



Intermedial Borders and Global Fairy-Tale Cultures

—Michelle Anya Anjirbag

Greenhill, Pauline, Jill Terry Rudy, Naomi Hamer, and Lauren Bosc, editors. *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*. Routledge, 2018. 664 pp. \$210.00 hc. ISBN 9781138946156.

Unlike other companions, such as the *Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales*, which highlights the textured and complex histories of fairy tales and their retellings through time, and the *Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, which takes an encyclopedic and historical view of the field and its critics, the *Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures* sits at the intersection of fairy-tale studies, media studies, and cultural studies. This *Companion* uses its positioning to draw these fields together in a dialogue that ultimately changes how we consider the cultural spaces in which these tales exist, how they are reclaimed and retold, and how contemporary transmediation of fairy tales might further open and expand current discourses about fairy tales in relation to new understandings of culture and media. Recent publishing—over the last five years in particular—has seen a rise in combining fairy-tale

and folktale research with cultural studies, in-depth examinations of pop culture, and media studies (Bellas; Foster and Tolbert; Greenhill and Rudy; Rudy and Greenhill; Zipes et al.). This trend has not only opened new avenues through which to consider fairy-tale research across contemporary media, but also helped to widen the field to incorporate more global contexts, marginalized voices, and concerns regarding the contemporary adaptation and re-interpretation of various fairy-tale and folktale cultures. The seventy-two-chapter critical text encompasses an expansive range of views, examining media texts from around the world in ways that push at the boundaries of socio-historically rooted fairy-tale and folklore criticism in favour of considering the cultural implications of the return to this mode of storytelling across multiple media platforms in the contemporary age. These updates pertaining to

contemporary concerns and cultural and media phenomena recognize that changes in media and culture have relocated the intersecting methods through which fairy tales are starting to be understood today.

The range of the text is extensive and ambitious; this *Companion* is not meant to be a simple survey or a beginner's primer on these topics; instead, the editors' stated goals are to "open . . . up" (xiv) these topics to new ways of thinking and thus, new ways of considering the field at large. Each chapter addresses the intersections of fairy tales, culture, and media from different angles or in relation to particular critical or contemporary political concerns. The topics themselves range from the expected, such as adaptation, orientalism, gender, and children's and young adult literature, to subjects that might be somewhat less expected, such as crime, fat studies, horror, mobile apps, and reality television. These latter topics illustrate that looking at fairy-tale studies in relation to changes in media and contemporary cultural concerns opens up new possibilities in the field and that these traditionally historically-located narratives have themselves become embedded in a new media landscape that requires more flexible thinking and conceptualization.

For a volume with so many wide-ranging areas of focus, the structure of the *Companion* makes it easy not only to research a particular topic, but also to browse and thereby discover routes in which to expand one's own thinking about what can possibly be considered a fairy tale. Rather than centring discourse related to national textual histories or the changes in socio-cultural positioning of different tales across a



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period of time or epochs in popular culture, the book is organized into five parts: “Basic Concepts,” “Analytical Approaches,” “Issues,” “Communicative Media,” and “Expressive Genres and Venues.” This structure allows readers to understand the topics through an issues-based perspective that foregrounds transnational flows and inter- and intracultural dialogues. Particular attention is also paid to different forms of media and to genres within creative media. The first two parts ground the reader in the volume and provide some of the tools necessary to navigate the criticism in the further three parts. Most helpfully, especially for those potentially coming to this volume as a first look at interdisciplinary or contemporary approaches to fairy tales, Jill Terry Rudy’s “Overview of Basic Concepts” defines folklore, fairy tale, culture, and media in clear relation to one another, road mapping a dialogue that carries on throughout the volume. To move from that starting point to a more deeply explored “Definition and History of Fairy Tales” (Carl Lindahl) and a discussion about the construction and contexts of fairy-tale media forms (Vanessa Nunes and Pauline Greenhill) makes the transition to the discussions of analytical approaches intelligible.

Though this volume is not meant to be read cover to cover, Parts I and II might well be worth the time to reorient researchers more used to taking a historical view of fairy-tale cultures to a more contemporary and rapidly expanding setting. As with the “Basic

Concepts” section, the “Analytical Approaches” section of the book is constructed such that readers can explore different theoretical approaches to fairy tales but through a contemporary lens. For example, by outlining psychoanalytical methods to approach the 2016 re-iteration of Disney’s film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), titled *Maleficent*, and the 2012 film *Snow White and the Huntsman* as sample texts, Veronica Schanoes brings forward and reillustrates the relevance of this methodological tool for contemporary analysis of fairy tales in new media spaces (40-46). Similarly, addressing contemporary political and cultural issues related to agency and indigeneity, and postcolonialism and decolonization, not only by naming, defining, and illustrating these issues in relation to fairy tales and their cultural positioning, but also by centring Indigenous voicing of these issues, helps to reaffirm this volume’s contemporary lens and recentres the analytical impetuses of the field through destabilizing a long-assumed status quo. In her chapter “Indigeneity” (122-31), ku’ualoha ho’omanawanui gets to the crux of the issues of creation as well as discourse surrounding misappropriation of Indigenous narratives and their subsequent analysis:

Because of the long history of settler colonialism in places like the United States, small Indigenous communities and their stories don’t simply get assimilated into neighboring (Indigenous)

communities. Rather, they get swallowed, erased, or appropriated into the dominant discourse of Western hegemony. Such hegemony is often thought of as solely White. But those who work within the industries of media and technology, for example, regardless of their own ethnic, cultural, and perhaps even Indigenous backgrounds, can be subsumed by the dominant discourse and perspectives of White patriarchy and consciously or unconsciously contribute to the mainstream narrative that diminishes or misappropriates Native stories. (129)

To have such a salient point about the power dynamics of creation and discourse highlighted in a Companion to a field that has struggled to acknowledge these issues in a foundational way is a strong move. In essence, illustrating these “Issues” (as the section this chapter belongs to is named) as not consigned to the past but still relevant to contemporary communities makes the issues themselves less abstract; they can thus be examined more fully and in relation to what is happening in the present.

Also helpful structurally is that “Part III: Issues” contains two subgroupings of essays: thematic issues raised by fairy-tale media, and issues of intersection with other study areas. These subsections explore the role that fairy tales play in transnational media and cultural exchange. While Parts IV and V elaborate this theme, they also emphasize how different media

shape and are shaped by fairy-tale cultures, drawing from such diverse fields as adaptation studies, material studies, and children’s and young adult literatures, and looking at the different kinds of media that fairy-tale cultures have become part of as the media landscape has evolved. I found this medium-based emphasis particularly interesting as it provides in a single volume the opportunity to acknowledge and compare the intersections between transmediation and transcultural exchanges in relation to what are now understood as fairy-tale cultures in localized, globalized, and hybridized media expressions.

Excepting the chapters in the first two parts of the volume, which work together cohesively to deepen understanding on these topics and their analytical approaches, some chapters do not quite strike the balance of assuming specialist knowledge while also providing enrichment to those who would hold that depth of specialist knowledge. Given the scope implied by the idea of media and fairy-tale cultures, I would have hoped for a greater problematization of fairy tales in relation to twisted tales in young adult literature and media. Anna Kérchy’s chapter on children’s and young adult literature touches on some of the major points in terms of how fairy-tale tropes can help children and young adults to face uncertainties in their lives. However, given the range of texts covered in the chapter and the blurring of distinctions between children’s and young adult media in the past two decades (further



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complicated by how convergence has changed how generations consume media), the compression of focus in a single chapter does make the analysis more cluttered than it might be. A fuller investigation of how adaptations for children differ from those directed at young adults might have helped with this. The lack of a mention of the “twisted” fairy tales, such as those popularized by writers like Patricia C. Wrede and Jane Yolen in the 1980s onwards, also seems remiss considering the attention given to Catherynne M. Valente’s works, which are based on that tradition. Additionally, though there are chapters addressing activism, indigeneity, and orientalism in Part III, I would have hoped to see a chapter on diversity and globalization, as well as one that addresses intracultural communication. Given the steps in the field toward a greater understanding of folklore and fairy tales across cultures and in global contexts, these gaps seem a missed opportunity to probe how the conversation around the social construct of the concept of globalization has influenced how we think of such areas as orientalism, indigeneity, and diversity in contemporary fairy-tale media.

Nevertheless, these points neither detract from the overall usefulness of this volume nor dampen its ability to speak to contemporary issues within the field. As a resource, this *Companion* seems to be largely addressed to readers and researchers who already have a baseline of knowledge in the fields of fairy-tale studies, cultural studies, and media studies in relation to young people’s texts and cultures. The chapters in the “Basic Concepts” section at the beginning of the book do provide comprehensive introductions to folklore, fairy tale, culture, and media, in terms of both historical senses of these

fields and the constructions of these fields in relation to each other. They are worth the read for both scholars just coming to the field and those who have a grounding in the historicism but are curious as to how to extend that historicism to the contemporary. Many chapters begin with effective, comprehensive introductory paragraphs, which allow for flexible use and easy parsing of the volume. Additionally, all of the chapters end with references, suggestions for further reading, and mediagraphies. Where relevant, they also cross-reference other entries within the volume that provide more information on related topics.

The *Companion* directly addresses some of the controversies embedded in folklore and fairy-tale studies, devoting space to activism surrounding agency and indigeneity, the legacy of orientalism, and issues surrounding capitalism, convergence, and different kinds of mass media. This serves to decentralize a historical-cultural trajectory of fairy tales within specific cultural or national contexts while also calling attention to and further problematizing the relevance of these political and social issues in the contemporary context with relation to fairy-tale cultures and media. However,

given the attention paid to colonization, decolonization, and postcolonial contexts, diversity, and indigeneity, the absence of a chapter directly addressing either the nuances of race/racism or colourism feels significant in Part III, which highlights political and identity issues, especially given the contemporary, social, and political bent of this volume, and the fact that this is a concern for the subtopics and media spaces covered in Parts IV and V.

Overall, the interdisciplinary mode of this text offers a fascinating and needed intervention in the field, relocating criticism of fairy tales from historically and nationally based analysis of when and where fairy tales operate and in what contexts, to how fairy tales travel across cultures and media and how this impacts the perceived function of the tales. To decouple fairy tales from their assumed spaces and relocate them within a media culture that is constantly transforming and recreating itself is a step long needed in the field of fairy-tale studies. This interdisciplinary *Companion* connects historical assumptions about fairy tales with the hybrid, glocalised, globalized, and metamorphosing circumstances of understanding fairy tales today, within the contexts of media and culture.

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Michelle Anya Anjirbag is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Cambridge. Her research interests include adaptations of fairy tales and folklore, and cross-period approaches to narrative transmission across cultures and societies. Her current research is on depictions of diversity in Disney's fairy-tale adaptations from 1989 through the present.