

Greenhill, Pauline. *Reality, Magic, and Other Lies: Fairy-Tale Film Truths* (Series in Fairy-Tale Studies). Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2020. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 264 pp. \$84.99 (cloth). \$32.99 (paper). ISBN 9780814347829 (cloth). ISBN 9780814342220 (paper).

The basic premise of Greenhill's *Reality, Magic, and Other Lies* is that, despite elements of the fantastic, not only are fairy tales linked to the experiential reality of those who tell them—a kind of “truth”—but the wonder elements of the wonder-tale explicitly frame the narrative as fictional—an “untruth,” if you will. Far from being paradoxical, the fairy-tale's true magic lies in its ability to tell figurative truths, rather than literal ones. And what is true for the *Märchen* is equally true for films based on, or which reference, those stories.

Despite dividing the book into two main sections—how the balance of verisimilitude and anti-mimesis are presented across entire *oeuvres* (be it the work of individual studios, directors, or writers), and a more thematic section examining several different cinematic treatments of individual tales (Hansel & Gretel, The Juniper Tree, and Cinderella)—the overall book coheres nicely. Overall, I am not only persuaded by her arguments, I am in full agreement with them. I have been teaching the fairy-tale film as anti-memetic for years, drawing on many of the same sources Greenhill cites. *Reality, Magic, and Other Lies* offers chapters I can use in my “Film & Folklore ” classes.

The central idea of the book is that fairy-tale films weave narratives of unreality: the films she discusses foreground artifice and their own construction in such a way as to violate what “traditional wisdom” would call the willing suspension of disbelief. In fact, fairy-tale films are predicated on “disbelief,” because those moments when the filmic world is ruptured, by the revelation of the author's hand, or self-consciously used special effects (like CGI), are invitations for the audience to read these moments discursively. The suggestion is that we do not believe in the mimesis of the film narrative but recognize its presentational frame as a fiction which needs discussion, an incorporation of the storytelling audience. Greenhill is also correct in focusing her analysis on illustrative sequences in the film, grounding her discussion in close textual analysis.

In her chapter on Tarsem [Singh]'s films *The Fall* and *Mirror, Mirror*, as well as his television series *Emerald City*, she introduces the highly useful terms “heterospatiality” and “heterotemporality:” the latter term coming from Brian L. Price' s 2012 article and refers to a cinematic mixing of different time periods in a single shot, of having characters in historical costume visually (as if unaware) mixing with the contemporary, for example (68); such heterotemporality is very much a practice of postmodernism. Greenhill develops Price's idea to include *heterospatiality*, a means of graphically mixing “spatial locations within the confined visual settings of the camera's gaze” (69) too. While, explicitly, the practices of heterotemporality and heterospatiality underline the anti-mimetic qualities of the fairy-tale film, they further, implicitly, are presented discursively welcoming the audience into the processes of signification. I will be borrowing these ideas for use in my own teaching.

At times, Greenhill, in laying bare her own methodology for this study, gives away too much and this opens her up to criticism. For example, throughout the book, she is much too dependent on citing the International Movie Database (IMDb) for “generic” descriptors; such is not necessary—I would rather see *her* generic descriptors for a film, than IMDb’s. Also, as she notes in her “Hansel and Gretel” chapter, her selection of films for discussion is predicated on Rotten Tomatoes aggregate scores, rather than anything inherent in the films themselves: Greenhill excludes films under a certain rating, and thereby misses potentially significant films (133). Her connecting William Friedkin’s *The Guardian* (138-141), *I, Robot* (147-150), and *The Cabin in the Woods* (155-158) to “Hansel and Gretel” are fuzzy connections at best. I have other problems with this chapter as well.

In her “Hansel and Gretel” chapter, Greenhill evokes Lee Edelman’s “No future” and Jack Halberstam’s “Queer Art of Failure” theses to the end that such child endangerment and infanticidal narratives operate in a “queer” challenge to the cultural assumptions of heteronormativity and heterosexuality (131). While I like Edelman’s work, at least as a provocation, Greenhill does not make the case that “Hansel and Gretel” (and in particular, the films she discusses) are thusly “queered.” Seeing apocalyptic imagery in these films is, according to Greenhill, part of an Edelmanian embrace of our own destruction (132). I am not disagreeing with the connection of Edelman to apocalyptic horror; but I am unconvinced by Greenhill’s argument to illustrate this. If Greenhill referenced Robin Wood’s highly influential “Introduction to the American Horror Film” and *his* 1979 discussion of “apocalyptic horror,” the case could be better made. The problem is that she wants to connect apocalyptic horror to “Hansel and Gretel” explicitly. This is where I question the success of some of her connections. I noted previously that she sees *The Cabin in the Woods* as an ersatz “Hansel and Gretel” narrative, particularly with the film’s apocalyptic ending. The two survivors of the narrative (but not of the apocalypse), Dana and Marty, are not Adam and Eve figures whose heterosexuality will repopulate a future humanity but are “just friends.” As Greenhill notes, “refusing the heterosexual, replacing it with the heterosocial, by implication places Marty and Dana in the realm of nonreproductive relationship, imputed as queer in American popular culture, as Edelman outlines” (157). Perhaps. But I would have liked to have seen the case made stronger, by using Wood (for example). Clearly this is one of the chapters I engaged the most with (and will be using in my class), which is why I wanted to see her connection of the fairy tale to Edelman and Halberstam more explicitly. I will also be using her chapter on “intersectional” Cinderella narratives (191-231), a chapter which I think best illustrates how the fairy tale film’s anti-mimetic presentation of narrative becomes discourse.

I have some minor quibbles, most of which I hold Wayne State University Press responsible for: the use of informal contractions, for example. Or the phrase “played by” parenthetically when referencing the actor who plays a character. I would always avoid, whenever possible, using a film’s dialogue as *evidence* of filmic discourse, rather than the performative aspects of the sequence, visually

and textually, to frame the dialogue. As an example of this last point, in her discussion of *Year of the Fish* (213-221), Greenhill uses bold typeface in her dialogue transcription to reflect changes to the editing and image construction (218-219). What Greenhill does is not incorrect; but in Film Studies, we would present it differently.

Greenhill does not engage with Eastern or Central European films per se, although an occasional reference is made in passing. However, I would like to see other film scholars adapt Greenhill's work to other film cultural contexts, such as applying her study of LAIKA studio's animation (33-65) to Švankmajer's stop-motion animation, with particular attention to the revelation of the animator's hand. But that might be a different book.

Overall, *Reality, Magic, and Other Lies* is a particularly informative book which deserves recognition. I hope that having published this volume, we can move the study of the fairy-tale film onwards, from the overly descriptive work of Jack Zipes in *The Enchanted Screen* (2010) to a more discursive study of what it means to tell these stories through this medium. And Greenhill's book is a major step in the right direction.

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