Reviews

Marvs & Tales Editors

Recommended Citation
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**Fairy Tales Framed: Early Forewords, Afterwords, and Critical Words.**

This thought-provoking and well-conceived volume draws attention to the often overlooked textual elements that are integral parts of the first collections of magic tales of the Western tradition published in early modern Italy and France, where this genre first flourished and developed. As Ruth Bottigheimer underscores in the preface, this critical anthology results from the fertile collaboration among some of the most dedicated scholars in the field of fairy-tale studies in the United States: Suzanne Magnanini, Nancy Canepa, Betsy Harries, Christine Jones, Sophie Raynard, and Bottigheimer herself. The goal of their joint endeavor is twofold.

First, *Fairy Tales Framed* emphasizes that literary fairy tales, which often became the source of oral retellings, are not isolated narrative organisms but rather components of a broader literary project. Forewords, authorial commentaries within the tales, and afterwords are indeed crucial editorial tools that enclose the single tales within a unifying literary strategy. Gerard Genette’s seminal work on paratexts still awaits to be fully integrated into the study of literary, and oral, magic tales. Jens E. Sennewald’s *Das Buch, das wir sind* (2004), dedicated to the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, is an excellent example of critical study founded on the paratextual system. Raynard and Bottigheimer stress, for instance, that, although Madame d’Aulnoy’s influential tales are available in English, no translation has ever included her “frame tale peritexts,” which serve as commentaries “on the tales, the settings within which, and circumstances under which the tales were fictively told in Madame D’Aulnoy’s collections” (170). *Fairy Tales Framed* fills this lacuna. Calling for a closer analysis of the actual structure of the single collections of literary but also oral fairy tales could seem like an obvious demand, but new questionable English editions of European collections prove that this is not the case. Recently, a well-known compilation of nineteenth-century oral tales from Europe was disassembled, rearranged, and even split into multiple volumes according to the scholar’s personal choice, with no respect for its original format.
The second fundamental goal of *Fairy Tales Framed* is ideological. Bottigheimer intends to emphasize the literary connotation of Western European fairy tales. As she states in the introduction, “The continuing use of paratext-less editions of fairy tales reinforced folklore-based assumptions that fairy tales were folk creations” (5). A particularly significant claim in *Fairy Tales Framed* concerns, in my view, the influence of Giambattista Basile’s *Lo cunto de li cunti* on late-seventeenth-century French collections. Whereas Giovanni Francesco Straparola’s *Piacevoli notti* was acknowledged as an explicit source of several French tales, the presence of the Neapolitan book has always been moot, given its seeming absence in France. Using Magnanini’s important essay on the possible transmission of *Lo cunto de li cunti* through its Neapolitan publisher Bulifon, *Fairy Tales Framed* establishes Basile as a firm source of the French vast production of fairy tales (see, in particular, pages 130 and 140). This is a bold and even contentious assertion that, nonetheless, tries to make sense of the innumerable narrative and thematic coincidences between the seminal Italian volume and the later French collections. These unmistakable echoes cannot be easily dismissed by invoking a common oral root. As more than one scholar has pointed out, Perrault’s “Sleeping Beauty” reads as a moralized version of Basile’s “Sun, Moon, and Talia.” Insisting on a vaguely oral origin is not less problematic than hypothesizing Perrault’s familiarity with the Italian literary source. Bottigheimer points out that Charlotte Rose de La Force’s *Tales of Tales* (1698) “invokes” Basile’s *Tale of Tales*, although the two books have quite different structures (195). In my view, Bottigheimer is right in stressing that echoes of Basile’s storytelling are particularly detectable in La Force’s tale “More Beautiful than a Fairy,” a retelling of the Cupid and Psyche myth (196).

The section dedicated to early Italian theorists and critics is particularly interesting because it offers a glimpse into the first European reflections on the meaning of folktales and oral storytelling. Magnanini introduces some precious and poorly known texts, such as Andrea Calmo’s “Letter to Signora Frondosa” (1556) and a long passage from Girolamo Bargagli’s *Dialogue on Games That Are Played During the Sienese Veglie* (1572). As Magnanini explains, in his epistle Calmo distinguishes between two kinds of tales; the first kind includes “what seem to be fairy tales and folk tales” (47). Magnanini stresses that, although Calmo’s statement is usually taken as evidence of the circulation of oral fairy tales, he wrote his brief text after the publication of Straparola’s seminal collection and thus he could refer to “an oral performance of published texts.” The legendary veglie is the topic of Bargagli’s fascinating dialogue, in which he explains the kinds of tales that should be told during the night gatherings. Bargagli has a character in his dialogue distinguish “the novella from both the history (istoria) and the favola, a category that included the literary fairy tale” (55). A favola with a
fairy-tale flavor (“wizards, enchantments, and magic objects”) is less beautiful and should be left to “simple young girls” (60). Calmo’s and Bargagli’s texts show that the Renaissance debate on storytelling, informed by a deeply Aristotelian perspective, did not overlook the presence of other, less canonical narrative forms, which, however, needed to be categorized according to the same theoretical guidelines. In this regard the introductory section of Fairy Tales Framed on Boccaccio’s Genealogy of the Pagan Gods will be of significant help for all students of early modern debates on prose narrative.

In rare instances the reading of Fairy Tales Framed can be challenging, given primarily the complexity of the multilayered narratives in many French collections (tales within tales within tales) but also an unclear use of italics (see, for instance, pages 173–74). Fairy Tales Framed is an original and necessary volume that raises important and timely questions.

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Afghan Folktales from Herat: Persian Texts in Transcription and Translation.

Reading the eleven transcribed oral texts with English translations in Afghan Folktales, I remembered a 1975 comment by Abdul Salám, an accomplished Herati oral storyteller. I asked if he changed stories that he heard from others. He said, “I never change them. Sometimes I correct/repair them.”

Youli Ioannesyan, a careful and knowledgeable St. Petersburg–trained dialectologist, presents traditional tales that he recorded from three nonliterate men in Herat villages (western Afghanistan) in the 1980s, during the Russian occupation. He protects the integrity of the oral texts, transcribing them verbatim, including all the discrepancies of grammar and syntax. The printed production is excellent, with few typographical errors. Ioannesyan offers abundant, well-researched lexicographic, phonological, and grammatical notes juxtaposing other regional dialect studies. The author’s “explanations of cultural terms” are less illuminating in places, as are some mistranslations, resulting perhaps from occasional limited fluency in the sometimes telegraphic local folk narrative idiom. The volume includes a glossary of dialectal and common words (212 entries), notes, and a bibliography.

Ioannesyan’s analytic goal in a 1999 monograph in Russian was to locate Herati Persian dialect phonologically and lexicographically on the varietal map of Persian-speaking Afghanistan and Khorassan (a historically important cultural region encompassing much of northeastern Iran and northern Afghanistan). He offers these eleven texts, the “large amount” of “folklore texts” (x) not in the monograph, primarily as data for Persianists, linguists, and language learners. He disclaims the work as “by no means a study in folklore
literature or anthropology, [although] these texts containing ethnographic data may be useful to folklorists or ethnographers” (xii). The problem of genre fluency is theoretically and methodologically important for folklorists and other comparative narratologists and should also concern field linguists. Thus in this review I reflect on dialectology and folk narratology.

For folklorists the utility of the translations is limited (although not that of the transcriptions) by Ioannesyan's occasional mistakes in Afghan/Herati oral traditional narrative idiom (perhaps also by the limits of his native-speaker consultants, students “of Herati descent” at Leningrad/St. Petersburg University). Hence Abdul Salám and his “corrections.” Drawing on my own contemporaneous collection of several hundred recorded oral narratives, mostly traditional folktales from more than a hundred mostly Herati speakers, male and female, I “hear” in the lacunae ellipses, ambiguous phonemes, false starts, and self-corrections in these eleven texts, things that help to “correct” superficially incoherent aspects of Ioannesyan's translations. Methodologically, what does such repair mean? How should it be evaluated as a listening practice addressing any single performed text?

The echoic corrective effect of juxtaposing other Heratis’ recordings to these texts supports John Foley’s theorization of immanent knowledge grounding performance competence (Immanent Art, 1991). It is one thing to agree with Foley that fluent performers and audiences hear in a global fashion, deploying prior knowledge of the discourse, making any one traditional “text” a locus of immanent meaning (like an auditory palimpsest), not an isolated speech event. The unsaid but immanently heard is crucial to understanding any performance and reperformance of a tale later. But how does a folklorist decide how (much of) our (or our consultants’) unspoken hearing of the immanent in a performance can be rendered in translation or commentary? Details not spoken in the performance (but immanent in competent hearers’ understanding) must be distinguished from what is surface-present in the text. Inferential translations or interpretations should be flagged as such.

Honest mistakes in translation or interpretation, as well as some English malapropisms (“cow shepherd” for “cowherd,” “cauldron” throughout for “cooking pot”) limit these translations’ utility for non-Persianist narratologists or language students, although the lexicography is mostly excellent. Ioannesyan describes the three narrators as “not ‘professional’ but . . . average dialect speakers” whose tales are “characterized by features typical of common colloquial illiterate speech. They lack consistency and contain repetitive phrases and expressions. The narrator may drop the sentence in the middle and either leave it incomplete or start it again from the beginning. Sometimes he would go back a few sentences, breaking narrative logic, and retell the whole portion with a slight change in vocabulary. . . . [Preserving all such
details in transcription] I tried to reduce [in translation] ‘redundancies and repetitions’ . . . and to . . . diversify the words introducing direct speech . . . [interpolating] ‘said,’ ‘told,’ ‘asked,’ ‘replied’” (xi–xii).

It was almost impossible in Herat in the 1970s and 1980s to find any “professional” storytellers, but there were traditional performers, male and female, who were recognized as excellent and valued for their contributions to social gatherings. Ioannesyan’s storytellers, to judge by details in the transcriptions, might not be dining out on their performance abilities; in native literary criticism, some aspects of these performances fall short of excellence. Yet the stories are fully traditional magic tales and novellas about the exploits of clever, even rascally male underdog heroes. Furthermore, as Dell Hymes taught us, tellers’ repetitions and lacunae—not all flaws in performance—as well as repairs, are important for interpreting performed texts. Cleaning them up in translation, which includes introducing alien stylistic features, is analytically inappropriate. Such changes are justifiable in literary or oral retellings, where the reteller takes artistic responsibility for a new text, but not in ethnolinguistic translations, which may suffer aesthetically to keep all oral patterns and glitches strictly in place for analytic purposes. At the same time, the awkwardness of portions of these translations does not stem from awkwardness or ambiguity in the telling but rather in the English not quite doing justice to the tellers’ fluency.

Translation problems include the following: (1) Handling occasional storyteller inconsistency and repair resulting from plot or motif interference: “Is the hero an ordinary man or a prince?” (an interesting question for an Afghan under Soviet occupation narrating to a Soviet-identified scholar). In some cases the teller starts one story, then shifts to another plot line. Some heroes suddenly have unexplained access to magical objects or assistants. The teller repairs, but the translator does not always notice that this is a repair, or of what. (2) Handling storytellers’ at times unmarked, abrupt scene changes in which new or prior actors (re)appear. Sentence-level ambiguities too often arose because there is only one genderless third-person singular pronoun, /ú/ (he, she, it), in Herati Persian and because the verb said with no subject pronoun marks all kinds of utterances (questions, replies, interjections, etc.). Characters may be designated by intonation alone: “He said . . . (then) HE (or SHE) said.” Ioannesyan occasionally assigns a statement or act to the wrong character, destroying narrative logic. Familiarity with analogous motifs in other stories, and/or intonational deixis, eliminates ambiguities for fluent listeners.

Ioannesyan’s important contributions to Persian dialect lexicography and phonology are helpful but not sufficient for folk narrative analysis. He sometimes alleges inconsistency where a fluent listener would hear immanent coherence. He unjustifiably counts narrative incoherence as a general feature of “illiterate”
traditional narrators. These three tellers all tell traditional tales, but at times they show signs either of lack of narrative fluency or perfunctory performance. Are their occasional glitches, distinct from those introduced in translation, due to lack of skill or lack of interest? Are they perfunctory because they are performing a narrative genre not regarded as serious (folktales, afsâna, are also called “lies,” dorugh), elicited in a nontraditional context by someone not considered an adept critical listener? Dialectologists have a lot to offer ethnolinguists and folklorists, but the opposite is also true. Sample size (a few speakers’ monologues versus larger full-text repertoire-focused collections) also matters.

Margaret Mills

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World on a Maple Leaf: A Treasury of Canadian Multicultural Folktales.


World on a Maple Leaf is a compilation of twenty-five folktales by twenty-four authors with the aim of fostering understanding and respect for cultural differences in the multicultural contexts of Canadian life. These stories are folktales in a generous sense of the term in that they include rewritings of published tales, oral tales from grandparents, and original compositions. The brief directive given to contributors was “to re-imagine . . . stories . . . heard from parents, grandparents, friends and families, and to write them for Canadian children” (vii). The first thousand copies are for free distribution to libraries; further sales will support children in need. The writers and editors show such idealism and the project is so manifestly worthwhile that any criticism may sound peevish, but from a folklorist’s perspective questions arise.

I had hoped, from the title, for a collection of newly recorded oral folktales from recent immigrants to Canada. Surprisingly, all but six of the contributors were born in Canada or the United States. All are highly literate, identifying themselves as storytellers (nine), writers (eight), academics (three), and graduate students (four), with three of the students studying comparative literature at the University of Alberta. I would have expected Edmonton immigrant communities to have been canvassed, and perhaps they were because the introduction mentions a call that elicited “an overwhelming response” and the “painful” rejection of some “fascinating” stories (vii–viii). It is not clear whether any of the included stories came as the result of inquiry among new immigrants. This is a pity, especially because the final contributor, Roxanne Felix, writes eloquently about the value of “ask[ing] about a person’s journey” (94). If this is just the first in a series, as the editors hope, it will be worth going to new Canadians and recording their stories directly, rather than relying on others, no matter how refined their storytelling skills, to speak for them.
It would surely be empowering for immigrants to know that their oral literature is valued in their new country. This raises my second question: Why is this compilation so literacentric? Although all the contributors speak highly of oral storytelling, the average reader would assume from this collection that oral tales are just an imperfect stage on the way to becoming written stories. Unaccountably, and inadequately, “folktale” is defined using a standard handbook of literary terms, where we are told that “many . . . tales eventually achieve written form” (vii)—as though this were the summum bonum of their existence. Only nine writers followed the original directive to reimagine stories they had heard from family and friends. The most interesting are those taken most directly from oral tradition: Margalara Rashid’s Afghan stories. Eight other contributions are composite texts, from published versions of originally oral tales; six are from out-of-copyright books, and two are original, in the style of folktales. In my world, as a folklorist, the term folk is a word of honor rather than a literary critic’s condescension; it is a mark of a community’s agreement that a certain story is worth hearing again and again.

Third, folktales are not (inevitably) children’s literature, and it would be doubly unfortunate if readers gained the impression that the stories of these new Canadian cultures are in any way “childish.” How many pitfalls lurk for well-meaning compilers of tales for children! And we have not even touched on stereotyping and representativeness. Will twenty-first-century Irish immigrants really want to see themselves represented by a leprechaun story only slightly revised from Thomas Crofton-Croker’s 1825 version, itself already archaicized? Will children overlook and forgive the overt moralizing in many of the stories and almost all of the authors’ notes?

These questions aside, however, the book is full of goodwill and hope, and the stories are enjoyable. The editors are to be congratulated for taking on a project that may have become unexpectedly complex. They should feel encouraged to produce further collections, especially if this leads them to discover new storytelling voices within Canada’s multicultural community.

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In 2003 the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice acquired from the descendants of Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806) an extraordinary family archive containing 9,500 unpublished folios and manuscripts that shed new light on the composition process of what would have become the playwright’s famous...
theatrical fairy tales. This acquisition not only led to the revival of research interest in Gozzi’s dramatic and theoretical writings but also launched an important editorial enterprise: the national edition of the playwright’s complete works by Marsilio publishing house. The first fairy play to appear in a new critical edition is one of Gozzi’s most engaging tales, La donna serpente (The Serpent Woman, 1762), edited by Giulietta Bazoli. This tale is already accessible in various Italian editions and to English-speaking readership in two accurate translations, one by John Louis DiGaetani (Translations of The Love of Three Oranges, Turandot, and The Snake Lady: with a Bio-Critical Introduction, 1988) and the other by Albert Bermel and Ted Emery (Five Tales for the Theatre, 1989). But Bazoli’s edition of La donna serpente succeeds admirably in providing an insightful discussion of the various steps in the tale’s composition, its mise-en-scène, as well as the experiences of the theatergoing public.

The introductory section includes a cursory outline of the genesis of Gozzi’s ten fairy plays. These plays had their origin in the mid-eighteenth-century debates on the reform of the Italian comic theater; the debates were one the most significant moments not only in theatrical life but in Venetian culture in general. To the realistic comedies of his rival dramatists, Carlo Goldoni and Pietro Chiari, who disseminated Enlightenment ideas, Gozzi responded with his new genre of the fairy drama, which promoted conservative values and contained an impressive number of transformation scenes, special effects, and commedia dell’arte stock characters. Further in the “Introduction,” Bazoli deals with the sources of The Serpent Woman, which recounts how the fairy Cherestani resolved to marry her mortal lover Farruscad and shed her immortality and magical powers against the orders of the king of the fairies. Bazoli points out that Gozzi was inspired by the medieval legends of Morgan le Fay and Melusine, the cabinet des fées, the contes of Madame d’Aulnoy, and the sixteenth-century Spanish plays of magic, but it was Pétis de la Croix’s Oriental tales enclosed in his Mille et un jours that provided the basic structure for La donna serpente. Bazoli explains that the play’s other episodes—in particular, the hero’s trials (after violating the prohibition to inquire into his beloved’s true identity) and his kissing a terrible snake, the fairy in disguise—come from the tradition of the Italian chivalric novels of Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, and Pulci. The editor also underlines how the scenarios of the French Théâtre de la Foire and Lesage and d’Orneval’s adaptations of the Oriental tales for the opéra comique played the role of intermediary for Gozzi’s assimilation of the fairy-tale material and its translation into theatrical terms. The detailed analysis of the playwright’s sources of inspiration shows that the genesis of Gozzi’s new genre of fairy drama consisted in adapting and skillfully blending prior literary material, techniques of oral storytelling, and the tradition of the improvised comedy.
As to the text of the fairy play itself, the editor has opted to reproduce it from the first Colombani edition (1772) of Gozzi’s works without including a critical apparatus with the variants from the recently acquired folios and manuscripts. As Bazoli clarifies, although these outlines present a high level of definition in the plot development (even in the parts designed to be improvised by the commedia dell’arte actors), their fragmentary character and the fact that they were destined for the stage and not for publication make them unsuitable for a coherent critical apparatus. This decision certainly makes for a more readable text, avoiding superfluous distractions, and the appendixes, with a selection of the folios, give a clear idea of the material now available at the Gozzi Fund of the Marciana Library. Moreover, the notes to the text provide an extended analysis of these “avant-texts,” allowing for a careful reconstruction of the playwright’s modus operandi and his strategies to transfer fairy tales to the stage. Bazoli shows how, from its first moment of inception, Gozzi was already thinking about the possibility of this fairy tale’s dramatic and scenic realization. These drafts also bear witness to the process of the playwright’s elaborate work of reviewing and revision and to his gradually distancing himself from his sources in order to transpose the tale to the stage. Furthermore, the folios contain a great number of annotations for the actors on the manner of execution; these show how the tale would find its final form only in theater, after the playwright verified its stage effects working alongside his comic troupe. These documents thus shed new light on Gozzi’s profound knowledge of the Venetian theatrical market, audiences, and stage machinery. They also show that the roles of the actors and the capocomico, Antonio Sacchi, in the creative process and in the success of the performance were more important than previously acknowledged.

The commentary on the text is extensive and facilitates the basic understanding of the play by explaining a variety of issues to the reader, such as Gozzi’s conception of magic and the merveilleux, the composition of his comic troupe, the copious intertexts and cross-references in the tale, and the Venetian dialect of the commedia dell’arte characters. The edition includes a section on the history of the play’s performances over the centuries and its reception. It also offers an up-to-date critical bibliography, incorporating a selective list of works dealing with the eighteenth-century theater and fairy-tale genre in general, as well as specific studies of Gozzi’s play.

Bazoli’s edition of La donna serpente is a work of formidable erudition and a valuable contribution to Gozzi scholarship. The interpretative insights offered throughout the volume enable a full appreciation of Gozzi’s artistry. Despite my wish for a deeper engagement with recent Anglo-Saxon fairy-tale criticism, which would benefit both the introductory part and the
commentary, this book is overall excellent and will prove to be essential reading not only for scholars of theater studies but also for teachers and students of fairy-tale studies.

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In 2011 Vanessa Joosen published *Critical and Creative Perspectives on Fairy Tales: An Intertextual Dialogue Between Fairy-Tale Scholarship and Postmodern Retellings*, in which she focused on the period between 1970 and 2005. In 2012 Joosen published the Dutch-language book *Wit als Sneeuw, Zwart als Inkt: De Sprookjes van Grimm in de Nederlandstalige Literatuur* (White as Snow, Black as Ink: The Grimm Fairy Tales in Dutch-Language Literature). The starting point for this publication is significantly earlier, 1810, when the Grimms compiled their Ölenberg manuscript, and 1812, when they published the first volume of their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. The publication of this book was not a resounding success from the start in Germany, let alone in the Netherlands; in a review, the first Dutch translation was called a crazy little book with horrid pictures. The translation was not terrific, but it cannot be denied either that the enlightened Low Countries were in no way ready for a Romantic movement yet. In England the translation did meet with immediate approval, because it contained a selection of the more successful tales and because it had accompanying illustrations by the talented artist George Cruikshank. By the time the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* was published in Germany and the Low Countries as a selection, with better illustrations and more oriented toward a juvenile audience, the book gained in popularity considerably.

*Wit als Sneeuw* further pays attention to the reception of the Grimm fairy tales in the Low Countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to the developments that the tales underwent in translations, images, and modern adaptations. As the title suggests, one fairy tale acts as a leitmotif in the entire study: “Snow White” (ATU 709), which is a typical Grimm fairy tale, absent in Perrault and Andersen. All important developments from translation to parody are illustrated based on “Snow White.”

Joosen demonstrates that the tales had already undergone a great many changes through Wilhelm Grimm’s intervention. For instance, in 1819 evil mothers changed into evil stepmothers. In the Low Countries the fairy tales were frequently translated by women, and the end of the nineteenth century saw the first criticism (by Nellie van Kol) of the materialistic, misogynistic,
and violent tendencies in fairy tales. The 1970s experienced a fairy-tale revival but also a return of criticism from a feminist and a Marxist angle. For example, Snow White was often accused of lacking initiative. In the twentieth century commercial companies created variants that were sometimes all too sugary and middle class. Examples would be Disney (with Snow White acting like a housewife and mother, forcing the dwarfs to wash their hands) and the Dutch fairy-tale theme park, Efteling. The supposedly delicate nature of children is considered to an increasing extent, and cruelties (such as Snow White’s stepmother dancing to her death in red-hot iron shoes) are removed. Conversely, in postwar modern adaptations and parodies, horrifying and erotic elements are sometimes consciously emphasized, intending to reach a more adult audience. The romantic elements are shattered, stories are retold from the perspective of different characters, fairy-tale and modern elements are combined in a funny way, and so on, leading to an intricate play of intertextuality.

Wit als Sneeuw surely builds up to a climax, for the last item Joosen discusses is the award-winning psychological youth novel by Wim Hofman from 1997, Zwart als Inkt is het Verhaal van Sneeuwwitje en de Zeven Dwergen (Black as Ink Is the Story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs). In this version the flat characters become round, the stepmother changes back into a depressed mother, and Snow White is portrayed as a sensitive, intelligent girl who writes a lot of letters that are never sent. Snow White repeatedly considers committing suicide.

Wit als Sneeuw is a useful book about the translation, adaptation, reworking, and parodying of fairy tales in the Low Countries; it is also about intertextuality and intermediality. Incidentally, Joosen more than once uses the term translation, even though we are dealing with a sliding scale from translation through adaptation to reworking. Joosen studied 200 Dutch-language versions of Snow White altogether and is fully aware that striving for completeness is not feasible. The number of versions known to her is impressive, but I missed the 1996 play Sneeuwwitje en de zeven dwergen by Jules Deelder (published in 2000). This piece contains a splendid mix of the Grimm version (the eating of the heart) and the Disney version (the stepmother falling into the gorge, the prince’s kiss) and also possesses some parodic touches: Snow White is a black girl in a white dress.

I encountered one misconception in Joosen’s book. On page 73 she states that, according to the book of Deuteronomy, the orthodox Protestants have a problem with “fantasie.” Now this Dutch word means imagination, and that’s not what Deuteronomy 18:10–14 forbids. Here the Bible opposes occult practices, such as fire walking, fortune-telling, divination, sorcery, and
spirit summoning. This may conflict with the English fantasy genre but not with imagination as a whole. Orthodox Protestants also reject Harry Potter, not because he is a product of the imagination but because he uses magic.

Wit als Sneeuw contains sharp analyses, well written by a true expert. Unfortunately, Joosen did not add a final chapter presenting an overall view of the material she studied. Had she done so, she could have drawn her conclusions about the entire evolutionary process from 1810 to the present from a convenient distance. Joosen does, however, conclude that all these fairy-tale adaptations and parodies have in no way supplanted the traditional tales. On the contrary: to fully understand the intertextual play between the adaptations and parodies on the one hand and the traditional texts on the other, one cannot do without the knowledge of classic fairy tales.

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Although David Hopkin, a prominent historian at the University of Oxford, wrote his book primarily to encourage historians to pay attention to folklore because it reveals more about social history and customs than his colleagues realize, his superb study should also be required reading for folklorists and scholars of fairy-tale studies. Or, perhaps I should simply say that it is time for scholars of folktale and fairy tales to pay more attention to Hopkin’s use of history and folklore to comprehend just how intricate the relationship of oral and literary networks is and how informants and collectors of tales combine efforts to produce unnoticed history through storytelling even today.

In his introduction Hopkin states: “This book is an attempt to show that the material collected by folklorists and labeled traditional might nonetheless provide sources for a history that escapes ‘the story of national development’ that Lehning warns ‘is implicit in the French discourse about the countryside, and indeed virtually all modern discourses about country dwellers.’ Like Lehning, I want a history that ‘will make country dwellers the actors in their history, rather than shadows drawn from developmental categories’” (19). Hopkin’s reference here is to James Lehning’s Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France During the Nineteenth Century (1995). To accomplish this mission, Hopkin presents six meticulous case studies to examine how voices from below formed and continue to form dynamic subaltern cultures resistant to the dominant culture. Moreover, he provides ample evidence to show that there was no such thing as a homogeneous peasant or folk culture. Rather, it was regional, particular, and heterogeneous. Indeed, Hopkin maintains that “folk culture is not the common
culture of a nation or a province, binding together seigneur and peasant, master and servant in the happy acceptance of social inequality; it was the voice of the dominated, separate from, sometimes radically hostile to their ‘betters’ and ‘governors,’ including folklorists themselves” (22).

Hopkin’s six case studies, drawn from different regions of France during the latter part of the nineteenth century, are the following: Chapter 1, “Storytelling in a Maritime Community: Saint-Cast, 1879–1882”; Chapter 2, “The Sailor’s Tale: Storytelling on Board the North Atlantic Fishing Fleet”; Chapter 3, “Love Riddles and Family Strategies in the dayemans of Lorraine”; Chapter 4, “Storytelling and Family Dynamics in an Extended Household: The Briffaults of Montigny-aux-Amognes”; Chapter 5, “Work Songs and Peasant Visions of the Social Order” (from the tiny parish of Montbrun in the Corbières); and Chapter 6, “The Visionary World of the Vallave Lacemaker.” In each case Hopkin focuses on the biography and intention of the collector of the tales, songs, and riddles. In particular, he deals with three of the great but neglected French folklorists—Paul Sébillot, Achille Millien, and Victor Smith—and the particular relationship that they had with the storytellers. Interestingly, all three folklorists, despite their education and upper-class backgrounds, were strongly attached to rural cultures and for different personal and political reasons wanted to recognize and celebrate customs and values that they could not share but esteemed. The repertoires of the storytellers who provided their songs and tales to Sébillot, Millien, and Smith were influenced by the relationship with their “superiors,” but they were also not afraid to voice their opinions about work and family in their tales. In fact, Hopkin demonstrates that the lower-class, often illiterate storytellers had an impact on how the folklorists wrote down their tales and caused them to change their attitudes and methods of collecting. Hopkin relied on archives, letters, and manuscripts that provided him with massive information about the specific conditions under which the storytellers worked, their conflicted relations with family members, church, and government, and their aspirations. The result in each chapter is a discrete and thorough analysis of how stories and storytellers made traditional tales their own stories and formed a means of communication that allowed people to articulate their wishes, grievances, opinions, and beliefs.

Throughout his comprehensive study, Hopkin uses two concepts, habitus and ecotype, that enable him to explain how storytellers and people in all sorts of jobs use their voices in active ways. He also explores gender differences in great detail. Yet, whether the storytellers were women or men, they were not victims or totally oppressed by their so-called superiors. They exercised a certain agency through storytelling, built their tales on tradition and their own
values, and formed their own strategies. Their habitus, or manners of behavior and thinking that they acquired from birth in a particular setting, did not prevent them from creating their own stories. And these stories, often widespread tale types in Europe, became their own ecotypes or variants that indicated something special about the storytellers and their environment. Hopkin uses performance theory in each chapter to distinguish what is historically significant in the tales told and collected in different regions of France in about the same time period.

For Hopkin the tales told, songs sung, and riddles created were social and historical acts connected to a particular location and time. Thanks to his exhaustive research, his careful and original use of methods from folklore and history, and his insistence that voices from below must be heard if we are to grasp the intricacies of social and cultural history, we can now gain a better understanding of the diverse aspects of national cultures and how we have stereotyped the folk, peasantry, and even the sovereign classes of imagined nation-states.

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After the Grimms and their successors in the nineteenth century discovered how many folktales were being told in all languages, they realized that “the folk” had an incalculably enormous memory for stories. How were computerless scholars to handle this huge mass? As one answer, Finnish scholars invented a system known as tale types, which catalog up to 2,400 recurrent plots. A more attractive answer, if you did not want to spend your life tracing the versions and variants of a single plot, was the discovery of Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp (1895–1970), whose 1928 book Morphology of the Folktale reduced the hundreds of plots of wonder tales, or magic tales, to a constant compositional structure. A hero or heroine leaves home, undergoes adventures, and achieves success. Scholars quickly saw the applicability of Propp’s sort of analysis to films and graphic novels, and the author became known as a Russian formalist literary critic. But he was insistently a folklorist; he rejected the formalist label. In the book under review he barks, “There was no formal school in the proper sense of the word in Soviet folkloristics” (79; my emphasis). His mode of analysis was inseparable from historicizing particular tales, indeed historicizing the whole genre: “Descriptive and historical studies do not exclude each other; rather, they depend on one another” (81). Partial translation of his Historical Roots
of the Wonder Tale (1946) helped to correct his image. So did translations of other writings (Transformations in Fairy Tales, 1972; “The Historical Bases of Some Russian Religious Festivals,” 1974; Theory and History of Folklore, 1984; On the Comic and Laughter, 2009). The Russian Folktale, edited after Propp’s death by his Russian colleagues, now fully and accurately translated by Sibelan Forrester, reveals that Propp was an encyclopedic folklorist.

The book adheres strictly to its title. First, the author lists approved criteria for defining the genre of folktale: (1) the folktale is not believed true, (2) historically, myth is prior, and (3) the folktale is for entertainment, in contrast to myth, which “has sacral meaning” (19), a distinction confirmed by innumerable storytellers and audiences around the world. Reflecting the contributions of colonial ethnography, Propp states that (4) myths come from “aboriginal peoples” and have “religious and magical significance” (20). In literate societies such as ancient Greece, he adds that (5) the characters in myth are “deities or semideities” (21). Finally, (6) myth can develop into folktale by losing its social significance (24). In this book Propp refines his formulation of the myth-folktale relationship. He may be responding to the review of the Morphology in which Claude Lévi-Strauss rendered homage to Propp’s great discovery. As to the genre of legend, treated briefly in The Russian Folktale (27–29), Propp argued elsewhere that the term should be limited to narratives treating characters associated with Christianity (L. J. Ivanits, Russian Folk Belief, 1989: 128).

After that introduction comes a clear, informative history of collecting in Russia. Chapter 2 gives a valuable critical history of the study of folktales, concentrating again on Russia but not ignoring European authorities. Some nineteenth-century definitions, says Propp, of the folktale genre were “distinguished by total fantasy” with respect to its early history (72). Wilhelm Grimm’s editorial practices, so much castigated by Western scholars (Maria Tatar, The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales, 1987: 36–37), display “great tact and taste” (91). Propp fundamentally rejects the Finnish method of studying plots one by one; it is “a methodological error” (126–27) that diminishes the social meaning of a tale (255). It is an irony of history that Stith Thompson, the foremost English-language practitioner of tale typing, showed that incidents and characters are mobile and turn up in plot after plot (Stith Thompson, The Folk tale, 1946). What, then, is the integrity of the “type”? The concept seems to disintegrate in the latest revision of the catalog (H. J. Uther’s Types of International Folktales, 2004), reviewed in Marvels & Tales in 2006 (v. 20.1).

The heart of The Russian Folktale is Propp’s exposition of folktale genres (Chapters 3–6). The divisions and subdivisions are strangely illogical, as Propp knows. The traditional categories for the folklorist of animal tales,
wonder (magic) tales, and cumulative tales continually overlap. Character types too, Propp points out, are an unreliable way of classifying; how can “a householder and his hired man as antagonists” constitute a group of tales (252–53)? For wonder tales (147–224), Propp gives his students, and us, an elegant and handy summary of his morphological analysis (147–74); then he turns to a discussion of language and style and to a detailed survey of the most popular Russian plots. These lectures must have been a pleasure to hear when the author, who was obviously a practiced lecturer, stopped analyzing and instead told one of the stories in summary. Although occasionally Propp’s concentration on Russia trips him up (for instance, he treats introductory formulas as though they were not worldwide), much of his presentation is valid for many tale traditions.

More problematic is the category treated in Chapter 4, “novellistic” tales. This word at first appears to be a translator’s misspelling of the word denoting “pertaining to a novel.” In literature the Boccaccio-style novella is normally defined as “a prose work . . . depicting an unprecedented, extraordinary, or ambiguous event” (M. McCarthy, Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, 2005: 404). But Propp means realistic or everyday. Tales organized around riddles are an example of the novellistic. Divisions between realism and fantasy are never firm, but Propp makes one plausible distinction: in wonder tales heroes acquire magical helpers or magic objects, whereas in novellistic tales they act alone (236). Perhaps the Russian repertoire supports this distinction for scholarly analysis better than others do.

The final chapter, “The Life of the Folktale,” sets the tale in social context. Already in 1961, in reconstructing the historical context of Russian lyrics, Propp declared that performance was primary: “The social material determines even the poetics” (Propp, Down Along the Mother Volga, 1975: 3). For both lyrics and tales, analysis of performance supports Propp’s analysis of folk artistry. Then when he expounds on the social setting of tale performance (305–310), the reader wonders about the degree of Marxist-Leninist pressure on the author. “How much Propp personally believed in it all [says his translator reasonably] is hard to say” (xviii). Propp criticizes the ardor of Soviet folklorists for glorifying the “striking, talented representatives of the folk creative art” (Y. M. Sokolov, Russian Folklore, 1950: 710): “The tale,” Propp asserts, “lives its full life not just in the person of expert narrators” (304). The Russian Folktale contains few chunks of inserted Soviet doctrine and much convincing treatment of social context.

The editors’ and the translator’s notes are full and excellent. I wish Sibelan Forrester had included in the ample bibliography the English translations of Propp’s other works (mentioned in this review). Isn’t the reader of her
translation the folktale enthusiast who has no access to Russian-language sources? But the book is so clearly written and informative that it can be read without trouble by students and scholars, who will then find on the Internet the bibliographic aids they need. Reading The Russian Folktale makes me dream of a one-volume survey on the history and theory of folktales around the world, which would be as comprehensive, readable, and authoritative as this book is about Russia.

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In this unusual, often insightful, and sometimes polemical book, Ute Heidmann and Jean-Michel Adam take up many of the problems that have long dogged criticism of Charles Perrault’s fairy tales. Both the sources and interpretation of his Histoires ou contes du temps passé have generated an ever-expanding body of scholarship and with it a number of seemingly intractable questions. Did Perrault base his tales on oral tradition? What were his literary sources, if any? What sort of social critique is performed by his fairy tales? And specifically, is Perrault a (proto-) feminist? These are some of the most prominent questions addressed by Heidmann and Adam, who use the tools of comparative philology, genetic criticism, and discursive analysis to scrutinize the textual fabric of this collection. Through intricate analyses of individual tales and the relationships between them and with other texts, the authors shed new light on this corpus and position themselves against many received notions in Perrault criticism and fairy-tale studies more generally.

The most fundamental notion that Heidmann and Adam question is the possibility of defining what a fairy tale is. As a point of departure, the authors assert, the question of how to define a fairy tale reinforces a universalizing perspective that obscures the textual specificity and variety of the texts we call fairy tales. For Heidmann and Adam, then, it is less productive to ask what fairy tales are and much more productive to ask how they use and dialogue with a range of linguistic and literary discourses. Focusing on the textual workings of Perrault’s prose tales also leads the authors to reject commonplace assertions of a debt to the oral tradition; instead, Heidmann and Adam prefer to analyze the historically contingent intertextual and interdiscursive references that are obscured by the (supposedly) universalizing and thematic approach of folklore studies. Rather than tale types, then, Heidmann and Adam use a limited number
of heretofore mostly neglected literary sources—particularly Apuleius’s *Tale of Cupid and Psyche*—to illuminate “Sleeping Beauty,” “Blue Beard,” and “Little Red Riding Hood” in particular, with implications for all of the *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*. Much more than a source study, *Textualité et intertextualité des contes* shows how Perrault reworks the generic conventions of the intertexts he draws on, thereby creating a newly inflected genre that departs from its antecedents in significant ways. The first part of this book, written by Ute Heidmann, centers on Perrault’s generic “reconfigurations” in some detail. The second part, by Jean-Michel Adam, often refers back to the first part and explores various textual and discursive features that give Perrault’s collection its coherence.

In the first section, “Genres and Texts in Dialogue,” Heidmann studies what she calls Perrault’s “dialogic poetics,” the means by which his prose tales incorporate and rewrite elements from specific intertexts (Apuleius especially, but also Virgil, La Fontaine, Scarron, and Fénelon), creating tales that often invert their storylines and invalidate their overt messages. But Heidmann’s argument in this part of the book goes even further, asserting that it is with these intertextual and interdiscursive dialogues—and not purportedly fictive “folkloric” sources—that Perrault creates the narratives we now know as “Blue Beard” and “Little Red Riding Hood.” Although this claim does not square with a large body of scholarship (none of which is engaged with, it should be noted), the intertextual underpinnings of the *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, which are astutely laid out here, shed important new light on Perrault’s stance toward antiquity. It is well-known, of course, that his fairy tales had a strategic place in the ongoing quarrel of the ancients and the moderns, but Heidmann’s analyses make clear that the prose tales actively rewrite ancient sources from a decidedly skeptical posture, highlighting their incompatibility with “modern” (i.e., late seventeenth-century) cultural and literary sensibilities. This is an important insight that adds a wholly new and rich dimension to our understanding of the place of Perrault’s fairy tales within the quarrel.

Part and parcel of Heidmann’s argument about the prose tales is the reconfiguration of the archetypal storytelling scene, visualized in the famous frontispiece but also evoked in the preface to the tales in verse. Once again, Heidmann is intent on setting aside assumptions that Perrault is in any way beholden to an oral tradition, and instead she views these oblique references to oral storytelling as pseudo-naïve. Like Apuleius, Perrault invents the pretext of an old woman tale-teller all the better to highlight the (often ironic) distance of a writer-commentator and the interpretive skill required of his readers. Although this conclusion is not particularly new, it does reveal yet another illuminating intertextual dialogue at the heart of the *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*. But it is entirely a different matter to claim,
as Heidmann does, that this nod to Apuleius can be construed as yet further proof that Perrault was not rewriting elements from an oral tradition. Even more perplexing is the nonironic reading of the final morals at the end of “Blue Beard.” After teasing out Perrault’s ironic reworking of Apuleius in the narrative, Heidmann shifts gears and views the final moral from a curiously literal lens. For her this tale actually endorses female curiosity, a conclusion that goes very much against the grain of recent feminist scholarship (although Heidmann does not respond to these arguments in any detail). Be this as it may, a more persuasive consequence of the argument about Perrault’s dialogues with Apuleius and other texts is Heidmann’s suggestive observation that they provide the sort of cohesion for the collection provided by the frame narrative of other fairy-tale authors.

In the second part of the book (“The Textuality of Perrault’s Tales”), Jean-Michel Adam elaborates further on this observation, demonstrating the coherence of the collection through specific textual details and relations of cotextuality, that is, the formal and thematic links among tales. Through intricate readings of the original editions of the verse and prose tales, Adam demonstrates how recurring features such as capitalization, conjunctions (ou and car), pronouns (on), hyperbole, onomastics, and parenthesis function coherently throughout. For Adam (and Heidmann), Perrault’s tales must be studied in their original form—notably, the editions of 1694 and 1697—failing which the full extent of its social commentary is lost. Again and again, Adam notes that the liberties modern critical editions take with the letter of the text alter the meanings conveyed originally. Adam convincingly shows how the use of capital letters and a number of grammatical oddities, for instance, contribute significantly to the cotextual meanings of the collection as a whole. Other scholars have noted the unusual use of capitalization in Perrault’s tales, but none as systematically as Adam. Even more enlightening is the overarching argument Adam makes about the cotextual connections among the tales in the collection, including the juxtaposition of antithetical plotlines and the recurring motif of the weak confronting the powerful, with greater and lesser success. The broader point Adam makes is that “the analysis of these relations of co-textuality reveals the coherence of a writing project that the ordinary interpretation of fairy tales as independent entities does not allow one to grasp” (163; my translation).

Paradoxically, at times Adam’s sheer attention to detail overwhelms this larger argument, focusing on specific lexical and linguistic features within individual tales. And at moments the conclusions drawn from the intricate analyses seem altogether obvious. But this is certainly not the case of the careful analysis devoted to the morals in verse, which Adam sees as a change in “textual regime” (210), where the voice of the narrator gives way to that of
an ironic moralist. Indeed, these pages are the most extensive yet in Perrault criticism on the narrative structure and function of the versed morals, giving particular attention to the use of irony. Also revealing is the analysis of meta-enunciation in Perrault’s tales, the reference to their own enunciation. Through an engaging analysis of the use of the pronoun on, Adam shows how the boundary between narrator, characters, and readers is dissolved, creating a common point of reference marked by irony toward the worlds of the fairy tale. At its best, then, this second part of the book refines and fleshes out conclusions made by other scholars, albeit from the standpoint of genetic and discursive analysis.

In their joint conclusion Adam and Heidmann point to the need for the study of other fairy-tale collections with the comparative philological, genetic, and textual linguistic analysis used in this book. The pair have already published studies of Andersen, the Grimms, and Angela Carter, and they promise future work in this vein. In North America and perhaps elsewhere, the methodology endorsed by the authors is not widespread, to say the least. And yet their book demonstrates that scholars of fairy tales have much to learn from this approach, even if they do not adopt it for themselves. We should all greet future work by Adam and Heidmann with great interest and hope that they will dialogue more directly with other methodological approaches.

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Meseterápia: Mesék a gyógyításban és a mindennapokban. By Ildikó Boldizsár.  
Mesepszichológia: Az érzelmi intelligencia fejlesztése gyermekkorban.  

Leading Hungarian folklore scholar Ildikó Boldizsár is nationally renowned as the editor of best-selling fairy-tale anthologies about men for women and about women for men (2007); about mothers and about fathers (2008); and about life, death, and rebirth (2009). In her 2010 publication, Meseterápia: Mesék a gyógyításban és a mindennapokban (Fairy-Tale Therapy: Tales to Help Cure and Everydays), she claims to have developed a bibliotherapeutic method, called metamorphosis fairy-tale therapy (metamorfózis meseterápiás módszer, abbreviated MMM), by relying on ancient folk wisdom encapsulated in the enduring form of the fairy tale, a genre that has not only served entertainment and informational purposes but also primarily provided a ritualistic means for intergenerationally passing down a complex body of mundane and metaphysical knowledge about the fundamental psychic needs and conflict resolution capacities of the “enworlded” human being.
In Boldizsár’s view the major leitmotifs and plotlines of folktales and fairy tales fictionalize real-life existential dilemmas by tackling questions such as how to find one’s true bride, how to fight the seven-headed dragon, where to locate the Water of Life, and what is beyond the Glass Mountains. They help us to appease struggles, settle imbalances, and “mend the time-out-of-joint,” not so much by promising to correct the malfunctioning of the world but rather by revealing potential tactics to harmonically relate to and make the most of the limited possibilities granted by our internal and external realities. The táltos magical winged horse—the mythical helping figure in Hungarian folktales that, once adequately ridden, “flies as swift as thought” and that traditionally serves a shamanistic means of meditation—spectacularly emblematizes the tales’ invitation to self-reflectivity both on the cognitive and the spiritual level.

Although Boldizsár’s fairy-tale therapy is allegedly based on empirical evidence gained from healing storytelling sessions she gave at children’s hospitals, her interdisciplinary method—combining folklore, philosophy, psychology, history, aesthetics, literary theory, and religious studies—is applicable to all age groups for psychotherapeutic, regenerative, and preventive purposes alike. However, MMM is most widely used in Hungary today as training in self-awareness and crisis management, helping people in their 20s through their 50s resolve anxieties and deal with an impasse temporarily surfacing or chronically prevailing in their lives as a result of common depressing or traumatic experiences: loss, mourning, solitude, communicational difficulties, problems in intimate interpersonal relationships (separation anxiety, divorce, unrequited love, abandonment, emotional addiction, rivalry), or any other form of distress constitutive of our contemporary cultural malaise.

First, the patient chooses the tale that she believes to bear the most resemblance to her own current life stage and self-image. Second, through a detailed and collaborative analysis of the tale, the patient is encouraged to take part in active fantasy work and explore how the story symbolically stages her own troubles and thoughts. The ritualistic, affectively charged identification with the heroic protagonist enables the patient to revitalize fossilized, suppressed sense perceptions and emotional channels, to reestablish lost contacts with inner and outer realms. Eventually, in the third stage of the therapy, the patient retells the tale changing some of its motifs to model her own road to (self-)healing. The new version, with personalized solutions of her own, will regenerate her life and allow for satisfactory access to “the totality of being.” Fairy tales tailored to individual needs are endowed with the capacity to provide consolation and encouragement, to ease psychic and physical pains, and to enable us to understand and rebalance our lives by letting us come to terms with our own desires, constraints, possibilities, and the spiritual roots that provide the ground for our shared system of universal human values.
The first Fairy-Tale Therapy Center, founded in a little Hungarian village called Paloznak in 2010, the year the book on MMM was published, adopts a line from Goethe for its credo: “There are two things children can get from their parents: roots and wings.” However, the point is that the stable value system and the self-fulfillment symbolized by roots and wings should be rendered available to everyone, regardless of origin, education, quality of life, or family background, simply by virtue of the gift of fairy tales.

The most recently published Hungarian scholarly work on the therapeutic value of tales, Mesepszichológia: Az érzelmi intelligencia fejlesztése gyermekkorban (Fairy-Tale Psychology: Developing Children’s Emotional Intelligence) (2012) by Annamária Kádár, pays homage to MMM by quoting Boldizsár’s argument concerning how the relation to wonder fundamentally determines the quality of human existence: the question is not that of belief or disbelief but rather of a capacity to make use of enchantment to better one’s life. The book also recycles the earlier-mentioned metaphorical imagery of roots and wings, regarding them as symbolic tokens of children’s development of an inner sense of emotional security, psychic integrity, imaginative willingness, and an inalienable primary trust in the goodness of being, which makes the effort to reach one’s goals seem worthwhile, the failures seem more bearable, and happiness seem more accessible. Kádár claims that this is the main message of fairy tales, fabulously encapsulated in Hungarian children’s poet Sándor Weöres’s line “The earth is beneath us, the sky is above, but the ladder is always within” and suggesting that every child should be offered the chance to gain empowerment through identifying with the little swineherd who climbed atop the tree reaching up into the sky and beyond, pointing toward limitless possibilities.

Kádár’s work is indebted to MMM—along with a number of other theoretical takes on fairy-tale therapy from Carl Jung, Bruno Bettelheim, and Jean Piaget to Verena Kast, Marie Louise Von Franz, and Laura Simms—which she intriguingly yet accessibly refers to in her study. But because Kádár is primarily a child psychologist, an expert in kindergarten and elementary school pedagogy, and a trainer in emotional intelligence developmental programs, her perspective on the beneficial, curative potentials of tales is slightly different. Whereas most of Boldizsár’s case studies report how tales can function by means of a retrospectively compensatory cure for frustrated or traumatized adults embarking on a self-help project, Kádár concentrates on calling parents’ and teachers’ attention to how storytelling can help the early development of emotional intelligence and serve as long-lasting spiritual support, preventing the emergence of future psychiatric disorders.

Quite pragmatically, Kádár suggests that any successful life career depends just as much on cognitive capacities and reasonable decisions (IQ) as on an intelligent use of emotions (EQ), both of which help to reach a harmoniously
satisfying self-esteem, to connect and cooperate with others in autonomous yet empathic ways, and to resolve conflicts, reach compromises, and define and realize desires. The special cozy atmosphere of the bedtime storytelling ritual allows children to reach a nearly trancelike relaxed state whereby daytime tensions can be released, frustratingly nonverbalized aggression can be projected on negative characters, instinctive and rational impulses can be harmonized, fear can be reinterpreted as an emotion concomitant with the activation of inner powers, and the painful loss of the comfort zone is disclosed as a prerequisite for further development.

Kádár excitingly argues that “living in a fairy-tale world” and “believing in miracles” for a person with a highly developed emotional intelligence signifies neither some sort of loony escapism nor a resenting, phlegmatically passive awaiting for the grilled dove to fly into one’s mouth already roasted, as the Hungarian proverb says. Neither does it require an uncompromising pursuit of the ready-made quest prescribed by fairy-tale plotlines. It does signify, on the contrary, the embracing of an optimistic life philosophy grounded in the solid value system of fairy tales, which show us that respect, solidarity, love, endurance, honesty, and a healthy combination of sane realism and creative fantasy can help us surmount obstacles, exploit emerging possibilities, and reach our goals. Fairy tales teach us never to back down and never to give up, to fight fears relentlessly, and, most important, to live serendipitously, making pleasantly surprising, happily accidental, fortunate discoveries of agreeable and valuable things that have not been particularly sought after.

After the careful examination of more than a thousand tales written by Hungarian schoolchildren, Kádár singles out the most frequent infantile narrative patterns of fictionalized conflict resolution and embarks on writing ten therapeutic tales of her own, published in the appendix of her book. The protagonist of Kádár’s therapeutic tales for children (4- to 9-year-olds) is a little girl called Lilla, who has an imaginary friend, FairyBerry (sort of an animated problem doll), who helps her to negotiate, express, and accept her emotions but never instructs or disciplines her. FairyBerry never asks Lilla not to cry and never mocks, doubts, or discredits her feelings. This fairylike tutelary companion is just simply present, “always there for her” to share joys and sorrows, and yet FairyBerry is prepared to let go once the little girl seems to be able to manage on her own. Thus FairyBerry symbolizes unconditional acceptance and the art of “loving with open arms,” thus serving as a model for “good-enough” parenting, in psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s sense.

Boldizsár’s and Kádár’s works are theoretically informed scholarly books, characterized by an erudite yet enjoyable style that is accessible to nonprofessional audiences as well. They fit nicely into the traditional lineage of
Hungarian endeavors exploring the therapeutic values of fairy tales, from thanatologist child psychiatrist Alaine Polcz’s pioneering play diagnosis introduced in the 1960s to today’s clown doctors, puppet cure, and collaborative fantasy works performed on new media platforms.

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In addition to two dozen color plates and numerous illustrations and ornaments throughout the text, Stranger Magic includes a glossary, a list of abbreviations, a list of stories and their various sources, fifty pages of notes, a brief bibliography, and an index.

Marina Warner’s beautiful new book explores the effect the Arabian Nights has had on Western thought. It aims ambitiously to “present a different perspective on the interaction of imagination and reason, on the history of intellectual inquiry and scientific invention in Europe,” and thus to “move toward the reassessment of the exchanges” between East and West (20). The arrival of the Nights, in its first translation by Antoine Galland (1704–1717), is fraught with contradiction: it was established as a masterpiece of imagination in the Europe of rationality and Enlightenment, was received with rapt enthusiasm, and yet was also dismissed for its irrationality, and the magic that permeates its stories was both infantilized and exoticized—relegated to the nursery or to primitive cultures—in a process that coincided with the West’s rejection of its own tradition of magical thought.

Stranger Magic is organized into five parts, each taking up a facet of magical thought. Fifteen individual tales, clustered around the five themes and summarized in lively detail, provide points of departure from which Warner’s commentary sallies forth in multiple directions, weaving together in suggestive patterns the Oriental plots and “ideas of enchantment in the book’s afterglow” (29), in both Eastern and Western cultures, ancient and modern.

Part 1, “Solomon the Wise King,” opens, aptly, with the story “The Fisherman and the Genie,” which brings up the question of the jinni characters so important in the Nights. Warner discusses the role of the jinni both in relation to the plot (they “introduce a dynamic of pure chance which runs alongside the larger designs of fate,” adding “the energy of unpredictability to the plots” [43]) and in terms of their preferred mode of transportation (flying). The flying carpet, an image that epitomizes the Nights for our Western imagination, appears in Galland’s story of “Prince Ahmed and the Fairy Peri Banu”; although we have some reason to suspect
that the tale was cobbled together by the inventive translator himself, Warner reminds us that it quickly became one of the favorite tales and also led to rich cinematographic recreations in the twentieth century, in particular Lotte Reiniger's *Adventures of Prince Achmed*, the two *Thieves of Baghdad* films, and Disney's *Aladdin*. The flying carpet is discussed both in the cultural context of the Enlightenment and its scientific experiments on flying, which culminated in the first hot-air balloons, and as an archetypal symbol of transport as both travel and rapture. “To understand the thinking that turned the folk motif of a flying carpet into such a prime symbol of fantasy today it is necessary to press a little further into the analogies between carpets, desire and narrative, specifically the narrative of dream-thoughts and fantastic, oriental plots” (79). This Warner does with breathtaking dexterity and grace, transporting us from Solomonic lore, to the art of rug weaving and the pleasures of pattern recognition, to Rudolf Nureyev's tomb adorned with a mosaic rug.

Part 2, “Dark Arts, Strange Gods,” turns to witchcraft, clustering three stories in which black magic features prominently ("The Prince of the Black Islands," "Hasan of Basra," and "A Fortune Regained") and weaving the readings of these stories with commentaries on witchcraft (Egypt, the land of hermetic knowledge, dominates this “fabulous geography” [99]) and dream knowledge. The chapter sketches the complex relations and blurry borders between religious orthodoxy and magic arts from the Renaissance onward, until the “splitting of magic and science” that occurred in the eighteenth century, when “imagination and reason [came] to be seen as irreconcilable processes” (111) and the quest for rationality relegated occult knowledge to the unspeakable margins of thought. This is exactly when Galland’s *Nights* took hold of European minds, and Warner provides some fascinating insights, reminding us, for instance, of Newton’s interest in sacred geometry or pointing to the false etymology of “nigromancer” (112), combining death and blackness, as a vivid example of the process by which magic was both exoticized and demonized during that period. On dreams her essay yields many surprising and illuminating associations, whisking us from the hyperstimulated sensitivity of the *Nights’* heroes to the Proustian narrator and to Barack Obama’s shamanic dream in his autobiography, *Dreams of My Father*, or from Kafka’s *Penal Colony* to Jorge Luis Borges’s “Circular Ruins.”

Part 3, “Active Goods,” yields more ingenious and delightful associations, although Warner seems at times carried away by the sheer pleasure of gliding from one topic to another; the history of translations, illustrations, and various Orientalist studies in the wake of the Napoleonic *Description of Egypt* seem perhaps rather loosely linked together by a general notion of “things” portrayed
in these books. The idea, however, is compelling. The tales are all about things, and the contrast she draws between the “wastrel heroes” of some of these tales, such as Abu Mohammed the Lazy who “lacks all definition and volition” (215) and the unimaginable riches piled upon him by the benefactor genie, proves that the goods are “the true subject of the story” (215), “a story of international trade [that] literally animates the goods that form part of that trade” (216). In her pioneering study, Mia Gerhardt aptly described the young merchants as the Oriental equivalent of fairy-tale princes; along the same lines, Warner traces suggestive parallels between the Nights and modern capitalistic societies. “Marouf the Cobbler” presents a “pre-modern pyramid scheme” (240). Her chapter on modern finances, “Money Talks,” which focuses on “the enchanted and phantasmic character of money in modernity” (257), is evidence of the many surprising encounters between the medieval universe of the Nights and the various forms of Western modernity that I analyzed in my own book, Les Amoureux de Schéhérazade: variations modernes sur les Mille et une Nuits (2009).

It would be productive to engage in systematic dialogue with other studies that touch on the same issues, such as Madeleine Dobie’s analysis of eighteenth-century material culture in her Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism (2001) or, more recently, Robert Irwin’s connection between the “romance of trade” in the Arabian Nights and the emergence of realistic fiction in Britain (2008). The things that Warner’s chapter highlights, however, are enchanted things, in particular, talismans, to which she devotes a fascinating few pages. The connections she makes between animated artifacts of the Nights (lamps, rugs, etc.) and “the modern strain of animism” (205)—that is, our uncanny dependence on various prosthetic devices (cell phones, laptops, iPods)—are captivating, as are her psychological meditations on the various affective ways in which things acquire souls or Hans Christian Andersen’s world of animated objects.

Part 4, “Oriental Masquerades,” explores arabesque in its various disguises: fanciful Orientalizing rewritings of the tales from Voltaire to Beckford, from Mozart to Hamilton, from Diderot to Goethe, emphasizing in turns the comic, the satirical, the macabre, and the erotic dimensions of Orientalist inspiration. The late writings of Edward Said, devoted to a more harmonious understanding of East-West cross-pollination than his early firebrand book Orientalism, provide an effective structure to the argument.

Part 5, “Flights of Reason,” treats us to lively musings on the innumerable flight episodes. The flying carpet returns. European fairy tales, Warner reminds us, traditionally shun flying (perhaps because of its association with witchcraft); their characters’ mode of locomotion is grounded. The Oriental trend sweeping through the West unlocks dreams of flying in later fiction, and
Warner connects this with scientific (and pseudo-scientific) interest in flying devices of all kinds from the most preposterous (e.g., Cyrano de Bergerac’s phials of dew) to the viable (the hot-air balloon). “The era of machine dreams had begun,” she reflects (356), as fanciful “science” migrates first to the popular stage and then to the nursery, giving rise to a wealth of children’s stories about flying, first among them Peter Pan. The chapter follows the exuberant history of staged Aladdins in all their precinematic extravagance. Indeed, the entire argument is built on the premise of “the affinity of the moving medium of film and the concept of the flying carpet” (372), on the special effects at the heart of film and tales. Pride of place is duly given to Lotte Reiniger’s 1926 shadow film, The Adventures of Prince Achmed, whose DNA can be found in the art of Rackham and Tim Burton. Finally, in the last chapter (“The Couch: A Case History”), starting with the story of “Aladdin abu-Shamat,” whose heroes travel by flying bed, Warner draws a wide circle encompassing erotic sofa literature, flying carpets, and the notorious couch of psychoanalysis, specifically Freud’s, which is covered by a Ghashga’i rug of intricate patterns.

In her introduction, Warner compares the 1001 Nights to a genie streaming out of a jar, taking many forms and answering to many masters. The same could be said of Stranger Magic. It does not adopt a folklorist’s approach. Nor does it bring new scholarship about the tangled history of the Nights manuscripts, editions, or translations. It is also not a narratological exercise in Todorov’s tradition, although it does pass over all these critical regions. This book about a book, as sprawling as its subject, is rather like a flying carpet itself, transporting us over so many lands in the space of a few hundred pages. With its delightful patterning and its breathtaking mobility, the flying carpet is the central and recurring motif in Warner’s book, which goes a long way to explain the power of the Nights over Western imagination, its enduring presence as the beating heart of repressed irrational forces.

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“I’m just finishing this off for the girls,” Angela Carter explained, with a nod to the manuscript of The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales lying on her hospital bed; it was January 1992, the month before she died of lung cancer at the age of 51. Ever since her seminal 1979 collection The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories, Carter’s multifaceted fairy-tale revisioning has played a vital role in the development of fairy-tale scholarship and, more than two decades after her death, continues to offer illuminating insights into the interpretation and the uses of this polymorphous genre.
Susannah Clapp’s *A Card from Angela Carter* sketches an intimate and evocative portrait in the form of a series of vignettes sparked by the postcards Carter sent Clapp during the 1980s from places as far apart as Texas, Taormina, and New South Wales. The book is compact in both length and format, not much larger than the postcards themselves, whose images are also reproduced here. The two women’s friendship began when Clapp invited Carter to write articles for the *London Review of Books*, of which Clapp was a founding editor. In her final illness, Carter appointed Clapp her literary executor.

Readers are first led to Carter’s study, the writer’s innermost space. The contrast Clapp makes between Carter’s study and the rest of her house vividly encapsulates her double-edged character, which is illuminated from different angles throughout the book. Clapp’s description leads us through the kitchen and sitting room, with “violet and marigold walls, and scarlet paintwork,” where pet birds “were released from their cages to swirl through the air, balefully watched through the window by the household’s salivating cats,” to Carter’s study which is far more austere and organized: “Not so much carnival as cranial,” Clapp notes. This juxtaposition of over-the-top extravagance and cool-headed analysis is reflected in Carter’s writings.

Clapp’s book does not claim to be a biography; rather, it is a memoir based on the personal experience of a close friend. Clapp uses the postcards, rather than the letters that she also received, as a starting point for her reminiscences because of their unpremeditated and laconic nature—exactly the opposite of the style of Carter’s own writing—and this method allows us to catch unexpected glimpses into Carter’s character and private thoughts.

The greater part of the portrait is dedicated to Carter as a journalist, the aspect of her life through which Clapp first became acquainted with her, reminding us that Carter, having started her writing career as a local newspaper reporter at the age of 18, continued to write journalism all her life. But Clapp also talks about the various other aspects of that life which she came to know personally: fiction writer, university teacher, wife, mother, telephone chatterer, and cook. Especially interesting for a fairy-tale researcher is the connection Clapp makes between the drafts of early poems, which she found in Carter’s diaries from the 1960s, and her later interest in fairy tales. One poem, “The Magic Apple Tree,” she calls “an early fierce fairy tale, an anteroom to *The Bloody Chamber.*” There is also a postcard sent from Auckland with a crude, sentimental comic strip of a Maori creation myth, about which Carter scoffs, “A likely story.” Clapp takes this as a glancing criticism of her own enthusiasm for Bruce Chatwin, whose biography she would later write. Carter’s interest in folktale and mythology, Clapp believes, was different from Chatwin’s anthropological search for the origins of human instincts and beliefs. Carter’s skepticism about this kind of universalizing
project, which she might well have expressed in a grotesquely exaggerated parody in her fiction—Zero and his harem of “primitive” women nursing pigs in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) come to mind—is expressed here in the elliptical form of a picture postcard to her close friend.

The last card Clapp writes about is not from Carter but an invitation (beautifully reproduced in the endpapers of the book) created by an old friend of hers, Corinna Sargood, for Carter’s memorial, which took place at a cinema in south London about five weeks after her death. The ceremony was based on the radio program *Desert Island Discs*, for which Carter had been asked to choose eight pieces of music, a book, and a luxury item to take. (The program was never made because of Carter’s declining health.) Clapp’s restrained description of the memorial, filled with warmth and subtle humor, affectingly captures Carter as a person so much loved and valued by those close to her. The final paragraph is especially moving for those of us who admire Carter’s work and spirit. At the end of the memorial, her husband and son went up on the stage to reveal Carter’s choice of luxury, as painted by Sargood; it was a zebra, that exotic herbivore, almost too wonderfully made to be real. This startling choice introduces another complication into Carter’s fairy-tale menagerie, offering an intriguing contrast to the figure of the wolf, that “carnivore incarnate,” that Carter demythologizes in her Little Red Riding Hood stories and that has become her signature animal and a kind of a totem among the readers of her fairy tales, as is indicated by the mail-carrying wolf depicted on the front cover of Clapp’s memoir.

Although slim, this book is infused with touching moments and insightful observations. It will stimulate many readers to turn again to Carter’s writings and, like a good hors d’oeuvre, leave them eager for something more substantial. Her long-awaited full-length biography is currently being prepared by Edmund Gordon, to be published by Chatto & Windus in 2016. Clapp’s lapidary memoir may mark the beginning of the demythologizing of Angela Carter. The book she had chosen to take to a desert island, by the way, was *Larousse Gastronomique*.

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There are six ugly little brick houses that 12-year-old Snotty can see whenever he looks out the window of his gloomy room. Six dirty houses that form the most familiar sight of his childhood in this poor and crime-ridden neighborhood. Six houses, but seven gardens—how can that be? That puzzling seventh garden proves to truly defy all logic when Snotty, running from the
police, escapes into the garden only to find himself falling and falling, all the way down the rabbit hole and into a different world. It is this mysterious land, populated by such fantastic creatures as talking teddy bears, living garden gnomes, and a small white horse with a strange scar on its forehead, that serves as the setting for Snotty’s adventures and journey of self-discovery. But as Snotty struggles to understand what truly is, rather than what only appears to be, and as he begins to peel away the layers of self-deception for his true self to emerge, he also finds himself at the center of a violent battle: in this land, the Strong and Big have declared war on the Weak and Small, and Snotty will have to choose a side.

Snotty’s tale, or The Legendus Snottianicus, as it is known in its untranslated form, is not only the story of a young boy’s adventures, however; it is also the foundation myth of the land of Arcadia and a text that has been extensively studied by Arcadian scholars. As the founder of Exterminating Angel Press explains in a note that precedes Snotty’s story, the book came into her possession complete with a foreword and extensive notes by Professor Devindra Vale, one of Arcadia’s most respected scientists. Her footnotes, which often refer to other academics’ works and highlight scholarly debates relevant for a more profound understanding of The Legendus Snottianicus, offer an additional layer of meaning to the reader: while Snotty’s tale provides insight into Arcadia’s beginnings, Professor Vale’s notes illuminate Arcadia’s current state of affairs and frequently ponder the causes for the civil war this land now finds itself in. As the reader quickly learns through the commentary Professor Vale provides, the opposing ideologies that lie at the root of the war Snotty is fighting also present the core of the modern-day Arcadians’ struggle.

Snotty Saves the Day is an unconventional text for children, or, as it proclaims, for “adults of all ages,” both in its innovative form and spellbinding content. Author Tod Davies skillfully interweaves the plot of Snotty’s tale with the metacommentary inherent in the text’s footnotes, and she presents the reader with a book that looks as much like a scholarly work as it does a fairy tale. Ultimately advocating the importance of academic study and intellectualism, Davies’s novel also posits that it is in children’s stories, fairy tales, and folktales that the most fundamental human truths can be found. In the bratty, selfish, and arrogant Snotty, the tale has an unlikely protagonist whose choices nonetheless remain relatable and whose journey of self-discovery further illuminates the war of ideas that serves as the novel’s core. By subverting Snotty’s internalized ideas of the female as subservient to the male, the text moreover critiques traditional gender roles and offers a startling and creative conclusion to the child character’s quest for his true identity. Davies’s fast-paced and mesmerizing tale, which propels
its reader from one breathtaking adventure to the next, is a novel of ideas for children and adults that invites its readers to reflect on contemporary politics not just in Arcadia but in our world as well.

*Lily the Silent*, the second book in the History of Arcadia series, continues to ponder the philosophical questions that *Snotty Saves the Day* raises: Who are we? Why are we here? And how shall we live? Picking up only a few years after Snotty’s tale left off, *Lily the Silent* tells the story of Arcadia’s first queen, although it focuses not on Lily’s eventual reluctant ascension to the throne and her reign but rather on her adventures as a young, teenaged woman. As her peaceful and idyllic homeland of Arcadia is colonized by the much stronger and more powerful Megalopolis, 15-year-old Lily is presented with a society much different from the community of her childhood: whereas Arcadians live in small towns surrounded by nature, share their resources, and tell stories at their many feasts, the people of Megalopolis reside in a loud big city, strive to gain money and power, and obsess over celebrity gossip. Uprooted from her village and faced with the ruthlessness and superficiality of Megalopolis, Lily wishes nothing more than to return home and to restore the Arcadian way of life. Before she can make her way back home, however, Lily has to undertake a journey to fulfill her destiny that takes her from enslavement in a children’s mine all the way to the moon (two moons, to be precise) and to the deepest bottom of the sea. In her adventures she is joined by characters the reader will recognize from *Snotty Saves the Day*, although they now reappear in different disguises and incarnations.

But at its core *Lily the Silent* is the love story of two teenagers. Lily, the future queen of Arcadia, and Conor Barr, the handsome prince of Megalopolis, fall in love at first sight, and both know that it is the other person who makes them truly whole. In Davies’s novel, however, love does not conquer all, and Lily and Conor do not live happily ever after, nor do they ever get married. Although Conor rescues Lily from slavery in the children’s mine, he remains too absorbed in the egotistical ideology of Megalopolis to help her on her quest to save Arcadia, and Lily knows that her fate is not to remain with Conor but to return home. For Lily, in fact, there is no happily-ever-after because her two deepest desires, to restore Arcadia and to live with Conor, prove to be irreconcilable, and the text thus breaks with the common motif of marriage as the end goal of the fairy-tale protagonist’s journey.

More overtly didactic than *Snotty Saves the Day*, this second installment in the History of Arcadia series is explicit in its critique of a superficial celebrity culture that values appearance, money, and power above all else, and it is because of his entanglement in this culture that Conor’s love for Lily is doomed. The text is also distinctly feminist, and the prevalence of strong female
characters is striking: the story is narrated by Lily’s daughter, Sophia the Wise, and features an almost exclusively female cast with Lily, her friend Kim, Conor’s mother Livia, Arcadia’s freedom fighter Maud, and Maud’s old friend Death as the central characters. Male characters, including even the handsome Conor, play supporting roles in the text and are generally portrayed as weaker and more passive than their female counterparts.

Much like *Snotty Saves the Day*, *Lily the Silent* is also a political allegory that asks its reader to reflect on gender roles, popular culture, and dominant ideologies. The texts also point to the importance of storytelling, although here it is not Professor Vale’s notes but Sophia the Wise who, in narrating her mother’s story, comments on the implications of this tale of the past for contemporary Arcadia. The reader thus learns more about Arcadia’s current problems, which closely mirror not only those Snotty and Lily have faced but also our own inequitable society’s and which are likely to feature prominently in the series’ next installment about Arcadia’s Lizard Princess Sophia. The stories, as Tod Davies’s History of Arcadia novels ultimately suggest, serve as a civilization’s backbone, and it is therefore in stories too that we can discover the potential for fundamental change and a better society.

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The newest film from Pixar Animation Studios, *Brave*, is a fairy tale about a Scottish princess who does not want to get married and tries to change her fate. Her parents, Elinor (Emma Thompson) and Fergus (Billy Connolly), invite the leaders of three other clans to bring their sons to compete for Merida’s hand in the Highland Games. Merida (Kelly Macdonald) competes as the eldest child of her father, winning the archery contest and her own hand. However, winning only delays the decision and her mother insists that she still marry. Merida buys a spell from a witch (Julie Walters) to change her mother, but the spell has unintended consequences, and Elinor becomes a bear. Merida and Elinor seek out the witch, and in their search start to repair their damaged relationship. The more Elinor acts like a bear, however, the less control she has as a human, and when she eats, that control slips and Elinor is more bear than queen. The witch is gone, but she has left Merida a message explaining how to undo the spell: “Fate be changed, look inside. Mend the bond, torn by pride.” Merida interprets this as needing to mend her mother’s tapestry that she tore in anger, so the women return to the castle.
Without Elinor there to keep peace, the men have turned the main hall into a war zone. Merida intervenes and gives a speech in which she intends to say that she will marry one of the young men, conceding that “one selfish act can turn the fate of a kingdom.” Her mother motions her to stop and through gesture prompts Merida to suggest that there is a new way for the clans to proceed: they should “break tradition” and allow the young people of the clans to decide who they want to marry for themselves. She is successful, and as the men celebrate, Elinor and Merida sneak upstairs. However, Elinor loses control and attacks Merida. Fergus intervenes and goes after Elinor, locking Merida in with the tapestry. With her brothers’ help (triplets who accidentally have also been turned into bears by the spell), Merida escapes and chases after her father and the other men. The spell must be broken by sunrise, and Merida stitches together the tapestry on horseback with her brothers in tow. When she reaches her mother, who has been captured, Merida draws a sword and fights her father. Mor’du, the bear who is Fergus’s nemesis for taking his leg, has been stalking Merida and attacks. Elinor breaks free to protect Merida and kills Mor’du by pushing him into one of the standing stones, which crushes him. Merida throws the mended tapestry onto her mother, but the spell does not break until Merida cries, apologizing for her actions and taking responsibility for them rather than blaming others.

It is important to note that Elinor, not Fergus, is the one who tries to reinforce patriarchal tradition. Elinor is afraid for her daughter if she breaks from tradition, and the film clearly shows that Elinor acts out of love. She asks Merida, “Are you willing to pay the price your freedom will cost?” Showing Elinor’s fear is important in terms of demonstrating why not following “tradition” is much more serious than Merida’s understanding of it as a personal choice. As much as the film is about valuing individual choices, suggesting that women do not need to be married and that princesses can be heroes, it is also about recognizing that one’s choices affect others. Having a man reinforce the tradition of arranged marriage and present a competition to “win the fair maiden” would more easily make him a villain, whereas a woman doing it more obviously nods to patriarchal structures rather than individual villainy. There is no individual villain in this film; tradition is the problem. Elinor is not a villain; neither is the witch. Even Mor’du, the bear set up as a villain in the opening scene, is not a villain in the structure of the fairy tale. A dangerous obstacle, yes, but Mor’du has been cursed by the same spell as Elinor and has lost his humanity to the bear’s instinct. Mor’du sought the spell to gain power as high king over his brothers, splitting the clans apart in the past, and he is presented as a parallel to Merida, a lesson for what awaits one who puts selfish desires before responsibility.

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But not wanting to get married is not really a selfish desire, and the film does not present Merida’s wish as unreasonable. Her selfishness is only that she does not initially see how her actions affect her family and her people. The transformation of Merida’s mother and brothers shows that her individual choices have consequences, but Merida’s choice not to marry also sends the clans to the brink of war. Breaking cultural tradition is not simply an individual choice. That Merida’s choice ultimately has a positive effect for all young people in the kingdom is wonderful, but the film suggests that it could have been another way. It is when Merida puts her choice in the context of her culture and suggests a change to tradition rather than allowing her to be exempt from that tradition that she shows her strength as a potential leader. The young men forced to compete for marriage support Merida’s choice and add to her argument, together convincing the clan leaders to change arranged marriage traditions. Merida’s success in the film is not that she does not have to get married; it is that she changes her society for the betterment of all her people. The film subtly demonstrates that patriarchy is about structures, not individuals, which is a much more notable change to the princess fairy-tale film tradition than a princess who does not get married.

As enjoyable as Brave is, it has its faults, the most egregious of which is the gender and cultural stereotyping. The secondary and background male figures are reduced to one-dimensional warrior buffoons. While they do provide comic relief, they do so at the expense of Scottish culture and believable male characters. The royal family and witch are the only characters treated with any depth at all, and Elinor and Merida are by far the most complex. The lack of female characters in the background is also disturbing. Aside from three maids, women are seen only in the games scenes, fawning over the competing men. At the very least the mothers of the young men could have been at the games to support their sons; their absence is noticeable.

Brave’s emphasis on the power and relevance of folklore is noteworthy. Elinor tells the story of four brothers who ruled over the clans until one broke the family bond and tried to claim power for himself, thus ripping the kingdom apart and setting the clans against each other. It is intended as a lesson about responsibility for Merida—a lesson Merida eventually learns—but she first rejects the legend as a story, only to learn of its truth when she discovers that the witch has worked the transformation curse once before, turning one brother into Mor’du. Elinor’s early statement that “legends are lessons” reinforces this portrayal that legends and folklore contain truth, if only we will listen to them.

As one might expect, the bravery of the film’s title is multifaceted, and the film shows bravery to be more than just swordplay and archery. As much as Merida can be admired for her warrior skills, that is not what changes her fate.
or her people’s traditions. Merida’s understanding of her heritage and lessons in diplomacy from her mother coupled with her own eventual willingness to take her responsibility as a princess seriously facilitate that change, and her willingness to accept blame for her family’s transformation and apologize for her actions breaks the curse. Although the initial plot may seem simple enough, the story is treated with complexity and depth. Brave is an enjoyable film that shows an implicit awareness and critique of the Disney fairy-tale franchise of which it is a part. Offering intact and loving families, Brave presents an ending that celebrates compromise and social change.

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