

Altered Milieus Due to Voluntary and Involuntary Hybridity in the Select Fairy Tales of Hans Christian Andersen

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Abstract

The terms “hybridity” and “diaspora” are synonymous entities that refer to any organism that is a product of two varied forms of habitat, culture, custom or heritage. These terms and their associated social nuances have become the vogue of the contemporary scenario, in which species— animals and humans alike— are brought into a varied environmental milieu based on many political, economic, social or cultural whys and wherefores. It therefore becomes mandatory to acquire an insight into the physical and mental whims and fancies of people who have undergone such consequences and this develops a new field of literary, cultural and anthropological study called Diaspora. The paper is presented with a view to highlight and contrast the life of characters in their primary habitat to that of the habitat they end up into, through voluntary or involuntary means, with special reference to characters in the select fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen.

Key words: *Diaspora- environments- differences- habitat- hybrid milieu- contrast- Andersen-fairy tale-characters.*

Introduction

The term “diaspora” is a combination of two terms “dia” meaning two and “spora” or “spore” meaning seed. The word stands to denote a product that has its origin from two sources and hence is used to refer to people who emigrate from one native country and become citizens in the other. The culture, tradition and other customary norms of such people stand infused with the elements of both the mother country and the host country. The differences are over

toned with a nostalgic yearning for the native past and literature produced by such people, or literature that recounts such nostalgic experiences of the past are called diasporic literature. The thematic crux of such literature is always a reflection of the mixed cultural differences and a quest for identity in the midst of such differences.

Scholars who define a diaspora by its social consciousness refer to individuals who live in a variety of societies and cultures and who emphasize their sense of belonging or exclusion, their states of mind, and their sense of identity...Diaspora, as a mode of production, refers to the reproduction of cultural phenomena through creolization and hybridisation. (Agnew 5)

Neither is Andersen a diasporic writer nor do his fairy tales contain themes of diasporic encounters. Yet Andersen's fairy tales do explicitly deal with the elements of an altered environment experienced by the characters through voluntary means of adventures or through accidentally forced circumstances. It is in this perspective of analysis that the fairy tales of Andersen are taken into scrutiny under a diasporic vein. The paper focusses on bringing out one of the most important elements of diasporic variation — change of habitat— with respect to Andersen's fairy tales *The Little Mermaid* and *Five Peas From the Same Pod*.

The two fairy tales are selected based on the criteria of alternation of environment, namely voluntary and involuntary. That is, in the first fairy tale, the little mermaid deliberately chooses to sacrifice her own comfortable life for the sake of love and ends up in loss and melancholy. In the second fairy tale the pea pods are dispersed manually by a human being and they each end up in a different scenario. In either of the cases, the prime attention is paid to differentiate the setting of the habitat in the characters' past and the present, and thereby strike a similar chord to that of the hybrid environment of diasporic populace.

The tale *The Little Mermaid* is one of the most famous fairy tales of Andersen. It deals with the story of the seventh and the youngest daughter of the Sea King. The mermaid is a royal brought-up and she is the lovely little favourite of all the family and all the sea creatures are very fond of her. Her voice is the loveliest in the sea kingdom and she enjoys all kinds of endeavours from her father, the Sea King. Life was pretty much a bed of roses for all the mermaid princesses: "All the livelong day they would play down there in the palace, in its spacious rooms, where living flowers grew from the walls. When the great amber windows

were open, the fish would dart in and out, just as swallows do up here, and they would eat out of the princesses' hands and let themselves be petted" (219).

But the little mermaid is not destined for this happy life. Once while peeping out through the sea surface, she catches a glimpse of a handsome prince on the ship, with whom she falls in love. To bear a tangible witness, a heavy storm comes down upon the ship and the mermaid saves the knocked out prince and takes him to the shore. But the prince is not able to take in the image of the mermaid as he lay unconscious. Days roll on and the mermaid's pangs of love torment her to dare take a human form and go to the prince. The mermaid goes to the sea witch, a creepy woman, and seeks her help without her family's notice. The witch gives her a fair warning about her fate. She must cut off and give her tongue as price for the potion that would transform her into a human with legs. Her walk, though graceful would inflict her the pain of walking on knives, and if the prince does not reciprocate her love, she would become nothing but foam on the sea surface. Whatever be the case, once transformed into a human, she could never come back to her family:

Then your tail will split in two and shrink into what humans call 'pretty legs.' But it will hurt. It will be like a sharp sword slicing through you...every step you take will be like treading on a sharp knife...On the morning after the prince marries another, your heart will break and you will be nothing but foam on the water.
(233-234)

And as fate would have it, the mermaid, being a mute, is unable to win the love of the prince, and he marries another princess. The little mermaid is too late to recollect her happy days with her father and six sisters: "The little mermaid danced and laughed, with the thought of death heavy in her heart...The little mermaid leaned her white arms on the rail and looked eastward for the first pink of dawn. The first ray of sun, she knew, would kill her...Then she saw her sisters rising out of the water, their faces were pale and grim..." (242). The mermaid's life ends in a loss for her unthoughtful demeanour, though her true love saves her from being nothing but foam on the water— he becomes a spirit of the air, pure and holy.

In the next fairy tale *Five Peas from the Same Pod*, there is a pea pod in which there are five green peas waiting to be popped open so that they can travel far and wide. Each one is proud of his own self except for the youngest one, who always remained humble. They grow in window garden of a poor peasant woman's house, whose daughter has been bed

ridden for years together. All the five peas become excited when one fine day they are burst open and they are each destined to different places. The four brothers expect too much of themselves and end up degraded. They become the peas for a little boy's peashooter and he shoots them one after the other. One ends up in a bird's nest, one goes high up and lands in a gutter, two are swallowed by pigeons, while the youngest and tiniest of all, ends up in a cracked wall by the bed side of the little girl and starts to grow. The little girl's hope in life is restored when she takes the little pea plant as a signifier of overcoming one's obstacles. She soon recovers and her health is restored:

Each morning she sat herself up in bed and looked with sparkling eyes at her little garden of one pea plant. Next week, the girl got up for the first time and sat happily in the sunshine for a whole hour... 'God himself planted that pea and made it thrive to bring hope to you and joy to me, my darling,' said the happy mother, and she smiled at the flower as though it were an angel from heaven. (303)

It is the last pea from the pod that is more blessed than the others because, though its native habitat was cozy and out of peril, it surrenders its fate and ends up in a better off environment, giving hope to a soul that was so long wasting away. Thus, the fairy tale shows that one's involuntary change of habitat may contribute not only to one's own betterment but also may be an inspiring factor for someone else.

Conclusion

The paper thus takes up two fairy tales to drive home the message that change of one's habitat might instil a sense of nostalgia for the native milieu. Yet like the tiny pea, when one makes a wise decision to cling on till the end and persevere, one can reach great heights. It is also not wise to decide on unknown grounds like the Little Mermaid, who simply chose to unthinkingly give up everything, blinded by the pangs of sentimental love. In either of the above cases, the change of environmental setting becomes pivotal for the development of the character and hence a change in social setting results in an entire turn of events. Therefore the paper concludes that it is wise to stick on to the environmental changes when it is involuntary, and when it comes into voluntarily altering them on grounds of individual nuances, one must always seriously ponder over it before putting it to action.

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