German Popular Stories. By the Brothers Grimm. Adapted by Edgar Taylor.

The bicentennial anniversary of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s Kinder- und Hausmärchen (KHM) generated renewed dialogue about the significance of that landmark publication, including the international scope of its influence in the nineteenth century and beyond. It is in this context that Crescent Moon has issued a reprint of the first English treatment of the Grimms’ fairy tales: Edgar Taylor’s German Popular Stories, with an introductory essay and appendixes by Jack Zipes.

Working with the 1819 edition of the KHM, Taylor took many liberties as a translator, combining stories, Anglicizing names and titles, eliminating some religious references, downplaying violence and bloody detail, rendering threatening figures comical, and so on. Such choices have generated nearly 200 years of unfavorable critique (at least from many scholars), and Taylor has become a relatively obscure figure in fairy-tale studies today. Nevertheless, the 1823 edition of German Popular Stories, Translated from the Kinder und Haus Märchen [sic] Collected by M.M. Grimm, from Oral Tradition, illustrated by George Cruikshank and published by Charles Baldwyn, was an immensely popular and influential book. It was reprinted in 1824 and 1825, followed by a second volume in 1826 and a revised edition in 1837 (shortly before Taylor’s death).

In fact, the publishing history of German Popular Stories rivals that of the KHM in its complexity. To begin with, Taylor was not the sole translator of the first volume, but neither his name nor that of his collaborator, David Jardine, appears on that book. Moreover, the edition of German Popular Stories cited most frequently—and the one on which this reprint edition is based—is a single-volume edition published by John Camden Hotten thirty years after Taylor’s death. The 1868 edition combined the contents of the 1823 and 1826 volumes and was introduced by John Ruskin (himself a small child when the book first appeared). The current volume is neither a facsimile edition nor an annotated one, but in addition to the introduction, Zipes has included...
important documents as appendixes: Ruskin's influential introductory essay from the 1868 edition (which offers a snapshot of later Victorian debates about the nature of the genre and its audiences); letters to Taylor from Sir Walter Scott and Taylor's correspondence with the Grimms, all from the 1820s; and the opening pages and introduction to the 1837 edition of German Popular Stories, which firmly established Grimms' fairy tales as English children's literature.

In his own introduction Zipes traces the complex history of German Popular Stories and offers critical context for what he calls "a revolutionary book" (16). Zipes argues persuasively that the success of German Popular Stories canonized Grimms' fairy tales as English literature for children and established a specific vision of the fairy tale as viable print commodity. Importantly, Taylor's interest in the KHM and his initial approach to the project were informed by the ideas and rhetoric of antiquarianism, and to his credit Taylor did address some of his editing choices in the notes he appended to each of the 1823 and 1826 editions, combined and included (with only minor emendations) in Hotten's 1868 edition and also in the current Crescent Moon reprint. Those first editions of German Popular Stories stand as early examples of a marriage between popular print culture and scholarly discourse so characteristic of nineteenth-century British folklore study, and the Grimms' own "small edition" of 1825 was inspired by the success of Taylor's English book (see pages 26 and 360–66). Although Zipes addresses the ways in which both the Grimms and Taylor negotiated that borderline between scholarly and popular discourses, his main concern in the introductory essay is the role that Taylor played (perhaps inadvertently) in transforming the Grimms' collection into "amusing popular reading material for children" (32). As a result, Zipes attends less to how he might to the book's history as a story of textual experimentation or the role that German Popular Stories played in establishing a significant (and primarily adult) English reading public for field-based tale collections and other folklore books that flourished later in the century. But in reprinting and offering a historical context for Edgar Taylor's German Popular Stories, Zipes has made a significant contribution: bringing this important work back into critical conversations about fairy-tale history.

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Russians call their equivalent to fairy tales volshebniye skazki, or sorcerous stories, when they are being precise, but more commonly they simply use skazki, "stories," thus implying that all stories are linked to the fantastic, which
leads to some confusion in cultures where the split between high culture and low, fantasy and realism, is more strictly enforced. In Russian Magic Tales, a thoughtfully presented overview, Robert Chandler has compiled a collection that not only manages to represent the breadth of the Russian fantastic but also captures the cross-currents at play between Russian folk belief and Russian literature.

The book is subdivided in an unusual fashion. Although its arrangement is roughly chronological, it is almost evenly split between anthologized sections (the earliest collections of folktales, folktales from the Soviet period, etc.) and sections dedicated to influential individual authors, including canonical favorites as well as less often translated writers. In Part 1 Chandler spotlights Pushkin; Part 2, “The First Folktale Collections,” provides a sampling of works by Aleksandr Afanasyev and Ivan Khudyakov; and Part 3 is titled “Early Twentieth-Century Collections.” Parts 4 and 5 are dedicated to the works of single authors again, Nadezhda Tefli and Pavel Bashov, respectively; Part 6 focuses on folktale collections from the Soviet period, and Part 7 concludes with a section of works from Andrey Platonov. Each of the seven sections includes both biographical and critical contextualization, which are as much a pleasure to consume as the stories themselves.

In his introduction Chandler provides an intriguing, broadly sketched overview of fairy tales both in general and in Russia. There are moments that whet one’s interest without satisfying it; for example, Chandler says, “Soviet folklorists collected a vast number of tales and made a still undervalued contribution to our historical understanding of them, but they said little about why these tales should still hold our interest” (xiv). We can only hope that they will be the seeds of future projects. In this one, however, Chandler makes an excellent beginning by piquing the interest of a new readership: those readers who may want to consider the works of Frank Miller, Alexander Panchenko, Marina Balina, Helena Goscilo, and Mark Lipovetsky, the last three of whom are the editors of the superb, recently published related text Politicizing Magic: An Anthology of Russian and Soviet Fairy Tales (2004), which is referenced in the bibliography.

The tales present an excellent cross-section of Russian perspectives concerning both the cultural value of the folktale and the specific, ironic, and occasionally counterintuitive humor or terror of its marvelous manifestations. In choosing from Pushkin’s oeuvre, for example, Chandler selects “A Tale About a Fisherman and His Servant Balda” and “A Tale About a Fisherman and a Fish,” two works that occupy opposite poles in Pushkin’s repertoire; the first is a traditional tale as heard from his former nurse, Arina Rodionovna, adapted only for its medium; and the second is an original tale inspired by a story out
of the Grimms embedded with critical political commentary on Catherine the Great. Similar care has been taken with the scope of the collection as a whole.

Chandler includes two essays regarding Baba Yaga. Sibelan Forrester’s introduction to her excellent *Baba Yaga: The Wild Witch of the East in Russian Folklore* (2013), is excerpted to provide a thorough, humorous, and unusually compassionate overview of this cruelest and occasionally kindest of characters. Forrester observes that as well as occasionally turning up as a helper figure, Baba Yaga still holds echoes not only of the chthonic goddess that Propp and Von Franz supposed her to be but also of the Russian saint Paraskeva, protector of women in childbirth. Forrester returns to the tales to observe that “in times of high infant and child mortality, the goddess of the borders of death would necessarily play a part,” and she notes that should the worst come to pass, the tales provide the symbolic comfort that the “stolen” child “seems happy and safe with Baba Yaga—playing with golden apples, or listening to a cat telling a story, [which] suggests that infant mortality causes little pain for the infant” (341).

The other essay, written by Nadezhda Teffi in 1947 and included alongside her fiction, is a lyrical piece that refers to Baba Yaga as the goddess of storms and whirlwinds and reflects that the only remnants of pagan Russia—the *domovoi*, the *leshy*, and Baba Yaga—have been emphasized in their negativity: “Baba Yaga is the most terrifying of them all, and the most interesting. And the most Russian. Other nations did not have goddesses like Baba Yaga” (214). Teffi also incorporates the witch into her story “A Little Fairy Tale,” in which a refugee Baba Yaga sits after being forced to flee to France (Teffi herself resided in Paris as an émigré and fell into obscurity after her death, partly because, as Chandler puts it, “both Western and Soviet scholars tended to ignore émigré literature” [166], a fact that for a modern reader adds more pathos to her character’s plight). Baba Yaga complains that “everything I own has gone to the winds. The government even requisitioned my copper mortar. If it weren’t for my broomstick, I’d never have got away at all! I’m just grateful for old Leshy! He serves at that Enlightenment Commissariat of theirs and he managed to sort me out a visa” (178). Teffi’s Baba Yaga concludes by wailing, “I’m unhappy; I’m in a bad way. . . . All this is going to be the end of me, it’s clear as daylight” (178). And thus does she release our protagonist, this terrifying, interesting, and most Russian of all archetypes, all but destroyed by her people’s new regime. But just as Baba Yaga may die in a tale, only to be reborn in the next, so too are the Russian magic tales enjoying a long-delayed renaissance. This accessible volume would be an excellent addition to any fairy tale scholar’s or Slavist’s library.

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The fifteenth edition of Hans Ritz’s Die Geschichte vom Rotkäppchen (The Tale of Little Red Riding Hood) is a testament to how prolific and diverse the scholarship and retellings of “Little Red Riding Hood” are. More than twice as long as the first edition published in 1981, this invaluable source of both classic versions and their lesser-known contemporary counterparts interdispersed primary texts with commentary and a sketch of fairy-tale scholarship in its almost 300 pages. As the subtitle Ursprünge, Analysen, Parodien eines Märchens (Origins, Analyses, Parodies of a Fairy Tale) suggests, Ritz sets out to trace the history of the story of “Little Red Riding Hood” from its obscure origins to the present day while also incorporating an overview of its perception and interpretations. Focused primarily on German versions, the work is nonetheless impressively broad in scope, referencing literary retellings as well as manifestations of “Little Red Riding Hood” in the visual arts and music and even pointing out local culinary dishes named after this female protagonist.

Ritz’s intent in Die Geschichte vom Rotkäppchen is not to arrive at one true or superior version of the tale but rather to showcase its many different variants: “Wir beabsichtigen nicht, das Märchen auf ein einziges reizloses Motiv hinzubiegen,” Ritz writes in the introduction. “Im Gegenteil, wir möchten ihm vielfältige Reize abgewinnen und das Lehrreiche mit dem Vergnüglichen verknüpfen” (7) (We do not intend to mold the fairy tale to fit one single, charmless motif. On the contrary, we want to take pleasure in its manifold charms and combine the instructive with the entertaining; all translations mine). Ranging from “Rotkäppchen in der DDR” (Little Red Riding Hood in the GDR) and “Rotkäppchen im Nationalsozialismus” (Little Red Riding Hood During National Socialism) to humorous retellings by Joachim Ringelnatz and Otto Waalkes, the tales collected here vary significantly in their different target audiences and intended purposes. As Ritz’s discussion of “Little Red Riding Hood” in Nazi Germany illustrates, the tale has been adapted to serve even opposing ideologies, with some texts published in the period spouting Nazi propaganda and others satirizing and explicitly criticizing National Socialism. Particularly noteworthy are also those versions that hybridize the German language, exaggerating for comical effect the incorporation of foreign words that contemporary German is sprinkled with. Three of these—“Rotkäppchen auf Anglodeutsch,” “Rotkäppchen auf Italodeutsch,” and “Das frankophone Rotkäppchen”—are included in this edition, and some other retellings, such as “Rotkäppchen auf Mecklenburgisch,” emphasize not the hybridization of language but rather a return to and privileging of local dialects.
Because Ritz draws connections between different versions and comments on “Little Red Riding Hood” scholarship and interpretations, his tone is typically witty and accessible. “Hans Ritz” is one of the many pseudonyms of author, philosopher, and aphorist Ulrich Erckenbrecht (who is also the founder of the Muriverlag), and his facility with language manifests itself in Die Geschichte vom Rotkäppchen through puns, a humorous tone, and easy readability. His commentary demonstrates extensive knowledge of the history and retellings of the tale, but Ritz finds fault with most academic work produced on “Little Red Riding Hood,” and it is when he discusses scholars and literary analyses that his tone can at times verge on the sophomoric and unfairly dismissive. North American fairy-tale scholarship, Ritz maintains, is often particularly “schlampig und oberflächlich” (sloppy and superficial), and he warns his readers not to accept facts, bibliographic entries, or interpretations put forth by North American scholars without doing additional research (241, 244). Ritz remains unimpressed by most fairy-tale scholarship outside the United States and Canada as well, and he derides the more widespread interpretive approaches to “Little Red Riding Hood,” such as feminist, psychoanalytical, and structuralist readings, as “stupide und schablonenhaft” (mindless and cut-and-dried) (121).

Yet Ritz hardly does these readings justice in his text. His brief sketch of feminist scholarship on “Little Red Riding Hood” spans no more than one short page in this 296-page work, and it is both misleading and misinformed in its overt oversimplifications (120–21). Characteristic of these distortions is, for example, how Ritz describes feminism’s understanding of history: “Am Anfang waren die Frauen mutig, frei und intelligent, dann kam der böse Wolf in Gestalt des Patriarchats und unterdrückte sie” (120) (In the beginning the women were brave, free, and intelligent; then came the big, bad wolf in the guise of patriarchy and oppressed them). His rough overview of psychoanalytical criticism is similarly short and concludes that the vast majority of scholarship produced in the field is not worth reading, and his brief discussion of linguistic, semiotic, and structuralist readings of “Little Red Riding Hood” (which he groups together) asserts that they do not even deserve to be called analyses (121–23). The meticulousness with which Ritz has researched the history of “Little Red Riding Hood” and his clear distaste for shoddy academic work starkly contrast this quick dismissal and misrepresentation of important interpretive strands of “Little Red Riding Hood.” Even though some of his critiques of fairy-tale scholarship may be valid or contain some truth, Ritz couches them in such harsh language that they seem designed to ridicule academia rather than to begin a productive conversation with scholars in the field.
The incorporation of scholarly readings of “Little Red Riding Hood” in a manner that is productive rather than principally dismissive would help to flesh out the Analysen (analyses) element of Ritz’s otherwise impressive work. This fifteenth edition of Die Geschichte vom Rotkäppchen certainly presents a wealth of information for anyone interested in the origins and retellings of “Little Red Riding Hood.” A future sixteenth edition that critically and constructively engages the main interpretive strands of the tale’s various manifestations would, however, all the more cement the status of Ritz’s work as a key reference text for “Little Red Riding Hood” scholars.

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With Marvelous Transformations: An Anthology of Fairy Tales and Contemporary Critical Perspectives, edited by Christine A. Jones and Jennifer Schacker, Broadview Press has made a rich addition to its line of fairy-tale-related texts. This volume is unusual in a variety of fruitful ways and will be an excellent resource for graduate and undergraduate students as well as their professors. Marvelous Transformations is dedicated to guiding the reader to the genre of the fairy tale and its development as a whole, rather than to individual tale types. To that end, not only do the editors organize the included tales by era of composition or recording rather than by type, but they also include brief essays by prominent scholars highlighting different perspectives on key issues in contemporary studies instead of attempting to encapsulate the history of scholarship on fairy tales. Further, the online components of the book allow for an expanded table of contents. This is a volume well worth adding to any library, personal or institutional, with much to offer and only a few flaws.

Whereas most scholarly compendiums of fairy tales organize their tales by theme or type, so that the reader can trace, for example, ATU 510A from “Yeh-hsien” to Angela Carter’s “Ashputtle, or, The Mother’s Ghost,” Marvelous Transformations is less interested in tracing the development of any one tale type than it is in tracing the development of the genre itself. Thus “Part I: The Tales,” is divided into five historical sections: “Early Written Traditions,” “Early Print Traditions,” “Romanticism to the fin de siècle,” “Modern/Postmodern Tales,” and “Contemporary Transcriptions and Translations.” Within each one of these sections, we are given a wide variety of tales from across Europe and the Mediterranean. This method of organization provides the reader, then,
with the opportunity to read Giambattista Basile’s “Cinderella Cat” (as the title is rendered here) in the context of three of his other tales, two of them much less well known, rather than as one of several versions of ATU 510A. Freed of the requirement that tales of the same type be juxtaposed, connections can also be more easily made among the tales of les precieuses, and there is room for some of the Norwegian tales of Peter Christian Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Engebretsen Moe, with their bold and bawdy heroines. This decision allows the pan-European development of the genre and the spreading influence of, for example, the work of the Grimms in the nineteenth century, to be more easily grasped.

This first part of the book contains several original translations, and the first two sections contain superb explanatory footnotes that add much to the reader’s understanding, often by pointing out a linguistic subtlety not captured by the translation or by providing an important piece of cultural context. Unfortunately, those footnotes largely drop out of the text afterward and have disappeared by the time we reach the Grimms, so that there is nothing to indicate the various changes and editorial decisions that affect their “Snow White” or “The Maiden Without Hands.” Not even the Grimms’ own notes on those tales are included, which deprives the reader of important information regarding the representation of gender and violence in these texts. There are a few other curious omissions, such as that of “Yeh-hsien,” the absence of which obscures the non-Western roots of the tale, and the absence of any tales by Oscar Wilde or Angela Carter. However, Carter’s work is easily found, and one should not complain about a section on modern and postmodern tales that includes work by both Nalo Hopkinson and Kelly Link! The first section, “Early Written Traditions,” is by its nature a bit strange, because it tries to encompass 2,700 years, stretching from the ancient Egyptian “Tale of Two Brothers” to a selection from the fourteenth-century, Alf Layla wa Layla (better known in English as The Arabian Nights); this wide span does somewhat defeat the committed historicist approach of the rest of the volume, and perhaps some division could have been made between the ancient and medieval worlds’ tales. Despite these concerns, however, this part of the book, which makes up the bulk of the text, is impressive in both its depth and breadth, and I am not ashamed to say that I discovered tales that I will definitely be adding to my next syllabus.

The second part of the book, “Contemporary Critical Approaches,” is divided into five key issues of contemporary fairy-tale studies: “Genre,” “Ideology,” “Authorship,” “Reception,” and “Translation.” These topics are then addressed in brief essays, each of which offers a new angle of insight, by such important scholars as Cristina Bacchilega, Nancy Canepa, and Elizabeth
Wanning Harries. One particular standout piece is Donald Haase’s engaging and perceptive piece on reception studies, in which he adopts some of the conventions of a letter to illustrate the interactions among writer, text, implied reader, and actual reader. Many of these pieces share a common theme in their relentless commitment to historical specificity and the relations among the author, teller, or editor of a tale, the text produced, and the reader, as well as the way these combine in various permutations to produce a particular experience or performance of a given tale. This focus is also reflected in the admirable introduction to the first part of the book, “How to Read a Fairy Tale,” in which Schacker and Jones guide students in historically contextualized close readings and provide a nuanced reading of various versions of “Little Red Riding Hood.” The cumulative effect is that of a snapshot of critical thought on fairy tales in this contemporary moment; it is possible that such a strategy will date the book, but what anthology or collection does not require updating from time to time?

This is a volume with an expressly stated agenda: “What you know (or think you know) is not the fairy tale itself but a critical interpretation that has been culturally accepted as normative. These normative readings have become lenses through which we tend to view all new stories that we encounter. The organization of this anthology and the critical texts included in Part II are both meant to promote a different series of lenses—some cultural and some purely heuristic—that allow us to see otherwise” (37). With its unusual organization and its distinct approach to the included scholarship, this book has the potential to alter the way we teach fairy tales and therefore how we and our students think about them.

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The Irresistible Fairy Tale: The Cultural and Social History of a Genre.

Although set in a framework of memes and cultural evolution, The Irresistible Fairy Tale is as much a book about fairy-tale collectors, collections, and the media of story expression as about individual tales and transmission. Indeed, Chapter 1, “The Cultural Evolution of Storytelling and Fairy Tales,” refers to and updates the increasingly popularized ideas about memes. Author Jack Zipes asserts, “To say the least, meme has suffered from its popularity and is now loosely used for anything and everything that becomes trendy and acts like a virus” (18). Zipes cites a recent study, The Evolution of Childhood (2010) by Melvin Konner, to claim the memetic aspects that most draw his attention as the fairy tale’s eminent social and cultural historian. He considers memes...
“cultural units of information such as stories” that undergo “change through innovation,” “chance events,” “social transmission between populations,” “the natural selection of cultural variants,” and “preservation through free decisions, and coerced preservation” (19). Still, references to memetic dissemination appear only briefly throughout the book, with more emphasis on collectors and their collections.

The book does develop a cultural evolutionary approach to the fairy tale by tracing the transformations of pagan goddesses into fairies and witches and the transformations of story protagonists from innocent persecuted heroines to innovative agents of their own stories. Chapters, however, center on Madame d'Aulnoy and the female French salon storytellers who named and perpetuated the literary fairy tale using fairies themselves, Catherine Breillat's televised and cinematic remake of Charles Perrault's “Bluebeard,” Baba Yaga stories and the critical work of Russian structuralist Vladimir Propp, heroines and nineteenth-century tale collections of Laura Gonzenbach and three other European women, Giusepe Pitrè and his local collection of Sicilian stories with its international comparative notes, and, finally, a variety of twenty-first-century artists who create fairy-tale mosaics for contemporary issues. While noting the “irresistible rise of fairy tales in almost all cultural and commercial fields,” Zipes keeps his sights on the scholarly study of the genre and on interdisciplinary approaches involving the humanities and natural and social sciences (xi). This is a history invested in extending current assumptions about fairy tales to incorporate visual media and to maintain the purview of fairy-tale studies on connections with oral tradition and folklore scholarship.

Admitting the utopian and dystopian impulses of the fairy tale and of key characters such as fairies and witches, Zipes paradoxically seeks to explain a genre that perhaps works best when provoking and sharing the unexplainable. The urge to outline prehistory leads to generalizations that must be entertained when coming from an accomplished scholar, and all are supported by references to other books and authors. Yet one would probably challenge similar ideas if they were expressed in a composition course. Take, for example, this early sentence: “Though it is impossible to trace the historical origins and evolution of fairy tales to a particular time and place, we do know that humans began telling tales as soon as they developed the capacity of speech” (2). The urge to explain origins of language, mythology, and storytelling created nineteenth-century theories now known by memorable names such as “ding dong,” “bow wow,” and “solar mythology.” That an accomplished scholar such as Zipes follows a similar originary track surely confirms the efficacy of his title and the irresistible desire to know how these powerful stories started. With historical precedent from exploded nineteenth-century theories, one must
concede that this origin searching remains a precarious endeavor. Still, Zipes gives a masterful and hopeful description of the genre and its inclinations: “The focus of fairy tales, whether oral, written, or cinematic, has always been on finding magical instruments, extraordinary technologies, or powerful people and animals that will enable protagonists to transform themselves along with their environment, making it more suitable for living in peace and contentment” (2). His capacity to allow the genre expression in every variety of media also shows an intellectual openness that cannot be seen in the two works he addresses in the closing appendixes.

Some chapters have an encyclopedic sweep of biographical and textual information about earlier tale collectors and collections. There are quotable sentences that do not capture but index the wonders of fairy tales and their emergence in specific versions and as a genre. Speaking of the tales of d’Aulnoy, Zipes concludes, “She was using information about fairies with which she was familiar in a particular French sociocultural context” (38). Of Breillat’s remake of “Bluebeard,” he says, “It is a radical remaking because she complicates the plot of prohibition, transgression, and punishment, and focuses on women’s assertion of their power as opposed to their curiosity” (54). And of Pitrè’s work, he indicates, “The art of telling stories . . . is more about learning how to survive under harsh conditions of life than learning how to lead a moral life” (127). However, Zipes includes “naïve morality” as a significant feature of the genre: “Together, storytellers and listeners have collaborated through intuition as well as conscious conception to form worlds filled with naïve morality. Fundamental to the feel of a fairy tale is its moral pulse” (14).

Because Zipes comments on the status of folklore studies and programs, it would be fascinating to pair this book with works on folklore history by Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, Regina Bendix, Jennifer Schacker, and Cristina Bacchilega. Books by these authors also address fairy-tale collectors and collections and discuss issues related to the formation of the genre, such as the rise of modernity and social inequality, authenticity, literacy, and decolonization. With The Irresistible Fairy Tale, Zipes shows that he is neither reluctant to profess his views on the history and social impact of the fairy tale nor eager to cut the genre’s ties with ancient beliefs and common people.

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**Angela Carter and Decadence: Critical Fictions/Fictional Critiques.**

Maggie Tonkin’s Angela Carter and Decadence: Critical Fictions/Fictional Critiques is an ambitious reading of Carter’s lifelong engagement with endur-
ing iconographies and mythologies of femininity. Organized around three dominant representations of femininity—the living doll, the muse, and the femme fatale—Angela Carter and Decadence situates Carter’s novels and stories in relation to their primary intertexts and to Carter’s critical reception in order to capture the complexities of Carter’s oeuvre and politics and to analyze some of the more vitriolic feminist responses to her work. Although Tonkin does not focus on Carter’s fairy tales and does not include any of Carter’s tales in her study, her interpretations are nonetheless relevant for fairy-tale studies insofar as they privilege many of the themes that Carter investigates, critiques, and reimagines in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979) and in her other transformed tales (indeed, in one telling example, Tonkin mistakenly refers to Aunt Margaret’s silver and moonstone choker in *The Magic Toyshop* as “the choking ruby collar” [44; my emphasis], thus conflating Aunt Margaret and the heroine of “The Bloody Chamber” and emphasizing Carter’s point that women may be active, perhaps even eager, participants in their own oppression).

Tonkin’s introduction seeks to frame the book’s case studies as Carter’s strategic fetishization of women intended to deconstruct the literary genealogies and cultural mythologies that instantiate and perpetuate such images. As suggested by the book’s title, Tonkin argues that decadence, as a literary tradition, is critical to understanding both Carter’s feminist politics and her richly detailed, postmodern writing style, which is often called out by her critics as antithetical to feminist politics. Against the feminist literary criticism that castigates Carter for fetishizing women, Tonkin contends that Carter’s use of irony—frequently overlooked and/or misread by critics who fail to see it as a “feminist” genre—recalibrates the meanings of her fetishized female characters. Although much of Tonkin’s complex, at times convoluted, argument rests on the homology that she identifies between fetishism and irony, her conclusions are not all that startling: Carter’s seemingly fetishizing representations of women turn out to be ironic commentaries on the hegemonic iconographies and mythologies of femininity. At the same time, Tonkin’s overemphasis in the introduction on Carter’s critics rings a bit hollow. Not only are these critics in a minority, but they have also been heartily and compellingly dispatched.

The introductory chapter is the weakest aspect of *Angela Carter and Decadence* because it never quite gets at why decadence, in particular, is so significant for Carter’s critical fictions and fictional critiques. Tonkin often gestures toward the importance of decadence for Carter, but she fails to articulate how the decadent tradition holds her case studies together or how such an aesthetic motivates Carter’s ironic play with fetishism. Several of the
authors of the primary intertexts under discussion can be linked to the decadent period, but only Charles Baudelaire and Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam would conventionally be considered decadent authors; E. T. A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, and the Marquis de Sade all influenced decadent writers, and Marcel Proust was influenced by the movement and is sometimes characterized as writing in the decadent style, but Tonkin never makes a clear case for decadence as the pivotal thread tying together this collection of Carter’s writings.

Despite these shortcomings, Angela Carter and Decadence offers some excellent, nuanced close readings and new insights. In Chapter 2 Tonkin provides a convincing analysis of The Magic Toyshop in relation to Hoffmann’s “The Sandman” (1817) and Freud’s “The Uncanny” (1919), arguing that the novel highlights and corrects Freud’s blind spot—gender—and his elision of Olympia. Tonkin’s reading of Finn as Melanie’s double and her analysis of the kitchen scene in which Melanie self-identifies as a wind-up doll and sees a severed hand in the knife drawer are especially persuasive. Through these examples, Tonkin contends, Carter makes clear that “for the female subject symbolic castration is a fact, a fait accompli, rather than the threat that hangs over the masculine subject” (45).

Chapters 3 through 6 center on the figure of the muse and are, by far, the book’s strongest chapters (Chapters 5, 6, and parts of 4 were published previously). In Chapter 3 Tonkin provides a history of the muse from classical antiquity through the nineteenth century, tracing its transformation from muse-as-inspiration to muse-as-beloved and, finally, to dead-beloved-as-muse. The following chapters, then, collectively argue that Carter’s deconstruction and transformation of the trope of the muse parallels this historical genealogy. Chapter 4 situates The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman and Albertina in relation to Proust’s simultaneous inscription and deconstruction of Albertine; Chapter 5 deftly illustrates the ways that “The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe” parodies the decomposition of the muse trope underlying Poe’s work, and Chapter 6 identifies Carter’s move away from the muse in “Black Venus,” suggesting instead that Carter positions Baudelaire as her muse, thus recasting the poète maudit as “enunciator rather than enunciator” (112). In these chapters Tonkin’s keen ability to maneuver between Carter’s work, her intertexts, and the criticism devoted to the intertexts is particularly clear and persuasive.

Chapters 7 through 9 address the figure of the femme fatale, with Chapter 7 providing historical grounding and Chapters 8 and 9 offering specific case studies. In Chapter 8 Tonkin argues that it is Carter’s preference for the femme fatale Juliette over the innocent victim Justine in The Sadeian Woman that so
provoked early feminist critics. Chapter 9 focuses on Leilah/Lilith from *The Passion of New Eve* as Carter's attempt to deconstruct the filmic iconographies and the cultural mythologies of the femme fatale; here, Tonkin's emphasis on the complex ambiguity of the narrative perspective—slipping as it does between the differently sexed and gendered voices of Evelyn and Eve—is particularly compelling.

Overall, *Angela Carter and Decadence* makes a significant contribution to Carter criticism, and even its limitations and more debatable claims will stimulate productive conversation around Carter's complexly layered critical fictions and fictional critiques.

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Murder, Michelle Ann Abate tells us, rather than being an aberration, is a predictable feature of society, particularly in the United States, and always has been. It is also a central theme in American literature. These claims may not be all that surprising, but Abate then takes them a step further. Murder, she argues, is central to children's literature, so much so that the subject is worthy of scholarly study. Her book is intended to "contribute to the social history of murder in the United States by tracing the homicide tradition in popular children's literature" (25). To do so, she examines not just stories that originated in America but also those that were, and still are, popular in this country, beginning with the Grimms' "Snow White" and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. She continues with examinations of Tarzan and Nancy Drew, before moving on to what might be called "modern" young adult literature by dissecting S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, Walter Dean Myer's *Monster*, and Stacey Jay's *My So-Called Death*. Abate's approach is deeply historical and thoroughly researched, taking into account a variety of social movements and philosophical positions having to do with murder that were extant at the time of each work's creation and demonstrating the ways in which each author was or appears to have been influenced by those real-world controversies.

Because *Marvels & Tales* is a journal dedicated to the study of fairy tales, I devote the bulk of this review to the book's early chapters, which deal with "Snow White" and *Alice in Wonderland*, and only briefly touch on the rest of the volume, though it should be noted that the later chapters contain some fascinating material. Abate actually begins with a meaty introduction, which thoroughly establishes that the "American thirst for murder," both real and
fictional, “can be traced back to the nation’s earliest history” (1). She also
discusses the ways in which social attitudes toward murder and its appropriate
punishment have changed over the centuries, pointing out that, although
murder rates have gone down in recent decades, contemporary America still
has the highest such rates in the industrialized world.

The first full chapter of the book, the colorfully named “‘You Must Kill
Her and Bring Me Her Lungs and Liver as Proof’: ‘Snow White’ and the Fact
as well as the Fantasy of Filicide,” which appeared in Marvels & Tales in an
earlier version, makes a startling claim. “The individual attraction and ongo-
ing appeal of ‘Snow White’ . . . is not that it allows young people to work
through psychological jealousy of their mother but rather that it allows
the nation’s parents the opportunity to indulge in homicidal fantasies towards
their children” (26). Abate devotes significant space to discussing child abuse
issues, noting that stepparents (and in our day, I would add, mom’s boyfriend)
are the most frequent purveyors of such abuse, framing her interpretation of
the tale within the context of the “lethal jealousy” (44) of the Queen toward
Snow White and mentioning that the methods that the Queen uses to attempt
to murder her stepdaughter, strangulation and poison, are in fact the ones
most commonly used by female murderers. She argues that, rather than being
“hyperbolic” or “too cruel to be real or even believable” (49–50), as is usually
claimed, the Queen’s anger and her methods are validated by historical study.
“Whether or not American children need horror stories depicting violence
and even homicide, their mothers and fathers do” (59). Abate’s argument
makes considerable sense, and she has definitely developed a valuable,
against-the-grain reading of this classic tale, though her take on “Snow White”
does not really account for the story’s (particularly the Disney version’s)
continuing popularity with children.

Abate’s chapter on Alice in Wonderland may well be the best part of the
book. Everyone is familiar with the Queen of Hearts’ trademark phrase, “Off
with his head!” but rather than seeing the Queen’s constant (and always frus-
trated) desire for executions as just another piece of nonsense, Abate argues
that it is, rather, the most obvious example of Carroll’s satiric attack on capital
punishment. That the British no longer beheaded criminals in the mid-
nineteenth century, but instead hung them, is irrelevant. When Carroll was
writing Alice, there was a powerful antigallows movement, which was sup-
ported by some of the nation’s better known intellectuals and artists, including
Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray, who publicly insisted that
execution was overly brutal and carried out so capriciously as to be worthless
as a deterrent to crime. Abate gives us a brief but detailed history of the devel-
opment of capital punishment in England. Carroll, she then points out,
includes several calls for execution in Alice beyond those of the King and Queen of Hearts, all of which are ridiculous and none of which are actually carried out. His purpose here, Abate argues, is to demonstrate to children the ridiculousness of capital punishment, in the hope of their taking this opinion into adulthood. “Far from trying to shield his child audience from the problems, debates, and controversies of the adult world, Carroll was seeking to educate them about such issues” (89).

In later chapters of the book, Abate analyzes the complex interaction of murder and race in Edgar Rice Burroughs’s Tarzan series, focusing on the theories of Frederich Nietzsche and the influential criminologist Cesare Lombroso (another fine chapter); the role of ESP in the Nancy Drew books (an interesting study but one not all that obviously tied to the book’s main thesis); the previously unexamined debt of Hinton’s Outsiders to the violent pulp juvenile delinquency novels of the period; Myers’s attempts to humanize a teenager who had taken part in a homicide in Monster; and the relevance in Jay’s My So-Called Death of such terms as “murder” and “homicide” when applied to the undead (zombies) or, by extension, the posthuman. Throughout this book Abate’s method is largely straightforward; she takes the murderous content of the works she is examining, content that has been seen by previous critics as in some sense secondary, and foregrounds it, showing it to be thematically much more important than previously thought and to be part of a lasting (and rather bloody) tradition in children’s literature, particularly in the United States. By doing this, she provides scholars of this literature with a valuable new tool for examining classic works of art that may not be quite as innocent as had previously been thought.

Michael Levy
University of Wisconsin, Stout


Gossip from the Forest is a major work of creative criticism by a writer of some of the most interesting and challenging fiction of recent decades, a writer with a profound interest in the life and workings of the fairy tale. It is a work that lives and breathes in the space of the hyphen that links—or does it keep apart?—creative writing and various forms of literary-critical and historiographic practice, an occupancy entirely appropriate, given the element of critique that has long formed a central strand of Sara Maitland’s fairy-tale fiction. And yet as suggested by its title, Gossip from the Forest has more than just the fairy tale on its mind. In addition to signaling Maitland’s concern for the byways of popular knowledge and understanding, the titular gossip is
indeed a nod to the tales; but the forest of the title is more than just a casual
gesture toward a generic fairy-tale setting. *Gossip from the Forest* is as much
about forests as it is about fairy tales, in particular, twelve real forested areas
situated variously in England and Scotland, each of which is visited and
inhabited by Maitland in the course of a calendar year, March to February.
Around half of the book is devoted to the subject of forests: what and where
they are, what we’ve done to them, what they’ve done to us, and what might
become of them. A fair proportion of this discussion is written against the
very idea that we can conceive of forests in the abstract or the collective, as
opposed to conceiving them as comprising a set of singular spaces each with
its own irreducibly textured and resonant presence: as Maitland says, “I want
the forests in the book to be real—real walks, real people, real ‘nature’” (20).
Hence she works to mark the presence of each of her chosen forest spaces—
Saltridge Wood, the Forest of Dean, and Kielder Forest, among others—
through a seductive mix of geography, natural and cultural history, and, above
all, personal observation. She walks and sits and talks and looks and listens,
alone and with others, and her writing is a register of the presence of her
mind and body in each of the forests in question. It is a book of inhabitation,
person in place and place in person.

*Gossip from the Forest* is thus an example of nature writing, that rich but
until now relatively minor genre that has in recent years come to occupy a
significant space in bookshops and on publishers’ lists. The renaissance in
nature writing is of course a symptom of our growing concern for the environ-
ment, locally and globally, a concern variously contentious in intention and
orientation, nowhere more so than in the praise and criticism generated in
response to the likes of Robert MacFarlane, Richard Mabey, and Roger Deakin
(to name just a few of the more prominent English authors of such works).
Ecocriticism is the term used most commonly to mark the environmental turn
within literary-critical studies; and although I am sure its author would bristle
at the notion, *Gossip from the Forest* can and perhaps should be identified as a
work of ecocriticism. As such, it is one of the first major works to offer a bridge
between ecocriticism and fairy-tale studies, just as previous decades witnessed
similar bridging work between fairy-tale studies and the likes of structuralism,
psychoanalysis, strains of feminism, Marxism, deconstruction, postcolonial-
ism, and queer theory (a ridiculously totalizing list, but it serves a purpose).
No doubt there are essays already in circulation that offer an ecocritical engage-
ment with the fairy tale—that is, that read fairy tales ecocritically—not least
within the thriving fields of cultural geography; but *Gossip from the Forest* is a
book-length work published by a mainstream press, so we can at least propose
as helpful the idea that Maitland’s book marks the arrival proper of ecocritical
fairy-tale studies. It is a welcome arrival.
Embedded in Gossip from the Forest is what amounts to a major new collection of fairy tales. Maitland intercuts each of her nonfiction forest chapters with a reimagining of a familiar story from Grimm, a counterpointing of registers integral to the book’s workings to such an extent that we might read the volume as a distant relative of the great framed story cycles of literary history. Here, the frame is provided by Maitland’s individual accounts of the life and times of her chosen forests. The tale-telling arises out of and feeds back into each of these accounts, with Maitland switching from storyteller to autobiographically inclined historian and geographer, and back again; and again.

Just as her nonfiction accounts are polemically voiced in the first person, so her tales are rooted in a set of occasions—hence the element of orality, of animated speech, that weaves its way through the counterpointed chapters. Both writerly registers, the critical and the creative, speak with a purpose in what we might call real time. In Maitland’s own ringing words: “I want to match up what is in the forests with fairy stories, see how the themes of the fairy stories grow out of the reality of the forest, and the other way round too—show how people see the forests in a particular way because of the fairy stories. So then I hope I can retell some of the Grimms’ stories so that the connection gets made again and maybe both fairy stories and ancient woodland get protected, valued, seen for what they are: our roots, our origins. And it will be fun” (20). The final sentence here is indicative of the vein of mischief, often tendentious, that runs through the book. At one point a sentence in a paragraph on bluebells is interrupted with a footnote: “If you pick them,” starts the sentence; “Don’t” is the lone word in the footnote.

A fair amount of the more general critical material on the fairy tale in Gossip from the Forest will be relatively familiar to those with an interest in the genre. Maitland’s thesis, if we can speak of such an abstracted thing, is that the “deep connection” between forests and the fairy tale has been lost. The book is “an attempt to bring them together, so that they can illuminate and draw renewed strength from each other” (18). To this extent, it aspires to the condition of a performative: to do what it says. Maitland writes admiringly of the “unscholarly and vigorous” language captured in the Grimms’ tales, and though her own writing is relatively well rooted in the various academic fields on which it draws, there is a strain of mild impatience with the ivory tower (15). Available accounts of the origin and spread of tale types are dismissed without any real insight—“To be honest, I don’t think either version really quite adds up, though I have no better theory to offer” (45)—and the ATU catalogue is set aside as “hardly seem[ing] terribly useful” (47). No doubt a generous reader will interpret such rather hasty dismissals as the collateral damage necessary in a book that seeks a forceful and transformative presence in the public sphere, because that is the goal of Maitland’s...
work: to narrate a dual and interwoven history of forests and fairy tales and thus to reanimate a vital but imperiled set of shared spaces, each variously constituted from the textual and the worldly. The book is a challenge to its readers, not least to those of us laboring in the field, so-called, of fairy-tale studies.

Stephen Benson
University of East Anglia


It is no secret that literary, modernized retellings of fairy tales have been extremely popular for a long while. A significant part of the appeal of the largely unspecific fairy-tale form is its ability to transform itself and inspire retellings set anywhere at any time. Retelling these stories is not at all a new practice, however, as this latest entry into Jack Zipes’s “Oddly Modern Fairy Tales” series clearly shows. The question of how one can “breathe new life into forms considered archaic, dated, passé, old-fashioned, or, worse yet, obsolete” (1) has attracted writers of all kinds over the years and was certainly the question put to several well-known British writers of the 1930s by this volume’s compiler, Peter Davies.

The stories contained in The Fairies Return were written and are set in the early twentieth century, a fact that results in a delightfully different fairy-tale experience for the contemporary reader. Even those well versed in literary fairy-tale retellings will find something new and enchanting in this volume. A great deal of the charm of these tales comes from the fact that they are firmly rooted in their time, featuring 1930s slang, gramophones, stockbrokers, and pleasure cruises. It is easy to imagine them played out on screen in black and white.

The tales’ emphasis on their particular time period results in many of them having a strongly satiric tone. The stories reflect the looming threat of World War II, the potential pitfalls of social ambition, the changing roles of women, and corruption in the workplace. They also, however, draw on the period’s lighthearted determination to have fun. Maria Tatar notes in her introduction that “in the international thicket of characters and plots, [these British writers] found plenty of material for fashioning stories that they could make their own—and in many cases had already been made their own—with the local colors of social and political satire” (4–5). These only subtly veiled references reveal to the reader, more than any of the other largely surface details
mentioned earlier, unique and unexpected insights into the mind-set of people in Britain during the time between the two world wars. The fairy tale is the perfect mode with which to do such commentary but, as Tatar points out, "modernizing" the fairy tale and "equipping it with a critical edge" can also result in a loss of its traditional wonder and "wild magic," something that a few of the tales included here do indeed suffer from (7). Take, for example, Eric Linklater’s story, “Sinbad the Sailor: His Eighth and Last Voyage.” Here, Sinbad becomes a cruise director, and the creatures and places of his marvelous, horrifying, and magical adventure are transformed into quirky tourist stops. Although the story is funny and the tourist stops do turn out to be rather more dangerous than the cruise goers were expecting, it also admittedly lacks some of the magic of the fairy tale in its traditional form.

That said, not all the stories included in The Fairies Return suffer from this lack of magic. One of the strongest pieces in the collection is Robert Speaight’s defiantly mysterious and captivating “Cinderella.” Although the story does seem to comment on the changing roles and desires of women in the early twentieth century, it also retains some of the mystical, otherworldly quality of fairy tales that can be lost in the more strongly satirical and amusing stories. As Tatar says in her introduction, in this bittersweet and interesting re-visioning of the “Cinderella” tale, “Cinderella becomes a martyr, a young woman who seems to make a mad dash from the beautiful mysteries of the physical world to the brutal mysteries of the metaphysical” (21). She forgoes the traditional fairy-tale romance after seeing the truth of what her love for the prince would bring her—nothing but “betrayal” and “suffering” (21). Instead, she finds peace and fulfillment on her own as a single and unknowable fairy-godmother- like character, a woman who helps others with advice and aid. Beautifully haunting but also firmly set in the modern world, Speaight’s story is a good example of the way that the magic of the fairy tale can remain in a retelling—even if the story is transferred to contemporary times.

Most of the stories included in The Fairies Return are each wonderful in their own way. Other standouts include Lady Eleanor Smith’s sad and lovely version of “The Little Mermaid,” A. G. Macdonell’s modern “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,” and Lord Dunsany’s amusing and sharp “Little Snow-White.”

Tatar’s lengthy introduction provides an excellent overview of the creation of the collection, its context in the history of fairy-tale publication, and its compiler. Peter Davies was a troubled man who once served as one of the inspirations for J. M. Barrie’s “Peter Pan,” a fact that haunted his entire life but also, perhaps, made him uniquely qualified as an editor of a collection of
retold fairy tales (27). It should be noted that the introduction does include detailed summaries of the stories that often reveal key plot points. These summaries somewhat spoil part of the readers’ personal experience of discovering the stories’ often ingenious reworkings, and it might be advisable to wait and read Tatar’s commentary until after reading the stories themselves.

This collection is an essential addition to the libraries of those who study fairy-tale retellings and will be an enjoyable read for many others as well. Clever, revealing, and often oddly poignant, these stories deserve recognition.

Brittany Warman
The Ohio State University


These two children’s books, La Llorona and Amadito, bring to the forefront very different stories that are sure to appeal to different audiences. I have never reviewed children’s books before, but I feel qualified to render an opinion on these two, written by renowned Chicano writer Rudolfo Anaya and folklorist Enrique R. Lamadrid, because they are working within the traditional storytelling tradition and at the same time disrupting well-known narratives.

In retelling the well-known story of La Llorona (The Crying Woman), Rudolfo Anaya brings us a variant of the tale situated before the conquest of the Americas, and, although it remains a cautionary tale, the familiar narrative of a scorned woman is nowhere to be found, perhaps because the target audience is not an adult one. Unlike Anaya’s La llorona, a novella (1994), this children’s book presents a story imbued with all the elements of the classic folktale.

The traditional legend of La Llorona, the weeping woman who cries for her children after she commits infanticide, has numerous versions throughout the Americas; in one she commits the crime as revenge, to get even with her philandering husband, and in others she “saves” her children from formidable suffering. Anaya creates Maya, who, because she is born with the sign of the Sun God, is doomed to never grow old. To keep her safe from Lord Time, who seeks to punish her for defying time by killing her children, her parents isolate her and she lives alone on the edge of a volcano. As she grows lonely, Lady Owl instructs her on how to have her own children by creating a beautiful clay pot that then magically grows a child with special seeds supplied by a young
man who is told by Lady Owl to plant them in Maya’s special pot during the full moon. The sexual allusions are inescapable, but Anaya goes further and Maya does the same several times. Many more children are “born,” as the young man comes periodically with various seeds: bean, squash, mango, papaya, lemon, and orange; thus were born Corn Maiden, Jaguar Boy, and many more children. Following the advice of Snake, Maya keeps the pots safely by the fireside, knowing that as long as the pots are safe, her children are safe. One day, of course, Lord Time, disguised as a wise old teacher, finds a way to get the gullible Maya to break her pots and fling them into the river by convincing her that doing so will ensure her children’s welfare and immortal life. As soon as she does this, a terrible storm occurs and Lord Time grabs the children and throws them into the lake. “Now they are mine,” he exclaims. Maya tries to put the pieces together but the water has dissolved the clay and she is left alone to cry eternally for her lost children. The story ends with the usual admonition of mothers calling to their children and instructing them not to go near the lake, lest La Llorona will mistake them for her own children and take them.

This disruption adds to the retelling of the familiar story, and although still obviously set in an indigenous framework, we are told that Maya is born in a village in ancient Mexico on the day the village is celebrating the Festival of the Sun. She weaves feathers and tends to her children in traditional ways. Even the seeds she receives are traditional Mexican foods—corn, squash, mango, papaya. Gratefully, because this story is based on an ancient tale, there is no reference to La Malinche or to the contemporary variants that have the woman killing her children in a fit of jealousy to punish their father who has left her for another woman.

Another children’s book, Amadito and the Hero Children, by University of New Mexico professor Enrique Lamadrid, presents a real episode in New Mexican medical history from the early twentieth century. Published under the Paso Por Aquí Series from the University of New Mexico Press, the book inspires and probes various children’s book genres. As a science story, it presents the true story of how an ingenious strategy to immunize children against the dreaded influenza epidemics saved thousands of lives. It is also a kind of cautionary tale because it teaches certain health practices. As a folk-based narrative, foodways, workplace, and faith beliefs of the bean-growing family permeate the story. Based on the life of New Mexican physician José Amado Dominguez, who was a child participant in the innovative and successful immunization campaign, the story weaves together various themes, including the resourcefulness of the families who weathered multiple hardships to survive. In addition to the theme of the cohesive traditional family, Lamadrid
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includes strong women in the figure of Amadito’s mother and a message of how a community can come together in times of trouble.

Amadito’s story focuses on two medical scares from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Reading the book reminded me of my grandmother’s stories of how illness could sweep through a community, killing hundreds so that almost every family had one or more causalities; in addition, the disease would leave people scarred—cacarizos they were called. Lamadrid brings hope and a life-affirming message that makes for a good read at any level. The inclusion of an academic afterword by Michael León Portillo, titled “Global Pandemics and remedios nuevomexicanos,” includes documents and historical photos and thus contextualizes the story beautifully. This book fills a gap in children’s books about New Mexico’s history the way that Carmen Tafolla’s That’s Not Fair / No Es Justo! (2008) celebrates Tejana Emma Tenayuca’s story.

Artwork by noted nuevomejicana Amy Córdova adds to both books by contributing a visual element to the stories that complements and supports the clear and accessible language.

Norma E. Cantú
University of Missouri, Kansas City


Oxford loves its own. This was abundantly clear in the Bodleian Library’s exhibition Magical Books: From the Middle Ages to Middle-Earth. The “Bod” was the perfect setting for this exhibition of original manuscripts, illustrations, and medieval texts because not only have its contents had a great influence on children’s fantasy literature (as the exhibition amply demonstrates), but also the library itself has figured in some of these stories, for example, in Matthew Skelton’s Endymion Spring (2006) and as the “Bodley” in Philip Pullman’s “other” Oxford. Although seeing the original material in the flesh is hard to beat, much of the exhibition can still be accessed online at www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/whats-on/online/magical-books; and there is a lavishly illustrated exhibition book, Magical Tales: Myth, Legend, and Enchantment in Children’s Books, edited by Carolyne Larrington and Diane Purkiss. Although there is considerable overlap between the book and the website, each contains text and images unavailable in the other, so it is best to consult both to get the closest approximation to a visit to the exhibition itself.
Larrington and Purkiss make an important claim about the genesis of children’s fantasy literature, which makes their book a useful adjunct to courses in that area. They assert that there is such a thing as “the ‘Oxford School’ of children’s fantasy literature,” and, as far as I am aware, they are the first to make that specific claim publicly in print (it is a truism that there is a general connection between Oxford and children’s fantasy literature). The claim made in the introduction and also in David Clark’s chapter, “The Magical Middle Ages in Children’s Fantasy Literature,” is that “the ‘Oxford School’ of children’s fantasy literature” arose from the University of Oxford’s English School during the mid-twentieth century. J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis laid the foundations for the children’s fantasy genre not only by introducing in 1931 an English curriculum that required extensive study of medieval literature but also by pioneering the use of medieval sources in their own popular children’s fantasy works. Steeped in the medieval literature introduced at Oxford by Lewis and Tolkien and following in their footsteps as writers of popular fantasy literature for children came such authors as Susan Cooper, Alan Garner, Kevin Crossley-Holland, Diana Wynne Jones, and Philip Pullman.

The chapter dealing most fully with this idea is Clark’s, though he also manages to squeeze in the important pre-Tolkien or pre-Lewis authors George MacDonald, E. Nesbit, and Rudyard Kipling (Oxford was off limits for the first two as, respectively, a nonconformist and a woman; Kipling was neither academic enough to win a scholarship nor wealthy enough to afford the Oxford fees). Clark concludes with a tale of post–Oxford School children’s fantasy writers, none of whom (other than Terry Jones) actually attended Oxford University; however, they all seem to have been in some way influenced by Tolkien.

Tolkien also figures largely in Larrington’s chapter, “The Myths of the North in Children’s Books,” though it was Lewis who provided the most famous evocation of pure “Northernness” in Surprised by Joy (1955): “a vision of huge, clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer, remoteness, severity” (74). Lewis’s vision was triggered by Arthur Rackham’s illustrations of Margaret Armour’s translation of the libretti of Richard Wagner’s Ring Cycle (the exhibition book contains two of these striking illustrations). Wagner had succeeded William Morris in the young Lewis’s personal pantheon, and Larrington explores the tradition of Victorian representations of Scandinavian mythology from the Keary sisters’ Heroes of Asgard (1857) onward, including Morris’s illustrations of his own verse translation Sigurd the Volsung (1876) (there is a splendid example in the exhibition book). The mid-twentieth-century writers retelling Scandinavian
mythology include the usual Oxford School suspects as well as Roger Lancelyn Green, who was taught by Lewis as an undergraduate and supervised by Tolkien in his postgraduate thesis (later a book) on Andrew Lang; and Barbara Leonie Picard, who declined Oxford (preferring to write) but was published by Oxford University Press in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, *Tales of the Norse Gods and Heroes* (1953). Larrington concludes with more recent retellings of Norse mythology by Joanne Harris, Melvin Burgess, and Francesca Simon.

Purkiss’s chapter, “Books of Magic,” plays with the various possible meanings of that phrase. Books are always already magic because they transport us elsewhere from the here and now. Literacy had an aura of magic in the Middle Ages, so that *grammar* becomes *gramarye*, meaning “magic” (glamour) or a magic book (for the latter, Purkiss uses the cognate term *grimoire*). Books of magic figure in books about magic (Lucy encounters a magic book in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*). Purkiss discusses the real books and scrolls of magic in the Bodleian Library, some of which Garner used in *The Moon of Gomrath* (1963). However, the inclusion in the exhibition of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (with instructions on torturing supposed witches) proved controversial. Purkiss also discusses books as objects with magical powers within books, for example, *Inkheart* (2003), *Endymion Spring* (2006), and *The Neverending Story* (1979).

Anna Caughey’s chapter, “Once and Future Arthurs: Arthurian Literature for Children,” provides an illuminating overview of the history of versions of Arthurian legend, which, as is already apparent in Caxton’s preface to the first printed edition of Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* (1485), was explicitly aimed at inculcating certain values in its young readers. Baden Powell’s *Young Knights of the Empire* (1916) was only repeating such ideological intent; a more realistic reflection of the realities of 1916 is provided in Rackham’s disturbingly bleak illustration (for Alfred Pollard’s *Romance of King Arthur* [1917]) of the mutual destruction of Arthur and Mordred against a landscape reminiscent of the World War I trenches. This survey of the constant reinvention of Arthur concludes with modern versions, including the Marvel Comics *Captain Britain* (1979).


William Gray
University of Chichester

Danishka Esterhazy’s H & G is a modern reworking of “Hansel and Gretel” set and filmed in Winnipeg, Canada. Harley (age 6) (Annika Elyse Irving) and his older sister Gemma (age 8) (Breazy Diduck-Wilson) are the children of Krysstal (Ashley Rebecca Moore), a beleaguered single mother living in poverty and struggling to feed her family. When Harley and Gemma find themselves lost after Krysstal’s abusive boyfriend abandons them far from home, they are taken in by Brendon (Tony Porteus), a pig farmer, who cares for them and feeds them but seems to have more sinister motives.

H & G clearly shows Esterhazy’s love of fairy tales and her understanding of what makes these stories appealing over time and generations. There is an element of timelessness that can be seen in many beautifully shot scenes, such as when Harley and Gemma wake after spending their first night alone in the woods and are shown playing in the fields, exhilarated by their sudden freedom and lost in the world of childhood. The timelessness of this idyllic scene, dappled with morning sunlight and children’s laughter, is in stark contrast to the very real and modern dangers facing the children as cars speed by on a nearby road and the darkness of the forest looms ahead.

These moments are paced well, with the camera lingering on the children’s happiness and then quickly cutting away as Gemma realizes that she is now responsible for Harley’s safety. She hurries them along to find help; she no longer has time for childish things. This is another central theme in H & G: the biggest threat to children may be the adults in their lives, and in order to survive, they must grow up, too soon, and leave childhood behind. This has been Gemma’s role from the beginning: taking care of Harley when her mother neglected to do so and coping with responsibility far beyond her years. Breazy Diduck-Wilson is perfect in her portrayal of Gemma; she is seething with anger at her mother, resentful of Harley’s carefree relationship with Brendon, and afraid of the situation in which they find themselves but unsure of what to do next. Unable to locate their mother, the children are forced to stay for days at the farm in a situation that gets more dangerous as time passes. Although Gemma’s instincts tell her that they should escape, she is also aware that home is not necessarily any safer.

On the website for H & G, Esterhazy states that she has always been interested in the portrayal of women in fairy tales, particularly the “demonization of adult female characters” (www.hg-movie.com/a-film-by-danishka-esterhazy/directors-statement/). H & G addresses this by replacing the witch with a threatening father figure but also in the representation of Krysstal. It is easy to
read Krysstal’s actions as selfish, putting her needs ahead of her children’s and being careless enough to lose them. But Esterhazy’s representation of Krysstal is much more complex. We never doubt Krysstal’s love for her children, but she is also deeply flawed and stuck in a life of poverty, which leads to Harley and Gemma feeling neglected. The fact that we never see her again heightens this: Gemma tries to reach her on the phone daily but she never answers, the police never show up, she appears to have forgotten them. Esterhazy plays on social discourses of motherhood where anything other than complete self-sacrifice is demonized. Although the audience might view Krysstal with pity, Gemma, who is unable to see the larger circumstances of Krysstal’s life, simply feels betrayed. She cannot understand why Krysstal is not a better mother or why she appears to have abandoned them, and this drives her need to care for Harley; she can be that better mother. However, unlike traditional versions of the story, Krysstal is not represented as a heartless villain who abandons her children because it is in her nature to do so. Instead, she faces real struggles as she copes with these stereotypes in her daily life as a poor, single mother.

Instead of the evil witch, there is Brendon, who has a special interest in Harley; he is framed as both the father figure Harley desires and a potential pedophile. He is reminiscent of the witch figure as he gives them food, bakes them cakes, and buys toys for Harley. He wins their trust with the basic care they were missing and the extra treats that they could never otherwise afford. He gives them the freedom to be children while leading them toward the inevitable: the relinquishing of innocence and childhood.

The burden falls to Gemma, the older sibling, to rescue them. Fairy tales often feature young women who must grow up too soon in order to save themselves. In many stories they must rid themselves of their evil, female counterparts, usually a stepmother, to stay pure and virtuous. What is appealing to me about this film is the way in which Gemma at first villainizes her mother and then must become like her to escape, using the survival instincts she has learned from Krysstal. This shifts the focus away from the monstrous mother back to the real threat: Brendon. But there remains a volatility in Gemma, an anger that comes from the life she has experienced so far and from the trauma of their time at the farm; this is her inheritance.

_H & G_ is full of ambiguity, and it is never clear who or what might pose the biggest threat. There is a no return home at the end of the film, no redemption for Krysstal, and no rekindling of childhood. The fate of Harley and Gemma is left unwritten, and the audience is left with uncertainty—perhaps they will find their way home or perhaps the next danger lurks on the other side of the forest. _H & G_ offers us the best in fairy-tale storytelling by leaving
us with questions, challenging what we think we know, and showing us that there are many possible paths through the forest.

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The Imaginary Beasts production of Angela Carter’s Hairy Tales, which ran this past fall in Boston, Massachusetts, made a sincere and refreshing effort to remind its audience that fairy tales are not the colorful, sanitized, robustly happy Disney interpretations that have dominated our culture for the past half-century. Neither are they the blockbuster, action-packed melodramas that are becoming vogue in today’s cinemas, in which Snow White deftly wields an axe and falls in love with a dreamy and oh-so-irresistibly troubled huntsman. Instead, in the intimate theater of the Boston Center for the Arts, we are brought back to the birthplace of fairy tales—the fireside—and the simple expression of complex thought.

The craft and care taken to transform Carter’s radio plays for the stage, giving them wholeheartedly over to the body, is evident throughout the two acts. The set design of Act 1, “The Company of Wolves,” is especially minimalist, playfully using the ensemble to represent swaying trees and a ticking clock; the only notable prop is the infamous red cloak. Act 2, “Vampirella, or, The Lady of the House of Love,” though it effectively uses a floor-to-ceiling canvas as a veil between the experiences of the living and the reminiscences of the undead, also primarily depends on the actors to set the scene; the most memorable improvisations are the hero humorously mimicking an exhausting bicycle ride and members of the ensemble filling in for the dour vampire portraits on the castle walls. In this way, through the aesthetics of each design, through the similar tension that permeates each act’s love (or lust) story, and through his tongue-in-cheek approach to the necessary absurdities and suspensions of disbelief that fantasy stories require, director Matthew Woods is able to connect Carter’s distinct fairy tales, each finding its necessary counterpart in a neo-Gothic diptych of sensuality, violence, and postmodern eclecticism.

Act 1, “The Company of Wolves,” shows a deep commitment to the storytelling tradition, with the tale of this not-so-little Red Riding Hood (Erin Butcher) embedded, Russian doll-like, within other stories relating to a girl, a wolf, and an encounter in the woods. The rumors of men who strip down to reveal their werewolf underbellies and the young women bewitched by these cleverly disguised beasts are told both to us and to Little Red in anxious tones.
by Granny (Lorna Nogueira), with admonishments never to stray from the path. The tension created by interweaving these reports of previous victims with Little Red’s present-day decision to enter the woods and trust the huntsman/werewolf (Michael Underhill) is palpable, even if the ticking grandfather clock (played by the ensemble cast) that counts down the minutes to Little Red’s impending rendezvous verges slightly on the histrionic. The ensemble cast of werewolves, however, breathe (and howl) life into the chilling cautionary tales that support the central narrative, such as that of a man (William Schuller) so overcome by his wolffish, lascivious sensuality that he is unable to recover his identity as a loving bridegroom and, as a result, his longed-for homecoming becomes a bloodbath. Ultimately, however, this retelling stumbles on tone: Little Red’s overly earnest “liberation” brings the tale to a disappointingly self-conscious and uninspiring close.

Act 2, “Vampirella, or The Lady of the House of Love,” is the perfect antidote to the rather lackluster end of Act 1. In her original retelling, Carter gives us a reinterpretation of a princess narrative. Her Sleeping Beauty is a vampire countess who laments her fate as a being who will never know love and who sees her life as an unrelenting series of repetitive actions, postponing and succumbing to her desire for human prey. Her prince is the handsome would-be victim who braves the decaying castle, shows the fragile countess pity, and changes her fortune. The genius of the Imaginary Beasts production of Carter’s radio play reveals itself in its lighthearted homage to gothic horror. Especially amusing are the creepy, wheezing Lantern Bearers, whose fascination and frustration with the new-fangled camera set the tone for the rest of the show. The tale of the Countess’s heritage is told to the audience by various members of the cast through a series of stories detailing the exploits and (un)timely ends of the previous members of her lineage. Notable is William Schuller’s performance as the unctuous Count Nosferatu, whose eventual grotesque and yet uproarious staking leaves his daughter in her lonely predicament. In conjunction with these riotously gruesome accounts of vampiric activity is the present-day story of the hero: an unflappable, bicycle-riding, stoutly pragmatic Englishman (Michael Underhill) who happens to find himself thirsty at a very inopportune time. The master storyteller in this act, however, is the hilarious Mrs. Beane (played with brilliant bawdiness by Kamelia Aly), the unapologetically cannibalistic housekeeper/governess who is forced to leave her home in Scotland because of her family’s partiality to human flesh and who is constantly bemused by her mistress’s efforts of abstention. Also interesting is the choice to split the role of the Countess in two, with Amy Meyer performing the Countess’s actions and audible dialogue and Poornima Kirby (whose delicate fluttering movements vividly and eloquently recall the metaphor of the caged
bird in Carter's original story) performing the Countess's daydreams and thoughts. Underhill's performance as the oblivious and obliging hero is at first amusing and then profoundly touching as his initial befuddlement at the Countess's curious manners and macabre abode change to compassion and convincing tenderness. His growing recognition of the vampirella's desperate vulnerability, her ultimate decision to free herself from her nonlife, and their clumsy, morbid, and yet surprisingly sweet love affair bring humanity not only to the vampire but also to the tale.

There are a few hairy moments throughout the three-hour performance, especially in the first act, when the play begins to take itself too seriously, thereby breaking the spell of the stories (e.g., when Little Red wails her passionate sympathy for the wolf and when the Countess gives one too many blank stares at the audience in response to inquiries about her life). Ultimately, however, the play never strays too far from Angela Carter's visionary path of intelligent and insightful reinvention. The Imaginary Beasts production gently reminds the audience that fairy tales teach us truths about the human experience with a simplicity that belies a profound understanding of our fears, our hopes, our humor, and our appetites—however peculiar our palates might be.

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