

(Un)Happy Endings of Andersen's Tales: a Semiotic Approach

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the exploration of the phenomenon of unhappy endings in famous tales of Hans Christian Andersen. The tradition of using happy and unhappy endings in fairy tales and other literary works is presented, highlighting the tendencies and general influences in literature. The era of Romanticism transformed unhappy endings of stories into happy ones and changed the way a child was regarded in general. However, not all of Andersen's tales, even though created in the spirit of Romanticism, have a traditional happy ending. Five of Andersen's tales were analysed in this study, by applying a semiotic approach revealing the ambiguity of the endings of H. C. Andersen's fairy tales and identifying the significant role of binary oppositions for interpretation of the narratives' endings.

Keywords: H. C. Andersen, fairy tales, happy ending, binary opposition, semiotic approach.

Introduction

Fairy tales are traditionally associated with happy endings, as are most literary works created for children. Nevertheless, some writers choose to break the established norms by giving their narrative an unhappy ending, thus setting these stories apart from what is seen as the traditional perspective. Among such authors is the well-known Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) whose fairy tales gave him a global reputation.

Andersen created a total of 156 tales, published in 11 volumes under the titles *Eventyr, fortalte for børn* (1835), *Historier* (1852) and *Eventyrog Historier* (1858). Interestingly, out of his 156 tales, 56 end with the death of the main character - this is considered an unhappy ending and is especially common in Andersen's last collection of tales which is primarily focused on an adult audience, the factor effectively determining the relevant content and underlying messages of the works. As Eitelgeorge & Anderson assert, it is quite unusual for a well-known author to end their tales with such tragic endings as H. C. Andersen does. His protagonists are frozen to death, burned in fire, dissolved into foam, or melted into a puddle. Namely, "Andersen broke through the boundaries of traditional folktales to move into new realms that contributed to the development of the fantasy genre" (Eitelgeorge & Anderson, 2004:37).

Andersen's tales are characterized by the fact that even if the content of the narratives ranges from simple to complex, to some extent they all contain a philosophical metaphorical meaning, an exaltation of goodness and condemnation of human limitations and weaknesses. Moreover, compared to the literary tradition of Andersen's times, his fairy tale style stands out as innovative and is based on colloquial language. The author introduced children to very complex, adult concepts by choosing serious themes, such as death and other tragic events. As Lewis notes (2002:680), Andersen incorporated dark undercurrents of fatalism and absurdity into his fairy tales that were influenced by the works of Charles Dickens and other - mostly German - writers, such as L. Tieck and E. T. A. Hoffmann, which in many cases led to unhappy endings of the stories.

By using a semiotic approach, this article explores the function of binary oppositions in H. C. Andersen's fairy tales with unhappy endings. The article aims to demonstrate how meaning is created in fairy tales by using binary oppositions which serve both as plot elements, as well as means of conveying values.

The semiotic approach to unhappy endings of Andersen's fairy tales employed for the analysis in this article has not been previously used in other academic publications, deeming this work originated from the methodological perspective: aiming to provide a new look into unhappy endings of fairy tale narratives, the application of semiotic approach reveals a dialectic relation of binary oppositions in Andersen's works.

Theoretical Assumptions about Happy and Unhappy Endings

According to J. D. Zipes, the assumption that fairy tales were first created for children and are largely the domain of children is far from the truth. Zipes states that originally tales were created to strengthen communal bonds in the face of inexplicable forces of nature. However, children enjoy stories mainly because of their hunger for change and independence (Zipes 2012:7). Thus, the origins of fairy tales for children date back to the late 17th century, when Perrault published the tales now called classical, distinguishing them from myths and folklore and laying the foundations for the development of a literary fairy tale.

The fairy tales are historically and culturally coded, and their ideological impact is significant for all generations. Originally, they were based on rituals designed to give meaning to the daily lives of community members. Additionally, their function was to explain natural phenomena or to celebrate holidays and ceremonies; and communal harmony was emphasized in most folk tales as the greatest value (Zipes 2012:10). Moreover, fairy tales are not universal or timeless; neither are they unaffected by history and politics (Teverson 2013:7).

It is commonly assumed that most fairy tales have a happy ending, and end with an expected cliché - *they lived happily ever after*. According to Zipes (1988:10), rarely do wonder tales end unhappily - in them, good triumphs over evil and life triumphs over death. Furthermore, it is the sense of wonder that distinguishes the literary fairy tale from the other modern short literary genres. In the same way, the logic of miracle is present in children's literary fairy tales, where - in line with the traditional expectation - good wins over evil causing young readers to experience relief and joy at the victory of good. In wonder tales, the universe works in such magical ways that anything can happen, and these happenings do not require a logical explanation. Thus, "fairy tales seek to awaken respect for miraculous living conditions and, in a religious sense, to evoke a deep sense of respect and fear for life as a miraculous process" (Ziper, 1988:11).

Even though many readers are used since childhood to expect a happy ending, especially when reading or listening to a fairy tale, Purnell and Bowman note (2014:179) that these "happily ever after" narratives of childhood form an illusion which, juxtaposed with real-life stories that sometimes just end, creates a dissonance between the desire for a positive resolution and the reality of a lived experience.

In comparison with the traditional storytelling folklore discourse of the world - where the fables of myths, legends, and fairy tales seldom end happily - the era of Romanticism, by re-evaluating folk creation and its value system, has effectively reconstructed fairy tale endings, transforming them into happy ones. In fact, numerous fairy tales originally were real "nightmares of senseless cruelty and violence" (Oates, 1997:99). Starting with the Grimm brothers and other Romantic writers, the happy endings of fairy tales eventually became a trend, if not the rule, in popularizing the fairy tale genre. Until the late 18th century, the happy ending of fairy tales and novels were associated with compromise or subordination of desires to abilities by which the characters achieve a true balance of their abilities and will (Pape, 1992:184).

It should be noted that certain other factors, such as experiences or perceptions that seem to be inevitably associated with an unfortunate ending, are in fact even more important than the actual unhappy ending itself. Among these experiences or perceptions are self-sacrifice, rebirth, purification, etc. Thus, in a way, even without a specific happy ending, it may still be possible to say that "They have lived happily ever after", if looking from a broader perspective (Raskin, 2003:2).

Both children and adults seek to curb world chaos in their longing for happiness. Freud, for example, argued that the pursuit of happiness was driven by the principle of pleasure. The changing concepts of happiness and the differences between the perception of happiness in adults and children also led to changes in their respective literature (Pape, 1992:186). A happy ending in a literature work assures the reader that, despite all calamities, diseases, losses, and hardships, a human being ultimately achieves happiness. It is therefore easy to understand the efforts to secure happiness for those who are not yet rational and therefore face dangers and difficulties, i.e., children.

According to Vaidik (2021:36), there is a particular connection between the psychological profiles of the protagonists and happy endings. He concludes that happy endings give an emotional relief to readers or listeners and deepen the personal connection of a reader or listener with the protagonist creating a psychological resonance.

Deficiency, deprivation, and prohibitions motivate people to look for signs of fulfilment and emancipation. In wonder tales, those characters who are naive and simple can succeed because they are pure, virtuous, and able to recognize the signs sent by destiny. They have maintained their faith in the miraculous power of nature, respecting all of its aspects. Unlike humble characters, criminals and villains are those who misuse others for their own benefit, control, transformation, imprisonment, and destruction (Zipes, 1988:12).

Another important aspect is that children and adults react differently to happy endings. If an adult reads a story with a happy ending, it conflicts with his or her experience, revealing the limits of a literary work in expressing reality. Furthermore, "ending a children's story in terms of grown-up happiness means promising a child a reward which is yet beyond his or her understanding and experience" (Pape 184). Thus, the promise of adult happiness is anticipated by happy endings for those who behave well and by unhappy ones for those who misbehave.

Furthermore, the happy ending no longer reflected the idealised idea of faith in God or the intervention of higher forces in the pernicious fate of man. As publishers and editors in the 19th century increasingly demanded that writers complete their stories happily, this eventually became a matter of obedience and humility to the needs of the literary market following the fundamental principle of pleasure (Pape, 1992:188).

Analysing Russian folk and fairy tales in his famous study "The Morphology of the Folk Tale", Vladimir Propp outlined the 31 basic functions that constitute the fundamental components of the model narrative (obviously, not all the functions need to be present in a fairy tale). Propp stated that at the end of a story the villain will be punished, and the hero will be rewarded, and these two functions at the least lead the fairy tale to a happy ending (Trinquet, 2010:45). Namely, the success of the protagonist generally leads to a) marriage; b) acquisition of money; c) survival and wisdom; d) any combination of the first three. If a story follows this pattern, then it is very realistic to expect a happy ending (Zipes, 1988:10).

In further developing Propp's ideas, Joseph Campbell's interpretation of the hero's journey is also relevant in this context of deep inner transformation shared by the main literary characters at any time and place, involving great movements of separation, descent, and return (Vogler,2020:1). Thus, to understand the meaning created by the end, it is not enough to state that the main character dies, but it is also necessary to evaluate the ending of the tale in the context of the whole story, thus also expanding the analysis from the focus on the plot to the exploration of the meaning creation process.

In fact, the hero takes part in a physical, active journey to solve a problem or reach a goal. Still, the hero's journey is as important emotional or psychological as the physical. The actions and decisions of the character at different stages of the journey reveal the traits developed by the character and the growth phases that the character experiences throughout the story (Vogler2020:1). Thus, the move from scarcity to abundance in terms of the main character's needs is an important indicator of a happy ending.

In a situation when the main character faces a conflict-loaded problem and takes on the challenge to solve it, his or her abilities, attitudes, or features become transformed. This is the most important aspect of the story because it allows the transmission of specific meanings. Consequently, every story reveals a message that is followed by a moral evaluation.

Thus, in assessing the role of an (un)happy ending, it is necessary to consider the stages of the whole narrative, as well as the initial situation and the scarcity that led the main character to move ahead with “crossing of the threshold” and embark upon a direct or symbolic journey (Kaufmann 29). To this point, the final stage of the journey, until the circle is complete, is the realization that the main character has the freedom to choose to live for himself or herself, acknowledging the nature of life.

Method

This article analyses the unhappy endings of Andersen’s tales using a semiotic approach, which opens the possibility of new perspectives on the analysed works and allows for finding deep connections of meaning between content-building elements and value structures. Semiotics “provides a set of assumptions and concepts that permit systematic analysis of symbolic systems” (Cullum-Swan & Manning, 1994: 466). Structural semiotics is mainly based on language or narrative analysis, revealing the interplays in sign systems and the meaningful connections between expression and content.

The application of the semiotic approach was aimed, firstly, at identifying the main binary oppositions allowing for a revelation of the deeper meaning of these fairy tales. Later, the plot of the selected tales was analysed from a scarcity-abundance perspective to assess the characters’ physical, as well as symbolic, journey towards their aspirations. Finally, the end of the narrative was assessed as either happy or unhappy in the context of the whole symbolic journey of the main character.

Identifying binary oppositions allows to gain a bigger picture of a literary text, as well as to profoundly understand the semantic layers of a literary work. This method provides a systematic foundation for understanding abstract and seemingly chaotic concepts by putting the ideas into complementary pairs, such as good and bad, up and down, truth and lie, living and existing, etc. (Putri & Sarwato, 2016:84). According to F. de Saussure, “binary opposition is the means by which the units of language have value or meaning; each unit is defined in reciprocal determination with another term, as in binary code. It is not a contradictory relation but, a structural, complementary one” (Fogarty, 2005).

Five fairy tales were selected for this analysis: The Little Match Girl, The Steadfast Tin Soldier, The Red Shoes, The Little Mermaid and The Swineherd. The analysed works met the following selection criteria: they all have an unusual ending with either a protagonist dying or a romantic intrigue ending not with a wedding but with separation. Furthermore, these fairy tales are very well known. Some of them were adapted into films with quite primitive and limited interpretations of the unhappy endings, eliminating the religious interpretations originally suggested by the writer. Thus, this analysis suggests a new meaning of these stories by applying the semiotic approach.

Results

"The Little Match Girl"

The first fairy tale to be analysed is “The Little Match Girl” - usually described as a "story about a dying child’s dreams and hope", as well as about "poverty, hunger and helplessness" (Saputri, 2020:82). Andersen’s story tells of a poor girl who sits outside on a cold and snowy New Year’s Eve and hopes to sell matches but fails. She does not dare to return to her abusive house, which is not much warmer than the place in which she has settled on the street. Thus, she slowly freezes while sitting outside. She lights a match to get some

warmth and sees a vision. Next, she lights matches three more times, and sees more visions. For the last time, in the light of a burning match, she sees her dead grandmother, “the only one who had ever loved her, and who was now dead” (Andersen, 2016:307). At dawn, the girl is found dead.

At first glance, especially when evaluating its plot, this short story is naturally seen as having an unhappy ending. However, looking at this tale from a semiotic perspective, one can easily notice the contrast created by significant categories used by the author. The binary opposition forming the backbone of this tale is Life and Death. At the same time, the contrast is created by detailing the cold and uncomfortable existing reality that is hostile to the girl, and the imaginary or fabulous reality that satisfies her needs and nurtures her.

A closer look at the visions of the girl reveals the needs that are satisfied by the imaginary reality that she is entering through the light of a match flame. When she dared to light the first match, she saw it burning like a candle, prompting a vision of a large iron stove. In other words, this first vision provided her with warmth and coziness, comfort and safety – essentially, her most important needs on this cold winter evening.

In the light of the second match, she saw a nice room with Christmas dishes served on a decorated table. Thus, the second vision satisfied her need of food for overcoming hunger and starvation.

In the light of the third match, the little girl saw herself “sitting under a beautiful Christmas tree. It was larger and more beautifully decorated than the one which she had seen through the glass door at the rich merchant’s” (Andersen, 2016:308). New Year’s Eve is one of the most important festivals of the year, primarily associated with a cozy home and family, as well as with abundance that creates security for the child - the third need that the girl got satisfied in the vision.

Finally, with the fourth lighted match, her grandmother visited her. She was “clear and shining, yet mild and loving in her appearance” in front of the little girl. This point in the tale marks an emotional climax as the girl asks her grandmother to take her along: “O take me with you; I know you will go away when the match burns out...” (Andersen, 2016:308).

Thus, the fourth and most important need that the girl has, and which is also satisfied by the match light vision, is the need for care and love by loved ones. The sense of belonging is crucial for survival and happiness, especially for a child.

One more important binary opposition pair of significant categories emerges here, i.e. Up and Down. According to Grigoryeva (2014:33), the Up-Down dyad is a culturally significant metaphorical opposition, whose primary semantics are associated with the expression of spatial relationships, which are one of the main types of relationships perceived by people and reflected in language forms. Based on the structure of the human body, attention is drawn to the importance of the upper elements (eyes, head, heart, etc.) in classifying them as “spiritual”. Thus, by associating the upper part of a body with positive connotations and the lower part with negative connotations, this principle is transferred to the external and internal world as well.

This symbolic Up-Down movement creates a meaning pair where Up leads to Heaven as a symbol of life and the abode of God, and the ascension becomes an aspiration leading to love and belonging. Meanwhile, the Bottom or the symbolic category of Down is associated with the dimension of poverty, scarcity, and death.

The little girl noticed that “the Christmas lights rose higher and higher, till they looked to her like the stars in the sky”. When one of them fell leaving a long line of fire, she thought

that someone was dying, as her old grandmother used to tell her. The little girl remembered her words “that when a star falls, a soul was going up to God” (Andersen, 2016:308).

The last sentences of this story highlight the contrast that contradicts the traditional thinking pattern: “The child still sat, in the stiffness of death, holding the matches in her hand, one bundle of which was burnt. “She tried to warm herself,” said some. No one imagined what beautiful things she had seen, nor into what glory she had entered with her grandmother, on New-year’s day” (Andersen, 2016:308).

Images of a new morning, the first day of the new year and the rising sun also stress a new beginning - this time, a spiritual one. From this perspective, the death of a frozen child as a fact is commonly evaluated as an unhappy ending. Meanwhile, from the perspective of a religious or believing mind, death as a transition to a happier further continuation, is a transfer into a better reality. In other words, the main argument for seeing the end of this tale as happy is the transformation that shifts the protagonist from scarcity to abundance, meeting the girl’s essential needs. Andersen clearly perceived himself as a religious person and this Protestant worldview is reflected in his works as well. According to him, God always helps a good person and life itself is one of the proofs of God’s existence (Gustaitiene,2009:62).

This is also supported by one of the most important symbols used in the fairy tale, namely, the match Light that builds an oppositional relationship with the category of Dark. When the match is ignited, the logic of the miracle begins to work and the light, as a creative force, provides the little girl with what she lacks the most. The light in this story is contrasted with darkness, which, in turn, symbolically encompasses the cold, poverty, hunger, and loneliness. Thus, it can be stated that Andersen, following Christian tradition, chooses to save his heroine from a poor and unhappy earthly life by transferring her to the blessed kingdom of Heaven.

“The Steadfast Tin Soldier”

This famous short tale tells a romantic love story that is also, at first glance, unhappy. The tin soldier is one-legged and therefore exceptional, and the challenges he faces are exceptional as well. His love for the dancer that lives in a castle and represents a higher social class seems impossible and creates dramatic tension in the story from the very beginning. However, the dancer is not far different from the soldier as she also stands on one leg - this adds an additional image of instability or, in other words, highlights the possibility of either falling or flying. At the same time, being grounded with only one leg also means being easier to get uplifted and spiritual, keener to fall in love.

The three main challenges that the tin soldier faces are all closely connected to the direction of moving down. In other words, the binary opposition of Up and Down is crucial in this narrative. The first challenge is presented when the soldier falls out of the window. His journey then sets further off as two boys find him and send him sailing on a paper boat. This part of the trip, involving underground waters and an encounter with a hostile rat, does not break the soldier’s courage. The second challenge is met when he reaches an even deeper dimension, going down under the water, eventually getting swallowed by an enormous fish. Still, the soldier remains calm and brave. The last and most severe challenge coincides with the climax of the story - the happy moment of emotional catharsis when the soldier, having returned to the same room from which he fell out of the window, felt the love of the dancer and was so deeply touched by the nicest feelings: “It touched the tin soldier so much to see her that he almost wept tin tears, but he kept them back” (Andersen, 2016:116) – during that happy moment one of the boys threw him into a stove.

All the three challenges happened as if by accident, although it is suggested they were most likely caused by the evil powers that the little black goblin represented. His words “wait till tomorrow, then” seem to be prophetic and fateful. Still, this story would be very sad and even tragic if not a sudden change in course of action. The little dancer flies into the stove fire, uniting with the tin soldier in the flames.

The unexpected ending of the story probably may leave the reader unsatisfied: “The tin soldier melted down into a lump, and the next morning, when the maidservant took the ashes out of the stove, she found him in the shape of a little tin heart. But of the little dancer nothing remained but the tinsel rose, which was burnt black as a cinder”(Andersen, 2016:116).

Still, looking from the perspective of the semiotic approach, some important points must be mentioned. As in the analysis of the previous case, the perspective must be divided into the real world and the fantasy world. In the real world, social rules are unbreakable, which makes love between the dancer and the soldier hardly possible. Thus, choosing to burn together also represents a choice to unite and stay together in the spiritual world.

The main character overcomes several limitations: firstly, finding love. The end of this story concludes with a heart, the main symbol of love, which reads as a sign that the soldier has indeed found love. The second limitation is the lack of stability caused by standing on one leg, and this is seen from the outset as a constraint that makes the main character different, a representation of otherness. This physical instability symbolically becomes the cause of falling out of the window and the category of the soldier’s inferiority. After all, it is not by accident that the boy happens to throw into the stove exactly this particular soldier. Yet again, at the end of the tale, this shortage is transformed into an advantage and abundance after the soldier’s unification with the little dancer, who also stands on one leg and who is therefore also carried away by the wind to the soldier while he is melting in flames.

Once again, as in the previous fairy tale, here we too see a transformation that is caused by the journey of the main character, moving him from the condition of scarcity to abundance and surplus, in this way meeting the essential need of the soldier - to love and be loved. The couple gets connected with the help of fire which is a fundamental element in all cosmological systems causing crucial transformations (Catana, 2016:59). Moreover, the fire as a symbol of life, passion, love, sexual energy, and purification moves the lovers to another eternal dimension that was important to the author as well. Thus, it can be surely stated that this tale has an untraditional happy ending where death functions as a condition to get united in love and move to a spiritual world.

“The Red Shoes”

Although the story of a little girl named Karen and her red shoes is somewhat less reminiscent of a fairy tale, it still presents the logic of a miracle and the magic works as a significant element of the fairy tale. Magical dancing shoes that symbolize vanity, sexuality and material values, turn an orphan girl into a never-ending dance that eventually exhausts her and makes her suffer.

Right away, the story details the protagonist’s state of poverty and emphasizes her wish to leave poverty for abundance, thus Abundance and Poverty are among the most prominent binary oppositions in this tale. Even though it could be said that later on, the little girl enters the category of abundance by living in her caregiver’s home, her desire for owning and only wearing the red shoes is still beyond the moral norms and common decency of the society at that time.

The conflict between spiritual and material values is highlighted here in the context of Christian morality, thus, another important binary opposition is Spirituality and Materiality. It is particularly this category that conveys the most significant transformation of the girl, both internal and physical, reflected in her words to the executioner: “Don’t cut off my head!” said Karen, “for then I could not repent of my sin. But cut off my feet with the red shoes.” (Andersen, 2016:292).

If at first the red shoes were an aspiration for the girl, reflecting her desire to live in abundance, then later they become an evil that has overwhelmed her and made her dance without having life anymore. The girl gave priority to the red shoes because it was something she always wanted, a desire that she has put higher than the human relationship and God.

In the terms of semiotics, the main character starts her symbolic journey by receiving the red shoes on the day of her mother’s funeral. Wearing red shoes is considered unsuitable for funeral or church but she does both, taking advantage of her caregiver’s lost ability to see colours. The attention Karen receives wearing the bright shoes feeds her wish for being noticed and seen as pretty.

It is important to acknowledge here that the perception of colours is a complex cultural construction, closely related to values, qualities and meaning; colours are also important communication agents. When it comes to colour archetypes, red is primarily associated with blood. It is argued that “it is archetypes that unite humanity in the primal experience. Potent, tangible and fundamental, it is the experience of red, that embraces blood so tightly as to become its archetype” (Pompas&Luzzatto, 2019:15). Consequently, it is the archetype of fertility and life itself. In addition, there is a strong connection between colour red and fire with destructive or purifying power, thus this colour creates meanings of destructiveness, destruction, aggression, and even death and Satan.

Red shoes is never neutral as a symbol - it combines literature, fashion and clothing, creating cultural and social meanings (Webster, 2010:164). Andersen’s story of the red shoes is much older than a story about Cinderella, which is why it preserved some horrible plot elements, such as cutting the feet off. The magical red shoes are depicted as requiring the commitment of their wearer to submit in behaviour, as they lead to wild dances that end in horrific suffering and death. In general, this story is about desire, jealousy, transformation, and the sin that the red shoes represent.

The story ends with a miracle performed by an angel who fulfils the protagonist’s wish to go to the church. The angel brings church to the little girl’s room, as if blending the spaces together so that the girl could finally be present in the place she was longing for in search of her peace of mind: “The church itself had come to the poor girl in her narrow room, or the room had gone to the church. She sat in the pew with the rest of the pastor’s household, and when they had finished the hymn and looked up, they nodded and said, “It was right of you to come, Karen.” “It was mercy,” said she” (Andersen, 2016:294).

The end of this narrative is, however, ambivalent: “The organ played and the children’s voices in the choir sounded soft and lovely. The bright warm sunshine streamed through the window into the pew where Karen sat, and her heart became so filled with it, so filled with peace and joy, that it broke. Her soul flew on the sunbeams to Heaven, and no one was there who asked after the Red Shoes” (Andersen, 2016:294).

Given this context, the ending of this story can indeed be considered as a happy one because Karen’s heart broke full of “sunshine, peace, and joy” expressing her choice to reconnect with God and spiritual values. Her injured and crippled body had become a

limitation preventing her from being able to move and attend the church, and now the priority was given to the soul and its needs.

The third binary opposition used in this tale- and closely related with Spirituality and Materiality- is Life and Death, emphasizing the issue of quality and meaning of life. Living purely a material life and ignoring spiritual values is a death pathway, according to this story. And, on the contrary, dying does not necessarily mean an end to existence - because the soul reconnects with God and the spiritual life continues, especially, when the earthly life is too demanding and limited. In terms of a religious worldview, the existential issues are raised here, showing the right way to a happy eternal life in this didactic story.

“The Little Mermaid”

In a popular version of this well-known fairy tale, the little mermaid dies, turning into sea foam. She does not win the prince's love, does not become his wife and is destined to die. However, in Andersen's original version, the end of this tale is slightly different. When the little mermaid turns into sea foam, she notices that she is surrounded by daughters of the air – fair, ethereal beings – to one of whom she is converted too. The daughters of the air explain to the little mermaid that her life does not end yet and she has a chance to earn an immortal soul: “You, poor little mermaid, have tried with your whole heart to do as we are doing; you have suffered and endured and raised yourself to the spirit-world by your good deeds; and now, by striving for three hundred years in the same way, you may obtain an immortal soul.” (Andersen, 2016:75).

The tale ends with the little mermaid watching people on the board of a ship looking for her – the little mermaid says goodbye to the prince and his bride, and floats up to a pink cloud with other children of the air. From them she learns of the possibility to get into the kingdom of heaven even faster, without needing to wait for three hundred years: “After three hundred years, thus shall we float into the kingdom of heaven,” said she. “And we may even get there sooner,” whispered one of her companions...”(Andersen, 2016:76).

The ending of this fairy tale is commonly considered as unhappy. Understandably, such an assessment is determined by the failed love of the prince and the little mermaid, and her death by turning into sea foam. However, the semiotic approach broadens the understanding of this ending and opens up new perspectives for consideration.

At the beginning of the story, the main character was put in a scarcity situation and had three needs or desires for a meaningful life. Firstly, it was the need for love as she was dreaming of a beautiful prince while looking at a marble statue of a handsome boy. After having seen the prince, his love became her primary desire and need. Love and connection, as a unity between the male and female forces, reflect a process of unity when the psyche becomes harmonious, making this connection a symbolic expression of totality, health and ultimate happiness.

The second desire that the little mermaid had was a wish to live a human life that was represented by two legs. Lastly, the third longing that the little mermaid had was that for an immortal soul, a feature not possessed by beings living underwater, and only the little mermaid felt a desire to obtain it. This fascinated the little mermaid and she wholeheartedly longed to experience the physical and afterlife of human existence.

Reflecting on the ending of this fairy tale it is apparent that not all desires of the little mermaid were fulfilled. However, even if she did not get married to the prince and died, she gained experience of love, human life and she got a pair of human legs. Again, even if she did

not acquire an immortal life, her existence did not end with death as her soul continued its journey with the children of the air. The whole story ends with this possibility allowing the little mermaid to fulfil her desire and take part in bringing happiness to mankind, thus converting her into an immortal soul. In fact, this desire, as well as the value of spiritual life, is presented in the story as the main and crucial one.

This story is also about a sacrifice, i.e. the little mermaid sacrifices her beautiful voice for a pair of legs, she also sacrifices her life to save the prince's life, and her sisters sacrifice their hair to save the little mermaid. As is revealed at the end of the story, all these sacrifices lead to an unconventional happy ending. Surely this motif is related to the author's Christian worldview and highlights certain Christian values.

This idea is supported by the binary opposition between Up and Down, creating a three-dimensional perspective. The little mermaid lives deep under the sea and this underwater world is depicted as beautiful and harmonious: "We must not imagine that there is nothing at the bottom of the sea but bare yellow sand. No, indeed; the most singular flowers and plants grow there; the leaves and stems of which are so pliant, that the slightest agitation of the water causes them to stir as if they had life" (Andersen, 2016:57).

In this dimension that represents the category of Down, the life of the mermaid community is depicted as utterly happy and careless. However, for the little mermaid, this world is associated with loneliness and symbolic death, lacking meaning and purpose in living that way. Thus, another binary opposition present in this tale is Life and Death, relating closely to the opposition of Up and Down which traditionally connects the lower dimension with death and, analogically, the upper dimension with life.

The human world that appears at the Up dimension is not only a place for life and love but also for suffering. The little mermaid suffers with every step as walking or dancing are painful to her, she also suffers seeing the prince choosing another lady as his bride. Moreover, she suffers quietly without the ability to express her feelings. However, the human world presents more life and variety, and the little mermaid does not regret her choices and sacrifices. Nevertheless, she must leave this dimension as she dies.

A paradoxical situation arises here because instead of dying and turning into the sea foam, which would symbolically mean returning to the underwater world, the little mermaid rises and converts into the air element, becoming one of the children of the air. Thus, in that way she is rewarded for her good heart, sacrifices and choice of love over life. Consequently, moving higher up gives her even more life and the possibility to gain an immortal soul which is related to eternal life.

In conclusion, this interdimensional journey from the bottom up and the transformation of the little mermaid allows viewing the ending of this fairy tale as a happy one. Moreover, viewing from the perspective of scarcity and abundance, it is apparent that the little mermaid has not experienced the desired abundance either in the underwater, or in the human world, and only ascending even higher into the air dimension, or the spiritual world, brought her closer to the possibility of the desired abundance. Thus, moving Up gives more Life for the female protagonist and represents a certain hierarchy of Christian values.

"The Swineherd"

"The Swineherd" is one more of the famous fairy tales by Andersen that, instead of ending in a wedding of a prince and a princess, leaves both characters lonely: "And then he

returned into his kingdom and left her behind. She could now sing at her leisure: “A jolly old sow once lived in a sty, Three little piggies has she,” &c.” (Andersen, 2016:197).

This story tells of several disharmonious interactions between the prince and the princess. Firstly, the princess is disappointed and does not accept the gifts sent by the prince, thus in this situation she holds a power position. Yet later, the prince takes over the power position, as he creates and gifts to the princess artificial low-value items that reflect material values, in exchange for kisses. The prince maintains this power position at the very end of the tale, rejecting the princess because of her vanity and materialism.

All the items gifted to the princess by the prince were miraculous and special in some way. The first gift was magic rose from “a rose-tree, the most beautiful of its kind. It bloomed only once in five years, and then it had only one single rose upon it, but what a rose! It had such a sweet scent that one instantly forgot all sorrow and grief when one smelt it” (Andersen, 2016:193). The second gift was “a nightingale, which could sing as if every sweet melody was in its throat”(Andersen, 2016:193). In addition, there were two more magic things that the prince created and exchanged with the princess for kisses, i. e. a kitchen-pot and a rattle.

All these four magic things play an important role in the narrative as they move action ahead and represent opposite values. Further, with their help, the binary opposition of True and False allows questioning not only values but also the trueness of the princess: whether or not she is indeed a real and true princess or perhaps a fake one, as royalty is not only an external status but also bears the expectation of internal nobleness. At the same time, the swineherd can be perceived as fake because he is, in fact, a real prince, representing true human values.

This fairy tale can also be considered as an interaction between archetypal animus and anima, however, the unity of these two parts of the human psyche, in this case, is impossible and harmony is not achieved. The differences in value systems and true desires create obstacles that convert the story to a didactic narrative. The author does not follow the traditional model of plot development - on the contrary, the challenges become a lesson for the princess because she was giving her kisses away for nothing, thus demonstrating a lack of dignity and deeming her underserving of the princess' title.

To conclude, if the tale started from a position of scarcity, it has in fact ended with it as well: the prince lacked and pursued love but came to realise that the lady he chose was not a real princess. In other words, marriage to such a princess would not have moved him to a state of abundance. The transformation in this story is mainly related to changes in social status as the prince changed his to a significantly lower social position but later returned to the royal status, while the princess lost her noble status and became an ordinary girl after being banished from her father's empire. In this context, the ending of this story can be considered neutral, i.e. neither happy nor unhappy.

Conclusions

The proposed semiotic approach to analysing Andersen's well-known fairy tales revealed several important points. By identifying the main binary oppositions in the analysed fairy tales, it becomes apparent that they contribute strongly to the transformation of a seemingly unhappy ending into, in fact, a happy ending. The use of binary oppositions in observing the phenomena of reality helps to interpret them and to form an evaluation scale, increasing their symbolic meanings.

Notably, the most common key binary oppositions found in the analysed Andersen's tales are Up and Down, True and False, Life and Death, and Light and Dark. In most instances, several of them are used cohesively and result in forming an integral semantic system by associating the dimension of Up with those of Light, True and Life. In all of the analysed tales, these binary oppositions marked the protagonist's symbolic journey from scarcity to abundance, which, in turn, determined his or her inner – and sometimes physical - transformation.

For instance, the binary opposition of Up and Down that is at work in the stories of *The Little Mermaid*, *The Little Match Girl* and *The Brave Tin Soldier* is essential for the creation of meaning. The opposition of moral categories on the vertical axis is initially associated with religious beliefs and following Christian and profane views, upward movement is assessed as positive, whereas downward movement is perceived as negative. The lexemes used for naming top and bottom become symbols embodying the values that a human being has acquired in mastering the world. The identification of spheres in which the evaluative nature of the metaphorical Up and Down dyad manifests itself is important for understanding the complex mechanism of reality assessment, realising its complexity.

As for the before-mentioned fairy tales, namely, *The Little Match Girl* and *The Little Mermaid*, portray death as the only means allowing or enabling the main character to ascend to a higher dimension. The writer's deep faith in God and religious worldview justifies his choice as a presentation of a happy ending, without regard for death as a completion but rather seeing death as a natural transformation that does not end human existence. In comparison, the Up and Down opposition is employed somewhat differently in *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* where the downfall relates primarily to challenges, however, eventually falling is attributed meaning of self-destruction to become united - through fire and love - with the beloved one.

Another important aspect revealed by this analysis relates to the moment of reaching a state of abundance by the main character during his or her symbolic journey in the narrative. The transformation from a scarcity state to the achievement of abundance, as a reward for making the right choices or for resisting challenging temptations, is crucial in defining the type of ending as happy or unhappy. According to the twelve stages of the Hero's journey, preceding the last stage known as *the Return With The Elixir*, there is also a stage of *Resurrection* that indicates a physical or symbolic rebirth of the main character and acquisition of new abilities or skills as a result of overcoming obstacles. Forming the climax of the story mainly leads to a new state of abundance and accomplishment of goals.

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