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# Book Review: Fairy-Tale Films beyond Disney: International Perspectives. Edited by Jack Zipes, Pauline Greenhill, and Kendra Magnus-Johnston.

Qinna Shen

*Bryn Mawr College*, [qshen@brynmawr.edu](mailto:qshen@brynmawr.edu)

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***Fairy-Tale Films beyond Disney: International Perspectives.* Edited by Jack Zipes, Pauline Greenhill, and Kendra Magnus-Johnston. New York: Routledge, 2016. Pp. xviii + 355. Paperback \$49.95. ISBN 978-0-415-70930-9.**

Disney and Hollywood films contribute significantly to America's soft power around the world. Resistance against US cultural imperialism has been widespread but arduous. Jack Zipes, whose antipathy toward global Disneyfication is well known, calls attention in the first chapter of this volume to "the great cultural tsunami of fairy-tale films," observing that "globalization and postmodern technology have provided filmmakers throughout the world with the means to challenge the Disney worldview and conventional narrative" (7). This long-awaited volume brings together an international array of authors who explore national or regional fairy-tale film histories on every continent but Antarctica. In general, the authors examine Disney's hegemony in a given nation or region and describe the efforts that have been made to challenge it. To that end, authors extrapolate distinctive national specificities of the fairy-tale films they discuss. A recurrent theme in the chapters is the tension between the maintenance of national characteristics and their erosion in the face of globalization and the onslaught of blockbusters from Disney and other American corporations. Admittedly, it is hard to compete with Hollywood's commercial successes. The chapters nonetheless convincingly demonstrate the vitality of fairy-tale films around the world and cite many that display more aesthetic experimentation and critical capacities than Disney productions do. In addition, readers are introduced to important authors, collectors, filmmakers, and their works.

In order to achieve its global perspective, the volume must define fairy-tale films broadly. A number of the regions surveyed here (e.g., Asia, Africa, Australia, and South America) have

hardly produced any noteworthy straightforward film adaptations of classical European tales. Instead, filmmakers draw on their own local cultural legacy, adapting stories, legends, and myths that are comparable to European fairy tales in narrative, structure, and motifs. Many of the adaptations, however, are not billed as fairy-tale films. One reason for avoiding the fairy-tale label is that, as Bacchilega points out in her chapter on Italy, filmmakers are afraid of “limiting one’s audience to children in an already small market” (105). Therefore, fairy-tale-like narratives are often combined with elements of other film genres, such as horror, fantasy, comedy, or thrillers, and audiences perceive them as such.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the international appraisal of Disney’s influence shifted from rather positive to negative. In the early days, many filmmakers were indebted to Disney’s innovative animation technology. Even Soviet live-action filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein were influenced by Disney’s works and production methods, while *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), for example, “remained a highly-esteemed film for Soviet animators” (Balina and Beumers, 126). But as Disney gained a virtual monopoly in the animation market, its rapacious impact was perceived as unwelcome. The Danes, fellow countrymen of Hans Christian Andersen, believed they could “build an entire film industry to animate his tales” and “could outperform Walt Disney, who was considered a capable artisan, but no true artist” (Oxfeldt, 110). The chapters point out schools of animation in other countries that rival Disney’s successes. In Japan, Hayao Miyazaki’s and Isao Takahata’s anime films use traditional hand-drawn animation in unconventional ways and go beyond the Disney model (Zipes, 2). In addition, Japanese fairy tales rarely end with “happily ever after” as Disney’s do (Napier). The animation techniques of Italian filmmakers Anton Gino Domeneghini and Emanuele Luzzati provides a stylistic alternative to both Disney’s classic and computer-animated

models (Bacchilega, 104). Indeed, Soviet animated shorts could also surpass Disney (Balina and Beumers, 132). In France, which has a long anti-American intellectual history, postwar reimaginings and queer tales challenge Disney's fairy-tale hegemony (Duggan). But as the French critic Pascal Vimenet commented, "Disney animation remains a reference, positive or negative" (Duggan, 64).

Instead of attempting to summarize the content of each of the book's twenty chapters, I will focus on some of the general observations and conclusions that emerge from the richly informative and insightful essays. But first, it will be helpful to describe the contours of the book, which begins with three general chapters. After Zipes sets the stage for the giant "cultural tsunami" of fairy-tale films, Kendra Magnus-Johnston examines live-action biopics of authors, collectors, and filmmakers associated with the fairy-tale canon, including Andersen, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, George Méliès, Walt Disney, and J. M. Barrie, and notes how the biopics recast the lives of these figures. Sofia Samatar treats global representations of tales from *A Thousand and One Nights* as one example of "traveling orientalism" and a visual spectacle of the exotic (39). Then the volume turns to regional traditions, beginning with four chapters on Western European fairy-tale films in Great Britain (Paul Wells), France (Anne E. Duggan), Germany (Jack Zipes), Italy (Cristina Bacchilega), and the Scandinavian countries (Elisabeth Oxfeldt), and then moving eastward to cover the very important traditions in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia (Marina Balina and Birgit Beumers), the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Peter Hames), and Poland (Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Marek Oziewicz). Four chapters treat Asian countries: Japan (Susan Napier), the People's Republic of China (Jing Li), India (Sadhana Naithani), and Korea (Sung-Ae Lee). The remaining chapters deal with African (Jessica Tiffin), Australian (Elizabeth Bullen and Naarah Sawers), Canadian (Pauline Greenhill and Steven

Kohm), and Latin American (Laura Hubner) fairy-tale films, with a concluding chapter by Jack Zipes on American fairy-tale films and their future.

The essays give overviews of the development of fairy-tale films in conjunction with each territory's political history as well as its cinema history, with which fairy-tale films are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, focusing on fairy-tale films leads several of the authors to conclude that this genre constitutes a significant part of national cinema. The chapters also pursue individual themes, for example, suppressed desire and the aesthetic innovation in British animation; the use of Aesopian language in Communist and post-Communist Eastern Europe; romance and gender politics in post-revolutionary China; the fairy-tale aspect of Bollywood films, which generally show fewer critical tendencies; a predilection for horror in Korean tales; the lost child motif in Australian films; crime in Canadian examples; and decolonization and societal problems in Latin America's *novo cinema*. What distinguishes fairy-tale films outside the U.S. from Disney/Hollywood treatments is a dose of realism as well as the subversive function with which fairy tales are endowed.

The volume's global approach to fairy-tale films strongly demonstrates the North-South divide and, with it, the prevalent anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in many regions, including India, Korea, Africa, and South America—places traditionally regarded as belonging to the Third World—as well as the erstwhile colonies Australia and Canada. The chapters on these areas address indigenous traditions, the colonial legacy, and postcolonial fairy-tale films. In Africa, for example, beast fables assisted colonialization in constructing the continent as “wild” and “primitive” (Tiffin, 230). The Japanese colonizers in Korea also used fairy tales for propaganda purposes. In the anti-colonial struggle, these places resisted European and US film

imports and developed nationally distinctive cinemas. The book contains many references to the use and abuse of fairy tales by colonizers and political regimes.

In the final chapter, Zipes concludes that “[a]ctually, we can never get ‘beyond’ the Disney production of fairy-tale films in the twenty-first century. That is, we can never get beyond notions of the well-made conventional fairy-tale film with its stereotypical characters and beyond the commercial exploitation of oral and literary fairy tales and marketing that panders to the lowest common denominator among viewers,” which Zipes identifies as the marketers themselves (278). But in light of the improvement that is already taking place in Disney’s gender depictions, Zipes remains hopeful that change will come, and also from within Disney. Therefore, fairy-tale films, even those by Disney itself, must go beyond Disney.

This is an ambitious and well-edited volume. Praise aside, an inadvertent mistake in the preface may escape many readers: the editors have confused “the Republic of China” (xvi), which today refers to Taiwan only, with the People’s Republic of China, which Li’s chapter in fact discusses. This error is, however, more than offset by the volume’s conscious and conscientious endeavor to break out of Eurocentric research by embracing a global study of the fairy-tale film. The film summaries are enjoyable to read and the analytic discussions are accessible to nonspecialists. The most famous fairy tales of Andersen and the Brothers Grimm have become a repertoire for world cinema to draw on. It is intriguing to see how a story can be adapted and reinterpreted in various new ways, adding national and cultural flavor to a traditional tale. Teachers of fairy tales may discover here lesser-known films that lie outside the conventional European or Disney canons and are suitable for classroom use. In this way, the laudable anti-eurocentric practice in scholarship can be translated into pedagogy.

**Qinna Shen, Bryn Mawr College**