Indexing Fairytales

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Definition of a Fairytale

- A fairytale is a story featuring folkloric characters such as fairies, goblins, elves, trolls, giants, anthropomorphic (talking) animals, and others.
  - A sub-class of the folktale
  - Often involving royalty
  - Superficial references to religion and actual places, persons, and events.
  - Part of an oral tradition¹

History of Indexing Fairytales

- Early on commonalities were found in fairytales.
  - Commonalities also know as motifs:
    • Most significant action described by the text (Plotlines, morals, characters, etc.)

- Two folklorists created classifications to better study and locate certain fairytales.
  - Sorted by overall plot (Aarne-Thompson type)
    • Updated by Hans-Jorg Uther in 1961
  - Sorted by function of each character and action on the story (Propp type)²

Problems with Indexing Fairytales

- There are exceptions to the rule
  - Although many fairytales have similar characteristics they are not all the same and that can be problematic

- Should every variation and version be indexed?
  - Ex. Cinderella
    - Also known as The Wonderful Birch, Aschenputtel, Kattie Woodencloak. Cap O’ Rushes, Catskin, Fair, Brown and Trembling, Finette Cendron, Allerleirauh, and Tattercoats.3

- Should the whole tale be indexed as opposed to parts or characters?
  - How does one ascertain the most important part of the text?

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Fairytale Indexes

Availability & Use

- Theme lists of characters and storylines
  - No comprehensive professional index of primarily fairytales exists
    - There are children’s indexes of fairytales only
    - Folktales and fairytales are indexed as though they are the same type of story rather than a part of the whole.

- Sociology Connection
  - Folklore indexing is very close to the indexing of fairytales
    - Indexed according to motifs rather than the tale itself.

- Library Connection
  - The indexing of fairytales gives librarians and researchers the tools to understand and use the different variations of fairytales.
Relationship of Fairytales to Folklore

- Fairytales as Folklore
  - Folklore or in this case folktales are the traditional beliefs, myths, tales, and practices of a people, transmitted orally.
  - Folklorists and Structuralists study oral stories
    - Fairytales are a subset of folklore and are specific type of folklore.
Classification Connection

- **Use of classification in indexing**
  - Assigning values for the plotlines of each tale for easier access.

- **Aarne-Thompson system**
  - Assigns numbers to certain plot points
    - Ex. 1-99 Wild Animals
    - 300-749 Tales of Magic

- **Propp system**
  - Ex. \( aa^5D^1E^1M^1Ta^5BKNToQW^* \)

- In order to index such a vast number of tales it would be helpful to have an accepted standard indexing system.
  - Two camps exist those who use an Aarne-Thompson inspired and those who use the Propp system.
Indexing Folklore

Antti Aarne vs. Vladimir Propp

- Finnish Folklorist
  - (1867-1925)
  - Created an classification system and index for folklore (1910)
    - Focused on the motif of tales and limited to tales that were once oral
    - Classification of simple plots
  - Included tales of Europe, West Asia, and the Lands settled by these peoples

- Russian structuralist/folklorist
  - Created competing classification system and index for folklore (1928)
    - Looked at function of each character and the action in tale
    - Criticized Aarne-Thompson type for its limited focus.
  - Included folk tales from Russia only

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4 Antti Aarne. The Types of the Folktale (Helsinki, Finland: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961), 5-9.

Online Fairytale Indexes

- “OCLC FictionFinder”
  - Online index of fiction by Genre, Subject, Character, and a search engine

- “Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts” by D. L. Ashliman
  - E-Library of folktales, folklore, fairy tales, and mythology indexed by subject (with Aarne-Thompson tale types)
Conclusions

- There are many different approaches to indexing fairytales: subject, place of origin, genre, main characters, plot, theme, and many others.
  - The use of each approach creates complete indexes
- No one single index of fairytales will complete the task.
- Indexing fairytales is intrinsically tied to classifying fairytales
  - With so many variants and variations a system of organization is needed to understand the terms
- By taking both into account the Propp and Aarne-Thompson method of indexing folklore one can create a consistent and reliable index of fairytales.
Suggested Readings


Suggested Readings Con’t


