

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
<i>Introduction: Just Wondering about Hope</i> <i>Jennifer Orme and Pauline Greenhill</i>	3

SECTION 1: ENACTING JUSTICE

1. Our Own Way of Walking: Reflecting Physical Difference in Icelandic Yule Tradition
Eva Þórdís Ebenezersdóttir and Stekkjastaur 19
2. Transformations of Wonder in the BBC series *Detectorists*
Marek Oziewicz 40
3. The Problem with Justice
Veronica Schanoes 59
4. Making a Mountain Mundane: Social Media and the Mundanity of Wonder in the Struggle to #ProtectMaunakea
Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada 69

SECTION 2: RE/VIEWING JUSTICE

5. Defending Happily Ever After: Seanan McGuire's *Indexing Serial*
Andrea Braithwaite 93

6. Disabled Bodies, Hurting Emotions: Suicide and Toxic Masculinity
in *The Fall*
Heidi Kosonen 115
7. Post-Traumatic Soldier Stories: Speaking to Survive with Hope
Jack Zipes 136
8. Reimagining Evil: Justice and Magic in Disney's Fairy-Tale Live-
Action Remixes
Ming-Hsun Lin 152

SECTION 3: SEEKING JUSTICE

9. Queer Kinship in the Grimms' "The Three Spinning Women":
Challenging the Binary
Kay Turner 175
10. Dead-End Genres, Hidden Wolves, and Misrecognition: Reading
Promising Young Woman through "Little Red Riding Hood"
Anne Kustritz 196
11. Margery's Miscellany; or, What "All the World Must Allow":
Children's Citizenship, Goody Two-Shoes, and the Fairy-Tale
Public Sphere
Allison Craven 217
12. The Horror of Crime: Representing (In)Justice in Canadian
Indigenous Crime Films
Steven Kohm 241
- Afterword
Jennifer Orme and Pauline Greenhill 263
- Index* 267
- About the Authors* 283

Introduction

Just Wondering about Hope

JENNIFER ORME AND PAULINE GREENHILL

Where does hope reside in a time of climate disaster, social and political upheaval, and factionalism amid a deadly global pandemic? Spending time with the internet's catastrophic fantasies and echo chambers, so-called doomscrolling, an ever-vigilant urge to know the latest in calamity, does not seem to lead to betterment. Conversely, an avoidance mode that wallows in the shallows of baby animal videos and funny memes provides escape into the adorable, the enjoyable, and the just plain silly, but gives little in the way of hope for the now or the future. Feet-on-the-ground activism, letter-writing campaigns, volunteering, and giving what money one can afford to causes all offer valid forms of protest and action for change. But creating, teaching, reading, and imagining what justice looks like and highlighting the injustices too often ignored in the face of the status quo and normalized dominance also suggest forms of resistance. They all begin with wondering, shifting one's view, questioning the way things are to see if they might be otherwise. All change begins with someone (or a bunch of someones) *just wondering*: what if . . .

Here we find hope in popular texts and folkloric traditions that point to injustices and/or envision forms of redress. Making a problem known, dramatizing it, encourages visualizing possible solutions. If fair resolutions could come easily in the current “globally dominant, largely white, market-oriented, human supremacist, settler-colonial and extractivist, growth-addicted, Euro- and North American-oriented culture” (as contributor Marek Oziewicz puts it in his chapter), surely they would have been implemented by now. But justice remains complex and very difficult, so we do not expect the source texts described here—or, indeed, the contributors’ chapters—to provide ready solutions. Nevertheless, we remain convinced, along with feminist theorists like Patricia Hill Collins, who says “the path to individual and collective empowerment lies in the power of a free mind” (2000, 204), that imagination is a first step toward liberation. Following that step, any work to defy injustices done to populations of humans, nonhuman animals, and ecological systems also moves toward hope.

We believe in wonder as a force not only for personal transformation in an individual’s moment of awe, but for collective power as well. Openness to wonder provides potentially critical social, cultural, and individual stances that have a role to play in reconceptualizing the past, present, and future. Tales and traditions can illustrate and support ways of creating more just and equitable worlds in diversity. But if narratives of wonder offer hope, they have also been used to validate inequality, inequity, and discrimination. This book offers readers ways of looking critically as well as wondering creatively to expand possibility, resist oppression, and seek justice.

Folklorists and folkloristics have long explored issues around social justice (see, e.g., Fivecoate, Downs, and McGriff 2021). And while some maintain a qualitative distinction between folklore/traditional culture on the one hand, and popular/mass culture on the other (e.g., Foster 2016), we decline to do so (see Kosonen and Greenhill 2022, 351). We consider here materials pretty conventionally understood as folklore, like tales from the Grimms’ collections or the Icelandic Yule Lads; revisions of traditional ideas and figures in film, television, novels, and social media; and ideas based on and inspired by traditional cultures and remixes thereof. We don’t concern ourselves with whether or not a text under examination would be understood as folkloric by nineteenth-, twentieth-, or even twenty-first-century folklorists. Instead, we want to examine its significance and meaning as a popular

intervention into discourses around the forms and meanings of justice in many senses.

One of these meanings is the familiar notion of “fairy-tale justice,” which refers to the perceived simplistic punishments and rewards of some of the best-known tales. So prevalent is the concept that it is the title of a comedy sketch on *RuPaul’s Drag Race: All Stars* (season 7, 2022), in which contestants, in the roles of well-known fairy-tale characters, participate in a courtroom reality show. Such courtroom sketches parody the perceived criminal acts of fairy-tale and nursery-tale characters such as the wolf or Goldilocks while simultaneously ridiculing American court TV shows and the American justice system (Mieder 2016). Indeed, fairy tales provide themes, characters, and plots for a plethora of procedural television shows dealing with justice granted and denied (see Rudy and Greenhill 2021, 159–206). Cinematic variations of “Little Red Riding Hood” in particular, whether live-action or animated, dramatic or comedic, for adult or child audiences, explore fairy tales, crime, and justice (Greenhill and Kohm 2010, 2013; Kohm and Greenhill 2011, 2014). But not all chapters in this volume deal with traditional fairy tales or with criminal contexts. They do, however, concern justice and the just.

JUST

Just can minimize. As a synonym for *only* or *merely*, the title might suggest that this book concerns wonder and nothing else, or mere wonder, the unimportant, simple escapism. We recognize that for many people wonder, fairy tales, magic, and even awe are indeed just imaginary flights of fancy. As the unreal, they may be pleasurable, entertaining, enchanting, even, but they lack the gravitas of allegedly true events or realistic depictions of the world. Yet the interpenetration between reality and magic has long concerned scholars of fairy tales as well as creators working with the form in various media (see, e.g., Greenhill 2020).

In contrast, when challenged as lies and/or harmful, especially to children, fairy tales become all too serious. Consider, for example, mid-twentieth-century feminists’ concerns that fairy tales sold girls in particular a damaging heteronormative narrative with the unrealistic expectation that they would marry a handsome prince and live happily ever after. And while fairy tales and

other wonder genres are not and have never been only or even primarily for children, as contributors Eva Þórdís Ebenezersdóttir and Stekkjastaur, Heidi Kosonen, and Allison Craven explore, even work consumed by or created for children can respect their capability for complex thought, their culture, and their personhood. Infantilization of the young, especially in combination with issues of gender, ethnicity, class, and/or physical embodiment, transforms the objects of discussion into mere children—just kids—whom the dominant (adult) subject must watch over, control, protect, and speak for, for their own good. This tactic excuses unjust treatment of individuals and groups, but pointing to its construction and who benefits from its normalization highlights resistance to its power.

Our most pointed usage of *just* means equitable, right, correct, fair in relation to judgments (legal or moral), or actions and behaviors—to be on the side of justice. The chapters concern ways of thinking that relate to what contributor Craven calls “the fairy-tale public sphere” (“the role of wonder in arenas of public debate”) broadly conceived, but also to more personal and private struggles. Our international collaborators (from Australia, Canada, Finland, Hawai‘i, Iceland, Netherlands, Taiwan, and the continental US) self-identify from different subjectivities and locations and come from a range of inter/disciplines in the arts, humanities, and social sciences: children’s studies, communications, criminal justice studies, ethnology, film studies, folkloristics, Indigenous studies, languages, literary studies, media studies, performance studies, and women’s and gender studies. This diversity makes for a variety of approaches and considerations of justice and wonder in traditional and popular culture.

Justice is itself a multivalent and complex term. As contributor Veronica Schanoes asks, “If justice means undoing harm, it truly is impossible, and there is no such thing. Nothing restores lives lost and families destroyed. If justice means making unfair things fair, it again is impossible and there is no such thing. . . . Is justice acknowledging the harm done? But who would be doing the acknowledging?” Contributors engage with *social justice* (seeking a just and fair society with equal opportunities and treatment in institutions and cultures) and *restorative justice* (repairing communities); they reflect on their own art and activism, and on the ethics of narrative production today. They may focus on representations implicating crimes (unlawful actions) and harms (damage to individuals, society, and environments often not

criminalized) as well as responses to these wrongs. Chapters explore both *procedural* (fair process) and *substantive* (fair outcome) justice in fictional texts.

Andrea Braithwaite's, Ming-Hsun Lin's, Anne Kustritz's, and Steven Kohm's chapters implicate Nicole Rafter's (2007) concept of popular criminology (see Kohm 2017), an approach that uses "film, television, literary, and other cultural representations of crime and criminal justice as analytical as well as textual sources" (Kohm and Greenhill 2011, 196), to address crimes and harms and the responses to them. Schanoes, Kosonen, Jack Zipes, Lin, and Kustritz address the traumatic aftermath of injustice and the ways wonder can address and, sometimes, redress. And solidarity and the creation of community figure as tools and key aspects of struggles for justice focus Ebenezersdóttir and Stekkjastaur's, Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada's, and Kay Turner's chapters. Oziewicz, Kuwada, and Kohm deal with ecological justice, and show how art, storytelling, and activism use wonder to open pathways to human and nonhuman relations that question, and sometimes explicitly reject, the ethics and inevitability of a hierarchical relationship in which humans picture ourselves as naturally inhabiting the dominant position. Each approach figures acts of storytelling, sometimes in doing harm and other times in voicing responses to harms done. Competing stories and storytelling techniques highlight injustices, and voicing one's own story offers a path for seeking justice—even if it is not yet attained.

WONDER

As with *just*, *wonder* has more than one meaning. Its verb form invokes open curiosity, questioning, testing, and playing with ideas, a capacity fundamental to all scholarship and art, and where they begin. But it also provides a key to seeking justice. Change comes about from questioning the status quo and pondering alternatives. As a noun, a quality or an emotion, it allows feelings of awe, of marvel, or of surprise in a way that, even if only momentarily, causes one to apprehend the world differently. This does not mean that wonder is necessarily rare or that one must go far and wide to seek it. As Kuwada's chapter demonstrates, it can manifest in the mundane and quotidian, as when one suddenly notices the beauty of the land or of weather patterns. A glimpse of the moon or clouds or a gliding hawk out of an apartment window has the power to make one pause, admire, and revel

in these sights as marvels. The mundane need not be ordinary or unnoticed. In order for a thing to be *wonderful(l)* it must have some degree of surprise or aspect of the unexpected. And this is the way that wonder in narrative often works.

A number of chapters engage specifically with fairy tales—primarily European in origin and manifestation. But we prefer to use the term *wonder* for opening up and aligning with other groups and stories, to respect and acknowledge the situatedness of traditional and popular narratives of wonder and the marvelous. In addition to discussions of fairy tales, we include considerations of other forms of wonder: in folk traditions, popular literature, realistic television, Indigenous knowledge, personal experience, fantasy, and horror.

Wonder's association with particular types of stories means that it "names the marvel, the prodigy, the surprise as well as the responses they excite, of fascination and inquiry; it conveys the active motion towards experience and the passive stance of enrapturement" (Warner 1994, 3). Acknowledging that the term *fairy tale* comes from the French *conte de fées*,¹ Marina Warner notes: "The word *Wundermärchen* was adopted by the Romantics in Germany and the Russian folklorists to characterise the folk tale or fairy tale. It is a useful term, it frees this kind of story from the miniaturised whimsy of fairyland to breathe the wilder air of the marvellous" (3). We would add that wonder also brings us back to activism and away from the infantilizing and dismissal too often linked to fairy tales. Instead, with Cristina Bacchilega (2013), we advocate for a politics of wonder.

Further, fairy tales were used as language and enculturation tools in colonial and postcolonial sites (Naithani 2010; Bacchilega and Naithani 2018; Hearne 2017). Transporting fairy tales from Europe to colonial settings has deleterious effects. For example, in Australia: "The uniqueness of the Australian landscape and its flora and fauna—from the European perspective—allowed the actual environment to fulfill the role of a fairy realm, but the fairies themselves emigrated from England and arrived in this realm in their European diaphanous gowns and fashionable hair" (Do Rozario 2011, 14). Fairy tales take up room and subsume or supplant Indigenous narratives, taking those tales out of context, ignoring their cultural functions, and placing a foreign understanding upon them while also relegating them to the nursery (Bacchilega and Naithani 2018).

Daniel Heath Justice notes that “‘fantasy’ . . . presumes a kind of arrogant certainty over what is real and unreal, true and false, legitimate and delusional. ‘Wonder,’ on the other hand, is a word rooted in meaningful uncertainty, curiosity, humility; it places unsolvable mystery, not fixed insistence, at the heart of engagement” (2018, 153). He explains, “‘Fantasy’ as it’s commonly understood is dangerous, because it’s so deeply entangled in settler-colonial logics of dead matter, monolithic reality, and rationalist supremacy”; thus he prefers the term “wonderworks” (152). “These works remind us that there are other ways of being in the world than those we’ve been trained to accept as normal. They offer us hopeful alternatives to the oppressive structures and conditions we’re continually told are inevitable material ‘reality’” (155).

We don’t conflate wonder tales and Justice’s Indigenous wonderworks, as we seek to avoid reprising settler-colonialism’s appropriation of Indigenous narrative traditions. Bacchilega and Orme carefully point out that “while Euro-American wonder tales are not to be confused with what Daniel Heath Justice calls ‘Indigenous wonderworks,’ both speculative genres participate in ‘imagining otherwise’ as a ‘moral imperative’” (2021, xx). Instead, our title’s and contents’ wonder seeks to ensure that the situatedness of texts that come from traditions beyond Euro-American fairy tales are not subsumed by them (see also Bacchilega 2007, 2013, 2018, 2019; Bacchilega and Naithani 2018; Haase 2010, 2019; Naithani 2010). We seek to reflect these concerns in our three sections: “Enacting Justice”—taking activist approaches to traditions; “Re/Viewing Justice”—exploring shifts in fictional representations; and “Seeking Justice”—focusing on perspectives of those who have been harmed by injustice and redressing their situations. Readers may note that the texts that offer our contributors inspiration and are gathered together in these sections are often quite disparate. Our point is that similar processes—enacting, re/viewing, and seeking justice—happen in a broad range of locations.

ENACTING JUSTICE

These contributions reflect upon the relations between wonder and activism and take an activist stance themselves. They examine and challenge long-held assumptions and offer alternate approaches to a wide variety of traditions and texts that have misrepresented, dominated, and/or ignored some human

communities and/or the nonhuman world. We open with a chapter coauthored by a human and her writing partner of trollish descent, showing the role the Jólásveinn (Yule Lad) Stekkjastaur and his family have in Iceland's Christmas traditions. Ebenezersdóttir and Stekkjastaur reflect on their shared experiences as a disabled human and a supernatural being with physical impairment to center their mutual understanding in tradition and society. Stekkjastaur is now considering becoming a spokeslad for disability awareness.

Next, Oziewicz's chapter contends that a contemporary "fantasy for the Anthropocene" must attend to the climate crisis and other ecological disasters. He challenges common portrayals of the natural world in fantasy, and argues for an emphasis on nonhuman kinship in both the genre and society. He draws on the BBC television show *Detectorists* to explore ideas of ecoliteracy and how connections to the nonhuman world allow wonder to inhabit an otherwise realistic text to bring attention to human-created eco-disasters and imagine other ways of being in the world.

Schanoes then moves us toward problematizing particular stories. Her chapter explores the history of antisemitism in the Grimms' fairy tales, demonstrating the personal harm that they cause by normalizing such narratives. She explores the damage that reimagining them might cause, as it potentially brings forth harms and risks as a result of erasing the historical impact of antisemitism in folktales. She raises questions about how fairy tales define justice—and whether or not justice is possible within a corpus of texts so deeply informed by hate speech.

This section concludes with an examination of the Hawaiian-led occupations of Maunakea on the Big Island of Hawai'i between 2015 and 2019, and how Indigenous land protectors fought to defend the mountain from ecological harm. Kuwada explores how social media offers an effective tool for Hawaiian activists to communicate with each other and the world. He considers how social media can share tales of wonder, shaping individuals' connections to traditional stories and the land while also redefining understandings of relations between wonder and the mundane.

RE/VIEWING JUSTICE

These chapters consider fictional cinematic and literary representations of criminal injustices and harms and those texts' possible just responses to

them. They address the traumatic aftermath of injustice and the ways that characters turn to wonder to address and redress harms done to them, sometimes offering models for action in the world and sometimes explicitly rejecting potential alternatives. The section begins with Braithwaite's chapter on Seanan McGuire's *Indexing* duology, which investigates how understandings of the true-crime genre and fairy-tale form shift when they are brought together. By combining the two, *Indexing* urges readers to reimagine the representation of justice and who or what defines it in a world literally dominated by narrative tropes.

Next, Kosonen examines director Tarsem Singh's exploration of wonder tale-telling by unequal narrator participants and how storytelling becomes tied to the taboo of suicide and its relations to gender, age, disability, and ethnicity. She demonstrates how *The Fall*'s primary male character embodies ideas of toxic masculinity, violence, and disability and juxtaposes them against the girl child co-narrator's positionings.

Then we move to a critical examination of soldier stories from six folklorists of the nineteenth century and how they criticize principles of war, trauma, and justice. Zipes argues that these narratives reveal the trauma that soldiers experience from war, and offers critiques of the military as an institution. He reflects upon texts for children and adults and concludes with a call to scholars to study the power of soldier stories more deeply.

We close the section with an exploration of how Disney's live-action remixes of their earlier animated features challenge ideas of justice, good, and evil in the corporation's fairy-tale universe. Lin points out that these remixed stories reposition villains as being incapable of love and transforms otherwise problematic characters who do demonstrate care—parental or heterosexual—as merely misunderstood. In doing so, the remixes portray magic as a diminishing force or as a moral test that must be overcome.

SEEKING JUSTICE

These chapters engage with difficult questions raised by traditional verbal and recent cinematic texts. They counter invisibility and erasure by training their gaze on and through the perspectives of queer kinship; victims of sexual violence; dismissed young, female, activist voices; and discriminatory power structures between white settler-colonial and Indigenous communities. In

the chapter that opens the section Turner explores the fairy-tale portrayal of homosocial and queer relations, showing how the Grimms' versions of "The Three Spinning Women" challenge heterosexual binaries through the title characters' triad bond and their relations to other female characters. She highlights the importance of women's friendship and bonding as means of overcoming personal and social struggles caused by gendered oppression.

Kustritz's chapter draws narrative connections between "Little Red Riding Hood" and the film *Promising Young Woman* to critically examine how women rarely receive justice for the acts of harm against them. Kustritz reflects on the patriarchal pervasiveness of unredressed sexual violence against women in both the real and fairy-tale worlds.

Craven then turns to the long-lasting legacy of the character and book of Goody Two-Shoes, examining how since the eighteenth century stories and fairy tales have modeled values of citizenship and morality to children, despite their being disallowed active participation in society. Craven applies ideas from what she calls "the fairy-tale public sphere" to examine how media continually demean and dismiss today's young women activists in response to their work as protesters and global citizens.

The section concludes with Kohm's interrogation of the films *Clearcut* and *Blood Quantum*, portraying the impacts of intergenerational trauma, colonialism, and racism against Indigenous peoples in Canada. Both draw on the true-crime and horror genres, using preternatural figures to reflect on the ways that Canada's colonial legacy continues to haunt Indigenous peoples. While both films employ Indigenous actors in Indigenous roles, Kohm points to some of the crucial differences between the white-settler-written and -directed *Clearcut* and the Indigenous-written and -directed *Blood Quantum*.

We hope that this volume contributes to and advances interdisciplinary discussions of justice, wonder, and traditions, but we also hope that our readers will respond to its calls to action. Curiosity, questioning, and intellectual wondering are essential to finding solutions and routes to a more just society. This is where we began this project and the contributors began each of their chapters: by pondering, daydreaming, picking at, thinking deeply, and venturing beyond limits. That is always a great place to start. As you take in these chapters and ideas, we urge you too to *Just Wonder*.

NOTE

1. In consultation with contributors, and as an expression of decolonizing solidarity, we do not italicize non-English-language words. In correspondence, Kuwada noted, “Most, if not all, Hawaiian scholars try to avoid [italicizing Hawaiian words] because we are making the claim that our language is not foreign to us” (2022). Though this practice is by no means entirely uncontroversial, “over the last decade, there has been a shift away from enforcing italics on non-English words in publishing. And the decision to italicize or not has prompted authors and editors to ask for whom they’re writing, and to question assumptions about the experience of reading” (Ha 2018). Further, “the practice of italicizing . . . [non-English] words is a form of linguistic gatekeeping; a demarcation between which words are ‘exotic’ or ‘not found in the English language,’ and those that have a rightful place in the text: the non-italicized” (Barokka 2020). The journal *AlterNative*, for example, has as its house style: “As a rule, do not italicize Indigenous or other non-English words” (n.d.).

We note, however, in contrast, that Gregory Younging, in a standard work on Indigenous style, makes no such recommendation. Indeed, he raises the opposite concern, about the *lack* of italicizing that marks assimilation into English. He notes that the Collins, Merriam-Webster, and Oxford dictionaries leave unmarked words like canoe, hammock, igloo, kayak, and maize. He says, “I regret that English has swallowed these words. These words bear witness to the history of Indigenous Peoples in contact with Europeans. They often represent technologies and foods that Indigenous People introduced to Europeans. Their presentation as ‘English’ terms fails to acknowledge the contributions Indigenous Peoples have made to mainstream culture and the English language, and fails to educate readers who may not be aware of these contributions” (2018, 87). However, we see not italicizing as appropriate in this context and now, although we note that practices may change over time.

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