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UNHAPPILY EVER AFTER: THE UNIQUE PERCEPTION OF MORALITY IN ANDERSEN'S FAIRY TALES

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“All grown-ups were once children... but only few of them remember it.”

Antoine de Saint -Exupery

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to focus on exploration of the phenomenon of unhappy endings in tales written by Hans Christian Andersen. Two of his fairy tales were analyzed by applying a moral approach, revealing the ambiguity of the unhappy endings and moral warnings through the folk stories.

Key words: Fairy tale, moral value, story, children literature, medieval society, poor girl

The theoretical issue dominates that traditional fairy tale stories were created by unknown authors at time erstwhile many people could even read or write. Stories were told or acted out. They were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Some details of the stories might have changed, but the main message remained the same.

Stories were collected, adopted and written down by writers and scholars like Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Perrault, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm who are considered to be the pioneers of the early tradition of fairy tales.

It is commonly assumed that fairy tales have always been a part of a happy childhood-reading routine and are often associated with children's literature, but originally tales had dark and often-gruesome plot lines intended for adult audience, not youngsters. It started with the Grimm's. They called their collection “Children's and Household Tales”. The Grimm brothers realized that children were being read these stories, so they softened many elements and, for instance, evil mothers became stepmothers.

Most of fairy tales begin with “Long time ago...”, or “Once upon a time...” and commonly end with an expected cliché “They lived happily ever after.” Tales are set in the past, but not in a defined period of history. They usually have a happy ending where the hero triumphs over adversity and good prevails over evil. Nevertheless, some story-writers hand-pick to break the habitual norms by giving their narrative an unhappy ending. Among these authors is a well-known Danish story-writer, Hans Christian Andersen, whose stories brought him a worldwide fame. The legendary fairy tale writer was born in Odense, Denmark, in 1805. He also used to draw pictures on his own to serve as illustrations for his tales.

The purpose of the research was the analyses of moral warnings of unhappy endings of fairy tales. Two fairy tales were selected: “The Little Match Girl” and “The Red Shoes” written by H.C. Andersen. The tales have an unusual ending with either a protagonist dying. The plot of the selected tales was analyzed from a scarcity abundance perspective, as well to assess the heroines' physical and symbolic journey towards their aspirations. In assessing the role of an unhappy ending, it is necessary to take a closer look at these unusual and oddly compelling stories.

“The Little Match Girl” tale is a condemnation of the plight of poor children. It tells about dying girl’s dreams and hope. Furthermore, it is about poverty, hunger and helplessness. A nameless girl is forced to go out into the winter street with barely anything to keep her warm. The poor child doesn’t even dare to return home because of her abusive birth father, who continued to mistreat her. The girl huddles between two houses and desperately lighted her matches to warm herself. Each time she strikes a match, she has visions of warmth and happiness. When the little girl strikes the entire bundle, she sees her passed away grandmother. A woman she loved dearly and whom she knows will look after her.

The cold winter in the story symbolizes the harsh environment and the matches are symbolic of hope. The focal point of the story is when the poor girl asks her grandmother to take her along:

“O take me with you; I know you will go away when the match burns out.” (1,308)

The story holds another important message that the power of one’s mind and imagination should not be underestimated.

“The little girl noticed that the Christmas lights rose higher and higher, till they looked to her like the stars in the sky. When one of them fell leaving a long line of tale, she thought that someone was dying, as her old grandmother used to tell her. The little girl remembers her words that when a star falls, a soul was going up to God”.(1,308)

Andersen perceived himself as a religious person and his worldview is reflected in his stories. Other researchers support this viewpoint. The light in this story is contrasted to darkness, which encompasses the cold, poverty, starving, adversity and loneliness. Thus, it can be stated that Andersen, as a pure Christian, prefers to save the helpless girl from poor and sorrowful earthly life by lifting her to the blessed kingdom of Heaven. Another overall moral this story presents is that people who have a hard life on earth will be awarded in the afterlife. The last paragraph of the story highlights comes to prove it.

“The child still sat, in the stiffness of death, holding the matches in her hand, one bundle of which was burnt. “She tried to warm herself”, said some. No one imagined what beautiful things she had seen, nor into what glory had she entered with her grandmother, on New Year ’s Day.” (1,308)

“The Red Shoes” is a fairy tale that has a strong moral warning to the readers to avoid sin like vanity and pride. This story, published in 1845, is about an orphan girl named Karen, who is extremely in love with a pair of red shoes. At first the red shoes were an aspiration for the girl, reflecting her desire to live in abundance, later her vanity gets her trapped in shoes that force her into never ending dance that eventually debilitated her.

As delineated by Dr. Oliver Tearle (Loughborough University) the very surreal and strange central motif of “The Red Shoes” _ the red shoes almost comically dancing against the wearer’s will _ is what makes the story so powerful. Andersen could have had the girl be attracted to a bright shawl, which then fasten tight around her until it strangled her, or a pretty dress, which grew tighter, but the choice of shoes associated with the gaiety and levity of dancing is inspired, as it constantly draws attention to Karen’s shoes making her loathe the attention they bring her and the way they wear her out as they send her off across the town and beyond [5].

A foremost remark to emerge in this study is that “The Red Shoes” is one of children literature that has moral message to the young readers. It teaches to earn good values from being submissive and kind-hearted and also to be dependent to God. Christianity is acknowledged a powerful cultural influence here and that is evident in the story.

The protagonist wore red shoes on the day of her mother’s funeral as well on her confirmation day. Due to Christian morality it is considered unsuitable, especially wearing red shoes as mourning attire. Nevertheless, the girl gave priority to the red shoes as the attention she received wearing the vivid shoes satisfied her desire for being noticed and seen as pretty. The girl is punished for her temptation and disobedience to elders. She meets the executor and begs him to cut off her feet.

According to some researchers, in some way “The Red Shoes” prefigures the theme of what Dickens’s most fairy tale inspired novel, “Great Expectations”, where Pip forgets his family and neglects poor Joe once he has had a taste of life as a gentleman in the city. Like Pip, Karen must undergo a chastening road to redemption, although the sacrifices demanded of her will be much greater: she loses her feet, and then, in the end her own life in order to be rid of the curse of the red shoes and welcomed back in the house of God.

“The Red Shoes” fairy tale ends with the miracle performed by an angel who fulfils the protagonist’s wish to go to the church. Overcome by the relief at being back to church, the girl feels her heart burst with joy and dies.

“The church itself had come to the poor girl in her narrow room, or the room had gone to the church. She sat on the pew with the rest of the pastor’s household, and when they had finished the hymn and looked up, they nodded and said, “It was right of you to come, Karen”. “It was mercy” she said” (1,194) . Given this context, the ending can be considered as a happy one because Karen’s heart broke full of “sunshine, peace, and joy” expressing her choice to reconnect with God and spiritual values.

The study of Andersen’s tales’ origins highlights the viewpoint that they are deeply personal and autobiographical. “The Red Shoes” protagonist was named after his own half-sister, Karen Marie Andersen. Besides his father was a shoemaker and once had to make red shoes for the daughter of a rich man. “The Little Match Girl” tale was inspired by the childhood experience of Andersen’s mother. As a child she was often sent out into the street to beg (4,7).

The main conclusion that can be drawn is that in controversy between the selected fairy tales, verity that either protagonist was the victim of the society is differentiated. An innocent child froze to death and no one noticed or land a helping hand. Unlike her Karen was given a chance to have a better life. But the society found fault with her behavior. The very society that neglected the dying girl on New Year’s Day.

Linguists and historians think the original inclusion of these themes was a reflection of the medieval society in which these folk tales originated, which was much more ruthless. It is believed that moral value is installed by fairy tales to affect the children’s characteristic. The aim of moral value is constructed from the society. The children must honor and obey: and that they should be sensible and ally and not impetuous, clumsy, temperamental, jealous or selfish.(2)

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Лилит Оганян - СВОЕОБРАЗНОЕ ВОСПРИЯТИЕ МОРАЛИ В СКАЗКАХ АНДЕРСЕНА: НЕСЧАСТНЫЕ НАВЕКИ. Статья посвящена исследованию феномена несчастливого конца в известных сказках Андерсена. Две известные сказки Андерсена были проанализированы в этой статье с точки зрения моральных норм, раскрывающих двусмысленность несчастливых концов в сказках и их нравственных предостережений через народные рассказы.

Ключевые слова: сказка, моральная ценность, рассказ, детская литература, средневековое общество, бедная девочка

Լիլիթ Օհանյան - ԲԱՐՈՅԱԵՆՈՍՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԲԱՅԱՌԻԿ ԸՆԿՎԱԼՈՒՄԸ ԱՆԴԵՐՍԵՆԻ ՀԵՔԻԱԹՆԵՐՈՒՄ: ԹՇՎԱՌ ՀԱՎԻՏՅԱՆ: Հոդվածն անդրադառնում է Անդերսենի տխուր վերջաբանով հեքիաթների ուսումնասիրությանը: Այս աշխատանքում ներկայացված են հայտնի հեքիաթագրի երկու սիրված ստեղծագործություն, որոնք ուսումնասիրվել են բարոյախրատական մետեցման տեսանկյունից՝ ժողովրդական պատմվածքների միջոցով բացահայտելով հեքիաթների տխուր ավարտի երկիմաստությունը և նրանց բարոյախրատական նախազգուշացումները:

Հիմնաբառեր- հեքիաթ, բարոյական արժեք, պատմվածք, մանկական գրականություն, միջնադարյան հասարակություն, ջրավոր աղջիկ