OTHER CULTURES AS FAIRY-TALES IN NOVELS

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Abstract - The purpose of this paper is to examine how other cultures in novels, such as Chinese, Japanese, and Moroccan, are presented to the Western public as a fairy-tale world. Marriage of Pleasure by Tahar Ben Jelloun, Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golding and Snow Flower and the Secret Fan by Lisa See make references to fairy-tales in order to show illusions about other cultures or the main character's progress through life. Why are fairy-tales references used to explore cultural differences in mentalities?

Keywords - Cinderella, Collectivism, Individualism, Rags-to-Riches.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tahar Ben Jelloun starts his novel Marriage of Pleasure with the renowned fairy-tale formula "Once upon a time" and he makes lots of references to the tales of Sheherazade. Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golding contains parallels with Cinderella, while Snow Flower and the Secret Fan by Lisa See contains information on the old Chinese culture told like a story by an old Chinese woman, with references to old habits and superstitions which relate to magic customs in fairy-tales. What is the role of these references to fairy-tale elements and structures? Are these stories about different cultures universal as Campbell suggests in The Hero with a Thousand Faces, meaning that they are about a hero or heroine who passes through various trials and then returns to the community to tell the story of his or her life? Indeed, the heroines in the three novels go through various trials and obstacles along their way, such as Nabou from Marriage of Pleasure enters the realm of Moroccan Islamic culture with its traditions and rules, with its way of treating women, as Chiyo from Memoirs of a Geisha who goes from a poor fisherman's daughter to going through the phases of becoming a respected geisha in Gion, and as Lily from Snow Flower and the Secret Fan who learns about the various rituals and traditions in ancient Chinese culture, going from a simple girl to a respected noble lady through her marriage and sisterhood with a laotong relationship. Lily guides us through every step in the ritual of a life of a girl from ancient Chinese culture, from footbinding to life as married women. Chiyo confesses us about her experience of becoming a geisha, even though she was never intended for this role from her birth. All the three female characters introduce us through their stories in a confessional mood, and as if they too, like us, their readers, saw the respective cultures and had contact with them for the first time. Like us, they also have their illusions, hopes and dreams: Nabou hopes to be loved, Chiyo hopes to win the love of the Chairman, through hard work to become a geisha, and Lily hopes to be worthy of her family's expectations of her and to become an example for her society.

The fairy-tales frames could be simple pretexts for suggesting hopes, dreams, illusions, and expectations of the heroines. In Marriage of Pleasure, the fairy-tale framework is suddenly dissolved in the second half as expectations and realities are in a harsh contrast. Chiyo in Memoirs of a Geisha has an ascending trajectory, from poor girl to a very admired geisha, only for everything to collapse into the disillusionments offered by war, yet manages to find the love of the Chairman in the end. For Lily in Snow Flower and the Secret Fan, the trajectory is also ascending, as through successful footbinding she manages to get a great husband, and become a respected woman. Her story reminds to some extent of Cinderella, through the analogy with a small foot and a small shoe that did not fit just anyone. While Chiyo and Lily have an ascending trajectory, with few problems in-between, Nabou has a descending trajectory, she falls from her dreams into a very harsh, disappointing reality. Her Cinderella type of plot lasts for a very short time. In Memoirs of a Geisha and in Snow Flower and the Secret Fan, the societies are of a traditional type, and the members are expected to fit in. In Marriage of Pleasure, we find the questioning of the norms; what has previously been described as a fairy-tale is dissolved, and this opens the mood for questioning traditions and customs for the reader. The societies in Snow Flower and the Secret Fan and Memoirs of Geisha look solid and without reasons for being questioned. They are not decaying cultures. In Marriage of Pleasure, we see doubts about the mentalities of some cultures regarding racial prejudice. Individuals are expected to conform and have not many reasons for not doing so. The girls have only some childhood rebellion episodes, such as Chiyo who wishes to run away from the training house where she is supposed to become a geisha or the Chinese girls who oppose the footbinding but in the end have no choice but conform. Nabou does not have a choice either after entering her husband's culture and family but to conform. However, the story is told in such a

way to make the reader rebel against the order of society and the way Nabou and her children are treated. Nabou reminds in some ways of Cinderella, through her trajectory: she does find the Prince and receives his love, yet the story does not end with "They lived happily ever after.", on the contrary, that is the moment when so many problems appear. Nabou is treated like Cinderella by her husband's family, send to sleep with the servants, and she never becomes the princess again.

The play upon the Cinderella plot and elements is common to all three novels. What is the purpose of using it?

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. The Structure of Fairy-Tales

Vladimir Propp, in Morphology of the Folk Tale, developed a theory based on his study of Russian folktales of building blocks, of similar actions and character types that can be found in all fairy-tales. His theory can help explain structural similarities between novels and fairy-tales, e.g. the way the novels discussed in the paper are based on Cinderella. In Marriage of Pleasure, we find similar actions, such as the marriage based on true love between Nabou and Amir, as well as villain characters afterwards, especially those in Amir's family. In Memoirs of a Geisha, we find the same type of actions in the plot based on the ascension of a poor girl in a fisherman's village who, with the support of the Chairman, becomes a very admired geisha, similarly to the way Cinderella was admired at the ball. The same villain characters are found in Memoirs of a Geisha, in the character of Hatsumomo, the jealous older geisha, but she also has a helper in the person of the geisha that instructs her as an apprentice. In Snow Flower and the Secret Fan, we have another story of a girl that can rise from poverty due to her small feet created by footbinding. The element of the small feet reminds of the shoe that only fits the right girl in Cinderella's story, and which is the criteria that makes the Prince choose her.

Propp's theory has been criticized for only paying attention to the structure and not to the social context, yet it serves to explain the way that the readers' minds work when reading these novels. The authors have based their novels on universal plot elements and characters, in order to help them understand and resonate with the stories of characters in other cultures. The way the lives of the characters move are according to the norms we have all learned from fairy-tales. The novels are addressed to European readers, or Western readers, and it is easier to introduce them into different cultures in this way. Lisa See comes from a traditional Chinese-American family, and through her fiction she wishes to make better known the ancient Chinese culture and customs, while Arthur Golden is another Westerner who researched ancient Japanese customs and made known the geisha world through his novel. However, the novel he worked on was based on his interview with Mineko Iwasaki, who wrote her own version of her story as a reaction (Geisha: A Life, USA, and Geisha of Gion, UK) after the publishing of his novel, claiming that he did not accurately present the geisha world. Iwasaki's reaction shows that Golden had adapted the geisha culture to fit Westerners' and Europeans' expectations of the story or at least to introduce them easier into this different world, creating parallels with fairy-tale elements, characters and structures they were familiar with. At the same time, foreign authors such as Ben Jelloun resort to the same methods, of knowing about the Europeans' and Westerners' image of their culture and introducing elements from what they know about their culture, such as Scheherazade's tales. The world of other culture appear as exotic, tempting, and are usually introduced through fairy-tale frameworks in order to make it all more dramatic and interesting. The film based on Memoirs of a Geisha introduces the reader in a mysterious, fairy-tale world, which fascinates the reader through the discovery of so many different customs. The reliance on elements which suggest magic such as making predictions about the fortune of girls before beginning their footbinding and the choice of whom a girl will marry in Lisa See's novels, the way girls are examined as to whether they are good for becoming geishas based on whether they belong to water or earth elements through their births in Golden's novel, or the way having twins (one black and one white) brings bad luck helps introduce the reader in a world reminding of fairy-tales. The reader imagines a fabulous world, as any different culture is an occasion for discovering fascinating customs and traditions. The evolution of the heroes in novels parallels the evolution of the heroes in fairy-tales, as fairy-tales create a frame of expectations for a character as to what he or she can achieve in his or her life.

B. A Common Understanding of a Script

A script is defined in behavioral psychology as sequences of behaviours we expect in various situations (Barnett 2006: 158-181). In a similar way with Propp's theory of the structure of fairy-tales, scripts believe in the existence of default characters, props, settings and incidents that may be found in certain situations. Propp has found in fairy-tales expected templates exactly as in the psychology theory of script. The only difference is that the psychological script is found with respect to real persons' minds. It is something that they unconsciously expect to happen in various life situations, according to the rules of society but also according to what they have previously known to happen in their personal life. They can expect people to behave in a similar way to their parents or to people

they have known in their early years of life. Fairy-tales can also set up expectations and can be assimilated to the script in behavioural psychology, as they offer a certain image of the way a person's course of life is expected to be like.

Brian Stock believes that "a textual community is a microsociety organized around the common understanding of a script" (Zipes 2006: 21). According to him, the stories has as their aim to change the way members of a group thought and behaved.

In a similar way, the most successful novels in our days are based on a common script, some techniques which make the plot to become enjoyed by many readers. One of the ingredients that bring success consists in the way the plots are based on universal stories, such as Cinderella. Several novels other than the ones analysed in this paper have been based on the plot of this fairy-tale, among which Jane Eyre and Great Expectations. Yet, a script can be used to show how the story deviates afterwards from it. For example:

"Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre was written following the main tenets of the classic fairy tale Cinderella and that Brontë also completely broke away from the Cinderella motif by making Jane an independent and autonomous persona." (Hildardóttir 2013: 2)

The use of a well-known plot can lead to ensuring success among readers, as everyone is familiar with fairy-tales they have grown up with and enjoyed. In the novels about other cultures, they provide background for something familiar in a world they know so little about.

Perhaps the Cinderella plot is an illusion when it comes to novels that suggest the plot only partially or even backwards, as is the case with Marriage of Pleasure. There are common themes that suggest the Cinderella plot:

"Studying more than 300 related narratives from Europe and Asia, Maria Roalfe Cox identified Cinderella stories according to the presence of certain themes: an abused child, rescue through some reincarnation of the dead mother, recognition, and marriage." (Cullen 2003: 57) but afterwards readers can be disappointed if the plot does not go on according to the way they expect. However, it is up to readers to have an interactive reading experience, and actively respond to what they read based on knowledge of previous literary works. After all, the message of the novel in this respect could well be that reality and what we expect from it is just an illusion, that our wishes have not much to do with reality. In a same way, our dreams of finding happiness or our image of a different culture can be contradicted by reality. The script from behavioural psychology may apparently offer us comfort and security, as we know what to expect, yet in the end it proves certainly not to be so. We are even more disoriented and disappointed after we apply it and the situation and characters prove to be totally different.

C. Fairy-Tales as Intertextual Elements in Novels

In time, intertextual references to fairy-tales have been made in literary works, ever since the beginnings of literature: "There are fairy tale elements in Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene, and ... in many of William Shakespeare plays." (Zipes 2007: 12). The intertextual references serve as a way to underline the fabulous world we are about to enter by reading those works of fiction. We live with fairy-tales ever since our childhood, and the fairy-tales told to children are in accordance with the norms of the society of the time. Through intertextual references, the reader perceives and transforms the literary work in his mind, according to the framework suggested by these references. The process can be seen as close to schema theory, which, like script theory, suggests that the current information and life situation, as well as characters, are organized according to patterns of thought and behaviour (DiMaggio 1997: 263-287). Stereotypes are examples of the action of schema theory. Readers can interpret the behaviour and life trajectory of the characters in the three novels as according to the stereotype of the Cinderella character. However, the story also deviates from the expected schema in certain cases. We witness the fight for true love in all novels: Chiyo fights for the love of Chairman by becoming more eager to learn and adapt to her life as a geisha, in order to be near him, Lily, the girl with small bound feet endured everything in order to please her husband, while in the case of Nabou and Amir they both fight for true love but the social norms are against them, and act as opponents. The challenges girls face in order to find or regain true love is a plot element found in fairy-tales, and afterwards they are rewarded. However, Nabou is never rewarded, and gaining a respected social position does not depend on her husband and lover. She does nothing wrong in her behaviour to Amir, but she has a bad life in his family. In some fairy-tales we have the issue of the young wife being too curious about her husband's secrets, such as stealing his pig skin as he turns human at night, in order for him to remain human, and so the young lady has to go through some trials in order to deserve forgiveness. In Nabou's story, however, it is not up to her husband to help her have a happy life and she is also not guilty of anything. The evil characters are those in his family, and they behave like this due to the norms they have internalized in their culture.

D. Culture Shock

Through culture shock, we notice the phenomenon of not being at ease and even being unable to function in a different culture than our own. The normal course when introduced into a different culture is to gradually

adapt. The adaptation requires a good background on the respective culture, and an understanding of the members of the other culture. However, culture shock occurs frequently, as we are not psychologically prepared for the very different cultural realities. The first phase of culture shock, the honeymoon phase, is apparently a very fast adaptation to the different culture. It is a phase in which everything looks so familiar and we are very enthusiastic about what we are discovering related to the different culture. Everything is very appealing and the enthusiasm is at its highest point. It is the point in which we see everything in a positive light. The foreign culture seems to be the ideal place, it seems to be everything we have dreamed of, and we could say that we feel like in a fairy-tale. Everything seems magical and fascinating. The fairy-tale references serve to underline the fascination with a foreign culture, and at the same time, they serve to provide a common, universal cultural background so that the encounter with the different culture goes on smoothly. The adaptation to the Japanese culture in Memoirs of a Geisha is done in a smooth way, as the readers apply the Cinderella ascending, way up to success pattern, and also the well-known rags-to-riches myth specific to American culture. By now, American culture has become a common reference point to European culture, so the common ground is well-established. In Snow Flower and the Secret Fan, the same rags to riches story, with a girl marrying high because of her small bound feet and her gaining of a respected social position for herself and her family appeals to readers of other cultures and helps them appreciate the beauty of ancient Chinese customs and beliefs. In Marriage of Pleasure, we could say that after the introduction of the honeymoon phase, the story takes the path of the archetype of tragedy, where the hero fails, seeks redemption and learns from failure. However, the learning from failure is addressed to readers, in an attempt to draw their awareness towards racial prejudice. What better way to draw their attention than through their empathizing with Nabou? In Marriage of Pleasure, two stages of culture shock are there: honeymoon and frustration, and each correspond to the two parts of the book, the honeymoon stage to the fairy-tale part and the frustration stage to the part where Nabou and her sons are badly treated. The violence and bad treatment, though, are also part of fairy-tales. In fairy-tales, it is only the ending of the challenges and fights with obstacles that ends well, otherwise less pleasant elements are there too. The challenge to seduce Amir is not so difficult a task for Nabou, yet the challenges she faces with his family do not have a fairy-tale resolution.

E. Individualist vs collectivist, high power distance vs low power distance cultures

The differences among cultures are explored in the three novels mentioned in this paper, together with providing a frame of cultural reference through fairy-tales. The differences relate to individualist vs collectivist cultures, and high power distance vs low power distance cultures. The foreign cultures in the novels are collectivist and high power distance, in contrast to European and Western cultures nowadays, which means a difference in mentalities.

Individualism vs collectivism refer to the “degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups.” (Hofstede 2015) For individualist culture, the benefit of the individual is what matters, while for collectivist cultures, the actions of the individuals are centered on benefitting the whole group.

The power distance refers to “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.” (Hofstede 2015) High power distance refers to a high influence of authority, while low power distance describes a culture where the relationship with authority is more relaxed and more on friendly terms.

In Snow Flower and the Secret Fan, ancient Chinese culture is collectivist and high power distance, from what we see from the way their marriage and life customs work. Girls marry in order for their marriage to benefit the whole family, and they obey their parents and later their husbands. In Memoirs of a Geisha, Chiyo firstly thinks on how to do what she wishes, but then when she meets Chairman she submits to the ways of her culture, deciding to become a geisha, which needs lots of work and effort. In Marriage of Pleasure, we see a wish to move from the customs which are collectivist and high power distance to individualist and low power distance mentality. We see how Amir and Nabou think of only their love, of their own pleasures, and they even defy the rules of their cultures, Nabou by moving into another culture and Amir by choosing to marry legally Nabou who was only destined for a marriage of pleasure. They wish to become individualist and the norms of their cultures to no longer be so rigid, yet they will face lots of obstacles which they will not manage to surmount.

III. RESULTS

The novels Memoirs of a Geisha, Snow Flower and the Secret Fan and Marriage of Pleasure have all in common the fact that they introduce the reader to a foreign culture through the fairy-tales frame of mind in order to provide a portion of familiarity as they are faced with an unknown world of very different customs, traditions and ways of life. The culture shock is, thus, minimized, and the readers hang on to something familiar which will make them step further into these fictional worlds. The fairy-tales framework is used even when it comes to workshops that teach

doing efficient business, according to the site https://mercermackay.com/fairy-tale-framework/, where the description of the workshop begins as follows: "The hero's journey and the fairy tale framework are known strategies for writing compelling books". By using this framework, the authors ensure a right marketing strategy. The authors act like efficient businessmen, getting the attention of their audience. The purpose of familiarizing them with Japanese, Chinese and Moroccan culture is achieved through developing an attractive plot and one that gains their attention through the tragedy development of the course of action.
The purpose of these three novels coincides with the purpose of the fairy-tales:

"Fairy-tales have been around since ancient times, having various purposes: to explain the world around us, to teach us a certain social order and norms, to develop empathy, to instruct us on possible scenarios and to become aware of mean intentions of people or even family members." (Drobot in Catelly 2018: 118)

In a similar way, the novels serve to explain the way other cultures work, in order to familiarize the readers with different lifestyles and mentalities, and also to draw their awareness on contemporary issues such as racial prejudice.
The purpose of the teachings by means of fairy-tales is collective, of use to the whole group, not just to the individual:

"Fairy-tales can be regarded as making references to a collective society, not an individual one, in which helping one another was a value which ensured survival." (Drobot in Catelly 2018: 118)

The novels about Japanese, Chinese and Moroccan culture, similarly, draw attention to other cultures, as we nowadays live in a multicultural society, and we need to behave properly. The proper behaviour is that of tolerance and respect for other cultures. We can gain this through interaction in real life or through interaction with characters we can sympathize with in works of fiction.

IV. DISCUSSION

A multicultural society is, by definition, a collective society, one that thinks about the common good of its members: "Multiculturalism provides a political framework for social equality and cultural differences as for substantial elements of social order." (Berkes 2010: 3)

Through reading fiction about other cultures and the problems they face, readers are introduced into an exotic world with the hope of helping them deal with cultural differences. This is the purpose of multiculturalism, which promotes the values of respect and equality:

"The ideology of multiculturalism is the most recent solution to the problems of minority groups with listening to them and respecting their habits." (Berkes 2010: 4)

The practice of multiculturalism has been criticized due to destabilizing order when mass migrations occur, of leaving people confused when it comes to multiple identities, as in fact they do not feel they belong to any culture (Berkes 2010). The novel that raises doubts and deals with cultural differences among characters is Marriage of Pleasure. There, the second part of the novel is like a dystopia for the reader, as he deals with negative attitudes in front of racial and cultural differences. Memoirs of a Geisha and Snow Flower and the Secret Fan introduce the readers into one culture only, while Marriage of Pleasure introduces them to two cultures (Senegalese and Moroccan) and to the clash between them. The fictional worlds are violent, though, in all cases, as in Memoirs of a Geisha and Snow Flower and the Secret Fan the characters face the changes in their society before and after wars. Historical changes in the same culture also require adaptation stage, from times when everything looked quiet and life was linearly arranged, towards times when the known order is destabilized. The destabilizing of the well-set order is also an element found in fairy-tales: life goes on peacefully in a kingdom, when a monster steals the sun or moon, and a hero sets on his way to bring them back, for example. In the case of the characters of the novels, the destabilizing factors, wars, or moving into another culture (for Nabou), show their ways of dealing with conflict. The armed conflict sets a conflict for survival for the characters, who struggle, and cooperate to remain alive, and the conflict between two cultures also sets up ways to cope with the current situation. These are the equivalent of the set of challenges the heroes are faced with in fairy-tales.

Schwabe (2016) draws attention to the continuous presence of the use of fairy-tales in our contemporary world:

"The continuing proliferation and diversification of fairy tales in our society permeates a wide range of mediums: from film and television to commercial platforms, advertising, and marketplaces capitalizing on consumer products (including clothing, toys, and more), and from popular literature and graphic novels to new media (Internet, social media, blogs, online newspapers, wikis, video games)."

Fairy-tales provide thus a template which is used to fit in the interests of what is being promoted. In the case

of the three novels, what is promoted are values of contemporary, multicultural society.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The novels are part of promoting the ideology of multiculturalism, through making it seem very appealing. The promotion of the ideology is easy due to common fairy-tale cultural background, but also due to the fascination since always with the exotic of the Europeans and Westerners. The fascination of Europeans with China has been expressed in the 17th century through the Chinoiserie, the Europeans' imitation of their arts, such as decorations, literature, and garden design. Artists from the West have practiced Orientalism, imitating cultural aspects of the Easterners, and creating themselves works of art imitating the Easterners'. The fascination with Japanese culture, Japanophilia, dates as a term back to the late 18th century. Ever since travelling in the world was available, people have become fascinated by different cultures, and the fascination of discovery continues today. They have imagined since old days various stories about far-away cultures and the process continues today through works of fiction.

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