

CLOTHES SHAPE A CHARACTER: A SOCIOSEMIOTIC STUDY OF ILLUSTRATION CODES IN A GREEK FAIRY TALE

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Abstract: *This research is a case study of 'I Kardia tis Vassilopoulos' [The Princess's Heart], a fairy tale in the collection Paramythia kai Alla [Fairy Tales and Other Stories] written by Greek author Penelope Delta. The aim of our research is to compare the different illustrations in the fairy tale's oldest version (published in 1915) with those included in the more recent edition (published in 1998). In particular, we study: (a) the role the characters play and their relationship with the dress code in the two different temporal versions of the same fairy tale, (b) the anchorage between text and image, and (c) the changes made to the illustration of the fairy tale, based on the year of issue and the socio-historical context. Researchers believe that: (a) the socio-historical context affects the presentation of a character's dress code, as (b) clothing is a semantic code for human societies, indicating social distinctions, professions, beliefs, people's ideals, age, sex, economic status, cultural level, traditions, nationality and many other characteristics. Our research is based on a mixed semiotic model (Barthes, 1985; Greimas, 1966; Lagopoulos and Lagopoulou, 1992) of socio-semiotic theory and text and image analysis. This is a qualitative research study, with emphasis on the characters' dress code and its correlation with the features of their role (e.g. king's dress, servant's dress, princess's dress). The novelty of this research lies in the fact that dress code has not been studied in Greek fairy tale illustrations.*

Keywords: *fairy tales, characters, semiotics, clothing, roles*

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

One of a society's most reliable sources of expression of its self-awareness is its literature. Literature is a significant sphere through which cultural codes and models can be identified, since writers convey and formulate the ideas, values and intentions characteristic of their social class in their work (Kapsomenos, 2001:46-47).

The emergence of children's literature coincides with the point in history when children ceased to be seen as miniature adults and childhood was recognised as a period with its own particular characteristics and needs (Chatzidimitriou, 1999:11). Children's literature has an ideological dimension and educational purpose since it teaches children to deal with problems that they encounter in their own life (Kanatsouli, 2000: 27-29). Fairy tales, myths and legends are deeply rooted in human nature, which is constantly in search of the reason for its existence (Cooper, 1998: 16). A fairy tale is a folk tale written in prose, set in no particular place or time, and lacking detailed descriptions of people or things; it is a narrative in which anything can

happen and nothing is impossible (Ioannou, 1973:7). Today, when we speak about a 'picture book', we refer to all the images and other decorative elements that form an integral part of the text (Benekos, 1981: 7). An image consists of signs that constitute a symbolic and representative language concealing ideology and the illustrator's ideas. The illustrator conveys these ideas and ideology using signs in a communicative manner. The reader must be able to decode the image's symbols and messages so that he or she may comprehend the ideology and deeper meanings (Kanatsouli, 2000:154).

In the picture book we have a marriage between two arts, with the illustrator supporting the writer so that the book, once illustrated, may have more meaning than when solely a written text. A picture book represents a unique kind of semiotic object, since text and image are structured in such a way as to convey meaning (Kantartzi, 2002:22, 121; Papastergiou, 1995:31; Mylonakou, 2006:58). Based on the new prospects and dimensions of illustration, it can be interpretive or narrative, either extending the text conceptually or simply rendering the words of the text. This

highlights the role of the illustrator, who chooses the manner of illustration and also calls attention to the role that the type of illustration plays as a means of creative expression or static presentation (Tsilimeni, 2007: 22). In the illustrations of a book, the reader discovers its characters, how they relate to each other, their actions, the spheres in which they are active – elements that essentially form the narrative characteristics and data of a book. According to Barthes, the text directs the reader between the signifieds of an image, towards one meaning. In such instances of anchorage, language is selective and serves to clarify. It is a metalanguage applied not to the entire image, but to certain parts of it only (Barthes, 1988:48).

Having in mind how civilisation and clothing had evolved, the historian Thomas Carlyle expressed the opinion that ‘society is founded upon cloth’ (Lagakou, 1998:14). The study of a people’s history of clothing focuses on folk culture, and encompasses the spiritual, artistic and intellectual expressions and actions of that people’s social and spiritual life (Kanatsouli, 2002:158-159). We wear an item of clothing for similar reasons to those for which we speak, in other words to make our life and work simpler and more comfortable, to assert our identity, to attract attention (Lurie, 2007:50). By decoding clothing, we learn about institutions and rules, models and ideologies, social and political situations, trends, values, morality, religiousness, prejudices, ways of life and thought (Lagakou, 1998: 14; Baldini, 2005b: 2; Galofono, 2006: 106; Kawamura, 2006). Just like language can be studied diachronically and synchronically, so too can clothing. There are semiotic systems built especially for communication (natural and written language), systems that make use of natural language to construct a more complex system (mythology, literature), systems that use language along with other codes (theatre, cinema) and other systems built for some practical purpose (dressing, decorating, urban planning, cooking) (Lagopoulou, 1980:15).

Semiotics borrows communication theory’s *basic communication model* (Segre, 1979: 46-47): (a) transmitter, (b) code, (c) receiver, (d) message, (e) channel. For communication to succeed, the transmitter and receiver must be set to the same code. Consequently, in the communication process, a code is a system whereby the message is converted from one form to another, which enables it to be transmitted and understood by the recipient (Kapsomenos, 1990: 10). Similarly, fashion trends

are the stylised and individualised forms of codes (Guiraud, 1975: 103).

According to Roland Barthes, clothing neither hides nor shows anything. It alludes to something. It does not exhibit anything, but semanticizes it. Just as a language is a meaning system, so too is clothing. It is history; it is an individual element, but also a collective institution, a complete structure consisting of a functional network of rules where the transformation of a simple element can bring about the modification of the whole. In clothing, a system, according to Barthes (1981: 102), is a set of clothes, items or details that we cannot wear at the same time on the same part of the body and whose variation corresponds to a change in meaning of the clothing (for example, knit cap, beret or wide-brimmed hat, etc.). Barthes believes that since a language can be studied in terms of general linguistics and, according to Saussure, in terms of *langue* (social perspective) and *parole* (individual perspective), this reasoning can also be applied to clothing. He therefore distinguishes between *dressing*, which corresponds to Saussure’s *parole*, and *dress*, which corresponds to his *langue*. Based on this distinction, *dressing* includes the individual dimension of the clothing, the act of getting dressed, in which the individual actualizes on their body the general institution of dress, whereas *dress* is an institutional and social reality independent of the individual. Dress and dressing together constitute a general whole to which the word *clothing* (which corresponds to Saussure’s *langage*) is ascribed. The syntactical nature of fashion is a form of grammar for clothing, whose rules we pretty much all consciously adopt in our daily choice of clothes.

Greimas defines language as the union of two levels, the semiotic and the semantic. Having determined the smallest units of meaning, the signs (semantics), he goes on to combine them (semiotics). The semantic level structures the syntactical level of language, and the semiotic level structures the paradigmatic axis (Christodoulou, 2003a : 58). If we were then to adapt these concepts to fashion, we would say that a paradigm is synonymous with choice, and in the case of clothing we choose what to wear based on what is in fashion, what the weather is like or our state of mind. Generally speaking, a paradigm is a category of elements in a system, a set of signs grouped together because they have some characteristic in common. In dressing, a skirt, a pair of trousers and a pair of shorts all belong to

the category *outer wear worn from the waist down* (Boklund-Lagopoulou, 1980: 13).

Thus, the semiology of clothing is not lexical, but rather syntactic. The unit of meaning must be sought in true functions, oppositions, distinctions and congruences that are analogous to the units of phonology. As regards meaning, a particular item of clothing may allude to psychological or socio-psychological concepts such as respect, youthfulness, mourning and spirituality. However, Barthes claims that besides all these nuances, clothing conveys only one fundamental and basic meaning, and that is the individual's inclusion and incorporation into the society in which they live. We can therefore say that clothing is a social model, a mirror of predictable and collective behaviours, and it is at this level precisely that clothing becomes a signified.

2. RESEARCH

This research is a case study of Greek writer Penelope Delta's fairy tale '*I Kardia tis Vassilopoulas*' [The Princess's Heart]. Penelope Delta is well-known in Greece for her children's novels, short stories and fairy tales. The particular writer was chosen because of the lasting nature of her works, as can be attested by the numerous times her books have been republished to this day.

The key purpose of this research is to conduct a comparative study of the characters' dress codes in the illustrations of the two different editions of this fairy tale published in 1915 and 1998. The earlier edition (1915) was illustrated by Maria Paparrigopoulou and the more recent edition (1998) by Daniela Stamatiadi. More specifically, the study focuses on: (a) the role that the characters play in the fairy tale and their relationship with the dress code, (b) a comparative study of the characters' dress code as determined by the illustrators in the fairy tale's two different temporal versions, (c) the adaptations made to the illustration of the fairy tale based on the year of issue (earlier and more recent editions).

We chose to explore the characters' dress code since clothing is a powerful *semiotic code* bountifully semantically charged with regard to human societies, for example relating to social distinctions and situations, occupations, perceptions, popular ideals, age, sex, epoch, financial status, cultural level, principles, traditions and nationality. The analysis of the fairy tale (text and image) is based on French semiotician Roland Barthes' semiotics theory, on text analysis

determined by Greimas' structural semantics theory, and Christodoulou's image analysis theory (2003, 2007, 2012). More specifically, Greimas' structural semantics theory has been implemented with great success in narratological analysis and in particular the actantial model that Greimas analysed in his *Structural Semantics*. The model in question has six facets that are key to narration: (1) a subject (who goes in search of the object), (2) an object (the aim of the subject's quest), (3) a sender (who sends the subject off in search of the object), (4) a receiver (of the object, in order to be safeguarded by the subject), (5) a helper (who assists the subject) and (6) an opponent (who hinders the subject) (Greimas, 2005; Selden, 2004).

This is a comparative, qualitative research study. The key parameter analysed is the dress code of the fairy tales' characters, and how it relates to their roles. More specifically, we have studied the make-up of the dress code on the syntagmatic axis (meaning structures that make sense in a particular environment, such as a tie worn with a suit) and in the paradigmatic choice of clothing items (items worn by the characters with regard to the prevailing fashion, weather conditions, their state of mind, or their actions).

3. ANALYSIS OF 'THE PRINCESS'S HEART'

3.1 Story Outline. In an island kingdom, a king and queen have a baby girl. When she is born, all the island's fairies arrive to give her a gift. The fairy called Fate steals the princess's heart so that the princess may never feel pain and sorrow. This distresses her parents and so the fairy called Life grants them a key, which the princess can use to find her heart when she is older and decides she wants it. In the meantime, as the princess grows up without a heart, she becomes meaner and meaner. She spreads misery throughout the kingdom, wounds her parents and even hurts the neighbouring kingdom's prince who she is intended to marry. At some point, the princess realises that she is missing something, something that makes her different from others. It is then that her mother tells her that she has no heart and that Fate stole it from her when she was born. The princess asks her mother how she can find her heart again, saying that she can no longer live this way, not knowing what joy or sorry are, and so her mother takes Life's golden key off the chain around her neck. The princess leaves the palace to search for her heart. On her way, she encounters people who need help, but pays them no attention

because without her heart she can feel pity for no one. When she finally finds her heart inside a box high up a hill and then begins her return journey, she comes across the same people on the way and this time helps them. In the meantime, in the neighbouring kingdom, the king, learning that his son nearly drowned because of the princess and that the engagement is off, wants revenge and decides to send an army to the island kingdom. An old woman in the forest tricks the princess and steals her clothes. The princess manages to escape and goes to the neighbouring kingdom's king, explaining to him that it was all her fault. She therefore saves her father's kingdom from certain attack and plunder. In the end, the prince and princess get married.

3.2 Key Actants. The princess, the fairies, the king and queen, the prince, the people the princess meets during the tests she undergoes, the old woman who robs the princess, and the doctor.

3.3 Analysis. According to Greimas, a narrative is a signifying whole because it can be grasped in terms of the structure of relations among actants. Greimas mentions that basic narrative developments represent the transformation from a negative beginning (disruption of order and alienation) to a positive end (establishment of order and integration). In Delta's fairy tale, the negative beginning has a positive end. In the beginning Fate steals the newborn princess's heart, thus upsetting the balance in her

life, since without a heart she has no emotions and so brings about the disruption of order inside the palace, in the entire kingdom and also in the neighbouring kingdom. In the end, the princess wins back her heart, balance is restored in the kingdom and she marries the neighbouring kingdom's prince. These transformations occur during a series of tests that the subject undergoes, having made a contract with the sender (Selden, 2004: 170-171). Thus, at the beginning of the story, the subject, namely the princess, is separated from the object (her heart). Without her heart, the princess cannot feel and so spreads a lot of pain and harm around. At some point, she decides to search for her heart (the object) and to act towards the benefit of a receiver. She is guided, in her search for this object, by a sender (the fairy Life), who at the princess's birth, right after her heart was seized by the fairy Fate, gifted the princess with a golden key that she hung on a gold chain around the newborn baby's neck, this key being what would help the princess find her heart when she decided to search for it.

The receiver for whose benefit the princess will seek to retrieve her heart is her environment. She will undergo all the tests for it, since when she obtains her heart, balance will be restored in the kingdom. The binary opposition pairings thus found in the fairy tale (Kapsomenos, 2003:219-235) are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Binary Oppositions and their Actualization in the Fairy Tale

Binary oppositions - Actualization of the Binary Structure in the Fairy Tale.
Wish VS Curse Gifts given by the good fairies VS Fate stealing the princess's heart, resulting in her unable to feel any emotions
Proposed contract VS Established contract Heart seized by Fate, so that the princess may know no pain or sorrow VS Golden key given by Life to the parents, so that the princess may at some point find her heart
Contract: Coming of age VS Engagement Princess's dialogue with her mother VS Engagement with the neighbouring kingdom's prince
Lack of knowledge VS Desire for knowledge The princess asks her mother what 'heart', 'sorrow' and 'pain' mean VS Her desire to learn how she can find her heart
Mother's reply VS Information The princess's mother explains to her how Fate stole her heart when she was born and then gives her Life's golden key.
Decision to act VS Action The princess leaves the palace to search for her heart.
Departure / Wandering Along her way, the princess encounters people that need her help. However, she does not offer them any help, remains indifferent and continues to wander in search of her heart.
Search effort VS Success – Recovery of object The princess finds her heart inside a box on a hill.
Misleading intervention VS Deception of heroine The poor old woman the princess encounters in the forest tricks her and steals her clothes.

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Recognition of feat VS Reward – Marriage

The princess saves her father's kingdom from an upcoming attack from the neighbouring kingdom, is recognised by the entire kingdom and marries the prince.

Thus, the princess goes through a qualifying test (she crosses crags and cliffs), a main test (through which she obtains the object) and a glorifying test (through which she gains recognition from the collectivity). Generally speaking, the fairy tale creates the impression of a bipolar social organisation: on the one hand we have the very rich (the king and his environment) and on the other hand we have the very poor (the dirt-poor widow with a baby, the poor blind child, a man who is unable to pay his debts) (Kaplanoglou, 2009:377). We note, with regard to the illustrations, that the 1915 edition has two black-and-white illustrations with captions quoting words said in the book. They show: (a) the princess's birth with her royal parents, Fate, Life and three other fairies present, and (b) the princess's transformation from bad to good. The more recent edition has thirty colour illustrations without captions, showing scenes from the

storyline. The characters portrayed in both editions' illustrations are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Characters in the Illustrations Included in the Two Editions

Illustration/Characters	1915	1998
The princess	+	+
The king	+	+
The queen	+	+
The fairy Fate	+	+
The fairy Life	+	+
The prince	-	+
The doctor	-	+
The old woman with the thieves	-	+
The poor old woman	+	+

In Table 2 we see that the characters that do not appear in the older edition's illustrations are the prince, the doctor and the old woman with the thieves. Our analysis of the characters' dress codes in the two editions has resulted in Table 3.

Table 3. The Characters' Clothing as their Roles Change

'The Princess's Heart'		
Actants	Earlier Edition (1915)	Modern Edition (1989)
Princess	Newborn princess: The baby's clothing is indiscernible. Princess going through tests: A long, loose gown without a full skirt, a rich cloak with various designs on the shoulder, hairstyle of the period	Newborn princess: white romper suit and nightcap Childhood and adolescence: a pink and yellow dress respectively As a young woman: a yellow gown with a full skirt, jewellery worn around the neck and in her hair Princess going through tests: a yellow gown, jewellery worn around the neck and in her hair Princess attacked by thieves: rough-spun dress Princess's wedding: white gown and white veil
Prince		As a young man: Meets princess Engagement to princess: plain, green shirt, purple leggings, brown ankle boots Wedding to princess: formal princely attire; short red cloak fastened around the neck with a piece of jewellery, coronet on the head and pale blue tunic.
King	Long robe, not particularly discernible, and crown on head	Red robe, long white cloak with designs
Queen	Long, white gown, not particularly discernible, crown on head and hairstyle of the period	Long, red gown with a full skirt and a triangular opening showing the white part of the dress, red veil and crown on head

Fairies	Life: clothing adorned with various little animals; head covered. Fate: Long, loose dress without a full skirt, a floral belt, flower in hair	Life: white dress and veil Fate: black dress and conical hat of the period
Poor old woman	Long clothing and wimple or hood covering head; garment not clearly discernible.	Blue headscarf on head, apron, long salmon-coloured dress
Doctor		Trousers, fur coat
Guards		Boots, hood covering head

4. FINDINGS

We observe that Penelope Delta develops her characters' actions through opposing pairs, such as prosperity vs wretchedness (king / poor people) and good vs bad (Life / Fate), and that the fairy tale is built and the illustrations tell their story based on these pairs. The older edition's illustrator tried to portray almost sixty percent of the story's characters in two pictures. Having analysed the illustrations, we observe that the princess is the central figure in both editions, and that her garments change in line with her age and role. In the new edition, emphasis is placed not on the characters' faces, but on their dress code, which is indicative of: (a) the character's sex (pink dress for the girl), (b) morality (black dress: Fate, white dress: wedding, purity), (c) power (royal attire in red, sceptre), (d) hierarchy (difference between king's and prince's attire), and (e) socio-economic situation (poor, rich).

The 1998 edition's illustrator dresses the princess in pink as a child and sticks to yellow for her years as a young lady, also then giving her iconic elements, e.g. accessories in her hair, thus indicating that she is a key subject (Kanatsouli, 2000b: 161). The king, queen and other characters maintain the same clothing in the illustrations throughout the story. The clothing of characters whose role remains constant also remains unchanged; the type of clothing depends on the applicable social conventions. Only the princess's garments change, depending on her role, e.g. as a newborn, a young girl, as a bad person, a good person and as a bride. Each time her role changes, then so do her clothes. Similarly, the prince's garments change too, when he is a young prince and when a groom. Furthermore, the 1915 edition's illustrator seems to have adopted the model of western European sartorial tradition, which is however reminiscent of medieval times. Thus, the king and queen wear long garments and crowns on their heads and the queen and princess have late medieval hairstyles, as do the fairies.

In the 1998 edition we note that: (a) the heroine's style is west European, with ethereal garments adorned with jewellery, (b) the fairies wear pointy hats on their heads, which bring to mind the Burgundian fashion of 1450 and Gothic era fashion in general, (c) the queen's clothing reflects the fact that she belongs to the upper social class and also the Gothic era, during which noblewomen wore cote-hardies, a type of fitted gown with a belt around the waist, (d) the king's cloak resembles the houppelande that kings wore in the tenth century. We observe that the text plays the biggest role in both editions of Delta's stories, and that the illustrations simply accompany the tales and present certain scenes, enhancing and enriching the text.

As far as the colours used in the modern edition are concerned, unlike other illustrated children's books, no dominant hue is noted in any of her stories. We note that in some places the illustrator has made symbolic use of colour, which may influence the subconscious (Kanatsouli, 2000: 158), such as with the fairy Life's white dress, the princess's white wedding gown at the end of the tale, or the princess's pink dress when she was still a little girl. Fashion is always linked to views on social hierarchy. Thus, those belonging to the upper classes stand out through external visual elements, distinguishing marks and special types of clothing (Costanza Baldini, 2008: 130), such as the prince's formal attire when he gets married at the end of the tale: the short cloak fastened around the neck with a piece of jewellery and the coronet on his head (Bernstein, 1989: 22). Excepting the coronet, which is the symbol of a ruler, the upper classes usually wore long capes that showed off the wealth and luxury of the aristocratic class to which they belonged (Adikimenaki, 2004: 36).

Following Greek folk tradition, the three fairies are young and beautiful, with long wavy hair, and are dressed in snow-white robes and airy veils. In general, both illustrators seem to have adopted the west European sartorial traditional model in their illustrations. In both editions of Delta's stories, the

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text plays the biggest role and the illustrations simply accompany the tales and present certain scenes, enhancing and enriching the text. However, the period in time in which each edition was published has influenced the way in which the characters are presented in both editions. Thus, we have the same fairy tale, which has however been illustrated at two different periods in time, and this chronological difference has in a manner 'imposed' on the illustrations stylistic or other aspects particular to each period (clothing details, human relations, relationship between the two sexes, social standing, the influence of artistic trends on aesthetic choices).

Fashion is a way to communicate, a way in which the individual defines their place in relation to the collectivity and the collectivity in relation to society. It also indicates the role that each person undertakes to play in a society. Therefore, the clothing elements analysed, the distinguishing marks and all other details that complete a garment or costume, are also social codes. All the above naturally refers to the princess's dress code in the fairy tale. However, if we were to compare the fictional princess's dress code, and in particular her wedding gown, with the wedding gown of a modern-day, 'real-life' princess, we would note that it is not that different. Although modern-day princesses' wedding gowns have to follow royal protocol, we could say that they still reflect their era. Thus, in 1951, Princess Soraya wore a majestic wedding gown adorned with many pearls, diamonds and feathers, whereas in 2011, Kate Middleton wore a wedding gown with a long train, long, lace sleeves and an unrevealing V neckline, with a veil covering her face.

In conclusion, the period of illustration influences the manner in which the dress code is presented. A dress code conveys messages and promotes communication. But ultimately, is it what 'shapes a character' in fairy tales?

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