

Deconstructing Fairy Tale Archetypes: An In-depth Analysis of Neil Gaiman's 'Snow, Glass, Apples'

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ABSTRACT: *This research paper delves into the graphic short story "Snow, Glass, Apples" by Neil Gaiman, a captivating reimagining of the classic Snow White fairy tale. The study employs a dual approach, combining visual and literary analyses to unravel the intricacies of Gaiman's narrative and artistic choices. The primary objective is to explore how the fusion of visual elements and literary techniques serves to deconstruct traditional fairy tale tropes and reshape the characters' roles. The visual analysis encompasses an examination of the graphic novel's artwork, focusing on the intricate details of the illustrations. Key aspects such as panel layout, character design, use of color, and visual motifs are scrutinized to unveil the nuanced storytelling embedded in the visual elements. Simultaneously, the literary analysis investigates Gaiman's narrative techniques, emphasizing the role of the unreliable narrator—the Queen. By dissecting the text, the paper aims to uncover the layers of symbolism, subversion, and thematic complexity woven into the story. The study delves into how Gaiman's prose complements and contrasts with the visual elements, creating a cohesive and immersive storytelling experience. This research contributes to the broader understanding of the graphic short story as a unique medium for narrative exploration. By synthesizing visual and literary analyses, the paper sheds light on how Gaiman's "Snow, Glass, Apples" challenges traditional storytelling norms, prompting a reevaluation of fairy tale archetypes and themes. Ultimately, the interdisciplinary approach adopted in this research offers a comprehensive perspective on the rich and multifaceted nature of Gaiman's work, demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between visual and literary elements in graphic storytelling.*

Keywords: *neil gaiman, graphic novel, horror, fantasy, retellings, snow white*

Neil Richard Gaiman, born on November 10, 1960 in Hampshire, England is an English author who can be credited to writing several novels, short stories, comic books, graphic novels, non-fiction and films. He has also been awarded the Hugo, Nebula and the Bram Stoker awards for his contributions to the field of literature. Some of his most famous works include *The Graveyard Book*, *The Sandman* comic books series and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. He has also won the Newbery and the Carnegie medals.

Snow, Glass, Apples by Neil Gaiman first appeared as a short story in 1994, written for Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. Later, it was included in Gaiman's short story collection *Smoke and Mirrors* in 1998. The story was then adapted into an audio drama in 2010 and into a graphic novel in 2019. Colleen Doran joined as the flag bearer of the project and the graphic novel won the 2020 Eisner Award for Best Adaptation from Another Medium. The Horror Writers Association also presented the "Snow, Glass, Apples" graphic novel with the Bram Stoker Superior Achievement in a Graphic Novel Award.

Graphic storytelling, which includes comics and graphic novels, holds a crucial role in literature and has undergone significant development. The fusion of visual components with storytelling has given rise to a unique and influential medium that engages a diverse audience. Its importance is evident in various key aspects.

The visual storytelling aspect of graphic narratives enhances the narrative by blending images and text, resulting in a more immersive storytelling experience. This easily accessible format is particularly attractive to readers who may find traditional literature intimidating, providing an entry point for a wider audience. The expressive nature of this artistic medium allows for a nuanced exploration of emotions, atmosphere, and storytelling. Artists leverage illustrations, color, and layout to convey intricate details. Additionally, the broad range of genres and themes, spanning from superhero epics to memoirs, fantasy, and historical fiction, empowers creators to approach complex subjects in distinctive ways. The sequential structure of graphic storytelling, which differs from traditional literature, demands a specialized approach to pacing and arrangement, adding to its unique appeal. The cultural impact of graphic novels is highlighted by their recognition as valuable literary contributions, earning critical acclaim, awards, and scholarly attention.

Snow, Glass, Apples is a dark retelling of the old German tale Snow White written by the Grimm Brothers in 1812. While Disney has definitely convoluted and white-washed the story to appeal to the younger audience, Neil Gaiman has ventured further into the realm of sublime and made the story even darker than the original tale by the Brothers Grimm. The Grimm's fairy tales version of Snow White includes murder, revenge and jealousy as the dark themes but to these existing themes, Gaiman has added pedophilia, incest, filicide, necrophilia, vampirism, and cannibalism.

The outline and the characters of *Snow, Glass, Apples* remain the same as the original story. The King, the stepmother, Snow White or the stepdaughter, the dwarfs and the prince are still the characters in the story. The King and the stepmother fall passionately in love and she is crowned the queen of the kingdom besides her husband. The Queen still has magical powers and has a magic mirror which shows her what she asks for.

The plot of the story follows the same fate as the Queen asks for Snow White's heart to be cut out and brought to her. The huntsman brings her a deer's heart and lets the child go free. Snow White survives and lives with the dwarfs in the forest.

In this reimagining of the Snow White tale, the Evil Queen assumes a more sympathetic role, offering her perspective on the events. She characterizes Snow White as a fearsome and unnatural being, contrasting the conventional depiction of the princess as an innocent and virtuous figure. The Queen, suspicious about Snow White's relationship with her father, becomes apprehensive about potential harm to him.

In her efforts to safeguard the kingdom from Snow White, the Queen observes the princess's uncanny ability to captivate people, shaping their perception of her as a blameless victim. However, the kingdom responds to the Queen's attempts to reveal Snow White's true nature with skepticism and censure.

Even though the Queen's famous poisoning of the apple to murder Snow White is still present, it is to safeguard the king and her kingdom from Snow White. When Snow White is discovered dead, the prince brings her back to life, after which she proceeds to wreak havoc in the Queen's life. Snow White enchants the prince and uses him as a vessel to infiltrate her own kingdom, later killing the Queen to take the kingdom for herself. Her innocent appearance wins the crowd over and with their support, she beheads the Queen. In the end, Snow White and the Prince celebrate a happy ending.

The narrative takes unexpected turns, delving into themes of innocence, sexuality, and the corrupting influence of power. To counteract Snow White's impact on the kingdom, the Queen resorts to drastic measures, leading to a dark and surprising resolution.

In "Snow, Glass, Apples," the narrative prominently explores the theme of innocence undergoing corruption. The conventional portrayal of Snow White as a virtuous princess is overturned, revealing a darker and more intricate characterization. The Evil Queen characterizes Snow White as a creature described as "monstrous" and "unnatural," challenging the established image of her as a symbol of purity and beauty. The Queen acknowledges Snow White's peculiar allure, manipulating people's perceptions of her as an innocent victim. Additionally, the story subtly alludes to an unsettling and taboo relationship between Snow White and her father, contributing to a sense of betrayal and distrust in the narrative.

The picturization of Snow White in the graphic novel also adds to the layers of her unnaturality, drawing her with dark, pupil-less eyes, ghost-like pale skin and blood-red lips. In the scene where Snow White bites the Queen's hand as a child, the red corners of her eyes and sharp teeth are made to stand out as the Queen recoils in pain and surprise. The evil intent in the princess's character is much easier to portray in the graphic form. Snow White also never smiles, expect when she's about to feed.

The Queen is portrayed as innocent-looking and happy when she first meets the King. She has blonde hair; characterizing her innocence and purity. She is dressed in warm hues of red, brown and yellow that highlight her happiness. Even during her first meeting with the King and the time when they start falling in love, they are both painted in warmer tones to show their joy and the warmth of the situation. The images of the King and Queen are much larger than the scenery, depicting the gravity of their love. The artwork has a lustrous sheen to it.

After the King's death, when the Queen orders to get Snow White killed, the colours of her outfit change along with her expressions. Her gowns gain a frosty blue and vicious burgundy look, highlighting the coldness of her character. Her open expression and kind eyes are replaced by worry when the King gets sick and fear in the presence of Snow White when she realizes her monstrosity. The King's pallor changes from flushed and healthy to pale and sickly as his daughter feeds on him and he gets sicker by the day.

The setting of the story too plays a big part in portraying how *Snow, Glass, Apples* progresses. At the beginning of the tale, when the King and Queen meet, we see green, open fields and the bright sun. The image is akin to a natural bounty. When the Queen initially moves into the King's castle, it appears warm and cozy. A place grand but also safe and comforting. The feeling of warmth vanishes after the King's death. The castle seems cold and unwelcoming now as the Queen feels more alone than ever.

Even the Spring Fair, which is supposed to be a place for people to come together and celebrate, becomes a barren site as less and less forest people visit the festival each year. Gaiman writes, "Five of them, each sadder, poorer and shoddier than the one before" to describe the state of the Spring Fair. Despite the warm tones used to paint the Spring Fair, the place still emerges as isolating, discriminating and cold.

All the scenes of Snow White as she roams naked and free as a monster in the forest are painted with shades of midnight blue and black. These dark colours portray the forest as a scary place where a monster thrives.

The Prince in Gaiman's graphic novel is painted in royal hues of blue, red and gold to convey his noble lineage. He is a perverse portrayal of the usual princes in fairy tales with his penchant for necrophilia. After awakening Snow White from her slumber, the Prince and Snow White march to the Queen's castle where the princess reclaims her heart. The scene of Snow White opening her chest cavity to insert her beating heart is vivid and gruesome.

The barbaric behaviour of the mob and their fanaticism to put their Queen to death adds another touch of darkness to the tale as Snow White and her Prince become the rulers of the kingdom.

The artwork in *Snow, Glass, Apples* rarely has frames and bleeds into one-another. The pages also do not have borders. This deliberate lack of white spaces and frames breeds a sense of claustrophobia and uneasiness. The darker hues create an eerie and gloomy atmosphere, where the reader is always aware about the monster in the dark and the impending doom of the protagonist.

The short graphic form also rarely has any speech bubbles. Majority of them are only text captions, informing us that the story is the first person narrative of the Queen, which makes us question about the authenticity of the story told by her.

In conclusion, the comprehensive analysis of Neil Gaiman's graphic short story, "Snow, Glass, Apples," has revealed a rich tapestry of visual and literary elements that contribute to its unconventional retelling of the Snow White fairy tale. The interdisciplinary approach employed in this study underscores the symbiotic relationship between the artwork and literary components, providing a nuanced understanding of Gaiman's storytelling techniques. Gaiman's prose complements the visual narrative, enhancing the overall impact and prompting deeper reflections on themes of betrayal, jealousy, and the consequences of blind trust.

While some readers may find the story's themes, including the suggestive and macabre elements, unsettling, it is essential to approach these interpretations with an awareness of the deliberate choices made by the author to create a dark and Gothic atmosphere. *Snow, Glass, Apples* challenges readers to embrace ambiguity, question traditional narratives, and engage in a reevaluation of fairy tale conventions.

In essence, the research underscores the significance of graphic storytelling as a unique and powerful medium for narrative exploration. By unraveling the complexities of *Snow, Glass, Apples*, the research has illuminated the ways in which visual and literary elements harmonize to construct a narrative that defies expectations, offering readers a thought-provoking and immersive experience in the blurred realms of horror and fantasy. Neil Gaiman's work stands as a testament to the capacity of graphic literature to transcend traditional boundaries, inviting readers to venture into the shadowy corridors of reimagined fairy tales.

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