



Universidad
Zaragoza

Lesbian Relationships in Emma

Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch:*

Old Tales in New Skins

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Trabajo de Fin de Grado en Estudios Ingleses

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Diciembre 2014

Universidad de Zaragoza

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INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales form part of our lives due to the fact that, since our childhood, we all have become familiar with them as they seem to be everywhere: in the books our parents read to us, in films, in the children programs we watch and, globally consumed as merchandising as well. Although many people think that fairy tales lack importance and that they are only entertainment for children, they can be powerful vehicles which convey ideas that help us understand the world. Moreover, these ideas do not disappear as we grow up, since many of them tend to stay with us even when we are adults.

It is difficult to determine the real origin of fairy tales. Scholars have discussed it for a long time without achieving a clear conclusion. However, what it is clear is that their origin is very much connected to folklore and the oral tradition. Some scholars, such as Warner and Zipes, claim that fairy tales rose from the interaction between a small group of young people and an older voice, who answered to their demands and curiosity (Warner, 1994: 21; Zipes, 1997: 3). This suggests that fairy tales had didactic purposes and that, in ancient societies, they may have been used not only to transmit information about nature and the world, but also to convey cultural values and historical knowledge. These oral fairy tales could have been used to pass on traditional values, and, consequently, although they have changed and evolved a lot, they may still carry part of those ideas.

Some of these oral fairy tales began to be written-down and collected in the late 17th century, when the French writer Charles Perrault published *Mother Goose Tales* (1697), a book which included famous stories such as “Cinderella”, “Little Red Riding Hood” or “Bluebeard”. Nevertheless, the long collections of fairy tales did not arrive until the 19th century, when the Brothers Grimm published *Children's and Household Tales* (1812) which, at the beginning, was formed of just one volume to which two more ones were added in the following years. It was with

the publication of this collection that some fairy tales were modified for the first time, as Wilhelm Grimm included Christian motifs in them. This writer was the first one to adapt fairy tales, transforming their pagan aspects into Christian values (Zipes, 1997: 48).

Since then, fairy tales have been modified many times due to two main reasons. The first one is that they have been accommodated to fulfill the necessities of different genres, as fairy tales have been adapted to opera, ballet, poetry, and more recently, to films. Some examples of this are Tchaikovsky's ballet, *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), or Béla Bartók's opera, *Bluebeard's Castle* (1918). The second main reason is that fairy tales have gone through plot changes, as the old versions were considered unsuitable for children. These new adaptations have omitted almost all the violence, cruelty and sex of traditional stories. Good examples of this are some Disney films, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), or *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). However, in spite of all the changes they have gone through in the last two centuries, traditional fairy tales are still being modified. They continue to be adapted and transformed, and, as evidence of this, some new versions can be mentioned, such as the Spanish film *Blancanieves* (2012) or the Hollywood production *Maleficent* (2014), which has been released only recently.

Nevertheless, not all the changes that fairy tales have experienced have been realised to make them more entertaining or suitable. In the second half of the 20th century, there emerged many movements which asked for rights and justice for social minorities; and they encouraged people to start to question things that had been taken for granted for many centuries, including history, traditional values, and the key texts which transmitted them. All this influenced the emergingly artistic movement, postmodernism, and affected literature profoundly; and writers began to express in their works not only their scepticism towards, but also their criticism of tradition. In order to do that, many writers started to revise traditional canonical texts and rewrite them from a different perspective, normally from the point of view of minority groups. In order to rewrite texts from a

new point of view, these authors frequently used a strategy called parody, which, in some way, consists in the imitation of a previous text; yet, it is not just a copy of other narratives but a “repetition [of them] with critical distance” (Hutcheon, 1985: 6). This means that postmodern writers took previous texts and modified them in order to expose and criticise some of the features that they contained. Although the use of parody is not exclusively a postmodernist phenomenon, since we can find parodies which were written many centuries ago such as Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1606) or Alexander Pope's “The Rape of the Lock” (1712), its use became very popular during the second half of the 20th century (Hutcheon, 1985: 1).

During this period, many female writers also revised old texts and rewrote them from a feminist perspective. They did that not only in order to denounce the oppression of women in literature and by extension in a patriarchal society, but also in order to expose that the role that women had in canonical texts was a minor one. For many centuries, texts written by female authors were despised or branded as not being good enough to deserve critical attention. Moreover, canonical texts frequently represented the ideal of femininity as a naïve, inactive, objectified woman, lacking in critical opinions or determination (Waugh, 1989: 22-33). To solve these issues, on the one hand, old female narratives were rescued; and, on the other hand, female authors started to do what Adrienne Rich called a “re-vision of literature” (quot. in Waugh, 1989: 24). This means that they took previous narratives and transformed them, or created new versions of them, normally by using the strategy of parody as well.

As many other traditional texts, in this period fairy tales were also revised and rewritten from a female point of view with two main aims. The first one was to expose the patriarchal ideology they contained; and the second one was to change the values they conveyed by giving voice to their female characters. However, rewriting fairy tales from a female point of view conveys a difficulty. Some scholars, such as Camile Paglia, argue that writing feminist versions of fairy tales

is impossible because this genre is built over patriarchal values which contradict feminism. They state that using traditional fairy tales to write about feminism is absurd as you cannot use a genre to reject the genre itself. Nevertheless, some other scholars, such as Angela Carter, Jacques Derrida, or Hélène Cixous, claim that feminist rewritings and especially feminist fairy tale rewritings are not only possible, but also necessary in order to denounce and destroy the old values that these stories contain and create new ones (quot. in Sellers, 2001: 22-30).

Some examples of female rewritings of fairy tales are collections such as Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), and Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (1997), which is the one I am going to focus on in this essay. Emma Donoghue is an Irish writer born in Dublin in 1969. After finishing her degree at University College Dublin and achieving her PhD at Cambridge University, she became a full-time writer. She has declared to be a lesbian and nowadays she lives in Canada with her partner and their two children. Her work *Kissing the Witch* is a collection of interwoven fairy tales aimed at adults, which belongs to late postmodernism as it was first published in 1997. As most of Donoghue's writings, this collection is related to homosexuality and contains many lesbian motifs and themes. The fact that Donoghue includes homosexual aspects in her fairy tales distinguish them from other parodies which were written before; and, in some way, it conveys the feeling that Donoghue's stories go even beyond the feminist point of view that can be found in, for example, Carter's ones.

Nevertheless, the fact that Donoghue includes homosexual motifs in her fairy tales may add a new difficulty, different from the one discussed above. Traditional fairy tales are built around heterosexual relationships and support patriarchal relationships based on marriage. Consequently, using this genre to write about homosexuality would go against the genre itself. However, in the same way as fairy tales can be used to write about feminism, they can also be used to write about homosexuality and to demand a greater acceptance and visibility of homosexual relationships.

In this essay I will be talking about homosexuality in Emma Donoghue's collection *Kissing the Witch*. Concretely, I will focus on how this author uses homosexuality in order to destroy the traditional gender and sexual values of fairy tales. First of all, I will introduce the fairy tales that I have chosen for analysis; secondly, I will talk about the kind of lesbian relationships that appear in them; then, I will analyse the portrayal of the female characters; and finally, I will try to offer a critical view of Donoghue's collection.

LESBIANISM IN *KISSING THE WITCH*

Kissing the Witch includes homosexual relationships, which is something uncommon in fairy tales and points out that the author can be included within a postmodernist critical tendency. As commented in the introduction, some collections of tales such as Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* broke with some of the traditional and sexist ideas and stereotypes that fairy tales transmit, but it did not focus on homosexuality. It is obvious that the main aim of Donoghue's fairy tales is to demand a greater acceptance of homosexual relationships, especially those between women. However, the collection written by Donoghue not only claims that there are more options apart from heterosexual relations or marriages, but also that they should be included in canonical texts. *Kissing the Witch* is a postmodernist work, and consequently, a re-vision of traditional literature, in this case, of popular fairy tales. This means that the author takes traditional fairy tales such as "Cinderella", "Beauty and the Beast" or "The Goose Girl" and changes them, omitting and/or transforming the old and patriarchal values into new ones in favour of women's liberation and lesbian rights.

In addition, this collection of fairy tales also aims to fight against the concept of compulsory heterosexuality that all traditional fairy tales convey. Historically, western culture has idealised heterosexual relationships (Rich, 1978: 134), and this can be seen in fairy tales due to the fact that they usually end in a happy heterosexual marriage. In fact, these stories try to convince people that getting married is a female duty. Donoghue's fairy tales aim to break with the idealisation of marriage and show that there are more options for women apart from getting married when they are young.

1.1 Corpus

In order to analyse homosexuality in *Kissing the Witch*, I have chosen three short stories which belong to this collection: “The Tale of the Shoe”, “The Tale of the Rose” and “The Tale of the Kiss”, as they are the ones in which homosexuality appears more openly. Whereas the first two ones are modern versions of traditional fairy tales – “The Tale of the Shoe” is a version of the Brother Grimms' “Cinderella” and “The Tale of the Rose” is a version of Perrault's “The Beauty and the Beast” – “The Tale of the Kiss” is just an invention of the author. However, it should be considered a fairy tale as it contains some typical features of this genre; for example, it includes magical elements. In fact, this tale can be seen as a “prequel” which tells the past story of the sea witch who appears in Andersen's most famous tale: “The Little Mermaid” (1837). Moreover, “The Tale of the Kiss” is not only the very last one of the book, but also the one which gives the title to the whole collection, which may indicate that this tale has a special importance. This fairy tale may be the great contribution of Emma Donoghue, not only to the genre itself, but also to her criticism of patriarchal values due to the fact that “The Tale of the Kiss” comprises most of the main ideas in the collection.

“The Tale of the Shoe” tells the story of a young girl who punishes herself by working all day until an old lady arrives to help her. At the end, the young girl realises that she is in love with the lady and they decide to stay together. In “The Tale of the Rose”, a man sells his young and intelligent daughter to a beast. She goes without complaining to the castle where the beast lives and she stays there for several months. When she discovers that her father is ill, she asks the beast for permission to return to her cottage and the beast lets her go. She remains home for several months as well, yet, she realises that she misses the castle and its garden and decides to go back to this place again. As time passes, she starts to see the beast as she really is, a beautiful queen, and she decides to live in the castle with her. “The Tale of the Kiss” tells the story of an aristocratic woman who,

after the death of her mother, decides to rebel against what society imposes on her and leaves her castle in order to live on her own in a cave next to the sea. With the passing of time, the inhabitants of the nearest village start to think that she is a powerful witch and go to her cave in order to ask for advice, forgiveness or spells. One day, she meets the parents of a young girl who want her to behave like an adult woman and get married; this witch convinces them not to force her to do so. When the young girl visits the witch to thank her for what she has done, she asks her for a kiss as payment, to which the girl consents. The girl leaves just after this, but she returns some days later. However, we cannot know how this story ends because the narrator explicitly says that the reader has to imagine it.

1.2. Lesbian Relationships: *Old Tales in New Skins*

The explicit homosexual relationships that appear in these three fairy tales take place always between two women. In fact, in none of the thirteen short stories of this collection is there any kind of hint of male homosexuality. This reinforces two main ideas mentioned before. The first one is that Emma Donoghue is very concerned about female sexuality; and the second one is that the main aim of *Kissing the Witch* is to demand acceptance for lesbian relationships. Another characteristic that “The Tale of the Shoe”, “The Tale of the Rose” and “The Tale of Kiss” share is that these lesbian relationships are always actualised at the very end of them. This means that, in the short stories, Donoghue proposes a totally different kind of closure for fairy tales. Moreover, the new type of ending clashes completely with the one which usually appears in traditional fairy tales, if we take into account that, in many cases, they usually finish with a heterosexual wedding, which is a limited view and celebration of love. However, although the type of relationships narrated in traditional fairy tales and in *Kissing the Witch* are opposed, all the tales end happily except for “The Tale of the Kiss”. This suggests that both kinds of fairy tales transmit that love is a way to reach happiness. In traditional fairy tales, nevertheless, love is mingled with questions of social class and wealth and also, in them, the girls are rewarded because they have behaved or because they are innocent or honest. As this aspect does not appear in Donoghue's tales, the image of love that they transmit seem to be purer and deprived of any materialistic concerns. In addition, if we take into account again that the relationships that appear at the end concern two women, this idea of happiness may also suggest that with these stories Donoghue conveys that marriage is not the only way to reach happiness. In fact, the author transmits somehow that a woman can be happy when she is with the person she wants to, in this case, another woman.

Although, as already said, homosexuality in the three tales that I have chosen is very clear, in other stories of this collection, it is more subtle. Of course, there are relationships between two

women as well, especially between a young girl and a mature lady. However, they tend to be quite ambiguous as there is not any hint of sexual attraction. According to Smith, in literature, this type of relations are romantic relationships which form part of a literary strategy called Lesbian Panic, which is “the disruptive action or reaction that occurs when a character is either unable or unwilling to confront or reveal her own lesbianism” (1995: 569). This author also says that this kind of relationships instead of being based on mutual support, companionship or affection, are based on the obsession of one of the members and the passive indifference of the other. (1995: 579). Although this strategy usually appears in novels and stories related to homosexuality, in *Kissing the Witch* there is not any hint of Lesbian Panic due to the fact that most of the relationship between women are either based on romanticism as in “The Tale of the Apple” (43-58), or on support and affection. For example, there are several fairy tales in which the old woman is the advisor and the young girl her protégée as in “The Tale of the Hair” (83-99) and “The Tale of the Needle” (167-182). In addition, in this collection, there is even a tale in which there is not any suggestion of homosexuality, “The Tale of the Voice” (185-204) which deals with different kinds of heterosexual relationships.

In the three stories that I have chosen, lesbian relationships are always seen as an alternative type of love due to the fact that all the main characters of these three tales think at some point of getting married with a man. This is especially obvious in “The Tale of the Shoe”, as the protagonist attends two balls because she wants to find a man and even dances with the prince. This fact also appears in “The Tale of the Rose” and “The Tale of the Kiss”, although it is also true that the main characters of these two tales are not much interested in getting married. However, they comment on the fact that they had suitors and that they could have got married if they had wanted to. In addition, the protagonists of “The Tale of the Shoe” and “The Tale of the Kiss” think that marriage is a good option for women. In fact, the protagonist of “The Tale of the Shoe” believes that marriage is the only thing that women could wish for and she, parodically and self-consciously remarks: “And then,

because I asked, she took me to the ball. Isn't that what girls are meant to ask for?" (3); and the main character of "The Tale of the Kiss" considers that getting married and having children is a good option if you do not want to become "old rags tossed in the corner" (208). The protagonist of "The Tale of the Rose" is the one who rejects marriage more deeply as she states that she is not like her sisters who wait for a prince "outside the door" (29). All this suggests the idea that not only the main characters of these tales but also women in general terms have been brought up and educated with the idea that getting married is everything a woman could wish for.

The relationships that appear in "The Tale of the Shoe", "The Tale of the Rose" and "The tale of the Kiss" always involve a young girl and a mature woman. Without any doubt, this is connected with the type of homosexual affairs that were quite common in Ancient Greece. In spite of the fact that it is widely believed that Greek homosexuality only affected men, this is not true. Although there are some authors who say that female homosexual relationships were less common (Dover, 1978: 171), others, such as Harris, claim that they were as usual as male ones but that they have been more strongly ignored and censored (1996: 20). What is true is that there were lesbian relationships in Ancient Greece, and the author Sappho and her poetry are evidence of this. Nevertheless, male and female homosexual relationships in Ancient Greece were not completely similar. Although it is true that all of them were based on the idealisation of youth (Sullivan, 2003: 102), according to Dover the ones between men were connected to subordination and submission (1978: 103) while the ones between women were related to equality (177). Although these connections have little to do with our contemporary reality, in Ancient Greece the link between male homosexuality and subordination existed because women were already considered inferior (Carrillo-Rush, 2012: 1), and consequently, all the men who had sexual relationships with other men were regarded as acting like women (Dover, 1978: 103). Thus, the fact that these tales contain only lesbian relationships emphasises the positive side of homosexuality in Ancient Greece, a kind of relationship based on consent in which there is no dominance of any of the members of the

couple.

The fact that Donoghue includes in her collection of fairy tales relationships between a mature woman and a young one, not only recalls Ancient Greece in general terms, but the poems written by Sappho¹ in particular. In them, she addresses other women, especially younger ones, probably with the aim of arising “the sexual interest of the other person” (Dover, 1978: 172). Consequently, some of the tales in *Kissing the Witch*, especially “The Tale of the Kiss”, which is the only one in which the protagonist is a mature woman who wants to win over a young girl², may allude to Sappho's poems. Moreover, the fact that the fairy tales of this collection recall Sappho and her poetry also emphasizes that lesbian relationships are not something new as many people believe, but a form of love that has existed for many centuries. Ultimately, the connection of Donoghue's fairy tales with Ancient Greece suggests somehow that homosexuality is a historical phenomenon.

Although all the fairy tales that I have chosen bring to mind homosexuality in Ancient Greece, the attitudes of the characters towards lesbianism vary due to the fact that this is something new for them, especially for the narrators. This occurs due to the fact that in the three fairy tales, the narrators are telling their first lesbian experience. Concretely, in “The Tale of the Shoe” and “The Tale of the Rose” the young girls are surprised by the possibility of being involved in a relationship with another woman. The girl in “The Tale of the Shoe” even rejects this possibility, first torturing herself by working all day long and afterwards attending balls in order to find a man with whom she can have a relation. In “The Tale of the Kiss” the mature woman is astounded mainly because she never thought about having a relationship with anyone. However, in this tale, the young girl seems

1 Sappho (630/610 – 570 B.C.) was a female lyric poet born on the island of Lesbos. As her poetry, which has an enormous quantity of allusions to women and love, has been considered autobiographical, she is the most and probably only representative figure of lesbian relationships in Ancient Greece (Harris, 1996: 1-10).

2 In all the other fairy tales that belong to *Kissing the Witch*, the protagonist is a young girl.

not to be surprised at all, which breaks with the stereotype that young women are always innocent. In addition, the fact that all the main characters of these fairy tales are surprised at having a homosexual relationship, together with the fact that they realise that they love a woman at the very end of the tales, may suggest that the tales end with an epiphanic realisation. This means that there is a point in every tale at which the protagonist realises not only that she loves a woman, but also that being with her is the only thing that can make the protagonist happy.

1. 3. Female Characters

The portrayal of women in *Kissing the Witch* is especially relevant when talking about feminism and liberation. In some tales, powerful and wise women are depicted as bordering monstrosity, especially at the beginning of them. This depiction is not new at all as it historically fits female artistic stereotypes. In art and literature there have always been stereotypes to classify people, which have been usually based on binary oppositions. Concretely, “people who are significantly different from the majority are frequently exposed to this binary form of representation” (Hall, 1997: 229). This means that everybody who is “different” in some sense, for example in terms of religion, race or even gender, is automatically considered as the very opposite of the majority group. In the literary tradition, women have been commonly represented through the angel/monster dichotomy³, which conveys the idea that women can be just good or evil, but never anything in between (Carrillo-Rush, 2012: 12). The angel/monster dichotomy consists in representing all the female characters who follow the strict social rules as angels and the ones who rebel against them as terrible creatures. According to Carrillo-Rush, this topic arose in Ancient Greece with the myth of Pandora and then spread to the Judeo-Christian tradition with the myth of Lilith (7). And finally, it expanded to literature and then became a very common motif in traditional literature and other artistic forms of representation in general.

In “The Tale of the Rose” and “The Tale of the Kiss” the motif of the angel/monster dichotomy is quite prominent. In the first one, the mature lady who lives in the castle is described repeatedly as a terrible beast, yet, the reader is not given any explanation of the beast's nature. The fact that the monster is not described in the tale makes the reader suspect that it is not really a beast, but just a person who is treated or seen as an evil creature.

³ This dichotomy can also be reworked as the virgin/whore or lily/rose binaries.

“I sat in my satin-walled room, before the gold mirror. I looked deep into the pool of my face, and tried to imagine what the beast looked like. The more hideous my imaginings, the more my own face seemed to glow. Because I thought that the beast must be everything I was not: dark to my light, rough to my smooth, hoarse to my sweet.”
(Donoghue, 1997: 35)

This quotation from the tale clearly shows that the building up to monstrosity or otherness actually corresponds to a process of differentiation based on projection. With the passing of time and after reading a lot of books in the library, the young woman starts to change her mind and at the end, she “learns that there is nothing monstrous in the woman” and that the “beast” is nothing but a beautiful lady (39-40). The young woman not only realises through reading that the lady is not an evil creature, but also that she is considered a monster just because she is powerful and she does not follow patriarchal social rules. This confirms not only that Emma Donoghue uses the traditional angel/monster dichotomy but also that she uses it in order to destroy it. As said previously, using traditional techniques or topics in order to expose and denounce their injustice has been a very common practice in the postmodern period. The “Tale of the Kiss” also includes the angel/monster dichotomy but in a different way. In this tale, all the characters think that the protagonist is an evil witch and they are afraid of her. However, the main difference lies in that the protagonist-narrator shows every time that she is just a common person and that people are afraid of her just because she rejects social rules and the patriarchal society. Consequently, the reader perceives her as a good and wise woman.

“[A small boy] threw seaweed into my cave until I came out with a big stick. He screamed when he saw me and ran until he fell over, then got up and ran again.

When he came back the next day, he was braver. He asked, What happened to the old one?

The old what?

Witch. Have you got her locked up in her cave or did you boil her in her pot?

This is my cave now, I told him sternly. There's no one here but me.

So it was a witch they were wanting. I laughed to myself, that first day, as the little boy ran down the headland, but soon enough I learned how to be what they needed.” (210-211)

We see here that in “The Tale of the Kiss”, Donoghue has used the traditional representation of witches as monstrous and has combined it with a first-person narrator in order to expose the sexist and artificial side of this stereotype. The quotation above clearly shows that the identity embodied by the stereotype is not essential but imposed from the outside. Concretely, the protagonist of “The Tale of the Kiss” decides to become a witch because being what people need may help her survive.

1. 4. Critical View

In spite of its defence of women's sexual freedom and lesbian relationships, *Kissing the Witch* is not interested in male homosexuality. This may transmit the feeling that there is no need to fight for the rights and tolerance towards male homosexuals. Yet, as everybody knows, this is not true because there are still many social groups that do not accept any kind of homosexuality. Consequently, the fact that none of the fairy tales contain any hint of male homosexuality conveys that the whole collection is not concerned about the problems that people in general terms may have just because of their sexual preferences. People, regardless of their gender, tend to be discriminated against just because of their homosexuality and *Kissing the Witch* does not seem to care about this. However, if we take into account that the author of the collection is not only a woman but also a lesbian, we can reach the conclusion that this work only includes topics that the author knows well. This means that this work fights only for the rights and the acceptance of lesbian women just because its author, Emma Donoghue, knows about the type of discrimination that this minority group has to face every day. So, the fact that *Kissing the Witch* does not contain any hint of male homosexuality does not mean necessarily that this collection is not concerned about the discrimination against the male homosexual community, but that its author only wanted to include themes that she was familiar with. In this respect, it should be said that the vindications that are made in literature tend to be considered stronger if they are written by a person who belongs to a group that is connected directly with them. This means that the demands for respect towards the female homosexual community which are made in *Kissing the Witch* are even more forceful just because Emma Donoghue is openly lesbian. If this work contained vindications in favour of the tolerance towards male homosexuality, those claims would be much weaker because the author is not a man. So, this may be another reason why this collection of fairy tales does not talk about male homosexuality.

Kissing the Witch is a collection of fairy tales that breaks with the compulsory

heterosexuality that traditional fairy tales convey. So, it is true that these stories do not idealise heterosexual marriages. However, they romanticise lesbian relationships due to the fact that the author presents them as totally sincere and authentic. This can be seen in almost all the stories, yet, it is even clearer in “The Tale of the Rose” as the lesbian relationship is compared with a red rose, which is the symbol of perfection. In fact, when reading some of these tales, the reader can have the feeling that if you have a lesbian relationship, you are not going to have any problem with it, which, of course, is not completely true as all kinds of love relationships are difficult at some points. This means that Donoghue may be idealising lesbianism, exactly in the same way as traditional fairy tales idealise heterosexuality. Nevertheless, this can also be explained as the author's purposeful intention of shocking the reader and make him or her realise that traditional fairy tales contain an ideological view of marriage.

CONCLUSION

Kissing the Witch is a collection of fairy tales written by Emma Donoghue that is absolutely connected to feminism and the orientation the movement took during the second half of the 20th century. The decade of the 60s was a period of feminist demonstrations that reacted against patriarchal social values and claimed for social and sexual freedom for women. The connection between this period and *Kissing the Witch* is quite obvious due to the fact that the main aim of this collection is to break with all the patriarchal and traditional values that canonical texts such as fairy tales promote. Firstly, the whole collection, and especially the three fairy tales that I have commented on in this essay, emphasize the necessity of sexual freedom for women. They claim in some way that women should be free to choose the person they want to be with, and more concretely, they defend relationships between two women. This means that they support lesbian relationships and their acceptance in society. It is this last aspect that moves the collection beyond second wave feminism and anchors it in the 1990s with the emergence of postfeminism.

In addition, the three fairy tales also break with the old conception of marriage. Traditionally, marriage has always been considered as crucial in patriarchy, especially for women, and the only possibility for them to be visible and happy. The three fairy tales that I have analysed, and somehow the whole collection as well, not only tear down all these ideas, but also replace them with new ones. First of all, they convey that marrying a man is not something essential for women and that women have a great variety of things that they can do with their lives. And then, these fairy tales also transmit the idea that in order to be happy and successful in life, a woman does not need to get married, but to choose what she wants to do or the person she wants to be with. This means that *Kissing the Witch* breaks with the idealisation of heterosexual marriage. However, at the same time, it romanticises lesbian relationships due to the fact that the tales which belong to this collection present them as almost perfect.

These fairy tales also break with the angel/monster dichotomy that has been used in the literary tradition for many centuries. This dichotomy, which consists mainly in depicting the female characters who follow the social and patriarchal rules as angels and the ones who reject them as monsters, has been extremely negative for women in two different ways. The first and most important one is that it has diminished the freedom of women due to the fact that women had to follow the social conventions not only to be visible, but also to be considered human. In addition, this dichotomy has also had a tremendous impact on the image of women, as traditionally they have been classified into angels or monsters depending on their social behaviour. “The Tale of the Rose” and “The Tale of the Kiss” break with the angel/monster dichotomy as they expose the reasons why the female characters of these tales are considered evil creatures by the people who surround them. This means that these fairy tales show why some people are considered monsters so that the reader can realise that this occurs because of the attitudes that these female characters have towards social rules.

In these three fairy tales, and in the whole collection as well, there is a prominent idealisation of youth and beauty due to the fact that, in almost all the tales, there is a relationship of love or friendship between a mature woman and a young girl. This may indicate that there is a connection between *Kissing the Witch* and the culture and literature of Ancient Greece, as these types of relations were quite common. In fact, this collection may be linked to the poet Sappho, whose poems, which seem to be autobiographical, are addressed to younger women than her. The fact that the fairy tales in *Kissing the Witch* are connected to Sappho's poetry emphasizes not only that lesbian relationships have existed for many centuries, but also that they are not aberrant. Nevertheless, this idealisation of youth and beauty is double edged. As commented above, it acts as a connection between lesbianism in Ancient Greece and the relationships narrated in Donoghue's fairy tales. However, this idealisation, at some points, may also become ironic and parodic. This means that *Kissing the Witch* also criticises the idea, which many traditional fairy tales convey, that

youth and beauty are essential for women.

If we take all this into account, it can be concluded that with the collection *Kissing the Witch* Emma Donoghue undermined the patriarchal values that fairy tales transmit to young children and to adults as well. In fact, she did not only break with the traditional depiction of women in canonical literature, but also with the belief that women should marry a man in order to be successful in life. In addition, she defended the rights of homosexuals and claimed for their visibility and acceptance by including homosexual relationships in otherwise canonical texts.

However, in her demands for tolerance, she only focuses on female homosexuality, as there is not any allusion to male homosexuality in the whole collection. This may emphasise the idea that the author is not so much concerned with discrimination against people who do not belong to the lesbian community. Yet, this is not necessarily true. Emma Donoghue may have chosen to speak about female homosexuality due to two main reasons. The first one could be that she knows this topic quite well due to the fact that she is openly lesbian. And the second one is that if she had included claims for the visibility and acceptance of the male homosexual community as well, those demands would have been less strong just because Donoghue does not belong to this group.

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