

THE FAIRY TALE AS ONE OF THE MANIFESTATIONS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Political fiction has a long history, dating back as far as Aristophanes and Plato. It was concerned with themes such as criticism of the contemporary ruling power, their policies, injustice and social problems. Political fiction has been used by authors such as Jonathan Swift, Thomas More, George Orwell and many others.

Fairy tales, at first glance intended for children, convey a wide range of implications including social and political issues. For example, the Brothers Grimm are said to have played a great role in forming the German national identity. Fighting against the French occupation, the authors believed that spreading national consciousness through their fairy tales would encourage children, and not only to strengthen the cultural identity. However, The Brothers Grimms' national propaganda later led to extremes and turned into popularising the Nazi. Nevertheless, at the same time, it proved that fairy tales are quite capable of spreading prejudice among a persuadable audience. George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, a fairy story, is an outstanding allegorical novel against the Soviet Union and Stalinism, whereas some of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales can be considered to be some of the best political tales of his time.

This paper studies the political fiction and its implications of the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen and George Orwell as well as Georgian and American modern writers' political discourse manifested in tales. Based on comparative and qualitative methodology of research, the tales are divided into expressly, subversively or accidentally political tales and discussed from the standpoint of hidden or obvious political messages, their historical background and importance. In addition, it discusses the reasons behind the increasing popularity of political fairy tales in the 21st century. Indeed, the study generates a clear image that the authors use the fairy tales to explore the socio-political state of their country and express their opinions. They have found a perfect way to get their ideas across and reshape the most important part of society - the future generation.

Keywords: politics, politically incorrect, sociolinguistics, fairy tale.

1. INTRODUCTION

Being one of the integral parts of our everyday lives, politics has always been used as one of the overarching themes in their works by skilled writers. Moreover, the history of political fiction dates as far back as Aristophanes and Plato, where the authors used social science fiction to openly and directly criticise existing problems in society. Moreover, Plato's *Republic* (380 BC) is still considered to be one of the most influential political works in history. Since then, political fiction, employing satire and criticism, sometimes irony too, has been the predominant topic with such prominent authors as Thomas More, Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens, George Orwell and many more.

Being a mixture of fiction and realism, political fiction, also known as a social novel, helps the authors to discuss the most problematic contemporary issues that trouble society, including violence against women, men and children, child labor and political injustice, in such an indiscreet manner that it relates to the reader and still leaves space for the wonder and imagination. For instance, due to the historic problems associated with Russia, Georgian Realism, together with Ilia Chavchavadze, Nikoloz Baratashvili, Akaki Tsereteli and others, sheds light on the social problems Georgian people were facing and used their work in order to “wake up” the nation.

To explore the role of fairy tales in this context also seems to be interesting. Although, at first glance intended for children, fairy, or folk tales convey a wide range of implications including the social and political issues and encourage not only children, but also adults to look at the problems from different angles.

This paper aims to discuss the political fiction in fairy tales, more precisely, the problematic issues brought up in the tales of the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen and George Orwell. As well as this, the paper examines political implications of several modern tales. In addition, the reasons behind the increasing popularity of political fairy tales in the 21st century are identified.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The history of a fairy tale is especially difficult to trace back, as it has been an inseparable part of the oral tradition and folklore well before written literature was developed. Moreover, based on the research done by the BBC (Fairy tale origins thousands of years old, 2016), fairy tales could be thousands of years old, for instance, “Beauty and the Beast” dates back 4,000 years. Sara Graca Da Silva suggests that fairy tales survived the period when there was no writing and some of the stories that have come down to us were probably told in extinct languages, one of them, as pointed out by the author, being Proto-Indo-European (2016).

What is a fairy tale? While for some it is linked with folklore and myth, others believe them to be the tales told to children. Filled with magical creatures like fairies, mermaids, giants, goblins, dwarfs, etc., tales have much more to offer than only amusement and entertainment.

In her guide book about the fairy tales, Marina Warner describes them as part of oral tradition and folklore, but also attributes their roots to literary retellings. Warner believes that the term that best describes the nature of fairy tales is the German “Wunermärchen”, which means a “wonder tale”. Warner studies the nature of European tales and children’s literature in depth, analyzes them from psychoanalytical and feminists’ standpoints and argues that the tales have the capacity to reveal the truth about human nature (Warner, 1995).

Despite the fact that quite a few psychologists, including Jung and Freud, misinterpreted the importance of fairy tales and made it rather a “quest for universal archetypes”, according to Zipes, the fairy tales are extremely relevant in forming the culture of the country and providing readers/listeners with hope that their political or social conditions can be altered for better. Moreover, magical elements, miracles and happy endings made people believe that the world could be a better place to live (Zipes, 2007).

Next to romance, heroism and chivalry, politics is one of the subtle and important themes of fairy tales. Mari Ness classifies political tales into three main categories (Ness, 2018):

- 1) Expressly political – a tale’s purpose is political.
- 2) Subversively political authors criticise the political situation using fairy tales and their structures and motifs.
- 3) Accidentally political - although not written with a political agenda, the tale ended up being political.

Due to society’s active concern regarding politics and being politically correct, fairy tales also acquired a new twist. Since active feminist movements, nowadays one can come across old fairy tales rewritten in such ways that they “suit” the modern views regarding gender, sexual abuse, family abuse, etc. In this case, *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories: Modern Tales for Our Life and Times* by James Garner (Garner, 1994) are considered to be one of the most popular collections that depict well-known characters like Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Goldilocks or Snow White from a politically correct and censored point of view.

Kingdoms and royals frequently occur as part of the main plot of fairy tales. However, in most of the cases they are portrayed positively and the “happy ending” usually means finding and falling in love with your Prince Charming or saving the damsel in distress and then marrying her, thus marrying into royalty. In fact, in most of cases, the ruling of the kingdom or difficulties with enemies are rarely the topic of discussion. Although the authors of the tales can present the stories in such a way that they line up with their views regard-

ing the politics, they should keep in mind that the main charm of the tales are fantasy and magic and that tales should only deliver simplistic but morally powerful messages (Raphael, 2016).

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The data of this sociolinguistic study is based on tales by George Orwell (*Animal Farm*), Hans Christian Andersen (*The Emperor's New Clothes*, *The Swineherd*) and the Brothers Grimm (*Red Riding Hood*, *Puss in Boots*). Based on comparative and qualitative methodology of research, the tales are divided into expressly, subversively or accidentally political tales and discussed from the standpoint of hidden or obvious political messages, their historical background and importance. Finally, modern popular tales will be presented and compared to the tales by George Orwell, Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm, as well as to the new adaptations of the old tales in the 21st century. The possible reasons behind the changes will be revealed.

3.1. George Orwell

In his essay "*Why I Write*" (1946), George Orwell guides us through his journey of becoming a writer and, in the first place, discusses the reasons why he writes. According to him, besides sheer egoism and aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purposes are the two most important impulses that the writers are led by while writing. Furthermore, according to him the reasons for this is "a desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of prosperity" (p. 3). In addition, the author argues that he uses the word *political* in the "widest possible sense". Even more, George Orwell suggests that there is no such thing as a book without a political bias and the attitude of a book being apolitical, is political in itself. In his masterpiece, *Animal Farm*, the author claims that he "tried his best" to fuse political and artistic purposes. Indeed, *Animal Farm* is considered to be one of the greatest political tales/novels of all time.

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is expressly political in nature, thus entirely dedicated to the theme of politics and is built around such problematic issues like political power, hopes for a better future and revolution (Carr, 2010). Interestingly, the first edition of the book was called a *fairy story*, however, publishers later dropped the full title. Nowadays, it is mostly known as a novella, or an Aesopian style fable. The tale describes events taking place on an English farm. In between the lines, readers can see the anti-Soviet novella, following the events of the Russian Revolution. On the farm, the rebellion is sparked by Old Major (symbolizing Vladimir Lenin and Karl Marx - the creators of the philosophy of the Russian Revolution), who describes the insufferable conditions of the farm and asks the animals to make a change. According to Meyers (1978) the skull of Old Major, put out as the symbol of the rebellion, evokes the image of the mausoleum of Lenin. After the death of Old Major, Napoleon and Snowball, two charismatic pigs on the farm, take over the revolution (Napoleon and Snowball represent Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky respectively) and get rid of Mr. Jones, a drunken farmer, who represents Tsar Nikolai II. Snowball is later banished from the farm too, as his views no longer coincide with those of the animals, in this very case, Napoleon's. The animal farm has seven commandments, principals of Animalism (Communism), that should ensure the smooth and peaceful ruling of the farm. However, together with power, Napoleon revises them in order to suit his and the ruling party's desires, for instance, the 6th commandment "No animal shall kill any other animal" is later changed into "No animal shall kill any other animal without cause" after they sentence one of the animals to death. The main goal of the revolution was to keep people from the farm and let the animals live free and painless lives, however, with the help of the revised commandments, we can observe perfectly how the ruling party and their promises change over time.

With the help of his mastery, Orwell perfectly employs psychology and the way people and their minds operate when it comes to revolutions and politics. This implies a universal problem, that despite the initial purpose of the political party, when in power, the result is always the same - tyranny. Phrases like "windmill or no windmill life will go on as it has always gone on, that is badly", "All Animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others", "The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which" can be seen as the main themes of the tale and generally the theme that the politics revolve around that put the people in the position of desperation after every other hopeful revolution (Kumar, 2014).

In addition, *Animal Farm* is not only an allegory of the Russian Revolution, but it was once again revived to describe the modern politics in the USA. Obama was quite often associated with the *Animal Farm* and Napoleon with his policy of Obamacare, hence the false promise of health care (Senn, 2015; Bloch, 2012) and nowadays Trump's excessive sexist and politically incorrect points of view have already started to trigger the same reaction. For instance, privileges for the ruling people or blaming all the problems on the previous leader, the way Napoleon always blamed Snowball for the misfortunes and bad decisions.

3.2. The Brothers Grimm

The 19th century proved to be the most productive for fairy tales as the folklorists Brothers Grimm decided to collect and publish a collection of Germanic tales. They believed that those stories perfectly mirrored the German culture and religion and, as patriots, the brothers saw it as their duty to spread them among their readers (Tatar, 2004). Furthermore, when Brothers Grimm started to gather or write the fairy tales they were not intended for children, even more, due to their influential nature, the Third Reich used these tales to promote their propaganda, because of which later they were banned. The Brothers Grimm tried to follow the exact plots of the collected stories, however, they also edited them in order to adjust them to the target audience. More precisely, when they started to modify the tales for children, they included didactic, philosophical and moralistic themes, as well as religious motifs, however, they omitted sexual and unethical elements (Murphy, 2000).

Dubbed as the “conscience of his generation”, Günther Grass studied Germany’s shameful past of the Third Reich based on the Grimms’ fairy tales which masked with magic, promotes murder, incest and cannibalism. Based on his findings, Grass created his own tale depicting the stripped truth (Straughan, 2017). While the Nazis tried to occupy every part of the German life, culture and religion, they perpetrated the tales with their anti-Semitic, anti-people propaganda reaching out to the whole nation (Riley, 2011). Being extremely skilled at twisting everything to suit their agenda, the Nazis and Hitler managed to turn such political moral stories as “*Little Red Riding Hood*” and “*Puss in Boots*” into the tools of promoting their political views, thus making them “accidentally political”.

Little Red Riding Hood, who in the original tale is a resourceful, wandering rather than a simple naïve girl (Tatar, 2002), in the Nazi film is a child wearing a cloak with a swastika (Hall, 2010). The antagonist of the story, the wolf which Brothers Grimm introduced in order to warn children about the threats of forests and the dangers of not following parents’ instructions, was turned into a Jewish wolf, who eats German girls. The wolf, unsurprisingly, is killed by a German soldier. The main anti-Semitic theme is also evident in “*Puss in Boots*”, where the Puss, after defeating the Jews, is cheered as “Heil Puss in Boots! He is our saviour! We will live again!”. According to Goebbels, the main brain behind turning the fairy tales into promoting Nazi ideals, children would be able to decode the message much better and quicker than their parents (Hall, 2010).

3.3. Hans Christian Andersen

Hans Christian Andersen is considered to be one of the most popular authors of fairy tales. Even though in his work “*The True Story of My Life*” (1847), Andersen noted that he had nothing in common with politics, knew nothing about it and he had embarked on the journey of writing for other purposes, some of his fairy tales have been seen as perfect illustrations of political and social satires, two of the most prominent being “*The Swineherd*” and “*The Emperor’s New Clothes*”: themes of which could easily be applied to the 21st century society. Being subversively political in nature, the tales describe unwitty royals and the consequences their actions bring. Even though the author does not directly criticise this or that emperor or the ruler of the country, Andersen indirectly mocks the vanity of people, especially when that person is influential. More precisely, when politicians including kings, presidents or prime ministers are encircled by vain and proud people, who are not willing to state the truth, it can lead to fatal mistakes. As well as this, a crowd is a dangerous force, however, if they do not wish to state the truth either and are willing to let the politicians trick them, they become a shameful part of the society. Moreover, if we look at the characters in both tales, we could easily draw parallels to the modern world, even though, sometimes people do not wish to face reality. After writing these two tales, where the author directly makes fun of the emperor, Andersen received gifts from the king. According to Alison Prince, this was the king’s attempt to stop Andersen from becoming too keen on political satire. Indeed, after “*The Swineherd*”, H.C. Andersen didn’t write anything in the genre (Prince, 1998).

3.4. Modern Fairy Tales

The way of writing changes over the course of time in order to fit the necessities of contemporary society. Fairy tales also keep up with the changes and development as modern little girls rarely dream about getting married into a royal family or being saved by a charming prince, they now yearn for adventure and thrills and no longer wish to sit back and wait. Exactly for this reason, modern cartoons and fairy tales show girls, who go on an adventure and, if necessary, save their counterparts (*Moana, Brave, Frozen, Tangled*, etc.).

Apart from criticising the ruling party, political discourse also includes a politically correct approach towards often debatable topics like feminism, woman rights, LGBT community, religious freedom, etc. While the tales presented above did not discuss these topics, partly because either they were not topical in that period or

they were considered to be taboo, due to recent interests they saturate every story, film, or fairy tale. To illustrate this, in order to fully implement the equality among women and men, Georgian story writers decided to start instructing the children from an early age and compiled a book of fairy/folk tales about strong women in Georgia and their brave deeds in the book "*There Once Was a Girl*" (2018), emphasising the prevalent importance of a strong character over gender. For instance, the story of Sandra and Sandro, where Sandra, the girl, saves Sandro from the bullies, or a tale of a princess Martha - Mariam, who, even though she is criticised for riding a horse and being a great archer, still keeps following her instincts and her bravery saves her country. In addition, some of the tales proved to be overtly political. For instance, the story about Queen Tamar mentions the Kajis, which, according to the author, appear to symbolize the modern Parliament of Georgia. The author compares the politicians to the Kajis - the Georgian fictional goblin-like characters of "The Knight in the Panther's Skin", who are characterised by the primitive thinking and uncivilized actions.

Politically Correct Bedtime Stories: Modern Tales for Our Life and Times by James Garner (1994) also revisits classic fairy tales and presents them mockingly in such a manner that they "suit" the modern world. For instance, Little Red Riding Hood is a young "womyn", a feminist, who believes the wolf is sexist, after he warns her that the forest is not a place a young girl should wander in. When she learns that the wolf has already eaten her grandma and he grabs her to devour her too, she is only appalled because of the fact the wolf invades her private space, not because of the fact that he is trying to eat her because that is what every respectable carnivorous animal should do. Little Red Riding Hood also considers "woodchopper-person", who rushes to help her to be sexist and speciesist, daring to assume that "womyn and wolves cannot solve their problems without a man's help" (p. 9). As a plot twist, grandma, wolf and Red Riding Hood kill the woodchopper-person and create a place that is built on mutual respect. In "The Emperor's New Clothes" the realm is "politically correct, morally righteous, intellectually astute, culturally tolerant, and the people don't smoke, drink, laugh at sexist jokes, watch too much television, listen to country music, or barbecue". Interestingly, while the emperor's greed for clothes and vanity remain the same, his nakedness is seen as the promotion of "clothing-optional lifestyle". Apart from presenting "a good moral tale", throughout the stories we can observe the words that are termed as politically correct, for instance, woodchopper-person, or a log fuel technician, optically challenged, wisdom-challenged, etc. Even more, the word woman is changed into a "womyn" and "wommon", in order to avoid any connection with a "man". Even though, in the introduction to the book, the author suggests that the politically correct tales will leave an "inedible mark on our children", the satirized, humorous collection of tales indeed makes one think that not everything can be censored and fitted into the "moral" of the 21st century.

Due to the recent well-grounded interest in Trump and his party, the fairy tale about a bunny called Marlon Bundo, named after the bunny belonging to Mike Pence, also known as the Bunny of the United States (BOTUS), has become increasingly popular. "A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo" (Twiss, 2018) is an expressly political tale, written for Sunday's *Last Week Tonight* and The Trevor Project. The fairy tale describes a day of a gay rabbit, who falls in love with another male bunny. Apart from teaching what is politically correct, the tale denigrates the current Vice President of the USA, Mike Pence, who, according to John Oliver (the host of Sunday's *Last Week Tonight*) is ethically compromised and against the LGBT community. In the tale, Mike Pence is portrayed as a stinky bug. The Vice President is easy to recognise due to his distinct hair style in the cartoon and political point of view. For instance, he forbids Marlon Bundo to marry another male bunny, however, Marlon does not give up and with the help of his friends, he indeed achieves success. In the end, the story states that there is no problem in being different, stinky bugs are temporary, whereas love is forever.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As revealed by the study of the fairy tales discussed above, political discourse, be it a criticism of the ruling power, depicting problems concerning society, gender and social equality, gay rights, seem to be quite evident in fairy tales. Because of the fact that fairy tales attract both adults and children and, despite their innocence, children have better abilities to understand the hidden messages, they are used to carry out the political propaganda and to influence children's way of thinking.

As classified by Ness (2018), the above-mentioned fairy tales that have been randomly picked indeed follow the pattern of being either expressly, subversively or accidentally political in nature. Surprisingly, as a pattern, the same authors used one and the same types of political tales, for instance Andersen opted for subversively political tales, whereas the Brothers Grimm did not employ topics directly connected with political discourse. However, because of the existent social circumstances of the later period (WWII and the Third Reich), their tales were turned into political tales and were used to manipulate people. As for George Orwell, as it has already been mentioned above, he saw the function of his writing as the fusion of art and politics in order to convey his ideas regarding the problematic issues in society.

In the specific political tales discussed above, both *Animal Farm* and *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* are written with certain people and events in mind, however, the styles of narration are different. Even though in *Animal Farm* George Orwell describes generally a rebellious situation and it is not difficult to decode this work as a political tale, it is still hard to state which historical event it applies to, unless, of course, the reader has a good background knowledge of the author's interests and, particularly, the Russian Revolution. On the other hand, *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo*, which is also an overtly political tale, directly criticizes the Vice President of America and his policies. Bundo himself is the bunny that Pence actually owns, and the stinky bug wears his distinct hairstyle. Therefore, *Marlon Bundo's* story is very specific concerning the context it is utilized in, whereas the plot of *Animal Farm* can be applied to numerous historical events and teaches the readers that, no matter what the given promises, when one gets the taste of power the tyranny is almost inevitable. That is why, written decades ago, this tale still comes back as a metaphor to describe this or that president or a ruling party.

The study showed that selected Andersen's fairy tales are subversively political in nature, which means that they do not describe any particular person or event, but the general flaws of the monarchy. Because of the fact that history keeps repeating itself, they too can be applied to any modern political situation, as they describe vain, greedy and unwitty ruling classes.

As for the Brothers Grimm fairy tales, they belong to the category of accidental political tales, because they were not intended to be political, but just promoted the German nationality, religion and values. However, they were used as a perfect tool to promote the Third Reich. In addition, due to the nature of the tales, more precisely, describing murders, incest, cannibalism, or sexist approach to women, they have been the centre of attention since the birth of feminist movements and are frequently transformed into more moralistic and politically correct stories. For instance, singer Alicia Keys declared that she doesn't let her children watch or read *Snow White* as it is sexist and misogynist.

Because of the correct sociolinguistic environment, that encourages countries to strive to reach gender equality, popularise women's rights, become politically correct, support and promote the rights of the LGBT community, and fight against racism a lot of fairy tales are written in order to revolutionise the world of magic (for example, *There Once Was a Girl*, *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo*). Due to the fact that society is changing, thus the language is changing together with it, we see a growing tendency towards using the precise and considerate language in order to reach and have an effect on every reader.

Thus, it can be claimed that fairy tales can be seen as one of the best ways of exploring the socio-political state of the country as they have been and remain to be the manifestations of social and political problems, acute for society. In order to change the way society thinks for the better, one should start from the youngest members of the community and reshape their way of thinking. Exactly because of this, prominent writers and politicians (in this particular case the Third Reich) have not disregarded the fairy tales and keep using them for their propaganda. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is an increasing popularity in the political tales in the 21st century. Indeed, what can be a better way to stir people's emotions than a little bit of pixie magic?

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