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*Research Article*

## The Golden Hair in Fairy Tales: Metonymy and Shifting Connotations in Cultures and Locations

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### Abstract

This paper makes a close reading of four fairy tales, one each from France, Russia, Armenia and Nepal that feature maidens with golden hair as central characters and examines how the hair, a recurring metonymy in these tales, acquires different meanings in different cultures and locations. These moving tales retain the golden hair as their meme or cultural replicator but the societies that adapt the tales ascribe different meanings to the meme. Taking the golden hair as a metonymy for the personality of the maidens featured in these tales, this study maps the tales across distances by using the Derridian idea of teleiopoiesis. In the process, it demonstrates the shift in the connotations of the metonymy as an outcome of a circular nature of expression that allows an outside reader, both an individual and a culture, to imaginatively reconstruct its structure and meaning by conditioning the shifts to its own value system. The study reveals that the French and the Russian tales depict the golden hair as a symbol of beauty and grace while those in Armenia and Nepal, where golden hair is not a norm, treat it as a symbol of negativities as well. This difference, the study concludes, is because of the difference in the ways these societies ascribe meaning to the hair colour.

**Keywords:** Fairy tales, teleiopoiesis, metonymy, metaphor, shifting connotations

### Introduction

This paper examines the simultaneous concurrence of a single image, namely that of the golden hair that appears in many fairy tales that are a part of different cultures in Europe and Asia. Such tales are apparently similar as all of them feature golden-haired maidens in them, but the different connotations the golden hair acquires in different societies makes these tales thematically different. Recurrence of similar elements like the golden hair in one hand and the difference in their meanings in different societies on the other triggers a few pertinent questions for investigation. It becomes relevant to inquire

why these culturally and geographically distant tales retain the same metonymy and how the meanings change as the tales change their locations.

The comparative study of structurally similar and thematically different fairy tales is not a new interest in the academic community. Ren Imai compares metaphors in English and Japanese fairy tales and claims that the differences are due to the difference in the conceptualization of metaphors in the two cultures. He claims that the difference in the conceptualization is “influenced by the culturally different aspects between the two languages” (80). He also ascribes the “individualistic” nature of the English society and the “collectivistic” nature of the Japanese society as the reasons behind the difference (80). In their discussion of the reception of similar fairy tales in diverse cultures, Li Huai Chang and Ding Bang Luh argue that a “diversity of symbolic codes is woven into fairy tales since writers, creative artists, and filmmakers refresh them from new angles, resulting in the significance of reception” (108). Their study is, however, limited to the response of the readers from distant communities on tales. They do acknowledge that the fairy tales have “variability, a route to flexibility and robustness, dealing with shifting circumstances” but do not discuss the circumstances clearly. Instead, they ascribe the shift to “a reader’s process of discovery” (108). Jaime Bergum has studied what he calls “culturally bound” stories and acknowledges that when adapted by other cultures, “fairy tales cannot be appreciated in full for their symbolic ideation” (8). Following a critical scrutiny of German tales inside and outside Germany, he demonstrates that the tales inside Germany were “perfect vessel by which to popularize opinion and points of view and communicate cultural ideals to children and adults alike” while those adopted outside with “appropriated lessons in culture bare no similar ideological importance” (8).

These studies reveal that scholars have mapped fairy tales in similar cultures and proximal geography and have compared their similarities and differences. However, research is yet to explain why a structurally similar story with a metonymy that moves across cultures and location acquires different treatment and meaning. The present study is an attempt to mitigate this research gap. It will provide a plausible explanation to the occurrence of similar metonymies and metaphors and comparable plots in geographically and culturally distant tales. The subsequent paragraphs will discuss teleiopoiesis as an approach to compare remote tales, examine the tales under consideration and draw the inferences. The stories taken for the purpose are the French tale “The Story of Pretty Goldilocks” collected and reworked by Madame d’Aulnoy, the Russian Tale “Golden Hair” collected and edited by Michael Terletski, the Armenian tale “The Golden Maiden” collected by A. G. Seklemian, and the Nepali tale “Golden Haired Maiden” collected by Mohan Raj Sharma and Khagendra Luitel.

When the fairy tales under discussion with golden hair as a major metonymy are mapped from the west to the east, certain changes in their connotations can be observed. These changes reflect varying gender considerations of those societies, particularly their treatment of a woman’s possessions, including her body parts. Differences in connotations across cultures and locations reflected by the tales call for an analysis of the value systems of those societies in regards with gender relationships.

To discuss these issues, this study makes use of the Derridian idea of ‘teleiopoiesis’, a concept that allows the mapping of similar content in distant and dissimilar cultures. It also uses Richard Dawkin’s definition of a meme, a replicator in fairy tales, discussed in his book *The Selfish Gene* (2006). The paper aligns itself with Ross and Atkinson’s claim that linguistic relatedness and geographic proximity independently predict overlap in folktale inventories, which provides evidence for both vertical transmission down cultural lineages and horizontal transmission between groups.

### Hair Colour, Cultural Connotations and Teleiopoiesis

Hair colour has always been a very important marker of an individual's choice. At the same time, it is also an anthropological trademark of a community. Though colouring of hair, in many cases, is a personal and fashionable choice of an individual, the 'natural' hair colour is genetic to a race and settles as a norm in the collective unconscious of a society. Which natural hair colour is generally liked and chosen in a society depends on how the society traditionally normalises hair colour. A study conducted by Y. Kato et al draws the following conclusion:

From the result of the questionnaire, it was found that Japanese students liked dark hair colours (dark brown and black), while British students liked bright one (light brown and blonde). In addition, British student's favourite hair colours were only four samples. Moreover, the British students tended to like blonde that Japanese students gave as an unfavourable colour. British student tended to dislike warm-colour (red brown, pink, and red). (2)

Studies show that in the West, blonde or golden hair is a sign of positivity and is associated with angels, fairies, goddesses, and the positive forces, while the dark hair is associated with witches and capricious women. Citing examples from Norse mythology, researcher Henrick Broberg claims that "Nordic mythology revered blonde hair as a symbol of beauty and strength. It was associated with the goddess Sif, known for her long, golden locks" (1). Similarly, the Greeks regarded the golden hair as a symbol of divinity and power. Broberg further says, "It was believed that the gods and goddesses had golden locks. For instance, Apollo, the god of the sun, music, and prophecy, was often depicted with blonde hair, symbolizing his radiant and youthful energy" (1). Marina Warner draws a similar conclusion: "Blondeness has associations not only with light and goodness and purity, as seen in "The Magician's Cape," but also of wealth because of its similarity to gold" (1). Farrington et al. say, in ancient Greece, "Blonde hair was the most prized and highly valued" (11). Similar assumptions prevailed through the Middle Ages. Farrington further says, "During the Middle Ages, beauty standards for women were clearly defined. Hair was to be blonde and fine like thin golden strands. If one's hair was not naturally blonde, it was to be dyed or bleached" (11).

But when it comes to representing the evil, for example witchcraft, the Western mythology and folk literature have most of the time used black hair though there are a few exceptions here and there. The reason is partly religious and partly racial. Farrington says: "The Christian associations with the colour white were purity and virtue, and associations with the colour black were evil and sin" (14). Toby Chen and others look into Asian standard of beauty where dark hair is a standard. They cite many examples from literature, including the *Mahabharata*, citing black hair as the norm. For example, they say: "Poets from South India wrote about beautiful women, for example, the Shringarashata of Bhartihari describes a woman whose 'skin eclipses gold lustre', who has 'heavy hips' and 'thick tresses that shame black bees'" (4). From such literature, they say, "it can be inferred that thick and black hair with golden skin was the idealized standard of beauty because South Indians generally have darker features than in other regions in the subcontinent" (4). Sumana R. Ghosh opines that black hair is the most natural preference for an Indian woman, and her attempt to dye it into any other colour is her "effort to become that culture's other" (130). She explains:

Not only this, the colour of the hair provides us with a wonderful example of how one culture is always making an effort to become that culture's other. Rapunzel, with her l-o-n-g raven-black tresses, is the archetypal figure of western culture's representation of its other. The Indian woman, with her black

hair, will *henna* (a vegetable dye) her hair to make herself a blonde or redhead.  
(130)

The discussion above establishes the fact that locations and communities have natural preferences for women's hair colour, and change or variation in the expected hair colour is considered an anomaly or an attempt to recapitulate the 'other'. The study of such changes and variations, therefore, become pertinent and interesting to decode the cultural meaning associated with them.

Fairy tales have also been comprehensively studied across decades to examine different thematic domains including beauty standards and the associated gender considerations. Uzma Shaheen, Naureen Mumtaz and Kiran Khalid in their study entitled *Exploring Gender Ideology in Fairy Tales: A Critical Discourse Analysis* (2019) have limited their analysis to utterances and have inferred that "genders are presented in stereotypical ways; males are having authority and violent nature and females are obedient, polite and resisting" (28). Madoda Cekiso studies gender stereotypes in African fairy tales, but the study is directed at guiding school children to become gender sensitive while reading the materials prescribed for them. He concludes that the females in the tales he analysed were portrayed as "submissive and dependent on men to rescue them" and the boys as "having power, bravery, strength and wit" (201). Suchismita Duttgupta in "Reading Hair as a Symbol to Understand Changing Gender Roles in "Rapunzel" and *Rapunzel's Revenge* (2018) limits her study to the comparison of German folktale "Rapunzel", collected by Grimm Brothers and the character Rapunzel in the novel *Rapunzel's Revenge* by Dean Hale and Sannon Hale (2014). Duttgupta claims that the objective of her study is "to understand the change in gender roles and identity" (53). Her study depicts how fairy tales in newer adaptations break stereotypes affirmed by the original fairy tales. Silima Nanda has also studies the portrayal of women in fairy tales from across the world. She particularly examines their changing versions and traces how the latter versions depict changing gender considerations. She claims that "a drastic change in the structure of fairy tales shows how culture can change for the better" (249).

Many researches that centre on the study of fairy tales have dealt with stereotypes, gender roles, beauty standards and changing perspectives but few have mapped the recurrence of similar metonymies and their changing connotations. Almost no researcher has so far attempted to explain the change in such connotations in relation with the difference in the value system of the society that adopts a fairy tales. This study addresses this gap.

The partial similarity among fairy tales popular in different and distant parts of the world are explained by different theories, though scholars do not have a consensus. There are a few who believe in the origin of the tales at one location and their spread through the migration of people. Jack Zipes says, "The fairy tale is a polygenetic cultural artefact that has spread throughout the world through human contact and technologies invented to bring about effective communication" (xiv). He pinpoints the seventeenth century as the time when fairy tales "erupted" and "began to evolve and spread indiscriminately" (3). But he believes that not all types of fairy tales travel. They only travel if they form a 'meme', a concept developed by Richard Dawkins. According to Dawkins, as Zipes quotes, a 'meme' is a cultural replicator and it sticks to readers'/listeners' mind more firmly than other, weaker fairy tales. Zipes maintains that "a meme must be capable of being copied in a faithful way; it must be shaped or formed in such a way that many copies can be made; and it must be able to survive a long time so that many copies will be disseminated" (5). Dawkins himself calls the meme a "replicator" (192). He adds, it is "a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation" (192). He elaborates:

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, and ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. (192)

The tales that feature golden-haired maidens and princesses can possibly be taken as one of such memes that have been copied and have survived across cultures. This idea explains the simultaneous concurrence of similar fairy tales in different cultural spaces.

Beyond Zipes and Dawkins, post-structural theorist Jacques Derrida puts forward a different idea to explain similar expressions in different and remote locations. He names the idea 'teleiopoiesis'. Derrida defines Teleiopoiesis in the following ways:

By way of economy—and in order, in a single word, to formalize this absolute economy of the feint, this generation by joint and simultaneous grafting of the performative and the reportive, without a body of its own—let us call the event of such sentences, the 'logic' of this chance occurrence, its 'genetics', its 'rhetoric', its 'historical record', its 'politics', etc., teleiopoiesis. Teleiopoiesis qualifies, in a great number of contexts and semantic orders, that which renders absolute, perfect, completed, accomplished, finished, that which brings to an end. (35)

This particular definition of teleiopoiesis by Derrida imagines a circular nature of a statement—the origin of a statement also entails its end, or the end of an utterance coils back to its origin, taking it back to its beginning like in the case of an ouroboros being. Derrida also hints at another definition of teleiopoiesis, in which the prefix 'teleio' is semantically close to the English word 'tele' meaning far, and poesis, meaning 'imaginative thinking'. This is to say that an utterance, which could be a creation as well, can be imaginatively engaged in a re-reading process, and the abstract or remote can be felt like a real experience by a remote or distant reader through that particular power of imagination.

But permit us to play too with the other tele, the one that speaks to distance and the far removed, for what is indeed in question here is a poetics of distance at one remove, and of an absolute acceleration in the spanning of space by the very structure of the sentence (it begins at the end, it is initiated with the signature of the other). (35).

Theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has re-defined the Derridian idea of teleiopoiesis in simpler term. In "A Note on the New International", she writes, "Teleiopoiesis is indeed one of the shocks to the idea of belonging in a collectivity, for it makes a constant and risk-taking effort to affect the distant in a poesis or imaginative remaking, without guarantees. This is a community that keeps silent together" (12). In her book *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012), Spivak further explains teleiopoiesis as an act of "touching the distant other with imaginative effort" (428). Jana McAuliffe interprets the term as "a mode of reading a text that calls for simultaneous attention to the singular and the general" (14). She further writes, "If poesis is an 'imaginative making' then teleiopoiesis is an imaginative making across distances, but not one in which the reader tries to grasp the meaning of the distant text" (17). For Corinne Scheiner, "Teleiopoiesis accounts for the more metaphoric distance of alterity...the negotiation of these distances, their mediation, is the movement of teleiopoiesis" (240).

Based on these theoretical foundations, this paper hereafter critically analyses four fairy tales along horizontal geographical lines, from West to East, and analyses the shift in treatment and meaning on one particular metonymy – the golden hair. The analysis occurs in the following order: "The Story of Pretty Goldilocks" from France,

“The Golden Hair” from Russia, “The Golden Maiden” from Armenia and “The Golden Haired Maiden” from Nepal.

### Interpretation of Fairy Tales

#### *“The Story of Pretty Goldilocks”*

This story features a king’s daughter whose hair was “finer than gold” (19), for which, she was thought to be so beautiful that “nothing in the world could be compared with her” (19). Merely on hearing about her beauty, a prince from a far-off kingdom “was already so much in love that he could neither eat nor drink for thinking of her” (19). Meanwhile, the king decides to marry the golden-haired princess and sends an ambassador to ask for her hand in marriage. Assured that the maiden would give her consent, the king has “beautiful dresses made for her, and wonderful fittings for the palace” (19). But she declines saying she has “no desire for marriage” and the ambassador returns empty-handed (19). Later, a boy named Avenant uses his grace, obedience, bravery, and wit to convince Goldilocks to marry the king, but the king, following others’ report, suspects that it is Avenant and not himself that the girl loves. Convinced, he imprisons Avenant. Every time Avenant is in injustice, it is Goldilocks who saves him. Much later, the king accidentally drinks poison thinking it to be magical water used to enhance facial beauty, and dies. Goldilocks comes to the rescue of the kingdom in destitute and names Avenant the next king:

Placing a golden crown on his head and the royal robes on his shoulders, she said “Come, dear Avenant, I make you a king, and take you for my husband.” Throwing himself at her feet, he poured out his gratitude. Everyone was delighted to own him for their master. Never was there such a wedding feast, and the princess Goldilocks and fair Avenant lived long together in peace and happiness. (30)

This way, Goldilocks, by dint of her golden hair and matchless beauty, becomes a source of love, kindness and inspiration and eliminates the evil represented by the wilful king. She is a messiah not only to individuals but also to the entire state. She replaces an ambitious, haughty, jealous and wilful king with a handsome, kind, helpful and compassionate successor. Overall, Goldilocks has been depicted as benevolent and graceful. This is a typical example of the Western perspective of looking at goldilocks with all positivity.

Thus the story maintains the archetypal elements of many good-versus-evil fairy tales in Europe that involve a beautiful maiden and an ambitious man. It has been culturally remade or adopted to fit into the value system of the society that adopts it. This allows a teleiopoetic mapping of this story with similar tales in distant cultures. As Derrida explains, teleiopoiesis works by “rendering, making, transforming, producing, caring” an utterance, which happens “only in the auto-tele-affection of the said utterance” (32).

There is no end to the story with the end of geography. Because no theory of fairy tales confirms strict limitation of a tale within geographical limits, its self-reproduction out of itself is certainly a case of ouroboric self-creation. Secondly, it is a teleiopoietic version of the ancient good-versus-evil archetype as explained by Northrop Frye in his story archetypes. Like several fairy tales all over the world, beauty becomes a bone of contention here for the ambitious ones, while beauty in itself is both innocent and graceful. The existence of greatly similar tales in the vicinity of France, including

Hungary and Germany<sup>1</sup> confirms how adjacent but outside cultures performed a teleiopoietic rendering of the same stuff over time and space.

### ***“The Golden Hair”***

The Russian fairy tale “The Golden Hair” collected by Michael Terletski features a maiden with a golden hair “that was thrown over her shoulder and the tip of it was dropped into the water” (par 1). The braid, the story describes, was “gold and very long, its length was about 10 *sazhen*<sup>2</sup>. The gold braid was reflected in the water and “made the river shine like the sun” (par 3). The braids are described as very hard, and no one could raise them. The girl was chained to the ground by those braids.

A Bashkir hunter called Ailyp happens to lay his eyes on the maiden. Unlike in most West-European fairy tales of this kind, it is the maiden and not Ailyp who offers to marry the man. The man asks how much bride money her father would require him to pay, to which the girl laughs and says her father is the owner of the entire world’s gold, and would not agree to part with her at any cost. The only way out, she thinks, would be to run away.

Bride money is a concept obscure to Western Europe but a fact for Russia. Nava Ashraf *et al* categorically say, “Bride price, a transfer from the groom to the bride’s family, is a traditional cultural practice prevalent in parts of Asia and throughout sub-Saharan Africa” (2). *New World Encyclopaedia* claims that it was absent in the Greco-Roman society: “The absence of bride price in classical times distinguished the Greco-Roman society from their contemporary Indo-European peoples, such as the Celts, as well as from the ancient Mediterranean societies.” As for Russia, there are evidences of the prevalence of the tradition of giving bride price, though it is only occasional: “some customs are a little occasional. For instance, there is a strange tradition known as ransom. The groom must pay a price for the bride. This may become money, a box of chocolate, or possibly a bottle of champagne” (“Russian Wedding Rituals”, para 1-2)

Getting back to the story, Ailyp tries to pull out the golden locks but he is himself snared, and the two get connected firmly. Because the maiden’s father Poloz is the master of all gold on earth and his power to attract gold can reach anywhere, running away with the maiden is impossible for Ailyp. Every time he tries, he fails, and the maiden gets back to the same river bank. Finally, at the advice of an eagle-owl, they escape underground through a hole underneath a stone in the middle of Lake Ikul and escape Poloz’s power zone, for his power is “ineffective in the underwater kingdom” (para 62). They are finally united.

The story features golden hair not only as a prized object for potential suitors but also a cause of pride and possessiveness like in the case of Poloz. The golden hair itself, nevertheless, has been depicted as a metonymy for a kind, loving and benevolent woman who sides not with her cruel father but with a brave and spirited hunter who passionately loves her and is patient enough to wait for six years, in two instalments, to win the queen of his dreams. This is understandably the reproduction of the European norm. Interestingly, the story mentions a maiden with black hair whom Ailyp briefly loves and wishes to marry, but this momentary distraction caused by the dark hair invites some disturbance in his relationship with the golden-haired maiden. She says, “Only in the end

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<sup>1</sup> Hungarian story “The Woman with Hair of Gold” and the German story “The Tale of Rapunzel” feature girls with golden hair. The former is “The Woman with Hair of Gold” is included in Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ *Women Who Run with Wolves* (1992) and the latter Grimm Brothers’ *German Fairy Tales*.

<sup>2</sup> 1 *sazhen* is 0.2134 metres

of the third year my braid became a little bit heavier. Have you fallen in love with someone?" (36). Ailyp is ashamed as he confirms the fact that he really had fallen in love with a pretty black-haired girl but all the same he decides to tell the truth and honestly tells his bride everything about the incident with the black-haired girl. The black hair has occurred as a distraction in the story, as is true for most of the European stories where blackness is not a prized colour but a colour of destruction, gloom and even death.

Compared to the French story of Goldilocks, this story from Russia places the golden hair in stark contrast with the dark hair. Anyway, it also acknowledges dark hair as a maiden's reality. Anthropologically speaking, the dark hair starts becoming a reality, as we move east from Western Europe. In this particular case, we need a value that prevails outside Europe to interpret the reality of a dark hair—still in the sense of 'beauty' and not as evil—and to unfold this, the theoretical foundation of teleiopoiesis becomes handy. Re-reading Derrida, Luke Collison, Cillian O Fathaigh and Georgios Tsangdis say, "teleiopoiesis is employed to invoke both the imaginative aspect of creation and its very creative act, the act of bringing something into being (*poesis*), where a sense of completion (*telos*) resonates with an undertone of the distant (*tele*)" (5). The distance is constituted by the outsider, whose active engagement and imaginative making make the reproduction of a tale possible. We find a sizable number of people in Eastern Europe with dark hair and in that case, the story would lose its validity if it had treated the dark hair as completely negative, like in Western Europe. This way, fairy tales revise their content and symbolism, and adapt to the realities of the land where they are told.

#### **"The Golden Maiden"**

This story from Armenia uses gold to describe prized parts of a maiden, the most poignant of them being her hair. Gold has been referred to at multiple occasions, referring also to her attires and slippers, besides hair, but the hair continues to be the most intriguing of the metonymies. The story features a poor girl, who loses her mother and is hated by her step-mother. The step-mother connives with her husband to abandon the girl and her brother in a desolate forest, and let the beasts devour them—the same way as in the classical German tale "Hansel and Gretel". The husband, a hen-pecked man, acts accordingly. By a magical turn, the brother drinks water from a ditch made by the footprint of a sheep, and turns into a lamb. The girl weaves clothes from the lamb's wool. As she is knitting one day, her spindle falls and goes underground. She follows it and goes into the underworld owned by a fairy. The girl serves the fairy so well that the latter changes the girl's hair and garment into gold: "Her hair and garments were all turned to gold and she herself was turned into a fairy maiden" (4). This gold, an emblem of a reward, brings the girl to the notice of the prince, whose father has proclaimed that the girl should be "most beautiful maiden in all the land", and incidentally, the poor girl becomes his bride (5). The jealous step-mother, who discovers all these things, tries to stop the marriage taking place by hiding the girl "in the great kitchen pit which is used as a furnace" and has her own 'ugly' daughter married to the king instead (6). But later, she is punished and eventually killed.

In the story, golden hair is presented as antithesis of ugliness, and a parallel story of ugliness runs alongside the golden hair. The character with the golden hair is presented all through the story as an epitome of love, care, obedience and hard work that leads to success, while the ugly one is dark enough to earn this description: "She was so ugly that it is impossible to describe her appearance" (5). Interestingly, the story does not mention the hair of the 'ugly' girl, because the atmosphere of the story requires the hair to be dark too, and dark hair, in Armenia, cannot anthropologically stand for anything ugly or wicked. This story is, therefore, to be read vis-à-vis the beauty standard of both



Europe and the region east of Europe. This is how teleiopoiesis works, requiring outside standards at times to re-read an expression through imaginative making.

Keegan Cook Finberg interprets the Derridian term teleiopoiesis as a “way of transferring agency that allows an encounter with the unknown, as figured in the text, to create our ethical stance and our reading practice” (104). Teleiopoiesis here explains the adaptive re-reading of the tale performed by Armenian culture by problematizing the standards considered central for defining a woman’s hair elsewhere. Darkness of the hair in Armenia is almost a common occurrence though not strictly a norm. The story of the golden-haired maiden is comparable to any of those children and step-mother stories found amply in the Western folk tradition—“Hansel and Gretel” being a classic case in point—and understandably, the golden hair has persisted as an emblem of a ‘meme’ although in Armenia. It is not, however, a normative metonymy for beautiful maidens in Armenia.

### **“The Golden Haired Maiden”**

This popular fairy tale has many versions prevalent in various parts of Nepal, but the variations are only very slight. They differ only in setting and a couple of minor details. The main strand of the story remains the same. The story features a king’s daughter who incidentally has golden hair. The story reads: “How many strands of hair she had had been all counted” (par 2). It has been announced that not a single strand of the hair is to be lost. But one day, incidentally, the girl loses a strand while taking bath. The queen announces, “Whoever finds the lost strand of my daughter shall get her as his wife” (par 2). This announcement made, all the young men set out to look for the strand, and incidentally, one of the brothers of the girl (not the youngest one though) finds it. There is a fix now: a born brother should not marry a sister! But a king should not morally default on his promise. So, incest or not, the marriage is decreed.

Ashamed and hurt, the girl climbs a treetop. The king, the queen, and all her brothers, except the youngest one, come to call her down the tree not to miss the most auspicious wedding hour. When the girl says they have changed from her family to her in-laws’ family, they all feel debased and drown themselves in a pool and take their own lives. For example, the king “cursed himself for being such an unfortunate father, and jumped into the river, killing himself” (para 9). The maiden’s mother and one of her elder brothers also invited for themselves a similar end: “Next, the mother, and one of the elder brothers did the same... They also jumped into the river and died” (para 10).

Finally, the youngest of the brothers comes and the girl invites him to live with her on the treetop. They soon found a ranch and rear cattle. One day, the girl’s golden hair attracts a prince, who takes her away. The brother mounts a cow, who sniffing the smell of the girl, takes the boy to his sister and they live happily thereafter.

In this story, the golden hair becomes a cause of so many interstitial confusions, commotion, and deaths. It devastates an entire family, invites incest and disgrace, and forces the maiden to go on exile. The story terminates in a typical Western-story-like fashion in which a prince finds the girl and marries. This element should be understood as continuation of a ‘meme’ that sticks to the collective memory of a society that imbibes a powerful fairy tale. It is understandably a ‘Western’ meme, but it requires tools from a space outside the West to read and interpret it, and this requires an outsider’s approach, as Derrida would contend, to completely unfold the semantics of the story through a teleiopoietic reading. Collions, Fathaigh and Tsangdis, in their interpretation of teleiopoiesis highlight the role of the outsider in making sense of an expression. They say an address “completes itself outside of the subject’s control and ipseity, whose meaning is dependent on the uptake and response of the other” which “describes a distance in

one's relation to the other" (5). This externality of readership from a non-Western culture has replaced the usual depiction of the golden hair as an addendum of beauty. The hair, instead, occurs as wealth and a marker of social prestige. The hair, therefore, occurs as an anomaly and not as a norm, and this anomalous occurrence of the hair obviously invites some sorts of aberration in the 'normal' cultural expectation.

### ***Discussion***

Mapped from the west to the east—that is from France to Nepal through Russia and Armenia in the middle—the fairy tales discussed above have a common meme, connecting them with a maiden who has golden hair. The stories on the two western edges of the geographical delimitation of this study treat the golden hair as a symbol of beauty and grace and there is no mention of its antonym, the dark hair, at any point in the stories. The Armenian story, however, presents the golden hair in contrast to its darker counterpart. This means, in Armenia where the dark hair is almost a norm for a female's ethnic characteristics, its presence cannot be undermined. Unlike in the French and the Russian tales, the golden hair in the Armenian tale is under a man's dominion and the girl, who owns it, does not have the freedom to use its grace and beauty to her benefit as intended. Here, the golden hair occurs as a commodity controlled by people in power. Because the golden hair in Armenia is non-normative, its occurrence is, understandably, a cause of misunderstandings, contention and conflict. The Nepali version of the story further consolidates the idea of commodification and control. Every strand of the maiden's golden lock is counted, and her parents decide how and where the girl is supposed to use it. As the story depicts, the golden hair in this case becomes a symbol of disgrace, and causes multiple conflicts and deaths.

This gradual difference in the symbolic meaning of the golden hair from France to Nepal depicts a gradual shift in the value systems of the societies that adopt these tales. The golden hair, a symbol of beauty, grace and positivity in the west gradually becomes a cause of conflict, tragedy and death in the east. As the tales shift from west to east, a parallel dark hair is also introduced, which relegates the golden hair to the rank of an anomaly and introduces the dark hair as a norm. This conspicuously reveals the fact that social value systems and norms revise symbols and lend them different meanings as they move. This shift in the semantics of the metonymy of the golden hair becomes noticeable only through a comparative mapping of the social value systems and norms, and this calls for a teleiopoietic mapping

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, fairy tales with similar constituent elements and comparable plots occur in diverse cultures but the different cultures and locations that adopt these tales ascribe them different meanings. Such tales retain a cultural replicator called meme but the meme serves different purposes in different locations. These differences become discernable when the tales are mapped across distances and judged against parameters that are outside the tale's immediate cultural locations. The above study has revealed that fairy tales with golden hair as the meme have different meanings in France, Russia, Armenia and Nepal. In France and Russia, where golden hair is a culturally accepted metonymy for a beautiful maiden, the tales ascribe a positive meaning to the hair, while in Armenia and Nepal, the golden hair also bears a negative connotation as it is an anomaly against the beauty standards of these societies.

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