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CONTENTS

Title	Page
The Use of Couplet in Translating Religio-Legal terms from Arabic into English Asst Prof. Dr. Luqman A. Nasser	1 - 20
/l / in the Definite Article in Mosuli Arabic: Divergence from Assimilation Rules in Standard Arabic Lect. Anmar H. Saeed	21 - 40
Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar	41 - 62
The Potential Meaning Conveyed by Comment Clauses as Pragmatic Markers Lect. Layth N. Muhammed	63 - 84
L'amour dans " Paul et Virginie de Bernardin de Saint – " "Pierre Asst. Lect.Saad Sajd Fattah	85 - 106
The Clause as Exchange in English and Arabic With Reference to Translation Asst. Lect. Saba Jassim Mohammad	107 - 122
A study of Cohesive Devices in "Death of a son Asst. Lect.Rand Zuhair	123 - 142

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar ()*

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Fairy tales have always been regarded as the province of children. According to Jack Zipes, one of the foremost contemporary fairy tales scholars, this assumption is the furthest from the truth. Children have never been the real target audience of fairy tales. Fairy tales were created and cultivated thousands of years ago by "mature men and women" to "create communal bonds in the face of inexplicable forces of nature", and in the present they "provide hope in a world seemingly on the brink of catastrophe."¹

It is incredibly difficult to define fairy tales due to the lack of an exact definition of them, in fact, they are "easier to illustrate than to define"² as if they resist definition. Indeed, Jack Zipes argues that there is "a strong general tendency among many readers in the West to resist defining the fairy tale," as if no one should "tamper with sacred material" as by defining the fairy tale." One might destroy its magic, and it appears that this magic has something to do with the blessed realm of childhood and innocence."³ Zipes also states that the definition of the fairy tales "depends on the manner in which a narrator/ author arranges known functions of a tale aesthetically and ideologically to induce wonder and then transmits the tale as a whole according to customary usage of a society in a given historical period."⁴

However, there have been many attempts to define fairy tales. Fairy tales have been defined as "short, imaginative, traditional tales with highly moral and magical content."⁵ Yet, this definition could be somewhat vague. Also, fairy tales are defined as a "morally edifying narrative which is governed by the optimistic requirement of a happy ending."⁶ Nevertheless, they "signify wishes fulfilled and dreams come true."⁷

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Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

Despite the general disagreement concerning the definition of fairy tales, there is one thing that no one can deny, that is, the general appeal of fairy tales. Fairy tales have enjoyed tremendous popularity through centuries. This could be attributed to the considerable role fairy tales play in readers' lives as well as in the nation and culture in general. W. H. Auden argues that fairy tales are "among the few indispensable, common-property books upon which Western culture can be founded." Auden goes further, saying "that these tales rank next to the Bible in importance."⁸ Moreover, some writers even warned that growing up without fairy tales implies "spiritual impoverishment," as fairy tales "have the power to stir long-dormant childhood feelings and to quicken our sympathies for the downtrodden. They also offer wit and wisdom; besides, fairy tales are not only poignant but also timeless and universal; in them there is something for every age and generation."⁹

Through ages, fairy tales have undergone so many changes, yet they have not lost their appeal to their audience, adults or children. They appeared thousands of years ago and became instituted as a distinct genre in the eighteenth century and they never cease to change ever since¹⁰.

Literary authors are among the devoted audience of fairy tales. The appeal of fairy tales to literary authors has something to do not only with the fascinating and magical world fairy tales depict but also with the common fears, dreams and problems of humanity fairy tales communicate.

Moreover, Jack Zipes states that fairy tales will continue to intrigue and influence their audience as long as they continue to "awaken our wonderment and enable us to project counter worlds to our present society, [fairy tales] will serve a meaningful social and aesthetic function, not just for compensation but for revelation: The worlds portrayed by the best of our fairy tales are like magic spells of enchantment that actually free us. Instead of petrifying our minds, they arouse our imagination and compel us to realize how we can fight terror and cunningly insert ourselves into our daily struggles, turning the course of the world's events in our favor."¹¹

Poets were not immune to these magic spells cast by fairy tales; there have been productive use of fairy tales in the work of so many poets, though the approaches are different .Eventually, a new genre ushers in poetry that is fairy tales poetry , a sub-genre of lyrical poetry that received little attention from scholarly world .In the nineteenth century a whole body of fairy tales poetry existed and has developed tremendously since then. Fairy tales poetry then used to be a simple retelling of fairy tales .It was no more than “stylistic variations” of the traditional fairy tales. They added “little to a deeper or differentiated understanding of the psychological underpinnings of the tales' messages. ”¹²

Nevertheless, modern poets did not pursue this tradition ,but only in different ways .They were unable to overlook the rich material provided by fairy tales yet they need to twist them and use them in a way that will serve their aims .

The outcome is a remarkable reinterpretation of the fairy tales as a genre within poetry .Modern fairy tales poetry, with the exception of some poems, is considered a “critical reaction to fairy tales that are no longer believed or accepted”. Fairy tales have been transformed by modern poets into “parodistic, satirical, or cynical anti-fairy tales, these poems often contain serious social criticisms” , and by doing so” the readers are supposed to re-evaluate societal problems”.¹³

However, the most remarkable change fairy tales underwent is the feminist fairy-tale production that usually involves “ a questioning of gender roles and a recording of personal experiences in poetry and prose” which is regarded as “a sort of revolution” in fairy tales that “breath[es] new life into the genre,”.¹⁴ The most notable and accomplished feminist poet who played an active role in challenging and appropriating fairy tales in her poetry in an extraordinary way is Anne Sexton.

Anne Sexton (1928–1974) is an outstanding Pulitzer prize-winning confessional poet who produced feminist and modernist poetry. In her most innovative poetry she openly tackles topics that deemed to be literary taboos like emancipation, incest, abortion, illegitimacy, mental illness, suicide and family relationships .¹⁵

Sexton has an indispensable place among celebrated American women poets. Her poetry is highly prized due to her pioneering

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

insistence on transmuting her painful personal experiences and taboo topics into art ;thus paving the way for the coming generations of poets to write freely about whatever they please . Maxine Kumin, a friend and fellow poet, states that women poets in particular “owe a debt to Anne Sexton” as she “broke new ground, shattered taboos, and endured a barrage of attacks along the way because of the flamboyance of her subject matter, which, twenty years later, seems far less daring.”¹⁶

Transformations (1971), is Anne Sexton's most memorable volume that gained much scholarly recognition .It is a witty but dark modernist retelling of seventeen fairy tales from the Brothers Grimm collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales, 1812–15) .

This volume is brilliantly labeled *Transformations* as each poem-story in this collection is a transformation of the original fairy tale . Moreover, fairy tales are essentially “transformative narratives on transformations”¹⁷ and transformation, magical transformation to be more precise, is part and parcel of fairy tales .

Anne Sexton was enchanted by fairy tales which were for her, perhaps, “what Bible stories and Greek myths had been for other writers.” Her approach in dealing with fairy tales is unique , her fairy tales poems “went one step further than contemporary poets' translations from languages they did not themselves read but apprehended through a third party. Their poems were *adaptations*; hers were *transformations*.”¹⁸

She is not simply adapting the tales but retelling and transforming them as new tales, modernizing their language and content. While she is reworking aspects of the traditional fairy tales , she perceives the inherent and enduring power in the tales and she appropriates this power for personal and social revelation. She realizes the power of fairy tales over their readers ; they fascinate , enlighten and move them.

However, the transformation and retelling of the tales remain true to Grimm's classic fairy tales ,each poem-story has not strayed too far from its traditional form. Anne Sexton explains her poetry in this volume saying "I take the fairy tale and transform it into a poem

of my own, following the story line, exceeding the story line and adding my own pzazz. They are very wry and cruel and sadistic and funny."¹⁹

The poet produces her own revisions of the Grimms' tales yet, no drastic change has been made in the plots of the original tales. She follows the same structure of the traditional tales wrapping them in her own language, turning the old tales into new ones with cynical and modern twist.

Transformation represents a hallmark in Anne Sexton's poetic career, in this volume critics mark the beginning of a shift in her poetry. In her early poetry, Anne Sexton was mainly absorbed in writing intensely emotional and self reflexive poetry that is drawn directly from personal life experiences that earn her the label confessional poet. Her poems are considered "outpourings of her individual human experience" and "her intense revision of these outpourings gave them artistic form and structure, and elevated her unique experience to the universal experience of human suffering."²⁰

In this volume however, the poet moves away from her confessional poetry to what has been termed the "transpersonal."²¹ Zipes states that "*Transformation* is unique in that she gains distance on her personal problems by transposing them on to fairy-tale figures and situations."²² Her poetic transformation of the fairy tales constitutes a "cultural critique of sex-role stereotyping."²³

In *Transformations* the narrator is the poet herself "The speaker in this case/is a middle-aged witch, me —"(ll.1-2)²⁴. It is really an unusual choice of the figure who will be the narrator, a witch. Yet, Anne Sexton's choice is perfectly justified. The witch is usually presented in classic fairy tales as a demonized woman who possesses a supernatural power, an agent of evil and the master of black art.²⁵

However, the witch figure in Anne Sexton's poetry is different, her witch is "a desirable version of the self."²⁶ She wants to gain the power of the witch which is harmless. She has the power to narrate the tales. She is eloquent with a strong voice, something that women in general lack in the poet's contemporary society, where only man's poetry is hailed as good and worthy to be heard.²⁷ She positions herself as the narrator of the fairy-tales poems of

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

Transformations, declaring herself to be “the new source of folk wisdom and of oracular authority ” as she is a witch, the “master of the arts, of an opaque art of illusion, and also as a disruptive force, a figure of anarchic energy who subverts conventional cultural wisdom.”²⁸

Furthermore, *Transformations* demonstrates Anne Sexton's gift for storytelling and it also reveals that the poet possesses a dark, unpredictable humor.²⁹ Her tone is mostly satirical and she depends on humor to lighten the dark aspects of the fairy tales she presents in her poems.

This paper deals with the transformations fairy tales underwent in Anne Sexton's volume titled *Transformations*. Three fairy-tale poems are chosen from this volume for discussion and they are transformed from the most well known fairy tales, the selected fairy-tale poems are “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, “Cinderella”, and “Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)”.³⁰

The poem “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” opens with an introduction, a prologue in which the poet portrays Snow White, as in the following lines :

No matter what life you lead
the virgin is a lovely number:
cheeks as fragile as cigarette paper,
arms and legs made of Limoges,
lips like Vin Du Rhone,
rolling her china-blue doll eyes
open and shut.

(ll.1-7)

Right from the beginning, Anne Sexton is satirical. She portrays Snow White as an icon of perfect beauty. She describes her in terms of inanimate objects using paper, porcelain, and wine to define her beauty; a beauty that is hard to believe as real. Though satirically, the poet presents Snow White as an ideal woman, an emblem of perfect beauty, imitating her portrait in the Grimms' version.

Anne Sexton retains the structure of the plot of the classic tale. She presents the two female protagonists, the evil stepmother and the good Snow White and sets them as rivals. Yet, her retelling

suggests that both of Snow White and her evil stepmother are the same ,they are victims of the concept of beauty or beauty myth shaped by male constructed society; she states that :

Beauty is a simple passion,
But, oh my friends, in the end
You will dance the fire dance in iron shoes.

(ll.21-23)

The poet points out the destiny of women who blindly pursue beauty. They are doomed to destruction ,and that is what happens to the wicked stepmother who tries to kill Snow White simply because she is more beautiful than her .The original tale ends with the punishment of the evil queen and the marriage of Snow White and the prince :

And thus Snow White became the prince's bride.
The wicked queen was invited to the wedding feast
and when she arrived there were
red-hot iron shoes,
in the manner of red-hot roller skates,
clamped upon her feet.
First your toes will smoke
and then your heels will turn black
and you will fry upward like a frog,
she was told.

And so she danced until she was dead,

(ll.147-157)

This is the typical happily-ever-after ending of the fairy tales; yet, the poet questions this ending .She retells the whole story of Snow White without making any obvious changes in the plot .Nevertheless, the fairy-tale poem ends with the following lines:

Meanwhile Snow White held court,
rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut
and sometimes referring to her mirror
as women do.

(ll.161-164)

So the twist in Anne Sexton 's fairy tale poem happens at the end ,at the very last line of the poem when the storyteller makes it clear that the destined fate of dancing to death is the fate of Snow White as it was the fate of the wicked queen; she also pursues beauty. The

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

poet satirizes women in general when she says "as women do" because they are bound to the patriarchal concept of beauty. The poet pessimistically states that this yearning for beauty is the fate of every woman, they all end up looking at the mirror hoping that their beauty is never going to wither; apparently the wish for beauty is eternal and indestructible.

One of the major messages embedded in the classic version of the tale by the Brothers Grimm is that the only desirable woman is the beautiful, submissive and docile, just like Snow White. Thus, the reward for such a woman is to marry and live happily-ever-after.

Anne Sexton in her fairy-tale poem tries to demythologize fairy tales by presenting Snow White cynically as the icon of perfect but unnatural beauty. Then she ends the retelling by stating clearly that Snow White is not an ideal woman. In the original tale no attention had been paid to Snow White's personality as if her beauty had been the only measure of her self-worth. She had been presented as an object of desire, so beautiful but in fact she is naïve. When she acts she commits the same mistake of trusting a completely strange woman who tried to kill her not once or twice but three times. She is simply "...the dumb bunny," (l.117)

Snow White is not the only female protagonist the poet satirizes; other female protagonists like Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty also receive their share of the poet's harsh satire "Cinderella" and "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)". In these poems as well as in "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", the witch-narrator "reveals how trapped these heroines are in their prescribed gender roles." "Cinderella" and "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)" are the poet's most remarkable feminist revision.

The fairy-tale poem, "Cinderella", has a prologue too in which the storyteller presents four contemporary stories of rags-to-riches that are the same as that of Cinderella. The poem opens with the witch narrator, saying: "You always read about it." (l.1) to give the sense that what the reader is going to hear are just common stories.

Then the witch narrator tells four rages-to-rages stories ,first “the plumber with twelve children/ who wins the Irish Sweepstakes. “ (ll.2-3), then she narrates the story of the nursemaid “who captures the oldest son's heart.” (l.8).The story of the milkman "who goes into real estate” (l.14) and finally the story of the charwoman “who is on the bus when it cracks up/and collects enough from the insurance.” (ll.18-19)

The stories of the plumber, nursemaid, milkman and charwoman, are really hard to believe. They are unrealistic just as that of Cinderella. So the poet, from the beginning, satirizes the story of Cinderella as unrealistic and unlikely to happen. Then she gives many satiric comments throughout the poem to prevent the reader from emotional involvement in the story or from sympathizing with the heroine .

The witch narrator retells the story of Cinderella and remains true to the classic Grimms’ version, but with a cynical twist; Anne Sexton’s version is grim and full of dark humor .The poet maintains the plot of the classic tale. The story begins with Cinderella’s mother calling her daughter to her deathbed to ask her to “Be devout. Be good. Then I will smile /down from heaven in the seam of a cloud.” (ll.25-26).Then the story goes on to tell of Cinderella’s suffering due to her stepsisters’ bad treatment as they were “..., pretty enough/ but with hearts like blackjacks” (ll.28-29) and also her stepmother’s cruelty ,which is something normal according to the poet who mockingly comments “That's the way with stepmothers.” (l.55)

The narrator continues to tell of Cinderella’s father as he once went to town and brought his wife and stepdaughters’ jewels and gowns and a twig for Cinderella and

She planted that twig on her mother's grave
and it grew to a tree where a white dove sat.
Whenever she wished for anything the dove
would drop it like an egg upon the ground.
The bird is important, my dears, so heed him.

(ll.36-40)

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

The poet cynically comments on the bird and its magical help for Cinderella. The bird is so important as it grants her all her wishes as simple as dropping an egg. So the narrator satirically asks the listener to realize the importance of magic and fantasy, and in this way she implies that the world of fairy tales is not real and nothing of these things could actually happen to any of us, so heed that fact.

Then something happens, the party which may be the most important thing in the tale:

Next came the ball, as you all know.
It was a marriage market.
The prince was looking for a wife.
All but Cinderella were preparing
and gussying up for the big event.

(ll.41-45)

The poet says "*as you all know*" to undermine the importance of this event, as if the ball is something unexceptional, not that important. Then she satirizes the prince's ball depicting it as marriage market where the prince is going to choose a wife.

Cinderella wanted to go to the party, she even "... begged to go too." (l.46) and her evil stepmother does her best to prevent her from going to the ball. Yet, as expected, Cinderella receives a magical help from the dove that sits on the tree over her mother's grave. The poet sardonically says:

Cinderella went to the tree at the grave
and cried forth like a gospel singer:
Mama! Mama! My turtledove,
send me to the prince's ball!

(ll.56-59)

Conveniently enough, "The bird dropped down a golden dress/and delicate little gold slippers." (ll.60-61) To question the believability of the tale, the poet comments satirically that it is "Rather a large package for a simple bird." (l.62) That Cinderella went to the party "... is no surprise." (l.63)

In the party ,Cinderella's real beauty is revealed and the prince immediately falls in love with her .Yet, Cinderella has to leave and for three nights the prince fails to find where she is ,so he :
 covered the palace steps with cobbler's wax
 and Cinderella's gold shoe stuck upon it.
 Now he would find whom the shoe fit
 and find his strange dancing girl for keeps.

(ll.75-78)

The fairy-tale poem, "Cinderella", is more gruesome than the Grimms' version. The poet states darker and grimmer side of the tale when the two stepsisters inflict themselves with unnecessary physical pain in their attempt to put on the slipper. The witch-narrator makes fun of the violence of the sisters, the eldest as her big toe "...got in the way so she simply/sliced it off and put on the slipper" (ll.82-83)while "The other sister cut off her heel". (l.88)

Then the poet uses a humorous tone again when she mocks the prince who, feeling wary, "... began to feel like a shoe salesman." (l.91) Finally,
 [...] he gave it one last try.
 This time Cinderella fit into the shoe
 like a love letter into its envelope.

(ll.92-94)

The prince marries Cinderella and at the wedding the evil sisters were punished as appears in the lines :
 At the wedding ceremony
 the two sisters came to curry favor
 and the white dove pecked their eyes out.
 Two hollow spots were left
 like soup spoons.

(ll.95-99)

Anne Sexton's fairy-tale poem is incredibly bloody, violent, and grim. The evil sisters were severely punished .In the classic fairy tale the tale ends with the marriage of Cinderella and the prince, yet the poet transforms the classic tale .

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

The poet modernizes the classic Grimm's fairy tale by adding some contemporary twists. In the poem's prologue, the poet makes references to the clothing line of Dior and the Bonwit Teller, department store. When the poet depicts Cinderella, she says that "She slept on the sooty hearth each night\ and walked around looking like Al Jolson." (ll.31-32) She compares Cinderella's face, that is covered with ash, to that of Al Jolson, the popular entertainer who used to appear wearing blackface.³¹ Later, the poet says that the prince began to feel like a shoe salesman when he felt tired of traveling all around looking for the owner of the shoe .

However, the most outstanding transformation in the poem occurs in the final stanza. In the original tale Cinderella gets marry and lives happily-ever-after. Anne Sexton, in her fairy-tale poem , shatters the conventional ending ,saying:

Cinderella and the prince
lived, they say, happily ever after,
like two dolls in a museum case
never bothered by diapers or dust,
never arguing over the timing of an egg,
never telling the same story twice,
never getting a middle-aged spread,
their darling smiles pasted on for eternity.
Regular Bobbsey Twins.
That story.

(ll.100-109)

In this way, the poet challenges the readers' expectations: Cinderella and the prince are portrayed as two dolls trapped inside a museum glass case; they are not simply real, they are dolls. They never kept a house, argued, aged, or suffered from life's hardships. They are shielded and isolated from life realities, they are as unreal as the fairy tale itself .

Anne Sexton sheds light on the thing that had been left untold in the original fairy tale :the kind of life Cinderella and the prince lived after they married. She mocks the conventional ending emphasizing

that real life is not a fairy tale and there is nothing called happily-ever-after. The poet also questions the prevailing notion that if a woman is going to marry, specially if she is to marry a prince, this will be the answer to all her problems .Marriage might not bring happiness, it might be the beginning of all kinds of problems, and this is what makes life colorful and meaningful. While the ending of the fairy tale is unrealistic and the poet compares the state of happily-ever-after with being trapped in a glass case which is sterile and tedious.

The poet repeats the phrase “That story ”at the end to undermine fairy tales’ false promises and to remind the readers that they are reading a fairy tale. Also she emphasizes the point that this story is like the other four rags-to-riches stories mentioned at the first four stanzas , unrealistic and unlikely to happen; they are simply fairy tales.

The poet also mocks the tale’s coded message that a woman should be beautiful to be happy; the fairy tale defines the beauty of an ideal woman, who should be beautiful, pure, pious and obedient. Cinderella was beautiful ,but beautiful from the inside unlike her stepsisters who were “pretty enough/ but with hearts like blackjacks” (ll.28-29). According to the classic tale, Cinderella’s problems were all resolved when her real beauty was revealed at the ball and the prince, charmed by her beauty, married her. They lived happily-ever-after as nothing could ever spoil their perfect happiness.

Consequently, if a woman is not beautiful, or doesn't fit into society's idea of beauty, then she will never be happy. The poem embodies the poet’s grim outlook on women’s liberation; the ‘true situation’ of women during the 1950s and 1960s.³²

Moreover , the poet highlights the absence of the positive role of Cinderella’s father. He appears only at the beginning of the tale; he is a rich widower with a child, Cinderella. Then “The man took another wife who had\two daughters,...” (ll.27-28). He starts a new life and becomes negligent of his own child.

Furthermore, he does absolutely nothing while Cinderella suffers from the cruelty of her stepmother and stepsisters .Later in the fairy-tale poem , Cinderella’s father is never mentioned again as if he had

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

disappeared from her life with no role at all. The absence of the positive role of Cinderella's father is in sharp contrast with the role of Briar Rose's father. In her fairy-tale poem "Briar Rose (Sleeping Beauty)", Anne Sexton presents Briar Rose's father as over protective of his only child ,to reveal later on the ugly and even horrifying truth about him.

The poem opens with a prologue in which the readers are asked to:

Consider
a girl who keeps slipping off,
arms limp as old carrots,
into the hypnotist's trance,
into a spirit world

(ll.1-5)

The poet then presents Briar Rose as being "...stuck in the time machine,/suddenly two years old sucking her thumb,"(ll.7-8).Besides, she is submissive and docile ,she is simply a "Little doll child"(l.15).

The poet retells the tale of Briar Rose after the end of the prologue. The original story tells of a girl who had been cursed by the evil fairy to one hundred-year sleep, then a handsome prince comes in to save her. When he kisses her, she immediately wakes up .They get marry and live happily-ever-after.

Anne Sexton retains the plot of the classic tale ,yet she makes a radical change at the end . The transformation of the ending of the tale is remarkable .The poet presents the story of Briar Rose from a new perspective ;it is Briar Rose herself who is going to speak and to tell her story .Moreover , the story has been extended to tell of what happens after the supposed happily-ever-after ending of the original tale .

The fairy-tale poem does not end with the traditional happily-ever-after ending; it ends as the prince :

[...] kissed Briar Rose
and she woke up crying
Daddy! Daddy!

Presto! She's out of prison!
 She married the prince
 and all went well
 except for the fear —
 the fear of sleep.

(ll.96-101)

The ending reveals that Briar Rose is insomniac .She is afraid of sleeping, as she says “sleep must take me unawares/while I am laughing or dancing”(ll.110-111). Anne Sexton has examined “as no poet has done before, what happens to a girl’s psyche after she has been disturbed from the sleep of death, her renewed life becoming a life after death and bringing with it fear-induced insomnia.”³³While in the original Grimms’ tale Briar Rose- after she woke up ,she immediately married and lived happily-ever-after -no attention had been paid to the effect of this sleep of death on her psych.

Moreover ,in the original tale, the heroine is presented as an icon of beauty , so much attention is given to her physical beauty .Whereas Anne Sexton is more concerned with Briar Rose as a person .The poet focuses on the disturbing aspects that had been left out of the original tale, like the effect of the one-hundred-year sleep on her, her passivity and docility ,as well as the loss of identity she suffered from due to her prescribed gender role. Accordingly, Anne Sexton’s fairy-tale poem is a feminist version of the Grimms’ tale of Sleeping Beauty.

Furthermore, the heroine of the Grimms’ version is shown as passive when she spends her life sleeping and she scarcely speaks but only few short sentences. The fairy-tale poem does not present Briar Rose as less passive nor she has any challenging role ,yet the poet gives her a voice; after she wakes up she learns to “...talk again.”(l.10) and speaks “...with the gift of tongues.” (l.6) The poet transforms the poem when she chooses to let Briar Rose tell her own story.

Through her speech ,Briar Rose is able to tell her own story ,from her own perspective ,revealing feelings of frustration and resentment due to her passivity and loss of identity. Her inactivity

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

and loss of identity are reflected in her speech, saying "I lie as still as a bar of iron." (l.126) and:

I was passed hand to hand
like a bowl of fruit.
Each night I am nailed into place
and I forget who I am.

(ll.147-150)

Nevertheless, Briar Rose does not resist her passivity or even protest against it ,she is simply withholding the anger that is supposed to be unleashed .

Moreover, Anne Sexton's poem takes a deeper and darker turn. Briar Rose reveals a terrible secret about her father as is shown in the lines:

Daddy?
That's another kind of prison.
It's not the prince at all,
but my father
drunkenly bent over my bed,
circling the abyss like a shark,
my father thick upon me
like some sleeping jellyfish.

(ll.151-158)

She was a victim of incest ,her overprotective father is actually the one who is abusing her .The ending of the poem is shocking as the poet has frustrated the readers' expectations by up ending the tale with such an appalling discovery .It is the most radical shift in the fairy-tale poem .

The poem with the lines:

What voyage this, little girl?
This coming out of prison?

God help —
this life after death?

(ll.159-162)

The ending is definitely not the happily-ever-after ending of the classic Grimms' tale .Briar Rose is not out of her prison, she is in fact in another kind of prison ,it is a state of death-in-life.

Another transformation in the poem is the modernization of the original tale by referring to modern inventions as when the poet says that Briar Rose " ... *is stuck in the time machine*,"(l.7).Also, she makes reference to many contemporary products like pocketbooks, straws, cigarettes, a cartoony Kaputt!, erasers, safety pins, Bab-o, cattle prods and Novacain. The poet has actually demythologized the tale as she makes it clear that the date of the tale is not once upon a time but it is the poet's own contemporary time, it is the 1970s.

To sum up, Anne Sexton's retelling of fairy tales conveys her feminist outlook , she retells them from an unexpected woman's perspective, satirizing the Grimms' fairy tales as they represent the cruel patriarchal culture. Fairy tales become a vehicle to express her feminist views and demonstrate her rejection of women's stereotyped role in society. Moreover ,she sheds an illuminating light on some of the psychological subtexts embedded in the original fairy tales .

Fairy tale represents a rich source for female characters who are trapped in their prescribed gender role. The poet does not trying to empower female protagonists, yet she aims at exposing the coded messages to women embedded in the classical tale. Traditionally, society expects women to be gentle, docile, quiet, and timid. They are helpless without men, and the Grimms' fairy tales embrace and enhance this notion. In them, the only desirable woman is the passive, obedient, and even silent ;they are the only ones who are going to be rewarded .

The poet's cynical prologues and the surprising ending stanzas as well as Sexton's biting satire and dark humor shatter the promises of the classical fairy tales . Her fairy-tale poems do not maintain the

Transformation in Anne Sexton's Fairy-tale Poems

Lect. Shaymaa Zuhair Al-Wattar

happy ending reached at the end of the Grimms' version of the tales as the poet makes it clear that those tales are simply fairy tales ,they are not real and their ending is too good to be true. Her poems which reveal the gap between those tales and reality aim at enlightening the readers to re-evaluate many social issues of importance ,including women emancipation and their constructive role in society .

Notes

1. Jack Zipes , ***When Dreams Came True*** (New York : Routledge, 2007), p.1. This book also provided an excellent historical overview of fairy tales .
2. Graham Anderson, ***Fairy tale in the Ancient World*** (London : Routledge , 2000), p.1.
3. Jack Zipes(ed.), ***The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales***(Oxford University Press ,2000), p. xv.
4. Zipes, ***When Dreams Came True*** , p.7.
5. Anderson, p.1.
6. Quoted in Maria Tatar, ***The Hard Facts of the Grimm's Fairy Tales***(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.164.
7. Tatar, pp. xx-xxi.
8. Maria Tatar(ed.), ***The Classic Fairy Tales***(New York : Norton Critical Edition, 1999), p. xii.
9. Tatar, ***The Hard Facts of the Grimm's Fairy Tales***, pp. xiii -xiv.
10. Jack Zipes , ***Relentless Progress : the Reconfiguration of Children's Literature, Fairy Tales, and Storytelling***(New York :Routledge, 2009), p.126.
11. Zipes, ***When Dreams Came True***, p. 31.
12. Zipes(ed.), ***The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales***, pp.388-389.

13. Zipes(ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*,p.389.
- 14.Zipes(ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, p.xxxi.
15. Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature*(New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2006),p.482.
16. Maxine Kumin,” *How It Was*”, an introduction to Anne Sexton *Complete Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001).p. xxxiv.
17. Donald Haase(ed.), *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*(Westport: Greenwood Press,2008),p. 982.
18. Kumin , p. xxviii
19. Diane Wood Middlebrook, *Anne Sexton: A Biography*(New York: Random House, 1992.),pp.336-337.
20. Steven Stack and David Lester (eds.), *Suicide and the Creative Arts*(New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.,2009),p.264.
21. Kumin, p. xxx.
22. Zipes(ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*,p.461.
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23. Catherine Cucinella (ed.), *Contemporary American Women Poets : an A-to-Z Guide* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002),p. 332.
24. Anne Sexton, *Transformations*(London: Oxford University Press, 1972)p. 3. All quotations from Anne Sexton’s poems are from this edition and only lines’ number will appear in parentheses.
25. For further information on the figure of the witch in history see Diane Purkiss,
The Witch in History : Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations(London:

- Routledge,1996) .
26. Purkiss,p.23.
27. See Ju-Hsin Wang, " *Embodying Voice: Women Writers and Fairy Tales* " Master's Thesis (National Taiwan Normal University, 2005).
28. Tatar, *The Classic Fairy Tales*. p.xvi.
29. Deborah Forbes ,*Sincerity's Shadow: Self-Consciousness in British Romantic and Mid-Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004),p.120.
30. See Edna Henry Lee Turpin, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*(New York: Norwood Press,1903), for the full text of the tales .
31. See Doug McClelland ,*Blackface to Blacklist ,Al Jolson, Larry Parks, and "The Jolson Story"*(London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.,1987).
32. Zipes(ed.), *The Oxford Companion to fairy Tales*, p.461.
33. Robert Phillips, *The Confessional Poets* (South Illinois: South Illinois University Press,1973), pp.90-91.

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”التحول في شعر حكايات الجنيات للشاعرة آن سكستن ”

م. شيماء زهير الوتاري

المستخلص

تعد حكايات الجنيات مصدر الهام للشعراء لا غنى عنه يتجلى وبصورة خاصة عند الشاعرات. فقد كانت تلك الحكايات منبعاً لا ينضب لعقود من الزمان وكان لها تأثير لا يستهان به في عالم الأدب. وبدأت معالم ذلك التأثير واضحة عند الشاعرة آن سكستن . إذ أنها استعانت بتلك الحكايات وحولتها لتلائم هدفها كوسيلة لإيصال فكرها المؤيد للمساواة بين الجنسين ولتوضيح مفهومها عن دور المرأة في المجتمع. فقد أدركت الشاعرة القوى الكامنة في تلك الحكايات وعملت على استغلالها لخدمه أهدافها .

يتناول هذا البحث التحول في شعر حكايات الجنيات للشاعرة آن سكستن. وقد وقع الاختيار على قصائد ثلاث لتوضيح ذلك التحول. يعد استعمال الشاعرة للتحول في شعرها استثنائياً. إذ عمدت الشاعرة إلى تحويل حكايات الجنيات دون المساس بالحبكة الأصلية فأدخلت أفكارها وتعليقاتها الخاصة التي أضفت رؤية جديدة لتلك للحكايات التقليدية.