

Rewriting fairy tales: new challenge in creativity in the classroom*

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Resumen:

¿Qué hace que un cuento de hadas sea tan duradero? ¿Por qué estos han sobrevivido durante cientos de años y seguirán haciéndolo por muchos más, cuando nuestros nietos lleguen a ser abuelos? ¿Por qué personas de todas las edades los disfrutan tanto? ¿Es porque los cuentos de hadas reflexionan y transmiten de una manera sencilla y concisa profundas verdades universales que grandes novelistas han luchado por expresar a lo largo de cientos de páginas? ¿O es porque nos retrotraen al reino mágico de la infancia y ofrecen la oportunidad de escapar de la dura realidad? ¿Es porque hablan de arquetipos con los que todos podemos identificarnos o porque cuentan que, al final, el bien siempre triunfa sobre el mal? La pasión por la narración está escrita en nuestro código genético. Los cuentos de hadas son tan queridos y populares que siempre serán una valiosa fuente de inspiración para los escritores. Su gran éxito radica en su capacidad para ser reescritos, transformados y ajustados a cada época y en cada sociedad. Esta reescritura de los cuentos populares ofrece muchas oportunidades. Al reescribirlos se pueden crear nuevas narraciones, nuevas formas que cultivan la lengua oral y escrita al mismo tiempo.

Palabras clave: reescritura de los cuentos de hadas, habla oral y escrita, técnicas narrativas, creatividad, placer.

Abstract:

What makes a tale so time enduring? Why fairy tales have survived for hundreds of years and will still be around for many years when our grandchildren become grandparents? Why do people of any age enjoy them so much? Is this because fairy tales reflect and convey in a simple and concise form deep universal truths that great novelists struggle to express over hundreds of pages? Or is this because they take us back to the magic realm of our childhood and offer the chance to escape from rough reality? Is this because they speak about archetypes we can all identify with or because they do tell us that in the end good always triumphs over evil? The passion for storytelling is written in our genetic code. Because they are so loved and popular, fairy tales will always be an invaluable source of inspiration for writers. Their great success lies in their capacity to be rewritten, transformed and adjusted to every era and every society. This rewriting of popular tales offers many opportunities. By rewriting popular tales we can create new narratives, new forms which at the same time cultivate our oral and written language.

Key words: rewriting fairy tales, oral and written speech, narrative techniques, creativity, pleasure.

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What makes a fairy tale so time enduring? Why fairy tales have survived for hundreds of years and will still be around for many years when our grandchildren become grandparents? Why do people of every age enjoy them so much? Is this because fairy tales reflect and convey, in a simple and concise form, deep universal truths that great novelists struggle to express over hundreds of pages? (Carter, 2006: 12; Meraklis, 1999: 57). Is this because they take us back to the magic realm of our childhood and offer the chance to escape from rough reality? Or is this because they express archetypes we can all identify with (von Franz, 1997; Jung, 1964) or because they do tell us that in the end good always triumphs over evil (Bettelheim, 1995: 380)? The passion for storytelling is written in our genetic code (Bacchilega, 1997: 88; Lüthi, 1976: 94). Fairy tales bring a tinge of optimism and a tiny flicker of confidence that there might still be hope for the human race (Cashdan, 1999: 95). Because they are so loved and popular, fairy tales will always be an invaluable source of inspiration for writers. Their great success lies in their capacity to be rewritten, transformed and adjusted to every era and every society.

The capacity to be rewritten is the secret of the survival of the fairy tale (Beckett, 1997; Zipes, 1979: 5; Rodari, 1985: 14-15). Wouldn't you read a story that promises an unexpected twist to *Beauty and the Beast*, *Snow White* or *Cinderella*? The twist could be a modern, comical, surrealistic, bizarre, or psychological one. By rewriting popular tales we can create new tales, new forms, and at the same time cultivate our oral and written speech, use new methods and techniques of narration (change of place, time, perspective, relations among heroes, etc.), as well as a range of activities which promote our creativity, enhance our fantasy and sustain our pleasure. It is up to our goals, ambitions and wishes to make the most of the possibilities that fairy tales can give to us.

However, what do we mean by saying rewriting fairy tales? The term has not been defined with precision; this is because it may be used in different frames and may mean different things. For example, a fairy tale can be rewritten in more explicit and comprehensible language. This is done when we rewrite the purely popular fairy tales, which are full of local linguistic forms and idioms, in order to adapt them for small children. Therefore, rewriting (transcription) can be considered as the adaptation of fairy tales. A lot of popular fairy tales are rewritten or adapted in terms of text or pictures; their content is modified so that they can be more comprehensible by children of today or more suitable in a pedagogical sense (when they contain episodes of violence). In other words, in this case a rationalisation is observed, in terms of the linguistic form or *mythoplasia*, in those texts which are considered cultural monuments of each country and which have lost their orality to a large extent and survive only in written form. Even in the modern children's theatre we watch this tendency for adaptation of popular fairy tales in the

cutting off or change of scenes, episodes and characters (e.g., the Greek tale called *To Σκλαβί* which has been adapted as a theatrical play).

Rewriting may also mean the existence of intertext in a story. It may be the transcription or transformation of a well-known fairy tale by changing basic parts of it and trying new techniques of narrative in order to create a new fairy tale, although keeping the core and the protagonists. This gives the listener or reader the opportunity to examine the tale from a new point of view.

From the above it is evident that the term rewriting has various meanings and various prospects. In this paper we will deal only with applying new narrative techniques in rewriting fairy tales.

No one can overlook the fact that the fairy tale changes continuously through time and is adjusted to social conditions. Despite the stability of its structure and properties (Propp, 1991), the fairy tale has been proved to be changeable and fluid. Georgios Megas commented on its basic operation: “Although it does not obey to the conditions of real life, it is adapted so perfectly to the environment, the manners and customs, the fables and beliefs of people, that it manages to become a piece from their life and acquire the special characteristics of them” (Megas, 1978: 180). This capacity of the fairy tale to survive in time and its flexibility to correspond to the different needs of persons of each era, is also expressed masterfully in the observation of M. G. Meraklis: “In its route through time, the fairy tale lived a multiple life, something like repeated circles of reincarnations” (Meraklis, 1993: 191). With this long-lasting adaptability, the fairy tale has influenced people of all ages and has survived in oral or written form.

The most convincing evidence for the resistibility of popular fairy tales in time is the fact that these old stories have never stopped to be rewritten. Each rewriting, functioning as a “meta-narrative”, presupposes the existence of an initial text, a matrix (“pre-text”), which by definition “allocates” the ideological or other coordinates of the era of creation and of its (initial) operation. At the same time, this rewriting transports values and ideals from another time and space, thus ideological, frame (Stephens & McCallum, 1998: 162). Therefore, each process of rewriting or re-reading involves the concepts of time and space, because it is done in the context of a dialogue with pre-existing oral or written narratives.

The popular oral fairy tale in Europe has gone through such adaptations in form and content. Zipes points out that known writers appropriated various oral popular fairy tales and changed them in literary narratives concerning values, morals and customs, with the aim of socialising children according to the norms of the era (Zipes, 1985: 3). In other words, the fairy tale is a historical construction which reflects its society and era.

Nowadays, fairy tales have survived also in several other forms of art: theatre, cinema in the form of cartoons, painting, music, literature in the form of comics and poems, and television in the form of advertisement. The theorists of intertext certainly agree that tales and particularly

popular fairy tales can be rewritten (adapted or transcribed), because they include such a strong force of renewal and liveliness that they can express meanings of modern era and become alive again (Souliotis, 2000: 125-151).

Several alternatives are offered and various preferences are satisfied by the transcription of fairy tales. We can change the story and the heroes, reverse their stereotyped roles, modify the way that the heroes' gender roles (especially feminine heroes) are depicted. The narration becomes more vivid and lively than before, with the addition of new dialogues and dramatization. Multiple combinations are invented and new associations are made. This means that the reader will be supposed to modify his initial expectations and to alter his/her memories, adopting "a new point of view" ("a wandering view-point") (Iser, 1978: 108-118). This also means that reading development is not only a continuous but also a progressive process, as the reader moves himself/herself constantly between former expectations and their cancellation. The reader tries to construct meaning ("consistency-building"), by organising information, using his/her imagination and his/her knowledge. In other words, he/she is in a continuously increasing dynamic process by means of the words and the picture of the tale.

What arises as a profit from this process, beyond the engagement and familiarisation with fairy tales and the knowledge that is acquired (Malafantis, 2006: 269), is this: while relaxing, the reader has the opportunity to develop literacy. New types of literacy are created, several forms of written and oral speech are cultivated through the use of various techniques and alternative activities, which contribute to culture, the development of creativity, inventiveness and imagination and at the same time provide opportunities for amusement and entertainment.

Below we propose certain practices and easy activities which give small children the chance to experience what transcription and rewriting means, become familiar with the process and realise how living and vivid a story can be after all these transformations. These converting activities enable children to understand better the dynamic of a story and the possibilities offered by modern narration:

Change of perspective: Fairy tales are characterised by the use of the third person. What would happen if we narrated the story in the first person? Whose point of view would be adopted? In the fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood*, for instance, we can rewrite the tale from the point of view of the heroine, the wolf, the hunter or the grandmother. We could also select a combination of two or more perspectives or an intermediate (in-between) perspective. In any case, first-person narration renders the plot much more interesting and vivid and enhances the dramatic (in the Aristotelian sense) character of the narration.

Change of time frame: How it would appear to children if we transferred the story of a classic fairy tale in the modern era? For example, we can create a modern Cinderella who lives in a

modern society. Which problems does she face? Another alternative is a future scenario, such as this: the story of Cinderella is located in the distant future, for example, after 2000 years.

Change of relations: The relations among the heroes of a fairy tale can also be reversed. This provides the possibility for a different outcome of the story. For example, in the tale of Little Red Riding Hood, the wolf may become the good one and the little girl the bad one. What would happen if the hunter had not killed the wolf? What would be then the end of the story?

Change of characteristics of heroes: The roles and characteristics of heroes may also be reversed. The three little pigs can become bad and malicious against the quiet and innocent wolf. The prince frog kisses a princess who becomes a frog too and they live happily ever after.

Change of space frame: a) *Natural frame:* We can change the natural frame, the environment, of the story. By consequence, this means that we make all the necessary transformations and the corresponding changes in the heroes, the plot and the means of action. Thus, instead of a forest, the plot can unfold on a ship travelling in the sea, on a beach or in a big commercial shop. b) *Cultural frame:* The story can unfold itself in another culture, in the historical or metaphysical sense (e.g., in another planet). This modification provides the opportunity for reporting customs and manners or stories of another culture and civilisation. c) *Socio-economic frame:* The heroes may be workers or businessmen, they may belong in the middle class or in an ascending social class. With such an activity, social stereotypes and perceptions are detected.

6. Change of genre: This constitutes the most creative piece of transcription/rewriting. With this technique a classic story can be given in another form, such as a comic, a newspaper, a news bulletin, a theatrical play, a romance, an adventure or even a poem. This presupposes explicit knowledge of each style and literary genre as well as obedience to the rules and conventions of each genre.

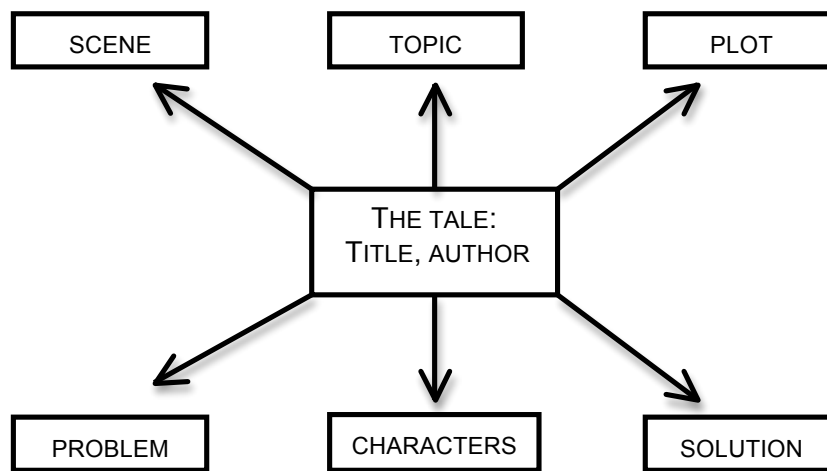
7. Change of illustration: In every popular fairy tale which appears in various versions all over the world, cultural elements are observed in its pictures. However, cultural or other stereotypes can be reversed through alternative illustrations. This has to do with the aim of the illustrator and the multiple possibilities that pictures can offer: an illustration can support the text by explaining it or simply accompany it by making it more attractive or it can even reverse the text. This also has to do with the relation and the operation of double language —the language of the text and the language of the picture. In modern children's books, double narration is often observed and it leads to a double story, the one that is said via pictures and the one that is said via words. Nikolajeva and Scott comment on this issue:

If words and images fill each other's gaps wholly, there is nothing left for the reader's imagination and the reader remains somewhat passive. The same is true if the gaps are identical in words and images (or if there are no gaps at all). (...) However, as soon as

words and images provide alternative information or contradict each other in some way, we have a variety of readings and interpretations (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001: 17).

Provided that, as Stephens claims, pictures portray objects and simultaneously offer a way or a style of depiction (Stephens, 1994: 198), then the depiction of any object is also an interpretation of it (Stephens, 1994: 162).

These activities can be realised in groups and can fulfil their mission through dialogue, discussion and the techniques of brainstorming, conceptual tables (see the scheme below), etc.



Furthermore, we can organise activities with graduated difficulty, depending always on the students' age, level, and interests. Beginning from toddlerhood, children can create or rewrite stories orally, later they can simply change the end of the story or, even more, invent amusing inversions ("salad tales") (Rodari, 1985), or subversive stories.

All these efforts in rewriting fairy tales must take place in a climate of pleasure and expectation in order for a tale to be constructive and creative, and not under pressure. The child and the fairy tale must meet each other in this travel —and this meeting should turn out a fascinating one. Everyone should be able to feel the magic that a fairy tale offers. This is the reason why educators should be flexible enough and never impose activities without the children's will. Educators give children stimuli for fertile and spontaneous responses, are always open to children's choices, listen to them and co-organize activities through dialogue.

Generally speaking, the fairy tale is part of the school curriculum both for its content and for its language, as it has a simple and comprehensible syntax and structure, without many difficult words or abstract concepts. Its language is succinct with words that signify energy and movement. For this precise reason, a fairy tale will always be suitable for any reason we use it: for educational or academic purposes, for enjoyment, and for all ages.

The pedagogical value of a fairy tale is evident in the following:

- It cultivates the mother language via the techniques of narrative and dramatization.
- It provokes imagination and develops creativity, extends thought, and develops children's potential.
- It brings aesthetic pleasure and optimism, and gives children the message that we can overcome life adversities and become victors like the fairy tale heroes. Moreover, rewriting a fairy tale through adjusting its content to the specific needs of the child may be a beneficial experience providing stimuli, courage and hope.
- Without resorting to didacticism, a fairy-tale cultivates moral conscience and transmits ideals such as Good, Virtue, Truth, and Justice. In this sense, it helps to balance unfairness and inequality (racial, social, political, class, individual).

(Malafantis, 2006: 268)

In conclusion, we would say that we have all realized the multiple values and importance of tales and of rewriting them. Children's interest is kept live and vivid, and the fairy tale itself survives. Rewriting fairy tales is a very creative activity. It is a way to make the tales continue their existence and survive, and a means of offering pleasure to all, children and adults alike. In every form, the fairy tale is renewed by itself (Kanatsouli, 2005: 134).

The time enduring property of the fairy tale is only a small evidence of its multiple significance. The tale satisfies children's fundamental needs and shows routes of exploring imagination and creativity. Through tales children express themselves, undertake roles, respect the group and its rules, externalise thoughts and feelings, fight fears and develop abilities. Through rewriting tales, children acquire an aesthetic stance, comprehend the language of pictures and symbols, and enjoy the tale as listeners, readers and/or creators.

It is astonishing how many ways of expression children may discover and how many skills they may develop through speech, song, dance, movement, sounds and rhythm in their contact with fairy tales. When rewriting fairy tales within a pleasant and creative atmosphere, children learn, acquire knowledge, act, communicate, adopt positive life attitudes and, above all, learn and enjoy themselves at the same time.

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