

Transformation in Fairy Tales, Transformation of Fairy Tales : A Study of “The Little Mermaid” and “The Frog Prince”

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Abstract : Fairy tale as a genre has undergone transformations over the ages. From stories meant for a matured audience, to stories meant exclusively for children, fairy tales have changed in both language and content. Embedded in the heart of these fairy tales, lie tales of transformation that express the yearning to be perfect and desirable. Animal bridegroom stories feature prominently; in fairy tales like “The Frog Prince” and “Beauty and the Beast”, the transformations happen through love, while in “The Little Mermaid”, the transformation happens for love. The modern literary adaptations come in and lends fresh perspectives to these classic fairy tales. It is interesting to see how the tales of transformation themselves have undergone certain changes over ages and across adaptations. My paper conducts a survey into this, in an attempt to explore the timeless appeal of fairy tales.

Keywords : *Transformation, adaptation, love, prince, beast*

The term *fairy tale*, now used as a generic label for magical stories for children, comes from the French term *conte de fées*, coined for a group of 17th-century tales written for adults. These stories have come down through the years in simplified forms adapted for children. Since the presence of fairies is not a deciding factor for these tales, many folklorists prefer the German term *Märchen*, which means “wonder tale”. The theme of transformation is a central one at the heart of fairy tales. Along with the tales of transformation, fairy tales itself as a genre has undergone transformation over the ages. The main change is the intent of fairy tales—tales written for a general audience were purged and transformed into tales primarily meant for children. A brief background of how the genre has changed will be insightful, before discussing the two specific instances of transformation in fairy tales and its implications.

Literary fairy tales borrow heavily from the oral folk tales of the peasant tradition (as well from myth, Romance, and literary sources like Apuleius’s *Golden Ass* and Boccaccio’s *Decameron*), but these motifs are crafted and reworked through a single author’s imagination. Some detect a first wave and second wave pattern in this literary fairy tale tradition where the first wave includes people like Madame d’Aulnoy and Charles Perrault and the second wave consists of people like Madame de Villeneuve. At this point the French salon became the thriving place

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for such stories. D'Aulnoy, as her contemporaries note, was a major force behind the fairy tale tradition and the first to publish her salon tales, but she was soon followed by a number of other writers (Mme. de Murat, Mlle. L'Héritier, Mlle. Bernard, Mlle. de la Force, etc.), most of whom were influenced by each other in varying degrees. Although d'Aulnoy's name is largely left out of the canon (for example, Perrault receives much more importance than her), her tales are still retold today, republished in modern forms- *The White Cat*, *The White Deer*, *Green Snake*, *The Yellow Dwarf*, *Bluecrest*, *The Royal Ram*, and so on. Perrault's collection of fairy tales in 1697 came near the end of the first wave of fairy tales. Sometime in the middle of the 17th century, a passion for conversational parlour games based on the plots of old folk tales was introduced in the salons. Each *salonnière* was called upon to retell an old tale or rework an old theme, spinning new stories that were not only a product of imagination but also a comment on the modern, aristocratic life. Great emphasis was placed on spontaneity. So, retellings of fairy and folk tales had already begun through such traditions.

By the 1630s, women gathered in their homes to discuss matters of interest to them- arts, politics and social matters. Women lacked autonomy regarding education and marriage at this point and their stories spoke against gender barriers and advocated intellectual compatibility between the sexes. These women and the sympathetic men who were attracted to these lively gatherings, came to be known as *précieuses*. They developed a witty, inventive and *précieux* mode of conversation, that led to the naming.

The German Romantics took up the literary fairy tale form in the 18th and 19th centuries, creating adult works inspired by previous French and Italian stories mixed with tales from the German folk tradition (as popularized by the Brothers Grimm). Also in the 19th century, Denmark's Hans Christian Andersen created such beloved fairy tales as *The Little Mermaid* and *The Snow Queen*; and England's Oscar Wilde penned poignant stories such as *The Selfish Giant* and *The Nightingale and the Rose*.

In the modern times, the term fairy tales have come to stand for a lie or fanciful untruth. This, says Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow, has simplified the old tales of “anguish and darkness” by reducing the trials and tribulations of the characters. The old tales were very different from the sugary Disney versions- they sent their protagonists into darkness, danger and despair and finally provided them with tools to save themselves, which must be used wisely and carefully, “Happy endings, where they exist, are hard won, and at a price” (Windling and Datlow, *Black Thorn*, *White Rose*, Kindle Location 76).

At the end of the 20th century, the old storytellers and their stories began to be reclaimed by a new generation of fairy tale scholars. Their original tales were rediscovered, reappraised, and re translated. Such tales provided inspiration for a whole new wave of fairy tale authors like Angela Carter, A. S. Byatt, Emma Donoghue, Margaret Atwood, Robert Coover, Tanith

Lee, Delia Sherman and many others. The new adaptations try to bring back some of those complications and layers of the old tales, by giving the prevalent themes a new twist. So, stories which began as oral narratives, became literary fairy tales, which in turn were simplified for children, that the modern adapters change with their mature content.

When we come to the transformation aspect in fairy tales, we must look at why these transformations happen. While there are various kinds of transformation in fairy tales- from poor to rich, from ugly to beautiful, the most common one is from animals to human beings. It expresses a desire to fit in and be acceptable in the society. Animal bridegroom is a popular theme in fairy tales and folk tales. It tries to build up a bond with our natural world by eliminating the threat, as the animal will ultimately transform into a humane figure. Usually, this human being is wealthy; often a prince and the princess is rewarded with him for his/her virtues. The beast's conversion into a "desirable" object is a comment on the society's obsession with external appearance and status. Without a suave exterior, they will always be "bestial" in the society's eyes. In a very well-known story, "Beauty and the Beast" you will see through the illustrations that even the type of the animal is not important to the narrative; it is the ugliness of the beast that is emphasized upon, that contrasts with the loveliness of the beautiful, delicate girl. A metamorphosis becomes necessary to eliminate this and aspire towards perfection as perceived by the society. This ends the story on a happy note, with an acceptable conclusion for both. While this is the pattern that we notice in the story "The Frog Prince", we have a slightly different pattern for "The Little Mermaid".

The Little Mermaid and her Transformation

The story "The Little Mermaid" did not originate from oral traditions, so we do not have various versions of it. But there are tales that presumably influenced Hans Christian Anderson while writing this story. One of them is *Undine* by the German author Friedrich de La Fouque (1777-1843). Anderson expressed his familiarity with this tale and there are unmistakable similarities between his and Fouque's tales. These tales seem to have their roots in an even older tale, *Roman de Melusine* or *Melusine* in short, written by the 14th century French writer Jean d'Arras. This is the best-known version of the Melusine legend, written at the behest of Jean, the Duke of Berry (1340-1416). Another version of the Melusine legend was written by La Coudrette in verse in the opening years of the 15th century. While stories of sea nymphs abound in all folklores, what remains constant in these stories is this nymph or a quasi-divine woman can change her form and is linked to a curse or a promise in some way or the other.

The figure of Melusine has become an important one across European folklore. The image of Melusine is visualized as a half-serpent, but if we look at the illustration in Image 1 (D'Arras, 11), she has an unmistakable likelihood to Andersen's mermaid in Image 2 (Pedersen, Web).

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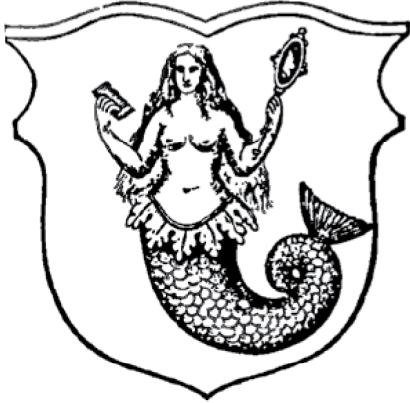


Image 1



Image 2

In “The Little Mermaid”, the metamorphosis happens for love. While in the tales like “Beauty and the Beast” and “The Frog Prince”, the transformations bring on happy unions, “The Little Mermaid” has a distinctly melancholic ending as the mermaid’s transformation becomes futile. Though she transforms for the prince, he fails to reciprocate her love as she is rendered mute to pay the price of her transformation. There is an unmistakable tragic strain running through both the precursors of this tale the stories- Melusine and Undine, but Anderson’s little mermaid at least has a redemptive ending, which lends the story its moralistic tone. As the mermaid has been true and virtuous, she gets a chance to gain an immortal soul despite failing in her mission of gaining the prince. Just like she was never a true part of the underwater world like the other mermaids, even in the human world, she failed to belong. She represents that two-ness of being and remains divided between the two realms that can never be one- the land and the sea, part fish part human.

A glimpse into the background of Anderson tells us that this failure might have a more personal meaning for him. Anderson apparently felt attracted towards both men and women and had developed very strong feelings towards his friend, Edvard Collin. But, Collin, with his heteronormative preferences, could never reciprocate his emotions. Their different preferences make them similar to the prince and the mermaid, who belonged to two different realms and could never unite. Though Anderson had his infatuations and relationships, he never married. Anderson’s heartbreaks flowed through his story and the little mermaid’s pain could be an expression of his own unreciprocated love and yearning.

The Modern Adaptations

The Little Mermaid as a tale has enraptured people for ages and it has spawned not only cinematic adaptations, but also numerous literary adaptations. It has been a rich source of inspiration for

stories based on love, sacrifice, and betrayal. Though the good deeds of the mermaid are acknowledged in the end, she never gets her prince. This becomes one of those very few fairy tales that do not end with a happy union or a “happily ever after”. The story of the little mermaid has been retold from various perspectives in the adaptations, from the well-known story of Oscar Wilde “The Fisherman and his Soul”, where a fisherman gives up his soul to unite with the mermaid he loves, to Katherine Vaz’s “What the Conch Shell Sings When the Body is Gone”- a tale of betrayal, extramarital affair and ultimate reconciliation against a modern backdrop. For my analysis, I have chosen two modern adaptations, “The Lady and the Merman”, by Jane Yolen, from her anthology *Dragonfield and Other Stories* and “The Sea Hag” by Melissa Lee Shaw from the anthology *Silver Birch, Blood Moon*, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. The idea of transformation presented in these two tales will form an interesting parallel with the older tales.

The Lady and the Merman

In this story by Jane Yolen, belonging to the same anthology, there is an inversion of the conventional roles as seen Andersen’s classic story. There is a gender reversal at play as we do not have a prince but a girl called Borne and a merman instead of a mermaid. Borne’s life on land is a miserable one as she carries the burden of loneliness due to her mother’s untimely death and her father’s coldness. Borne’s father is unsparing and never has a kind word for her, “He said at every meeting, “God must have wanted me cursed to give me such a child. No one will have her. She shall never be wed. She shall be with me forever.” So he called her Borne, for she was his burden” (Yolen, *Dragonfield*, 198). She would be hurt and the love that she bore her father was never reciprocated. Her father was a sailor and he was always reluctant to return home to his daughter, but she was always on the lookout for her father’s sail. This led to her solitary wanderings by the seashore and in one of them, she decides to rest for a while, “Finding a rock half in half out of the water, she climbed upon it to rest. She spread her skirts about her, and in the dusk they lay like great gray waves” (198). In a strange inversion, this description is reminiscent of the popular image of a mermaid sitting on a rock. Though a mortal, Borne at this point seems to be a part of the sea, almost a part of the waves, just like a mermaid. This foreshadows the yearning that she would soon feel for a merman.

Just like Andersen’s little mermaid who falls in love with the prince instantly, Borne falls in love with the merman at first sight, “She saw him and loved him, though she loved the fish half of him more” (199). We do not find the usual revulsion that the humans have for the fish’s tail, unlike in Andersen’s story, where the mermaid had to give it up. The merman responds to Borne’s desperate call and comes up to sit beside her all night, “And Borne loved the man of

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him as well as the fish, then, for in the silent night it was all one” (201). Here, there is no need for the merman to undergo a transformation to please his beloved, she loves his half-human self. But, he is a creature of the dark and the underwater, so, just as the sun was rising, he was compelled to dive back into the sea. This time, Borne was determined to follow him, “She cast but one glance at the shore and her father’s house beyond. Then she dived after the merman into the sea” (201). This is very similar to the point where Andersen’s little mermaid is poised at a crucial juncture of her life, between her familiar realm of water and the unfamiliar realm of land, ready to give up one for the other, “She saw that in her father’s palace the torches in the ballroom were extinguished, and all within asleep; but she did not venture to go in to them, for now she was dumb and going to leave them forever, she felt as if her heart would break” (Andersen, 364.) While Andersen’s mermaid rises above the water to meet her beloved, Yolen’s Borne decides to go underwater. With undertones of suicide, we understand that it will not be long before she would succumb to the waves. In the process, she undergoes a much-desired transformation, “She was beautiful for the first time. And for the last” (Yolen, *Dragonfield*, 201). Borne, just like Andersen’s mermaid, pays dearly with her own life, in a hope to get united with her beloved. The mermaid was loved and accepted by her own family, but she failed to belong to the world above water. Borne, on the other hand, failed to gain acceptance on land, within her own family and embraced the underwater, knowing that she was not equipped to belong there. This transformation does not come with the immense pain that Andersen’s mermaid undergoes, rather, it is a result of the lifelong pain that Borne has faced due to loneliness and insults.

The Sea Hag

This story by Melissa Lee Shaw is a feminist rewriting of “The Little Mermaid”, where she rewrites the character of the sea witch. The author writes this as a response to the black and white characters that frequent the didactic fairy tales- “She noticed a disturbing trend for positive female characters to be either adolescent heroines or bumbling grandmothers, with women in between usually portrayed as villains. “The Sea Hag” is meant to counteract that type of stereotyping” (Windling & Datlow, *Silver Birch, Blood Moon*, 112). In Andersen’s tale and the Disney adaptation, the sea witch is portrayed as a vile, cunning woman who takes advantage of the naïve emotions of the little mermaid and makes her pay heavily for her transformation. Shaw, in her turn, humanizes the figure of the sea witch, showcasing her not as a sinner but someone who has been sinned against. This is reminiscent of Jean Rhys’ rewriting of the character of Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* in her novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Bertha is labelled as the madwoman in the attic, but Rhys humanizes her and shows us her side of the

story for the first time and how the loveless marriage drives her mad. Women have often been repressed and derogated by the terms like “witch”, “hag” and associated with madness and hysteria to account for their lack of rationality. Shaw, just like Rhys, tells the story of a woman who is not an actual witch, but is simply depicted as one.

The Sea Witch at the centre of Shaw’s story is actually a caring mother who is tricked by her lover. He was a fisherman, who made false promises of love to gain power over her and the underwater world. The Sea Witch, known by the name Spirit of the Sea at that point of time, could command the underwater realm and was equipped with magic. She could either assume the shape of a fish or a woman, and is not seen as a mixture of both. She knew nothing of trickery and trusted the fisherman. So, when the fisherman wanted to transform into an aquatic creature like herself to be with her, she could not refuse him, “She made him a powerful potion of transformation, to give him the gills and tail of a fish” (125). Here again, in a strange inversion, it is the man who transforms. Ironically, it is not for true love like Andersen’s mermaid, but for his selfish interests. But, the now transformed fisherman had no wishes to stay on with the Spirit of the Sea and after learning all the magic from her and persuading her to give birth to six mermaid daughters, imprisons her in a wrecked ship. This betrayal and bewitchment by the fisherman bring about a transformation in the Spirit of the Sea, “Her body contorted and shrivelled, and her hair turned gray and ragged” (126). This is the point where she physically transforms into the “hag” that she will be labelled as by the fisherman, who has now assumed the position of the Sea King. It is only after her mermaid daughters discover her truth and accept her as their mother, the spell is broken and she transforms to her previous beautiful self, “My heart swelled to hear them, and then I realized my body swelled too, filling out its wrinkles with smooth skin, straightening my spine. The ropes of my hair transformed to soft shining locks green as moss” (128).

These are not the only transformations that happen in this story. The Witch’s actual identity is revealed against the backdrop of one of her mermaid daughters asking her for a pair of legs to unite with the prince she loved. This daughter, named Coral, mirrors the little mermaid of Andersen in her yearning. Her fate, however, might be a different one as the ending is open but hopeful with the prince coming to meet her. The Spirit of the Sea had tried to dissuade her to transform, because she herself has been a sufferer in the hands of love. In the end, she plays the role of a fairy godmother and that of a doting mother, to make Coral equipped with a steady pair of legs to meet the prince. In the process, she even sacrifices the power of her own legs for her daughter, as she points out, “Every transformation requires a little death” (134). This is interesting as it problematizes the idea of transformation; however, promising it may seem, it always demands a heavy sacrifice. In the story, transformation has a crippling effect

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as first Coral and then her mother loses the power of their feet. Earlier, the transformation into a hag had also crippled the Spirit of the Sea as she was trapped and powerless. Coral, though initially rendered as naïve and powerless as Andersen’s little mermaid, later finds assurance and support in her mother, who is ready to transform her back if the prince betrays her.

Just like Prospero, who takes over Caliban and usurps his realm in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, The Sea King holds the Spirit of the Sea captive and usurps her underwater realm. With strong postcolonial undertones, this story ultimately becomes a feminist fable as the Spirit of the Sea breaks through the shackles with the help of her daughters. She, in turn, liberates Coral, forming an example of selfless motherhood.

The Frog Prince and his Transformation

Moving on to the story of “The Frog Prince”, the story is about a frog living in a well who returns the princess’ ball on the condition that she will make him her companion, letting him eat and sleep with her. She promises all that in the spur of the moment, but runs off once she gets her plaything back. At night, during dinner, the frog appears, demanding to be let into the castle. The king, wanting to teach her daughter some values, insists on her keeping her promise. Though the Grimms meant this to be a children’s story teaching them lessons on acceptance and keeping promises, this contains certain lessons and criticisms for the adult world too. In “The Frog King”, the protagonist is usually a spoilt princess, who, by accepting the frog as her companion, is being taught a lesson on keeping her promise. But, she also learns not to judge based on external appearance. In the optimistic world of fairy tales, ugliness is simply a curse waiting to be broken. There are sexual undertones, as the frog insists on sleeping on the same bed. The adaptations that stemmed from this story have often focused on this sexuality or the life after their marriage, of which the original fairy tale simply tells us vaguely, “...they lived happily a great many years” (Grimm, 65, Web). “The Frog Prince” is an old story, a Latin version of which is said to have existed as early as 13th century in Germany.

“The Queen Who Sought a Drink from a Certain Well” is one of the oldest precursors to “The Frog Prince” story which can be traced back to 1548, according to J. F. Campbell of Scotland, who documented a Gaelic version of the tale. This story was told to him by his friend, Mrs. MacTavish. It appears in print only in 1862 in the *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*. To mention a few other versions of the story, we have “The Maiden and the Frog” that appeared in England, collected by James Orchard Halliwell-Phillips in his *Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales* (1849). We also have a German version of the fairy tale title “The Enchanted Frog”, collected in *Fairy Tales and Legends from Hanover* (1854), by Theodor Colshorn, together with his brother, Carl Colshorn. This version of the story is an apparent mixture of the Frog

Prince story with the story of “Beauty and the Beast”. This reminds us how oral narratives can often overlap and even go hand in hand. The beginning of the story is quite similar to “The Beauty and the Beast” narrative where a merchant was held captive by a large frog, who would not let him go till he promised to give his younger daughter in marriage to the frog. In seven days’ time, the frog arrived to carry away the grieving maiden to his house. The same night he touched the girl’s heart with his sweet songs and she took him to bed with her. The next morning, the girl woke up to find that the ugly frog had transformed into a handsome prince. This story might be the beginning of those tales where the girl gets over her repulsion for the frog and looks beyond his physical appearance. In the earlier versions, the transformation had either been gradual or brought about through a violent act like chopping off the frog’s head or dashing it against the wall. But the kiss that is a popular part of this tale, is still nowhere to be seen. Addressing this interesting point, Heidi Anne Heiner says,

The famous kiss is a relatively modern tale, its exact origin unknown. Many scholars believe it to be an Anglo-American addition derived from Edgar Taylor’s translation...Its first introduction remains shrouded in mystery for now, but it’s almost certainly fairly recent. Somehow it was introduced into the tale and now it is arguably the most important, at least most recognized, element of the tale (Heiner, Web).

In a fairy tale, it is more acceptable that a happy ending is brought about by a kiss rather than a violent act. In the tale of “Sleeping Beauty”, it can be noticed that there too, the kiss was added to bring in the concept of romance that has become synonymous with fairy tales in the modern times. Heiner also talks about how the inclusion of the kiss has subtly changed the ulterior motive of the old tale, which was initially about the importance of keeping one’s promise. Now, it has become a commentary on modern romance and the necessity to look beyond the standards of the beauty which is just skin-deep (a point which is highlighted even in “Beauty and the Beast”). It also gives a certain agency to the girl who is not passively waiting for a prince to save her; she takes matters into her own hands and discovers the hidden prince herself.

The Modern Adaptations

With changing times, as “The Frog Prince” story has come to symbolize different things, the modern storytellers have also found a vast scope of spinning several retellings of the old tale. While some look at the tale from the viewpoint of the frog, others give us a glimpse of the events that unfolded post marriage. Is the girl really a saviour? Is the transformation desirable at all? Is it really a “happily ever after”? Since the conventional fairy tales end with this vague ending and/or a marriage, we do not get a glimpse of what lies beyond. Most of the modern adaptations give us a glimpse at the “transformed” life of the man/prince, take us through the

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psychological mess that they have become and question whether the transformation was at all a good idea. The psychological state of the transformed frog seems to fascinate most of the modern writers and Susan Mitchell in her poem “From the Journals of the Frog Prince”, suggests that the transformation might have been a temporary one. The poem is written in the format of a confessional journal entry where the frog is clearly uneasy in his new skin and in his marriage :

[...]

Night after night I lie beside her.

“Why is your forehead so cool and damp?” she asks.

Her breasts are soft and dry as flour.

The hand that brushes my head is feverish.

At her touch I long for wet leaves,

the slap of water against rocks.

“What were you thinking of?” she asks.

How can I tell her

I am thinking of the green skin

[...]

“What are you thinking of?” she whispers.

I am staring into the garden.

I am watching the moon

wind its trail of golden slime around the oak,

over the stone basin of the fountain.

How can I tell her

I am thinking that transformations are not forever? (Mitchell, 38).

In a cartoon (Image 3) from the magazine *Better Homes and Gardens* (February, 1979 issue), a frog about to be kissed by a young princess, looks up and says, “But I don’t want to be turned into a prince. I want you to accept me for what I am” (*Better Homes & Gardens*, 200). In another cartoon (Image 4) from the *Ladies’ Home Journal* (November, 1974 issue), a very jaded and irritated king and queen sit in their thrones next to one another, as the king turns to her and says, “If you must know, yes! I was happier when I was a frog!” (*Ladies’ Home Journal*, 204).

The Man Next Door.

Although I can't see where, Chris claims that she put on a few unwanted pounds because of all the holiday feasting. Looking at her profile in a full-length mirror, she sighed. "You know, you really lose something when you gain something."

Judy complains that you can always tell when Burt, Jr., has been in the bathroom because there's water all over the place. Bud defends himself by saying that he goes in there to wash, not to get dry-cleaned.

Dot Dresh calls herself a rare and endangered species. Rare because she's the only person around who hasn't had a garage sale; endangered because if she doesn't have one, she'll be suffocated by her possessions.

According to Isabel Norman, her recent stint as a public opinion pollster was interesting but she found it awful



"You've got more coupons than money in your purse," I remarked to Christine the other day. "Well," she explained, "Look at it this way; a handful of those coupons equals the

The McKeens are so new to the neighborhood that I hadn't even met them when their name caught my eye in the paper. It seems Vicky McKeen, 13, had been hospitalized with multiple injuries after a Friday night freeway accident. I related the story over a quick Saturday lunch.

"Must be especially hard," Chris observed, "having something like that happen when they've just moved in and they don't know anybody."

"Is that cake for lunch, Mom?" Burt, Jr., had spotted the newly baked cake cooling on the counter.

"That cake is not to be touched," Chris announced firmly. "It's for bridge club tonight."

I checked the time. "I've got to go or I'll be late for an appointment."

Chris got up from the table. "And I've got to get some shopping done."

"Got to go, too . . . basketball game," Bud said as he gulped the last bite of his lunch.

Image 3

"You couldn't do it," Brian said. "You don't believe in any of it. You don't believe in anything. I don't want my children to have a mother who had to be forced to quit pills in four different colors at the point of divorce. If I come back, I'll be nothing but a mercenary, so let's quit fooling around."

"If you hang up," Connie said, "I will kill myself."

"Oh, God," Brian said violently.

"If you force me to a divorce, what would I have to live for? I tell you, I will. You'd better believe me, Brian."

Brian's voice changed. "People who talk about it never do it!" he said contemptuously. "I don't like threats."

"Neither do I," Connie said, "like you threatening me with a divorce."

"Half your crowd are already on their second marriages," Brian said. "Maybe you can find a man who plays bridge, and I can find a girl who loves gardens."

"Listen," said Connie, "I've got a whole bottle of—"

"Well, be my guest," Brian said, and

am alive, alive!
Aloud she said: "Oh, God, he was right. I didn't take enough."
Then a voice said: "Oh, yes, you did."

ing with it.
"Yes," she said, "I know. I have courage, so I must know."
And off she went to Oregon.

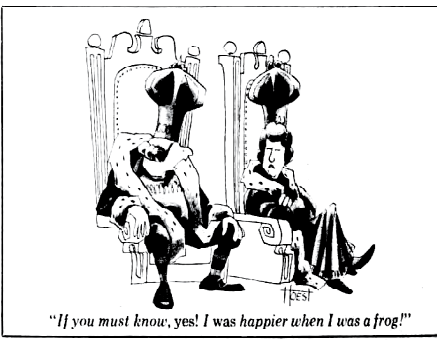


Image 4

To elaborate upon how the new adaptations deal with this idea of transformation, I would like to focus on two stories- "Kiss Kiss" by Tanith Lee taken from the anthology *Silver Birch*, *Blood Moon* and "The Frog King, or Iron Henry" by Daniel Quinn from the anthology *Black Thorn*, *White Rose*. With fresh perspectives, these new retellings challenge and add to the fairy tale in significant ways.

Kiss Kiss

This story by Tanith Lee, published in the collection *Silver Birch*, *Blood Moon* gives a realistic twist to the fairy tale. It tells us the story of "The Frog Prince", but the narrative continues even after the royal marriage. The protagonist is a princess but her family's financial state is on the decline when the frog arrives. Even then, her father got her a golden ball for her eleventh birthday, setting the events in motion. The narrative remains the same as she drops the ball into

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the lake and meets the frog who rescues it for her. In fairy tales, the idea of exchange is very popular and magic usually comes at a price. So, as the princess asks him, “What do you want?”, his reply comes easily, “To be yours” (Windling & Datlow, *Silver Birch, Blood Moon*, 18). She does not really understand the magnitude of this as she promises so, “And because it hadn’t said to me, I must have your virtue, or, I must have your firstborn child, as in the stories they do, I was just relieved to say, “All right. You can be mine. Please fetch it for me!”” (19)

After this, the frog starts following her everywhere and though initially everyone is repulsed by him, they kept him for good luck. Slowly, the frog, through his pleasant manners and his lucky charm endears himself to everyone at the palace, especially the princess, acquiring the nickname of Froggy. He becomes her dear friend and companion and was always there to make her laugh, sing to her or give her a massage when she had cramps. This relationship between the girl and the frog is described so well that slowly, one starts forgetting that the sweet, humble creature is actually a slimy, green frog. The problem arises when the princess turns fifteen and it is time for her to get married. The astute girl immediately understands that her life after marriage was about to change drastically as she listens to her mother’s advice, “Never, ever say no. God said women must be obedient. Do whatever your lord wants...Recollect always, he’s your superior. You owe everything to him” (29). The internalized patriarchy is made evident when the princess’ mother is hit by her husband and wears her bruises proudly as a batch to prove that her husband gave her attentions. The princess is expected to meet with the same fate as her parents choose a suitor for her.

The most fascinating aspect of this story is how Tanith Lee has exploited the symbol of the “kiss” and has turned it upside down. As the chosen suitor kisses the princess, she is quite repulsed by him. But, as she becomes quite upset at the prospect of losing Froggy after her marriage, she spontaneously kisses the frog, “I never in my life did anything more easily. I lifted him up and kissed him” (31). The kiss in this version is given out of love that is built over a period of time. It was not possible for the princess to feel that love for her suitor instantly. Naturally, as the frog transforms into a handsome prince, their marriage was imminent.

What happens after this marriage is however, the crux of the story. We find out that physical transformation is not the only change that happened. The prince slowly starts exhibiting the characteristics of a man in a patriarchal world. As a frog he was a loyal companion of the princess, but now, “He smells of health and meat and wine, sweat, lust, sometimes of other women” (32). The frog had taught the princess how to be kind, but this trait in him also seems to change after his transformation. The girl recounts how he hit her for disobeying him, mirroring the attitude of her own father towards her mother. The change of the frog into a man is instant but the change in his nature is gradual. As the girl herself changes from a slender, carefree girl with a mind of her own into a subservient woman just like her mother, she wonders, “I don’t know why he changed so much, changed spiritual shape as pregnancy and birth physically have altered me” (32). It seems that the girl has broken the curse of the prince, but has brought one upon herself, “I lost him forever to that hateful betrayal of a kiss” (33). In this story, the transformation is regretted rather than celebrated, as we get a glimpse of the repercussions

afterwards. It is a story about the impossibility of a happy ending in a patriarchal world where the princesses are also treated just like any other women.

The Frog King, or Iron Henry

In this story by Daniel Quinn, from the anthology *Black Thorn, White Rose*, we look at a prince who has transformed, but is now suffering from amnesia as a result of hitting his head against the wall when the princess threw him. His faithful servant Henry tries in vain to remind him of the past events and the original story is narrated through their conversation. The story is narrated in a loop that signifies the confused mind of the prince turned king as he tries to grapple with the details of his traumatic transformation. There are sudden moments of clarity and Henry starts to hope that the king will remember everything, but those moments are quickly lost as he starts forgetting the details that he recounted himself, “What is to be remembered, I suppose I remember; everything else dissolves and vanishes: breath on an icy mirror” (Windling & Datlow, *Black Thorn, White Rose*, Kindle Location 1138). These lines begin and end the story, signifying the endless cycle of remembrance and oblivion.

In this story as well, we get a glimpse into what happens afterwards in the prince’s life. We understand that the prince is now a married king, but his loss of memory is not letting him lead a normal life. Even as Henry points out that it will soon be dawn and the queen will be signing in her bed, but the king does not seem to remember her. He simply remembers a little girl with a ball, but he does not recall her becoming his queen. Both of them seem to be trapped in an unhappy marriage as the king’s nightly episodes seem to be quite frequent and the queen seems to be suffering the pangs of loneliness. We are looking at a transformation that yields an unforeseen result and does not bring any happiness to either the prince or the girl. While the story of the Frog King is about the breaking of a curse, this story questions whether curses can truly be broken, “It’s like an enchantment, Iron Henry: another enchantment, hidden beneath the first. I can’t find the end to it” (Kindle Location 1150). Iron Henry lets out exasperated sighs as the king’s condition does not improve and he keeps on questioning Henry in a desperate urge to remember. Henry did not leave the king even when he had been transformed into a frog. But this second transformation seems to be too overwhelming even for him. Despite being an epitome of loyalty, he seems to lose his patience and desert the king in the end. The king is left alone in the dark, with a fractured memory. The end of enchantment that was supposed to bring joy, brings nothing but hopelessness and despair.

Several modern adaptations change the framework of “once upon a time” to change the temporality of the narrative to talk about contemporary issues or about particular events in history. These adaptations show us the relevance of the popular fairy tales, but at the same time, acknowledge its need to keep pace with the changing times. The concept of “happily ever after” is also often challenged through these adaptations, as in the story “Kiss Kiss”. Here, we get a glimpse of the princess’ life after her marriage to the transformed prince and we do not find the anticipated happiness. These adaptations show that we probably believe in “happily ever after” only because we have no idea what comes after. Through these adaptations, “happily

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ever after” becomes a utopian concept, which is not achievable by simply a transformation. Transformation is not seen as a solution, rather, it creates further complications. In the story of “The Lady and the Merman”, we have seen transformation connected to sacrifice and death, while in “The Frog King, or Iron Henry”, it is connected to a painful, amnesiac existence. The adaptations also try to transform certain perspectives and characters, like the figure of the sea hag in Melissa Lee Shaw’s story. If we consider these adaptations as a form of translation, according to Walter Benjamin’s claim in the essay, “The Task of the Translator”, these constitute the afterlife of the original narrative. Julie Sanders firmly states the importance of the category of adaptation, “...as readers and critics, we also need to recognize that adaptation and appropriation are fundamental to the practice, and, indeed, to the enjoyment of literature” (Sanders, 2).

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Born and brought up in Kolkata. After completing her schooling, she went on to do her graduation in English Honours from St. Stephen’s College, Delhi. She pursued her M.A. in English from and M.Phil degree from JNU. She has worked as a teacher in Pathways World School, Aakash Institute and Heritage Institute of Technology. She has submitted her Doctoral thesis recently at JNU and is currently working at The Heritage College as the Head of the Department of English. She has worked extensively on fairy tales and her area of interests include Children’s Literature, Fairy Tales and Adaptation Studies.