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REVIEWS

Fantasy Fictions from the Bengal Renaissance. Translated and edited by Sanjay Sircar, foreword by Peter Hunt, Oxford University Press, 2018, 339 pp.

This is a major book mainly for scholars of folktales and fairy tales, and let us hope that Oxford University Press in India finds a way through its parent company in the United Kingdom to make it more available in English-speaking countries than it is now.

The book consists of Sanjay Sircar's excellent translations from the Bengali of Abanindranath Tagore's *Khirer Putul* (*The Make-Believe Prince*, 1896) and Gaganendranath Tagore's *Bhodor Bahadur* (*Otter the Great*, 1946) along with Sircar's long and thorough introductions to these tales. In his foreword to this edition, Peter Hunt remarks that "Sircar has not only worked with powerful texts, and provided much useful context for them; but his efforts have been directed towards scrupulously accurate translation into English which conveys a non-Western cultural and linguistic flavor, but which is clearly understandable" (x).

Actually, the Tagore brothers are better known in India and the world as groundbreaking modern painters and founders of the Indian Society of Oriental Art. Gaganendranath Tagore (1867–1938) was also a cartoonist, and his major contribution to literature was *Bhodor Bahadur* (*Otter the Great*), published posthumously in Bengali and later in English by different translators. This remarkable "fable" was based on Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and Sircar, who uses a different title, *Toddy-Cat the Bold*, points out its unique significance: "Unlike Carroll's Gaganendranath's wonderland reflects the real-world co-existence of separate ethnicities and regional/linguistic and religious communities in India, which has in general long taken for granted something like the phenomenon that the West now terms 'multiculturalism,' but in which groups co-exist, form alliances, but nevertheless stay separate" (191). In this regard, Tagore's accomplishment is the transformation of a Victorian fantasy into a mock beast epic that mirrors

social conflicts in India and reveals how the major protagonist, cat/otter, regains his childhood in old age.

Long before Gaganendranath wrote his narrative, his brother Abanindranath (1871–1951) published *Khiner Putul* (*The Make-Believe Prince*), a children's fairy tale, in 1896, which also depicts aspects of Indian customs and conflicts of the Bengal Renaissance. In this case, as Sircar admirably demonstrates, the younger Tagore transformed a well-known folktale type, ATU 459 "The Make-Believe Son (Daughter)," into a stunning literary fairy tale in which an extraordinary monkey enables a neglected queen to regain her status after her husband had abandoned her. The plot is simple and comical, somewhat like Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes" (1837). Once his first wife Duo Rani grows less attractive, the king of Deepnagar discards her and spends all his time with his second wife, Suo Rani, to whom he gives seven kingdoms, seven gardens, seven chariots, and so on. Duo Rani is forced to live in squalor. Nevertheless something is still missing in the king's life—an heir. Suo Rani cannot provide him with a male heir. Consequently, Duo Rani has the good fortune to draw the compassion of an extraordinary monkey, who tricks and convinces the king that the elderly Duo Rani is pregnant and will provide him an heir. However, the king is not allowed to see his first wife until after she has given birth. The monkey connives and deceives a goddess who enables a sugar or milky doll to be transformed into a child, and the king is reconciled with the first wife.

The Make-Believe Prince was illustrated by Abanindranath and contained poems, as does *Toddy-Cat the Bold*. Sircar provides an elaborate and thorough sociohistorical background to both stories so that readers unfamiliar with Indian folklore and children's literature will be able to grasp how important this period of the Bengal Renaissance was for the flowering of both indigenous Indian children's literature and the literary translations from Bengali to English. Questions of colonization, adaptation, translation, and tradition are raised throughout Sircar's erudite introductions to the tales. The question as to which versions were written for the British colonialists and which for the indigenous people of India are examined carefully by Sircar, who provides numerous references and material for understanding how Indian culture was becoming more independent during the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, if anyone wants a primer dealing with the early development of folklore and children's literature in India, this is the book to read.

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American Myths, Legends, and Tall Tales: An Encyclopedia of American Folklore. Edited by Christopher R. Fee and Jeffrey B. Webb, ABC-CLIO, 2016, 3 volumes, 410 pp., 387 pp., 361 pp.

When Jan Harold Brunvand's book, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: American Urban Legends and Their Meanings*, was published in 1981, it brought the study of legends into mainstream discourse because it was both accessible and analytical, enabling it to generate significant interest in popular culture. The book itself even made a cameo in the 1998 psychological slasher film *Urban Legend*, sitting on the desk of Professor Wexler, who, in the movie, taught "Intro to American Folklore." Brunvand would later speak of how he would regularly receive letters with additional legends or different variants from people all around the country, even abroad. In going through the nearly five hundred entries that comprise the three volumes of *American Myths, Legends, and Tall Tales*, I cannot help but to think of all those legends Brunvand must have received and how many of them found their way here. Yet, while exploring the legend scholarship is what piqued my interest in reviewing this title, the collection goes far beyond the study of urban legends—known as contemporary legends in folklore circles—expanding to include additional narrative genres, such as animal tales, culture heroes and villains, conspiracy theories, and folklore-influenced items of popular culture.

The introduction provides a straightforward and easily digestible breakdown of the title's key terms that the general public has a passing, although often mistaken, familiarity with—folklore, myths, legends, and tall tales—and it speaks to the need of recognizing the diverse ethnic roots that formulate the corpus of American folklore. As such, the introduction serves as a solid primer to conceptualize the distinct meanings behind these terms, their significance, and how narratives from around the world have adapted to an American context. It would thus serve as a useful reading for a folklore section in a high school or freshman-level undergraduate English class—though due to its brevity (four pages) and lack of critical analysis, I would not recommend it for a semester-long course on introduction to folklore where each term should get far deeper consideration than what can be provided here.

The entries are arranged in alphabetical order, with a "Contents" section that lists all items in the front of each volume. Additionally, there is a "Guide to Related Topics" that categorizes culturally or thematically related entries, such as "Hispanic American Legends and Folklore," "Native American Mythical Creatures," "Historical Figures and Americana," and "Conspiracy Theories." This makes it easier to scan through the volumes for items that correspond with specific areas of interest. Following standard encyclopedic format, each of the entries provides an overview of the item, cross references as appropriate, and a "Further Reading" segment with helpful internet links where

appropriate. Also included are black-and-white photographs with informative captions, text boxes that summarize important characters or events, and examples of primary documents, such as the words to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Paul Revere's Ride" (816–17). The staggering diversity in entries makes this a valuable collection. Included are well-known contemporary legends ("Alligators in the Sewers"), traditions ("Jumping the Broom"), historical figures ("Amelia Earhart"), cryptozoological figures ("Bigfoot"), conspiracy theories ("Area 51"), and areas of academic inquiry ("Fakelore"), as well as tales that the larger country is not familiar with but should be ("Legend of the Pineapple" and "Orphan Boy the Farmer: A Hmong American Folktale").

Of particular interest to readers of this journal might be the collection's treatment of fairy tales (also known as *Märchen*), which is unfortunately not very extensive. This is understandable considering the broad source material and its larger focus on legends, but there are still, however, some noteworthy entries. For instance, the passage on Bruno Bettelheim provides insight into the history of the psychoanalytic study of fairy tales, and the section, "Folklore and Folktales," provides a more nuanced understanding of how fairy tales fit into folklore scholarship. There are also a few entries that delve deeper into specific tale types that could be of interest to fairy-tale scholars, such as "Animal Bride," "Frog King," "Bunch of Laurel Blooms for a Present," and "American Cinderella Tales." Unfortunately, one has to sift through all the items to find the relevant work as there is no fairy-tales section in the "Guide to Related Topics"—strangely, though, there is one item associated with the *Märchen* category in the index.

There are some other minor issues. At times, items seem misplaced. For instance, I am unsure why an entry is devoted to quilts in a collection focused on folk narratives. If the entry were to have engaged on the narrative function of quilts, I could see the justification, but it does no such thing. Although certainly a treasured aspect of American folklore, it seems better suited for the two-volume set, *American Folk Art: A Regional Reference*, also published by ABC-CLIO. Similarly, the entry on Atlantis has little relevance to the collection's theme, but at least, in that instance, the included primary document draws some connections to the Americas more generally—specifically between Atlantis and the mythic Aztec land of Aztlán. At times, the writing also leaves something to be desired. In the entry "Anansi/Anancy," detailing the West African spider trickster god, a passage reads, "He can also appear as a human, but his human figure is almost always spindly. He can appear as a human with spider-like traits, such as long thin legs. To the unaware, his small, spindly appearance makes him appear weak and insignificant" (33). This level of repetition should have been caught in editing, and its inclusion detracts from the well-researched information. Additionally, the "Chronology" section is a bit

arbitrary as it highlights seemingly random historical moments of importance to folklore, not all of which occurred in the United States. Lastly, and perhaps more pressing, I am bothered by the lack of involvement of folklorists. Although folklore scholarship is mentioned throughout, the vast majority of entries are written by people in other fields, perhaps as a direct result of neither editor being a folklorist. In fact, most narrative folklorists in my circles did not hear of this collection during its development. It should go without saying that an encyclopedia of American folklore should ensure that folklorists are involved at every level and, doing so, would have created a much stronger collection.

All of these issues, though, do not detract from the value of this well-researched, overall enjoyable collection. This rich trove of American lore will serve as a valuable resource for individuals interested in exploring their beloved tales, and the “Further Reading” section can function as a useful springboard for more involved folklore scholarship. Due to these and many more reasons, these volumes would be a welcome addition to library reference collections focused on folklore, anthropology, or popular culture.

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The Caribbean Story Finder: A Guide to 438 Tales from 24 Nations and Territories, Listing Subjects and Sources. By Sharon Barcan Elswit, McFarland, 2017, 308 pp.

Sharon Barcan Elswit, a children’s librarian and teacher in New York City, is the author of four books in the same series: *The Jewish Story Finder* (2012), *The East Asian Story Finder* (2014), *The Latin American Story Finder* (2015), and *The Caribbean Story Finder* (2017). The most accurate word to describe these manuals is *inventory*: the reader can expect an extensive list of numbered tale titles associated with the concerned cultural area and classified according to common themes, along with a 150- to 200-word summary of each tale in English. It should be noted that the stories themselves do not appear in the Story Finders series; the purpose of this book series is to refer to the tales and organize the titles into a structured, comprehensive list.

In her preface to *The Caribbean Story Finder*, Elswit makes the book’s mission clear: it is intended to share tales otherwise confined to their insular birthplace with the outside world, including the people of Caribbean descent living in the United States (2). Continuing the work of story collectors and cultural passers the likes of Bartolomé de las Casas in the colonial era, Elswit undertakes an important enterprise for collective memory and the perpetuation of culture, with special attention to non-Western culture. As a secondary purpose, this book makes an important statement because it reclaims creole

languages and cultures. Noting that the creole or patois languages are not “broken” English, French, or Dutch but officially recognized languages, the author explains that she includes references to stories told in creole that the English-speaking reader may understand (1–2). Therefore, some titles are listed in both their English and creole or patois titles (separated by a slash and accepting different spellings, following the Library of Congress conventions). The summaries, however, are all in English. The author is also cautious to justify her choice to include or reject versions of stories containing creole words that may be offensive—a very welcome testimony of the book’s self-consciousness as a medium for the visibility of underrepresented cultures (7).

The Caribbean Story Finder is a well-structured manual containing a preface, an introduction, eleven thematic chapters (averaging twenty pages each), three appendixes (a geographical lexicon, a separate list of stories told in creole or patois, and a glossary), a bibliography, a story title index, and a subject index. The introduction is perhaps the most argumentative part of the book even though the book is an argument for cultural memory in itself. Before she lists and classifies the four hundred and thirty-eight stories, Elswit underscores their main characteristics, including their separate identity from Latin American stories; their orality and performative character; and their common themes of national identity, power, status, injustice, racism, inequity; and, especially for Indian tales from Trinidad and Jamaica, including their ability to “weave strong morality into magical fantasies” (4). With these emphases and the author’s justification of her corpus of stories, the introduction is a very good guide to using the book.

The eleven chapters are each defined according to a common theme of the stories they group together, ranging from music to magic, through justice, love, and survival. Specific attention is given to recurring characters of Caribbean tales, such as Anansi, Malice, and Rabbit (chapter 8). The “Connections” and “How Else This Story Is Told” sections are thoughtful additions, although one may regret the absence of chapter introductions, conclusions, or transitions. The chapters do not explicitly make any individual points other than highlighting important themes and common threads of the stories chosen. The appendixes, bibliography, and indexes are clear, succinct, and very user-friendly. The subject index is particularly welcome for locating at one glance all the pages containing one and the same subject or character.

For an idea of the stories that are included, let us take Philip M. Sherlock’s “From Tiger to Anansi,” one of the many Anansi (or Anancy) stories listed in the book. Anansi the spider is a famous folktale character in the Caribbean. In this particular story, the tiny spider decides that he wants all the stories in the kingdom to be named after him, and not after Tiger, the king. Thinking the spider weak, Tiger tells Anansi that he can own the stories if he can deliver

Snake alive. Failing many times at first, Anansi manages to deceive Snake by asking him if he is longer than the bamboo tree. Bragging he is, Snake allows Anansi to tie him to the bamboo tree to measure, and therefore the spider delivers the snake to Tiger the king, thus becoming the owner of all stories (184). Perhaps less famous is Elsie Clews Parsons's "Barking Head": jumbies (malevolent spirits) repeatedly try to take an old lady for her death. Bobbie, her little dog, always barks to chase them away. Not knowing the reason for Bobbie's barking, the old lady beheads him; but the head continues to bark, so she buries it deeper and deeper until it is quiet. When the jumbies return, she is terrified and belatedly cries for Bobbie to save her. The spirits cook her and "dance the jumbie dance" in her house (100).

In his review of Elswit's *Latin American Story Finder* published in the journal *Hispania* (vol. 100, no. 2, June 2017, pp. 322–23), Rafael Saumell praises "a large inventory of cultural syncretism" while reproaching the author for her rejection of certain stories according to their likelihood to offend some readers—for example, on the way slaves are portrayed. Saumell argues that no story should be rejected "for the sake of present sensitivity towards race, social or historical issues" (Saumell 323). Elswit somewhat addresses this issue in *The Caribbean Story Finder* by justifying her inclusion or omission of story versions containing potentially offensive terms for certain populations. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that the stories that the author proposes to shed light on are very difficult to access, and that listing all of them is by no means possible. Her laborious enterprise and her call for more works to "give people back their heritage and to catch the stories before they disappear" deserves to be saluted (2).

A book to treasure for cultural remembrance and collective memory, Elswit's inventory of Caribbean tales will suit any reader with a curiosity for autochthonous storytelling, native languages, and the influence of colonization on local myths and oral literature. Although it is perfectly accessible to nonacademic audiences, it is also a valuable addition to high-school or university syllabi for courses dealing with Caribbean culture.

Manon Hakem-Lemaire

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The Bitter Life of Božena Nêmcová: A Biographical Collage. By Kelcey Parker Ervick, Rose Metal Press, 2016, 338 pp.

Kelcey Parker Ervick is a storyteller–scholar who gives readers an impression of Božena Nêmcová that is both literary and visual in *The Bitter Life of Božena Nêmcová*. This hybridized text is a collage in every sense, blending biography and memoir with fairy tale. Ervick offers readers an introduction to Nêmcová's fiction, as well as her life. Part 1 constructs a fragmented sense of

Němcová's brief life as a Czech nationalist and fairy-tale writer in mid-nineteenth-century Bohemia, where she shattered conventions by taking lovers and smoking cigars. Part 2 is a memoir of Ervick's failing marriage and struggle to learn Czech while contemplating reading, writing, and happy endings.

Ervick's free-verse poetry creates a feeling of Božena Němcová's hazy early life by merging Němcová's personal history with fragments of her fairy tales, particularly *Babicka* (*The Grandmother*, 1855) and "Diva Bara" (1920), which translates into "Wild" Bara. An excerpt from Němcová's letter discussing her happy childhood is paired with excerpts from the fairy tales discussing Wild Bara's happiness in her own strength and independence. In the excerpts that Ervick includes, Wild Bara is a carefree villager who can outrun and outthink the men around her, making her both attractive and threatening to the other villagers. Wild Bara eschews heteronormative assumptions about women's fairy-tale dreams by choosing her "golden freedom" over the boys courting her (29). Ervick's celebration of an *Orlando*-style biography is especially apparent here.

Ervick's conflation of life and fiction undermines the idea of truth in biography. Ervick's poem "We Don't Even Know" emphasizes the uncertainty in Němcová's biographical record, pointing out the conflicting years for her birth in official records (20). Conflicting theories about Němcová's heritage circulating in her biographies are juxtaposed in a series of Ervick's free-verse poems. They are followed by an excerpt from Němcová's Slovak folk story "The Twelve Months" (n.d.), which describes a mother who did not love her stepdaughter. The story seems to reflect Němcová's relationship with her own mother, suggesting she knew she was not her mother's biological child.

The sections of the first part work chronologically through Němcová's life. Later sections include a greater number of excerpts from Němcová's letters, as well as selections from scholarly texts about the Czech author. One of the most poignant is Ervick's "That Child," which addresses Němcová's dying son, Hyneck (139–42). Ervick arranges a few lines from one of Němcová letters like a free-verse poem, progressively deconstructing the text until the reader is left with only the name "Hyneck" repeated on the final page.

Excerpts from scholarly texts, paraphrased or translated by Ervick, give readers a sense of Němcová's legacy and popularity in her homeland. For example, Ervick pairs an excerpt from *Babicka* with a scholarly history that celebrates the book's translations and reprintings, concluding with the statement "The old lady is a perpetual comfort in hard times" (146). The Czech author's long cultural shadow adds another layer of texture to the work.

Free-verse poems by Ervick are punctuated with photographs, paintings, and collages throughout the book. Apart from a few historic photographs or postcards, the images are primarily the original work of Ervick. In the first

section, photographs and paintings of Nĕmcová are juxtaposed with paintings of the two different princesses who are rumored to be her mother. The paintings and photographs complement the surrounding text, literally putting faces with unfamiliar names.

Unlike the text, the images rarely include notes besides titles. The reader is left to ponder the images' relationship to Nĕmcová and her life. Images also become increasingly abstract. They are primarily collages, combining photographs, illustrations, and Czech text. The artistic use of Czech in the images gives the reader a feel for Nĕmcová's later devotion to the Czech language. The title image, "Shrouded in Mystery" (2016) by Ervick, contains scraps of Nĕmcová's Czech fiction, as well as a handwritten excerpt from one of Nĕmcová's letters (55). These fragments of text are incorporated into ghostly painted images of Nĕmcová. The image captures the feel of Ervick's message, illustrating a woman and her writing that forever remain elusive.

The snapshots of life and fiction are narrated by extensive footnotes. Ervick's notes create a rich, rambling conversation that flows alongside the collage, building a relationship between the reader and Ervick. This subtext relationship blossoms in the final section, where Ervick reflects on her own journey into discovering Nĕmcová and her art. The notes provide readers the introductory context necessary to appreciate each entry. The notes also add scholarly credence to Ervick's artwork.

The second section opens with series of postcardlike notes between Ervick and Nĕmcová. The notes merge Ervick's life experience with reflections on language and art. Like the deconstruction of Nĕmcová's letter about Hyneck in "That Child" (139–42), Ervick's struggle to learn to introduce herself as a professor in Czech unravels into a contemplation of her identity, concluding with the statement "I didn't know who I was" (251). These final reflections make the elusive Nĕmcová present and relatable for the reader.

Ervick's collage is a beautiful, artful deconstruction of traditional biography. It introduces one of the most celebrated Czech writers in history alongside snapshots of her art. *The Bitter Life of Božena Nĕmcová* leaves the reader with a grounded sense of an artist and her elusive work.

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Fairy Tale: A Very Short Introduction. By Marina Warner, Oxford University Press, 2018, 156 pp.

With language full of imagery and references to fairy tales that anyone can identify, Marina Warner dives straight into her history and analysis of the genre. She makes it clear: fairy tales are no longer reserved for children, and many aspects of them still remain unexplored. Of interest to both academic

and popular audiences, the fairy tale is a perpetually malleable genre whose ancient myths allow us to relate to contemporary cultural anxieties.

Despite the always problematic enterprise of defining a genre, Warner manages a simple definition: fairy tales are short narratives that tell familiar stories. They contain the orality of anonymous narratives once told among unlettered people and passed down the generations. Fairy tales have recurring motifs (e.g., magic and violence), characters (e.g., innocent children, witches, and princesses) and plots (e.g., injustice, epic journeys, and dramatic or happy endings). Above all, these tales give a sense of wisdom coming from our ancestors. With this comprehensive definition and references to popular titles such as “Red Riding Hood,” “Cinderella,” or the *Arabian Nights*, Warner then engages with authors’ and theorists’ approaches to fairy tales, from Italo Calvino’s term “consolatory fables” to Angela Carter’s “heroic optimism” (xxviii–xxix). Thus, Warner achieves an effective, enticing prologue that paves the way for an accessible manual, promising a good overview of fairy tales for a large audience.

If they do not seem to follow a logical order at first, this *Very Short Introduction’s* nine chapters transition very well into one another. Their amusing titles are perfectly evocative of the themes addressed by each chapter, from fairies and magic to stage and screen, through translation and psychology. Inside each chapter, the reader will find inspirational quotes from fairy tales. These quotes are not prompts for a close analysis of a particular tale, but rather a starting point for a more general discussion around the theme at stake (fairies, for instance). Then, the reader will find welcome illustrations from old and new paintings, books, and films. Numbered “boxes” giving attention to a particular tale are also a very useful addition to support each chapter’s arguments. Because Warner’s writing style is colorful and creative, one may find it difficult to follow the progression of her argument while juggling between the main text, the quotes, the illustrations, and the boxes. Nevertheless, handy subheadings, brief chapters, and small transitions before each new one ease this slight difficulty. Averaging fifteen pages, the chapters each treat their specific theme while gradually building towards Warner’s main arguments: first, that fairy tales have been taken as “scriptures” to guide us, adults, through life (136). Second, that they are progressing from being considered childish illusions and are increasingly seen as realistic in their capacity to create “an alternative world” that, by effect of contrast, reflects contemporary anxieties and trauma (135).

By combining her analyses of traditional tales by Perrault or the Grimms with Disney classics and more recent works such as Pablo Berger’s film *Blancanieves* (2012), Warner makes another notable point: that role models in fairy tales are crucial to understanding past and current appreciations of

gender and sexuality. About modern representations of fairy tales, Warner argues that they “reveal an acute malaise about sexual, rather than social, programming of the female,” all the while striving to depict stronger, more independent heroines, such as in Disney’s *Frozen* (2014), written and directed by Jennifer Lee (132, 109). By acknowledging both the progressiveness of fairy tales and their problematic depiction of gender and sexuality, Warner does not denounce an inconsistency of the genre; she compellingly illustrates her argument that fairy tales are, after all, about reality, and that, as they are told and reinvented, fairy tales reflect current *malaises* of society. With this focus on gender in chapters 7 and 9, Warner addresses an aspect of fairy tales that once lacked academic attention, as pointed out by Daniel Peretti in his 2008 review of *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (2004): “Non-Western theories, performance-centered studies, analyses by women—these areas, not merely another idea about a larger domain, might define the future study of myth” (500). Peretti’s call was also relevant to the study of the fairy tale, and Warner’s work very much contributes to filling the gap.

Overall, Warner’s cross-disciplinary study is an innovation in its capacity to concisely treat a variety of works from different art media, as well as in its response to research gaps in fairy-tale studies, such as the depiction of gender in fairy tales. Warner’s problematization of the meaning of fairy tales in the twenty-first century is extremely inviting for the reader, who will easily make the correlation between ancient myths and current society. It is encouraging for further research on what this perpetual form does to and about our cultural anxieties. As a cultural historian, Warner uses a rather neutral methodology, combined with jargon-free language that will appeal to the literature student as much as the historian, the film scholar, or, indeed, to anyone from any discipline in the arts and humanities.

A light manual with refreshing moments of first-person narrative, *Fairy Tale: A Very Short Introduction* makes an entertaining account of the history and function of fairy tales that will suit both academic and nonacademic enthusiasts. This *Very Short Introduction* is a valuable addition to undergraduate-course syllabi about fantasy, children’s literature, or short fiction. As for graduate audiences, this book will make a helpful start for longer and more in-depth readings on the function of the fairy tale. In fact, because it highlights the subversive power of the fairy tale, Warner’s *Very Short Introduction* is helpful to anyone reflecting on the social and political functions of popular storytelling. It makes an essential contribution to Oxford University’s already extensive series.

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Scotland's Forgotten Treasure: The Visionary Romances of George MacDonald. By Colin Manlove, Aberdeen University Press, 2016, 184 pp.

Colin Manlove frames *Scotland's Forgotten Treasure* by identifying "desire" as a central theme of George MacDonald's fairy tales and fantasy (xiv, 159), especially in the three romances that focus this study: *Phantastes* (1858), "The Golden Key" (1867), and *Lilith* (1895). MacDonald's greatest desire was for God and heaven, fueling his approach to fairy tales, "with their own drive towards happy endings, as pictures of his own desire" (161). Manlove claims MacDonald as a "prime exponent" of Scottish fantasy and its connection with the land, "legendary creatures," a solitary and interior focus, and a protracted sense of longing (x–xi). He also asserts that MacDonald deserves acknowledgment as a great Scottish writer (166). Manlove could, but does not, analyze MacDonald alongside other Scottish authors: "[Robert] Burns, [Walter] Scott, [James] Hogg, [Thomas] Carlyle, [Robert Lewis] Stevenson, [Andrew] Lang, 'Fiona Macleod,' [J. M.] Barrie, David Lindsay, Neil Gunn and George Mackay Brown" (x). As written, the book centers much more on the "visionary romances" of the subtitle than on Scottish literature.

For fairy-tale scholars, the first three chapters on MacDonald's life, theology, and literary predecessors provide rich insights into his distinctive views. The next three chapters discuss each of the three romances and see them as a meandering, attentive progression of MacDonald's thought on God, love, possibility, and human destiny. The opening chapters portray a unique understanding of Christian faith and life that informs MacDonald's vision of fairy tales' purpose and potential. A fruitful conceptualization emerges that involves the Scottish fantasy traits of isolation, rationality and the unconscious, nature, and longing, and the English trait of journeying through a secondary world (x–xi). Descended from clan MacDonald of Glencoe, MacDonald studied at Aberdeen University and Highbury Theological College but was removed from his first church assignment because of his "liberal and heterodox theological views" (1). Manlove admits that his prolonged study reveals that MacDonald's "faith is the constant ground of everything he does, and the root of almost every pleasure he takes in life" (6). That heterodox faith involves MacDonald's conviction that "the sole truth of the world [becomes] God and love"; thus it follows that his fairy tales and fantasy writing cherish the mortal world while anticipating another, better one (6).

Chapter 2 relates MacDonald's fairy tales with his theological and literary vision. This explores the imagination and the nature of God. MacDonald understands God as a creator of an ongoing universe whose material form expresses God's thoughts, including human beings, which stem from God's imagination and also participate in creation through their own imaginations (10). Thus, for MacDonald, the fairy tale is God's "idiom" because it affords insight into the

natural world and the imagination in symbolic terms, “seen as by a child, full of magic, or like a dream, a collection of seemingly random events” (11). MacDonald’s fairy stories at times resemble those collected by the Grimms, such as “The Giant’s Heart,” yet his other popular stories like “The Light Princess” and “The Golden Key” innovate with structure, texture, and mood. What MacDonald’s traditional and inventive stories share is “their source in the imagination,” which for MacDonald connects with creation, with artistry, and ultimately with God (13).

Chapter 3 contextualizes MacDonald’s work with a variety of writers, especially those religiously and fantastically inclined. MacDonald fits in a literary tradition involved with the imagination and world building. Manlove observes that pre-Enlightenment thought and belief support the production of imaginary worlds, as in Dante Alighieri, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland, and the Grail legends. When Renaissance and Enlightenment rationality paralleled, or usurped, supernatural thought, Manlove asserts that “Christianity was the one exception to the general rule on excluding the supernatural from literature,” citing the work of seventeenth-century poets John Milton, Andrew Marvell, and Henry Vaughan (31). John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) resonates with MacDonald because it is a journey story, although his protagonists wander rather than directly seek goals (33). Closer literary contemporaries include British and German Romanticists, and several Victorian associates who wrote invented tales and fantasies for children and adults. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Novalis, E[rnst] T. A. Hoffman, and Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué produced inspiring, “chaos-embracing” works where characters wander across “fantastic worlds” (xii). MacDonald’s *Phantastes* influenced Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and later works by G[ilbert] K. Chesterton, J[ohn] R. R. Tolkien, and C[live] S. Lewis. MacDonald’s imaginative stories show new fairy tales can be written from this literary history and his original perspectives and beliefs.

Manlove’s last three chapters develop a trajectory of MacDonald’s artistic and spiritual curiosity and growth. He finds *Phantastes* to be intentionally shiftily, with the protagonist’s subtle changes from curious observer to involved participant revealing that “the numinous cannot be possessed, but must be continually pursued” (163). “The Golden Key” involves the dual protagonists in goal-based journeys to find the key, lock, and shadow land; still, their meeting and separate experiences portray contrasts and balances, revealing “the numinous is experienced from the very surface of the symbol” (97). This prepares for *Lilith* to challenge easy conceptions of the other world through characters’ attachments to the status quo and evil, showing readers that “reality is whole but presently divided” (163). Manlove asserts that these works refuse a purely happy ending, not only to be realistic but to convey that “there is ... something that can transfigure our poor notions of what we want” (162). For

MacDonald, that vision involves stories that take readers on journeys through magical and meaningful worlds to God's desires.

Manlove is an erudite scholar whose book suggests pockets of devoted MacDonald readers who need to engage in other scholarly conversations. For students and scholars devoted to fantasy and fairy-tale history, the first three chapters reward attentive reading because of MacDonald's expansive understanding that connects fairy tales with ultimate truths. This book does not go far enough toward integrating MacDonald with Scottish literature or other pertinent scholarly conversations such as postsecularism. It does, however, richly develop central tenets of MacDonald's life and writings that pertain to fairy-tale studies and to readers and thinkers open to experience his fantastic and grounded approach to our world and others.

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Tales from the Inner City. By Shaun Tan, Allen & Unwin, 2018, 214 pp.

You know from the very first glance, from the very first touch, that a book created by Shaun Tan, such as *Tales from the Inner City*, is going to disturb you. It is going to send you spiraling from your so-called real world into a world in which you will be speechless and wordless because his marvelously peculiar drawings and paintings are so provocative and alienating. You feel as though you have been transported to Kafka's novella *Metamorphosis* (1915), and, like Gregor Samsa, you awake and are incapable of knowing what has transpired and caused the world to turn upside down. The more you try to be rational, the more the world around you appears to be weird and irrational.

This time, in contrast to his remarkable wordless masterpiece, *The Arrival* (2006), there are words—poems, stories, and commentaries—that may assist you in explaining the inexplicable of the images of an inner city. You will never fully understand this inner city, but you will sense that they reflect the barren facades of a peopled environment, where humans and animals engage in absurd struggles. Everyone is estranged from everyone. Unlike *The Arrival* and his other works, this book depicts humans and animals desperate for compassion and survival.

Twenty-five illustrated narratives and poems are inserted or encased in *Tales from the Inner City*. The cover depicts a boy named Pim who goes fishing in the sky and catches a gigantic moonfish that he proudly exhibits to onlookers with TV antennas sprouting in the background. The back of the book portrays the enormous head of the "lost" cat called Tugboat with a girl perched between his ears as they swim outward into a turbulent sea. The front inside of the book consists of black and orange arrows on a plastered street wall, and if you follow the arrows and turn to the inside end of the book, the arrows turn

into a huge black-and-orange tiger staring at you on a lonesome street. The title page is a misty blue-gray painting of an indistinguishable city that blends into the sky, and, once you turn the title page, you are stunned by a full-bleed two-page spread that reveals two deer, at the edge of a forest amidst trees and wood-covered grass, looking out through a glass window of a skyscraper and gazing at the dim blue-gray skyscrapers of a city.

Following a second title page, we read a short epigraph written by Alice Walker: "The animals of the world exist for their own reasons." And, in fact, they are pictured as invasive creatures, but not malicious, who constitute our inner cities for their own reasons. Actually, we are the invaders who have devastated their lands and destroyed their environment. Consequently, the animals have no place to go and must deal with humans and provoke humans to deal with them. This is quite apparent in the very first story in which crocodiles inhabit and live on the eighty-seventh floor of a skyscraper. At the end of the first-person narrative, we learn this:

Nobody even remembers that this whole city was built on a swamp. The crocodiles, well, they've been living in this very spot for a million years and I'll bet they'll still be here long after the traffic has ground itself back into mud and we hairless apes conclude our final meeting, declare bankruptcy and move on, as hairless apes will do. In the cool brain of a crocodile the city is just a waiting room: the biggest of all waiting rooms, rising up through an age with which they have no account, no appointment, and to which they owe no attention. (3)

From this point on, Tan's book is about unusual incidents involving the encounters of animals and humans. It is not a didactic animal rights plea. Rather, it is a pictorial account of our engagements with creatures that occupy our minds and imaginations: butterflies that arrive at lunchtime, strange dogs, dead monsters, galloping horses, a sinking pig in an apartment, a rhino on the freeway, an intrepid white owl, members of a corporation turned into frogs, respectful sheep, dreamlike hippos, talking parrots, and bears with lawyers. Invisible and extraordinary, Tan brings them to life in his illuminating paintings and stories, and he challenges us to explain the inexplicable. His roots as one of the most exceptional artists writing and drawing today can be traced back to Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz, Marc Chagall, Albert Camus, and other experimental writers and painters of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. They all recognized the devastating effects of the so-called civilizing processes on the natural world. They saw meaning in a struggle against absurdity. They all had an ironic smile as they worked. It is this ironic smile that makes Tan's work so baffling and astonishing.

Jack Zipes
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Dread & Delight: Fairy Tales in an Anxious World. By Emily Stamey, Weatherspoon Art Museum (in association with the University Press of Colorado), 2018, 120 pp.

When I go to a museum exhibit, I usually purchase the accompanying catalog, so I have become familiar with the peculiar genre of the exhibit catalog. *Dread & Delight* by Emily Stamey belongs to this genre, but, in several ways, it transcends it. Stamey is the curator of exhibitions at the Weatherspoon Art Museum, which is on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. In the fall of 2018, she curated a major exhibition of original art by contemporary artists who respond to traditional fairy tales. The exhibit ran at the Weatherspoon Art Museum from August through the beginning of December 2018, after which it traveled to the Faulconer Gallery at Grinnell College in Iowa and then to the Akron Art Museum in Ohio. Like the authors of most art catalogs, Stamey provides key information about the artworks featured in the exhibit, photographs of the works, and biographical material pertaining to the artists. However, Stamey does not limit herself to the conventional material typically included in art catalogs. She also includes a thoughtful survey of how visual artists have responded to fairy tales over the past forty years, and she concludes the book with an original fairy tale by Kelly Link titled “The White Cat’s Divorce” (2018).

All of the art featured in the exhibit and the accompanying catalog relate to seven traditional fairy tales: “Hansel and Gretel,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Rapunzel,” “Cinderella,” “All Fur,” “Fitcher’s Bird,” and “Snow White.” Many of the artists whose works are represented are especially interested in the dark undertones that run through these fairy tales. Sculptor Tom Otterness explores the topics of imprisonment and child abuse in a pair of bronze castings titled *Hansel and Gretel* (2001, 2018). Both of the castings take the form of cagelike cubes. In one cube, two faceless children are entangled in the tight, confined space. The other cube is identical to the first one except that it is empty. In a sense, Otterness’s cubes can be seen as sequential art, but it is left to the viewer to fill in the story that bridges the two cubes. The viewer is left wondering if the children escaped or were eaten.

African American photographer Carrie Mae Weems explores the demeaning obsession with physical appearance that runs through “Snow White.” In the staged black-and-white photograph *Mirror Mirror* (1987), a young black woman looks into a framed mirror while an older white woman stares back at her with a disapproving look. The accompanying caption reads, “Looking into the mirror, the black woman asked, ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the finest of them all?’ The mirror says, ‘Snow White, you black bitch, and don’t you forget it!!!’”

Some of the artists represented emphasize the positive aspects of traditional fairy tales. MK Guth, an installation artist, focuses on the positive if

misguided motivations of the witch from “Rapunzel.” In an expansive work titled *Ties of Protection and Safekeeping* (2008), Guth draws inspiration from the witch’s desire to protect young Rapunzel from the evils of the world. Guth asked hundreds of people across America to respond to the question “What is worth protecting?” Their responses were written on strips of red flannel. Guth then incorporated these strips of flannel into an extremely long plait of braided, blonde hair. The installation looks something like a surreal jungle of vines hanging in long droops from the ceiling and takes up most of a the high-ceilinged room. The catalog includes photographs of this installation piece, but the work cannot really be captured in photographs. It is an immersive work of art that transports the viewers into a fantasy world that is hauntingly beautiful.

In her commentary about the works in the exhibition, Stamey argues that the artists represented in the exhibition use the subject matter and narrative structures of traditional fairy tales to reflect on the anxieties associated with living in contemporary America. She goes on to argue that these artists are influenced by the postmodernist movement’s “emphasis on deconstructed content and dismantled master narratives” (12). In a summation of her argument, Stamey writes,

Postmodern artists began turning in many instances to the earthly, human protagonists of fairy tales. Through the latter half of the twentieth century, and in tandem with critical social movements, these postmodern artists would increasingly take up identity politics—a realm in which fairy tales’ traditionally marginalized characters (women, children, the poor) proved apt vehicles for addressing contemporary concerns. (12)

For readers who are interested in the history of how the visual artists have responded to fairy tales in recent years, Stamey’s brief history of this topic is especially helpful. She starts with the 1960s and then covers each decade until the present, and she discusses how trends in popular culture influenced the work of visual artists. For example, she examines how the success of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) shaped the work of photographer JeongMee Yoon. This part of the catalog provides a historical context for the work represented, but it can be read as a stand-alone essay.

The catalog ends with Kelly Link’s original fairy tale “The White Cat’s Divorce,” a haunting story that has the feel of a traditional fairy tale but is set in contemporary America. Like many fairy tales, it features an anthropomorphic cat, but this cat is a bit more complex than Puss in Boots. The inclusion of this story might seem at first to be an odd addition to an exhibition catalog of visual art, but the tone of the story harmonizes well with the artworks

represented in the exhibition. Like the works of art, Link's story draws on traditional fairy tales in its portrayal of life in today's anxiety-ridden world.

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Figure per Gianni Rodari Illustrators for Gianni Rodari. Edited by Einaudi Ragazzi, 2019, 119 pp.

In honor of the centennial of Gianni Rodari's birth, the "Illustration for Children—Italian Excellence" exhibit that is part of the 2020 Children's Book Fair in Bologna features twenty-one Italian illustrators of Rodari's work. Organized by Bologna Fiere Bologna's Children's Book Fair in partnership with the San Francisco Italian Cultural Institute, the exhibition travels from Portland (Bologna's sister city) in late 2019 to San Francisco and Bologna in spring 2020 and subsequently to other countries. As the homage to Rodari in this issue of *Marvels & Tales* foregrounds, this remarkably inventive Italian writer has stimulated children's imagination in Italy and throughout the world since the 1950s. The exhibition and its bilingual catalog showcase how Rodari has inspired visual artists and how in turn their illustrations multiply the creative potential of Rodari's verbal play.

Five concise and informative essays in Italian and English introduce Rodari and the exhibit. The first two essays by Jack Zipes and Beatriz Helena Roblado offer complementary views of Rodari's work and its impact on children's education. Zipes foregrounds how for Rodari "part of learning is a transformational experience," which is achieved via individual and collective play and encourages critical thinking (16), whereas Columbian writer Robledo emphasizes how Rodari's conception of "the fantastic," which is quite different from Tzvetan Todorov's notion, relies on children's imagination and their somewhat surrealist capacity for "analogical thought, where everything is possible" (22). The other three essays focus more on the illustrations themselves and are authored respectively by illustrator and president of the Moscow Association of Book Illustrators and Designers Anastasiia Arkhipova, professor of illustration at Cambridge School of Art at Anglia Ruskin University Martin Salisbury, and scholar of the history of illustration and cofounder of the Giannino Stoppani Cooperativa Culturale and Accademia Drosselmeier Silvana Sola. Arkhipova's incisive piece discusses Rodari's travels to Russia when it was part of the USSR, the influence of his work and the character Cipollino (Little Onion) on Russian popular culture, and his interactions with Russian illustrators and schoolchildren. Salisbury's essay focuses on a few artists' "visual vocabularies" and "style" (31), pointing out how some of the graphic artists in the exhibition, like Olimpia Zagnoli and Manuele Fior, are also internationally known illustrators and cartoonists for *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and *The*

New Yorker. Sola in turn suggests how different Italian artists enrich and elaborate our appreciation of Rodari as “a word magician” who “created exhilarating combinations of narrative, rhetoric and fantasy” (37).

Illustrators in the book and the exhibition include Bruno Munari and Emanuele Luzzati, Altan, and Nicoletta Costa, Giulia Orecchia, and Alessandro Sanna. The range is thus historical as well as stylistic, and in some cases two different approaches to one of Rodari’s narratives prove particularly illuminating. Short biographical profiles of the twenty-one illustrators are included, and the book closes with a bibliography of relevant illustrated editions of Gianni Rodari’s works from the 1960s to the present.

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