



Gender and the Male Character in 21st Century Fairy Tale Narratives

**From Enchanted Heroes to
Modern Masculinities**

Edited by Natalie Le Clue

EMERALD STUDIES IN POPULAR CULTURE AND GENDER

Gender and the Male Character in 21st Century Fairy Tale Narratives

EMERALD STUDIES IN POPULAR CULTURE AND GENDER

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Gender and the Male Character in 21st Century Fairy Tale Narratives: From Enchanted Heroes to Modern Masculinities

EDITED BY

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Nelson Mandela University, South Africa



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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About the Editor

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Introduction

Natalie Le Clue

Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Abstract

What's in a name? Not much if you're Prince Charming. While the erstwhile indistinctive princes and heroes of fairy tales have enjoyed a bit of the spotlight in modern television and film narratives, this exposure has not extended, as much, to the academic study of fairy tale men.

This collection of chapters delves into the often-overlooked realm of contemporary male fairy tale characters, a domain that remains largely unexplored within academic circles. By drawing on diverse narratives from television, film, and literature, this interdisciplinary collection sheds light on the evolving representations of male characters in fairy tales and their intersections with broader socio-cultural themes.

Through an acknowledgement of the historical roots of the fairy tale genre, this collection explores how these characters have transcended their original contexts and infiltrated various fictional genres. By examining the thematic resonance of fairy tales in contemporary narratives, this collection underscores its enduring influence on modern storytelling.

This collection seeks to fill the scholarly void surrounding male fairy tale characters, particularly within the realms of queer studies, gender studies, and postcolonial studies. By including a range of academic approaches, from character analysis to fan studies to film and television studies, this collection enriches the understanding of the complex role of male characters in modern fairy tale discourse.

Keywords: Fairy tale characters; contemporary representations; gender discourse; masculinity; socio-culture themes

Introduction

Much of the focus of fairy tale research centres on understanding the narrative complexities, the representation of *-isms* and the pivotal contemporary portrayal

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of the female character. But the spotlight has rarely been turned on the male characters that has often lurked on the periphery of the story. For as much as the traditional female fairy tale character has been revolutionised by modern-day storytellers so too the male characters have experienced their own infusion of life and complexity into their otherwise lacklustre and one-dimensional stereotypes.

In contemporary re-tellings and interpretations of fairy tale characters and narratives, many male characters have been pushed to the fore. Therefore, it is prudent to compile a collection of chapters, approached from an interdisciplinary perspective, that explores the depiction and representation of male fairy tale characters. As such, the book effectively illustrates how the essence of fairy tales persists in influencing contemporary storytelling. The chapters contained within this book serve as a compelling showcase of this enduring phenomenon.

Dr Maggie Webster investigates the depiction of male witches whilst challenging traditional gender norms and exploring the construction of the witch identity. Similarly, Caleb George Hubbard and Brittney S. Morrissey explores the evolution of masculinity in Disney films by examining the representations of male characters and their impact of societal perceptions of gender roles. Cheeno Marlo M. Sayuno extends the consideration of representation to analyse the portrayal of older brothers in Filipino children's literature and examines their influence on younger protagonists through an exploration of the themes of masculinity and sibling dynamics.

Tess Watterson's investigation of gender subversion in tabletop role-playing games focusses on male characters who challenge traditional norms and expectations within fantasy narratives. The challenge of traditional norms is further emphasised by Thanong Autipak who examines the deconstruction of male heroism by highlighting the portrayal of female protagonists and their relationship with male characters. Dr Jennifer Fogarty extends her research towards a visual analysis of the representations of masculinity in early 20th century fairy tales and considers how artists challenged traditional gender norms through illustration.

Auba Llompert considers representations of masculinity in *Frozen* by focusing on the characterisation of male figures and their challenging of traditional fairy tale tropes. Brittany Eldridge considers the particularly understudied element of ageism and the disappearance of the older male character, while Ailish Kate Brassil focusses on the fashion choices, actions, and roles of the unconventional male fairy tale character.

The important investigation of race in fairy tale representations is considered by Dina Pedro, who explores the depiction of white masculinity in *Carnival Row* by examining how the series reimagines racial stereotypes. Dr Fiona Smith and Dr Fiona McKay push further in the understanding of masculinity by reviewing the male characters in contemporary adaptations of *Red Riding Hood*. Correspondingly, Kirsty Worrow presents an evaluation of Gothic masculinity in Netflix's *1899*.

An examination of gender-inclusive representations of the fairy godmother archetype is taken up by Marty Heath, and Dr Natalie Le Clue presents a new evaluative tool with which to analyse the complexity and evolution of the representation of contemporary male characters.

The Witcher series serves as the focal point of Justin Shay Easler and Kaitlyn Michelle Samons's study in which they focus on *Geralt's* deviation from traditional fairy tale hero archetypes. Kirsty Worrow, through the Netflix series *Dark*, studies the themes of trauma, ego, and agency through its representation of masculinity. Finally, Natalie Le Clue scrutinises the resonance of toxic masculinity in modern storytelling by tracing the influence of the Blue Beard archetype in contemporary narratives.

This collection of chapters offers a wide-ranging exploration of the male fairy tale character in contemporary storytelling. Through their meticulous studies of diverse narratives, across various media platforms, the contributors not only illuminate the evolving representations of masculinity and complexity thereof but also its intersections with broader larger socio-cultural themes.

Each chapter aims to challenge traditional gender norms and significantly enriches our comprehension of the intricate role of male fairy tale characters. This book serves as a testament not only to the lasting impact of fairy tales on modern storytelling but also acts as a catalyst for research and analysis across gender studies, cultural studies, and beyond.

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Section 1

Gender Representation in Fairy Tales and Media

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Chapter 1

Gendered Stereotypes of the Male Witch in Selected Children's Film and Fiction

Maggie Webster

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Abstract

Children's film and fiction often portray a witch as either an evil hag or an incompetent older woman yet when the male witch is within the narrative, he is named Sorcerer or Wizard, suggesting therefore that (unlike the hag) age and gender is not a factor when performing witchcraft. Moreover, the male witch identity is introduced from the position of empowerment and competency rather than prejudice. Witch identities are gendered, and the male witch is underappreciated and overlooked by the historical identity of the female witch.

This chapter analyses how the male witch is presented in selected children's film and fiction through the frameworks of Hegemonic, Hybrid, and Mosaic Masculinity. Hegemonic Masculinity demonstrates the toxic performance of the male witch, indicating to readers and audiences that to be male and a witch, a heterosexual man must be cruel and manipulative. Hybrid Masculinities relate to some patriarchal behaviours such as violent outbursts, that also blend with more empathetic and emotional behaviours. Mosaic Masculinity presents the male witch in a way that is fluid and disrupts the binary of Hegemonic and Hybrid Masculinity.

This chapter acknowledges the absence of presence of the male witch and encourages a more authentic representation of the male witch that is akin to those who practice witchcraft. There are non-toxic examples of masculinity that challenge the potential for stereotyping, hence there is a need for a better representation of what it means to be a witch within popular culture.

Keywords: Gender; witch; stereotype; masculinity; hegemony

Introduction

Film and fiction that is aimed at young children often present a witch as either an evil hag or an incompetent older woman. The witch identity is frequently a victim of gender labelling where women are presented in an unfavourable light (Webster, 2021b) but some studies such as Gibson (2018) and Deepwell (2019) have raised discussions around gender and witch stereotypes that relate to the notion of symbolic violence.¹ Pearson (2010) explored the vilification of witches and like Luhrmann (2001) analysed violence against the witch and women with the aim to challenge the heuristic of the female witch that is old, evil, and untrustworthy. Additionally, Deepwell's research investigated representations of the historical witch in modern art and suggested the art installations addressed the stereotype by 'problematis(ing) the history, myths and fictions that continue to associate women with witches' (2019, p. 157). However, there seems to be little research that has explored the representations of the male witch. Hence, to illuminate gender politics related to the witch identity, this chapter analyses how the male witch is presented, and masculinity stereotyped in selected children's film and fiction.

Portrayals of the Witch Identity in Film and Fiction

Although the dominant view is that a witch is female; Witch is a gender-neutral term that can be male, female, trans, or non-binary (Webster, 2021a). However, non-female genders are under-represented and often overlooked within the mediated narrative and historical recount of the witch. Children's film and fiction rarely portray male witches, but when they do, they are often presented in a way that use identity tags, character appearance, and behaviours that stereotype masculinity. For example, the Australian teen TV drama, *Nowhere Boys*, and the BBC series *Merlin* depict male witches that are (at times) powerful, aggressive, and violent.

A male witch is typically named a Wizard, Warlock, Magician, or Sorcerer, whereas a female witch is a Hag or Crone and depicted (in the main) as old, ugly, and dangerous. The age-related discourse is a characteristic of the female witch; yet age is not a factor for the male witch, hence is not an important identity marker. Male identity tags offer a different discussion to that of the female witch, possibly because masculine discourse is 'theorised as a product of gender relations and behaviours rather than fixed identities and attributes' (Salter in Waling, 2019, p. 366). Yet it is important to acknowledge that a label or tag can give an insight into the identity of a character as it often reflects the self (Rodgers & O'Connor, 2017). Likewise, how the character is visually represented encourages the audience to gain an awareness of their value and status within the narrative.

¹Symbolic violence refers to normalised behaviours that are symbols of violence but not necessarily physical. It can be the normalised use of phrases such as 'run like a girl' or 'man up' and purposely marginalises and separates groups.