

## REINTERPRETATION OF FAIRY TALES IN ANNE SEXTON'S POETRY

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*Abstract.* The paper focuses on the phenomenon of adaptation of culturally significant texts in the book of poems “*Transformations*” by Anne Sexton, a prominent representative of American confessional poetry. The aim of the study is to identify factors that determine the semantic shift in her reinterpretations of the Brothers Grimm fairy tales. Two types of metatextual elements have been singled out in the course of the study and their pragmatic functions have been thoroughly explored. The analysis shows that metatexts can be incorporated directly in the original sentence of a well-known plot in the form of a current commentary allowing the author to develop the story and to draw the readers' attention to the key moments of the original text. The other type of metatexts is located outside the sentence of a fairy-tale plot; it takes the form of a prologue or a frame consisting of a prologue and an epilogue telling stories of the present time. The text-within-a-text structure allows the reader to draw a parallel between the modern stories in the frame and the adaptations of classical fairy tales embedded within it. This structure gives the readers a key to explicate the potential meaning of a familiar story, questioning their customary views on it. The author studies the relationship between the possibility of inclusion of metatextual elements in reinterpretations and the change of their target audience.

*Keywords:* reinterpretation; fairy tale; secondary text; American women's poetry; Anne Sexton; Brothers Grimm fairy tales; metatext; metatextual elements; commentary; text within a text

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## РЕИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ ВОЛШЕБНЫХ СКАЗОК В ПОЭЗИИ ЭНН СЕКСТОН

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*Аннотация.* В работе рассматривается явление вторичной репрезентации произведений, значимых для социума. Материалом исследования послужила книга стихов «Превращения» Энн Секстон, известной представительницы исповедальной поэзии в американской литературе. Цель статьи – выяснить, за счет чего происходит смысловой сдвиг в ее произведениях, переписывающих и реинтерпретирующих сказки братьев Гримм. Тщательно исследована прагматическая функция двух выявленных типов метатекстовых элементов. Метатексты могут быть инкорпорированы непосредственно в переложение известного сюжета в виде текущего комментария, позволяя автору развертывать историю и фокусировать внимание читателя на ключевых моментах «материнского» текста. Другой тип метатекста расположен за пределами переложения сказочного сюжета в виде прологов или рамочных конструкций с прологом и эпилогом, излагающих истории сегодняшнего дня. Структура «текст в тексте» помогает читателю провести параллель между современными сюжетами в обрамляющей части и пересказываемыми классическими сюжетами внутри нее; она дает ключ к экспликации потенциального смысла привычных историй, подвергая сомнению устоявшиеся взгляды читателя на них. Исследуется взаимосвязь между возможностью включения метатекстовых элементов в реинтерпретации и сменой их целевой аудитории.

*Ключевые слова:* реинтерпретация; волшебная сказка; вторичный текст; американская женская поэзия; Энн Секстон; сказки братьев Гримм; метатекст; метатекстовые элементы; комментарий; текст в тексте

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*“Just as every rewriting of a tale is an interpretation,  
so every interpretation is a rewriting”  
[Tatar 1992: xxxvii]*

Literature of the final decades of the twentieth century produced a large number of retellings of texts that belong to the canon showing “obsession with evolutionary repetition” [Gandlevsky 1998: 34]. It is culturally central texts, or strong texts, that are open to interpretation by writers, researchers, translators and readers [Cook 1993; Gronas 2001; Maslennikova 2016]. These include fairy tales and myths that serve the purpose of storing and communicating values important for society. When they are appropriated by an author in a situation with a new current agenda, their reinterpretations are often intended to demonstrate one-sidedness of the values that the text conveys and highlight its stereotypes that modern readers are ready to share or to reveal latent meanings lost in the flow of time.

Contemporary writers deal with “the usual themes of the fairy tale under a critical, skeptical perspective, with the intent to cause a disturbance in the viewer and to remind him that fairy tales do not offer any alternative to reality. Their works collide with past interpretations... that force the audience to ask questions and to see the world from new perspectives” [Barsotti 2015: 77], as Susanna Barsotti remarks. Their reinventions of fairy tales [Kérchy 2011] are often characterized, as Thomas Leach qualifies updates of classical texts, “by the overtly revisionary stance toward an original text” [Leitch 2002: 46], which holds true of modern-day reinterpretations of fairy tales. Besides, “reinterpretation initially implies the need for active cooperation on the part of the subject of perception who turns from an outside observer into one of the participants in the dialogue” [Volkova 2009: 178–179]; it “does not so much reconcile contradictions as sharpens the differences of viewpoints on the object of speech” [Volkova 2008: 98–99].

Researchers point to overlapping fairy-tale retellings with fairy-tale criticism at the end of the past century. Stephen Benson, for example, notes “the extraordinary synchronicity... of fiction and fairy-tale scholarship... The concerns of the fiction are variously and fascinatingly close to those of the scholarship” [Benson 2008: 5]. According to Jack Zipes, “since 1980 there has been an inextricable, dialectical development of mutual influence of *all* writers of fairy tales and fairy-tale criticism that has led to innovative fairy-tale in all cultural fields” [Zipes 2009: 122]. Zipes calls these reinterpretations of fairy tales that have to adapt themselves to everchanging conditions “hybrid genres” [Zipes 2006: 3] since new adaptations of fairy tales absorb elements of other genres. In her comprehensive study of parody, Linda Hutcheon points out: “Art forms have increasingly appeared to distrust external criticism to the extent that they have sought to incorporate critical commentary within their own structures in a kind of self-legitimizing short-circuit of the normal critical dialogue” [Hutcheon 1988: 1]. In the paper with the title that speaks for itself, “Parody as criticism”, J. G. Riewald formulates the main point this way: “[Parody] is not a branch of theoretical criticism, but a very special and pleasant type of practical or ‘applied’ criticism, a kind of handicapped close reading” [Riewald 1966: 130].

Discussing the role of commentary, Michel Foucault notes that “commentary rests on the postulate that speech (*parole*) is an act of ‘translation’” [Foucault 1973: xvi–xvii]. It “tries to transmit an old, unyielding discourse seemingly silent to itself, into another, more prolix discourse that is both more archaic and more contemporary... to comment is to admit by definition an excess of the signified over the signifier; a necessary, unformulated remainder of thought that language has left in the shade” [ibid., xvi]. The inevitability of the commentary manifests itself in recognizing unspoken components in an utterance, written or spoken, that need articulating.

Gerard Genette describes metatextuality as “the relationship most often labeled ‘commentary’”. It unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it. ...This is the *critical* relationship par excellence” [Genette 1997: 4; emphasis in original]. The concept of metatext is widely used in contemporary research, and all the works that discuss it in one way or another refer to Anna Wierzbicka’s classic work “Metatext in the text”. In it, the author examines “metaorganisers” of the monologic text that make it two-voiced. Wierzbicka assumes that the author of a text is like a thoughtful listener of someone else’s speech, who records its content and mentally comments on what he has just heard, and that the author himself can also be the commentator of the text [Wierzbicka 1978: 404]. She refers to M. M. Bakhtin’s words on two hidden voices in the monological utterance: “dialogic relationships are also possible toward one’s own utterance as a whole, toward its separate parts and toward an individual word within it, if we somehow detach ourselves from them, speak with an inner reservation, if we observe a certain distance from them, as if limiting our own authorship or dividing it in two” [Bakhtin 1984: 184]. Wierzbicka identifies the functions that “metatext threads”, as she calls pieces in the monologic text relating to the “meta-voice”, perform. “They clarify the ‘semantic pattern’ of the main text, connect its various elements, reinforce, bind” [ibid.: 421].

Distinguishing metatext, a statement about the statement, within a monologic utterance is connected with the fundamental distinction between object language and metalanguage used to describe the former, that is between the text and the commentary on it [Shaimiev 1996: 80]. Many scholars admit the pragmatic function of metatext. As V. A. Shaimiev argues, “in this case we talk about the reflection in a text of a specific situation of its creating (developing), commenting upon (interpreting) and preparing the addressee for the perception of some particular text. The pragmatic essence of commenting is ultimately a focus on the addressee’s adequate understanding of the text commented upon” [ibid.: 82]. V. A. Lukin specifies that “metatextual elements... serve to switch the recipient over to the text fragments that are most significant from the author’s point of view” [Lukin 2005: 100].

Shaimiev distinguishes at least two types of metatext: inclusive metatext, or intrametatext (when metatextual structures are woven into the main text), and separative one (metatextual structures are in preposition or postposition to the main text, that is are separated from it) [Shaimiev 1996].

The ways metatextual elements are integrated into the book of poems “Transformations” [Sexton 1971a] written by Anne Sexton, a well-known representative of the confessional poetry in the United States, are of considerable interest. Confessional poetry, as its name suggested by M. L. Rosenthal in 1959 in his interview with Robert Lowell, the main figure of this movement [Rosenthal 1960], indicates, deals with examination and revelation of the self. Confessional poetry is the projection of personal disturbances, intense psychological experiences, existential crises, family troubles and sufferings, that is the reflection of “more intimate aspects of life, areas of experience that most of us would instinctively keep from public sight” [Mills 1965: 288].

The most notable confessional poets are Sylvia Plath, W. D. Snodgrass, and Anne Sexton who studied at Boston University under Robert Lowell. Sexton admits, “The poetry is often more advanced, in terms of my unconscious, than I am. Poetry, after all, milks the unconscious. The unconscious is there to feed its little images, little symbols, the answers, the insights I know not of” [Sexton 1971b: 162]. Themes, in particular Sexton’s painful personal experiences, in her poems, “Transformations” including, were often the focus of profound critical analysis [Ostriker 1982; Cronan Rose 1983; Colburn 1991].

The aim of this article is to reveal how, in her transformations of the Grimms’ tales, Sexton used, quite intentionally and explicitly, techniques that stimulate the audience to re-examine their notions about the ideological meaning of the tales she appropriates. In her revisionist fairy tales, the ‘applied’ criticism and hybridity manifest themselves, as it will be shown, in the presence of commentary, or metatext, which takes various forms. Sexton’s poetry book consists of sixteen transformations from the Brothers Grimms’ collection of tales [Grimm 1962]: “Snow White and Seven Dwarfs”, “Red Riding Hood”, “Hansel and Gretel”, “Rapunzel”, “The Twelve Dancing Princesses”, “The Frog Prince”, “The Little Peasant”, “Godfather Death”, “The White Snake”, “Iron

Hans", "Rumpelstiltskin", "Briar Rose" ("Sleeping Beauty"), "Cinderella", "The Maiden Without Hands", "One Eye, Two Eyes, Three Eyes". These tales serve as a ready-made scheme, a starting point for the author's reflections on their meaning, characters and *moralité*, as well as on the problems the poetess faced during her own socialization. Furthermore, fairy tales, with their straightforward trajectory of unfolding events, without digressions, saves the confessional poet from inevitable fixation on herself.

All sixteen transformations have a similar structure. They begin with a prologue that varies in length from one stanza to almost half a poem. The narrator, or rather the *persona* whose narrative voice the reader hears, is "Dame Sexton", "the speaker in this case / ...a middle-aged witch, me... ready to tell you a story or two... to transform Brothers Grimm" [Sexton 1971a: 1; further references to this book are given in brackets]. Both names foreground the *persona's* basic trait: she is a mature and experienced woman who has worldly knowledge. To a great extent, it's her perspective that predetermines frequent appeal to the feminine mind, as well as her angle of seeing classic fairy tales and the target audience, mostly women.

The narrator comes from the twentieth century; brazen wit and contemporary realities and facts suggest it. In the prologue, she discusses current-day social and psychological issues, such as alienation, gender identity, sexual abuse, commodification of women, etc. Dame Sexton declares her intention to transform the Grimms' tales ("Transform? / As if an enlarged paper clip / could be a piece of sculpture" (p. 2). In prologues, Sexton reflects on the universal nature of the phobias and folly these stories contain [Gallagher 1991].

The prologue is followed by retelling a particular tale; it starts with "once", "once upon a time", "there once was", "long ago there was", "in an old time". These are the so-called traditional initial formulas [Roşianu 1967] that serve as signals for readers to move to another level of narration – the fairy-tale world. According to Jerzy Bartmiński, "the use of circulating expressions, which the recipient recognises as 'his' or 'hers', contributes to the actualisation (or even the formation) of a circle of perceptions common to both contacting parties", the

addresser and the addressee [Bartmiński 2005: 204]. Some transformations end with an epilogue in which the narrator returns from the fairy-tale world back to the real one.

In the course of the presentation of the "mother" text [Lotman 1992a: 153], in this case a particular fairy-tale story, the poetess Anne Sexton delegates to the narrator, Dame Sexton, the right to make remarks while she is telling her story. These remarks are an example of intrametatext since they are made not from outside the fairy-tale narrative (prologue or epilogue) but from inside. They are often accompanied by direct address, its addressee being either the reader: "Next came the ball, as you all know. / It was a marriage market" (p. 54; emphasis added); "But *oh, my friends*, in the end you will dance the fire dance in iron shoes" (p. 5) or the narrator herself: "But I get ahead of my story" (p. 76); "But I digress" (p. 95). This running commentary facilitates the unfolding of the story and draws readers' attention to their willingness to share universally shared judgements, stereotypes or expectations about fairy tales:

"They [Rapunzel and the prince] lived happily as you might expect / proving that mother-me-do / can be outgrown" (p. 42);

"[Cinderella] planted that twig on her mother's grave / and grew a tree where a white dove sat. / ...*The bird is important, my dears, so heed him*" (p. 54); "Cinderella went to the tree and cried. ... / My turtledove, / send me to the prince's ball! / ...So she went. *Which is no surprise*" (p. 56).

The metatextual commentary can take the form of a maxim, a judgement of an experienced person – "a middle-aged witch", "a dame":

"On his [poor soldier's] way to the castle / he met an old old woman. / *Age, for a change, was of some use.* / ...She told him not to drink a drop of wine / and gave him a cloak that would make / him invisible when the right time came" (p. 90); "I am a dwarf. / ...and no child will ever call me Papa. ...Without reward the dwarf would not spin. / Give me your first-born and I will spin. / ... [The queen offered the dwarf] all the kingdom / but he wanted only this / a living being / to call his own. / *And being mortal / who can blame him?*" (p. 20);



“No, Cinderella, said the stepmother, / you have no clothes and cannot dance. / *That’s the way with stepmothers*” (p. 55).

The intrametatext can also take the form of a comment by the narrator that presents a critical judgement on the characters and their actions:

“Then he [the wolf] put on her nightdress and cap / and smuggled down into the bed. / *A deceptive fellow*” (p. 77);

“There was once a miller / with a daughter lovely as a grape. / ...she could / spin gold out of common straw. / The king... locked her in a room full of straw / and told her to spin it into gold / or she would die like a criminal. / *Poor grape with no one to pick. / Luscious and round and sleek. / Poor thing. / To die and never see Brooklyn*” (p. 18);

“Beware, beware, [the dwarfs] said. / ...but the queen came, / Snow White, *the dumb bunny*, / opened the door / and she bit into a poison apple” (p. 8).

The “metatextual thread”, or intrametatext, can be easily extracted from the story being told without affecting its core content. However, this type of metatext has a pragmatic meaning: it is a brief note in the margin made in passing that helps readers to go further into the story as it unravels and draws their attention to its key points. With them, Sexton sets the accents needed for the explication of the story’s meaning.

The separative metatext in Sexton’s reinterpretations takes the form of a prologue preceding the fairy-tale retelling; in some of them, it embraces a prologue and an epilogue that frame the embedded fairy-tale narrative. Everyday stories told in prologues and epilogues are set in modern time and abound in contemporary realities; they are also provided with a moral. This type of metatext reveals parallels between the fairy-tale world and everyday reality and highlights the idea of repetition and similarity (situations, events, etc.). In this way, the structure of poems makes the meaning of classic fairy tales, as the author of “Transformations” sees it, more transparent: the separative metatext promotes interpretation.

In the prologue to “Cinderella”, four contemporary stories about different people of different professions – plumber, nursemaid, milkman and charwoman – are told. Each time

readers are reminded that they heard the story before:

*You always read about it:*

the plumber with twelve children  
who wins the Irish Sweepstakes.  
From toilets to riches.

*That story.*

Or the nursemaid,  
some luscious sweet from Denmark  
who captures the oldest son’s heart.  
From diapers to Dior.

*That story.*

Or a milkman who serves the wealthy,  
eggs, cream, butter, yogurt, milk,  
the white truck like an ambulance  
who goes into real estate  
and makes a pile.  
From homogenized to martinis at lunch.

Or the charwoman  
who is on the bus when it cracks up  
and collects enough from the insurance.  
From mops to Bonwit Teller.

*That story.* (p. 53)

In the prologue, there is a fourfold reference to “that story”. While in everyday communication the deictic pronoun “that” points at something distant in space and time, in poetry it “points to objects and phenomena present in one’s mental image or memory” [Kovtunova 1986: 42]. Together with the address to the reader “You always read about it”, “that story” implies that readers should keep a familiar story in their memory even though it is not named. Though the idiom “from rags to riches” summarizing the idea of magical transformations that happened to Cinderella is not mentioned by Sexton, she plays variations on it, which helps to revive the original fairy tale’s concept:

“from toilets to riches”  
“from diapers to Dior”  
“from homogenized to martinis at lunch”  
“from mops to Bonwit Teller”

Four contemporary anecdotes in the prologue (about a plumber winning the lottery, a nursemaid capturing the oldest son, a charwoman winning the lawsuit and a milkman taking advantage of the situation) are followed by retelling the tale of Cinderella who marries Prince. Sexton emphasizes that her story of success is not different from the other four. All of them reflect a similar situation: its characters acquire a higher status without effort, not because of their professional skills, but because of happy coincidence or cunning tricks.

The frame construction in "Transformations", as it is typical of "text within a text" [Lotman 1992a: 155] structure, seeks to characterize the text it incorporates. The idea of doubling inherent in it brings to the fore the idea of repetitiveness of situations presented in the embedding and embedded texts because of the limited set of life scenarios.

In her versions of classic Grimms' fairy tales, Sexton changes the target audience from children, as the title of precedents, "Die Kinder- und Hausmärchen", suggests, to adults. Targeting the needs of this audience allows the narrator to enlarge or problematize those aspects of tales that relate to adult sphere, to try to answer 'childish' questions of a 16-year-old boy who is "each of us":

Attention,  
my dears,  
let me present to you this boy.  
He is sixteen and he wants some answers.  
He is each of us.  
I mean you.  
I mean me.  
It is not enough to read Hesse  
and drink clam chowder  
we must have the answers.  
The boy has found a gold key  
and he is looking for what will open. ...  
He turns the key.  
Presto!  
It opens this book of odd tales  
which transform the Brothers Grimm.  
Transform?  
As if an enlarged paper clip  
could be a piece of sculpture.  
(And it could.) (p. 2)

The shift to a new addressee makes the integration of commentary, both inclusive and separative, within a fairytale reinterpretation potentially possible. The narrator, sometimes in a rather sharp and ironic way, expresses her non-participation in maintaining long-established myths and tries to refute certain truths. As Vladimir Jankélévitch observes, "In every assertion there is a possibility of error that will willingly walk us around if we allow our minds to rush readily for truths. ...Hence the analytical... nature of irony: ...it forces them [false truths] to reveal flaws that without it would remain unnoticed. Irony vividly illuminates nonsense, leads absurdity to self-denial" [Jankélévitch 2004: 74].

Dame Sexton, the ironic narrator, often following the black-and-white logic of fairy tales for children, reverses accepted human values. Thus, female beauty, in her opinion, can verge on cruelty: "[women] pretty enough, but with hearts like blackjacks" (p. 54). After her stepmother is punished and dances her death dance in white-hot iron shoes, Snow White looks at her reflection in the mirror as if nothing happened: "referring to her mirror / as women do" (p. 9). The narrator draws attention to the callous behaviour of women in situations that are dramatic for other women, the stepmother's and to her dreadful fate in this case, that will boomerang on them:

Beauty is a simple passion,  
*but oh my friends, in the end*  
*you will dance the fire dance in iron shoes.* (p. 5)

In the reinterpretation of "One-Eye, Two-Eyes, Three-Eyes" about three sisters, the eldest of whom has one eye, the youngest three eyes, and the middle one two eyes, like all people do, for which she is abused by her sisters and mother, the narrator makes a harsh comment on charity, often fake, for the poor and the disabled: people get into character, bear their cross eagerly and expect praise for this:

[The parents of]  
the somehow deficient,  
the somehow maimed...  
have bizarre thoughts...  
and admire their trophy.  
They turn a radish into a ruby.  
They plan an elaborate celebration.  
*They warm to their roles.*  
*They carry it off with a positive fervor. ...*

The club-footed boy  
wearing his shoe like a flat iron.  
The idiot child,  
a stuffed doll who can only masturbate.  
The hunchback carrying his hump  
like a bag of onions...  
*Oh how we treasure  
their scenic value.* (pp. 60–61)

The practice of ameliorating some tough issues of original folkloric sources as well as conventions of literary fairy tales become the target for the author's irony as well. In "Transformations", situational irony and grotesque expose cruelty and violence inherent in folklore. They accentuate unattractive features of positive characters' personalities that as a rule remain in the shadow since long ago they turned into abstract concepts of the good. Negative characters, in contrast, get sympathy from the *persona*. Thus, the system of values is either inverted or questioned:

The huntsman and the grandmother and Red  
Riding  
Hood  
sat down by his corpse [of the wolf] and had a meal  
of wine and  
cake. (p. 79)  
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The wicked queen was invited  
to the wedding feast  
and when she arrived there were  
red-hot iron shoes...  
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,  
a subterranean figure,  
her tongue flicking in and out  
like a gas jet.

*Meanwhile Snow White held court,  
rolling her china-blue doll eyes open and shut  
and sometimes referring to the mirror  
as women do.* (p. 9)

Some elements of fairy-tale poetics are also ridiculed. In "Cinderella", the down-to-earth comment of the *persona* "Next came the ball, as you

know. / It was a marriage market" (p. 54) deprives the ball in Prince's palace, the culminating event of the fairy tale, of any romantic aura typical of the original text. The reader to whom the narrator refers is invited to see the roles heroines perform in a new way: they are an object of purchase and sale at the ball.

Such an indispensable narrative convention of fairy tales as happy ending [Lotman 1992b: 231] – the protagonists' wedding that serves as a pledge that they will live happily ever after – also becomes an object of irony. E. N. Kovtun rightfully remarks, "Children are not confused by the inconsistency of fairy-tale logic with the logic of everyday life" [Kovtun 1999: 139]. The shift to adult target audience allows the author of "Transformations" to suggest a rationalistic perspective: after all, "life is not... a magic fairy tale with a guaranteed happy ending" [Alker 1987: 410]. In her reinterpretation of Cinderella's story, Sexton writes beyond the ending and offers a sequel: she describes the virtual life scenario of the protagonists after their marriage. It does not look like a fairy tale: nappies, household chores, tiffs and quarrels over trifles, food shortages, senility and so on. She paints the other, unsightly, side of life that Cinderella and Prince Charming, two exhibits in a "museum case", never get to know within the fairy-tale limits. In doing so, Sexton adds meanings that the fairy-tale convention of happy ending excludes:

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 about 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. (p. 57)

The storyteller exposes real details of which adult readers know not by hearsay and which fairy tales gloss over. As a result, by the end of the story the refrain "That story" acquires, apart from its function of appeal to the well-known fairy tale, an evaluative one: "that story", that happy life after the wedding, that happy ending.

On the whole, the author sticks to the poetics of happy ending: half of the tales in “Transformations” end the same way as in their precedents – with their heroines’ marriage. However, this institution is viewed by the author as one that deprives a person of an eventful life and makes her feel trapped (“box”, “blue coffin”, “blue funk”, “prison”):

So, of course,  
they were *placed in a box*  
and painted identically blue  
and thus passed their days  
living happily ever after –  
*a kind of coffin,*  
*a kind of blue funk.*

Is it not? (p. 15)

\*\*\*

[The prince] kissed Briar Rose  
and she woke up crying:  
Daddy! Daddy!  
Presto! She's *out of prison!* (p. 110)

\*\*\*

Cinderella and the prince  
Lived, they say, happily ever after,  
like two *dolls in a museum case.* (p. 57)

As stories of initiation about acquiring a new social status, fairy tales reflect the constraints that society imposes on women's searches from childhood and the patterns of behaviour it sets for new generations of young female readers who remain captives within these patterns. Sexton emphasises the compliant, puppet-like nature of fairy-tale heroines: their lives cannot be controlled by them; therefore, these young women never grow up, there is no development or *Bildung* for them.

Some important features of Sexton's reinterpretations of well-known fairy tales can be highlighted. Unlike many other reinterpretations

of fairy tales undertaken during the second wave of feminism when the authors experimented with plot, motifs, actors, etc. (see more [Atlas 2015]), the narrative line of “mother” texts, the Grimms' fairy tales, is not altered by Sexton in “Transformations”. On the contrary, the author consistently adheres to the original narrative plotline, thereby emphasising its unchanging course, which does not allow the heroines of the tales to act on their own: they are predetermined to fill the slots in the original plot on and on.

At the same time, leaving the plot of textual precedents unchanged, Sexton gives the *persona* of “Transformations” sufficient freedom to comment on “mother” texts. The tone of her “meta-voice”, now ironic, now sarcastic or satirical, differs from the consistent epic tone of the Grimm Brothers' narrator. These comments made both outside the retelling of classical fairy tales (in prologues and epilogues) and within it enhance the possibility of interpreting them.

Thus, the types of metatext discussed above, inclusive and separative ones, can be viewed as a way of making the author's presence exposed, revealing her rationalist attitude to classical fairy tales, and giving the reader a code that helps to explicate their potential meaning. These metatextual elements are pragmatically tuned towards the intended addressee, towards an adequate, from the point of view of the author, perception of the “mother” text by contemporary audience in the spirit of revisionist thinking.

Rewriting and reinterpretation of fairy tales demonstrate willingness of writers to question, in the context of a new social agenda, value relations that these tales, with their set of truths anchored in the collective consciousness, communicate. What is essential here is writers' reflection on the coincidence or non-coincidence of their own axiology and the value system of cultural tradition represented by textual precedents.

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