A review of

Mapping Fairy-Tale Space: Pastiche and Metafiction in Borderless Tales

Victoria Leslie

Christy Williams' study of popular 21st-century fairy tales begins with a quote from Marina Warner, who solicits her readers in *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of the Fairy Tale* to 'imagine the history of fairy tale as a map'. This request certainly resonates with Williams, whose book explores the fictional geography of a series of contemporary fairy-tale incarnations and the metaphor of mapping as a way of navigating the narrative space and the narrative strategies employed. Performing close readings of these works, which include the television show *Once Upon a Time*, the Korean drama *Secret Garden*, three short stories from Kelly Link, a novel series *The Lunar Chronicles* and a serial novel *Indexing*, Williams draws upon fairy-tale scholarship and literary theory and focuses on pastiche and metafiction as a way of highlighting the links between fairy-tale narratives and their geographies.

Williams highlights the 2011 American television season as being particularly important in shaping the development of recent fairy-tale adaptations, which included the release of *Grimm* on NBC and *Once Upon a Time* on ABC. Though adopting different formats (one is a police procedural and the other a melodrama), they both profess to adhering to the 'real' and 'true' versions of the fairy tales they depict. Williams identifies instead that they offer 'new twists on old tales', contributing to an ever-expanding repertoire of narratives that revisit fairy tales and adapt them to our times, in much the same way that fairy tales were retold in previous periods to reflect emergent agendas and perspectives. Williams highlights the feminist retellings at the end of the 20th century by authors such as Anne Sexton, Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson. For Williams, the 21st century is characterised by visual and narrative iterations that test the limits of the genre, depicting the slippage between fairy-tale geographies, identities and storylines.

Once Upon a Time is a good example of the way in which the conceptual parameters of fairy tales are tested and ultimately overwritten and overstepped. The show is set across two storyworlds: the small town of Storybrooke, Maine, is situated in the 'real' world while

the Enchanted Forest is the realm from which fairy tales and fairy-tale characters emanate. But Storybrooke is an artificial space, constructed by a magical curse and populated by fairy-tale characters who are ignorant of their identities, histories and magical powers. Trapped in a simulacrum of small-town America in 1983, outsiders are not permitted to enter, or its populace able to leave. Like the 1954 film *Brigadoon* – itself part of a tradition of mythical villages under magical curses – Storybrooke is locked in time and only able to move forward as the characters uncover their fairy-tale identities and storylines. As Williams considers, the decision to set the contemporary story world in the 1980s reflects the childhood nostalgia of its target audience and the desire to return to simpler times.

The polarising geographies of new and old worlds sets up a series of conflicts which sees modern advancements set in opposition to magic, and the community of exiled fairy-tale characters torn between two versions of home. However, being free of the Enchanted Forest also means that characters are liberated from their prescribed stories, able to act in different ways and permitted to adopt different roles. Williams highlights this disintegration of narrative borders as a way of revealing the connections across the fairy-tale landscape. Without the formulae of individual stories, *Once Upon a Time* can be regarded as a 'fairy-tale pastiche', using the fragments of the genre, such as the characters, iconography and motifs, to create new stories. Williams also cites other examples of pastiche such as Stephen Sondheim's musical and Disney film *Into the Woods* (1986, 2014) and DreamWorks' film *Shrek* (2001), which situate an array of fairy-tale characters in a shared geographical space where they can interact in each other's stories.

Able to transgress the boundaries and borders of individual tales, *Once Upon a Time* is also able to expand the pantheon of characters it includes in its story worlds. Over the seasons, characters from folk ballads such as Mulan and Robin Hood are added to the cast along with those from literary fairy tales, such as Alice from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and Peter Pan. Moreover, the geography expands to reflect this wider inclusion of stories, the Enchanted Forest for instance becoming part of the wider Fairy Tale Land which includes folktales, legends and myths. Additionally, books become destinations beyond the known geography, as characters travel to new worlds like Neverland, Wonderland and Oz. Williams considers that the 'book-equals-world configuration' conveys the way reading books allows us to figuratively escape into new worlds, while grouping various stories and geographies together operates in much the same way as fairy tale collections which collate myriad tales into one conceptual story space.

The inclusion of literary works into the fairy-tale landscape is also a feature of Seanan McGuire's *Indexing* novel series. Taking its title from the Aarne-Thompson Index, which catalogues folk tales by tale type, McGuire constructs her story world based on the boundaries and parameters of given stories as opposed to the geographies and settings within these tales (though physical manifestations from these tales, like a gingerbread house for instance, can appear in the 'real world'). The narrative follows the adventures of the agents of the Aarne-Thompson Index (ATI) Management Bureau who are tasked with preventing 'fairy-tale

incursions', whereby fairy tales and their inherent narrative patterns can negatively affect reality. Characters who are on the 'ATI Spectrum' or 'story touched' have to be cognizant of the tale type they conform to, for instance Snow White characters have to be careful around princes when this kind of tale type is being investigated, while characters who exist beyond the fictional ATI classification like Cinderella's Wicked Stepsister have to acquiesce to a false tale type in order to take an active place in the world.

For Williams, the ATI functions as a 'tale map' to navigate the storyworld, but even in a world where the rules are clearly established, interactions between characters demonstrate more narrative fluidity than the structuralist frame suggests. As with *Once Upon a Time*, the storyworld allows for the infiltration of literary fairy tales, justifying their presence because they are too recent to have been added to the Index. This contention between the authorised and codified folk-tale corpus is out of pace with the more imminent 'public record', drawing attention to the fact that the fairy-tale genre is not fixed but constantly evolving. Likewise, the way the investigations are documented – by handwritten notes or on a typewriter – reveals a need to protect against the possibility of alteration and modification, since this is the way variants are created, suggesting the propensity for fairy tales to continually change and adapt.

Mapping Fairy Tale Space is an engaging and erudite study charting the evolution of the fairy tale in the 21st century and showcasing an array of examples in print and TV that push the limits of the genre and examine the structures and systems that govern narrative construction, transmission and categorisation. The metaphor of mapping provides an insightful way to conceptualise and navigate an expanding fairy-tale landscape, highlighting connections within shared narrative space that draw attention to the intertextual and metafictional links between individual stories and worlds. As Williams concludes, her text does not seek to 'create a new fairy tale map' but to acknowledge that maps are 'drafted and drawn' and arguably redrafted and redrawn as narrative borders shift or collapse. Williams' text is an invaluable resource, demonstrating the protean and borderless nature of the fairy tale and reflecting the genre's enduring relevance.

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