A review of

A Cultural History of Fairy Tales in the Long Nineteenth Century

D.L. Ashliman

Following the pattern established in the six-part series edited by Anne E. Duggan, the eight essays in this volume trace the evolution of the fairy tale, its production, reception, and influence throughout the long 19th century (defined here as the period between 1800 and 1920). The following chapters comprise this volume: 'Forms of the Marvelous' by Laurence Talairach, 'Adaptation' by Jan Susina, 'Gender and Sexuality' by Amy Billone, 'Humans and Non-Humans' by Nicole Thesz, 'Monsters and the Monstrous' by Sarah Marsh, 'Space' by John Pennington, 'Socialization' by Michelle Beissel Heath, and 'Power' by Molly Clark Hillard.

Throughout this work, 'fairy tale' is broadly defined. The term encompasses texts that feature magic and other fantasy elements, including anthropomorphised animals. Most of the chapters go beyond literal texts. Visual interpretations, including those of Gustave Doré, Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, John Tenniel and Beatrix Potter, are discussed alongside the stories that they illustrate. Other non-verbal subjects include the depiction (often with gender ambiguity) of fairy-tale characters such as Peter Pan in stage and film productions.

In her series preface Anne E. Duggan further explains that the term 'fairy tale' is traditionally associated with 'children's literature, old wives' tales, and oral peasant culture'. Nineteenth-century Europe, inspired by the first publication in 1812 of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children's and Household Tales*) by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, experienced a surge in the collection and appreciation of oral stories and folklore. However, with the exception of chapter four, 'Humans and Non-Humans: Uncanny Encounters in the Grimms' Tales', this book deals only marginally with the folklore roots of literary fairy tales. For example, there is no mention at all of such pioneer collectors of national and regional folklore as Jón Árnason (Iceland), J.F. Campbell (Scotland), James Halliwell-Phillipps (England), Robert Hunt (Cornwall), Evald Tang Kristensen (Jutland), Laura Gonzenbach (Sicily), or Paul Sébillot (France).

Geographically, the book's eight essays centre around Great Britain, with frequent forays into France, Germany and Denmark, due to the enduring influence of Charles Perrault, the Grimm brothers, and Hans Christian Andersen.

A standard translation of the term 'fairy tale' into German is '*Zaubermärchen*' ('magic tale'), and magic is the thread that ties all eight of the book's essays together. This includes not only the beneficial use of magic objects and incantations but also the confrontation against threatening superhuman monsters.

In many respects the 19th century was a pragmatic era – a time of unprecedented advances in science and technology. The ensuing conflict between fantasy and reality gave rise to sometimes heated debate about the appropriateness of fairy tales as entertainment for children. Already in 1812 with their title *Children's and Household Tales*, the Grimm brothers asserted the appropriateness for children of at least some traditional tales. Mid-century, Charles Dickens gave a dramatic example of this debate in chapter seven of *Hard Times* (1854): when Sissy Jupe admits to Mr Gradgrind that she reads stories about fairies, she is reprimanded, 'Never breathe a word of such destructive nonsense any more.'

The relationship between the make-believe of fairy tales and the pragmatism of science and technology, especially with reference to children, touches most of the essays in this book. Prominent here is the chapter 'Adaptation', a comprehensive history of the evolution of children's literature in the 19th century. Whereas fairy tales published in the earlier centuries (for example, those of Charles Perrault or Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy) were intended primarily for adults, the 19th century witnessed increasing acceptance of fantasy literature for children. Important 19th-century authors and editors who adapted traditional mythological and folklore themes and motifs into literature for children include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Charles Kingsley, Andrew Lang, Joseph Jacobs, John Ruskin, George MacDonald, J.M. Barrie, L. Frank Baum, Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Grahame, and Edith Nesbit.

The topic of gender and sexuality is given an entire chapter, but its thread weaves through most of the book. Amy Billone, in chapter three, presents a symbolic interpretation of Hans Christian Andersen's ever-popular 'The Little Mermaid' and Oscar Wilde's 'The Fisherman and His Soul', each with the central theme of unfulfillable love between a human and a mermaid. The inspiration for these stories may have been prompted by the well-documented but socially unacceptable homosexuality of each author. Paradoxically, the 19th century idolised fairy tales that symbolically depicted feelings that could not be openly expressed in everyday life.

Another aspect of gender identity is outlined in Michelle Beissel Heath's chapter on the socialisation of children through fairy tales. In traditional fairy tales the pathways to success of male and female protagonists are quite different: boys become men through acts of bravery and skill (killing dragons or climbing glass mountains) whereas girls become women more often through physical beauty and passive humility, prominently demonstrated in the various 'Sleeping Beauty' stories where the heroine falls asleep as a girl and awakens on her wedding day. This chapter discusses many tales (for example, the Grimms' 'Snow White') where the heroine's primary quality is beauty, but who makes herself useful with household chores. The author contrasts this and similar traditional stories with Edith Nesbit's literary fairy tale 'Fortunatus Rex & Co.' (1901) and its critique of contemporary expectations and evaluation of women's work.

The book's final chapter deals with power, an appropriate conclusion to the work as a whole. The uses and abuses of power form a central theme throughout the fairy-tale world. In this space a Gretel can outwit and overpower a witch and bring wealth to her impoverished father. A Cinderella can prevail over her more favoured stepsisters and advance from rags to riches. A disinherited and presumably slow-witted son can disenchant a haunted castle and marry a princess. And, perhaps most unrealistically, with the help of a magic light a discharged soldier can overthrow a king and assume power over an entire realm. These stories reflect an important function of many fairy tales: fantasy wish fulfilment. Goals impossible in real life may well be realised in the make-believe world of fairy tales.

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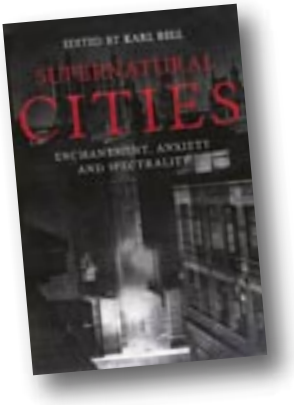

A review of

Supernatural Cities: Enchantment, Anxiety and Spectrality

Amy Butt

In the pub last night a friend asked me what I was reading, a casual question thrown out carelessly into the dimly lit, wood-panelled space. I found myself shifting forward and lowering my voice, my breath barely causing the candle on the table to flicker. 'Let me tell you a tale of the banshee that lives in the handball alley …'

The collection of essays gathered in *Supernatural Cities: Enchantment, Anxiety and Spectrality* ache to be retold. This is all too fitting for a collection which revels in the power of storytelling, exploring the ways in which oral histories, folklore and folktales both convey and construct places. Each chapter lingers in a specific location, revealing the stories of supernatural experiences which lurk beneath the surface, and revelling in the complex

multiplicity of cities. It is a global tour of the supernatural which takes the reader through Paris, London, South Africa's East London and Mdantsane, Limerick, New York, Manila, Washington, Krasnoturynisk and Zarechny, Tokyo, Ballarat, Mexico City, Beijing, and Manchester. In doing so it invites us, as the collection's editor Karl Bell expresses, to engage with the 'emotional and imaginative topologies enfolded' within these places (3). The book is split into sections on 'Urban Enchantment', 'Urban Anxiety' and 'Urban Spectrality,' speaking to the ways in which magical beliefs and practices articulate community and enrich urban space, how the monstrous and the Gothic resonate with social anxiety and environmental unease, and how haunted topographies serve to retain communal memory, granting histories of horror a spectral presence. While this structure serves to draw out commonalities of concern, these themes are all richly present throughout the book.

Just as each of these chapters expresses the multiplicity of experience, expressed in tales which shape and structure each of these individual cities, the repeated acts of story-telling within this book powerfully remind us of the storied nature of place, continually reshaped by the act of retelling. It resonates with the understanding of place as 'open, multiple, and relational, unfinished and always becoming'[1] as expressed by urban geographer Doreen Massey; place is 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far'.[2]

This storied nature of place is richly reflected in 'The Banshee Lives in the Handball Alley' by Tracey Fahey. Fahey's fascinating examination of legends and folktales in Limerick, captured by Irish artists Michael Fortune and Aileen Lambert, understands these stories as part of Irish folklore traditions which serve to establish and affirm community identity through the act of telling, creating a shared space within the story. They are acts of collective memory preserved through oral storytelling, but they are also part of a 'living gothic tradition' which serves to reform these tales so that they continue to carry the contemporary horrors of 'forbidden places, behavioural codes transgressed, and rites not followed' (77).

While Fahey reflects on storytelling within a community, this book also offers reflections on the role of storytelling from the outside, and the horror constructed from fear of the other. In Oliver Betts' examination of H.P. Lovecraft's *The Horror at Red Hook*, terror has very little to do with the experiences of those living in Red Hook and the Lower East Side and much to do with 'wider cultural anxiety' around immigration and the chaos of slum neighbourhoods (111), and Lovecraft's xenophobic fear of the unknown is recast as unspeakable horror. Tom Sykes' work on 'Manila-as-Hell' continues this examination of how places are presented in tales told by the outsider. Sykes looks at how Orientalist readings combine with perceptions of poverty, urban decay and Catholic superstition to lead multiple authors to cast Manila with hell-like characteristics, frequently disregarding the roles of colonialism and US imperialism in creating these conditions.

Similarly, in David Puglia's chapter on 'The Goatman and Washington, D.C.', stories of the Goatman are both a response to the real figures of hermits and increasing numbers of dead bodies being dumped in specific areas, and a 'locus for the transference of fears'

regarding the 'encroaching metropolitan area' and associated crime (147). Here the figure of the Goatman serves as both a source of anxiety and 'a way of expressing and handling' a fear that 'otherwise could not be managed' (156). Storytelling is understood as a way to approach and attend to existential fears in Deirdre Flynn's examination of a Huraki Murakami novel in 'The Uncanny City', where social anxieties of the urban dweller inhabiting unknowable late-capitalist urban space are expressed in experiences of isolation, disorientation and disconnection. While in Natalia Veselkova, Mikhail Vandyshev and Elena Pryamikova's recounting of the folklore of 'young' cities in the Urals, which are heavily reliant on industry and founded on an associated heroic conquest of nature, stories of environmental horror serve as a space to address fears that nature will reassert itself, or that the industrial processes which we rely upon will have hidden monstrous consequences.

This narrative co-existence of heroic endeavour and unknowable loss is echoed in Alex Bevan in 'The London Underground'. This chapter considers the multiple readings of the underground, as a gleaming space of industrial triumph and the gloaming dark of subterranean horror. Here the modern passenger travels on 'the largest ghost-train network in operation' (196) through the burial sites of the dead; those displaced for the Tube's construction, those lost in horrific instances of overcrowding and fire, and the individuals who end their lives on the lines. Such a haunting presence of historic horrors is particularly powerfully conveyed by David Waldron and Sharn Waldron's account of Ballarat in 'Ghost on the Goldfield', as a city haunted by legacies of colonialism. Here, ghost stories are an expression of the 'deep, pervasive sense of loss' (236) felt by immigrant communities separated from homeland, and the 'hidden grief' experienced by indigenous communities in the systematic destruction of heritage and violent dislocation (237). They argue that these ghost stories serve as a way of drawing attention to and 'memorialising traumatic experiences' (240), while also giving these experiences potency in the present, demanding that they be addressed.

This understanding resonates with the role of monstrous tales in Manchester, compellingly explored by Morag Rose in 'There's Something in the Water!'. Here the canal serves as a 'repository of stories, many shameful, of the exploitation and horror the city was built upon' (298), where stories of Jenny Greenteeth kept children safe from industrial effluent, and the monster of the canals is 'past made flesh and returned to haunt a landscape that seeks to bury history under layers of regeneration' (302). Rose uses techniques of psychogeography, personal recounting of walks and mapmaking to express the multiple readings of the water, as a site of horror but also a site of nostalgia for a lost collective identity and purpose through industry. This use of maps is echoed in William Redwood's examination of the esoteric in London, where the energy of places and their significance is understood as highly personal and continually shifting based on the specific encounter of the moment, and the map of the city is 'never definite, never totalised' (101). While in her account of 'Spectral Mexico City', María del Pilar Blanco explores the spectrality of space in

two novels through photographs, which are understood as moments of folded time, 'simultaneously frozen and eerily protracted' (259).

The role of historical records is also addressed in 'Magical Capital', where William Pooley reflects on the role of newspapers whose fascination with apparently fraudulent acts of witchcraft served to assert the prevalence of this practice. By examining how Paris told the story of itself in newspaper articles during the 18th century, Pooley reflects on the practices of modern witchcraft in this most modern of cities. Such potency of media presence is reiterated and updated by Felicity Wood in 'Fatal Seductions, False Promises and Urban Enchantments'. Here social media in modern South African cities serves to spread the message of wealth-giving spirits, figures who manipulate and control through the 'deceptive enchantment of consumer capitalism' (61). Similarly, the transformation of folklore through contemporary media is considered in Alevtina Solovyova's account of Beijing. Solovyova revels in the accrued ghostlore of this ancient city, recounting how traditional demonic characters have been adapted in contemporary culture, in a melange of real-life experiences and traditional literary forms, becoming transformed by advertising and tourism into 'objects of attraction and consumption' (287).

This collection vividly presents the ways in which the supernatural continues to shape the urban in multiple and complex webs of storytelling. The critical importance of this was most viscerally present in the works which directly addressed the supernatural in sites of historical violence and injustice, ranging from the personal tragedies of suicide and betrayal to the vast and intractable horrors of colonialism. Through these sections, there rises an argument that the supernatural serves to ensure that the past is not allowed to be laid to rest; instead it shapes spectres which linger and are recalled and recognised with each retelling. This grants historical events a powerful liveliness in the present moment, a recognition of the still-present pain of trauma within each specific location which is given voice through this communal storytelling. Through this book, these stories refuse to allow history to be softened into memory or nostalgia; instead its capacity for hurt remains active and present, lurking in the dark and demanding to be spoken.

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Notes

1. Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Sage, 2005), 59.
2. Massey, *For Space*, 24.