

Research Note

Crossing Boundaries: The Fox-Woman in Twenty-First-Century Novels

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Summary

The fox-woman, a literary figure able to shape-shift from fox to woman and vice versa, originated in Chinese mythology, thereafter appearing often in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean folklore. The figure was first introduced to Europe in the nineteenth century, at a time when fascination with Asian literature and art was blooming. The character and the narrative structure of the East Asian fox-woman stories have been adapted and interpreted in various cultural contexts, establishing connections between Eastern and Western traditions, and between tradition and modernity. In the last 20 years, more novelists from other cultures have adapted the fox-woman story into their own writing than ever before. This paper argues that the fox-woman in twenty-first-century novels is used to portray the ambiguous boundaries between cultures, genders, and human-animal spheres against a background of globalization and technological development. The fox-woman is therefore becoming a cultural symbol of those who cross boundaries in postmodern society, individuals with heterogeneous identities who transform themselves in order to live in different environments. Until now, studies on the fox-woman have remained mainly within the limits of national literature. This paper adds new perspectives to these readings by exploring the fox-woman story within a broader context that goes beyond that typical national framework. Several examples from twenty-first-century novels featuring the fox-woman are taken up and explored using different methodological approaches, such as critical feminist, postcolonial, new materialist, ecocritical, and animal studies.

Keywords: literary animal studies, literary transformation, fox-woman, twenty-first-century novel

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