talisman and throws it into the fire while her mother doubts the world of fairy tales. This scepticism may have influenced her mother's death during childbirth. As a result of these events, Ofelia finds herself isolated until the faun presents her with an opportunity to guide her baby brother through the labyrinth. However, this task comes with a sacrifice: spilling the innocent infant's blood and opening a passage to the mysterious realm. Recoiling from this demand, Ofelia is met with Captain Vidal's deadly gunshot, marking her tragic yet transformative end. Her pure and innocent blood mixes with the earth of the labyrinth, unlocking a realm of rejuvenation and symbolising the bond between parent and child.

In contrast to this ending scene, Captain Vidal faces his impending demise as the insurgent fighters and Mercedes close in on him. Aware of his fate, Vidal desperately asks Mercedes to pass on his legacy to his offspring. She firmly rejects him, saying, "He will not even know your name." This poignant response seals Vidal's destiny, echoing Ofelia's birth shaped by fairy tale symbolism and ultimately leading to his downfall. Despite knowing her mortality, Ofelia assumes the role of protector for her baby brother, freeing him from the clutches of their oppressive parent. Her transformation from a figment of imagination to a symbolic representation signifies a

profound journey she orchestrated. It is as if she morphs into a butterfly, embodying the depth of her growth. *Pan's Labyrinth's* convergence between fantastical realms and tangible reality deviates from conventions by portraying the fantastical world as anything but an ideal sanctuary; instead, it mirrors the real world's hidden contradictions and unspoken taboos. This underlying theme aligns closely with Rosemary Jackson's perspective on Fantasy literature. Its ability to explore suppressed aspects of culture and unveil what remains concealed or overlooked (Jackson, 1981, p.4).

### 5.1.2 The Enchanted Forest Within; Symbolism and Transformation in the Woodlands of Pan's Labyrinth

*Pan's Labyrinth* beautifully depicts the sometimes dangerous allure of enchanted forests, capturing the mixed feelings that fairy tales often evoke. This intricate portrayal reflects a shift in how Spanish cinema represents forests, moving from landscapes in the 1970s to a renewed nostalgic fascination with their enchantment in the 1980s. According to scholars Barry Jordan and Rikki Morgan Tamosunas, during Franco's era, films with opposing viewpoints used settings to convey stagnation and repression contrasting with the official narrative of an idealised Spain (Jordon & Morgan Tamosunas, 1998, p. 46).

In *Pan's Labyrinth,* the forest embodies an identity deeply rooted in folklore and European tradition. It is a place where children are abandoned but where fantastical creatures dwell. This archetype, as both benevolent and menacing, exists alongside the forest role, forcing children to confront its harsh realities. Such context emphasises the film's historical nature, echoing Max Luthi's view that fairy tales are narratives that endure across time (Luthi, 1976, p. 47). This dichotomy of the forest is prominently showcased when Ofelia first encounters the labyrinth. The camera's perspective changes to match Ofelia's point of view, making the audience see things through her eyes as she discovers the entrance to the labyrinth. The labyrinth's dark and intricate design and the presence of a creature create a feeling of both fascination and unease. This moment captures the conflicting emotions that Ofelia experiences – her curiosity mixed with caution – as she explores the forest. The forest serves as a catalyst for

Ofelia's imagination, a place where she brings her dreams to life. It becomes an escape and a form of rebellion for her, highlighting how nature plays a role in her journey. The film shifts between periods, creating gaps and inconsistencies that reflect both the child's perspective and the interference of adults. As Lury (2010) suggests, such encounters often occur in forests, which are archetypal settings where various elements – literal and metaphorical monsters – come together reminiscent of fairy tales. There is a contrast between the adult world and the realm of childhood fantasies. This contrast is particularly evident in the film when Carmen briefly finds relief from illness during the car scene, causing their journey to pause temporarily and allowing Ofelia to venture into the woods. The fairy disguised as a praying mantis flutters near her face. As Carmen calls for Ofelia to return to the car, she tries to share her encounter. "I actually saw a fairy," she says; Carmen dismisses it and focuses on Ofelia's now muddy shoes instead. As they continue their journey, the camera follows the path of the praying mantis from behind, capturing its movements. The insect's graceful flight around a tree and its observation of the departing vehicles add a touch of enchantment, lending authenticity to Ofelia's visions.

The forest becomes an arena where her imagination thrives, bridging the gap between real elements (Arroyo, 2006 p. 66). Ofelia's imaginary realm invites the audience to join her world. The forest in the film symbolises her journey and echoes vital elements found in classic fantasy quests. In line with Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory (1949), Ofelia experiences her call to adventure, traversing thresholds and facing trials that reflect universal stages of heroism. Additionally, through Ofelia's connection with creatures, we witness how the forest represents transformation and identity and interacts with Ofelia, highlighting how the forest serves as a testing ground for the protagonist's sense of self. Initially enigmatic and distant, the faun guides Ofelia on her journey, challenging her understanding of reality and encouraging her to embrace her identity as a princess. This encounter demonstrates how the forest is, both physical and psychological, where transformations occur. As Ofelia explores this terrain, she undergoes a metamorphosis that defies societal expectations, asserting her autonomy—a theme emphasised by Warner's feminist perspective (Warner, 1994). Her encounters with the creatures in the forest play a pivotal role in this transformation, teaching her courage, morality and love lessons.

Another significant theme in *Pan's Labyrinth* is how it portrays the woodland as an oppressor and liberator. The forest is intricately tied to its historical context—the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War—and its significance resonates with the film's characters. For those involved in resistance efforts, it symbolises an opportunity for escape and a place where they can exist outside of norms. From Captain Vidal's perspective, the forest evokes a sense of unease, revealing his fear of the other'' lurking within. This further reinforces the role of the forest as a sanctuary for those who oppose his authoritarian rule. As the film progresses, the forest evolves from a physical setting to a metaphor for the Resistance's battle against oppression. It embodies the power of fairy tales in challenging dominant narratives (Clover, 1989). This duality highlights how the forest can be both a refuge and a threat, mirroring filmmaking's use of legends and fairy tales to explore societal realities (Jordon & Morgan Tamosunas, 1998, p. 50).

## 5.2 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Pan's Labyrinth* portrays the forest as symbolising the allure of the fairytale world—a dangerous and enchanting realm. This cinematic journey through ambiguity echoes the film's exploration of transformative stories. Through its thickets and ever-changing moods, *Pan's Labyrinth* captures the essence of folk narratives—constantly shifting and reflecting cultural changes and moral inclinations over time. The woodlands serve as a conduit for resistance, empowerment and transformation, with their liminality and mystique. As we accompany Ofelia on her journey, the intricacies of the forest enhance our connection with the story, serving as a reminder that the boundaries between fantasy and reality are not rigid but flexible. This concept holds significance beyond just what we see on the screen. *Pan's Labyrinth* masterfully merges childhood innocence with the harshness of reality through its character, Ofelia. This exploration echoes scholars like Honesty Hight Warburton, who delve into how traumatic experiences erode childhood purity. For instance, works like William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* tell stories that blend playfulness and ruthlessness, revealing the intersection between innocence and the harsh reality of conflict (Hight Warburton, 2017). In this vein, *Pan's Labyrinth* explores how childhood innocence is

affected by trauma, effortlessly incorporating elements of horror into a fairy tale framework. Thus, the young protagonist in this film serves as both a representation and a reflection of societal realities, offering a profound portrayal of the complex interplay between innocence and turmoil.

The film emerges as a captivating piece of cinema that combines the allure of fairy tales, unsettling horror and thought-provoking postmodern storytelling techniques such as frame narrative, intertextuality, magical realism and genre hybridity. At its core, the film captures the essence of a fairy tale—an adventurous journey of self-discovery for a young protagonist filled with fantastical creatures and an eternal struggle between good and evil. The narrative intertwines magical elements like the faun, fairies and enchanted objects. It also embraces fairy tale themes such as morality, love, power, and bravery. It subverts expectations by immersing viewers in a darker and more violent world than we typically find in fairy tales. The film explores themes of loss of childhood innocence as Ofelia confronts her vulnerability when exposed to the world's harsh realities. The stark contrast between innocence and brutality in *Pan's Labyrinth* highlights the difference between the two realms, evoking a deep desire for a world untouched by harsh realities.

Moreover, this film aligns with interpretations of fairy tales found in animated works like *The Wolf House*, as discussed. These works often delve into how trauma affects identity formation. *Pan's Labyrinth* portrays how traumatic experiences can fracture and distort one's sense of self, leading to a disconnection from oneself and the world. Ofelia's recourse to fairy tales serves as a coping mechanism to escape her stepfather's tyranny. Ultimately, her journey culminates in embracing the experience as an integral part of her identity, reflecting the nuanced exploration of identity amidst trauma.

The coexistence of fantastical realms with grim realities creates an unsettling atmosphere—a defining characteristic achieved by blending fairy tale motifs with horror elements. The film creates ambiguity by using postmodern techniques such as frame narrative and juxtaposing scenes from the world with the fantastical realm. It prompts reflection on the boundaries between truth and illusion. The deliberate refusal to

provide answers adds complexity, leaving audiences to decipher the authenticity of the fantasy world and unravel the relationship between Ofelia and Pan. Ambiguity is at the core of this film's appeal, with elements open to interpretation. The enigmatic nature of Ofelia's journey through the fantasy world raises questions about its origin—is it a creation of her imagination? Does it exist independently? The film compels viewers to actively engage and interpret its ambiguous narrative, breaking away from linear storytelling norms. Furthermore, the mysterious bond between Ofelia and the faun exemplifies this narrative complexity by provoking speculation about his motives and intentions. This intentional opacity adds depth and richness to *Pan's Labyrinth,* showcasing its adherence to storytelling traditions. The film's impact endures as a symbol of excellence in cinema, capturing the beautiful blend of imagination and real-world elements. It delves into the spaces that push our understanding and redefine how we interpret fairy tales. Its influence goes well beyond what happens on the screen.

# 6 CONCLUSION

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary society, the convergence of horror and fairy tale narratives emerges as a captivating avenue for filmmakers to explore the intricate facets of human experiences and societal complexities. This fusion of genres, seamlessly entwining innocence with darkness, tradition with innovation, and reality with fantasy, generates narratives that transcend traditional confines. Themes of transformation, the struggle between good and evil, and the hero's journey interlace within this narrative fabric.

This study has meticulously examined a repertoire of films, with each chapter delving into the expedition of young protagonists navigating their developmental years amidst societal backdrops. These films shatter the veneer of childhood innocence by immersing characters directly into the realm of grim themes, rendering reflections of the real world. In these narratives, young protagonists grapple with violence, danger, and moral ambiguity, compelling them to confront the harsh realities encompassing their lives. These encounters with surreal or uncanny elements engender rites of passage that unfold both within and around the characters, shaping their perceptions, relationships, and personal agency. A central motif emerges - their evolution through adversity, culminating in the profound choices that mould their identities.

Filmmakers embark on a journey of subversion by melding horror elements with fairy tale themes, traversing a trajectory from classic adaptations to contemporary narratives. These filmmakers accentuate the horror aspects by employing postmodern strategies like intertextuality, metafiction, metanarrative, self-reflexivity, and genre

hybridity. The role of visual elements, such as cinematography, set design, special effects and traditional animation methods, in crafting horror-infused fairy tale narratives is paramount in driving this fusion. The cinematography of these films creates an atmosphere of suspense and eeriness, drawing viewers into a world where fantasy and horror intertwine. Set design transports audiences to otherworldly landscapes, mirroring the duality of the fairy tale realm. As we observe in Chapter 2, stop-motion animation and mixed media accentuate the uncanny, highlighting the liminal space between reality and fantasy.

The infusion of historical and cultural elements within horror-infused fairy tales also unveils insights into cultural significance and modern relevance. Folklore, rooted in cultural tenets and historical contexts, is brought to light, resonating with contemporary sensibilities. This interplay between historical and contemporary elements is exemplified in the films *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), *Hanna* (2011), and *Freeway* (1996), offering glimpses into past norms, struggles, and conflicts that maintain their resonance in the present. By juxtaposing these historical aspects with modern concerns such as systemic flaws, power dynamics, gender disparities, and technological advancements, filmmakers accentuate thematic continuity across eras. For instance, *Pan's Labyrinth* navigates post-Civil War Spain, mirroring the era's turmoil. At the same time, *Hanna* and *Freeway* probe how surroundings and encounters shape young characters, reflecting the interplay between personal growth and societal influences. National cinema intricately weaves local cultural perspectives and storytelling traditions into narratives. *Pan's Labyrinth* authenticates Spanish myths and fairy tales, enriching thematic dimensions while resonating with national audiences. Themes of cultural identity, historical injustices, and societal paradigms are outrightly addressed, fostering conversations and collective introspection. This confluence of culture and storytelling within local contexts enriches cinematic experiences and propels films to serve as vehicles for understanding and dialogue within national spheres.

Furthermore, the research underscores how young protagonists grapple with identity, self-discovery, and growth, often utilizing fairy tales and horror as coping mechanisms. These tales resonate with psychoanalytic journeys of the human psyche, unearthing deep-seated desires and fears through archetypes and symbolism. The integration of

darkness into fairy tales invites dialogue on pertinent issues, resonating with both younger and adult audiences, bridging generational gaps and fostering discussions about the complexities of human existence. Characters like Coraline Jones and Maria in *Coraline* (2009) and *The Wolf House* (2018) are presented as individuals seeking their place in the world, learning to distinguish themselves from others, and undergoing transformational experiences. By confronting the darkness within and around us, filmmakers cultivate empathy, introspection, and understanding, forging connections across diverse demographics. As filmmakers embrace the transformative power of the genre hybridity of fairy tales and horror, they pave the way for fresh interpretations of classic tales and the creation of entirely new narratives. This process reflects the evolving nature of culture and societal norms, providing a canvas to paint stories that resonate with current issues. The integration of darkness into fairy tales can serve as a metaphor for the complexities of contemporary existence, confronting viewers with uncomfortable truths and encouraging discussions about relevant topics. A recent example that accumulates most of the elements this research has discussed is the 2020 South Korean television series *It's Okay Not to Be Okay*, directed by Park Shin-woo, which illustrates how genre hybridity can be harnessed to dissect contemporary societal challenges. *It's Okay to Not Be Okay* is an empowering story encouraging individuals to find their inner strength and resilience during difficult times. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought about several factors, such as social isolation, uncertainty, grief, economic stress, and disruptions to daily life. Incorporating horror and fairy tale narratives that deal with themes of adversity, fear, uncertainty, and mental health concerns into the global response to the pandemic can provide a creative and meaningful way to address issues relevant to many people's experiences during the pandemic. Engaging with narratives that discuss this kind of topics, create a shared understanding of these emotions, foster community and empathy, and promote resilience and empowerment. *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* uses a range of cultural, historical, and psychoanalytic references to create a rich and complex narrative that explores themes of trauma, mental health, and healing. The show highlights the social stigma surrounding mental illness in Korea and its impact on individuals and families. It also addresses other issues, such as the complex dynamics of parent-child relationships and the lasting effects of childhood trauma. Fairy tales are often used to teach children morals and values; in the show, they explore the characters' emotional

struggles and trauma. The show's narrative style uses a mix of animation and live action, which facilitates the idea of genre hybridity and intertextuality in horror and fairy tale films. The opening sequence of each episode features a dark, fairytale-inspired animation that sets the tone for the series. This sequence is significant in that it immediately establishes the show's interest in combining horror and fairy tale themes while also highlighting the importance of storytelling and the power of imagination. These animated sequences often portray a dreamlike, surreal quality, using fantastical imagery and symbolism to convey complex emotional states. It uses the medium to depict the inner emotional worlds of the characters, particularly those of the two main leads, Moon Gang-tae and Ko Moon-young. Both characters allow for exploring complex topics such as trauma and memory metaphorically and symbolically, making the show both engaging and emotionally resonant. Another exciting aspect of the narrative techniques employed is the use of fairy tales to suggest that society often infantilizes those with mental illness, treating them like children rather than addressing their needs as adults. The significance of horror and fairy tales in the series is also evident in the incorporation of elements of Korean folklore and the various stories and myths woven into the plot of each episode. For example, there is a recurring theme of the "cursed castle", a reference to the Grimm's fairy tale *Bluebeard*, which is about a wealthy man who murders his wives and hides their bodies in a secret room of his castle. As well as other Western fairy tales such as *Cinderella* and *The Little Mermaid*. This theme is used to explore the idea of secrets and hidden traumas.

The series is essential to note as it showcases the broad scope of this topic of horror and fairytale narratives in films, one that is beyond the constraints of this research. As future filmmakers continue to navigate modern society, the fusion of horror and fairy tale genres offers a new outlet to engage with narrative cinema. By understanding genre hybridity, exploring the multidimensional nature of fairy tales, and addressing pertinent societal issues, the film industry has the potential to craft narratives that resonate deeply with contemporary audiences. Just as the films discussed and *It's Okay Not to Be Okay* pushes boundaries in media, filmmakers worldwide can draw inspiration from this approach to illuminate the rich complexities of our times, creating stories that engage, challenge, and ultimately foster a deeper connection between art and life.

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