



Ain Shams University
Faculty of Al-Alsun
Department of English

**Postmodern Parody in Roald Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes*
(1982)**

MA Thesis
Submitted by
Amal Hamdy Atea El-Said

Under the supervision of
Prof. Laila Galal Rizk
Professor of English Literature
Faculty of Al-Alsun, Ain Shams University

Dr. Amal A. El-Hadary
Lecturer of English Literature
Faculty of Al-Alsun, Ain Shams University

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Name: Amal Hamdy Atea El-Said

Degree: Master of Arts Degree

Department: English Language

Faculty: Al-Asun (Languages)

University: Ain Shams University

Year of Graduation: 2012

Year of Approval: 2018

Approval Sheet

Name: Amal Hamdy Atea El- Said

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Examination Board:

Prof. Osama Abdel Fattah Madany, Professor of English Literature and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Menoufia University

Prof. Laila Galal Rizk, Professor of English Literature, Faculty of Al-Alsun, Ain Shams University

Prof. Fadwa Kamal AbdelRahman, Professor of English Literature and the Head of the English Department at the Faculty of Al-Alsun, Ain Shams University

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Grade: Excellent

Summary

In an attempt to underscore how the British poet Roald Dahl (1916-90) has challenged the gender paradigms and the happily-ever-after motif in traditional fairy tales in his volume of poetry *Revolting Rhymes* (1982), this thesis applies the six parodic techniques introduced by the American theorist Dan Harries (1963-) in his book *Film Parody* (2000) to selected poems from Dahl's *Revolting Rhymes* (1982). Dahl presents a new kind of fairy tales where maidens save themselves and where noble princes turn out to be cruel villains. Dahl parodies several traditional fairy tales in *Revolting Rhymes* (1982) in order to deconstruct certain prevalent notions in traditional fairy tales: female passivity, male superiority, the belief in magic, the happily-ever-after motif, etc. This thesis explores three of Dahl's poems through the lens of postmodern parody: "Cinderella," "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," and "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf." The thesis also compares and contrasts the aforementioned poems with other parodic adaptations in poetry. Each comparison explores new themes and brings about fruitful findings in this thesis.

The thesis falls into a preface, four chapters, and a conclusion. The **preface** outlines the division of the thesis and its theoretical background briefly. **Chapter One** which is entitled "The Concept of Postmodern Parody and the Parodic Adaptations of Fairy Tales" is divided into two sections: "Postmodern Parody" and "Retelling Fairytales." The first section of the chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis through discussing the concept of parody. The chapter traces the roots of postmodern parody as it introduces the theories that have helped pave the way to the development of postmodern parody. For instance, it explains Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) dialogism and Gérard Genette's (1930-) concept of transtextuality. Moreover, the chapter offers a detailed review of Linda Hutcheon's (1947-) *A Theory of Parody* (1985)—the most comprehensive book to trace the etymology, definition, and development of the theory of postmodern parody. The chapter also briefly analyzes

Margaret A. Rose's (1947-) *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-Modern* (1993) and Simon Dentith's (1952-) *Parody: The New Critical Idiom* (2000). Finally, the chapter offers a detailed analysis of the theoretical approach presented in Dan Harries's *Film Parody* (2000). Harries introduces six parodic techniques—reiteration, inversion, misdirection, literalization, extraneous inclusion, and exaggeration—that are primarily meant to be applied to movies but could also be used in literature. This thesis is considered to be the first to apply Harries's parodic techniques to a poetic text.

The second section of the chapter reviews how fairy tales have changed in their adaptations and parodies. Fairy tales have been the inspiration for hundreds of retellings and parodies due to their familiarity and popularity. The chapter explains how the prevalent gender paradigm in traditional fairy tales favors the heroes and objectifies the heroines. Therefore, women writers of the late twentieth century have tried to deconstruct these patriarchal texts through revision and subversion. This act of revisionist mythmaking has resulted in several adaptations and parodies where women writers give voice to the voiceless heroines. The chapter briefly reviews some examples of such texts: Angela Carter's (1940-92) *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), Tanith Lee's (1947-2015) *Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimm* (1983), Emma Donoghue's (1969-) *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (1997), Sara Henderson Hay's (1906-87) *Story Hour* (1963), Anne Sexton's (1928-74) *Transformations* (1971), Olga Broumas's (1949-) *Beginning with O* (1977), and Roald Dahl's (1916-90) *Revolting Rhymes* (1982). This thesis is concerned with Dahl's volume of poetry *Revolting Rhymes* (1982) in which he retells six fairy tales in the form of poems. The thesis is essential to understanding how Dahl challenges the patriarchal values found in traditional fairy tales and the motif of happily-ever-after.

Chapter Two is entitled “Deconstructing the Prevalent Happily-Ever-After Motif in Roald Dahl's ‘Cinderella’ (1982).” The chapter offers

an illuminating comparison between Charles Perrault's "Cendrillon" (1697) and the Grimm's "Aschenputtel" (1812, 1815). With its emphasis on refined manners and the obsession with beauty, Perrault's fairy tale is meant for children as a didactic tale and for the French aristocracy as a guide to behavioral codes. The Grimms' version, on the other hand, is meant for an adult audience due to the violence at the end of the tale. The chapter analyzes Dahl's poem "Cinderella" (1982) thematically and technically. Through applying Harries's six techniques of postmodern parody to Dahl's "Cinderella" (1982), the thesis explores the theme of female passivity, male superiority, the obsession with beauty, the emphasis on refined manners, the superficiality of the aristocratic class, and the unrealistic happily-ever-after. Dahl's creativity is brought to light as the chapter highlights his use of sensuous imagery and sound patterns. The chapter also offers a brief analysis of other parodic poems of "Cinderella." After each analysis, the analyzed poem is compared with Dahl's poem thematically and technically.

Chapter Three is entitled "Breaking Free from the Patriarchal Chains in Roald Dahl's 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' (1982)." Beginning with a comparison between the Grimms' "Sneewittchen" (Snow White) (1812, 1815) and the Disney movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), the chapter explores several prominent themes like female rivalry, the emphasis on beauty and young age in fairy tales, and severe punishment. The chapter analyzes Dahl's poem "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1982) through employing Harries's parodic techniques on it. The chapter also traces how Dahl imbues his heroine with strength of character, wit, and a sense of independence. Through applying Harries's techniques to Dahl's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1982), the chapter sheds light on how Dahl deconstructs the angel/monster dichotomy, the male/female power dichotomy, and the happily-ever-after motif. By comparing Dahl's poem to other parodic adaptations, the chapter sheds light on themes that were left unexplored in

Dahl's poem like the theme of the jealousy between the stepmother and the stepdaughter or the delicate relationship between mother and daughter. The comparisons are quite enlightening as the researcher examines the different themes and techniques in each poem and offers a critical appreciation of them.

Chapter Four is entitled "Subverting the Hero/Villain Dichotomy in Roald Dahl's 'Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf' (1982)." The chapter begins with differentiating between the different origins of the tale: the oral folktale "The Story of Grandmother," Perrault's "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge" (Little Red Riding Hood) (1697), and the Grimms' "Rotkäppchen" (Little Red Cap) (1812, 1815). It is noteworthy that Dahl presents the character of Little Red Riding Hood in two poems in *Revolt Rhymes* (1982): "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf" and "The Three Little Pigs." Through applying Harries's six parodic techniques, the chapter sheds light on the theme of female empowerment and the hero/villain dichotomy. The chapter compares and contrasts Dahl's parody of "Little Red Riding Hood" with other parodic poems, offering new perspectives on certain themes.

The **conclusion** crystallizes how the thesis' objectives have been achieved. Furthermore, it offers some final comments on how Dahl has developed the character of each of his female protagonists, granting them the chance to appear as the heroine, the savior, or the villainess of the fairy tale. Dahl's aim throughout his poems is to deconstruct the superficial and patriarchal ideas that are prevalent in traditional fairy tales and to present children with a revised version of their beloved tales.

Abstract

Amal Hamdy Atea El-Said. Postmodern Parody in Roald Dahl's *Revoltin' Rhymes* (1982). MA Thesis, Ain Shams University, Faculty of Al-Elsun (Languages), Department of English Language, 2018.

Postmodern parody is mainly used to subvert that which it parodies. Fairy tales have been the target of several parodies due to their simplicity and familiarity. Fairy tales have been used throughout history to convey morals and expected behavioral codes to children. Postmodern parodies of fairy tales aim to criticize these morals and codes of behavior. While traditional fairy tales usually depict male characters in a superior position to female characters, revisionist fairy tales often deconstruct this notion by empowering and reinventing female characters. Through the use of parodic techniques, postmodern fairy tales aim to subvert the patriarchal values that are present in most traditional fairy tales.

This thesis examines the transformations of three prominent fairy tales—"Cinderella," "Snow White," and "Little Red Riding Hood"—in the poetry of the British poet Roald Dahl (1916-90) who transforms the traditional fairy tales in order to challenge the conventional notions of gender paradigms. The thesis aims at examining the different transformations of the aforementioned fairy tales in Dahl's volume of poetry *Revoltin' Rhymes* (1982). It explores how each poem challenges certain notions found in traditional fairy tales: female passivity, female inferiority, male superiority, and the happily-ever-after motif.

This thesis will attempt to explore the three fairy-tale retellings through the lens of postmodern parody, with an emphasis on the six parodic techniques introduced by the American theorist Dan Harries in his book *Film Parody* (2000). Through employing Harries's parodic techniques and adapting them to poetic use, the thesis will examine how these techniques are used to twist each fairy tale into a new one that

blatantly challenges the gender paradigms and the happily-ever-after motif. The thesis will be the first to apply the above methodology on a poetic text.

Key words: Roald Dahl, Postmodern Parody, Fairy Tales, Cinderella, Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood.

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Preface

Parody is a highly ambiguous literary term since it has several different definitions. Postmodern parody both reaffirms and challenges the parodied text. It aims at revising the norms of the past through playful mockery. Fairy tales have been parodied several times within postmodern poetics. Women writers regard postmodern parody as a tool to help them undermine the patriarchal discourse found in traditional fairy tales that present heroines getting their happily-ever-afters by being passive and submissive. Postmodern parodies, however, allow their heroines to take their destiny into their own hands and achieve their own version of a happy ending.

This thesis examines the transformations of three prominent fairy tales—"Cinderella," "Snow White," and "Little Red Riding Hood"—in Roald Dahl's (1916-90) volume of poetry *Revolting Rhymes* (1982). Though the volume includes three other poems, the thesis shall primarily focus on the above poems because they are the only three poems in the volume that place the heroine at the center of the poem. The thesis shall explore how each parodic poem transforms the traditional fairy tale in order to challenge its patriarchal notions and its happily-ever-after motif. This shall be done by analyzing the various parodic techniques in these poems.

This is the first thesis to apply the concept of postmodern parody on Roald Dahl's poems. Furthermore, there has been no published book or thesis that is concerned with analyzing Dahl's volume *Revolting Rhymes* (1982) thematically or technically. Thus, the significance of this thesis can be found in its contribution to the field through the close analysis of the themes and parodic techniques in Dahl's poems. Though this thesis is not a comparative one, it still offers several brief comparisons between Dahl's poems and other postmodern parodies of the same fairy tales. Leading women poets, like Anne Sexton and Carol Ann Duffy, have challenged the patriarchal concepts found in traditional fairy tales. It would be illuminating to compare and contrast Dahl's parodic twists with their own.

The theoretical framework of the thesis is concerned with postmodern parody. The thesis briefly traces the development of the concept of postmodern parody through incorporating the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Gérard Genette, Linda Hutcheon, Margaret A. Rose, Simon Dentith, and Dan Harries. The basis of the thesis's theoretical approach will be drawn from Dan Harries's book *Film Parody* (2000). Though Hutcheon's book *A Theory of Parody* (1985) provides an insightful theoretical approach to parody, her theory fails to mention any specific parodic techniques that could be applied to a literary text. Therefore, this thesis will make use of the parodic techniques introduced by Dan Harries in his book *Film Parody* (2000). Harries introduces six techniques of postmodern parody that could be employed to explore cinematic and literary parodies: reiteration, inversion, misdirection, literalization, extraneous inclusion, and exaggeration. These techniques are used to explore how Dahl has transformed each poem in order to deconstruct the values and motifs that are found in traditional fairy tales.

The thesis is divided into a preface, four chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter One introduces the theoretical framework of the concept of postmodern parody and a literature review of how fairy tales have changed in their postmodern adaptations; Chapter Two examines how Harries's parodic techniques highlight how Dahl's "Cinderella" (1982) deconstructs the happily-ever-after motif; Chapter Three explores how Dahl's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1982) subverts certain patriarchal values through applying Harries's parodic techniques to it; and Chapter Four analyzes Dahl's "Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf" (1982) and its deconstruction of the hero/villain dichotomy through utilizing Harries's parodic techniques. A conclusion follows.

Chapter One

The Concept of Postmodern Parody and the Parodic Adaptations of Fairy Tales