A review of

Tales of Wonder: Retelling Fairy Tales through Picture Postcards

Catherine Parsons

Jack Zipes' stress on the fundamental social importance of folk tales and fairy tales probably needs no introduction here. It is well known that this Marxist critic holds the fairy tale as an entity 'with its own special code and forms through which we communicate about social and psychic phenomena'.[1] He emphasises the ways in which the old peasant-based oral tradition of storytelling were universally applicable, holding out the possibility of improving poverty, disadvantage, and social status, and stressing and instructing on the preservation and celebration of rituals within a community. Some were stories of warning, others were didactic and moral. These stories were part of a web of communication, where priests used the fairy-tale tropes in their sermons, and travellers such as journeymen, soldiers and sailors told stories in their travels. It was, as Zipes says, through these tales that one gained a sense of values and one's place in the community. His emphasis is stringently socio-historical, relating both oral and written tales to the cultures in which they were situated, opposing the more ahistorical and essentialist approach of writers such as Bruno Bettelheim.[2] In his introduction to *Tales of Wonder*, Zipes shows how the original orally transmitted tales have undergone a process of reappropriation and reformulation. Following the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, they metamorphosed into the literary fairy tale, intended for a reading public formed by the aristocracy and the emerging middle classes. These printed tales, given new form in the late 18th and early 19th centuries by writers such as Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, were aimed more at children, many containing illustrations, and these pictures gave the stories another dimension, helping to fix key moments of the stories in readers' imaginations and memories.

According to Zipes, the phenomenon of fairy-tale postcards adds another layer of signification to the old stories. This sumptuously illustrated book contains a wide-ranging selection of such cards from Zipes' own collection, garnered over the space of some fifty years, with examples spanning the period from the first picture postcards dating from the last decades of the 19th century right up to modern-day Chinese and Russian ones. Their social relevance is repeatedly emphasised. As Marina Warner points out in her Foreword, these postcards can be seen as an illustration of the idea of fairy tales as a means of mass communication, 'winged messengers' that evoke the shared symbolism of folk tales, the pictures on the front of the cards reinforcing the shared understanding between sender and receiver. Zipes, too, in his 'Introduction', shows how they reinforce at once both the democratic and domestic nature of folk and fairy tales. They are a medium of which the

content is overt, open to all, and in their reference to things 'already known', they evoke a common experience that serves to reinforce friendship or familial ties. In his assertion of their ready transferability, he uses his idea of 'memes', which he has previously described as 'an information pattern contained in a human brain … capable of being copied to another individual's brain that will store it and replicate it.[3] He also makes a case for these postcards as contributing to a new perspective on the stories, showing the different ways in which the tales may be represented through art, provoking the receivers of the cards to relive and rethink the stories, and helping to keep the tales alive. This may be seen as an example of Zipes' insight that fairy tales 'pervade and invade our lives', emphasising how stories gain further life through retelling.[4] Warner, in her turn, maintains that the contents of the postcards, referencing the ever-popular traditional stories, run counter to the 'Disneyfication' of fairy stories from the 1930s on, and show a more nuanced interpretation of the traditional tropes that opposes the sanitised and over-simplified patriarchal treatments of such stories as 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Snow White'.

Zipes examines the fairy-tale postcards from a number of angles, discussing the 'golden age' of fairy-tale postcards in Western Europe and North America beginning at the end of the 19th century and running on until the 1930s, showing the prevalence of depictions of stories and storytelling, and then going on to compare and contrast different versions of eight of the most popular fairy-tales such as Cinderella, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, and their treatment in the accompanying postcards. Using the postcards as illustrations, he shows how writers such as Perrault, the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen have largely shaped our understanding of folk and fairy tales. What is interesting, though, is that although the styles of the postcards differ to reflect the contemporary aesthetic conventions of the times of production, the underlying treatment of the topics does not change. There is admittedly the odd subversive political illustration, such as the wolf in a 1919 French Red Riding Hood illustration wearing a World War I German helmet, but mostly the depictions are in the traditional vein of beleaguered childhood innocence or vulnerability, or of those of a lower social class employing their wits to overcome adversity or make their way in the world, a generalised approach that seems to run counter to Zipes' stringent insistence upon their socio-historical cultural relevance. This lack of stringent examination is reflected in his comparison of the traditional Perrault and Grimm fairy tales, where he simply relates the different stories without any analysis of their differences.

Zipes goes on to discuss more modern postcards, including Russian fairy tales, showing how although fairy tales were used in the 1930s to subversively critique Stalin's rule, the overt use of them was considered unsuitably bourgeois by the authorities, and it was only after his death that fairy tales and depictions of fairy tales became more popular. He shows a number of beautifully illustrated postcards, depicting traditional Russian folk tales such as 'Baba Yaga' and 'The Firebird'. Children's novels such as *Alice in Wonderland*, *Pinocchio*, *Peter Pan* and *The Wizard of Oz* are included by Zipes in the category of fairy tales, illustrating his commentary with a number of postcards including photographic stills from films and plays and reproduced illustrations from the books. He then concludes by discussing in more detail the prevalence of photographic postcards, showing how the invention of photography had a fundamental influence on the popularity of the postcard. Finally, he shows how postcards are still very popular in China and Australasia, with some very interesting Chinese interpretations of Grimm fairy tales.

While this book is, as previously mentioned, beautifully produced and printed on art paper with colourful and lovingly rendered reproductions of the postcards, it seems to serve primarily as a means for Zipes to share his love of fairy-tale postcards with a wider public. He adopts a 'snapshot' approach, with no central insight or theme running through the book, and, as I have mentioned, very little actual socio-historical analysis of the postcards or cited fairy tales in terms of being cultural productions. Although I do accept his point that fairy-tale postcards have obviously been well loved and widely used over a historically significant span of years, I would argue that this work needs to be understood as a lovingly curated decorative coffee-table book, rather than a serious work of cultural theory.

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1.   Jack Zipes, 'Origins: Fairy Tales and Folk Tales', in *Children's Literature, Approaches and Territories*, eds. Janet Maybin and Nicola J. Watson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 38.
2.   Bruno Bettelheim, 'Introduction', *The Uses of Enchantment* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).
3.   Jack Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.
4.   Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (Routledge: New York, 1991), 38.

A review of

Fashion in the Fairy Tale Tradition: What Cinderella Wore

B.C. Kennedy

R ebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario introduces her book by presenting us with iconic imagery from famous fairy tales; the glass slipper, a scrap of red cloth that falls from the jaws of a wolf, feline boots, a donkey's pelt lying discarded upon the floor of a scullery maid's room. These images are, she suggests, 'items of the fairy tale wardrobe' that 'exist within changing economies of consumption and luxury, evolving textile and clothing industries, and discourses of fashion that shape the fate of fairy tales' divers protagonists'. In other words, the author is addressing not only what is

worn in the fairy tale but also the 'skill, economics and political powers that drive sartorial choices'. This book explores how fashion and fairy tale are inexorable linked, and how their relationship articulates centuries of debate over female agency and autonomy.

While fashion is fairy tale, the author argues, the objects of fashion within the tales have long been interpreted as symbolic rather than the representation of dress trends. Do Rozario acknowledges that the term 'fashion' itself is problematic since it encompasses cycles and changes of trends that includes, amongst others, clothing, music, literature and design. As part of a historical process, the mercurial nature of fashion has shaped and transformed the Western fairy-tale tradition since the 'evocation of timelessness, nostalgia and antiquity reveals how fairy tales themselves exist in the same kind of temporal flux as fashion' and identities themselves in fairy tales may be constructed and deconstructed through clothing. The representation of fashion by Disney in the fairy-tale genre is a theme that the author returns to throughout this book in an effort to analyse the physical materiality of the Disney princess dress, revealing the histories of patronage, political intrigue, constructs of class privilege, and sexual politics behind these tales.

This book seeks to investigate the role clothing and fashion plays in fairy tales and how fashion has actively shaped fairy-tale traditions, revealing the material cultures behind the most sartorial gestures. The book is divided into an introductory chapter followed by a further six chapters and a conclusion. In the introduction Do Rozario tells us that in fashion terms Cinderella is the fairy-tale hero; her story is all about the power of clothes to redefine identity; the dress becomes the object of female empowerment particularly since it is often gifted by a female benefactor. It is the ability to obtain the right clothing that gives Cinderella the opportunity to re-enter society and to reclaim her status and authority. She examines the different versions of Cinderella by Charles Perrault and the Grimm Brothers.

Chapter two focuses on 'fashion felons', the Cinderellas who risk all to reclaim their status in societies regulated by sumptuary law and royal edicts. Chapter three examines Cinderella's counterparts, the Donkey Skins who 'use abjection to rebel against patriarch and regain sovereignty', the heroes who 'rather than engage in crime and delinquency, use dirt and cinders to extort their sovereignty from paternal kings'. Chapter four turns to the production of fashion, to the spindles, needles, distaff and fibre that makes clothing. This chapter elaborates on the skills that ultimately generate female agency, reassessing the textile wonder of fairy tales in line with the histories of women's work within the context of class and economic hierarchies – from the queens who spin for pleasure to the most lowly of seamstresses. Chapter five looks at shoes such as the red slippers and cat's boots, revealing how 'desire and damnation are embodied in footwear'. The author notes that shoes are the 'necessary vehicle for social mobility' and, as such, play a significant role in fairy tales. Chapter six concentrates on the custodians of sartorial power, the fairies who have the power to bestow the most sumptuous clothes on those whom they deem worthy. This chapter also focuses on what fairies themselves wore over the centuries and their use of disguise; the clothing of poor, working women often used to camouflage the wise women, fairy godmothers and witches. However, wicked fairies are, Do Rozario asserts, 'figures of terrible glamour and sexual confidence, threatening the status quo with their loud make-up and the black and purple ensembles'.

This of course is not always the case, as exemplified in the 2005 production of C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* where the main antagonist, Jadis, is depicted as a White Witch, and perhaps the author could have explored this apparent anomaly since her research extends to Marvel's *Black Panther* (2018).

The book's conclusion sums up the argument by examining how underwear – rarely mentioned in early modern fairy tales – such as the corset, shift and in some cases drawers, have become outerwear in what the author argues is a 'misguided attempt to free the princess of her restrictive clothing'. The corset, in particular, has a vexed history and is quoted as being 'the most controversial garment in the entire history of fashion'. In Perrault's Cinderella, for example, the stepsisters break more than a dozen laces in the effort to clinch their stays more tightly, while the evil queen laces Snow White up so tightly that she loses consciousness in the Brothers Grimm's version of the fairy tale. Such gestures misread the histories of high heels and elaborate gowns, Do Rozario concludes, since they 'overlook the political power that has been wielded by princesses through dress'. Of course fairy tales are not just about dresses and shoes, but the habit of treating an interest in fashion as trivial is itself mirrored in the history of fairy tales being treated as inconsequential. As the author points out, it is no coincidence that fashion and fairy tales are viewed as a feminine sphere of concern.

The author has included six black and white figures. However, in a book of this nature more illustrations would have been valuable to augment the descriptions in the text, for example, *Marie Antoinette on Horseback* (1783), George Cruikshank's illustration of the fairy godmother or Frank Adams's cover of *The Story of Mother Goose* (ca. 1920). One of my concerns is Do Rozario's excessive use of the word 'sartorial'. In Chapter two this word occurs at least 24 times and is a distraction to this reader. Careful technical editing would have prevented this repetition. The book is a useful addition to this expanding area of literature. It is well referenced and highlights a novel aspect of the fairy-tale tradition.

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