

Editorial

The Fairy Tale and Its Uses in Contemporary New Media and Popular Culture Introduction

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Academic Editor: Albrecht Classen

Received: 13 September 2016; Accepted: 19 September 2016; Published: 27 September 2016

Abstract: Ever since the beginning of the 21st century, the fairy tale has not only become a staple of the small and silver screen around the globe, it has also migrated into new media, overwhelming audiences with imaginative and spectacular retellings along the way. Indeed, modern fairy-tale adaptations pervading contemporary popular culture drastically subvert, shatter, and alter the public's understanding of the classic fairy tale. Because of the phenomenally increasing proliferation of fairy-tale transformations in today's "old" and "new" media, we must reflect upon the significance of the fairy tale for society and its social uses in a nuanced fashion. How, why, and for whom have fairy-tale narratives, characters, and motifs metamorphosed in recent decades? What significant intermedial and intertextual relationships exist nowadays in connection with the fairy tale? This special issue features 11 illuminating articles of 13 scholars in the fields of folklore and fairy-tale studies tackling these and other relevant questions.

Keywords: fairy tale; new media; popular culture; film; television; adaptation; paratexts; intertextuality; intermediality; digital humanities

Following the increasing influence of visual culture on fairy-tale productions since the 20th century, the digital revolution has contributed significantly to the dissemination of the fairy tale and has solidified its presence in late-20th-century and 21st-century popular culture. Similarly to cinema and television, which are considered "old" media, so have "new" media (the Internet and websites, such as online platforms and blogs, social media, online newspapers, wikis, and video games) made frequent use of fairy-tale materials and thus kept the genre in the public consciousness. While fairy tales are constantly migrating into new cultures and different media, reinventing themselves along the way, recent years in particular have seen a wave of highly innovative but also highly disputable fairy-tale retellings in popular culture. On television, popular fairy-tale series that are based explicitly on fairy-tale figures and motifs are, for example, American Broadcasting Company's (ABC) *Once Upon a Time* (2011–present) and National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) *Grimm* (2011–present) [1]. These shows drastically subvert viewers' expectations of traditional fairy-tale structures and characters. To promote interest in the series, both "*Once Upon a Time* and *Grimm* make use of print- and web-based paratexts that give the reader the potential to engage with the programs beyond the televised text itself" ([2], p. 1010). The same subversive tone unsettling familiar fairy-tale conventions is noticeable in many recent fairy-tale film adaptations, including *The Huntsman: Winter's War* (2016) [3] and its prequel *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012) [4], *Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters* (2013) [5], the *Shrek* films (2001–2010) [6–9], or the Disney productions *Into the Woods* (2014) [10], *Maleficent* (2014) [11], and *Frozen* (2013) [12]. Contributing to this new and transformed pervasiveness of the fairy tale in today's culture is its hypercommodification and mass-mediated hype, especially in the United States. One major, though by no means exclusive, focus of this Special Issue is tackling the questions: How do we read popular culture's employment of the fairy tale? How, why, and for whom have fairy-tale

narratives, characters, and motifs metamorphosed in the 21st century? What significant intermedial and intertextual relationships exist nowadays in connection with the fairy tale?

The continuing proliferation and diversification of fairy tales in our society permeates a wide range of media: from film and television to commercial platforms, advertising, and marketplaces capitalizing on consumer products (including clothing, toys, household items, and more), and from popular literature and graphic novels to new media. Thanks to the electronic accessibility of fairy-tale texts and fairy tale-inspired materials via websites and online publications, they now have become a multimedia phenomenon. Technological tools, such as computers, tablets, and smartphones allow us to watch, read, listen to, play, and generally engage with fairy-tale material from any place in the world. The same tools give us the ability to navigate the “fairy-tale web,” as Cristina Bacchilega [13] coined the term in her book *Fairy Tales Transformed* (2013), and to control the way fairy-tale texts are presented to us and to others. Donald Haase noted in the Greenwood Encyclopedia *Folktales and Fairy Tales* (2016): “As a genre characterized by endless variation and adaptability, the fairy tale lends itself especially well to reinvention under these circumstances. As technology continues to advance and the visual experience becomes increasingly creative and interactive, it will be interesting to see how the production and reception of the fairy tale changes to take advantage of these new possibilities” ([2], p. 1010).

This development of what can be described as “fairy-tale hype” in the media has not only informed scholarly perspectives but has also taken hold in popular consciousness. An essential question that must be asked in this context is: How is contemporary media changing the face of the fairy tale and to what effect? At the same time, thanks to the fast-growing field of modern technologies, we are now in a better position than ever before to explore and discuss the intersections of fairy-tale studies with media and technology. The advancement of online fairy-tale databases that are publicly accessible, such as the International Fairy-Tale Filmography (<http://ifff.uwinnipeg.ca>) and the Fairy-Tale Teleography and Visualizations digital humanities project (<http://ftv.byu.edu>), two archival online tools for intermedial fairy-tale research, offer significantly evolving opportunities to examine the relationships between tales and popular culture within the framework of new media. Heidi Anne Heiner’s invaluable website SurLaLune Fairy Tales (<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com>) features hyperlinked textual annotations to numerous international fairy tales, histories of tales, bibliographies, illustrations, modern interpretations of tales, a blog, and book galleries. Tracey A. Callison’s research website Folk and Fairy (<http://www.folkandfairy.org>) offers a vast selection of print sources from literary traditions ranging from feminism to psychology to Marxism. Noteworthy blogs online are Maria Tatar’s *Breezes From Wonderland* (<http://blogs.harvard.edu/tatar/>), Kristin’s *Tales of Faerie* (<http://talesoffaerie.blogspot.com>), Tahlia Merrill Kirk’s *Diamonds & Toads* (<http://www.diamondsandtoads.com>), and Amy Kraft and Sophie Bushwick’s *Tabled Fables* (<http://tabledfables.tumblr.com/podcasts>), which also features eight illuminating fairy-tale podcasts.

This special issue offers 11 insightful articles of 13 scholars in the fields of folklore and fairy-tale studies. In their thought-provoking contributions to this Special Issue, the authors analyze and discuss topics, including the generic complexity of recent fairy-tale adaptations with regard to genre mixing and mashing; fairy-tale hybridity; intertextuality and intermediality; international reinterpretations and reboots of classical fairy tales in old and new media; intersections of fairy-tale studies and digital humanities scholarship; responses to “Disneyfied” fairy tales on social media platforms; digital forms of storytelling; international dissemination of fairy tales using new media; transmedia approaches to fairy tales; artifactualization; ideological aesthetics of fairy tales in television series; fan fiction culture; fairy-tale alternate universe stories; happily-ever-after endings; definitions of the fairy-tale genre; the queering of fairy tales; feminism and fairy tales; the concept of the *folkloresque*; magic realism; science and fairy tales; fairy tales as filmic art; fairy tale-inspired comic book series and anime; and televisual fairy-tale iconography in advertising.

“Between Earth and Sky: Transcendence, Reality, and the Fairy Tale in *Pan’s Labyrinth*” is the title of a chapter by Savannah Blich, a student of English Literature at Arizona State University. Blich

focuses on Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) [14], a film that plays upon our deep-rooted and mercurial relationship with fairy tales and folklore. By turns beautiful and grotesque, *Pan's Labyrinth* is a complex portrait of the clash between the protagonist's (Ofelia) fairy-tale world and that of the brutal adults around her. Blich provides an illuminating analysis of the juxtaposition of the film's imagery of closed/open circles, their respective realms, and how Ofelia moves between the two spaces. Blich argues that these aspects create an unusual relationship between the fairy-tale universe and the physical one, characterized by simultaneous displacement and interdependency. Ofelia acts as a mediatrix of these spheres, conforming to neither the imposed rules of her historical reality nor the expected structural rules of fairy tales, and this refusal ultimately allows her transcendence from the circumscribed realm of the liminal into Victor Turner's "liminoid" space, escaping the trap of binarism.

In her chapter "'All That Was Lost Is Revealed': Motifs and Moral Ambiguity in *Over the Garden Wall*", folklore scholar Kristiana Willsey claims that unlike the majority of fairy-tale films and television shows of the last decade, Patrick McHale's animated miniseries *Over the Garden Wall* (2014) [15] does not self-consciously disrupt or critique fairy-tale norms. Instead, the miniseries strips away a century of popular culture associations and uses motifs in the way oral narrators use them, to create resonant images—what Max Lüthi called "the shock effect of beauty" ([16], p. 3). In her intriguing analysis, Willsey describes *Over the Garden Wall* as pointedly nostalgic in both its source material and storytelling approach, and identifies the miniseries as an argument for singular fairy tales in an increasingly transmedia-driven narrative landscape.

Jill Rudy, Associate Professor of English at Brigham Young University, and Jerom McDonald, an independent scholar who specializes in algorithmic media analysis, co-wrote the chapter "Baba Yaga, Monsters of the Week, and Pop Culture's Formation of Wonder and Families through Monstrosity". The authors highlight the fact that in television shows outside of Slavic nations, Baba Yaga often appears in Monster of the Week (MOTW) episodes. Their chapter considers transforming forms in this trope. Whereas some MOTW are contemporary inventions, many are creatures from folk narratives. Employing the *folkloresque* concept, Rudy and McDonald explore how contemporary audiovisual tropes gain integrity and traction by indexing traditional knowledge and belief systems. Using digital humanities methods, the authors built a "monster typology" and used topic modeling to investigate central concerns, finding connections between crime, violence, family, and loss. Rudy and McDonald recognize Baba Yaga's role as a villain and acknowledge that the narrative arcs build close relationships between characters and among viewers.

Sara Cleto and Erin Kathleen Bahl, two doctoral candidates at the Ohio State University, focus on the anime series *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (2011) [17], in which middle school girls fight witches in exchange for a wish. Many of the series' action sequences unfold in "labyrinths", magical spaces controlled by witches. Cleto and Bahl investigate these labyrinths as creative acts of embodied composing that negotiate grief and despair. By composing a labyrinth, witches can simultaneously reshape their environment and create a powerful statement about identity in narrative spaces that they control. In particular, Cleto and Bahl argue that both the frameworks of "fairy tale" and "new media" give us useful analytical resources for beginning to make sense of the complex phenomenon of *Madoka's* labyrinths.

Brittany Warman, a doctoral candidate in English and Folklore at the Ohio State University, examines in her chapter the popular television show *Once Upon a Time* (2011–present) [18] and takes a closer look at the character Ruby/Red, the series' version of Little Red Riding Hood, who *is* the wolf. As a werewolf, Ruby/Red must wear an enchanted red cloak in order to keep from turning into a monster. Warman argues that though Red's story certainly calls on the classic fairy tale, it also makes deliberate use of the less familiar tale "Snow White and Rose Red" (ATU 426). Taking queer readings of this text as starting points, Warman demonstrates that this allusion opens up space for a compelling reading of Red's werewolf nature as a coded depiction of her later confirmed bisexuality.

In his chapter "Don Draper Thinks Your Ad Is Cliché: Fairy Tale Iconography in TV Commercials", Preston Wittwer, a master's student at Brigham Young University, zooms in on the history of

fairy-tale iconography in advertising and the relationship between advertising and fairy tales. Wittwer investigates how, and for whom, fairy-tale figures have been adapted decade by decade in order to examine popular culture's commercialized and hypnotic relationship with fairy tales in the most direct format available: television commercials. In his text, Wittwer draws on Don Draper, the fictional character and the protagonist of the television series *Mad Men* (2007–2015) [19], who rejects a shoe commercial pitch featuring Cinderella, calling it "cliché". Wittwer illuminates that the temptation for advertisers to use fairy-tale iconography continues today and highlights that some ads feature fairy tales, which are innovative for their time.

Anne Kustritz, an assistant professor in Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University, contributes the chapter "'They All Lived Happily Ever After. Obviously': Realism and Utopia in *Game of Thrones*-Based Alternate Universe Fairy Tale Fan Fiction". Kustritz's chapter focuses on how fan fiction alternate universe stories (AUs) that combine the popular television series *Game of Thrones* (2011–present) [20] with fairy-tale elements construct a dialogue between realism and wonder. Kustritz argues that realism in "quality TV" often rejects feminine genres, while the happily-ever-after ending also receives significant feminist criticism. However, because fan fiction cultures place stories in dialogue with numerous other versions, the fairy-tale happy ending can serve unexpected purposes. By examining *Game of Thrones* fairy-tale AU fan fiction, Kustritz's chapter demonstrates the genre's ability to construct surprising critiques through strategic deployment of impossible wishes made manifest through the magic of fan creativity.

A master's student in Folklore at Utah State University, Kylie Schroeder's case study sheds light on how YouTube artist Paint, a.k.a. Jon Cozart, challenges Disney's "happily ever afters" through comedic satire and creates parodied storylines, bringing four animated Disney princesses into the real world. Schroeder's case study looks at the global recognition of Disney and how it allows the creation of social commentary, while an increasingly digital world impacts the capabilities of the creator and the viewers. Cozart's fairy-tale parody takes on content and a form that reflects the increasingly globalized and digitized world.

Julianna Lindsay, who holds a doctorate in Heritage Studies from Arkansas State University, adds the chapter "The Magic and Science of *Grimm*: A Television Fairy Tale for Modern Americans." Lindsay argues that NBC's television series *Grimm* (2011–present) uses fairy tales and an altered history to explore modern issues in American society, such as environmental concerns, individuality, and social and cultural change through magic and magic-tinged science. Worldwide chaos is explained as part of the *Grimm* universe through Wesen (fantastical creatures), leading to a more united view of humanity and equality of human experience. Lindsay suggests that *Grimm* gives its American audience a form of societal unity through historic folklore and a fictional explanation for the struggles Americans perceive to be happening within their own society as well as in other parts of the world.

Based on Jane Orton's fieldwork conducted in Tibetan cultural areas of the Indian Himalayas, her chapter "Himalayan Folklore and the Fairy Tale Genre" explores Himalayan understandings of what defines a fairy tale in contrast to the Western understanding of the term. In parts of the Himalayas, a distinction is made between "lakshung" (fairy tales) and "kyakshung", which are shorter stories, the kind one might tell over tea. In light of the proposals to record and disseminate many of these stories using new media, folklore scholar Orton examines these genre definitions and investigates the various contexts in which these stories are told.

Jason Harris, an instructional assistant professor at Texas A&M University, analyses in his chapter Bill Willingham's popular *Fables* and *Jack of Fables* comics, which use fairy-tale pastiche and syncretism based on the ethos of comic book crossovers to redeploy and subvert previous approaches to fairy-tale characters. Tension between Willingham's subordination of fairy-tale characters to his libertarian ideological narrative and the traditional folkloric identities drives the storytelling momentum. Harris demonstrates in his work that Willingham's portrayal of the Big Bad Wolf, Snow White, Rose Red, and Jack challenges assumptions about gender, heroism, narrative genres, and what comprises a fairy

tale. Emerging from negotiations between tradition and innovation are fairy-tale characters who defy constraints of folk and storybook narrative, mythology, and metafiction.

Thanks to the scholarly articles of this Special Issue, we not only gain different, innovative insights into how today's media is changing the face of the fairy tale, we also learn about the manifold ways in which fairy tales pervade and influence contemporary popular culture. Just as authoritative as tales told through oral storytelling modes, fairy-tale adaptations of the 21st century in "old" and "new" media reflect the sociocultural conditions in which they were made. The nature of the fairy tale should thus be understood as a complex but ever-changing, fluid one, which allows for the fairy tale's constant mutability and reinvention. It is the hope of the editor that this Special Issue will contribute in fresh and stimulating ways to the overarching discussion in fairy-tale scholarship surrounding the significance of the fairy tale for society as it migrates into new times and places.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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