



DISTINCTIVE APPROACHES TO REWRITING FAIRY TALES IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE

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Abstract

Contemporary American authors transform fairy tales using innovative narrative strategies and thematic reinventions, challenging traditional forms and values. This article examines diverse rewriting methods, exploring gender politics, sociocultural commentary, and metafictional techniques. Such reimaginings illuminate how these classic narratives continue to evolve, maintaining cultural resonance while reflecting America's modern ethos.

Keywords: Fairy tales, Rewriting, American literature, Adaptation, Metafiction, Gender, Contemporary.

INTRODUCTION

Since their origins in oral traditions, fairy tales have proven highly malleable, reflecting social values across centuries. In contemporary American literature, writers reshape these canonical narratives, creating works that speak to modern readers' concerns. Whether through reimagined settings, subverted character roles, or fresh thematic emphases, American authors repeatedly demonstrate distinctive approaches to rewriting fairy tales.

One hallmark of these rewritings is an overt challenge to patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes. In her 1971 poetry collection *Transformations*, Anne Sexton retells classic tales with a raw, confessional style that lays bare the vulnerability and resilience of female protagonists. By foregrounding mental health, physical embodiment, and sexuality, Sexton expands the narrative possibilities and highlights issues not traditionally addressed in fairy-tale lore. This shift resonates with American social movements—particularly second-wave feminism—and illuminates how authors deploy familiar plots to critique dominant cultural assumptions.

Similarly, many contemporary retellings emphasize multicultural identity and inclusivity. Writers adopt diverse backdrops, weaving together elements of Native American folklore or African American storytelling traditions. By doing so, they decenter the European roots of many fairy tales, challenging assumptions about whose voices and experiences are worthy of representation. This approach aligns with broader efforts in American letters to recognize marginalized identities and histories, thereby reinforcing the genre's adaptability to local cultures and social contexts.

Another distinct tactic is to relocate the fairy-tale framework into modern or futuristic settings, thus showcasing how timeless archetypes adapt to contemporary realities. In Gregory Maguire's well-known novels, such as *Wicked*, familiar characters inhabit morally complex worlds that mirror present-day ethical quandaries. Protagonists are no longer one-dimensional but display inner conflict, shaping the story's moral core in ways that resonate with modern

American readers. These rewritten tales challenge the binaries of good and evil, exploring the complicated factors that influence personal decisions and societal perceptions.

Metafictional and intertextual strategies also characterize American retellings. Authors may reference multiple fairy tales within a single narrative or embed popular culture allusions to build new layers of meaning. This postmodern technique invites readers to question the nature of storytelling itself. By drawing attention to narrative artifice, writers highlight the constructedness of fairy tales, prompting reflection on how these seemingly timeless stories have been shaped by societal norms. For instance, short story collections often juxtapose multiple versions of a single tale, allowing readers to observe the transformation of characters and themes across shifting cultural landscapes.

Contemporary American rewritings also tackle urgent societal topics, such as technology dependence, environmental crises, and political discord. Modern fairy-tale retellings in dystopian or speculative fiction contexts underscore the fragility of our world while affirming the enduring power of hope and collaboration. By situating archetypal struggles in futuristic scenarios, authors illuminate both the malleability of these timeless forms and the degree to which universal human desires—love, justice, and identity—remain intact.

Finally, these innovative rewritings amplify reader engagement. Because readers already recognize the underlying structure and archetypes, they can easily note deviations and new interpretive angles. This familiarity fosters an interactive reading experience: the audience gains insight into how creative revisions reflect changing social mores. Thus, contemporary American writers demonstrate that while fairy tales can traverse centuries unaltered, their capacity to transform resonates strongly with shifting perspectives.

In conclusion, rewritings of fairy tales in contemporary American literature exemplify the genre's boundless adaptability. Through the revision of gender roles, infusion of multicultural elements, use of metafiction, and incorporation of modern anxieties, these works engage classic narratives in conversations that remain perpetually relevant. Their transformative power underscores the enduring appeal of stories once told around ancient firesides, reflecting America's evolving cultural landscape.

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