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Narrative Space and Transtextual Dialogues in Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch*

Emma Donoghue'nun *Kissing the Witch* adlı Eserinde Anlatı Uzamı ve Metinleraşkın Diyaloglar

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Abstract

This article aims to introduce a critical reading of the narrative space of *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* by the Irish author Emma Donoghue. In this collection of rewritten fairy tales, Donoghue not only thematically reimagines the popular classical fairy tales penned by Grimms, Beaumont, Perrault and Andersen, she also makes the protagonist/narrator of each story the narratee of the next one, allowing for a dialogue between diverse figures from oral and written tradition across cultures. The narrative strategy and framing technique deployed by Donoghue enables a transtextual space of gathering where previously objectified and focalized female characters of canonical tales engage in dialogue through storytelling. The possibilities offered by this transtextual agency of rewriting will be explored from a narratological perspective, paying particular attention to gender-informed politics of reimagining canonical narratives. As examples of "rewriting as displacement", according to Doležel's categorization, the tales in *Kissing the Witch* create story-worlds that affirm transgression and flow against all forms of stabilizing and restricting mechanisms of normativity. Talking back to the canon and literary convention through first-person narratives of classical fairy tale characters, the collection offers an unsettling example of the liberating potential of storytelling against ossified and ossifying power mechanisms.
Keywords: Emma Donoghue, *Kissing the Witch*, rewriting, narratology, transtextuality, gender.

Öz

Bu makale İrlandalı yazar Emma Donoghue'nun *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* adlı eserinin anlatı uzamının eleştirel bir okumasını sunmayı amaçlar. Donoghue, masalların yeniden yazımlarını bir araya getirdiği bu kitapta, Grimms, Beaumont, Perrault ve Andersen gibi yazarların kaleme aldığı popüler klasik masalları tematik olarak yeniden kurgulamakla kalmayıp, bir masalın anlatıcısını bir sonraki masalın dinleyicisi/alımlayıcısı yaparak zamanlar ve kültürlerarası bir diyalog uzamı oluşturur. Yazarın kullandığı bu anlatı çerçevesi ve yöntemi sayesinde, kanonik masalların nesneleştirilen ve fokalize edilen kadın karakterleri metinleraşkın bir uzamda bir araya gelirler ve hikâye anlatıcılığı yoluyla bir diyalog evreni oluştururlar. Yeniden yazımın bu mentinleraşkın pratiğinin sunduğu olanaklar, kanonik anlatıların toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarına referansla yeniden kurulması meselesi odağa alınarak, anlatıbilimsel bir perspektiften ele alınacaktır. Doležel'in sınıflandırmasına göre "yer değiştirme/yerinden ayrılma/yerinden edilme" olarak yeniden yazıma örnek teşkil eden *Kissing the Witch*, normatifliğin sabitleyen ve

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sınırlandıran mekanizmasına karşı sınır aşımını/ihlalini ve akışı onaylayan hikaye evrenleri kurar. Klasik masalların kahramanlarının birinci tekil anlatı yoluyla kanona ve edebi geleneğe seslenmesi, hikaye anlatıcılığı pratiğinin kemikleşen ve kemikleştiren güç/iktidar mekanizmalarına karşı özgürleştiren bir potansiyel taşıdığını da ortaya koyar.
Anahtar sözcükler: Emma Donoghue, *Kissing the Witch*, yeniden yazım, anlatıbilim, metinsel aşkınlık, toplumsal cinsiyet.

Introduction

Each retelling is *inside* the original
(A.S. Byatt, *On Histories and Stories*)

Antonio Gramsci in "Observations on Folklore" infers that folklore is not merely a "picturesque element" but may reflect and reproduce the "fossilized" (2000, p. 361, 362) codes of normative systems and thus has a powerful impact on fashioning popular culture and thought. Modern and contemporary fiction abounds with rewritings of fairy and folk tales that unbosom and decode these fossilized structures. Irish writer Emma Donoghue's short story collection *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* (1997) contributes to this archive with thirteen stories that are grafted by a particular narrative design. Beyond thematically reimagining the popular tales penned by Grimms, Andersen, Beaumont and Perrault, and simply revising the storylines of received narratives; Donoughe makes the protagonist/narrator of each story the narratee of the next one, allowing for a dialogue between diverse figures from oral and written tradition across cultures. In this narratological pattern, the textual space of the book becomes a transtextual sphere of gathering where the previously objectified and focalized female characters of canonical tales engage in dialogue through storytelling and gain autonomous agency and voice. Donoughe thus unleashes another potential of storytelling rooted in oral culture, which Gramsci describes as another stratum which consist of "a series of innovations, often creative and progressive […], which are in the process of developing and which are in contradiction to or simply different from the morality of the governing strata" (2000, p. 361). This article aims to explore how the narrative devices and narrative space in *Kissing the Witch* operate in a destabilizing and displacing manner to outface patriarchy's governing strata in folk and fairy tales.

The overall discussion hinges on the founding premise that Emma Donoghue's deployment of rewriting as a narrative strategy reflects the critical agenda of feminist rewriting, which seeks to dismantle patriarchal stereotypes and culturally prescribed gender roles. While her critical stance against imposed and often paralysing gender roles connects Donoghue to second wave feminist retellers like Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood on these grounds, she differs from previous re-visioners/rewriters of fairy tales in terms of her radically disturbing "gender refashioning" as Crowley calls it (2010, p. 298). Similar to a number of third-wave feminist retellings of classical fairy tales – such as Francesca Lia Block's *The Rose and the Beast* (2000) and Barbara Walker's *Feminist Fairy Tales* (1996) – Donoghue's collection embarks on deframing the heteronormative gender patterns of patriarchal order by introducing same-sex desire into the picture. Her subversive imaginary landscapes populated by queer characters brings her work more on par with avant-garde representatives of third wave feminism, such as the Japanese artist Yanagi Miwa's avant-garde photographic works based on classic fairy tales (collected in her 2007 book, *Fairy Tale: Strange Stories of Women Young and Old*). Affirming Gramsci's claims above, *Kissing the Witch* is a powerful illustration of how rewritings of folk and fairy tales, from less assertive retellings to utterly radical ones, provide us with invaluable material for exploring how rewriting operates as a dissident form of critical rethinking on the hegemonic command of tradition.

In describing the symbolic universe of *Kissing the Witch* as a transtextual space of gathering, I refer to Gerard Genette's conceptualization of "transtextuality" as an overarching term to denote the phenomenon of a text invoking and establishing connections to other texts. Rewriting as a transtextual practice puts emphasis on the idea of author as reader, and reveals the shaping influence of individual critical reception of received narratives on the character of a text's dialogue to its pre-text/s. Rewriting as a distinct subgeneric category relies first and foremost on what Genette calls "*textual transcendence* – namely, everything that brings [a text] into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts" (1992, p. 81, emphasis original). Narrative

space of *Kissing the Witch* is designed as a space of textual transcendence in the sense that each individual tale in the collection acts as a text that transcends into other tales/texts, making each teller/author also a hearer/reader. Given that each of these texts is a retelling of a distinct classical tale, the interlinked space of dialogue in the overall semiosphere of the book gains further significance in its implications on the complexity of narrativization. Such narrative strategy inspires further critical thought on the subject of rewriting as a critical readerly response to pre-texts, and reminds us yet again that relations between reading and writing are "complicated" (Byatt 2000, p. 1), and even more so when writing is characterised as re-reading.

As theories and academic discussions on alternative histories, possible worlds, or speculative fiction have gained wider currency in recent decades, numerous conceptualizations have been introduced in critical approaches to rewriting as textual practice. Commonly placed under the overarching categories of adaptation and appropriation, rewriting is a self-aware palimpsestic activity that demonstrates "how art creates art, or how literature is made by literature" (Sanders 2006, p. 1). As a "reinterpretative act" in its critical readerly response to the canon, rewriting commonly aims at "a dissonant and dissident rupturing of [the] value-systems and hierarchies" of tradition, as Julie Sanders puts it (2006, pp. 2, 9). One of the most compelling contributions to theoretical discussions on rewriting has been introduced by L. Doležel in *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* where the author classifies rewriting under three categories, including transposition, expansion, and displacement. It will be shown in the course of the discussion that *Kissing the Witch* perfectly matches Doležel's categorization of rewriting as "displacement" and uses such displacement as a liberating and destabilizing force against ontological confinements. The "transworld travels" of canonical fairy tale characters, in Doležel's phrasing, allows Emma Donoghue to carry rewriting to a different level by illustrating the significance of narrative space as an articulative device of its own in storytelling.

Emma Donoghue and *Kissing the Witch* in the Context of the Convention of Retelling

Emma Donoghue descends from the class of gender-aware female writers who have written against the canon – especially the second wave feminist re-writers such as Angela Carter, Anne Sexton, Margaret Atwood, and Olga Broumas, whose paradigm-shifting stories have dismantled patriarchal stereotypes and culturally prescribed gender roles. Although Donoghue follows the footsteps of these powerful dissident precursors of feminist revisionism, she liberates the discussion from heterosexual and heteronormative binaries such as the dichotomy between oppressive masculinity and oppressed femininity. Beyond the familiar game of turning polarities on their head, she puts queer love and desire into the picture. Donoghue's literary production in the context of retelling, therefore, poses a solid example of how singular contributions can potentially enhance the impact of intellectual convention once they are critically empowered. Her work reminds us of the significance and potential of re-imagining inherited and received storyworlds, and taking the liberty to claim a gaze and voice that would see and articulate other possible versions of being.

In a recontextualized frame shaped by such attitude, Donoghue depicts storyworlds where vices go unpunished and virtues remain unrewarded. Her disillusioning plots destabilize closed and secure spaces that accommodate typecast and typified characters. In this manner, she not only re-visions canonical fairy tales composed predominantly by male writers within male tradition but also takes the roads not taken by previous re-visioners/rewriters of such texts. The tales – or anti-tales – in *Kissing the Witch* are "disobedient" re-visions in the sense Nancy A. Walker uses the adjective while describing retellings that "expose or upset the paradigms of authority inherent in the texts they appropriate" (1995, p. 7). Such disobedience is inherent to the critical power of re-visioning which Adrienne Rich defines as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – […] an act of survival" (1972, p. 18). Disobedient authorship, in this regard, given its counter-normative character, denies fixed models, and it is energized by disobedient or "resistant" readership in Judith Fetterley's words. Fetterly in her seminal work, *The Resisting Reader*, makes clear that critical feminist reading requires the active response of "a resisting rather than an assenting reader" in order to be able to "exorcis[e] the male mind that has been implemented in us" (1978, p. xxii). It thus contradicts with the manner adopted by the writers of fairy tales who, according

to Elizabeth Wanning Harries, "rarely attempt to uncover or rediscover the folk elements in a tale", and prefer to "build on, revise, and change the story as it has come down to them, rereading it in their own ways, pouring new wine into the old bottle that they know from the written tradition" (2001, p. 8). Angela Carter uses the same metaphor to describe the innovative potential and subversive effect of rewriting: "Reading is just as creative activity as writing and most intellectual development depends upon new readings of old texts. I am all for putting new wine in old bottles, especially if the pressure of the new wine makes the old bottles explode" (1997, p. 37).

What Harries indirectly discloses is that the written fairy tale canon is already a corpus of re/written versions, in the sense that the essential incubator of folk and fairy tales had been the time old convention of storytelling until the tales were moulded into writing mostly by male compilers For instance, as Zipes informs us, Jeanne-Marie le Prince de Beaumont's "Belle et la Béte" (1756), the most widely canonized and circulated version of "The Beauty and the Beast", is based on the "transformation of an ugly beast into a saviour as a motif in folklore", which "can be traced to primitive fertility rites" (2002, p. 10). Zipes makes it clear that late twentieth and early twenty-first century postmodern writers are not the first re-visioners with an urge to redress received narratives. And, as a matter of fact, not all rewritings and retellings are subversive and anarchic. Received oral tradition is often penned down into discourses trumpeting dominant ideologies in order to promote obedience especially amongst women, children, and working classes. Hegemonic ideologies and agents of power with privileged positions, as symbolically manifested in Orwell's *1984*, are no strangers to rewriting former narratives after all.[1] Charles Dickens, for instance, in his frequently quoted essay "Frauds on the Fairies" (1853) overtly denounces practices of editorial authorship of this nature. He considers the act of rewriting fairy tales as "an act of presumption, and appropriateness to himself what does not belong to him". Those who edit fairy tales at their own will for the purpose of "propagating [a] doctrine" or "interpolating" their opinions "upon an old fairy tale", according to Dickens, are like a weed which "grow[s] up in a wrong place". Although Dickens overlooks the fact that the versions he wishes to be preserved in their given form are already rewritings in one way or another, he may have a point in favouring some forms of rewriting over others. Disobedience, then, is a double-edged, context-dependent concept. "Disobedient" nature of Donoghue's reimagined tales is marked rather by the shadow of doubt they cast on our received baggage of identity traits so repetitively engraved in the tales we read, hear and watch. Donoghue's "disobedient" reimaginings raise silent yet powerful critical questions about the politics of how and what we imagine as well as how narratives shape our desires, selves, imagination and eventually the world we live in.

Readerly response to such texts that consciously draw attention to the politics of storytelling equally requires a critical reflection on how form operates alongside content in the meaning formation of narratives. Accordingly, in the context of Harries' analogy in the above quotation, *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins* renews both the wine and the bottle. The manner in which the tales are linked to one another in a narrative chain suggests that every tale, and teller for that matter, are defining and shaping elements of the symbolic universe they inhabit. The narrative form of the book, in this respect, almost becomes part of the content, given that none of the tales would be complete without other tales and that the tales are linked to one another content-wise through the overarching narrative form that knit them into a whole. From a narratological perspective, Donoghue revises both the *story* and *discourse* of classical tales. While some of her rewrites in the book preserves the backbone of the classical story (the *what* of things) and changes the discourse (the *how* of things), in some tales both the storyline and discourse are transformed. The first twelve tales in the collection are based on well-known fairy tales (Cinderella, Thumbelina, Beauty and the Beast, Snow White, Goose Girl, Rapunzel, Snow Queen, Rumpelstilskin, Hansel and Gretel, Donkeyskin, Sleeping

[1] As Jack Zipes notes in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, "the reutilization and transformation of the Grimms' tales were not the inventions of West German writers or were they so new. There was a strong radical tradition of rewriting folktales and fairy tales for children that began in the late nineteenth century and blossomed during the Weimar period, until the Nazis put an end to such experimentation. This tradition was revived during the 1960s, when such writers as Hermynia Zur Mühlen, Lisa Tetzner, Edwin Hoernle, and Walter Benjamin were rediscovered and when the antiauthoritarian movement and the Left began to focus on children and socialization" (2006, p. 72).

Beauty, Little Mermaid), whereas the last one – "The Tale of the Kiss" – is Donoghue's own creative addition to the canon. If we take the first tale ("The Tale of the Shoe" – rewrite of the Cinderella tale) and the last one ("The Tale of the Kiss") as the framing tales of the book, we can infer that the narrative space of the textual symbolic universe is designed as a passage between received tradition and endless alternatives of tales to be produced by future storytellers. Embracing the universal and timeless spirit of oral storytelling, the book situates itself in a symbiotic universe of sound and meaning where each storyteller and each story exist as a link between the past and the future.

Narrative Space and Framing in *Kissing the Witch*

The framing strategy that Donoghue employs in stitching each story to the next in *Kissing the Witch* creates a transtextual space of storytelling. The first tale "The Tale of the Shoe" is narrated by the reimagined version of Cinderella. The heroine/narrator finishes her story by the question she asks to the "stranger" – the character who functions as Cinderella's fairy godmother who grants her wishes: "In the morning I asked,/ Who were you/ before you walked into my kitchen?/ And she said, Will I tell you my own story?/ It is a tale of a bird" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 9). She thus hands the ball over to the narrator of the next tale. We learn in the second tale ("The Tale of the Bird") that the stranger who granted Cinderella's wishes used to be Thumbelina. She too tells her own story before handing the ball over to the bird who used to be the "Beauty" of the "Beauty and the Beast" in her former life: "In a whisper I [Thumbelina] asked,/ Who were you/ before you took to the skies?/ And the bird said/ Will I tell you my own story/ It is the tale of a rose" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 25). And in the next tale we hear/read Beauty's story from her own perspective. The ceremonial passage from one teller to the next is repeated in this fashion throughout the collection and each passage is marked by a question with the same rhetorical formula, demanding an autobiographical story from its addressee. This nested series of tales ends with the thirteenth tale "The Tale of the Kiss" whose narrator is a witch (a character in "The Tale of the Voice" – reworking of Andersen's "Little Mermaid") who on the closing page hands the ball of narration over to the reader with the following words: "This is the story you asked for. I leave it in your mouth" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 228). Addressing the reader/listener in this manner, the writer invites us to be the next narrator and includes us in her game of storytelling. In this narrative frame, not only the motherless teller of "The Tale of the Shoe" (Cinderella) is genealogically linked on a symbolic level to the childless female teller of the closing tale "The Tale of the Kiss", every reader as a potential storyteller to take over the oral performance is similarly linked to the teller of the first tale.

Invoking a potentially infinite scroll of voices, the narrative space of Donoghue's symbolic universe refuses to be sealed by a final word or closing remark. Its open ending suggests that each reader of this collection is a potential storyteller whose story might become a part of an interconnected web of tales. This particular aspect of Donoghue's book not only points at the oral roots of storytelling as a collaborative act, or "cooperative storytelling" (Orme, 2010, p. 118), it also invites a number of post-structuralist readings with its dynamic and dialogic structure that brings to mind Barthes' category of "readerly text" or Umberto Eco's "open text". Eco, in *The Role of the Reader*, compares a literary text to a "machine" that operates by "producing possible worlds (of the fabula, of the characters within the fabula, and of the reader outside the fabula)" (1979, p. 246). *Kissing the Witch* is a perfect Ecoean machine, which operates on each of these three levels of creating possible or alternate worlds. Like all machinic assemblages in Deleuzean terms, which operate against fossilized static mechanisms, the narrative space of the book is encircled by passageways that enable a continuous flow between the inside and outside of the text. Showing us how different things could be from what they are or what they say they are, the tales in *Kissing the Witch* urge us to think out of the box, especially with respect to the reigning illusions of gender-informed normativity.

The collection opens with "The Tale of the Shoe", one of the most unsettling rewrites of the Cinderella tale, which is probably the most popularized fairy tale across cultures and genres through countless retellings and adaptations. This tale sets the destabilizing tone of the entire book and announces the alienating and occasionally uncanny tone of the tales to follow. The symbolic universe of "The Tale of the Shoe" is populated only by the nameless female character, the older female stranger (fairy godmother) who grants her wishes, and the prince. There is no father, no cruel stepmother and no jealous stepsisters. This Cinderella

"scrubbed and swept because there was nothing else to do" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 1-2), not because she was tormented by a stepmother who usurped the household after her mother's death. The dichotomic tension between innocence and evil, stereotypically embodied by the beautiful and innocent Cinderella and the ugly and wicked stepmother, is replaced by the heroine's inner tension in Donoghue's version. Portrayal of Cinderella as a lonely woman, who constantly hears voices in her head and suffers from desolation and longing, shifts the ground under the reader's feet. Ashley Riggs, in her meticulous and thorough comparative analysis of "The Tale of the Shoe" and its French translation, underlines this shift from external oppositions to tormenting "internalized voices" and notes that "[t]he girl's hopelessness and her problematic relationship to language illustrate her depression, self-hate, and deviation from society's expectations" (2016, p. 184). Riggs reads the female stranger (representative of the fairy godmother) as a guiding figure that allows the heroine to "forge a new identity, to reject to roles prescribed for her, and to 'come out' as a lesbian" (2016, p. 185). According to Riggs, this older woman "is also the repository for the story's magic. Indeed, her features herald the lesbian relationship as a source of the marvellous, as demonstrated by an amusing and suggestive little finger with a magic whose ability 'to do spectacular things' […] might be read to include giving sexual gratification" (2016, p. 185). Unlike in traditional versions, she is not a victim of mistreatment and is not rewarded with poetic justice. In the finale of the tale, the heroine discards the fantasy of the fairy tale clichés and returns to her own reality which is willing to embrace lesbian love rather than the shining, royal love of a prince. In the morning of the night she spends with her female companion, she hands over her role as the narrator as she demands to hear the story of this stranger. The narrator of the next tale, "The Tale of the Bird" (the rewrite of Andersen's Thumbelina), tells an equally disrupting story, dashing all romanticized codes of family romance. In her paradigm-shifting tale, Thumbelina describes her former self as a child who "did not belong", lived a "borrowed life", and had to put up with "indifferent giants called mother and father" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 13). Family is introduced as a hegemonic system in which you are taught to "keep your horizons narrow, your expectations low, […] your heart infinitesimally small (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 14-5). Each of the remaining tales removes a brick from the wall erected by various agents of androcentric culture, and exposes an infinitely unfolding space of multiplicity.

The act of deframing existing forms and patters, in this regard, is accompanied by a need and urge of reframing new textures, forms, processes, and most importantly, new means and tools to operate with. According to Veronica L Schanoes "[r]evision has the potential to expose the ideological underpinnings of the stories that shape our lives, not in order that we surrender to them, but in order that we can shape them in turn" (2014, p. 57). Such a perspective is informative in the sense that new ways of seeing produce new stories which demand a new language and a new way of framing. This condition is best exemplified and articulated in the collection in "The Tale of the Rose" – Donoghue's version of "The Beauty and the Beast". Beaumont's classical version follows a commonly acknowledged patriarchal trajectory, where the beautiful and young heroine is portrayed as a passive victim of objectification, and treated as a commodity that can be exchanged between her father and the Beast upon a verbal contract. Beauty conforms to the expectations and demands of patriarchal order, and her passive embracement of patriarchal gender codes is eventually rewarded with a felicitous marriage once the Beast is transformed into a handsome prince. While Donoghue preserves the storyline of the classical version, she alters the working paradigm of the tale and repositions gender categories informed by patriarchal order. The masked Beast in Donoghue's re-vision is a lesbian woman who has been dismissed from the normative social order and treated as a monstrous other. Until the anti-heteronormative identity of the Beast is revealed at the very end of the tale, Donoghue keeps us in the comfort zone of the familiar canonical knowledge, preserving the dichotomic codings of beauty and the beast, or the familiar and the monstrous unknown. The mysterious Beast is described by Beauty alternatively as the "monster", "hooded beast" or a "beast who speaks and looks" behind a mask (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 34). She says that she "thought the beast must be everything [she] wasn't: dark to [her]light, rough to [her]smooth, hoarse to [her]sweet", and describes its very presence as "the grotesque shadow [she] threw behind [her]" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 35). Seemingly safe and secure categories of received narratives are dismantled not only for Beauty but also for the reader once she "pull[s] off the veils one by one" from the face of the "monster" lying almost dead in the frozen rose garden and sees that "the beast was a woman" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 39). The "faceless mask" of the Beast is revealed to be a bitter representation of

manipulative discursive agents of gender-oriented identity norms. Beauty's epiphanic moment is marked by an awareness of the power of narrative agents in manipulating meaning, and suggests that the void created by what is invisible, hidden, latent and veiled is filled by narratives, made-up accounts, tales and rumours. Beauty's final commentary exposes once again how agents of patriarchal power operate against anti-normative gender preferences: "there was nothing monstrous about this woman who had lived alone in a castle, setting all her suitors riddles they could make no sense of, refusing to do the things queens are supposed to do, until the day when, knowing no one who could see her true face, she made a mask and from then on showed her face to no one" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 39-40).

When the narrator of the tale (Beauty) discovers the true identity of the "beast", her reaction reflects the significance of storytelling and language in making sense of our experiences. As given language and form of telling fails her in the face of dissonance created by the conflict between symbol and meaning, she notes that "[t]his was a strange story, one [she] would have to learn a new language to read, a language [she] could not learn except by trying to read the story" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 39). Her reaction also implies that every new story comes with its own language and way of telling. Beauty's language coded with received symbolizations fails to assist her exactly in the same way it fails us as readers. As the representations of the Beast in classical versions is one of a monstrous masculine figure of authority, it is hard to imagine the beast outside the frame of the portrait of a commanding husband. That is why we are as astonished as Beauty when she removes the mask that conceals the truth from the gaze of others. When she sees that the beast is a woman with "hair black as rocks under water [...], a face white as old linen [and] lips red as rose just opening" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 39), her language fails her in expressing her destabilizing experience. What is unmasked or disillusioned in the tale is not only the true identity of the beast queen, but also her lesbian love for Beauty, and her unstooping attitude in choosing "the faceless mask and the name of a beast" over all the riches the "World had to offer" (*Kissing the Witch*, p. 40).

Literalized in "The Tale of the Rose", acts of masking and unmasking are powerful metaphors of displacement and replacement of various forms, and the mask metaphor stands at the centre of the semantics of the text in *Kissing the Witch*. It also speaks volumes for the generic positioning of the text as a unique specimen of postmodern rewriting. The concept of displacement often resonates with adverse or disfavourable connotations due to its associations with various literal and metaphorical forms of exile. In Donoghue's imaginary landscape, however, it stands for a necessary means of self-emancipation and liberation as well as a working principle for moving away from ossifying centres of power towards autonomous spaces of co-existence. Such liberating and renewing potential of displacement frequently surfaces in postmodern literary and cultural theories. Doležel's *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds*, a valuable contribution to the theoretical debates on possible worlds theory, provides us with an optional critical lens to navigate through discussions on rewriting as a form of liberating displacement. Doležel posits three distinct types of rewrites:

> a. Transposition preserves the design and the main story of the protoworld but [locate] them in a different temporal or spatial setting, or both. The protoworld and the successor world are *parallel* but the rewrite tests the topicality of the canonical world by placing it in a new, usually contemporary, historical, political, and cultural context.
> b. Expansion extends the scope of the protoworld, by filling its gaps, constructing a prehistory or posthistory, and so on. The protoworld and the successor world are *complementary.* The protoworld is put into a new co-text, and the established structure is thus shifted.
> c. Displacement constructs an essentially different version of the protoworld, redesigning its structure and reinventing its story. These most radical postmodernist rewrites create *polemical* antiworlds, which undermine or negate the legitimacy of the canonical protoworld. (1998, pp. 206-207, emphasis original)

Among the three categories of rewriting, Donoghue's retellings accord best with "displacement", for they transform their protoworlds in one way or another. As metaphorized in its subtitle, *Old Tales in New Skins*,

Donoghue's book points at storytelling as a kind of performance with transformative power. Using narratological agents as masks or skins that cover textual bodies, the storyworld of the book's symbolic universe places transformation at the centre of its conceptual deframing strategy. Concerning the metaphor of skin in the title of the collection, Ashley Riggs draws our attention to a possible analogy that refers back to an abandoned practice of writing, and reminds us that "long ago, texts appeared on vellum, a parchment made from the skin of a calf" (2016, p. 192). This analogy, according to Riggs, emphasizes "only the history and the continuity of fairy tales but also their capacity for renewal" (2016, p. 193). Additionally, as will be discussed in the next section, transformative power and potential of Donoghue's rewriting as displacement becomes more visible in the narrative voice or perspective from which each story is told.

Narrative Voice and Politics of Storytelling in *Kissing the Witch*

As mentioned above, the heroines of canonical fairy tales become storytellers themselves and assume the role and status of speaking subjects, or autodiegetic agents in narratological terms. In Cristina Bacchilega's words, "the storytelling loops take each narrator spiraling back in time to her earlier life experiences and each listener spiraling forward toward another transformation" (2013, p. 61). This anarchic shift in narratological strategy relies heavily on Donoghue's use of the first-person narrative and focalization in each tale. Third-person point of view or omniscient narration in classical folk and fairy tales creates an effect almost similar to that of spatial distance, keeping us at bay and enabling us to read the tales from a psychological distance. This effect is reinforced by the conventional opening sentences of most folk and fairy tales: "Once upon a time…" or "There was once…". As Terry Eagleton puts it in *How to Read Literature*, "[t]he verbal gesture 'Once upon a time' pushes a fable so far off from the present into some misty mythological realm that it no longer seems to belong to human history. It deliberately avoids locating the story in a specific place or time, thus lending it an aura of timelessness and universality" (2013, p. 18). The discursive atmosphere created by this "teller of tales" tone (Fludernik, 2009, p. 31) is dethroned in *Kissing the Witch*. Diana Rodrígues Bonet, too, in "Feminist Rewritings of Fairy Tales in Ireland", draws particular attention to Donoghue's game-changing deployment of first-person perspective. She observes that in canonical fairy tale collections, including those of Perrault and Grimm Brothers, "the voice of the storyteller [issues] from elsewhere, silencing the female voice", and "[e]ven contemporary revisions such as *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) by Carter […] record female experiences from a third-person point of view. […] [Donoghue] broke this narrative convention in writing all the stories through the protagonist's voice in *Kissing the Witch*" (2022, 47).

First person narration has far more significant implications than merely erasing this distance and introducing us to the individual mental and psychological gaze of the protagonist. Within the context of this narrative mechanism, narrators in Donoghue's book function as transgressive agents of storytelling. Rather than "framing" a given fictional universe, each one of them deframes it by opening a portal that connects a space of individual memory to another. Storytelling becomes a tool and means of connecting one mnemonic space to another. The book's fictional universe embodies a space of interconnectedness. Also, this form of mnemonic agency, which links one tale to another, attributes pseudo-autobiographical qualities to the tales which are mostly voiced through a "narrating self". In Fludernik's phrasing, "when events and actions are reported from the perspective of a now older or wiser narrator, this narrating self often indulges in retrospection, evaluation, and the drawing of moral conclusions" (2009, p. 90). The framing structure of the book creates such a readerly aura that the written textual space imitates the manner of oral storytelling in which narrating selves orally transfer and hand down their stories/histories to the next generation of storytellers. It is possible to interpret this sense of orality in the text as a counteract in narratological terms, as opposed to the fixed, anchoring, ossifying nature of writing. The sense and form of orality provides the book with a truly fluid, centreless and dialogic narrative space.

On another level, Emma Donoghue's Irish intellectual baggage might have a relevance in shedding more light on her choice of using the narratological devices summarized above. Although Donoghue's literary heritage connects her directly to the previous generation of feminist writers like Angela Carter who wrote with similar urges and concerns in terms of their dialogue with normative systems, her Irish literary

heritage should not be overlooked. As an Irish writer born into a postcolonial nation, Emma Donoghue may be expected to be more sensitive to the ways in which point of view in narrative may be used as a manipulative tool for control and governance. With its particular emphasis on first-person narration, *Kissing the Witch* echoes several Irish texts that are engaged in the issue of liberation in both form and content. It was Joyce, one of Donoghue's Irish literary ancestors, who built a subtle link between imperialism and patriarchy in "The Dead" and showed how these two ideologies operated through similar codes of hierarchy and power. Patriarchy's "gender trouble" in Judith Butler's terms emerges from the same toxic set of values that drive the machinery of colonialism, speciesism, racism, so on and so forth. The bottom line is that transformation of narrative voice from third person to first person in Donoghue's rewritings bears familiar overtones for readers of Irish literature, especially within the context of decolonization. It reminds us of one of the most iconic figures of liberation in Irish prose fiction, Stephen Dedalus of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* – a novel which uses Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as its mythic subtext. Stephen liberates himself from the prison-house of the mastering third-person narrative in which he is denied of his own perspective and voice in his own story, and the novel ends with a Stephen speaking outside the frame of quotation marks and becoming the narrator of his own story of hope and emancipation. *Kissing the Witch*, in this respect, is marked by a similar transformation from being the object of a narration to becoming the subject of one's own storyworld. Displacement of the authority of omniscient narrative voice of protoworlds, speaking in Doležel's terms, has a liberating function that transforms Donoghue's characters into speaking subjects with agency of self-representation. As they transgress the narrative thresholds of their given protoworlds of classical fairy tales and step into another in their "transworld travel" (Doležel 1998, p. xi), they are revitalized as storytellers.

Conclusion

Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, in terms of its transactive narrative space, proposes fresh responses to critical debates on how narrative form relates to content and vice versa. Most importantly, the collection as a whole suggests that imagining alternative versions of received storyworlds may have a revolutionary impact on our perception of defined reality and thus releases the potential of conceptualizing a different set of codes and values for an alternative future. On the other hand, Donoghue's web of tales, no matter how innovative and disruptive its narrative devices may be, retains its umbilical cord that connects it to ancient forms of storytelling. Although transgressive devices and transformative strategies of narrative are associated with postmodern expression and are more commonly utilized in cultures with traumatic collective experiences, they are an essential part of the surviving mechanism of storytelling in general. In order to survive, stories – and storytellers for that matter – need to transform, evolve and adapt to the needs of their time. Modern versions of fairy tales, as Jack Zipes sees them, are forms of an evolved species that has adapted to its cultural environment to survive (2011, p. 221). Our *Zeitgeist* of the last few decades is informed by the idea of transgression and the preposition *beyond*, and inspired by the possibility that things may be imagined differently from what they are in passed-on stories. Doležel's treatment of fictional worlds as "possible worlds" (1998, p. ix) and his emphasis on a "possible-worlds semantics of fictionality" (1998, p. x) in *Heterocosmica* provides us with useful theoretical tools to reflect on the politics of rewriting as a narrative strategy in general, and feminist rewriting in particular. In *Kissing the Witch*, Donoghue redesigns, relocates and reevaluates the protoworlds of classical fairy tales by "constructing a new, alternative fictional world" (Doležel 1998, p. 206). In the light of all things considered, the tales in *Kissing the Witch* remind us of the inspiration behind all practices of storytelling, and salute Walter Benjamin who observes that "[e]xperience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn" (2007, p. 84). While preserving its umbilical cord that spiritually connects it to tradition, all the way back to prehistoric storytellers; the book as a collection of rewritten classics also raises questions about the very tradition it stems from. It shows that rewritings, especially those that are "writ[ten] back to the predominantly male canon" in Hennard's words (2009, p. 15), are by their very nature "unfaithful readings" (Lau, 2008, p. 78). Like all literary practices or acts of writing that raise the question of fidelity, the hierarchic relationship between original and copy is

undermined. Rewritings as the repetitions of "originals", in this respect, not only supersede the hegemony of origins as determinants of meaning, but also introduce imagination as an agent as powerful as factuality in designing a better future.

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