



"Twice Upon a Time: Fairy Tales Revisited"

SUZZALLO-ALLEN LIBRARY EDITION

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THE ENDURING POWER OF FAIRY TALES . . .

We encounter versions of traditional fairy tales in innumerable children's picture books and Disney movies as we grow up. Familiarity with stories like "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty" gives us a commonality of experience unusual in today's fragmented world; allusions to fairy tales are some of the few pop-culture references we are all likely to understand.

Such popular saturation makes fairy tales the perfect texts for writers who wish to comment on the canon while making points of their own. There are hundreds of examples of such re-interpreted tales; the 35 items featured in this display are some of the best contemporary works commenting on and amplifying fairy tales from the (mostly Western) canon. The writers of these tales have not simply retold the stories, but have taken imaginative narrative leaps and wandered down dark side paths left unexamined by the original tales. By choosing fairy tales as their canvas, these writers have illustrated the enduring power of fairy tales to fascinate and frighten, move and enlighten us today.

ADDING LIFE TO CARDBOARD CHARACTERS

Many writers have amplified fairy tales by adding complexity to the stock characters encountered in the traditional stories. Some approaches are simple; for instance, in just one page, James Marshall's retelling of Red Riding Hood gives life to the grandmother character by making her a crabby old bookworm who talks back to the wolf. Some approaches are more complex; Robin McKinley's book-length retelling of "Beauty and the Beast," *Rose Daughter*, fleshes out relationships between Beauty and her sisters and father. Adèle Geras retells "Snow White" in *Pictures of the Night*, but her protagonist is a modern teenager who plays in a band and struggles with her father's remarriage to a stepmother she dislikes, rather than the passive princess of the original tale.

SEEING FROM ANOTHER ANGLE

Familiar fairy tales take on a different cast when they are told from atypical points of view. Jon Scieszka's children's book *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* uses the huffing-and-puffing wolf as a comically unreliable narrator. The poems in Sara Hay's *Story Hour* and Gwen Strauss's *Trail of Stones* take on the points of view of many neglected secondary characters. In *The Magic Circle*, Donna Jo Napoli paints a psychologically complex portrait of the witch from "Hansel and Gretel," while Anatole France's story "The Seven Wives of Bluebeard (from authentic documents)" tells the tale from the point of view of the merchant himself.

INVERTING TRADITIONAL TALES

Twentieth-century writers often challenge our expectations of fairy tales by up-ending the original tales. Brinton Turkle's wordless story *Deep in the Woods* turns the tables on Goldilocks and her family when a young bear stumbles into their house. In *Babette Cole's Prince Cinders*, it is the man who requires rescuing with the aid of a comically inept fairy. In *Jim and the Beanstalk* by Raymond Briggs, the ancestor of the original Jack brings items to the giant rather than stealing from him, while William Brooke's collection *Untold Tales* re-tells four stories, each with a bit of a twist.

CHALLENGING NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS

The "once upon a time" and "happily ever after" trappings of the fairy tale have been closely examined by several modern writers. Patrice Kindl's narrator in *Goose Chase* explicitly rejects the conventional narrative: "...I know full well that the customary way to begin such a tale as mine is: 'Once upon a time' But what do I care for custom?" In *The Frog Prince, Continued*, Jon Scieszka's formerly-frog hero questions the "happily ever after" part of his fairy tale. Robert Coover's *Briar Rose* takes place as the prince hacks through the brambles to free Sleeping Beauty from her enchanted sleep, ignoring the bits of the story that come before and after. Philip Pullman, in *I Was a Rat!*,

alternates the main story of one of the rats turned into a coachman by Cinderella's fairy godmother with tabloid snapshots of the royal romance, while the hero of Jonathan Carroll's supernatural thriller *Sleeping in Flame* finds that traces of his previous lives lead back to Rumpelstiltskin.

EXPLORING GENDER AND POWER

In the 1970s, women writers began to examine how traditional fairy tale narratives have been used to reinforce patriarchy. In her story collection *The Bloody Chamber*, Angela Carter retold old tales like "Bluebeard" and "Little Red Riding Hood" while exploring the misogyny of the original stories and the sexual complicity of their heroines. Anne Sexton's seminal collection of fairy-tale poetry, *Transformations*, describes stories such as "Sleeping Beauty" and "Rapunzel" while linking them with psychological issues like sexual abuse and abandonment. Olga Broumas's poetry collection *Beginning with O* emphasizes the roles of women in the tales, while in her linked series of twelve retold tales, *Kissing the Witch*, Emma Donoghue uses women's voices to tell the stories which were originally recounted by an omniscient third-person narrator.

PROVIDING SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Fairy tales have also been used to make points about society and politics. In *My Love, My Love, or, The Peasant Girl*, Rosa Guy uses the framework of "The Little Mermaid" to suggest that class and race are barriers as insurmountable as having a fish tail while living on land. Manlio Argueta's *Capucita en la Zona Roja* (Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District) sees as the repression of the modern Salvadoran state as the wolf in the story of Red Riding Hood; Gunter Grass's *Der Butt* (The Flounder) takes up where the old tale "The Fisherman and His Wife" leaves off when a group of feminists put the magical flounder on trial for its past complicities with male-dominated society.

CASTING LIGHT ON ANOTHER STORY

The rich symbolism embedded in old tales has been used to add significance to other tales. Margaret Atwood's novella "Bluebeard's Egg" uses the themes in the "Bluebeard" and "Fitcher's Bird" tales to examine the way a woman traps herself in a destructive marriage. A.S. Byatt's celebrated novel *Possession* retells the French fairy story *Mélusine* as an epic poem, using its themes to amplify those of her other two entwined narratives. In *The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars*, Steven Brust alternates a retelling of the old tale with an account of the hardships of an artist in the modern world. Carmen Martín Gaité's protagonist in *La Reina de las Nieves* (The Farewell Angel) finds parallels to his own frozen emotional state in Andersen's tale "The Snow Queen".

METAPHORS FOR THE HOLOCAUST

Several writers have used fairy tale frameworks to explore the meaning of the Holocaust. In *Kindergarten* and *The True Story of Hansel and Gretel*, Peter Rushforth and Louise Murphy both use the familiar story of two children abandoned by their father in the woods to present events from a child's-eye view, while in *Jane Yolen's Briar Rose* a woman uses an altered version of the "Sleeping Beauty" tale to transmit her own Holocaust story to her granddaughter.

THREE VERSIONS OF "ONE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS"

Cultural perspectives can give an entirely different cast to the same stories. In interpreting the story cycle of "One Thousand and One Nights," John Barth's *The Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* situates the action in Chesapeake Bay as well as North Africa and uses his themes to examine twentieth-century western life. In *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, Salman Rushdie seeks to reconcile Western and Eastern storytelling traditions, while Naguib Mahfouz uses his *Arabian Nights* and *Days* to explore issues such as social justice and greed from an Islamic perspective.

Books on Display:

MANLIO ARGUETA

Capercucita en la Zona Roja
(*Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District*)

**MARGARET
ATWOOD**

Bluebeard's Egg

JOHN BARTH

*The Last Voyage of
Somebody the Sailor*

RAYMOND BRIGGS

Jim and the Beanstalk

WILLIAM BROOKE

Untold Tales

OLGA BROUMAS

Beginning with O

STEVEN BRUST

*The Sun, the Moon, and
the Stars*

A.S. BYATT

Possession: A Romance

**JONATHAN
CARROLL**

Sleeping in Flame

ANGELA CARTER

*The Bloody Chamber, and
Other Stories*

BABETTE COLE

Prince Cinders

ROBERT COOVER

Briar Rose

EMMA DONOGHUE

*Kissing the Witch : Old
Tales in New Skins*

ANATOLE FRANCE

*The Seven Wives of
Bluebeard and Other
Marvellous Tales*

ADELE GERAS

Pictures of the Night

GÜNTER GRASS,

translated by **RALPH**

MANHEIM

Der Butt (The Flounder)

ROSA GUY

*My Love, My Love, or, The
Peasant Girl*

SARA HENDERSON

HAY, illus. by **JIM**

MCMULLAN

Story Hour

PATRICE KINDL

Goose Chase

NAGUIB MAHFOUZ,

translated by **DENYS**

JOHNSON-DAVIES

Lay^āal^ī Alf Laylab
(*Arabian Nights and Days*)

JAMES MARSHALL

Red Riding Hood

CARMEN MARTÍN

GAITE

*La reina de las nieves (The
Farewell Angel)*

ROBIN MCKINLEY

Rose Daughter

WOLFGANG

MIEDER, ed.

*Disenchantments : an
Anthology of Modern Fairy
Tale Poetry*

LOUISE MURPHY

*The True Story of Hansel
and Gretel*

DONNA JO NAPOLI

The Magic Circle

PHILIP PULLMAN,

illustrated by **KEVIN**

HAWKES

I Was a Rat!

SALMAN RUSHDIE

*Haroun and the Sea of
Stories*

PETER

RUSHFORTH

Kindergarten

JON SCIESZKA,

illustrated by **LANE**

SMITH

*The True Story of the Three
Little Pigs*

JON SCIESZKA,

illustrated by **STEVE**

JOHNSON

The Frog Prince, Continued

ANNE SEXTON,

illustrated by

BARBARA SWAN

Transformations

GWEN STRAUSS,

illustrated by

ANTHONY

BROWNE

Trail of Stones

BRINTON TURKLE

Deep in the Forest

JANE YOLEN

Briar Rose

FOR MORE

INFORMATION:

HILDA E.

DAVIDSON & A.

CHAUDHRI, eds.

*A Companion to the Fairy
Tale* (2003)

HEIDI ANNE

HEINER

*The SurLaLune Fairy Tales
Pages.*

surlalunefairytales.com

THE ENDICOTT

STUDIO

Journal of Mythic Arts

endicott-studio.com

Marvels & tales: a journal

of fairy tale studies

online through UW

Libraries subscription

JACK ZIPES, ed.

*The Oxford Companion to
Fairy Tales* (2000)