



A review of
The Eyrrie

Emily Jessica Turner

A mysterious owl insignia, ominous rural landscapes, misty cobbled streets, creaky taverns, and irate sea-dogs barking warnings – recently published graphic novel *The Eyrrie* ticks all the boxes for a classic ghost story which combines the rural uncanny with a thriller's distinct sense of unease. In this folk horror tale, Rebecca, a magazine photojournalist struggling under immense pressure from her editor, travels a long way from her home in the States when she visits the ancient county of Sussex. Staying in her boss's remote 'Carfax' cottage on the outskirts of Rye, Rebecca discovers an ancient lamp and heads into town, where she learns just how superstitious the locals can be.

After she stumbles across a hidden tunnel underneath her cottage as well as a secret vista cordoned off with police tape near the shoreline, a menacing figure begins to stalk Rebecca through the fields and towns of Sussex. From the night mists emerges an animalistic shape with glowing, eerily circular eyes, crouched behind a ghostly scarecrow.

Written by Thom Burgess and illustrated by Barney Bodoano, *The Eyrrie* generates a *mise en abyme*, a fictional folklore within the novel's wider narrative inspired by the author's visits to Rye and Hastings. With the English Channel to the south, the forest to the north and marshes to the east and west, Sussex's folklore emerges sea-soaked from the coastline and enchanted by the woodland's fairy rings.

After recognising the face of a smuggler in an antique book, Rebecca begins to connect the local tales of 'The Black Mantles' or Brothers Bannick – inspired by the infamous 18th-century Hawkhurst Gang – with a lamp and door found underneath the cottage. Both objects bear the mark of an 'owler'; the afeared smuggling gang used hooting sounds to evade capture, they say. As Burgess' tale progresses, the eyrie, a secret tunnel used by the contrabandists which eventually led to their gory end, begins to give up its secrets.

Through both its narrative and illustration, the graphic novel is highly successful in its depiction of a haunted landscape, generating an authentically atmospheric reimagining of rural East Sussex. Perhaps the novel's greatest success is how truthful it

remains to its 'source material' – the area's cultural backdrop. In addition to interweaving coastal folklore which faithfully echoes the themes and concerns of traditional county lore, Burgess evokes its archaic dialect, referencing aggy-jaggers (sea mists). The cottage in which Rebecca stays – The Old Carfax – is named after an old word for crossroads, that liminal space favoured for dealings with the devil and burying suicides or criminals in tales of old.

It is interesting to see that *The Eyrie*, which follows the model of the classic horror tale of suspense and mystery, has been accompanied by the unconventional illustration of Bodoano. The elongated, skeletal figures inhabiting many of L.S. Lowry's paintings are a clear influence on how Bodoano depicts characters – with bony fingers and swathes of straight hair hanging down, hunched over.

Etching in pen and ink, the artist creates a suitable misty landscape in a palette of black, white and grey. Bodoano – who has also illustrated stories by M.R. James, a strong literary influence on the creation of *The Eyrie* – tells the story through a series of panels which are mostly close-ups of faces, parts of buildings, or photography equipment. The decision not to depict Sussex via views of its wide, expansive landscapes serves to increase the reader's sense of Rebecca's claustrophobia.

The Eyrie is a distinctly cinematic graphic novel, both in terms of the pacing of Burgess' writing and the German Expressionist feel of Bodoano's illustration. A two-panel scene, for example, shows Rebecca glance through her car's back window to reverse the vehicle towards a wooden scaffold in the distance, and as she looks forward to drive off, a ghostly silhouette of one of the 'longmen' manifests, hanging from the post. This reverse jump-scare references the horror film format whilst playing with the convention itself.

Following Burgess' debut *Malevolents: Click Click*, which conjures the narrative framework of the classic ghost story within a modern setting, *The Eyrie* similarly takes the masters of the supernatural short story – Charles Dickens, E.F. Benson – as a starting influence for a tale in which the past comes back to haunt the present. Exploring the creation of local legends and the impact they can continue to have on communities, the author weaves a gripping tale about ghostly smugglers wreaking their revenge on those who would cross them. The novel is well constructed, drawing the reader into its folk horror ambiance through the compelling creation of setting. However, it effectively creates an unsettling feeling of anxiety even before the terrible hidden secrets of the landscape are revealed. The true horror of *The Eyrie* lurks in the shadows, behind masks, in corrupted picture files, crouched in the mist and slowly manifesting, effectively leading up to the great unveiling of the monsters themselves.

Burgess' narrative builds up a sense of tension, as well as an aura of unreliability. Rebecca is an unstable narrator – immensely under pressure, she is paranoid, irritable, isolated and claustrophobic, and there are hints of past issues with drinking. By undermining the authority of its protagonist and suggesting links but ultimately

allowing mystery to shroud details of the narrative, *The Eyrie* uses ambiguity to create a classical but artfully constructed horror story. 'It's not real', Rebecca cries to herself as the book reaches its conclusion, 'it can't be real'. Or can it?

Author: Thom Burgess; Illustrator: Barney Bodoano.

Thom Burgess (2017), 44pp.

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A review of
**Alice in Transmedia
Wonderland:
Curiouser and
Curiouser New
Forms of A Children's Classic**

Ida Yoshinaga

For readers bored with academic convention, specialty press McFarland & Company presents a parade of the under-scrutinised and overlooked among scholarly subjects. The media-themed publisher curates sports and gaming research, ethnic-minority medical history, and transportation and military studies. To McFarland's substantial pop-culture library, Hungarian folklorist Anna Kérchy's *Alice in Transmedia Wonderland: Curiouser and Curiouser New Forms of a Children's Classic* (2016) stands out, as a 21st-century model for comprehending cross-medial adaptations of iconic popular-culture texts – specifically, the 150-year-old intertext referencing author Lewis Carroll and cartoonist John Tenniel's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871). Following the methodological directives of transmedia narratologists such as Marie-Laure Ryan, close readings of this complex, globally distributed

'Alice' intertext – which Kérchy crowns as exemplar of fantasy as a multimedial meta-genre, generating self-aware narratives that each reference earlier versions of the girl adventurer – would call for formal analyses specific to the narratives' Information and Communication Technology (ICT) platforms. Like screenwriter Linda Woolverton's *Alice* (*Alice in Wonderland*, 2010), who in that Disney film famously advocates for believing in six impossible things before breakfast (a phrase borrowed from Carroll's White Queen), Kérchy improbably juggles the girl's adventures within written, cinematic, stage, musical, multisensorial, digital, and experimental ICTs, interpreting them within these platforms' aesthetic, ideological, and linguistic conventions. Presenting readers with a staggeringly ambitious project that makes this reviewer wonder if we indeed are all mad here, in the unreserved scope and trendiness of the multiforms under discussion, Kérchy's densely particular approach accumulates into an inter-generational, international, intermedial ethnography that honors the possibilities of fantasy as a gendered, cross-cultural genre of awe, imagination, incredibility.

A postmodern reading of this massive intertext, argues Kérchy – who regards every remediated Alice tale as newly welcoming readers, viewers, and participants to engage self-reflectively in its content – would position each producer's nuances against *Wonderland's* traditional ambiguity and the peculiarities of reception. Cautioning against the didactic reading pedagogy of scholars such as Marxist Jack Zipes, which she feels divides the fantasy genre into either 'purely escapist' or 'purely political' works, Kérchy re-valuates Alice narratives as 'ludic destabilizations of hegemonies and proliferation of polysemic potentialities' in both their mass-cultural (i.e. commodifiable) and subversive (i.e. agentic) impacts – the complicated breadth of which she cheerily traverses. Among her choices of ICTs that retell the girl's story through 'palimpsestic overwriting without erasure' are: Benjamin Lacombe's retro pop-up picturebook (*Il état une fois...*, 2010), which Kérchy appreciates for the 'infantile ludic' benefits of its form that moves young girls towards 'freedom and joie de vivre by providing a relative liberation and momentary delights' when these readers manoeuvre 3D Alice (and other classical fantasy heroines) in playful self-identification; the 'Alice for the iPad application' (Atomic Antelope, 2010), a digital, interactive, children's book that provides a 'multi sensory experience, investing the reading process with conjoint user-activated acoustic, ocular, and tactile pleasures'; the 'lyrical biografiction' depicting the intimate relationship between Carroll and real-life muse Alice Liddell in feminist journalist Katie Roiphe's novel (*Still She Haunts Me*, 2001), which Kérchy praises for disrupting the fact-fiction divide; and Czech surrealist Jan Švankmajer's animated puppet/object films (*Something from Alice*, with Eva Švankmajerová, 1987; 'The Jabberwocky or Straw Hubert's Clothes', 1971) that remediate the Carrollian storyworld into anti-totalitarian nightmarescapes valued by Kérchy for their 'plethora of sensorially stimulating synaesthetic effects sprung from the spectacularized stream of deranged consciousness, experiments with tactile dissonance, sound montages, grotesque found-objects, living-dead puppet-composites, or collages of disassembling drawings'.

Kérchy's most daring proposition is that the imaginative agency generated by the Alice intertext transcends the structural vulnerability of both its *producers* (creative workers) and *participants* (consumers), whom leftist scholars traditionally theorise as wielding limited power against global capitalism. Defending the Disney blockbuster by director Tim Burton, Kérchy positions the auteur's subversive use of digital-era, computer-generated, three-dimensional technology in *Alice in Wonderland* within the context of progressive postwar debates over the relationship between cinematic form and ideology. Kérchy argues that on the side of producers, Burton's nonsensical and bizarre signature style, deployed through 3D CG imagery to achieve the film's dynamic surrealism, effectively overpowers ideological agendas established by pedantic realism: that of the liberal-feminist, colonialistic screenplay authored by fellow producer Woolverton and that of Disney's corporate drive to leverage the film towards dominating the gendered 'princess' market. The postmodern power of the Alice intertext does not just allow Burton to borrow from Wonderland's rich audio-visual history of multiple media forms, but also, on the side of participants, lets viewers exercise their creativity, curiosity, and critical sense of wonder, in freely interpreting those layers of referenced texts to express imagination. In Kérchy's book, lit up with diverse Wonderland fan art testifying to the sheer vision and power of this imaginative agency, enchantment wins out over disenchantment, transgressive and fantastic disruption over doctrinaire dictation of meaning.

A key scholar of formal issues within fairy-tale studies, Kérchy undertakes ferocious methodological experiments to convey millennial cross-mediation, her expression muted only by the linear, static, constricting conventions of academic writing. Western philosophy seems insufficient to the Amazonian task of tracing this wonder tale across so many dimensions and depths, as syntaxes of the scholarly monograph fail to contain the raw power of Kérchy's provocations and revelations. Like her subject, the century-and-a-half-old Alice, whose well-known 'objectification ... via incomplete or infinite variations of grotesque bodily metamorphosis' represents our human efforts to engage the unimaginable, Kérchy's weighty contribution to transmedia scholarship deserves a grander, fiercer form: at the very least, an audio-visual essay that transmits such a treasure of insights and illustrations to the reader multisensorially, perhaps crafted by a surrealist puppeteering auteur fluent in the semiotics of 3D videogames, in a work to be engaged interactively via digital devices. Which would be the merriest unbirthday present of them all, for female heroes assaying the impossible.

Author: Anna Kérchy.
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