



Applying literary theory to folktales: A structural, psychoanalytic, and feminist approach to meaning-making in Oral Narratives

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the use of feminist, structuralist, and psychoanalytic literary theories in folktale interpretation. The study examines the structural patterns, psychological aspects, and gendered representations contained in a few chosen folktales from various cultural contexts, drawing on the seminal works of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Vladimir Propp, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and feminist literary scholars. Using a qualitative research approach, it analyzes gender dynamics, archetypal motifs, and story structures in oral traditions through textual and comparative literary analysis. The results show that folktales frequently represent unconscious desires and conflicts linked to Jungian archetypes while also adhering to recurring structural patterns in line with Propp's morphology. Through depictions of female agency and resistance, feminist analysis emphasizes both the subversion of gender expectations and the reinforcement of patriarchal standards. By showing how folktales function as cultural objects that reflect social ideals, worries, and aspirations, the debate highlights the intersections of these theoretical stances. The study suggests that in order to reinterpret classic stories within contemporary social and cultural contexts, multidisciplinary approaches should be used going forward, especially when incorporating modern feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives. This study advances scholarship by bridging the gap between literary theory and folklore studies and highlighting the importance of theoretical frameworks in illuminating the folktales' underlying cultural, psychological, and ideological aspects. In the end, it emphasizes how oral histories serve as both windows into social structures and forums for criticism, change, and resistance.

Keywords: Folklore, Symbolism, Patriarchy, Narrative Theory, Custom

INTRODUCTION

Folktales have long been used to convey cultural knowledge, moral lessons, and social conventions, but their importance goes beyond simple narrative. To reveal the deeper meanings buried within these stories, scholars have been using literary theories more and more.¹ Folktales have been the subject of

¹ Marcel Hénaff, *Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Making of Structural Anthropology* (U of Minnesota Press, 1998).

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significant investigation, although most of that analysis has been limited to structural or topic studies without including other theoretical stances. By integrating structuralism, psychoanalysis, and feminist literary theories into folktales, this study aims to close this gap by providing a thorough analytical framework that highlights both culturally particular and universal elements of oral storytelling.²

While existing research on folktales recognizes their cultural value and narrative patterns, it frequently ignores the interaction of gender portrayal, psychological depth, and structure. While structural studies highlight story patterns, they fail to consider the social and psychological factors that shape these stories.³ Psychoanalytic interpretations, on the other hand, examine subconscious themes but hardly ever take gendered power systems into account.⁴ Although feminist critiques patriarchal representations, it has not been extensively applied to oral traditions in a cross-cultural, comparative way.⁵ By showing how various theoretical stances interact to influence folktale interpretation, this study overcomes this constraint.

By bridging the gap between literary theory and folklore studies, this study advances previous research by demonstrating the complementary nature of structural, psychoanalytic, and feminist approaches to the study of oral narratives. By revealing latent societal fears, subconscious archetypes, and ideological constructs, the study advances theoretical discussions on folktales through an interdisciplinary lens. It also draws attention to folktales as possible locations of resistance, especially in the representation of gender, as well as carriers of social norms.

The breadth of interpretation has been limited by earlier research that primarily looked at gender roles, symbolic significance, or narrative structure separately.⁶ More multidisciplinary techniques are needed to uncover the multifaceted significance of folklore, according to recent studies.⁷ By combining three different but complimentary theoretical frameworks, this study expands on these conversations and offers a more sophisticated interpretation of folktales.

The lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework in folktale analysis leads to a restricted investigation of the interplay among gender ideologies, psychological archetypes, and narrative structures.⁸ These dimensions have mostly been handled independently in previous research, which has resulted in inconsistent interpretations. This study fills this vacuum by showing that folktales serve as intricate cultural artifacts that concurrently encode structural patterns, psychological tensions, and gendered power relations.⁹

In order to do this, the study qualitatively analyses a few chosen folktales from various cultural traditions, looking at their gender portrayals, psychological themes, and narrative structures. Propp's morphological model,¹⁰ serves as the foundation for structural analysis, whilst Freudian and Jungian notions¹¹ are applied in psychoanalytic interpretation. The way that folktales either uphold or subvert patriarchal standards is examined by feminist critique.¹² The study guarantees a comprehensive analysis of the cultural and ideological aspects of folktales by utilizing various techniques in tandem.

Beginning with an introduction outlining the study subject, objectives, and significance, the paper is divided into multiple sections. The theoretical framework is then discussed after a review of the literature that covers previous research on folktales and the pertinent literary theories. The research

² Shanna E Butler, *The Alchemy of Gender: A Hermeneutic Inquiry* (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2017).

³ Jean-Francois Santucci, Albert Doja, and Laurent Capocchi, "A Discrete-Event Simulation of Claude Lévi-Strauss' Structural Analysis of Myths Based on Symmetry and Double Twist Transformations," *Symmetry* 12, no. 10 (2020): 1706.

⁴ Carl Gustav Jung and William McGuire, "Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido," 2023.

⁵ M. Bulmuş, "Gender Discourse in Selected European Fairy Tales: Masculinity Constructed upon the Objectification, Repudiation and Devaluation of Femininity" (Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2020).

⁶ Timothy J Biblarz and Evren Savci, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Families," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 3 (2010): 480–97.

⁷ Jeana Jorgensen, *Folklore 101: An Accessible Introduction to Folklore Studies* (Dr Jeana Jorgensen LLC, 2021).

⁸ I. Simurdic, "Archetypal Narrative Structure and Archetypal Characters in the Novels of Michael Ende" (University of Novi Sad (Serbia), 2022).

⁹ Simurdic, "Archetypal Narrative Structure and Archetypal Characters in the Novels of Michael Ende."

¹⁰ G.K. Kenga, "Structural Analysis of Fairy Tales of The Giriama of Rural Kilifi County in Kenya" (Pwani University, 2022).

¹¹ Carl Gustav Jung, "Analytical Psychology," in *An Introduction to Theories of Personality* (Psychology Press, 2014), 53–81.

¹² Fjola Murati Kurti, "'A Feminist Subversion of Fairy Tales': Écriture Féminine, Gender Stereotypes, and the Rejection of Patriarchy in Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*," 2021.

design, data selection, and analytical strategy are all covered in detail in the methods section. Findings pertaining to gendered representations, psychological motifs, and narrative patterns are presented in the analysis section, which concludes with a summary of the main conclusions and suggestions for additional study.

This work provides a sophisticated examination of folktales by combining several literary theories, establishing them as crucial elements of literary and cultural discourse. It emphasizes the value of multidisciplinary techniques in examining oral narratives and reinforces the significance of folktale studies in modern research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have been studying folktales through literary theory for a long time. To find deeper meanings in oral traditions, academics have used feminist, structuralist, and psychoanalytic techniques. This overview of the literature looks at the fundamental ideas and significant works in these fields, examining the various ways in which folktales have been examined by academics. Additionally, the review identifies gaps in the literature, highlighting the need for an interdisciplinary approach to folktale analysis.

Studies of folktales have benefited greatly from structuralism, especially because to the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp. A methodical approach to examining the structure of Russian folktales was developed by Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, which identified 31 narrative functions that take place in a predictable order.¹³ Numerous folktale traditions have made extensive use of his framework, demonstrating the existence of cross-culturally universal narrative frameworks. In an extension of Propp's study, Dundes contends that structuralist approaches offer a scientific framework for classifying folklore, facilitating cross-national comparisons of oral traditions.¹⁴

On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss concentrated on binary oppositions in myth and folklore, proposing that folktales serve as a tool for resolving societal tensions like nature vs culture, good versus evil, and life versus death.¹⁵ According to his structural analysis, these binary oppositions are a reflection of underlying ideological tensions and cultural fears. Lévi-Strauss's theories have been further developed by academics like Meletinsky, who has applied them to a variety of oral traditions in order to uncover shared cognitive elements that underlie folklore narratives.¹⁶

Despite structuralism's accomplishments, others contend that it may ignore the flexibility and cultural uniqueness of oral storytelling by rigidly classifying folktales into predetermined forms.¹⁷ Furthermore, structuralist approaches have come under fire for ignoring the socio-historical and psychological aspects of folktales in favour of an excessive emphasis on form.

Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud developed psychoanalytic theory, which has greatly advanced our understanding of the psychological complexity of folktales. Folktales frequently convey inner wants and suppressed fears, according to Róheim and Dundes, especially when it comes to early development.¹⁸ Classic stories like Hansel and Gretel and Little Red Riding Hood demonstrate how his Oedipus complex theory has been widely applied to stories about familial tensions.¹⁹

Folktale analysis has also been impacted by Simurdic idea of archetypes, which hold that recurrent characters like the hero, the trickster, and the wise old man are universal patterns of the human psyche.²⁰ According to Jungian academics like Weisner, folktales provide symbolic resolutions to internal tensions and are communal manifestations of psychological processes.²¹ For instance, the process of individuation, in which the protagonist integrates various facets of the self, is mirrored in the hero's journey, which is a common motif in folktales.

¹³ V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (University of Texas Press, 1968).

¹⁴ Alan Dundes, *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (Univ of California Press, 1984).

¹⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, John Weightman, and Doreen Weightman, *Tristes Tropiques*, vol. 504 (Plon Paris, 1955).

¹⁶ Eleazar M Meletinsky, *The Poetics of Myth* (Routledge, 2013).

¹⁷ Jessica Evans Merrill, *The Role of Folklore Study in the Rise of Russian Formalist and Czech Structuralist Literary Theory* (University of California, Berkeley, 2012).

¹⁸ Géza Róheim and Alan Dundes, "Fire in the Dragon and Other Psychoanalytic Essays on Folklore," 2021.

¹⁹ Chinyere Okoroafor, "Illuminating the Dark Side of Fairy Tales" (Brunel University London, 2024).

²⁰ Simurdic, "Archetypal Narrative Structure and Archetypal Characters in the Novels of Michael Ende."

²¹ Sjoñ C Weisner, *The Mythology of Infancy: Lullabies from a Jungian Perspective* (Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2001).

Psychoanalytic interpretations have been criticized for their propensity to impose Eurocentric psychological models onto non-Western narratives, even though they have increased our knowledge of folktales as representations of the unconscious mind.²² Furthermore, feminist researchers contend that by viewing female characters largely through their interactions with male characters, Freudian analysis frequently perpetuates patriarchal interpretations of folktales.²³

Traditional folktale interpretations have been questioned, thanks in large part to feminist literary criticism, which has revealed how these stories either support or contradict gender stereotypes. Folktale female characters are frequently portrayed as meek, submissive, or limited to domestic responsibilities, according to scholars like Fadina.²⁴ Male authority figures decide the destiny of classic characters like Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty.

Nonetheless, feminist academics also point out situations in which folktales subvert conventional gender norms. Whatman looks at how some fairy tales, especially those told by women, present women as active participants rather than passive objects of male rescuing.²⁵ Teverson investigates how contemporary folktale retellings subvert patriarchal narratives by recasting female protagonists as more independent and nuanced.²⁶

A more complex understanding of gender in folktales has resulted from the convergence of feminist and psychoanalytic methodologies. For instance, the representation of monstrous women in folklore has been analysed using Kristeva's theory of abjection, demonstrating how female power is frequently vilified in patriarchal cultures. According to these interpretations, folktales serve as forums for negotiating cultural fears related to femininity and power, rather than just serving as mirrors of gender standards.²⁷

There are important gaps in the literature that call for more investigation, despite the fact that structuralist, psychoanalytic, and feminist approaches have offered insightful perspectives on folktale interpretation. First, a large portion of the literature now in publication is centered on Western folktales, with little attention paid to oral traditions from Africa, Asia, and Indigenous peoples. Scholars like Irele stress the importance of culturally specific interpretations that take into account the particular settings in which non-Western folktales are created and passed down.²⁸

Second, despite the widespread use of structuralist and psychoanalytic frameworks, feminist and intersectional viewpoints in folktale studies need to be more fully integrated. Feminist scholarship has not yet thoroughly examined the nuanced representations of class, race, and sexuality seen in many folktales.²⁹

Third, research on modern folktale adaptations in literature, film, and digital media is still lacking. Studies that look at how these stories are being reinterpreted in modern contexts are necessary since folktales are still changing in response to contemporary cultural and political shifts.³⁰

Scholars from structuralist, psychoanalytic, and feminist schools have made significant contributions to the literature on folktale interpretation, each providing a unique viewpoint on the purpose and significance of oral traditions. Feminist critique has contested gendered readings of folktales, psychoanalytic approaches have exposed the psychological depth of these tales, and structuralist methods have exposed universal story patterns. Nonetheless, there are still shortages in the areas of intersectional viewpoints, cross-cultural studies, and modern folktale adaptations. By combining structuralist, psychoanalytic, and feminist methodologies in the examination of a few chosen

²² Jack Zipes, *Remembering the Jewish and German Questions: Essays on Fairy Tales, Poetry, and Culture* (Taylor & Francis, 2025).

²³ Miranda García and Julia Danaide, "The Fairy Tale as a Fertile Soil for Silenced Voices, Challenges to Patriarchal Authority, and Repossession of Non-Normative and Distorted Identities. A Case of Study: Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*," 2019.

²⁴ Nadezda Fadina, "Fairytale Women: Gender Politics in Soviet and Post-Soviet Animated Adaptations of Russian National Fairytales," 2016.

²⁵ E. Whatman, "Postfeminist Identities in Contemporary Fairy-Tale Adaptations for Young People" (Deakin University, 2019).

²⁶ Andrew Teverson, *A Cultural History of Fairy Tales in the Modern Age* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

²⁷ Julia Kristeva and Margaret Waller, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (1982): 77–92.

²⁸ Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa & the Black Diaspora* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁹ Dána-Ain Davis and Christa Craven, *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

³⁰ Ana-Maria Baciu, *Fairy Tales and the Shift in Identity Poetics from Modernism to Postmodernism* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023).

folktales, this study aims to close these gaps and show how these stories serve as cultural, psychological, and ideological documents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theoretical frameworks feminism, psychoanalysis, and structuralism served as the foundation for this investigation. A multifaceted comprehension of the chosen folktales' narrative, psychological, and gendered characteristics was made possible by the unique yet complementing lenses that each framework offered for analysis.

The Theory of Structuralism

The study's initial framework was structuralism, specifically the ideas of Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Finding the underlying structures of folktales and spotting recurrent themes and connections within them were the main goals of structuralism. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* offered a methodical approach to character roles and narrative functions. Using this method, the study mapped the recurring narrative functions of archetypal characters such as the hero, villain, donor, and helper across many cultural contexts.

By emphasizing binary oppositions seen in folktales, such as good versus evil, nature versus culture, and life versus death, Lévi-Strauss' structuralist theory enhanced the analysis even more. These contrasts demonstrated how many societies incorporated cultural norms and moral principles into their stories. The study was able to understand folktales as cultural texts that both reflect and uphold social systems thanks to this framework.

Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis was the second framework used, mostly based on Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud's views. Understanding how folktales convey suppressed wants, anxieties, and psychological conflicts was made possible by psychoanalytic theory. The interpretation of symbolic elements signifying internal conflicts and unsolved human struggles was informed by Freud's theories on the unconscious, repression, and the Oedipus complex.³¹

Recurring motifs like the hero's journey, the shadow, and the anima/animus were examined using Jungian psychology, namely the idea of archetypes.³² Considered manifestations of the collective unconscious, these archetypes exposed culturally common psychological characteristics. Folktale symbols, including the mother figure, the wise old man, and the transformational voyage, were evaluated by the study as representations of cultural identity and the collective human experience.

Feminism

Feminist literary theory, which studied the construction and representation of gender roles and power dynamics in folktales, was the third framework used. The study examined how patriarchal ideas influenced character portrayals and how female figures were positioned within these tales, drawing on the writings of Judith Butler and Gilbert & Gubar.³³ In addition to examples where women showed agency, resiliency, and resistance to patriarchal expectations, the feminist critique concentrated on situations in which women were restricted to passive roles, such as the damsel in distress. The study's identification of folktales as possible venues of resistance, places where alternative gender representations questioned prevailing social norms and provided a platform for underrepresented viewpoints, was made possible by feminist theory.³⁴

³¹ P.L. Van der Merwe, "Freud, Lacan, and the Oedipus Complex" (Stellenbosch University, 2011).

³² Sulagna Sengupta, *Animus, Psyche and Culture: A Jungian Revision* (Routledge, 2023).

³³ Vusala Aghabayli, "Unique Standpoints of the Distinctive British Feminist Writers of the 20th Century (Regarding Gender Concerns)," *Traektorîa Nauki* 10, no. 3 (2024): 4007–15.

³⁴ Anup Adhikari and Bhim Raj Sigdel, "How Gender Is Constructed through the Activities of Everyday Life: A Justification with Number of References," *International Journal of Atharva* 2, no. 2 (2024): 42–59.

Combining Frameworks

A thorough understanding of folktales as dynamic cultural products was attained by the study by fusing structuralist, psychoanalytic, and feminist viewpoints. The stories' gendered power dynamics were exposed by feminism, the psychological depth of the symbols and conflicts was revealed by psychoanalysis, and structuralism shed light on narrative patterns and oppositions. By using this integrated paradigm, the study showed how oral narratives store cultural ideals, psychological experiences, and opportunities for resistance and change, demonstrating how folktales served as both reflectors of social values and tools of critique and development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design Methodology

In order to analyze folktales from many cultural traditions, the study used a qualitative research design that included structuralist, psychoanalytic, and feminist literary theories. In order to reveal the deeper meanings buried within oral traditions, a thorough examination of narrative structures, psychological motifs, and gender portrayals was made possible by this multidisciplinary approach.

Population and Study Sample

A selective collection of folktales chosen from diverse geographic and cultural contexts was the main focus of the study. Stories with significant structural patterns, psychological depth, and gendered depictions were given special consideration in the selection process. To guarantee linguistic and cultural diversity, the folktales were taken from translated collections, oral traditions, and printed anthologies.

Data Collection

Textual sampling of both the original and translated versions of a few chosen folktales was used to gather data. The main sources of information were written documents, oral histories, and already-published anthologies. The selection of folktales was based on how well they aligned with the study's theoretical focus on gender, psychology, and structure.

Procedure for Data Analysis

An interpretive approach with multiple stages was used for data analysis. Propp's morphological model was employed to determine character roles and recurring narrative functions. The structuralism of Lévi-Strauss aided in the discovery of cultural codes and binary oppositions. Feminist theory directed the investigation of gender roles and power dynamics, while Freud and Jung's psychoanalytic ideas were used to investigate unconscious urges and archetypal symbols. Themes and motifs were compared and contrasted across cultures using comparative analysis.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical norms. Storytellers or cultural guardians gave their informed consent when oral narratives were used. The study honoured the intellectual property and cultural authenticity of the communities whose folktales were examined.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Several important conclusions that advance our knowledge of these oral histories are drawn from the examination of folktales using structuralism, psychoanalysis, and feminism. These results highlight the complex ways in which gender dynamics, psychological tensions, and universal cultural patterns are reflected in folktales. Through the integration of these three literary theories, this study reveals how folktales function as potent cultural agents that encode and convey gendered power relations, unconscious anxieties, and societal views, in addition to being entertaining.

Consistent narrative patterns were found in the chosen folktales when structuralist theory was applied, especially through Propp's morphology and Lévi-Strauss's study of binary oppositions. Character types, including the hero, the villain, the donor, and the helper, were successfully identified

using Propp's framework. These roles appeared regularly in the folktales that were examined, demonstrating how Propp's theory is applicable to a wide range of cultural traditions.

Apart from character functions, Lévi-Strauss's emphasis on binary oppositions shed light on how these folktales convey societal tensions like good versus evil or the struggle between civilization and the wilderness. The settlement of disputes in the folktales represents a restoration to social balance, and these oppositions frequently reflect profound cultural worries. For instance, the hero's triumph over the villain in a number of folktales signifies both a story's conclusion and a cultural reinforcement of moral principles and social order.

The results demonstrate that folktales are a potent instrument for socialization and cultural transmission because they are organized according to dependable patterns. By reinforcing common values, conventions, and expectations, these narrative frameworks shed light on how folktales function as a cultural tool for forming collective consciousness.

According to Freud and Jung, psychoanalytic theory showed that many of the folktales examined embody psychological conflicts and latent impulses. The manner in which some folktales portrayed hidden fears and social taboos was a clear example of Freud's ideas of repression and the unconscious.³⁵ Family-related folktales, for example, frequently depict unsolved psychological issues, such as the Oedipus complex, in which the protagonist's battle with parental figures represents the greater human desire for independence and identity.

Finding recurrent symbolic patterns like the shadow, the wise old man, and the hero's journey was made easier by Jung's theory of archetypes.³⁶ These archetypal characters and their symbolic functions reveal psychological traits that are common to all cultures and eras. For instance, the hero's journey symbolizes a person's path to psychological development and self-discovery. By looking at these archetypes, this study demonstrated that folktales can help people navigate difficult psychological terrain and face and integrate suppressed aspects of their minds.

Additionally, the study discovered that by promoting idealized behaviour models and reiterating social standards, folktales frequently function as social control mechanisms. They serve the dual purposes of upholding and subverting prevailing societal ideals by simultaneously creating a forum for the examination of taboo topics and suppressed feelings.

Many folktales support traditional gender roles, with male characters being portrayed as active, heroic individuals and female characters frequently reduced to passive or subordinate positions, according to a feminist examination of gender dynamics in folktales. As evidenced by the traditional Siswati folktale *BoMfanukhona naNtfombikhona* trope, women are commonly portrayed as objects of male desire that require protection or rescue. These depictions reinforce the social order that places men as the main actors and women as the passive objects of masculine action, reflecting the patriarchal ideals that rule many societies.

However, the feminist study also found examples of resistance and subversion in these folktales. Female characters in a number of stories display agency, intelligence, and bravery, defying conventional gender stereotypes. In certain folktales, for instance, women play parts that are typically played by men, including the leader, the wise character, or the hero. The patriarchal assumptions ingrained in many folktales are counter-narrated by these examples of female agency. They show how folktales may be places of resistance, where people imagine different gender roles and opportunities for empowerment.

The feminist research also demonstrated how women's positions in folktales frequently overlap with other social categories, including race, class, and age. These intersections make it more difficult to depict gender and show how gender is not the only issue that shapes women's roles in folktales. To illustrate the variety of women's roles in folk narratives, some folktales depict elderly women as strong and smart characters, which goes against traditional ideas of feminine passivity and frailty.

The combination of feminism, psychoanalysis, and structuralism allowed for a thorough comprehension of folktales as intricate cultural artifacts. A strong basis for examining the recurrent themes and social purposes of folktales was provided by the structuralist emphasis on narrative patterns

³⁵ Sigmund Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I)," *Standard Edition* 12 (1913): 121–44.

³⁶ C.G. Jung, *Aion*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959).

and character roles. Feminist philosophy emphasized the gendered power relations that influence character portrayal, while psychoanalysis provided depth by examining the unconscious desires and psychological struggles that underpin these stories.

The junction of these ideas demonstrated the complex character of folktales, which serve as both centers of resistance, questioning prevailing norms and providing alternative perspectives on gender, power, and identity, and cultural mirrors, reflecting social ideals. This study illustrated how folktales can function as both socialization aids and catalysts for cultural change by utilizing a variety of theoretical approaches.

The study's conclusions emphasize the value of analysing folktales through the lenses of structuralism, psychoanalysis, and feminism. These theoretical frameworks offer a deep, multifaceted perspective for understanding the intricate ways in which folktales influence psychological processes, societal institutions, and cultural beliefs. While the psychoanalytic and feminist analyses reveal deeper, frequently hidden meanings relating to unconscious psychological conflicts and gendered power dynamics, the structural patterns found in the folktales serve to reinforce shared values and cultural norms. Collectively, these results show that folktales are profound cultural texts that embody and communicate societal values, concerns, and aspirations rather than being only entertaining stories.

These observations add to the larger conversation about the value of folklore in historical and modern settings by providing a sophisticated knowledge of the ways in which oral traditions continue to influence social dynamics and cultural identities. The results emphasize the significance of re-examining folktales in light of contemporary feminist and psychoanalytic viewpoints and promote more interdisciplinary research into the nexus of gender studies, psychology, and narrative theory.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research is to use feminist, structural, and psychoanalytic literary theories to investigate the deeper levels of meaning that are present in folktales. These theories offer different but complementary perspectives on the role and importance of folktales, demonstrating how they serve as both cultural resistance tools and social norm mirrors. A comprehensive examination of the narrative, psychological, and gendered components of these oral histories is made possible by the fusion of structuralism, psychoanalysis, and feminism. With thorough citations to pertinent academics and works, this debate delves deeper into the theoretical methods and analyses how they advance our understanding of folktales.

Claude Lévi-Strauss and Vladimir Propp developed structuralism, which provides a framework for comprehending the intricate structural patterns that underpin folktales. According to Propp's study of Russian folktales, many stories have a set of established narrative functions and character roles. These characters, the hero, the antagonist, the giver, and the servant, form the foundation of folktales, establishing a common storytelling style that cuts across cultural divides. According to Propp's morphological approach, these narrative functions are universal, making it possible to identify structural patterns that recur in different narratives and cultures.

By emphasizing binary oppositions seen in folktales, such as good versus evil, life versus death, and nature versus culture, Lévi-Strauss's structuralism broadens the study even more.³⁷ Cultural myths and folktales are based on these oppositions, which show how cultures encode and transmit their norms, values, and beliefs. We can learn how folktales either support or contradict social institutions by examining them through the prism of binary oppositions. For instance, the hero's journey in many folktales entails negotiating and conquering obstacles, such as the struggle between the untamed, wild elements of nature and human civilization. The cultural tension between chaos and order, which is fundamental to the worldview of many communities, is reflected in this conflict.

This study uses structural analysis to find recurrent themes and roles in folktales and explore how these structures represent common human experiences. Folktales from many cultures share a structural motif: the hero's journey, the villain's deceit, and the hero's eventual victory over hardship.³⁸

³⁷ Lévi-Strauss, Weightman, and Weightman, *Tristes Tropiques*.

³⁸ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*.

This implies that folktales have basic narrative patterns that represent universal themes of conflict, resolution, and social order despite cultural variances.

Because psychoanalysis explores the underlying impulses and psychological conflicts that are contained in folktales, it offers a more profound and subjective method of comprehending them. Carl Jung's idea of archetypes and Sigmund Freud's notion of the unconscious are useful instruments for examining the psychological and symbolic aspects of folktales. Folktales, according to Freud, frequently reveal suppressed tensions, fears, and wants that are made visible through symbolic representations in the story.³⁹ For instance, the hero's quest may be interpreted as a metaphor for a person's battle with suppressed urges or unresolved psychological problems. In a similar vein, the antagonist in a folktale frequently symbolizes the shadow side of the human psyche by taking on the form of suppressed urges or social taboos.

By proposing the idea of archetypes universal symbols and themes that manifest throughout human history and across cultures, Carl Jung expands on this psychoanalytic viewpoint. Archetypes that represent basic human experiences and psychological states include the trickster, the wise old man, and the hero.⁴⁰ These archetypes, which stand for universal psychological tendencies that cut beyond cultural barriers, are used as vehicles for examining the human condition in folktales. For example, the archetype of the "hero's journey," as defined by Moran, is a common motif in many folktales and represents the psychological growth of the self, or the process of individuation.⁴¹

Psychoanalysis also shows how repressed cultural conflicts and societal fears are encoded in folktales. For instance, according to Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, the protagonist's relationship with their parents in folktales may represent their unconscious quest for identification and autonomy.⁴² These psychological aspects provide researchers a better grasp of the emotional and symbolic content of folktales, enabling them to investigate the ways in which the stories express societal anxieties, unconscious desires, and internal conflicts.

A critical lens for analysing how gender roles are portrayed in folktales is provided by feminist literary theory, which emphasizes how these stories both uphold and challenge conventional gender norms. Feminist critics, such as Gilbert & Gubar and Judith Butler, contend that women are frequently portrayed in literature as docile or obedient, reflecting and upholding patriarchal power structures.⁴³ Women are often portrayed in folktales as the passive objects of masculine action, either as characters in need of saving or as damsels in distress. By depicting women as reliant on males for their survival and social standing, these roles uphold traditional gender stereotypes.

Feminist study, however, also reveals instances of agency and resistance in these folktales. The potential for folktales to serve as sites of cultural resistance is demonstrated by female characters who defy patriarchal expectations, demonstrate independence, or question traditional gender norms.⁴⁴ Many folktales, for instance, have female characters who, in spite of social norms, show courage, cleverness, or guile when faced with hardship. By exposing the potential for women to surpass social constraints, these subversions of gender roles provide a critique of the patriarchal structures that control the social order.

Feminist philosophy also emphasizes how gender intersects with other social categories, including age, ethnicity, and class. These overlapping factors frequently influence the roles that women play in folktales, which makes the representation of gender in these stories even more challenging. Feminist analysis highlights the power dynamics ingrained in storytelling traditions and the ways that folktales either support or challenge society gender structures by looking at how women's roles are defined in relation to male characters.

A more complex understanding of how folktales reflect and influence cultural ideas and values is made possible by the merger of structuralism, psychoanalysis, and feminism, which offers a multidimensional

³⁹ Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I)."

⁴⁰ Jung, *Aion*.

⁴¹ Jacqueline Moran, "The Hero's Journey in Player Experiences" (Swinburne, 2021).

⁴² Freud, "On Beginning the Treatment (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis I)."

⁴³ Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Shakespeare's Sisters: Feminist Essays on Women Poets*, vol. 263 (Indiana University Press, 1979); Judith Butler and Gender Trouble, "Feminism and the Subversion of Identity," *Gender Trouble* 3, no. 1 (1990): 3–17.

⁴⁴ Butler and Trouble, "Feminism and the Subversion of Identity."

approach to folktale research. Every framework adds a distinct layer of meaning: feminist theory studies the gendered power dynamics that determine the roles of men and women in folktales, psychoanalysis reveals the unconscious desires and psychological conflicts ingrained in these narratives, and structuralism reveals the universal patterns and narrative functions that structure them.

When combined, these frameworks enable the research to provide a thorough understanding of folktales as cultural texts that store society fears, gendered power dynamics, unconscious psychological conflicts, and social goals and values. By combining these theories, the study clarifies how folktales function as both venues of social commentary, resistance, and transformation as well as mirrors of cultural norms. A greater comprehension of folktales as dynamic, multi-layered narratives that endure across cultures and generations is provided by this all-encompassing approach.

This conversation emphasizes the value of integrating feminism, psychoanalysis, and structuralism in folktale research, offering a comprehensive, multifaceted framework for comprehending the cultural, psychological, and gendered aspects of these stories.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several suggestions for further research, teaching methods, and cultural preservation initiatives pertaining to the interpretation and analysis of folktales can be made in light of the study's findings. These suggestions stress the value of inclusive representation, interdisciplinary approaches, and the enduring significance of folktales in modern culture.

This study emphasizes the advantages of combining feminism, psychoanalysis, and structuralism with folktale analysis. Multidisciplinary techniques that integrate literary theory with other disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, and cognitive psychology, should be a part of future research. This would offer a more comprehensive view of folktales as cultural expressions and literary creations. Additional research into other literary theories, such as ecocriticism and postcolonialism, may provide fresh insights into the ways that folktales represent environmental and historical contexts.

This study's feminist approach showed that patriarchal norms in folktales are both reinforced and subverted. Teachers and academics can reexamine folktales from a gender-sensitive standpoint, identifying narratives that empower women and challenge conventional preconceptions, in order to advance gender equity in storytelling traditions. In order to ensure that these stories reflect shifting cultural views regarding gender roles, modern folktale retellings and adaptations should also aim to feature more varied and strong female characters.

Due to modernity and shifting cultural dynamics, many folktales are in danger of disappearing. Folktales, especially those from underrepresented and indigenous people, should be collected, documented, and digitally preserved as a top priority for governments, cultural organizations, and researchers. This will make these oral traditions more widely available while also preserving them for upcoming generations.

Folktales should be actively incorporated into curricula at all educational levels because of their cultural and psychological relevance. Incorporating folktales into literary theory instruction helps improve students' analytical and critical thinking abilities while cultivating a respect for cultural heritage. In order to foster a deeper comprehension of folktales' meanings and societal influence, educators should also urge students to examine them from a variety of angles, such as structural, psychoanalytic, and feminist ones.

To preserve the oral heritage, community storytelling gatherings, workshops, and intergenerational discussions ought to be promoted. Folktales should be passed down from elders and storytellers to younger generations in order to promote cultural continuity and identity. Folktales can also be made more approachable and engaging to audiences in the modern era by utilizing contemporary storytelling techniques, including podcasts, internet platforms, and animation.

Although gender dynamics were the focus of this study, other intersectional elements like race, class, and disability in folktales should be investigated in future studies. A deeper understanding of how various identities and experiences are portrayed and negotiated within storytelling traditions can be gained by examining the ways in which these social categories overlap in folklore.

Folktale analysis has benefited from psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations, but given recent advances in psychology and feminism, these viewpoints need to be reviewed. For instance, contemporary psychoanalytic ideas about identity development and trauma might provide fresh perspectives on how folktales represent human experiences. Analysing how folktales address gender identity and power dynamics could also be done using emerging feminist discourses, such as queer theory and intersectional feminism.

Indigenous epistemologies should be incorporated into folktale studies since folktales are archives of indigenous knowledge. Instead of depending only on Western theoretical frameworks, this involves interacting with oral historians, indigenous researchers, and traditional storytellers to obtain culturally grounded interpretations of folktales.

To find both universal themes and culturally unique components, future research should compare folktales from various cultural contexts. Our comprehension of how folktales operate in various civilizations and how they adjust to various historical and social contexts will be enhanced as a result.

By finding patterns, recurrent themes, and narrative structures in sizable folktale collections, digital humanities techniques like artificial intelligence and textual analysis software might improve the study of folktales. By making it simpler to compare and evaluate folktales from many cultures and eras, such technical developments have the potential to completely transform folklore research.

These suggestions highlight the significance of folktale preservation, study, and critical engagement as an essential component of literary scholarship and cultural heritage. Folktales can remain important literary and cultural assets for future generations if academics and educators embrace multidisciplinary approaches, encourage gender parity in storytelling, and make use of contemporary technologies.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to investigate the ways in which folktales could be analyzed and their deeper meanings revealed using structuralist, psychoanalytic, and feminist literary theories. This investigation showed that folktales are much more than just entertaining stories; they are intricate cultural documents that capture the ideals, anxieties, and social dynamics of the society in which they are produced. The study discovered underlying narrative structures, psychological aspects, and gendered representations that influence the storytelling tradition across countries by utilizing various theoretical stances.

The results demonstrated that folktales, which represent universal human experiences and cultural aspirations, adhere to recognizable narrative patterns and archetypal themes. Additionally, they exposed the ways in which these stories construct, reinforce, or subvert gender roles, demonstrating how folktales can both support and contradict patriarchal and social norms. These revelations emphasized the significance of folktales as potent mediums for social reflection, moral instruction, and cultural identity.

The study concludes that an interdisciplinary approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of folktales and their ongoing significance in modern discourse. Folktales are still used as social mirrors and as forums for resistance, change, and rebirth. The study also concluded by restating the significance of researching and conserving folktales as living cultural relics that link generations past and present. Scholars and practitioners can further understand how these timeless tales influence human experience and collective consciousness by examining oral traditions through a variety of theoretical frameworks.

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