

ADAPTATION AND THE FAIRY-TALE WEB

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Like "fairy tale," adaptation is pervasive and not easily definable, for reasons that in both cases have to do with their complex intertextuality. It is thus productive to think through how focusing on "fairy-tale adaptations" raises questions of multimodality that impact both adaptation and fairy-tale studies and how understanding adaptation in relation to cultural change informs the fairy-tale web as framework. But first some grounding concepts with rather contemporary examples.

What Is an Adaptation?

Possibly the most widely influential answer to date is Linda Hutcheon's in *Adaptation* ([2006] 2012), which approaches the question by breaking it down into chapters about the what, who, why, how, where, and when of adaptation as both product and process. For Hutcheon, adaptation as product is

an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This "transcoding" can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film), or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation. (2006, 7)

Georges Méliès's short film *Cinderella* (Cendrillon 1899), which remediates Charles Perrault's tale (1697); Anne Sexton's poem "Cinderella," which plays on the Grimms' tale (1971); and Sara Maitland's first-person "Cinderella" short story, "The Wicked Stepmother's Lament" (1987), all versions of tale type ATU 510A, would all fit the bill as fairy-tale adaptations since they announce their relationship to a specific tale, or the genre, and develop it through repetition with a difference in medium, genre, or frame. When approaching adaptation as process, Hutcheon distinguishes between its production, which "involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation," and its reception, whereby "we experience adaptations as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation" (2006, 8). Examples of adaptation resulting from the interpretation and re-creation of fairy tales abound, ranging from the classic novel *Jane Eyre* that extensively reworks various fairy tales including "Cinderella" and "Bluebeard" (ATU 310) (Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher 1992) to visual artifacts as different as Gustave Doré's illustrations of Perrault's tales (1867),

Dina Goldstein's dystopic photographs reimagining Disney princesses (2011), and Shaun Tan's artwork inspired by the Grimms (2015) as well as U.S. television series like *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990)/*Beauty and the Beast* (2012–2016) and *Once Upon a Time* (2011–). As for reception, the 2014 film *Into the Woods* is a good example, as it will be processed as fairy-tale adaptation by those who are familiar with the Broadway musical *Into the Woods* (1987) live or via TV or home video productions of the show, with the various fairy tales that mingle in the two productions, or both.

While Hutcheon's parameters are clear, their application to studying (fairy-tale) adaptations is not so straightforward. For instance, as Kamilla Elliott notes (2004), *what* is adapted when a novel is transposed on to the screen may be "the spirit of the text" (psychic concept of adaptation), its essence (genetic transfer), its reproduction in another medium (ventriloquism), relationship to other cultural texts (de[re]composing), or incarnation (use of less abstract signs). This means that, in adapting the ATU 425C tale type, films as varied as *Beastly* (2011), *La belle et la bête* (1946), Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (Átame! 1990), and *Shrek* (2001) each take on very different elements of the story to be their core hypotext. And, given the powerful and extended re-visitation of fairy tale in *Pan's Labyrinth* (El laberinto del fauno 2006), it would also seem appropriate to extend the *what* of adaptation to genre rather than restrict it to individual tales. *Who* does the adaptation matters as well, as seen in Pauline Greenhill's discussion of "Snow Queen" filmic adaptations by male and female directors (2015, 2016), the heavily Disney-inflected *Once Upon a Time* (2011–) television series produced by the Disney/ABC Television Group, or the independent film *Dancehall Queen* (1997), a Jamaican dancehall-culture "Cinderella" filmed in Kingston and featuring a Jamaican cast. And connecting the *what*, *who*, *where*, and *when* is not only the poetics, but the politics, of adaptation, which leads to thinking about *for whom* as well.

Most crucially, does an adaptation have to be recognized as such in the process of reception in order to be one? Hutcheon posits it does. But what if most audiences don't perceive it as a palimpsest because its intertexts are not that popular, as in the case of Giambattista Basile's seventeenth-century collection of fairy tales on which the 2015 film *Tale of Tales* draws? Or the intertexts have powerful meanings for specific audiences or subcultures only, as Jennifer Orme argues about David Kaplan's *Little Red Riding Hood* 1997 film? Isn't there an experiential difference between immediately recognizing a text's invitation to be read as adaptation because we are so familiar with its intertexts we can do nothing but and accepting the invitation because reviewers or others in the know make us aware of it? And what is the import of this difference in the affective power of an adaptation in different knowledge communities? While the impact of the adaptation depends on the audience's awareness of this relationship (Cartmell and Whelehan 1999), that awareness and impact need not be universal or equally intense across the board. As I have argued before, a lot depends not only on where cultural production is located but also on where and from which knowledge systems, cultural habitus, and critical agendas the reader or interpreter accesses any fairy-tale adaptation (Bacchilega 2013).

At the same time that Hutcheon would require that producers and receivers engage knowingly with an adaptation as such, she draws little distinction among adaptation, translation, and appropriation. "What Isn't an Adaptation, and What Does It Matter?" asks Thomas Leitch, one of the leading and highly reflective figures in adaptation studies (2012). When discussing fairy-tale film specifically, Jack Zipes has emphasized that, like translation and appropriation, adaptation is an interpretive and transformative set of operations—selecting, updating, concretizing, amplifying, contextualizing, critiquing, and more; what Hutcheon sums up as "repetition without replication" (2006, xvi); in doing so he develops Robert Stam's understanding that "adaptations redistribute energies and intensities, provoke flows and displacements"

(2005, 46), therefore always resulting in change. Like appropriation and translation, adaptation is imbricated with matters of property and propriety in that making a story one's own often involves expropriation, which in turn raises "ethical responsibility to the source, hypotext, and audience" (Zipes 2011, 12). While for Julie Sanders it is useful to define appropriation as a wholesale rethinking of the hypotext, something like Adrienne Rich's "re-vision" (1972), Phyllis Frus and Christy Williams call attention to "radical transformations" in films and graphic novels that go "beyond adaptation" (2010). Zipes takes various distinctions into account, but makes it a point to show how filmic and other adaptations of fairy tales today rest on the centuries-long and cumulative appropriation, translation, and adaptation of the oral folktale as well as of so-called "classic" fairy tales.

In the end, what is gained by identifying a cultural product and process as adaptation is to understand it within the broader framework of intertextuality, whereby all texts to some degree invoke and rework other texts (Kristeva [1969] 1986; Genette 1982); to highlight the importance of "the protocols of a distinct medium" (Stam 2005, 45); and to take into account how cultural economy shapes the production and reception of adaptations. Simone Murray's work is in this respect a significant complement and corrective to adaptation studies that privilege intertextual interpretation, proposing to conceptualize "adaptations as the outcome of a vast, transnational, constantly mutating, and frequently internally conflicted socioeconomic system with tremendous influence in shaping the contours of contemporary culture" (2012b, 123) and to study how they are shaped by economics and institutions.

This sociological approach goes beyond Stam's considerations of how "studio style, ideological fashion; political and economic constraints, auteurist predilections, charismatic stars, cultural values, and so forth" (2005, 45) impact filmic adaptations. Murray's focus is on "industrial structures, interdependent networks of agents, commercial contexts, and legal and policy regimes within which adaptations come to be" (2012a, 6), and she discusses the role of book fairs, screen festivals, and prizes; the cross-promotion of related products in different markets; and the impact of an adaptation on the sales of its hypotext as well as, increasingly, on the production of amateur adaptations by "producers." This approach, which contextualizes the intertextual one, has enormous potential for better understanding the phenomenon of fairy-tale filmic adaptations in the early twenty-first century, and Zipes's work on "hyping" in contemporary fairy-tale films is only the start of it (2015).

To approach fairy tales in print, film, comics, theater, television, blogs, YouTube videos, photographs, and other forms as adaptations, then, demands some attention to how their story power draws upon their "mediality"—the semiotics of each media, the senses they address, their "spatio-temporal extension," their signs' materiality, and their "cultural role and methods of production/ distribution" (Ryan 2004, 18–19)—and their circulation in a broader cultural economy. So in contrast to "retelling," which emphasizes narrative reoccurrence, and "revision," which points to interpretation, (fairy-tale) "adaptation" invites a consideration of transformative interpretation as grounded in the materiality, codes, experience, and promotion of a (fairy) story's move across media—and thus into new contexts, audiences, markets, and potential for further adaptation.

There is one caveat. In adaptation studies, much of the discussion has been weighed down by questions of fidelity to high or canonical literature; its preferred domain, as suggested by my examples so far, has for the most part been film, and the fairy tale, with its relatively low symbolic capital, or prestige, and its incorporation into the larger category of fantasy film, has rarely been a focus. Sue Short's film-studies book *Fairy Tale and Film* (2015) is an exception, but it assumes that scholars of fairy tales have not been engaging popular culture, which is amply disproven by ongoing work (see Rankin 2007; Greenhill and Matrix 2010; Zipes 2011;

Bacchilega 2013; Greenhill and Rudy 2014; Warner 2014; numerous essays in *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*; and two important databases, the *International Fairy-Tale Filmography* and *At the Crossroads of Data and Wonder: Algorithmic Visualizations of Fairy Tales on Television*. Cultivating a conversation between fairy-tale studies and adaptation studies holds promise as long as it is a two-way learning process.

Fairy-Tale Multimediality and Adaptation

Thinking about fairy tales as adaptations is a particularly fertile site of inquiry into how their intertextuality is inflected by their multimedial history; a versatility across media that makes them exemplary as what John Bryant calls “fluid” texts (2002). Significantly, we need not limit the fairy tale’s historical multimediality to the orality and print combination; rather, the fairy tale’s multimediality includes, from the moment of a tale’s conception, the visual.

Writer Italo Calvino wrote in the late 1950s about his own fantastic tales that their point of departure was an image, and this can apply to the genre more generally: “The tale is born from the image, [. . .] and the image is developed in a story according to its internal logic. The story takes on meanings, or rather, around the image extends a network of meanings that are always a little uncertain” ([1959] 1998, ix). Snow White (ATU 709) “red as blood, white as snow,” Red Riding Hood (ATU 333), Sleeping Beauty (ATU 410), and Cinderella are powerful and multivalent images at the same time that they are stories and fairy-tale characters. Images or mental pictures are also at work in a storyteller’s experience as s/he recalls elements of a story and in the listeners’ as they take the story in, suggests Canadian folklorist Vivian Labrie (1980) based on her ethnographic work. So broadsides, illustrations, films, picture books, YouTube videos, and comics are just *some* visualizations of fairy tales. Furthermore, theater and dance performances played a part in the French fairy-tale vogue during Louis XIV’s reign, just as pantomime (Schacker 2007) and later musicals (Cutolo 2014) have contributed to the popularity of the fairy tale in the United Kingdom and the United States respectively. Whether announcing its status as adaptation or not, the fairy tale proliferates multimedially (in various media at the same time) and intermedially (making connections across media boundaries), and has done so for centuries.

Angela Carter (1940–1992), whose intervention in the genre of the fairy tale was momentous and continues to inspire today, worked the multimediality of the genre in her own fairy tales about fairy tales. Carter adapted fairy tales most famously in print (*The Bloody Chamber* 1979), but also in other media, and these adaptations did not consistently originate as tales for print. The 1984 fairy-tale/horror film directed by Neil Jordan, *The Company of Wolves*, for which Carter wrote the screenplay, was an expansion of a 1980 homonymous radio play that replayed her story in the 1979 collection with a strong dramatization of interactive storytelling between Granny and Red Riding Hood (Croft 2003). And her short story “The Lady of the House of Love” in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) reworked the 1976 radio play *Vampirella* (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère 2011).

Intimately familiar with the technical possibilities of radio for producing acoustic images, Carter asserted, “I write for radio by choice,” “as an extension and amplification of writing for the printed page,” which Croft sees as “literally an extension of [Carter’s] published work,” her reaching “a wider, more diverse audience than the literary public” (2003, 37), as well as the amplification of orality and voice—especially women’s voices in the plural. While intertextually and intermedially linked, *The Company of Wolves* print, audio, and filmic adaptations have no center of origin or fixed message; rather as they each exploit the singularity of medium and

genre, they powerfully reenact the traditional multimediality of fairy tales, and they put it to work toward transformative performances of sexuality and gender.

A legitimate question that follows is whether a fairy-tale text, in whatever medium, is always already an adaptation since there is no “original” that speaks to all audiences and the tale itself is processed across media. I maintain that there isn’t an essential difference between fairy-tale “version” and “adaptation” and that they operate in an intertextual and intermedial continuum; however, there may be reasons methodologically or in practice to distinguish between them that have to do with both processes of story production and reception.

Here are two examples of how the difference is not one of essence. When the Brothers Grimm wrote and published their seven editions of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* collection, their work involved not only a shift in medium from oral to print, but serious editing that resulted in ideological and aesthetic changes. They definitely changed the tales they had heard, and as such it is understood that the Grimms adapted and appropriated the folktale and that translations of the Grimms continued to adapt it further into children’s literature.

However, it is also the case that—while it paradoxically involved their ongoing redaction of the tales they received—their project was to record and present German tales as authentically as possible, and not to change them, and they did comparative work to legitimize their tales as traditional (see Zipes 2015 for a synthesis of this complex process and the critical debates about it). Similarly, with Italo Calvino’s collection *Italian Folktales (Fiabe Italiane)* ([1956] 1980), we have a writer translating and editing tales from various regional folktale volumes, not to make his mark on them (which of course he did, as did the folklorists whose work he translated), but rather to make a variety of “their” folktales more available to Italians. Calvino perceived himself in that project as one in a chain of storytellers, enjoying and participating in the rhythms of repetition and variation that animate folk/fairy tales’ circulation; only later and in a different key would he wink at the fairy tale in his novel *The Nonexistent Knight* (1959) and revisit the genre’s qualities from the perspective of a modern creative writer in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988).

When ventriloquizing identifies a kind of filmic adaptation (Elhott 2003), it is a trope; for folklorists and other collectors of tales of magic, it is more of a practice that speaks to their motivation: the stories they circulate in print or other media are intended to speak for their oral tellers and their culture, not that of the collectors. Does that mean we should take their claims at face value? These claims need to be scrutinized, even more so when the collectors are, as colonizers for instance, not of the culture whose stories they want to record (Naithani 2010; Bacchilega 2007). However, it is also important to acknowledge that in the larger picture, today, the Grimms’ and Calvino’s tales are processed as “versions,” providing historical and situated examples of the multivocality of the folk/fairy-tale genre. And even Perrault’s highly literary tale “Red Riding Hood” is not a “one-off” but a story that shares symbolic affinities with the oral tradition and thus in a way adapts to it even as it popularizes the genre in print (Vaz da Silva 2016).

So within fairy-tale studies, which developed in the late 1970s and in conjunction with a proliferation of fairy-tale adaptations (Joosen 2011), it is pragmatic if nothing else to approach the genre’s history and circulation by distinguishing—both on the basis of the producers’ relationship to fairy-tale traditions and the receivers’ experience—between versions that are not limited to the oral tradition and aim to ventriloquize, even replicate, and adaptations that not only actively seek to intervene in the tradition—whether to make the tales more marketable in a new context, protest their unsuitability for a given audience, or put them to radically different aesthetic and ideological uses—but are also perceived by audiences in Hutcheon’s terms

as “repetition, without replication.” Once again, then, the situatedness of the production and reception of adaptations matters and renders the distinction between version and adaptation productively fuzzy.

Reading Fairy-Tale Adaptations in the Fairy-Tale Web

Grappling, as we must for most fairy tales, with the absence of an original text calls for a sharp turn away from adaptation as the result of a one-way transfer from its given source (e.g., tale to film) and an approach to fairy-tale adaptations as fluid texts that are produced and processed, in this century perhaps even more than before, in a web of connections that are “hypertextual,” in that they do not refer back to one center (Haase 2006). While every fairy tale and fairy-tale adaptation presupposes antecedents and anticipates prospective intertexts, we as scholars and the culture industry as transmedia storytellers cannot fully predict or control which stories mingle with, influence, anticipate, interrupt, take over, or support one another in the fairy-tale web because every teller and recipient of a tale brings to it, hypertextually, her or his own texts. The hypertextual links we make to fairy-tale adaptations are not only multimedial, intermedial, and ideologically multivocal; they are dependent on popular cultural memory as well as, more unpredictably, on culturally located knowledges and non-hegemonic desires that adapters and audiences alike bring to the experience of fairy-tale adaptations.

Methodologically, approaching adaptations in such a fairy-tale web opens up possibilities for recognizing multiple traditions within the history of the fairy-tale genre: considering how the circulation of the genre relates to the spread of capitalism and colonialism, exploring the ties between the fairy tale and non-Euro-American wonder genres, rethinking the promiscuous relationship between fairy tales and other genres of the fantastic, and recognizing how the genre serves differently located artists and audiences. In other words, as an interpretive practice, the fairy-tale web helps us critically rethink the history of fairy-tale adaptations and relocate the genre geopolitically; and it offers us a significant point of entry into understanding how the fairy tale works in what Henry Jenkins has called convergence culture, “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (2008, 2). How do producer and consumers in convergence culture deploy the multimediality and hypertextuality of fairy tales? As the power of conglomerate transmedia storytelling increases, are there also more opportunities for new storytellers and stories to wield the powers of wonder?

Bryant reminds us that collective and individual memory plays a role in what and how we perceive adaptations (2002), and I would add that we are witnessing an interesting development in the relationship between popular cultural memory and fairy-tale adaptations today. If we think with Karin Kukkonen (2008) of “popular cultural memory” as a transmedia repository of conventions and imagery that are continually reconstructed in relation to one another and in the experience of communities of recipients, it is clear that Disney continues to pervade popular cultural memory of fairy tales. However, since the 1970s the image of the fairy tale in popular cultural memory has also become both more fragmented and more expansive thanks to the confluence of several factors, including feminist critiques and revisions of fairy tales, the emergence of fairy-tale studies as a discipline, and the electronic accessibility of a wide range of fairy tales; the filtering of feminist and other social critiques into children’s education and fairy tales in literature and popular culture so that, whether individuals identify with feminism or not, there is a widespread sensibility to issues of gender in fairy tales; and greater possibilities for reader response to become production and be shared in new media.

At play, then, in the currency of twenty-first-century fairy-tale adaptations is a, perhaps paradoxically, fertile (mis)match between the economy of profit, which makes stories that are not protected by copyright and come in (un)familiar versions particularly attractive to cultural conglomerates and adapters, and what can be described as a new economy of knowledge, whereby today’s young adult and adult publics have acquired, or at least have the potential to easily access, a more complex and expansive sense of the “fairy tale” than what was generally available some thirty years ago. There is more awareness in the production and reception of fairy-tale adaptations of the multivocality of the genre, a pleasure in reaching for the pre-sanitized not-for-children-only tales, even a demand to redirect the “what if?” possibilities of the fairy tale. Increasingly, the culture industry can depend on being challenged by adult audiences who want fairy-tale “family” films to incorporate contemporary values that challenge the “happily ever after” heteronormativity of Disneyfied fairy tales; increasingly, the culture industry responds, albeit for the sake of profit, as seen in *Bare* (2012) and *Frozen* (2013). Popular fairy-tale themed songs range from Sara Bareilles’s “Fairytale” (2004) to Misono’s “Vs” (2006) and *Frozen*’s “Let It Go” (2013), all also circulating in official and fan-produced unauthorized YouTube videos. In convergence culture, the “high level of coordination and creative control” required in franchising and other forms of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2011) interacts—sometimes supporting, and others reigning it in—with the multiplicity of the fairy tale.

What’s different is not that fairy-tale adaptations are all around us. Rather, “fairy-tale culture” has once again shifted and relies—to different extents and purposes, in conglomerate productions, genre fiction, audience expectations and interpretations—on rather complex and competing senses of what fairy tales are and do. Children in the first decade of the twenty-first century may very well have been exposed to *Shrek* films, that is, DreamWorks’ parodies of Disney, before viewing what baby boomers would consider fairy-tale “classics” (Poniewozik 2009). Postcolonial, queer, Black, and Indigenous artists such as Nalo Hopkinson, Yousry Nasrallah, Emma Donoghue, Helen Oyeyemi, Dan Taulapapa McMullin, and Karlo Mila are adapting the fairy tale, tapping into the genre’s transformative powers and links that the hegemony of the heteronormative and Euro-American fairy tale left behind. African American speculative-fiction author Octavia Butler’s unfinished *Panable of the Trickster* epigraph reads, as reported by Gerry Canavan: “there is nothing new under the sun, but there are new suns” (2014). Not only are there new media platforms, but new adapters of fairy tales to connect with and learn from. Thinking of fairy tales and their transformative possibilities in a hypertextual web raises the stakes of exploring the what, who, why, how, where, when, and for whom of adaptation.

Related topics: Anthologies; Broadcast; Cinematic; Comic Cons; Convergence Culture; Criticism; Fan Cultures; Fan Fiction; Fantasy; Language; Material Culture; Orientalism; Print; Sexualities/Queer and Trans Studies; Translation; YouTube

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Mediagraphy

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