

Abstract

Key words: Fairy tales, Revisionism, Transformation, Feminism, Poetry, Anne Sexton, Olga Broumas, Emma Donoghue

This thesis focuses on the diverse ways in which three authors and foremost representatives of their respective literary generations – Anne Sexton (1928-1974), Olga Broumas (b. 1949) and Emma Donoghue (b. 1969) – reimagine classic fairy tales. Traceable to the versions of traditional tales as told and collected by the Brothers Grimm, the poetic and prosaic revisions explored in the thesis test the boundaries of literary forms, genres, and narrative structures. As they insist on recasting the well-known stories, characters, and denouements, these authors challenge various social and cultural norms. By foregrounding the creative power of language per se, they all also revivify literary discourse and enhance the possibilities of lyric poetry and narrative prose respectively.

The Grimm's fairy tales are considered to be of the same importance as ancient myth or biblical iconography in the Western cultural tradition. Together, they constitute a canon which not only has stood the test of time but continues to be challenged and revised by authors from different spaces and timelines. One of the prominent traits of these stories is how well they travel; not only through space, between national traditions and continents, but also between genres and individual literary forms. The universality of fairy tales lies in their consistency, yet the familiar blueprint provides enough plasticity for the literary material to be bent, in order to question its meanings, perspectives, and narrative voices. By looking at revisions by authors from various genres and traditions, the thesis maps out the inevitable tendency of the fairy tale to change and adapt to new contexts, and thus demonstrate the variability of the text in its full potential scope.

After all, fairy tales, as they exist in the collective consciousness, are already revisions since their historical roots stem from the oral tradition, marked, above all, by multiplicity and constant change. In this respect, the current, continuing processes of transformation can be viewed not only as adapting the popular tales for modern times and widely familiar to contemporary audiences, but as an attempt to return them to their original, open and plural form. A revision allows for the "original" text to be entered from a new angle and for its established order to be challenged. It also makes us question how the text behaves when it is reshaped from prose to verse narrative and back again.

All three authors introduce a moment of disruption into the engraved stories. They point up the tales' problematic associations with the patriarchal and heteronormative traditions and insist on their timeless nature. With imaginative speculation at its core, revisionism becomes a tool of literary transformation, shaping the old as something new which, after all, is one of the oldest principles of story-telling as such.

The three main chapters of this thesis focus each on one of the three authors and their fairy-tale adaptations: Anne Sexton's *Transformations* (1971), Olga Broumas's *Beginning with O* (1977) and Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (1997). The study examines the authors' distinctive revisionist practices – their form, thematic scope, language, and agendas – and aims to map some of the key tendencies in fairy-tale revisionism in the last third of the twentieth century.