A Critical Review

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Pauline Greenhill, Jill Terry Rudy, Naomi Hamer, Lauren Bosc (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*, **Routledge, 2018; pp. 680.**

   A book like *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures* has the power to promote and enrich children's literature as a field of knowledge, and render fairy tales as integral to the literary canon. The terms culture, media and fairy-tale, which constitute the focus of this *Routledge Companion*, are concepts that have independently been of interest to scholars and the common man in the past and at present. They will continue to engage academicians and intellectuals in the future because they are umbrella terms that have been defined at length and in depth for decades if not centuries, having affected human life and consciousness. Bringing these terms together and dealing with them in interdisciplinary contexts (discussed in an entire section, 223-308), is both rich and enriching. Greenhill, Rudy, Hamer and Bosc compiled and edited a volume divided into five parts with 72 chapters which shed light on how progress in general, politics and the media, and the development of modern and postmodern critical theories have transformed the way these terms have been understood and used in the past and are dynamic in the twenty first century. The five parts of the *Companion* have titles that are broad and comprehensive enough to discuss "Basic Concepts," "Analytical Approaches," "Political and Identity Issues," "Communicative Media," and Expressive Genres and Venues."

   To sift through these five parts is beyond the scope of one review article. This is why this essay will focus on the opening chapter, which sets the tone for the entire *Companion* and highlight that this volume covers extensive fertile ground, but the colonial and postcolonial contexts have not been addressed and the efforts of different cultures to work on decolonization need to be explored. In their chapter entitled "Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Decolonization" Cristina Bacchilega and Sadhana Naithani (83-90) argue that "To analyze the place of fairy-tale media and cultures today with reference to colonialism, postcolonialism, and decolonization is to reconsider colonial fairy-tale scholarship and practices,

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postcolonial predicaments, and actual and emerging processes of decolonization" (83).

Because the "once upon a time" fairy-tales, which have "myriad forms" as Vanessa Nunes and Pauline Greenhill argue convincingly (20), belong to the genre of folklore, they can be traced back to the oral tradition way before they were collected, adapted, and published by the French Charles Perrault in *Contes du Temps Passé* (1697) and the German Grimm Brothers at the beginning of the 19th century. And because by definition a fairy tale can be a simple or intricate fictitious narrative that portrays imaginary creatures (fairies, dwarfs and/or giants, talking animals, elves, dragons, witches, goblins, etc.) interacting with humans in incredible, supernatural, mysterious events that include magic, set in enchanted places to convey a moral lesson, the term can incorporate stories from ancient Egypt, Ibn Al-Muqaffa's *Kalila wa* [and] *Demna*, tales by Hans Christian Anderson, as well as the *One Thousand and One Nights* and more. In these cases, each of these (Perrault, Grim Brothers, Anderson and Al-Muqaffa) is "the collector, not an author" (Rudy, 8). This volume provides evidence that fairy tales are far from being simple in any culture they belong to. Carl Lindahl in chapter two provides a detailed "Definition and History of Fairy Tales" that proves this (11-19). Writers in this volume adopt multidisciplinary approaches that bring together children's literature and culture, history, psychology, politics and more. They address academics and scholars in different disciplines, librarians, critics, intellectuals and the general reader.

In *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*, the first chapter "Folklore, Fairy Tale, Culture and Media" by one of the editors of the volume Jill Terry Rudy in Part I entitled "Basic Concepts" is a model of a lucid, informative introduction. It includes a history and definition of terms that do not sit still for easy definitions. The chapter reads like a story (hi-story) that the common reader can understand, but paves the way for the scholar to learn about the character of folklorists, writers of fairy tales, intellectuals discussing culture, media specialist and developers and how each group and all these groups together have a role to play in relation to their audiences on local and global levels. Rudy's opening sentence that identifies "Folklorists, as experts trained in the study of traditional expression, think again and again about narrative, communication, and media" (3) is pin pointing that folklorists are the masters who reflect on what matters in the world. Human beings have developed by producing narratives in every field of knowledge, and as a Muslim I believe that God sent narratives through Moses, Jesus and Muhammad to communicate with humanity at different stages of history to inform this development. Media, in the context of Rudy's chapter, is not only a reference to mass media, namely the radio, television, cinema, publishing, etc., but digital media, the scenes carved on the walls of Egyptian monuments, the Pyramids and the Sphinx and more. Rudy's second sentence asserts that "Primarily, folklorists think that oral expression matters, even advocating for understanding the primacy of words spoken in face-to-face interaction, because they study those expressions that involve tradition and groups, the lore and the folk" (3). This assertion constitutes the backbone of what folklorists believe in and study, but it is a finding that reasonable

human beings advocate: words matter. Although the global Covid pandemic led to virtual communication which proved vital for educational, personal and professional purposes to avoid contagion, physical "face-to-face interaction" is incomparable. Communication is, therefore, a pivotal theme and the editors of this *Companion* are justified in devoting an entire section to "Communicative Media" (309-388). Folklorists and Egyptologists study the live scenes on the walls of Egyptian monuments that have figures who speak to humanity until now, without spoken words though.

How does Rudy deal with the fact that folklorists study the past? Does this mean that they will not address the present, let alone the future? The following extract will provide evidence that for Rudy the folklorist is a studious visionary. She wrote,

> Yet because folklorists follow where traditional expressions lead, they must recognize the revolution toward other media, especially as new media evolve. They concede that the inclination to communicate using the voice and the spoken word has turned, and sometimes quickly, toward other media that inscribe and project communication. The hands and eyes and tools (technologies) that extend embodied capabilities become important in producing and receiving written, printed, photographed, and filmed expressions, including traditional ones. They also allow for participation by differently abled people, for example those who are hearing impaired. As communication and media connect with and beyond bodies to artifacts, machines, and airwaves, folklorists' preferred assumption of artistic communication in small groups speaking together (Ben-Amos 1972) morphs toward an admission of, perhaps even fascination with, intermedial mingling. (3)

This quote alludes to T.S. Eliot's (1888-1965) "Tradition and Individual Talent" (1919) and the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann's "Communicative and Cultural Memory" (2008) and *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (2011). Like Eliot, Rudy believes that folklorists must have a sense of tradition which Eliot calls "the historical sense [which] involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence" and "which is a sense of the timelessness as well as of the temporal and of the timelessness and of the temporal together" (55). Folklorists, whether they study the values, customs, traditional artifacts, stories, music rituals of a certain group or are producers and reproducers of material pertaining to a certain culture, they are not simply dealing with what is old and exotic, but with how the old and exotic can communicate with those who live in the present and possibly will live in the future. Rudy's assertion that folklorists "must recognize the revolution toward other media, especially as new media evolve" indicates her awareness that folklorists cannot fulfill their mission unless they study and examine the outside world, detect the changes that are occurring, establish links between the stories that circulate and how the media in

its different shapes and forms addresses these stories. This "recognition" requires that folklorists have what Eliot calls "individual talent" that allows them to develop their field of knowledge. What Ruby said is evident in what the prominent British children's writer Roald Dahl (1916-1990) did as a folklorist/fairy-tale writer/rewriter of poetry who revolutionized the genre of fairy-tales when he wrote *Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes* (1982). The six best known fairy-tales Cinderella, Jack and the Beanstalk, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Little Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs were revised to introduce the modern child to humour, twists in the plots of the traditional stories and scenes that stimulate critical thinking. In a different narrative tone (in her chapter, Katharine Young focuses on "Storyworlds/Narratology" 213-221), Dahl's Cinderella, the most captivating, attracts the attention of the child by criticizing the traditional story,

> I guess you think you know this story.
> You don't. The real one's much more gory.
> The phoney one, the one you know,
> Was cooked up years and years ago,
> And made to sound all soft and sappy
> Just to keep the children happy.

Convincingly, Dahl changes the ending of the story, after showing how Cinderella disapproves of the character of the Prince and refuses to marry him,

> … Cinderella
> Was married to a lovely feller,
> A simple jam maker by trade,
> Who sold good home-made marmalade.
> Their house was filled with smiles and laughter
> And they were happy ever after.

This revised fairy-tale and all the others in the volume involve a change in both form and content. They show a clear interest in the idea of class consciousness (discussed by Andrew Teveron in "Marxism," 47-55), feminism and gender (empowering girls which is dealt with by Allison Craven in "Feminism," 65-73 and by Anne E. Duggan, 113-121) and psychology (discussed by Veronica Schanoes in the *Companion*, 40-46). And in general, Dahl's fairy-tales were re-written in such a way to lend themselves to be produced in the form of an audiobook, a BBC production, computer animated television films, and it can be watched as a YouTube trailer (dealt with by Patricia Sawin and Milbre Burth in "Performance," 56-64).

Developing and producing Dahl's book in different media confirms that Rudy is sound in arguing that folklorists "concede" that communication does not only involve "the voice and the spoken word" but "hands and eyes and tools (technologies)" with "intermedial mingling." Setting the tone in this opening chapter

for this *Companion* (as mentioned earlier) that is inclusive rather than exclusive, Rudy sheds light on how the way folklorists have evolved using the new media has integrated the "differently abled" in society since folklorists have an interest in the past, but simultaneously they are communicating with an audience at a moment in the present, with an eye on the future. Although in the past, the differently abled were marginalized, at present governments and human rights institutions are taking revolutionary steps to empower them and the new media is helping in this. When Rudy eloquently states that "staying attuned to tradition requires us to insist on recognizing human beings as *communicative omnivores* whose expressive media overlap and expand rather than supersede and replace" (3-4), she is not directly referring to the differently abled, but the idea of "expanding" brings them in. Later in the *Companion,* there is a section on "Disability" by Ann Schmiesing with the subtitles: "Disability Studies and Fairy Tales" and "Elsa: Super-Ability as Disability?" (104-111)

The two images that cannot be ignored in Rudy's chapter are the "*communicative omnivores*" and "superorganic entities". With the global use of the internet, the fact that the cell/mobile phone is now owned even by children and with the frequent use of the social media, the fact that human beings are "communicative" is difficult if not impossible to counteragrue. The "Disney Corporation" (as Lynda Haas and Shaina Trapedo put it, 178-187) "with global distribution channels in every conceivable medium" (178) played an incredible role in communicating messages through adapting fairytales in sensational productions that created trends like that of the princess among girls, for example. Another fact that cannot be refuted is that human beings in general are omnivores. Definitely there are exceptions to every rule, but time has proven that this is an accurate description of human beings. In her attempt to teach children what different creatures eat in her poetry picture book *What's for Dinner*, Katherine Hauth in "Eating Words" informs children about insectivores, carnivore, herbivores, and finally omnivores in the concluding stanza,

> When you know
> that omni means all,
> you will know
> that omnivores call
>
> Everything
>   they can suck or chew—
>   sometimes even me or you—
> food.

Even in addressing children by mentioning food, Hauth is referring not only to what omnivores eat to nourish the body, but is also pointing out that there are "human" parasites that "can suck or chew—sometimes even me and you." Rudy's

"communicative omnivores" is broadening the symbolism even further by suggesting that human beings consume literally everything on the face of the earth. In relation to the "superorganic entities," Rudy said,

> The ideas and patterns associated with traditions, and expressed as stories, sayings, songs, customs, celebrations, objects, and artifacts, sometimes seem to have such a life of their own that scholars at one time thought of these expressions as superorganic entities. (4)

As discussed earlier, the story of Cinderella does have a life of its own (discussed in a chapter entitled "Adaptation and the Fairy-Tale Web" by Cristina Bacchilega, 145-153) and Rudy provides evidence that, with this particular fairy-tale, "browsing the children's folklore picture book aisle reveals [Cinderella] stories from around the world: Chinese, Egyptian, North American Indigenous, Mexican, Russian" (5). She adds that

> the digital humanities project Fairy Tales on Television Visualizations (FTTV) finds "Cinderella" the most frequently televised fairy tale from the 1950s to the present, as indicated by a database of mostly North American, but some Japanese, British, and European, television shows Japanese, British, and European, television shows. In 2015, Disney revisited its animated classic with the Kenneth Branagh–directed, live-action *Cinderella*. Each retelling situates the tale in specific contexts while adding to its intertextual and intermedial resonances. (5)

Another character that is a "superorganic" entity is the spider: Spiderman in the west is a most popular figure among children, Anansi spider stories are integral to African folklore and the story of the spider that wove a web at the entrance of the cave in which Prophet Muhammad and his friend Abu-Bakr hid in their flight from Makka to Madina (Enani, 87). And yes, the list in the quote above does constitute "superorganic entities" for be it a birthday celebration, a prayer, a song, a wedding or any ritual, it is similar to every other and yet different. Because the term organic refers to a living entity that grows and develops with a life of its own, unlike any other, adding the prefix "super" gives this entity a superior dimension as an element of culture.

By its very nature, folklore constitutes the body of traditions shared by people belonging to the same culture and passed on from one generation to another invariably involves the use of memory. Jan Assmann strongly argues that memory

> is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level. Identity, in its turn, is related to time. A human self is a "diachronic identity," built "of the stuff of time" (Luckmann). This synthesis of time and identity is effectuated by memory. (2008, 109)

The key words here are awareness, selfhood, personal and collective identity, and time. In Dahl's "Cinderella" extract quoted above, the poet directly communicates with children to inform them not to assume to know the story. How intriguing! The story is dynamic rather than static. Although the traditional story is well known and is integral to the "collective memory" of human beings, Dahl is asserting that our "collective memory" is not playing tricks, but a retelling of the story is possible and necessary because the times have changed. The traditional Cinderella story does not suit liberal females in the modern age: they have a mind of their own and are independent thinkers.

In "Communicative and Cultural Memory" Assmann argues that "Memory enables us to live in groups and communities, and living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory" (109). Despite the fact that there is no mention of fairy-tales here in Assmann, he distinguishes between Maurice Halbwach's "collective memory," which is set "apart from the realm of traditions, transmissions and transferences" (Assmann, 110) and his own idea of memory which includes "mimetic memory," "the memory of things," "communicative memory," and "cultural memory" (Assmann 2011, 5-6). Such distinctions aside, the stories that human beings share as families and communities, constitute a fundamental part of their growing up process and their memory. This is why what Rudy wrote in a seemingly paradoxical statement at the beginning of the paragraph below, in a way, echoes Assmann's claim quoted above. Rudy said,

> Hearing, seeing, and knowing someone else's situation, their very different situatedness, may yet allow for their very similar humanity and life situations. This is one great reason for keeping and sharing the fairy tale, to acknowledge and transform social division. As Maria Tatar astutely observes, "Fairy tales register an effort on the part of both women and men to develop maps for coping with personal anxieties, family conflicts, social frictions, and the myriad frustrations of everyday life" (1999, xi). No wonder people around the world love them and tell them over and over in every available communicative technology and semiotic mode. (4)

Both Assmann and Rudy describe humans as social beings who share their lives together and have similar and different experiences that render fairy-tales as a repository that allows them to understand one another. The story of beauty and the beast that alludes to the idea of appearance versus reality, the power of kindness and love is admirable and well known in ever society and will be forever remembered and retold. This is why when "living in groups and communities enables us to build a memory" (Assmann p. 109), human beings hopefully "acknowledge and transform social division" (Rudy p. 4). I say hopefully because although there are so many

fairy-tales in the world about how virtue prevails, there are conflicts and wars everywhere.

In the latter part of the chapter, Rudy discusses dichotomies in fairy-tales: oral versus written, "imagined and real worlds" (5), "intertextual and intermedial" (6), "shapeshifting" (30) characters that are "filmed, televised and digital counterparts" (6), "shifts between fantasy and reality" (6) and whether thinking and the imagination are "universal" or not. Such dichotomies are not unique to fairytales but to our lives as human beings in the modern world. And since thoughts are symbolic, as she claims, they are linked to Jung's archetype and the collective unconscious. The bond, therefore, between fairytales, culture and the media is truly valid. This bond can be exemplified through the portrayal of characters especially animals to support Rudy's definition that "Folklore was thus conceptualized as that specific part of culture, or group values, that gets expressed as stories, sayings, songs, superstitions, rituals, and ceremonies that stand out as unusual in the contemporary time period" (7).

Animals in fairytales have been focal, but animals in different environments/cultures have different roles. Since the time of the ancient Egyptians, for example, animals were integral to their culture and emerged in their rituals and activities, be they royal, religious or mundane. The crocodile and ibis were sacred, one standing for the god of water and the other for the god of writing and inspiration, who stood for Thoth, the god responsible for the ceremony of "weighing the heart." The ancient Egyptians brought man and animal together when they produced the sublime sphinx with the head of a man and the body of a lion. It was, therefore, natural to find animals portrayed in the scenes on the walls of monuments and on papyrus to exhibit the different roles they played. Although it is definitely "unusual" to regard animals as sacred in Egypt, Egyptians use the falcon Horus as the symbol of Egypt Air, Egypt's prominent modern sculptor Mahmoud Mokhtar (1891-1934) carved his spectacular statue "The Renaissance of Egypt" with the graceful peasant woman representing Egypt who helps the Sphinx to rise, and at the center of Egyptian flag is the Eagle of Saladin which is the emblem of anti-colonialism. These animals, in a way, establish a bond between symbols in ancient and modern Egypt. Such animals can be studied as archetypes and they are at the basis of the Egyptian collective unconscious. It is true none of these are talking animals, but each tells a different story. In Egyptian Arabic stories for children, animals do have a voice. Abdel-Tawab Youssef (1928-2015) wrote the biography of the life of Prophet Muhammad for children by having the elephant, she-ass, camel, *burāq* (a creature not known to mankind), snake, dove, horse, goat, she-camel and ewe each narrate the event they witnessed in the life of the Prophet. Egypt's poet laureate Ahmed Shawky (1868-1932) wrote poems for children about birds, and on "The Story of the Fox and the Cock," "The Donkey and the Ship," "The Lion, the Fox and the Calf" in which animals communicate with each other and with humans to entertain, empower and share experiences with children.

These works and many others lead many scholars to read and discuss anthropomorphism and Human-Animal Studies (HAS) and start comparing how writers for children in different cultures (Ahmed Shawky in Egypt and Ted Hughes

in England, for example) use animals in works of fiction for more reasons than one. Some writers focus on animals in their natural habitat to introduce city children to elements of nature, others use them to deal with sensitive, critical and traumatic issues that become easier to discuss with children through reading works of art with them. In *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1981), the Kenya author and scholar Ngugi wa Thiong'o describes their favorite animal the hare as "being small, weak but full of innovative wit arid cunning, was our hero. We identified with him as he struggled against the brutes of prey like lion, leopard, hyena. His victories were our victories and we learnt that the apparently weak can outwit the strong (p. 9)." As for the Nigerian Nobel Laureate Chinua Achebe, in his picture book *The Drum* the tortoise in the tradition of West African Tortoise tales" who goes "to search for food, manages to find the land of the spirits" (Youssef 2022 p. 8). All these examples that *ku 'ualoha ho 'omanawanui* in a chapter entitled "*E Ho 'okokoho 'e iā Pe 'ape 'amakawalu* (Digitizing the Eight-Eyed Bat): Indigenous Wonder Tales, Culture, and Media" (122-132) would regard as "wonder tales" (122) rather than fairy-tales, provide evidence, that within the same continent, Africa, writers focus on different animals altogether.

Reviewing such a volume has been a real challenge. This review, as mentioned earlier, did not discuss the different parts or chapters of the book because they are numerous and varied, but has taken the lead from what Rudy explains are the "Guidelines for contributors" (9): "Ideally, your contribution would open the topic, rather than just summing it up" and "critically discussing leading views" together with "establishing future directions" (p. 9). The discussion about animals above helps in stressing that the gap Ballhilega and Naithani identified in this *Companion* is serious. Bacchilega and Naithani mention *The Arabian Nights* as representing fairytales from what they call the "Eastern" or "Oriental" (83) part of the world, but Africa and Asia, past and present, have been ignored. What is also significant about their chapter is that they acknowledge that "the impact of colonialism on the collection, translation, distribution, appeal, and study of fairy tales in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is less discussed" (83). Bacchilega and Naithani argue that

> the European fairy-tale's hegemony in common perception is unmistakable, and it is deeply and insidiously connected to colonialism and postcolonialism. This connection has spanned several centuries and informs contemporary global and capitalist media cultures. We would say that it is not possible to understand fairy tales' place in media cultures today without considering these stories' place in the colonial world. (83)

They add,

> In order to rethink the definition of fairy tale we need to revisit colonial folklore scholarship and get an overview of how the fairy tales of non-European peoples were treated by European colonizers. (84)

Despite European hegemony, Aladdin (discussed in the chapter on "Orientalism" by Jenny Heijun Wills (133-142), Ali Baba, Open Sesame, Sindbad are memes, namely cultural features that have been passed on from past to present and from east to west. However, what is more important than studying how western fairytales affected the colonies is to explore the fairytales of the natives of these colonies. It is also necessary to explore not only how the colonizers "treated" the fairy tales of the colonized, because these were probably regarded as not worthy of being discussed, but how the natives themselves told and retold their own tales. Bacchilega and Naithani argument is quite valid and to fill this gap, a sequel to this *Companion* is needed to shed light on fairytales in Africa and the Far East in colonial and postcolonial contexts together with the efforts of the process of decolonization. "Political and Identity Issues" will be discussed at a different level. This new volume will definitely include a more comprehensive definition of fairytales.

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