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A TALE WITHIN A TALE: *MISE EN ABYME* ADAPTATIONS OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Abstract

In accord with the promise made by Henry Jenkins that “old and new media will interact in ever more complex ways” (*Convergence Culture* 6), this research observes metamodern fairy tale adaptations of the twenty-first century in light of Christina Bacchilega’s construct of the *fairy-tale web* and Henry Jenkins’ theory of *convergence culture* and *transmedia storytelling*. The research will address the growing trend of embedding “wonder tale” collections within the context of a larger narrative as an artefact of significance, power, and material value. Although original tales with known authorship, these fairy tale adaptations are appended to the mythology and culture of the fantastic secondary worlds. Such texts tend to be parodic, subversive, and even carnivalesque (Bakhtin; Stephens), providing a commentary on the culture of their origin, as well as our own. By blending cultures, styles, and formats, *mise en abyme* wonder tales also result in the empowerment of specifically marginalised groups. Generally defined as spin-offs that are otherwise a part of a complex inter- and hypertextual web, these fairy tale collections constitute a metafictional body of knowledge and wisdom. In the digital era much focus is placed on multimodal, hypertextual, and transmedia narratives with a significant influence of fandom on the

production of such literary works. The study will focus on the popular examples of such practice, J.K. Rowling's *Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2007/2008) and Ransom Riggs' *Tales of the Peculiar* (2016), in order to define *mise en abyme* fairy tale adaptations, as well as to discuss their cultural significance and function.

Keywords: Adaptation, *mise en abyme*, fairy-tale web, convergence culture, trans-media storytelling

Introduction

In 2007, J.K. Rowling wrote *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* as a present for “the real insiders” (Wu 192) or the people who significantly contributed to the publication of the Harry Potter series. The only remaining copy in the original collection which was handwritten and illustrated by J.K. Rowling, called the “Moonstone edition,” was auctioned at Sotheby's on December 13, 2007 and sold to Amazon for £1,950,000, making this the highest bidding modern literary manuscript of all time, including a children's book or any J.K. Rowling manuscript (Cleland; see fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The “Moonstone edition” embellished with morocco leather, silver ornaments, and semiprecious stones, emphasising the material value of the original collection; “J.K. Rowling’s *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*”; *Amazon.com*, 2007; 25

The material inaccessibility of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* was greeted with strong reactions by the fandom who demanded the manuscript to be published and available for sale so that they might “feel, touch and read what Harry, Hermione and Ron read during the last days of war against Voldemort” (Wu 200). This resulted in the publication of the collector’s edition, and later, of the standard edition of the *Tales*, in 2008.

Prior to this, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* had already made their appearance in the final sequel of the Harry Potter heptalogy, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), where in the chapter “The Will of Albus Dumbledore” they are bequeathed to Hermione Granger by Professor Dumbledore as a body of traditional literature that is “as familiar to many of the students at Hogwarts as Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty are to Muggle (non-magical children)” (*Bard* xi).¹ However, in the final sequel of the wizarding saga, their significance surpasses that of a “children’s tale, told to amuse rather than to instruct,” as the final tale in the collection, “The Tale of the Three Brothers,” contains information about the Hallows or three magical objects which “if united, will make their possessor the master of Death” (*Deathly Hallows* 333). The literary, as well as material value of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* as the integral part of the Harry Potter series will be observed in the context of Christina Bacchilega’s socio-cultural construct of the *fairy-tale web* and Henry Jenkins’ theory of *convergence culture* and *trans-media storytelling*. Furthermore, the phenomenon of *mise en abyme* adaptations of fairy tales will be explored by means of the example of *Tales of the Peculiar* (2016) by Ransom Riggs as representative of the publishing trend that reflects the complex multimodal and transmedial nature of contemporary storytelling. Accordingly, this research explores the cultural and transformative properties of fairy tales, vehicles of enchantment and empowerment across centuries, as witnesses in the digital era in which the developments in technology do not always go hand in hand with the quality and credibility of disseminated information. *Mise en abyme* adaptations of fairy tales demonstrate that adapting fairy tales in the twenty-first century has become a complex process of weaving, embedding, and spinning tales, which reflects the intensely interactive features of the World Wide Web, fosters the elusive quest for truth, and signifies an honest attempt at avoiding cultural retardation.

¹ For the sake of clarity, the two case studies will be referred to in the text as (*Bard*) and (*Peculiar*). **363**

1. Adaptations of Fairy Tales

In her book *Fairy Tales Transformed?: Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder* (2013) Christina Bacchilega reveals that all fairy tales are essentially adaptations because the search for the “hypotext” (Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* 5) or the original text is impossible. Furthermore, Bacchilega’s construct of the *fairy-tale web*² supports the idea that “all texts – oral, written, visual and social – participate in the web of intertextual relations” (19). During the course of history, fairy tales have been adapted to suit the needs of culture, society and authorship:

The fairy tale distinguished itself as a genre a few centuries ago when storytellers began appropriating different kinds of magical folktales and transforming them and conventionalizing them, for it became necessary in the modern world to adapt the oral tales to the moral, literary, and aesthetic standards of a particular society and to make them acceptable for diffusion in the public sphere. (Zipes et al. 175)

Conversely, fairy tales make it possible for us to observe and make conclusions about the nature of the world in which we live. Likewise, in *Literature and Film* (2007) Robert Stam notes that adaptations “adapt to” various environments, tastes and media which are influenced by market demands, commercial preferences, aesthetics and censorship, making them a “hybrid form” or the “meeting place of different species” (3). Influenced by Bakhtinian conception of authorship, Stam views adaptation as “a hybrid construction mingling different media and discourse and collaborations,” marking them as “dialogic” and “intertextual” (9).

Rather than searching for the original, research in cognitive criticism and adaptation asserts that every tale consists of core schemas resulting in a script or “a knowledge representation in terms of which an expected sequence of events is stored in the memory” (Herman 10). These are dealt and tampered with in various ways, and enable “a modern adaptation to take a drastically new form while remaining constant to the script” (Stephens and Geerts 194).³ Likewise,

² Drawing on theories of Kristeva, Bakhtin, or Barthes.

³ For example, “Cinderella” may be composed of the following schemas: “a female orphan; physical poverty, persecution by an older woman, one or more female peers as rivals; a helper; a shoe that, linked only with her, is lost and found; a future husband of high birth” (Lee 276).

John Stephens and Sylvie Geerts claim that “radical adaptations could be neither imagined nor comprehended” (193) were it not for *conceptual blending* (Facounnier and Turner) or the mind’s capacity to integrate seemingly incompatible concepts and mental patterns. As an example of such practice they offer “Ovid’s Golden Age retelling of the story of Medusa (*Metamorphoses*, IV. 779ff)” to suggest that “a particular retelling is not necessarily an adaptation of some original text, but part of a larger process of adaptation in which many other retellings and intertextual affiliations lie between a common source text” (193). Beginning with the orally transmitted wonder tales, fairy tales eventually evolved into literary tales with known authorship, spawning the genre of modern fantasy and, particularly in the twentieth century, resulting in many literary and media adaptations addressing the issues of gender, society, environment, or technology (Zipes et al. 182). For example, the parodic and carnivalesque approach to fairy tale adaptations is Roald Dahl’s innovative adaptation “Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf” (*Revolting Rhymes* 1982) in which Dahl subverts all the tale’s core schemas to create a dynamic, provocative, and amusing fairy tale adaptation in rhyme (Flegar 173–76), allowing “Little Miss Red Riding Hood” to whip “a pistol from her knickers” and shoot the Wolf (Dahl 40). Similarly, a superb practice of *conceptual blending* as a strategy in adapting fairy tales is evident in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter spin-off *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, a collection of fairy tales adapted to covertly perform a critical and divergent function.

2. The Harry Potter Web and *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*

The twenty-first century narratives were affected by the changes that occurred as a result of the development of the World Wide Web. In 2003, Victoria Carrington observed that children’s texts had become “multimodal (rather than printed), intertextual (rather than isolated and bounded) and politically charged (rather than rendering childhood as an ideological or commercial ‘neutral zone’” (95). Likewise, Jenkins’ theory of *convergence culture* introduced us to the environment in which “old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (2). J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter phenomenon is largely grounded in inter- and hypertextuality, denoting the web of products that are in constant dialogue with the series and one another, mutually derivative and referential (see fig. 2).

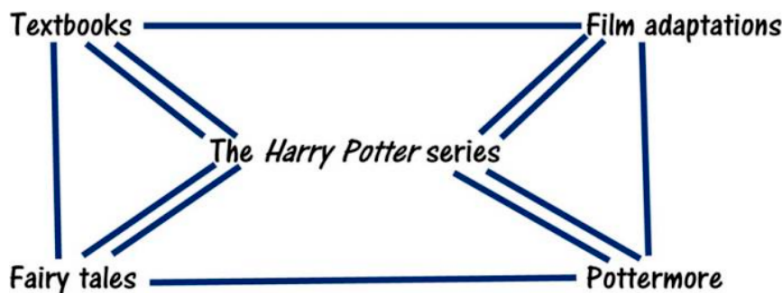


Fig. 2. The inter- and hypertextual Harry Potter web; Flegar, Željka. “The Alluring Nature of Children’s Culture: Fairy Tales, the Carnival and the World Wide Web.” *International Research in Children’s Literature*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2015, pp. 169–84.

Those include the centrally positioned Harry Potter series with its latest sequel, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016), a West End play published as the rehearsal script, Harry Potter film adaptations, the collection *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, the wizarding manuals *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001) and its 2016 film adaptation, and *Quidditch Through the Ages* (2001), as well as the website *Pottermore* where fans were in 2012 encouraged to “begin on [their] own.” *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* were published per request by fans in the attempt to probe further into the secondary fantastic world of their origin. In this sense, the *Tales* constitute a *mise en abyme* adaptation, a term referring to “a representation or narrative segment, which is embedded within a larger narrative, and which reflects, reproduces, or mirrors an aspect of the larger primary narrative” (Prince 53; McHale 124–25; Hutcheon 54–56; McCallum 404–5). The *Tales* are a product and a component of the wizarding culture, mirroring the conventions and practices of the specialized folk group rooted in magic (Lacoss 68) with its lexicon, dress, food, or means of transportation. Most importantly, however, their three-fold function as a fictional construct, a literary text and an artefact are the testimony to the nature and complexity of *transmedia storytelling* which Jenkins on his official weblog defines as “a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story” (“Transmedia 202: Further Reflections”). Accordingly, the reviews of the five tales – “The Wizard and the Hopping Pot,” “The Fountain of Fair Fortune,” “The Warlock’s Hairy Heart,” “Babbitty Rabbitty and Her Cackling Stump,”

and “The Tale of the Three Brothers” – likened them to the classic tales of the Brothers Grimm (Flood), with the “The Tale of the Three Brothers” also loosely resembling “The Pardoner’s Tale” from Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*. On the other hand, their remarkability was commented upon solely in the context of the Harry Potter universe (Rahim par. 9). Although classic in format, the *Tales* also constitute a parodic, even carnivalesque (Bakhtin) fairy tale adaptation by means of subversive and parodic interventions characterised by time-out nature and regenerative laughter (Stephens 120–57), illustrated in the following excerpt from “The Fountain of Fair Fortune.” The tale features three witches, Asha, Altheda, and Amata, and Sir Luckless seeking their Fair Fortune and never finding out that “the Fountain’s waters carried no enchantment at all” (*Bard* 35), and was quite unfortunately staged as a “Christmas pantomime” at Hogwarts:

The night’s entertainment concluded with a packed hospital wing; it was several months before the Great Hall lost its pungent aroma of wood smoke, and even longer before Professor Beery’s head reassumed its normal proportions, and Professor Kettleburn was taken off probation. Headmaster Armando Dippet imposed a blanket ban on future pantomimes, a proud non-theatrical tradition that Hogwarts continues to this day. (38–9)

This effect is achieved by means of metafiction and intertextuality appearing in Professor Dumbledore’s Footnotes, A Note on the Footnotes (JKR), and the fictional translation from the original runes by Hermione Granger. Although not strictly limited to postmodernism, these techniques add a postmodern air to the *Tales*, allowing us to view them as a blend of literary genres, narrative techniques, traditions, and formats.

Likewise, in this case conceptual blending addresses the issues of society and culture as well. In the Harry Potter series the wizarding world coexists alongside the “Muggle” world, with certain aspects of our culture at times glorified and improved for use.⁴ Behr claims that Rowling “presents our culture afresh to us, her readers, twice over: once as a version of ‘our’ reality . . . and once more as the wizarding world itself, which is our culture defamiliarised, transformed and

⁴ Visible in the Weasley family’s attitude towards Muggle artefacts, particularly apparent in the second sequel *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998) in which the flying car makes its appearance.

enchanted” (121–22). By means of the wizarding tales Rowling is able to comment on the issues of ethnicity, power, gender, truth, and the nature of writing for children by, for example, describing the author of the *Tales*:

Beedle the Bard lived in the fifteenth century and much of his life remains shrouded in mystery. We know that he was born in Yorkshire, and the only surviving woodcut shows that he had an exceptionally luxuriant beard. If his stories accurately reflect his opinions, he rather liked Muggles, whom he regarded as ignorant rather than malevolent; he mistrusted Dark Magic, and he believed that the worst excesses of wizardkind sprang from the all-too-human traits of cruelty, apathy or arrogant misapplication of their own talents. (*Bard* xviii)

or emphasising that Beedle’s princesses “take their fate into their own hands, rather than taking a prolonged nap or waiting for someone to return a lost shoe” (*Bard* xii). Yet, at the root of the tales remains their original cautionary function when they inform the reader that “magic causes as much trouble as it cures” (xii) as it “tends to lie at the root of the hero or heroine’s troubles” (xi). Generally addressing the Harry Potter franchise, Jenkins claims that

Harry Potter is a particularly rich focal point for studying our current constraints on literacy because the book itself deals so explicitly with issues of education (often lending its voice to children’s rights over institutional constraints) and because the book has been so highly praised for inciting young people to develop their literacy skills. (171)

Equally, in such manner Rowling created the original mythology of the wizarding world that is subversive, amusing, multimodal, appealing to all age groups, both to *insiders* and outsiders, and especially mindful of literacy and critical thinking. It is also quite representative of the age of transmedia storytelling and convergence culture, which allows for distribution of relevant and important information, as well as the creation of new mythologies.

3. *Mise en Abyme* Adaptation, Repeated

Eerily resembling the style of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, the appearance of the collection of tales belonging to the peculiar world in 2016 is suggestive of the fact that *mise en abyme* adaptations of fairy tales have become a publishing trend. Ransom Riggs’ *Tales of the Peculiar* is a collection of tales belonging to the

subculture of peculiardom in *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* and its two sequels (*Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children Series*), whose importance is particularly emphasized in the second book *Hollow City* (2014) where peculiar children discover a lake with a large rock formation, resulting in the realization that “[I]t’s the giant from the story!’ . . . It’s Cuthbert!” and that “[G]iants are real,’ . . . ‘And so are the *Tales!*” (Chapter 3 Loc 722).⁵ Coinciding with the release of the film adaptation of the first *Miss Peregrine* novel directed by Tim Burton in September 2016, *Tales of the Peculiar* were published on September 3, also known to fans of the peculiar as Loop Day.⁶ The book, therefore, represents the literary tradition of the peculiars, while it at the same time functions as a loop guide entrusted to and edited by *Miss Peregrine's* ward Millard Nullings, the authority on the *Tales* and “scholar of all things peculiar” (*Peculiar cover*).⁷ Accordingly, he introduces the tales as:

a collection of our most beloved folklore. Passed down from generation since time immemorial, each story is part history, part fairy tale, and part moral lesson aimed at young peculiars. These tales hail from various parts of the globe, from oral as well as written traditions, and have gone through striking transformations over the years. They have survived as long as they have because they are loved for their merits as stories, but they are more than that, too. They are also the bearers of secret knowledge. (*Peculiar* “Foreword”)

Much like Rowling, Riggs spins the fictional fairy-tale web to include both the primary and the secondary world of his narrative. Additionally, in the introduction the Publisher addresses the Reader and explains the nature of the *Tales* as such:

The book you hold in your hands is meant for peculiar eyes only. If by chance you are not among the ranks of the anomalous – in other words, if you don’t find yourself floating out of bed in the middle of the night because you forgot to tie yourself to the mattress, sprouting flames from

⁵ Referring to the final tale in the collection, “The Tale of Cuthbert,” a very kind giant who was turned into stone by a witch.

⁶ The term signifies the loop created on September 3, 1940 by *Miss Peregrine* in order to stop her home from being bombarded by the German WWII forces.

⁷ Much like Rowling’s Albus Dumbledore who (un)fortunately at the end of *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* proclaims himself to be a “fool just like anyone else” (*Bard* 105).

the palms of your hands at inappropriate times, or chewing food with the mouth at the back of your head – then please put this book back where you found it at once and forget this ever happened. Don't worry, you won't be missing anything. I'm sure you'd only find the stories contained herein strange, distressing and altogether not to your liking. And anyway, they're none of your business.

Clearly, Riggs' collection, much like Rowling's, belongs to the *insider* fan culture familiar with its terminology, while enticing the reader who happens to randomly come across it with its virtual inaccessibility. The *paratext*, or the "accompanying productions" (Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* 1) of the book which surround and extend it, point to its traditional value and function. Likewise, its hard covers, golden lettering, and luxurious woodcut engraving illustrations by Andrew Davidson project the value and care invested in the edited edition released to the public. It is obvious that the collection is written foremostly for the Reader, the fan and the fellow peculiar. "The Splendid Cannibals," "The Fork-Tongued Princess," "The First Ymbryne," "The Woman Who Befriended Ghosts," "Cocobolo," "The Pigeons of St. Paul's," "The Girl Who Could Tame Nightmares," "The Locust," "The Boy Who Could Hold Back the Sea," and "The Tale of Cuthbert" encapsulate specific peculiarities, as well as touch on the origins of essentially important features of the peculiar folklore, such as the origins of "ymbrynes" and "loops." The exceedingly positive reviews, therefore, mostly focused on the celebration of diversity and difference as the chief feature of the collection. Quite intentionally, characters who are out of place learn to appreciate themselves for who they really are, such as Zheng, who in the end of "Cocobolo" finally feels "like himself" when he turns into an island (*Peculiar* 87),⁸ or "The Woman Who Befriended Ghosts," who finds her true love by seeking out haunted places. Accordingly, the presence of multiple narrative voices and the awareness of text as a fictional construct, evident in *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, is present in the *Tales of the Peculiar* as well by means of self-referential footnotes, Editor's notes, and the afore-mentioned Publisher's address to the Reader, which also function as time-out from the classic, oftentimes grotesque tales.⁹ As such, *mise en abyme* adaptations reveal the existence of more than one truth, as well as promote divergent and critical thinking involved in the process of consuming and producing literary and media materials in the

⁸ A peculiar take on the phrase "no man is an island."

370 ⁹ Such as the Editor's contribution of an alternate ending in "The Tale of Cuthbert."

contemporary storytelling context. Simultaneously, they retain their original function and serve as cautionary tales of empowerment, because the Editor, like Beedle the Bard, states that “there are some talents that are simply too complex and dangerous to use, and are better left alone” (*Peculiar* 116).

In this way *mise en abyme* adaptations of fairy/folk tales blend the power of the oral tradition of storytelling (Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson 99) and traditional fantasy (Tunnell and Jacobs 101–15) with experimental literary techniques which immerse us in the exploration of the literary text, its function and value, as well as our own “sense of values and of one’s place within society” (Zipes et al. 176). Although *Tales of the Peculiar* are of a later date and have not been disseminated in the media quite as much as *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, the similarities in reception and production abound. The publication of *Tales of the Peculiar*, followed by the release of the *Miss Peregrine* film adaptation in the same month, marked the affirmation of the parallel culture and folklore of the fantastic secondary world to which readers flee in need of recognition and acknowledgment of their peculiar talents. Meanwhile, they might bide their time finding a new loop on the official *Tales of the Peculiar* website (www.talesofthepeculiar.com) while eagerly awaiting the *Hollow City* film adaptation where “The Tale of Cuthbert” might make its debut. The popularity of *mise en abyme* adaptations, therefore, is indicative of the general interest in works of literature which challenge and mock conventions, celebrate peculiarities, and generate acceptance.

4. *Mise en Abyme* Adaptations of the Twenty-First Century

In “Rethinking Formal-Cultural and Textual-Contextual Divides in Adaptation Studies” (2014) Kamilla Elliott suggests that “both aesthetic formalists and postmodern cultural scholars are centrally concerned with adaptations as vehicles of cultural value” (583). Many scholars and media theorists emphasise the dialogic, intertextual, and hypertextual relations of texts and media. Accordingly, Christina Bacchilega claims that

within the globalized economy of the early twenty-first century, fairy tales are produced and experienced as intertextual, multivocal and transmedial cultural practices that individual and in relation to one another seem to put into action not necessarily the complexities of feminist and other

social critiques but a complex sense of what fairy tales do, a more generalized awareness that the fairy tale genre is not simple or one. (27)

Bacchilega is, therefore, also interested in the “more multivocal and unpredictable uses of the genre” (18) “in a world that has been characterized as disenchanting” (30). Contemporary *mise en abyme* adaptations are blends that often subtly generate the web of content which begins with the literary text and is then expounded to encompass electronic and digital media, oral and visual traditions of storytelling, intricately questioning authorship, production, and dissemination of literary texts. Often they are deviant, critical, grotesque, and even carnivalesque, implying the notions of change and renewal inherent to Bakhtin’s concept of the carnival (Blackledge and Creese 8). Essentially, they are multimodal and, much like traditional fantasy and fairy tale, are not specifically produced for children, but are consumed by general audiences. Similarly, they signify the return to traditional values, yet intentionally question social conventions and authority.

These matters of style and plurality are evident in the separately rendered animated sequence of the “Tale of the Three Brothers” from the *Tales of Beedle the Bard* in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* (2010), stylised and graphically told in manner of the traditional animation style of Lotte Reiniger, “a German-born animator who worked from the 1930s through the 1950s making mostly short films based on fairy tales and classic stories. Her animations were distinguished by their use of hand-cut paper silhouettes and lyrical, elastic movements” (*Pottermore*, “Behind the Scenes: Animating the Tale of the Three Brothers”), which added “simplicity and naivety” to the sequence. The Framestore animation team further opted to blend Reiniger’s style with the elements of traditional Asian shadow plays. After the laying of “the grainy paper texture coloured with sepia tones over and behind the animated figures,” the final result was the mysterious shadow-like atmosphere of “a very clever puppet show” (in which the three brothers try to cheat Death) as a distinct and luxurious CGI storytelling unit separate from the rest of the film, illustrating the nature of the contemporary multimodal fairy tale as a blend of various styles and modes of expression.

Therefore, the very nature of *mise en abyme* writing can be traced to the essential markings of the recently coined sentiment of *metamodernism*, which implies the movement between two poles (such as modernism and postmod-

ernism) and beyond, and is concerned with engagement, affect, and storytelling (Levin). In “Notes on Metamodernism”¹⁰ (2010) Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker conceive of this “structure of feeling” by observing new generations of artists who “increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis and pastiche in favour of *aesth-ethical*¹¹ notions of reconstruction, myth and metaxis. . . . They express a (often guarded) hopefulness and (at times feigned) sincerity that hint at another structure of feeling, intimating another discourse.”¹² Vermeulen and van den Akker further connect metamodernism to “a sensibility akin to Romanticism” (“Neoromanticism”), pointing to a great number of exhibitions “exposing the often-figurative paintings and photographs of twilights and full moons, ethereal cityscapes and sublime landscapes, secret societies and sects, estranged men and women, and strange boys and girls.” The insider culture of both collections of *mise en abyme* tales, the return to the origins of fictional mythologies as bearers of secret knowledge, the presence of uncanny topics and characters such as “a handsome, rich and talented young warlock” (*Bard* 45) with a hairy heart in *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* or Riggs’ collection of vernacular photographs of peculiar children embedded in the narrative of the Miss Peregrine’s Peculiar Children Series, all point to the metamodernist neoromantic sensibilities which, like the postmodern, turn to deconstruction, pluralism, and irony, yet are bound to desire instead of apathy. They are understood as *re-signification* of “the common place with significance, the ordinary with mystery, the familiar with the seamliness of the unfamiliar, and the finite with the semblance of the infinite” (“Neoromanticism”; see fig. 3).

¹⁰ For more information, see also a webzine of the same name at <http://www.metamodernism.com/>.

¹¹ Emphasis by the authors.

¹² Or, as the opening exhibition of the Gallery Tanja Wagner implied, such works “convey enthusiasm as well as irony. They play with hope and melancholy, oscillate between knowledge and naivety, empathy and apathy, wholeness and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity . . . looking for a truth without expecting to find it” (*Galerie Tanja Wagner*, qtd. in Vermeulen and van den Akker “Metamodern Strategies”).



Fig. 3. Covers of all three Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children novels, based on peculiar children photographs collected by Ransom Riggs (omitted from the *Tales of the Peculiar* simply because they “come from the age” when photography was not available); “Three_Books.jpeg”; *The Peculiar Children Wiki*; *Wikia*, 2017; 23 Mar. 2017, http://thepeculiarchildren.wikia.com/wiki/Peculiar_Children_series.

Overall, based on various literary, social, cultural, and media theories, it would appear that the core function of the popular twenty-first century fairy tale is to draw from the past and assess the present in order to prepare one for a rather unstable future.

Conclusion

Observing *mise en abyme* adaptations of fairy tales as a popular publishing trend in the context of *convergence culture* and the *fairy-tale web* may yield insights into the nature and purpose of storytelling today. More broadly, in her online forum Breezes from Wonderland, in response to a newspaper article Maria Tatar commented:

The reporter links the resurgence of interest in fairy tales to the success of Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* film and to the fact that producers do not have to pay for the rights to these stories. I wonder if that's all there is to it. I think we may be giving these stories more air-time, letting them breathe as Arthur W. Frank puts it, in part because we need their power

surges now more than ever. The mythical always stages a comeback in times of high anxiety about technology and the atrophy of our affective life.

Similarly, Vermeulen and van den Akker suggest that metamodernist artists look back on the Romantic for the purpose of neither parodying it nor mourning it, but to “perceive a new future that was lost from sight” (“Neoromanticism”). As interest in fairy tales ever so grows, much like it did during Romanticism (“Fairy tale origins thousands of years old, researchers say”), modern fantasy as a genre that grew out of the oral tradition of storytelling, mythology, and folklore nowadays converges dialogically with its roots by subverting and playing with authorship, content, and form. Likewise, it interacts with the new media in very intricate and unpredictable ways that involve and are affected by the readership as well.

For all these reasons, the chaotic and uncharted virtual world marked by diversity of expression and the plurality of voices is reflected in *mise en abyme* fairy tales which celebrate tradition and make observations about the present fantastic and real worlds. Whereas the Little Red Riding Hood of the nineteenth century was the wolf’s victim and the twentieth century one learned to overpower him, the twenty-first century heroine knows him inside and out. *Mise en abyme* adaptations are a testament to the layers of complexity and diversity of the times we live in, as well as the fact that truth “is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution” (*Bard* xvi). In addition to the enchantment of the cautionary wonder tale and the playfulness and subversiveness of the literary fairy tale, currently readers are also provided with its background, its funny bits, its significance, and its context. In other words, the contemporary fairy tale is often analysed, dissected, and reconstructed. Not surprisingly, therefore, adapting fairy tales in the twenty-first century is a quest for knowledge, the most magical means of change and survival.

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PRIČA U PRIČI: *MISE EN ABYME* ADAPTACIJE U DVADESET I PRVOM STOLJEĆU

Sažetak

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U skladu s predviđanjima Henryja Jenkinsa da će „stari i novi mediji uzajamno djelovati na sve složenije načine“ (*Convergence Culture* 6), ovo se istraživanje bavi metamodernim adaptacijama bajki dvadeset i prvoga stoljeća kroz konstrukt *mreže bajki* Christine Bacchilege te *kulturu konvergencije* i *transmedijskog pripovijedanja* Henryja Jenkinsa. U radu se promatra trend integriranja zbirke bajki u veće narativne cjeline kao artefakata značenja, moći i materijalne vrijednosti. Iako se pod pojmom *mise en abyme* bajki smatraju originalne bajke poznatih autora, te su adaptacije obično dio mitologije i kulture fantastičnog paralelnog svijeta. Takvi su književni tekstovi često parodije, subverzivne, pa čak i karnevaleskne prirode (Bahtin; Stephens) te reagiraju i na vlastitu izvornu kulturu i na našu svakodnevicu. Kroz spajanje kultura, stilova i formata putem konceptualne integracije, *mise en abyme* bajke također rezultiraju osnaživanjem marginaliziranih skupina. Po definiciji *spin-off* koji je dio složene inter- i hipertekstualne mreže, takova je zbirka bajki metafiktivni proizvod čija je funkcija prenošenje znanja i mudrosti. U digitalnom svijetu današnjice naglasak se stavlja na multimodalno, hipertekstualno i transmedijsko pripovijedanje u kojemu u velikoj mjeri sudjeluju i obožavatelji/čitatelji. Rad se bavi popularnim primjerima te prakse, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2007/2008) [hrv. *Bajke Barda Beedlea*] J. K. Rowling i *Tales of the Peculiar* (2016) Ransoma Riggsa da bi se поближе definirale *mise en abyme* adaptacije bajki te se odredila njihova funkcija i kulturno značenje.

Gljučne riječi: adaptacije, *mise en abyme*, mreža bajki, kultura konvergencije, transmedijsko pripovijedanje