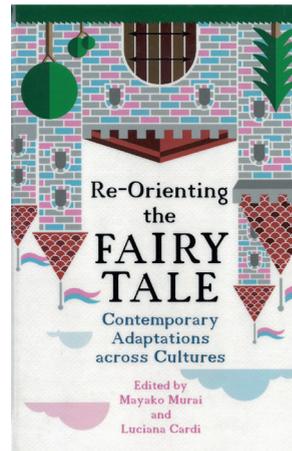


Review/Recension

MAYAKO MURAI & LUCIANA
CARDI (EDS.)
**RE-ORIENTING THE
FAIRY TALE**
**Contemporary Adaptations
across Cultures**

Detroit: Wayne State University Press,
2020 (424 pp.)



Re-Orienting the Fairy Tale: Contemporary Adaptations across Cultures (2020) is an edited collection of selected papers presented at the international conference of the same name held at Kanagawa University in Yokohama, Japan in 2017. Through the conference, editors Mayako Murai and Luciana Cardi sought to bring new developments to the call for fairy-tale criticism to move away from analytical frames based on Euro-American binaristic thinking – an area of enquiry that has emerged over the last decade in fairy-tale criticism (Haase, Bacchilega, Naithani, Teverson, Lau and Joosen amongst the most well-known in the field).

The term “re-orient’ is hyphenated, Murai and Cardi explain, first, to foreground traditional West-East power relations, elevating the role of the local and the marginalized in shaping fairy-tale narratives and scholarship; second, to deorientalize the “Orient” and focus instead on a globalizing network of flows; and third, to overturn the Euro-American hierarchies embedded in the notion of the “fairy tale” by taking non-traditional vantage points, as illustrated by the upside-down castle on the book’s cover. The scholars in this collection embark on journeys not unlike the fairy-tale quest, seeking to forge new pathways with (magical) tools from a range of decentering approaches that break us free from traditional perspectives and invite us to take multiple re-orienting viewpoints. It is an exciting premise. The multidisciplinary approaches range from film studies and musicology, to ecocriticism and age studies, amongst others, across diverse media including film, art, children’s books, anima-

©2021 A. K. Gutierrez. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons CC-BY-NC 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Barnboken - tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning/Barnboken - Journal of Children's Literature Research, Vol. 44, 2021 <http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v44.635>

tion, graphic novels, music and dance. What becomes apparent is how each scholar's personal context influences the directions they choose to explore. Thus, I feel it is also important to mention that I am reading from the perspective of a children's literature scholar educated in Australia whose focus of study has been on glocalization in the fairy-tale network, a path of study that came naturally from being born and raised in the Philippines where Euro-American, East Asian and Southeast Asian fairy-tale flows and cultures constantly interact and blend with decentering, re-orienting and transformative effects. It is from this context that I am writing my review.

The volume is organised into three parts, where each part is led by the critical insights of one of the conference's keynote speakers. The first section, "Disorienting Cultural Assumptions," presents several approaches for disorienting the fairy tale. Cristina Bacchilega's "Fairy Tales in Site: Wonders of Disorientation, Challenges of Re-Orientation" is a meditation on fairy tales "as events positioned, produced, and received in specific locations and times" (15). She presents her meditation in four takes or movements that consider the cross-cultural and multi-medial "journeys" of fairy tales in a globalized world, and anchors these on a homophone of "site": on fairy tales *in sight* in the sense of their presence as artifacts in our everyday lives and the web of relations these potentially activate in our conscious and subconscious minds; on fairy tales we *cite*, where she reminds us to consider whether adaptations of oriental wonder tales extend colonialist attitudes of consumption or generate new stories that shake up colonial hierarchies; on fairy-tale *insight* that emerges from disorienting adaptations and decentered criticism that foregrounds fairy-tale interconnectedness; and fairy-tale re-orientation that *incites* adaptation and scholarship to, first, break away from the genre's hegemonic positioning that upholds the imagined superiority of Euro-American wonder tale traditions, and second, become cognizant of the various multiplicities across all wonder tales. Most significantly, she reflects that an anti-Orientalist stance also requires surveying the Euro-American fairy tale map anew and becoming forcefully aware of varying degrees of impact on interrelated groups that are unequal to one another. Through these four movements, Bacchilega shakes up the status quo and re-orientes our perspective, whether we look towards uncharted lands or return home. It provides a strong entry point to the collection by establishing and practicing concurrent disorienting and re-orienting takes from which to consider the rest of the chapters.

The next two chapters contextualize wonder tale adaptations against a background of history, politics and culture through the lens of disorientation and re-orientation. In “*Mo’olelo Kamaha’o 2.0: The Art and Politics of the Modern Hawaiian Wonder Tale*,” ku’ualoha ho’omanawanui examines a range of contemporary Indigenous adaptations of Hawaiian wonder tales (*mo’olelo*), including children’s stories, art narratives and dance, that emerged from the ongoing Hawaiian sovereignty movement. Born from a backdrop of cultural activism, these adaptations re-imagine the demigod Maui in positive ways (e.g. Maui the Hawaiian Superman), and in this way seek to reclaim Indigenous Hawaiian identity from the negative stereotypes foisted on them by settler colonial retellings that are still in effect today. The political and activist backdrops become more significant with the reminder that wonder tales and history are interwoven in Indigenous storytelling and underscore the terrible impact of disorienting settler colonial narratives, as well as the self-empowering effects of re-orienting adaptations. The range of new media adaptations and their rootedness in traditional expressions is a strength of this chapter. We then journey to 1980s America in Roxane Hughes’ “Re-Orienting China and America: *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China* and its TV Adaptation.” She foregrounds the ambivalent use of fairy tales when disorienting and re-orienting multicultural identities through her examination of Ai-Ling Louie’s and Ed Young’s 1982 children’s retelling *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China*, which has as its source the “Yexian Tale” from ninth century China, and its 1985 adaptation on *CBS Storybreak*. Hughes argues that the very idea of a “Chinese Cinderella Story” is ambivalent, drawing cross-cultural connections that aim towards a more socially cohesive America yet upholding Euro-American hierarchies, and points out how it mirrors the sociocultural position of Chinese Americans in Cold War America.

Natsumi Ikoma’s “Monstrous Marionette: The Tale of a Japanese Doll by Angela Carter” situates her analysis of Carter’s *The Loves of Lady Purple* (1974) within a web of Japanese and Euro-American intertexts and influences, the former having been neglected despite Carter’s documented time in Japan. Ikoma focuses her discussion on the interplay of Western and Japanese doll narratives and performances in Carter’s story to foreground a disoriented and re-oriented ideal woman/prostitute dyad. Situating her critique within this cross-cultural web reveals thought-provoking new dimensions to the tale, giving it new power and significance amongst Carter’s deconstructive and feminist fairy-tale reversions. Her chapter is an

exemplary demonstration of the multi-layered and rich scholarship that emerges from comparative analyses that decenters Eurocentric hierarchies and considers contemporary adaptations as globalized works. The chapters in part one illustrate the new possibilities generated from disorienting the fairy tale. I do feel compelled to note that frameworks theorizing ambivalence and globalization in transcultural fairy tales have also been explored in the field of children's literature, media and culture (e.g. *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* by John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, 1998 and *Mixed-Magic: Global-Local Dialogues in Fairy Tales for Young Readers* by Anna Katrina Gutierrez, 2017).

The second section, "Exploring New Uses," opens with storyteller-researcher Hatsue Nakawaki's keynote lecture "Japanese Heroine Tales and the Significance of Storytelling in Contemporary Society." Nakawaki situates her work as a fairy-tale anthologist and researcher of *mukashibanashi* (literally tales of old times) in the context of children's literary education in contemporary Japan. Significantly, Nakawaki points out that Western tales did not replace or overshadow *mukashibanashi*, thus providing an interesting contrast to ho'omanawanui's piece. Rather, her point of critique is the selection of Western fairy tales and *mukashibanashi* that have become part of Japanese children's literary canon, the ways these perpetuate gender, age and cultural biases in contemporary society, and the gatekeepers that select them. In a patriarchal society that presents itself as homogeneous, Nakawaki's argument for collections that represent a diversified society is subversive and powerful. She offers several pathways for diversification, one of which is to retell and include *mukashibanashi* with active and strong heroines, like she does in her own fairy tale anthologies, and another is to encourage modern retellings and adaptations that empower women and celebrate diverse others. She cites fairy tales where, like Cinderella, the protagonist is sometimes male, as a reminder that gender is also the storyteller's choice and as an argument for gender swapping in retellings. Certainly, gender exchange is a genre trope that has increasing relevance in today's world, where more young people are exploring gender fluidity, underscoring the potential of wonder tales to, as Nakawaki states, consider "human existence [as] much wider than the one determined by gender" (162). Nakawaki's research on Japanese heroines in *mukashibanashi* will be interesting for anime and manga researchers, especially those who are interested in contextualizing *shōjo* heroines in Japan's literary tradition. Also in the

realm of education is Shuli Barzilai's "Who's Afraid of Derrida & Co.? Modern Theory Meets Three Little Pigs in the Classroom." She draws on adaptations of the aforementioned tale to explore "the uses of enchantment for teaching modern theory, and the uses of modern theory for re-orienting enchantment" (197). From my own personal context, I can say that children's literature studies has long used fairy tales and their adaptations as a pedagogical tool to guide university students' understanding of literary theory and of how texts reflect sociocultural shifts, and so presenting this as a new use is arguable. However, her contribution certainly demonstrates the potential of fairy tales to inspire in all people a deeper understanding of not just literary criticism, but of the human condition as eternally shifting.

The remaining chapters in the section focus on live-action fairy-tale film adaptations. Aleksandra Szugajew takes us to Hollywood in "Adults Reclaiming Fairy Tales through Cinema: Popular Fairy-Tale Movie Adaptations from the Past Decade." She argues that the popularity of these films is in the ways they strategize an "appeal to the origin" (of a character or of the tale itself) and an "appeal to darkness" through bending and breaking the characteristics of fairy tales and blending these with fantasy, history and horror genres. Both methods stir in its adult audience the kind of nostalgia that inspires us to critically evaluate the promises of Disneyfied and other sanitized childhood versions on society and culture in a globalizing world and their potential impact on individual subjectivity and agency. Her comparative analysis focuses on five Hollywood productions, but she does briefly discuss Korean and Polish retellings in her final remarks, demonstrating her methodology's application and relevance to other local contexts. In "Trespassing the Boundaries of Fairy Tales: Pablo Berger's Silent Film *Snow White*," Nieves Moreno Redondo draws from Spanish film studies to reveal the fascinating ways the film *Blancanieves* (2012) confronts sociocultural stereotypes and critiques their conflation with national identity through a combination of fairy tale and film genres, in particular the silent film and the *españolada* genre (an artistic work that exaggerates stereotypes of "Spanishness"). *Blancanieves* is a hybrid of the passive Snow White and the powerful Carmen, Spain's own referent for the exotic and passionate Spanish woman. Redondo argues that deconstructing and bringing together contrasting stereotypes of identity allowed Berger to throw into sharp focus the impact of these figures on imagined communities. Her chapter provides a model for critiquing the ways globally popular Euro-American fairy tales can be used to re-orient local symbols, images and stories of identity through a

productive intertextual dialogue, where the resulting hybrid has the potential to reveal new insights across imaginaries, especially when studied in contrast to the global and local source symbols.

The final section, "Promoting Alternative Ethics and Aesthetics," explores the integration of fairy-tale studies with newly emerging disciplines, underscoring that contemporary adaptations produced in a globalized world are essentially intercultural, and must be analyzed from the perspective of a network of exchanges. Vanessa Joosen sets the stage with "Re-Orienting the Fairy Tale, Revising Age?" where she analyzes traditional and contemporary retellings through the lens of age studies. She argues convincingly for this approach by revealing new insights from Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch* (1997), amongst other selections, through an intersectional analysis that draws from age and feminist studies. Joosen's proposal is simple, yet it is one of the more exciting examples of re-orientation in the collection, especially when considering the many new readings possible from the intersection of age with other constructions of identity, and how cultural contexts, place and time affect such readings. Michael Brodski's chapter brings us to the other end of the age spectrum in "Re-Orienting Fairy-Tale Childhood: Child Protagonists as Critical Signifiers of Fairy-Tale Tropes in Transnational Contemporary Cinema." His intertextual analysis of Western and non-Western films and the traditional tales that inspired them reflects on the constructedness of childhood across time and space in a globalized world. He draws from childhood studies, fairy-tale studies and film studies to show how these adaptations combine fairy-tale magic with horror, sci-fi or the uncanny to re-orient global expectations of childhood innocence and purity, resulting in strange non-childlike bodies that signify the effects of sociocultural, political and economic discourses on ideas of normative childhood that have implications on the collective imaginary of society's (bright) future.

The following three chapters situate their analysis in the hybridized fairy-tale culture in Japan, where the range of media they examine gives a sense of how deeply fairy tales are embedded in their popular culture. In "Alice on the Edge: Girls' Culture and 'Western' Fairy Tales in Japan," Lucy Fraser reiterates the need to move away from Orientalist assumptions when analyzing local adaptations of Euro-American fairy-tale texts, in particular tired notions that these are mere mimicry of or aspirations to Western culture; rather, these should be understood from within their specific cultural contexts to avoid replicating hegemonies. She demonstrates this through an analysis of creative and artistic adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's*

Adventures in Wonderland (1865) from within the context of Japan's *shōjo* culture, revealing the unexpected and exciting ways these hybrid adaptations are enriching across cultures and breathe new life into the reproduced text. Fraser's chapter foregrounds how relocating a text within various subcultures can reveal new insights. Masafumi Monden's "Magical Bird Maidens: Reconsidering Romantic Fairy Tales in Japanese Popular Culture" also applies a cross-cultural approach in his analysis of the Japanese anime series *Princess Tutu*. He illustrates how the series reimagines the traditional fairy-tale princess narrative from within the conventions of Japan's magical girl anime, *shōjo* manga and ballet cultures, resulting in stories about modern and empowered girls that add new significance to fairy-tale scholarship in this area. Katsuhiko Suganuma's "When Princess(es) Will Sing: Girls Rock and Alternative Queer Interpretation" explores fairy-tale re-orientation at the intersection of popular musicology and queer studies through an analysis of gender subversion and the queer potential of heteronormative fairy-tale intertexts in the discography, performances and history of the popular Japanese girl band Princess Princess. Suganuma's chapter is the only one that focuses on fairy tales and popular music, and it strongly illustrates the transmedial possibilities of fairy-tale re-orientation and the new meanings that can emerge from an interdisciplinary approach to adaptations that are cross-cultural, multimedial and intertextual. All three chapters exemplify the re-orienting effects of globalization, and specifically glocalization (although none use the term) as a creative process whereby the intertextual relationship between globally popular fairy tales and national signs and cultural spaces results in new stories that can shed light upon, enrich and even subvert the fairy-tale and its scholarship, as opposed to the idea of the local as a passive recipient of Euro-American cultural flows. As I mentioned earlier, children's literature studies has also been preoccupied with mapping intertextual and intercultural dialogues in contemporary retellings in a glocalizing world, and these chapters will be of interest to ongoing studies in this area.

The volume ends on a strong note with "The Plantation, the Garden, and the Forest: Biocultural Borderlands in Angela Carter's 'Penetrating to the Heart of the Forest,'" as Daniela Kato draws from the insights of ecofeminist theorists to "reframe the politics of wonder through a new ecological sensibility" (384) that extends the study of multispecies relationalities to include, not just humans and animals, but also plants, bacteria and other organisms. In her analysis of Carter's literary fairy tale, the fairy-tale forest is a "biocultural

borderland," a liminal and marginal space where species meet, relate and overturn colonialist nature-culture hierarchies. One of the more creative chapters, Kato's multispecies approach shines a light on just how entrenched hierarchical thinking is in our storytelling and scholarship, and the potential new directions that can emerge for storytelling *and* for living on our planet should we move away from domesticating and colonizing women and all living beings.

Although the coverage of the volume, with examples from Japanese, Euro-American and indigenous Hawaiian stories and media, seems limited at first, a complete reading made me agree with the editors that the range provides a viable model for a multidisciplinary and transcultural fairy-tale research that can be applied widely, where each scholar offers a constellation of new insights to help guide our way through new ways of thinking and being. *Re-Orienting the Fairy Tale* as a whole succeeds in its goal, and although there is some overlap in the strategies used, the unique cites (in Bacchilega's sense) and contexts each scholar explores on their journeys through the margins, edges and borderlands nevertheless reveal enriching insights. It solidifies with its contributions that this is a rich area of enquiry with many possible avenues of exploration, and that it is necessary to disorient and re-orient hierarchical and binaristic perspectives, ultimately underscoring the remarkable ability of the fairy tale to surprise us with new wondrous dimensions.

Anna Katrina Gutierrez
PhD in Children's Literature
Macquarie University Alumna