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RED RIDING HOOD ACROSS MEDIA
Transmedia Storytelling in Contemporary Adaptations of
“Little Red Riding Hood”

Thesis booklet

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Szeged, 2023

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Summary of the thesis

The dissertation explores the complex structure of transmedial universes, which are the most prevalent and pervasive model in contemporary popular culture, and examines them within an interdisciplinary framework. In the chapter on the theoretical background of the research, in addition to general theories of adaptation, certain notions of media theory and transmedial narratology are included as well. Furthermore, as the title of the dissertation already indicates, the genre of the primary sources makes it necessary to incorporate relevant theories from the field of fairy tale studies as well, especially those referencing and relevant for the discussion of the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” in particular. The theoretical framework is founded on Henry Jenkins's theory of transmedia storytelling and Jan-Noël Thon's outlining of the main cross-media elements of transmedia narratology. The notion of *transmedial microcosm* used in this dissertation combines and complements Jenkins's and Thon's theories with Cristina Bacchilega's conception of the fairy-tale web. Transmedial microcosms thus designate and delineate specific groups of adaptations that are based on the same source text and recount narratives set within a shared storyworld, yet they are markedly distinct from other transmedial microcosms relying on the same source text. The dissertation analyzes five distinct groups of adaptations that can be understood as transmedial microcosms from within the transmedial universe of “Little Red Riding Hood,” most of which were produced for young adults and adults in the 21st century, and all of which link texts created in various media formats to printed literary-textual sources or adaptations. The first subchapter of the main analytic chapter approaches Angela Carter's paradigmatic short story “The Company of Wolves” (1979) as a rewriting of the classic literary versions of “Little Red Riding Hood,” also taking into account the film adaptation of the work (1984). The second subchapter foregrounds the often-marginalized and ignored genre of novelization through the discussion of the junior novelizations *Red Riding Hood* (2011) and *Red's Untold Tale* (2015) based on the film *Red Riding Hood* (2011) and the series *Once Upon a Time* (2011-2018). The last subchapter embraces new media adaptations through Emily Carroll's printed graphic novel *Through the Woods* (2014) and its webcomics adaptations, along with the video game *The Wolf Among Us* (2013-2014) and its comics adaptation series of the same title (2015-2016). By means of its diverse catalogue of primary sources, the dissertation aims to draw attention to the influential and persistent role of printed texts in adaptation and transmedial contexts.

The primary goal of the dissertation is to further develop our understanding of increasingly meandering transmedial universes by formulating the concept of the transmedial microcosm.

The goals of the dissertation

The objective of the present dissertation is to provide comprehensive and media-specific analyses of a representative sample of inter- and multimedial fairy tale adaptations through the combined lenses of fairy tale, adaptation, and media studies, while extensively employing and amplifying the tools of transmedial narratology. *Transmedial microcosms* are introduced in the dissertation as a novel concept intended to facilitate and encourage the interpretation of and the delineation of the inherent structure of the currently extremely widespread and dominant transmedial universes in popular culture. In addition, the dissertation contributes to the field of fairy tale studies through the use of a diverse list of contemporary “Little Red Riding Hood” adaptations as primary sources, thus complementing the considerable amount of existing research on this particular fairy tale in a fresh, markedly transmedial context.

The methodology of the dissertation

While the present research is predominantly literary in its essence, it does take place in a markedly multidisciplinary plane. The theories of adaptation that form one of the major pillars of this interdisciplinary research are derived primarily from the works of Linda Hutcheon, with the addition of citing Jan Baetens’s work on the development and cultural impact of the genre of novelizations in an attempt to open up the debate to one of the more neglected forms and directions of adaptation. Moreover, as there are numerous digital works among the transmedial adaptations chosen to be analyzed for the purpose of this dissertation, the inclusion of certain new media theories has also been necessitated. In providing detailed analyses of each carefully selected adaptation, the tools of narratology are utilized as refined by Mieke Bal and Monika Fludernik on the basis of Gerard Genette’s works and supplemented by the concept of transmedial narratology by Jan- Noël Thon (2016, xviii). In addition to these tools, the sociohistorical (Alan Dundes, Jack Zipes, Sandra L. Beckett) and psychoanalytical (Bruno Bettelheim, Ildikó Boldizsár) approaches to fairy tales also proved to be useful and fundamental, especially when connecting the individual subjects of the case studies to their historical roots and locating them within their respective fairy tale webs—bringing to mind the very creative way Cristina Bacchilega visualizes the interrelated systems

of fairy tale adaptations (2013, 27). Reflecting on such a multidisciplinary framework scoping the fields of literary and media theories is what has made it possible to thoroughly analyze the equally multifarious primary sources of the present dissertation.

In the dissertation, I continue braiding together the theories of these fields by asserting that transmedial universes, and even fairy-tale webs, can be broken down into smaller subdivisions connected through elements of a specific transmedial storyworld. I call these subgroups *transmedial microcosms* in order to emphasize their transmedial aspects while at the same time designating their embeddedness in larger transmedial universes. The benefits of analyzing transmedial microcosms lies in that they make it possible to and facilitate delving into the contents and meanings of specific narratives spread out through multiple media and in thus allowing for the deeper understanding of transmedial relations. In this dissertation, following a brief theoretical overview, case studies of exemplary transmedial microcosms are carried out using the tools of transmedial narratology. Although transmedial microcosms are not exclusively applicable to fairy tales—we could talk about transmedial microcosms in groups of transmedial adaptations of various mythologies or the Marvel universe, for instance—, they do provide paradigmatic examples, which is why adaptations of “Little Red Riding Hood” have been chosen as primary sources for this dissertation.

While investigating the roots and origins of fairy tales is beyond the scope of the dissertation, the ways the chosen adaptations deviate from the earliest literary adaptations of the text of “Little Red Riding Hood”—which are considered to form the basis of all contemporary adaptations—are closely observed, along with the ways the structure and elements of these primeval tales have been repurposed in contemporary adaptations for (young) adult audiences, thus recognizing and expressing respect for the long and meandering history and continuing cultural relevance of the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” and of the fairy tale genre in general. In addition, the symbolic elements within and the underlying meanings these contemporary adaptations are used to propagate are also considered, along with the different ways in which the morals of literary fairy tales for children are altered and conveyed to different target audiences. At the same time, analyzing the selected sets of transmedial adaptations—which exemplify various directions of adaptation between diverse media formats—also gives way to the examination of the close-knit relations between the adaptations involved in as well as the subtle mechanisms in operation within transmedial microcosms. Since the purpose of this research is to create a transmedial approach to narratives, instead of highlighting media specific differences, focus

is on the functions and transformations observable across various media formats. Above all, the present dissertation aims to verify the need for and pave the way towards the adjustment and modification of existing narrative theories in order to accommodate and enable the development of the discourse on the webs of contemporary transmedia adaptations.

The structure of the dissertation

The structure of the dissertation is designed in a logical way to be both coherent and easily comprehensible. Framed by the introduction and the conclusion, the main body is divided into two broad yet distinctive chapters: one specifying and reflecting on the various theoretical resources relevant for the research at hand and one analyzing the diverse list of primary sources based on the theoretical framework laid out in the preceding chapter.

As it is asserted in the introduction, interconnectedness and interdisciplinarity are the chief principles governing the course of the dissertation, as its scholarly objective and subject materials both operate at intersections—connecting scholarly fields and popular cultural productions in various media formats, respectively. Accordingly, in chapter 2, the treatment of the theoretical-methodological framework of the dissertation centers not on a single field of study but on the shared vantage points between disciplines. Proceeding from the field of fairy tale studies, this chapter highlights the increasingly popular and widespread merging of fairy tale scholarship with adaptation theories that arose in response to the recent surge in transmedial rewritings of fairy tales for (young) adults. Throughout the chapter, emphasis is placed on the theories discussing or applicable to the study of “Little Red Riding Hood,” with examples demonstrating the ways in which this often didactic tale has been used to express and warn against certain social issues, complemented by an overview of the book-length scholarly examinations of the tale available to date. This studious literature review is meant to demonstrate both the multitude of approaches applied in the discourse of the tale as well as the research gaps—the disregard for the new media elements of the transmedial universe of “Little Red Riding Hood” and the lack of scrutiny and recognition of the self-containment of each distinct transmedial microcosm. Having established the existence of such limitations in research, the second subchapter of chapter 2 provides a theoretical background and a foundation for the examination of hitherto disregarded fairy tale adaptations. This section relies on theories devised within the fields of narratology and (new) media, with the intent to contribute to the particularization of an applicable methodology at the threshold of the two in the form of transmedial narrative theory. It is in this section that the definition and the need

for the concept of transmedial microcosm is explained. Consistently with the dissertation's aim to bring disregarded cultural products to the foreground in academic discussion, this subchapter is complemented by a thorough examination of the history and theorization of the genre of novelization, a decidedly undervalued and marginalized literary genre that nevertheless occupies a continual and significant place in transmedial universes.

Similarly to the theoretical-methodological chapter, the subject materials of the case studies are also governed by the principle of inbetweenness. Accordingly, the analytical section of the present dissertation is divided into subsections based on the various types of media each group of primary sources were created in, with the aim to reach a better understanding of the processes and products of adaptation in the contemporary era largely dominated by transmedial entertainment. The first subchapter starts out from textual adaptations of the tale, promptly releasing the discourse from its intramedial constraints with the discussion of one of the most influential film adaptations of "Little Red Riding Hood," *The Company of Wolves* (1984), which was created based on Angela Carter's short story "The Company of Wolves" (1979). The second subchapter continues analyzing intermedial filmic adaptations, but swiftly shifts the focus to novelizations, an intriguing though generally overlooked element of contemporary transmedia universes. In this section, the novelization of a film and of a television series are considered, namely *Red Riding Hood* (2011) and *Red's Untold Tale* (2015), which allow for the demonstration of quite dissimilar adaptation processes despite the correspondence—referring to their audio-visual and textual natures—between the media involved. Finally, the third subchapter centers around what appears to be a considerably underresearched area in fairy tale scholarship: new media adaptations. Commencing with the examination of interactive textual renderings of the tale in various e-book formats, the subchapter gradually progresses towards digital adaptations through the examples of the graphic novel *Through the Woods* (2014) by Emily Carroll and the webcomics related to it and the video game *The Wolf Among Us* (2013-2014) and its comics adaptation (2015-2016). What ensures the relevance of the above-described set of primary sources for the present dissertation in particular as well as the originality of the research within the scope of fairy tale scholarship in general is the fact that they are not mere free-standing adaptations of "Little Red Riding Hood," but are linked to one another as groups of adaptations of the same exact transmedial storyworlds in different media formats. Thus, the focus on examples of transmedial microcosms throughout the analytical chapter allows for the closer inspection of intermedial and transmedial links between adaptations.

The above-specified structure allows for the direct and immediate application of the theories and methods emerging from the intersections of the various fields of studies from the second chapter into the contexts of the analyses and case studies carried out in the course of the third chapter. The last chapter of the dissertation, the conclusion, not only summarizes the content and findings of the thesis but also offers ideas and possibilities for further research. The final element of the dissertation is the alphabetically organized bibliography.

The results of the investigation and possibilities for further research

The purpose of this dissertation has been to analyze contemporary fairy tale rewritings and the transmedial universes they are embedded in within a multi- and interdisciplinary context by integrating the theories and methods of three scholarly fields, namely transmedial narratology, adaptation studies, and fairy tale studies, and thus shed new light on what is the most popular and most prevalent model in the sphere of contemporary Anglophone popular cultural productions: transmedial storytelling. More than just a buzzword, narratives told across various media platforms are currently the unquestionable norm in entertainment industries, which fulfill their purpose by extending their transmedial universes not only across a wide and more engaging variety of media but narratively as well, and as such, are not merely worth studying in an intellectual context, but also need to be explored from various academic angles in order to fully grasp how such narratives travel across media and what makes them so appealing to their audiences. Both the ways in which they are produced and the ways in which they fulfil their roles as entertainment products are of interest.

Nevertheless, popular cultural adaptations do still rely on old media formats, including textual ones, in order to be present in more areas of everyday life and thus reach wider groups of audiences as well as to expand on the narrative universes of each storyworld in creative ways. In this dissertation, I have argued that textual and other printed genres, such as short stories, novelizations, and graphic novels, which serve to increase both audience participation and access, in other words, they are at once meant to generate new fans as well as to engage existing ones, fulfil significant and unique roles in their respective transmedial universes. The simultaneous use of old and new media formats not only enhances their visibility, but also strengthens the webs within transmedial universes and their microcosms. With that being said, the aims of this research have been not only to examine the way a narrative text works or the ways in which a text needs to be altered in order to operate in

different media environments, but also to locate each text in their respective transmedial microcosms and to observe how they are connected to their most closely related adaptations.

Ultimately, with this dissertation, I wish to have contributed to the field of fairy tale studies by discussing “Little Red Riding Hood,” which is one of the most frequently and diversely adapted of the classic literary fairy tales, from a novel perspective, meaning the transmedial relations connecting its contemporary rewritings, as well as to transmedial studies through the introduction of the concept of transmedial microcosms to make sense of the otherwise too extensive and as such incomprehensible transmedial universes.

Naturally, the dissertation, although it strives for precision, is not all-encompassing. There are questions and issues relating to both the theoretical and cultural aspects of the topic that were left unexplored due to the literal and conceptual limits of this text. Regarding the discussion of fairy tales and “Little Red Riding Hood” in particular, there are several further interesting courses of studies that could and should be explored, such as the closer examination of the humanimal disposition of the wolf and the human-animal relationship between the girl and the wolf within a posthumanist discourse, the observation of the fluctuating relationship between the roles of the main characters, between villain and hero, across various texts and media formats—both of which were briefly touched upon in the thesis—, or the focus on solely new medial adaptations of the fairy tale, as the narrative horror art video game *The Path (Tale of Tales, 2009)* or the equally gruesome platform game *Woolfe: The Red Hood Diaries (GriN Gamestudio, 2015)*, which were not included in the argument of the dissertation due to their lack of direct adaptations within their respective transmedial microcosms.

The discussion of transmedial microcosms in this dissertation is not exhaustive but rather fulfills an introductory and representative role, primarily as it is limited to the transmedial universe of a single fairy tale. Admittedly, discussing the presence of transmedial microcosms in other narrative contexts could contribute immensely to ascertaining their relevance in transmedial studies. Further examples of transmedial microcosms could be demonstrated in similarly renowned and deep-rooted transmedial universes, such as the mythologies of any given culture, or in the rapid expansion of more recent transmedial franchises, such as the DC Comics universe or the storyworld of Harry Potter. An additional element of transmedial microcosms, which was omitted by choice due to the vast amount of texts related to it, is the world of fan-produced materials, including fanfiction and fanart, but also memes, excerpts, and even redubbed scenes shared across various online social

platforms. In the contemporary digital era, the role of social media and the influence of individuals' sharing practices fulfill an immense function in transmedia world-creation and spreadability, which reaches far beyond and could valuably complement the approach taken in this dissertation.

Published works pertaining to the dissertation's topic

1. Bálint, Emma (2022). "The Woods Keep Getting Darker: The Forest in Contemporary Fairy Tale Rewritings for young adults." *Detinjstvo* 2022/1. Available at: https://zmajevedecjeigre.org.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Detinjstvo_01_2022_color.pdf.
2. Bálint, Emma (2018). "Who's Afraid of Red Riding Hood? Little Red Riding Hood as Fille Fatale in *Hard Candy* (2006)." In: Gyuris, Kata et al. eds. *Turning the Page: Gendered Identities in Contemporary Literary and Visual Culture*. Budapest, Hungary: L'Harmattan, pp. 53-69.
3. Bálint, Emma (2018). "Filmből regényt – A filmregényesítés múltja, jelene és jövője." In *Híd*, 2018 September, pp. 59-67. Available at: <http://www.hid.rs/hid/2018/hid-2018-szeptember.pdf>.
4. Bálint, Emma (2018). "The Representation of Women in Walt Disney's Productions in the Studio Era [Reprint]." In Trudeau, Lawrence J. ed. *Children's Literature Review. Reviews, Criticism, and Commentary on Books for Children and Young People*, Volume 223. Columbia, SC, USA: Layman Poupard Publishing, pp. 151-162.
5. Bálint, Emma (2018). "Animated Noir: Investigating the Walt Disney Female Characters of the 1940s and 1950s [Reprint]." In Trudeau, Lawrence J. ed. *Children's Literature Review. Reviews, Criticism, and Commentary on Books for Children and Young People*, Volume 223. Columbia, SC, USA: Layman Poupard Publishing, pp. 162-166.
6. Bálint, Emma (2016). "Novelization as Image X Text." In: Györi, Zsolt and Gabriella Moise eds. *Travelling around Cultures. Collected Essays on Literature and Art*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 245-258.
7. Bálint, Emma (2014). "Animated Noir: Investigating the Walt Disney Female Characters of the 1940s and 1950s." *AMERICANA E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*, Vol. X., No. 1., Spring 2014. Available at: <http://americanajournal.hu/vol10no1/balint>.
8. Bálint, Emma (2014). "Novels Strike Back: Adaptation from Motion Pictures into Novels." *AMERICANA E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*, Vol X., No. 2., Fall 2014. Available at: <http://americanajournal.hu/vol10no2/balint>.
9. Bálint, Emma (2013). "The Representation of Women in Walt Disney's Productions in the Studio Era." *AMERICANA E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*, Vol. IX., No. 2., Fall 2013. Available at: <http://americanajournal.hu/vol9no2/balint>.

List of conference papers given on the subject of the dissertation

1. Bálint, Emma (2023). "Adaptation of Red Riding Hood as Transmedia Microcosms." *16th Biennial Conference of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English (HUSSE)*, January 26-28, 2023, University of Miskolc, Hungary.
2. Bálint, Emma (2022). "On again, Off again – Multimedia Adaptations on and off the screen." *6th International Society for Intermedial Studies Conference: In Between and Across: New Directions, Mappings and Contact Zones*, September 1-3, 2022, Dublin, Ireland.
3. Bálint, Emma (2022). "The forest in contemporary fairy tale rewritings for young adults." *65. Zmajevih Dečijih Igara: Zmajevito Doba: Nova čitanja Evropske bajke i fantastike*, June 6-12, 2022, Novi Sad, Serbia.
4. Bálint, Emma (2022). "The Wolf Among Us: A Graphic Novelization." *15th Biennial HUSSE Conference*, January 27-29 2022, Budapest, Hungary (Online: Zoom).6.
5. Bálint, Emma (2021). "Képregényből videojáték, videojátékból képregény." *II. Végtelen határok - Konferencia a popkultúráról*, Próza Nostra, Grand Café, Szeged, Hungary (Hybrid/Online: Zoom).
6. Bálint, Emma (2020). "E-Books as Components of Transmedia Storyworlds." *Encounters of the Popular Kind: Traditions and Mythologies in Dialogue*, October 27-28, 2020, School of English and American Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary (Online: MS Teams).
7. Bálint, Emma (2017). "Literary Adaptations of 'Little Red Riding Hood'." *English Language and Anglophone Literature Today (ELALT) 4*, 25 March, 2017, Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad, Serbia.
8. Bálint, Emma (2016). "Contemporary Adaptations of Little Red Riding Hood." *13th ESSE Conference*, Doctoral Session, August 22-26, 2016, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland.
9. Bálint, Emma (2016). "Digitalizing Red Riding Hood." *The Child and the Book International Conference*, May 19-21, 2016, University of Wroclaw, Wroclaw, Poland.
10. Bálint, Emma (2015). "Who's Afraid of Red Riding Hood?" *Gendered Identities in Contemporary Literary and Visual Culture Conference*, June 5-6, 2015, Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest, Hungary.
11. Bálint, Emma (2015). "Novelization as Image X Text." *12th Biennial Conference of the Hungarian Society for the Study of English (HUSSE)*, January 29-31, 2015, Debrecen University, Debrecen, Hungary.

Other presentations

1. “Narratives Across Media.” *PhD Research Seminar* (instructor: Lilla Farmasi), May 13, 2021, SZTE, IEAS, Szeged, Hungary.
2. “Little Red Riding Hood.” BA course: *Fairy Tale for Adults* (instructor: Anna Kérchy), February 20, 2019, SZTE, IEAS, Szeged, Hungary.
3. “Digitalizing Red Riding Hood.” *PhD Research Seminar* (instructor: Anna Kérchy), November 29, 2018, SZTE, IEAS, Szeged, Hungary.
4. “New Media Adaptations of Fairy Tales, and Digital Red Riding Hood.” BA course: *Theories of the Fantastic* (instructor: Anna Kérchy), May 4, 2017, SZTE, IEAS, Szeged, Hungary.
5. Co-instructor of *Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf* BA seminar with Anna Kérchy, 2016/2017 spring semester, SZTE, IEAS, Szeged, Hungary.
6. “Digitalizing Red Riding Hood.” *PhD Research Seminar*, May, 2016, SZTE, IEAS, Szeged, Hungary.
7. “Fairy tale studies and new media.” BA course: *Disney and Pixar* (instructor: Zsófia Anna Tóth), November, 2015, SZTE, IEAS, Szeged, Hungary.

Memberships in academic associations and other academic responsibilities

2022—: Association of Adaptation Studies (AAS), member

2020—: Híd Kör Egyesület, member

2016—: *AMERICANA E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*, review editor

2014—: ESSE (European Society for the Study of English), member

2014—: HUSSE (Hungarian Society for the Study of English), member