

2025

Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/marvels>

Recommended Citation

. "Reviews." *Marvels & Tales* 39.2 (2025). Web. <<https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/marvels/vol39/iss2/11>>.

REVIEWS

The Selected Children's Fictions, Folk Tales and Fairy Tales of Andrew Lang. Edited by Andrew Teverson. Edinburgh University Press, 2022. 292 pp.

The name Andrew Lang will already be familiar to many; as editor of the popular Coloured Fairy Book series, he is highly regarded for his interest in folklore and fairy tales. The author and scholar, born in the Scottish Borders and educated at Oxford, spent much time in Scotland gathering folkloric material; evidence of such material is sprinkled throughout his work. He also delved extensively into anthropology, religious practices and beliefs, nature, and classical studies, among many other overlapping interests. Lang's wife, Leonora "Nora" Blanche Alleyne, was his main collaborator on the Fairy Books, also undertaking a large portion of the translation work. Lang wrote several works of poetry, contributed articles to *The Daily News* periodical, and had a particular interest in Homer, publishing prose translations of the *Odyssey* (1879), the *Iliad* (1883), and his own *World of Homer* (1910). His varied interests have always made him challenging to define.

In this volume, editor Andrew Teverson has collated some of Lang's contributions to the world of children's literature; although the reasoning for this selection is outlined in the introduction, the particulars are scattered across the chapter, rather than bound together with a sharply defined explanation of the criteria used. Under the heading of the first section—Scottish Folk Tales—Lang's own nursery tales and two further stories he collected are included and elevated as an archive of Scottish storytelling (24). Section II brings together the bulk of Lang's original writing in Children's Fictions, reprinting in full those fictions that had gradually dropped out of children's catalogs (22–24): the Pantouflia sequence (*Prince Prigio* and *Prince Ricardo of Pantouflia*, but not *Tales of a Fairy Court*), *The Princess Nobody*, and *The Gold of Fairnilee*. The final section—Traditions Retold—concludes the volume with two tales from Lang's Coloured Fairy Book series and one from *Tales of Troy and Greece*; these are reformulations of stories from Greek ("The Terrible Head" and "The Fleece of Gold") and Norse ("The Story of Sigurd") myths and legends. The book thus

presents a hand-picked selection of Lang's fairy-tale writing, linked by Lang's exploration of how traditional narrative inheritances "from the past can be reconstituted to form the groundwork for new fictions in the present" (26). As Lang shared the views of anthropologist E. B. Tylor on primitive cultures and the comparativist approach, this is unsurprising, yet, while each section stands proud on its own merits, the three remain disjointed as a whole. In particular, *Scottish Folk Tales* loses luster when compared with *Children's Fictions and Traditions Retold*, and the edition lacks cohesion as a result, making the volume difficult to use by nonspecialist readers, or those studying Scottish heritage.

Nevertheless, for readers already familiar with Lang's oeuvre, the volume offers extensive explanatory notes throughout and links to further reading that will aid the study of his work. Some of the selected tales are not otherwise easily available in print, and thus will now be easily located and further studied. However, there is little more than a mention to the considerable contribution of Mrs. Lang to her husband's writing output. As noted in a footnote (251), this is explored at length by Andrea Day in "Almost wholly the work of Mrs. Lang': Nora Lang, Literary Labour, and the Fairy Books" (2017). The presence of a reference to said article, in the footnote and in the Further Reading section, implies that the editor is aware of the crucial role that Nora Lang played in the production and afterlife of Lang's work. Consequently, it seems an oversight not to give a more substantial acknowledgment to the invisible labor of Mrs. Lang in the introduction to the selected texts, particularly considering that two stories from Lang's Fairy Book series—which is the focus of Day's article—make up the majority of the *Traditions Retold* section. As Day (2017, 400) suggests, "the marginalization of Nora Lang's editorial, translational, and creative labour" is part of a larger elision of female storytelling voices from the history of children's literature. Teverson acknowledges that the two stories contained in the article written by Lang and published in 1863, reproduced in the *Scottish Folk Tales* section of this book, are not original works by Lang, but rather collected from Margaret Craig, his great-aunt (25). It would seem a natural point to mention Day's research and others like it directly, addressing and redressing the authorship and authenticity of these narratives once we consider Lang's Foucauldian "author function." The volume would benefit from a more direct engagement with this growing discourse as early career researchers and students may come to the texts and the author unaware of the context.

This book will be most useful to those who are already familiar with the themes and characteristics of the author, looking for an in-depth analysis of these selected tales. Of note is the thorough investigation of the surviving manuscripts, and, despite a few of omissions and misconceptions, this remains an

authoritative publication for stories that are not often seen, least of all gathered together under one roof. Teverson's own previous output on Lang's work, *The Edinburgh Critical Edition of the Selected Writings of Andrew Lang* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), vol. 1, coedited with Alexandra Warwick and Leigh Wilson, would aptly serve as a companion piece, and indeed the volume is referenced a few times in this more recent scholarly endeavor. It is thus a convenient source of the selected texts, boosted by the explanatory notes and introduction.

Silvia E. Storti
Independent Scholar

***Wonder Tales for Men*, edited by Diego Morales. 2024. 190 pp.**

One of the significant outcomes of feminism is the regendering of masculinity. Once men are no longer the unconsidered norm, the default setting for everything from clothing styles to medical studies, then cultural patterns associated with male persons become visible. This shift applies to fairy tales as much as anything else, and yet there has been relatively little study of the ways *Märchen* portray men and boys, individually or in groups. Popular culture associates fairy tales with the feminine, either as something that locks women into limited, Sleeping Beauty-type roles or as potentially empowering stories of female heroism. There is no such association with the masculine, except for the sinister version of masculinity found in "Beauty and the Beast" or "Bluebeard," as I noted in a 2018 article in *Marvels & Tales*. Although some scholarship on the topic exists, there are few anthologies on the theme, and most of those involve either literary responses to fairy tale, as in Kate Bornheimer's *Brothers and Beasts*, which focuses on retellings by male writers, or collections of original tales, many of them for gay men. The preface lists four previous actual fairy-tale collections, including Jane Yolen's *Mightier Than the Sword* and Allan B. Chinen's *Beyond the Hero*, but dismisses them as overly disparaging toward patriarchy and overemphasizing male violence.

Into this picture comes the anthology *Wonder Tales for Men*. Editor Diego Morales has selected thirty-five tales from five continents, plus a few island cultures. In a brief preface, Morales explains that his model is Kathleen Ragan's *Fearless Girls, Wise Women, Beloved Sisters: Heroines in Folktales from Around the World* (1998). Distinguishing in the preface between men's folklore and folklore of men, drawing on Simon Bronner's study of *Manly Traditions: The Folk Roots of American Masculinity*, the editor has attempted to gather a sampling of tales that do not represent a particularly ideological slant, or what the preface calls "the bigotry that pervaded older works." To achieve this aim, he avoids stories in which the main character dies or is either a fool or a predator, looking instead for "a variety of protagonists: striplings and codgers, husbands and

bachelors, monarchs and peasants, fighters and tricksters.” The texts selected are all in the public domain, which means relying on nineteenth-century translations, although the editor did alter archaic diction in the interest of readability.

The result is mixed. The tales are indeed varied and representative of many cultural traditions. Selecting against fools and abusers means that the protagonists are mostly rather nondescript—though folktale heroes tend toward the generic anyway. They do represent a number of roles within the family: sons, brothers, fathers, uncles. Several different occupations show up: woodcutter, innkeeper, peasant farmer, hunter, landowner. It is hard to say what, if any, model of masculinity is represented or how it might differ from the female heroism of Ragan’s book. The editor chooses not to group the stories thematically or to comment on them individually, a decision I found frustrating. In the absence of editorial commentary, I found myself trying to note patterns. Some of those are more evident if one compares the male heroes to the female heroes of other tales. For instance, these men and boys are not subject to threats of sexual violence or incest. They typically have occupations. Most are not notably handsome or physically powerful but rather rely on cleverness and help from others—in that they are like female heroes such as Mollie Whuppie. A recurring pattern is the powerful influence of older men, either as benefactors or as adversaries. In that regard, the character of the male hero doesn’t seem to matter; the older man views the younger as a potential rival or an heir, regardless of the younger man’s ambitions or loyalties.

For me, the most interesting tale was the least typical, a story from Romania called “The Princess Who Would be a Prince or Iliane of the Golden Tresses.” As the title indicates, the hero of that story is a girl who passes as a boy—not by her own desire but to save her father, who has no son to serve as tribute to a malevolent emperor. Like the Chinese hero Mulan, the girl puts on armor and sets out into the world. She finds an ally in a magical horse, solves problems and avoids pitfalls, and eventually is ordered by the emperor to rescue a beautiful maiden, Iliane, from a genie. Having brought Iliane back to the emperor, the disguised maiden is given a final task: to steal a vase of holy water from a hermit. When she succeeds, the hermit curses the sacrilegious thief: “May he become a woman if he is a man, or a man if he is a woman.” (I especially like the phrase, “if he is a woman.”) That curse allows the maiden, now known as Prince Charming, to inherit the country from the evil emperor and to marry Iliane. Prince Charming’s final words to Iliane are that once they are married, “in our house it is the cock that speaks and not the hen.” Having achieved manhood, he is all in favor of male privilege.

What does the editor make of this tale and its gender politics? We don’t know. The only editorial intervention comes in the form of the notes at the

back of the book, which give sources and ATU types and variants for each tale. This, it turns out, is type number 514: The Shift in Sex, with variants including one of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and an Albanian version called "The Girl Who Became a Boy." Would a parallel story of transformation from boy to girl ever occur in folk tradition? If not (and I suspect not), what does that say about gender relations and valuations?

I appreciated both the preface and the notes, which greatly add to the value of the collection, but I wish the editor had taken both further and given us some guidance in how to read these tales individually and as a set. What makes these tales specifically for men? What do they tell us either about men's folklore or the folklore of manhood? Would a different selection support or undercut the patterns represented here?

The book is offered as a free e-book from Barnes and Noble, so I recommend that anyone interested in *Märchen* and/or masculinity studies take a look. Despite my reservations, I think this is a well-edited collection and might serve as the beginning of a conversation about some of the issues that the editor chose not to engage, at least overtly.

Brian Attebery
Idaho State University

Möbius Media: Popular Culture, Folklore, and the Folkloresque. Edited by Jeffrey A. Tolbert and Michael Dylan Foster. University Press of Colorado; Utah State University Press, 2024. 360 pp.

The metaphor of the Möbius strip guides Jeffrey A. Tolbert and Michael Dylan Foster's edited collection about the intersections of popular culture and the folkloresque. It's a mathematical and philosophical concept of a continuous loop of space and time that elegantly twists 180 degrees so that up becomes down and down becomes up yet remains one unified, unending path (10). Where culture and folklore are concerned, things may seem new and fresh but are likely to be reinventions or recursions of something that has been around for quite a long time.

The first section, "Introduction: The Value of Recursion," primes readers for understanding how the aura of "actual" folklore is manipulated and transmuted to produce things that are folkloresque. Tolbert explains that "the folkloresque names those objects, processes, narratives, and other cultural miscellanea that are worked into (or invented for) new media contexts specifically *because of* their seeming 'folk' qualities" (5, emphasis in original). The introduction is thorough, including definitions, examples, and a persistent reminder that folklore and the folkloresque are inextricable à la the Möbius strip metaphor. Tolbert specifically acknowledges that the collected chapters "labor to demonstrate, in their various ways, what is at stake when folklore

and its cognate concepts . . . are invoked and deployed in new contexts and new media" (25).

With five categorized parts, the first is part 1: "Tradition, Inc.," and its chapters are about how the folkloresque functions as an effective marketing tool. Gilman's chapter, "Bits and Pieces," focuses on the Mvuu Camp in Malawi and the practices that invite tourists to feel like they're having an *authentic* African experience, but those experiences have actually been highly curated for them. Next is Lepselter's analysis of a YouTube home cook in "Simply Sara and the Art of Hominess." Lepselter analyzes Sara's kitchen practices, which disrupt common notions about race, class, and gender in the context of Appalachia (67). "Fairytale as Fuck" by Buccitelli examines online mediated trends like ASMR, cottagecore, and specific Reddit threads as the evocation of an antimodernist nostalgia. The last chapter, "Folkloresque at Work" by Cuccio, looks at the historic butter-making Napali *theke* and the polysemy of material objects.

Part 2: "Folkloresque Worlds" explores how creators cherry-pick "real-world folklore to craft more compelling, participatory [fictional] narratives, to preserve elements of local cultures, or to simultaneously champion and critique normative ideologies and identities" (23). There are two essays in this section. Gitzen and Gershon's essay consider the TV series *Battlestar Galactica* (2003–9) and the video game *Horizon Zero Dawn* (2017) and their connections to Hellenistic-era Greek pantheologies as the building blocks for the folkloristic practices embedded into the fictive universes. The second essay by Occhi pertains to the Japanese live-action local heroes franchise *Himukaizer*; this series draws from the *Kojiki*, the written account of specific legends of the Miyazaki region. Both offer compelling critical insights into the ways that long-lived mythologies inform contemporary media texts.

The third part is "The Horror of the Folkloresque," and it includes three chapters, which "consider popular media that enlist folkloresque imagery of monsters and the supernatural" (23). Lau writes about the vampires of *The Twilight Saga* as indicative of a trend toward centering white supremacist patriarchal power wrapped in an attractive and seemingly inoffensive package. Two episodes of the classic series *Doctor Who* are the site for critical analysis in Cowdell's essay, which investigates the interplay between academic folkloristics and its interpolation into those episodes. The third essay by Thomson is about Universal Studio's cycle of werewolf films (1935–48) and their influence on broadband cultural understanding of werewolf-related folklore.

"Folkloresque Beliefs," part 4, is about other places in popular culture where the folkloresque falls into "truth claims and notions of 'reality'" (24). The first of three, Manning's chapter looks at the intricacies of Ambrose Bierce's writing strategies, coupling printed news with the truthiness of eyewitness

accounts to create stories like “The Damned Thing.” The second chapter by Tosenberger is about the ways that neo-pagans use folklore to help construct practices, rituals, and theology, and as a creative endeavor there is considerable overlap in those processes that define the folkloresque. The last chapter is about Atlantis and the continued popular culture cultivation of it as a historic myth. Anderson notes that there are many variations of the folkloresque Atlantis and that each provides a tantalizing mystery to solve, despite no possible solution.

Finally, the book ends with part 5: “Reference, Replication, and Recursion”; its two chapters focus on “notions of iteration and performativity” (24). James’s contribution follows the meandering path of the speculatively true firsthand account of Horace Greeley’s 1859 journey West into Mark Twain’s co-optation of the tale for stage, page, and beyond. Last, Foster’s title reminds us that “Nothing Is Original,” which is about the Japanese supernatural creature Amabie. Depicted as a guardian against plagues, Amabie understandably regained visible popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This was a delightful read. As a media studies scholar, I found that every chapter had something to offer. After receiving my book, I immediately included Gilman’s “Bits and Pieces” about Mvuu Camp into my Global Media Cultures class and Lepselter’s piece about YouTuber Simply Sara into my Visual Literacy course. “Simply Sara and the Art of Hominess” is now especially poignant given the news of Sara Marie Salyer Potter’s unexpected death in April 2025. I am sure that other essays will become readings or classroom examples in the near future. This book made much clearer those nuances between folklore and the folkloresque. As Tolbert finalizes in the introduction, “we would do well to finally abandon the obsession with origins . . . and focus instead on what they are doing here and where they are going” (28). This text is a welcome addition to both folklore studies and media studies and will be useful to critical researchers and undergraduate students alike.

Amanda Firestone
University of Tampa

The Book of Yōkai: Expanded Second Edition. By Michael Dylan Foster. University of California Press, 2024. 449 pp.

Within the first few pages of *The Book of Yōkai*, Michael Dylan Foster loosely describes yōkai as a “weird or mysterious creature, a monster or fantastic being, a spirit or a sprite” (5). This description is both expected and anticipated, with Foster consciously positioning his text as a bestiary. Yet, in the preamble to this initial definition, Foster evidences the unruliness—the transient and transformative potential—that categorizes yōkai in contemporary understanding. This unruliness, rather, yōkai’s “liminality, or ‘in-betweenness’” (5),

becomes the first means of identifying, connecting, and interpreting yōkai in local (Japanese) and global contexts. As Foster restates throughout *The Book of Yōkai*, the “liminal”—or, as part III of the text (re)determines, “*interstitial*” (106)—spaces occupied by yōkai are not simply geographical or dimensional. Though “they are creatures of the borderlands” (5), yōkai equally “occupy a space between the academic and the popular” (5), “between fact and fiction, between belief and doubt” (8), “past and present” (11–12), and local, global, and *glocal* cultures. The uncertainty of these spaces prompts the endless generation and mutation of yōkai, qualities emphasized by the inherent anonymity of folklore as “communal intellectual property” (9).

Foster’s most evocative definition of yōkai—“Yōkai begin where language ends” (14)—locates the term as a catchall for the inexplicable and (potentially) supernatural. Where no reason or explanation is given, imagination takes root, and a yōkai is born, transformed, or found accountable. In this sense, “yōkai is nothing more than a convenient label to indicate a whole range of otherwise ineffable experiences” (14). They are a way to make sense and give meaning to a chaotic world. However, as Foster is quick to assert, “yōkai” is a “relatively recent” label (15), as such, the study of yōkai would be severely limited if reduced to a single, contemporary word. This is, for Foster’s anglophone reader, an assumed gap in available knowledge, a gap Foster eagerly fills with an etymological history of words that occupy a similar “liminal” and “unexplainable” space.

While some of Foster’s proffered words share *kanji* with yōkai—“妖怪” with characters representing “something mysterious, suspicious, or troubling” (15)—such as the *Heian* (ca. 794–1185 AD) “*mono-no-ke*,” or the monstrous “*kaijū*,” many are distinct in character and meaning. Though all are (nominally) synonymous with yōkai, knowledge of these words embroiders on our understanding, indicating the mutability of yōkai, folklore, and like-creatures within “specific cultural contexts” (27). Of particular use, Foster’s navigation of yōkai and *Kami* (or “gods”) details how the perception of a single yōkai can vary on an axis of morality, immorality, and amorality depending on “the perspective of the humans affected” (21). As Foster exemplifies, a shift in human perspective can transform a “a murderous spirit into a beneficial kami who . . . helps students get into the school of their choice” (23), with both disparate identities filed under the yōkai “*Michizane*.”

Drafting yōkai as both language and the absence of language (the unexplainable), Foster explores “the basic cognitive processes that, in theory at least, give birth to yōkai” (27). This process is, as Foster attests, “not specific to Japan” (27), allowing for the application of Foster’s text to other folklore traditions. Although yōkai can be recognized as “monsters or spirits or

demons”—supernatural beings more familiar to an anglophone reader—and vice versa, it is the generative “cognitive processes” behind them, and not their shared physiological features, that connect yōkai to their international counterparts. Recognizing this, the universality of “how human beings struggle to grasp, interpret, and control the world around them” (27), Foster positions *The Book of Yōkai* as a fruitful text for emerging folklorists, whether they possess an interest in Japanese folklore or not.

One of Foster’s express “objectives,” perhaps the one he fulfills most skillfully, is “to introduce Japanese yōkai and Japanese scholarship on the subject to an English-Language readership” (6). Throughout, Foster consciously occupies the space between Japanese- and English-language understanding of yōkai and associated academic fields—including, but not limited to, Japanese etymology; the influence of Chinese literature and language from the Nara period (710–94 AD) onward; the changing cultural and intellectual landscape of the Edo (ca. 1600–1868 AD) and Meiji (1868–1912 AD) eras; and Japanese art history—acting as both translator and synthesizer of prominent Japanese scholarship for the anglophone reader. This is necessary and valuable work, introducing an existing wealth of knowledge and literature to his unfamiliar readership. Much of Foster’s synthesis is given chronologically during the chapter “Shape-Shifting History” and is prefaced by a summary of Komatsu Kazuhiko’s (1947–present) influential yōkai studies. Reading through Komatsu’s work, as translated by Foster, the influence of Komatsu’s work on *The Book of Yōkai* is clear, with the final statement—“*defining* yōkai is less interesting than the questions they raise and the discussions they inspire” (33)—answering for Foster’s reconfiguration of the encyclopedic, or bestiary, form.

Speaking on the history of taxonomic and encyclopedic classification of yōkai, born from the intellectual and scientific interests of the Edo period, Foster marks the uncertainty and liminality of yōkai as a driving force: “it is precisely because they reside in the zone of uncertainty that we seek something certain about them” (108–9). However, the “encyclopaedic mode” (108), as Foster coins, requires a compression and organization of information antithetical to the generative, creative, and mutable nature of yōkai. In order to maintain the “vitality” of yōkai, Foster resists the desire to assert a “universal classification or nomenclature” (126), instead valuing the “inconclusiveness” that makes yōkai “so fascinating” (130). Toward this goal, Foster avoids the economic language expected of encyclopedic, or codex, definitions. Rather, in pursuit of maintaining and exemplifying yōkai as interstitial beings, Foster includes multiple narratives, descriptions, and sources within his entries. In place of a single model of any known yōkai, Foster establishes their

discrepancies and gaps. Not only does this model support Foster's own methodology, the threefold use of "ethnographic, archival, and secondary research" (10–11), it evidences the limitations of taxonomy and defends Foster's conscious decision to avoid the pretense of an exhaustive catalog. Of particular note, Foster's integration of ethnographic sources, often conveyed through personal or inventive anecdotes, frame Foster as a locatable body within the text, bringing levity and emphasizing the subjectivity of his research.

Rather than alphabetized, as may be expected (despite the lack of standardized *romaji* spellings), Foster organizes his collection loosely by "contact zones," the places in which humans and *yōkai* might come into contact with each other (132). As such, his *yōkai* are categorized by the liminal spaces in which they reside—"Wilds," "Water," "Countryside," "Village and City," and "Home"—allowing copious slippages to occur between beings and tales. These slippages, carefully curated, invite the reader to continue the imagining of *yōkai* possibilities. Approaching the "Epilogue," Foster reorients with these possibilities in mind. One of the final entries of the "Yōkai Code," *Tsukumogami*, prompts Foster to muse on the potential for social and environmental commentary offered by "inanimate objects [that] become animate [beings]" (295), especially within the context of Japanese consumer culture. This is, of course, just one possibility for transformation. Concluding his work, Foster notes the role of *yōkai* within the twenty-first century, in providing both "an escapist dream of fantasy and lighthearted play" (352) and "a metaphor for imagining the unknown" (352), thus inspiring subversive change. Both roles are essential in fulfilling *yōkai*'s formative purpose, making sense of the ever-changing world around us.

Sarah Jessica Darley
University of East Anglia

The Brothers Grimm: A Biography. Ann Schmiesing. Yale University Press, 2024. 336 pp.

In *The Brothers Grimm: A Biography*, Ann Schmiesing gives us a detailed and engaging look at the incredibly productive and influential lives of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm during a complicated period of history in Europe. Using the brothers' own words in their letters and writings throughout, Schmiesing has produced a picture of their lives that is both intimate and broadly historical.

She writes that her audience is twofold, for she says: "I have written not exclusively with academia in mind, but in the hope that this book will interest a broader readership" (xvii). The biography succeeds in this endeavor, as Schmiesing has written a fairly tight biography, the text itself being only 265 pages with an additional chronology, index, and extensive endnotes. The biography is engaging and accessible to read without any extensive background

in German literature or history needed, but it is also an excellent resource for scholars who work in this period.

Although Schmiesing writes for a broader audience, she does not only keep to discussing the fairy tales of *Children's and Household Tales* with which such an audience would be most familiar. She explores all the many scholarly endeavors of the Brothers Grimm in detail, from Jacob Grimm's writing on linguistics and grammar and the role of Grimm's Law, to Wilhelm Grimm's work on medieval literature to the all-encompassing, and ultimately incomplete, project of the dictionary.

In addition, Schmiesing demonstrates how the brothers were not only affected by the tumultuous history of the period, but also how they helped to shape the history of the period both in the development of fields of knowledge, such as linguistics, folklore, and literature, and also in politics. The period of the Grimms' participation as two of the Göttingen Seven and Jacob's role at the Frankfurt National Assembly are explored in depth. In addition, while we think of the Grimms primarily as scholars, they had no such luxury to simply work on their research without other occupations. Schmiesing follows them through their careers as government officials, librarians, and professors.

The result of this detailed history is a real understanding of their individual personalities and work. Schmiesing carefully presents Jacob's interest in language and Wilhelm's in literature, and Jacob the introvert with a preference for his family and Wilhelm the extroverted social butterfly. Even their health was uniquely different, with Jacob's general good health, outliving all of his five siblings, and Wilhelm's lifelong struggle with illness and heart issues. In addition to seeing them as unique individuals, Schmiesing presents their deep bond to each other as brothers, friends, and colleagues. One gets to know the brothers throughout the biography in a way that feels familiar and intimate. Particularly endearing to me was reading about the brothers' love for nature, that Jacob would have preferred to study botany, and that their home was full of rocks, shells, and flower pressings. Schmiesing even describes a chaotic move from Kassel to Göttingen in which Jacob carried a favorite potted plant under his jacket.

This is not to say that Schmiesing presents the Grimms only in a rosy light. An honest representation of their politics is given, which, while certainly in opposition to Absolutism, is not as liberal as a modern reader may hope. Also, Schmiesing does not shy away from mentioning anti-Semitic comments in their letters and the inclusion of a few anti-Semitic tales in both *Children's and Household Tales* and *German Legends*. Schmiesing also discusses the role the Grimms' writings would play a century later in the Nazi period. She discusses how they could not have predicted their work being used in such a way, but also that there are consequences for nationalism in all its forms.

As Schmiesing writes in her introduction, the audience of the text is meant to be both the lay person and the scholar, and “scholars might thus be disappointed to find that certain figures, concepts, or issues are given less specialized treatment than they would wish” (xvii). Indeed, the exploration could have benefited from a little more inclusion of contemporary scholarship. For example, Schmiesing references Bruno Bettelheim’s theories without even a note on the more recent understanding of Bettelheim’s problematic practices. A more complete picture of the role of women writers would have also served the biography well in presenting how the Grimms worked with and benefited from the writing and stories of women.

While Schmiesing briefly describes the Grimms visiting Benedikte Naubert, she does not explain in more detail their research and notes on her literary fairy tales that predated *Children’s and Household Tales*. In addition, the role of “Mother Holla” in the Grimms’ collection is discussed, without mentioning that the first version of this tale in German appeared in Naubert’s collection decades earlier. Similarly, the inclusion of Caroline Stahl’s original published story “The Ungrateful Dwarf” as “Snow White and Rose Red” in *Children’s and Household Tales* is glossed over as Schmiesing writes, “Wilhelm revised so substantially as to create his own tale,” (195). Stahl’s extensive representation in the notes to *Children’s and Household Tales* and her other tales that demonstrate a connection to their most famous stories, such as “The Robber Bridegroom,” are not mentioned. Schmiesing acknowledges the patriarchal nature of Wilhelm’s edits throughout *Children’s and Household Tales* but also praises him for the creativity of his edits. Although the Grimms’ relationship with Bettina von Arnim as a friend and advocate is presented, Arnim’s work with the Grimms in collecting and writing fairy tales is not. Similarly, the youth fairy-tale writing salon in which Herman Grimm and Gisela von Arnim participated, the Kaffeterkreis, is not discussed, though the Grimms lectured to the group. To be fair, Schmiesing mentions all of these women writers in the biography, which is more than can be said for some other biographies of the Grimms, but their larger role, in particular to the work of collecting and writing fairy tales, is not explored to the extent that it could have been.

Considering the length of the biography and the dual audiences for which it is written, however, Schmiesing greatly succeeds in both providing an audience of nonspecialists with a much more complete history of the Grimms extensive work and complex lives and in giving scholars of the period a much more detailed, nuanced look at two figures who are often mushed together into one personality. The writing and extensive research into the Grimms’ letters and other writings are excellently done, enjoyable to read, and detailed in their specificity, offering a valuable resource for Grimm

scholars. This biography certainly deserves a place on the shelf of any reader or scholar with an interest in fairy tales, the German language, or the nineteenth century as whole.

Julie L. J. Koehler
Michigan State University

The Disney Princess Phenomenon: A Feminist Analysis. By Robyn Muir. Bristol University Press, 2023. 247 pp.

At first glance, the Disney princess may seem like a harmless fairy-tale figure—a kind, beautiful, always-smiling young woman who achieves her “happily ever after.” But what if these seemingly innocent characters have more of an impact on our children than we think? Robyn Muir sets out to prove that Disney princesses are more than just fun and innocent make-believe stories; they are mirrors that reflect society’s expectations of women onto the most vulnerable of our population: our children. Muir’s book analyzes how Disney princesses, which are often perceived as trivial and nonsubstantive children’s characters incapable of influencing societal norms, actually shape how young girls in particular view themselves and other women. These fictional narratives reveal societal standards around how women are perceived and which women are silenced or ignored. So, Muir sets out to prove that “the princesses are the political,” a cultural phenomenon that deserves to be analyzed because of its far-reaching effects on the psyches of entire generations of young women.

Muir clearly defines which princesses she considers to be part of the phenomenon and creates a framework for analysis that considers: (a) how femininity is depicted in these films, (b) which models of femininity are most dominant in the merchandise marketed for these films, and (c) which models of femininity are most dominant in the consumer experience of young girls for these films. The book is organized into two major sections: film analysis and consumer experiences. In the film section, Muir constructs a film analysis framework to examine expressions of femininity in the films, uses the framework to classify shifts and changes in how femininity is depicted, and then identifies which models of femininity are more dominant in the marketing of said princesses. She walks readers through the films chronologically at first, separating the phenomenon into five “waves” before digging into the merchandising and use of princess imagery in Disney parks that bring the princesses to life for the viewers.

Muir’s organizational structure categorizes Disney princesses into five “waves,” as mentioned, based on the evolution of their character traits and motivations. This structure convinces the reader to see the value in more closely examining the media to which our children are exposed. The first wave features what Muir defines as the “passive dreamers,” like Snow White,

Cinderella, and Aurora, who exhibit traits of domesticity and passivity and focus on romance as a primary motivator. The second wave, or “lost dreamers,” Ariel, Jasmine, and Belle, are more assertive and rebellious but still romantically motivated. The third wave, including Pocahontas, Kida, and Mulan, emphasizes leadership, communication, and independence from romance. Muir identifies a regression in the fourth wave—Tiana and Rapunzel—marked by self-sacrifice. The fifth and most recent wave, with characters like Moana, Merida, Anna, and Elsa, showcases assertiveness, leadership, female support systems, and minimal focus on romantic relationships. By separating Disney’s princesses into these categories, Muir highlights societal perceptions of women in America during each wave, drawing the reader’s attention to the ways in which these characters were created to represent the feminine ideal at the peak of their popularity and cultural significance. However, it is important to note that many of the first- and second-wave Disney princess films have remakes that have already been produced or are currently in production, including *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Snow White*, bringing princesses who represent outdated and even problematic caricatures of the ideal feminine figure to a new generation of young, impressionable psyches.

Muir goes beyond simply tracking common trends throughout Disney princess history in her examination of the impact these portrayals have on both children and their parents. In her interviews Muir reveals how financial motivations often drive the design and marketing of the princesses. One interviewee remarks: “They’re gonna always put whichever princess is the most commercial and has the biggest financial gain to them at the forefront,” while another agrees, “companies such as Disney aim to create products that are both appealing to children and acceptable by their parents” who are the controlling force in purchasing these products for their children (179–80). Muir’s inclusion of these colloquial and emotionally charged perspectives on Disney marketing very effectively injects a sense of the personal. These speakers are anonymous, but Muir tells us they are previous employees of Disney, which suggests a kind of insider perspective on their part, further solidifying the real-world relevance of her project and its implications.

The same is true for her anecdotal recountings of her own interactions with Disney princesses portrayed by actresses in Disney parks, who in turn reinforce the feminine ideals associated with their characters. Parents encourage their children’s interactions with the actors portraying these characters as a safe and wholesome social activity that results in a photo-souvenir and enduring memory of meeting a beloved role model. Muir identifies this parental reinforcement—ranging from passive acceptance to active encouragement—as a key element in what she calls “cycles of reinforcement” of femininity, which children must navigate and internalize. In some ways, Muir

leaves us with more questions than answers, but every reader will inevitably come to feel the pull of her call to action: that we must continue to “investigate how femininity is being constructed in spheres that are often seen as trivial yet may have a significant impact on young people’s development and their understanding of gender” (213). And so, her call to action resonates: we must critically examine how femininity is constructed in spaces often dismissed as trivial yet which are deeply influential in shaping young people’s understanding of gender roles as portrayed and reinforced by this phenomenon.

Jordan Rindenow
St. John’s University

The Green Children of Woolpit: Chronicles, Fairies and Facts in Medieval England. By John Clark. Exeter New Approaches to Legend, Folklore and Popular Belief. University of Exeter Press, 2024. 260 pp.

The twelfth-century story of Woolpit’s green children has intrigued people across the centuries and given rise to an array of theories attempting to rationalize the children’s appearance and strange nature. The children, a boy and a girl who wandered out of the fields near Woolpit speaking an unrecognized language and with “leek green” skin, were treated as escapees of the land of Fairy and were neatly slotted into the local fairy belief of the time. Later viewed as protagonists of a wonder tale by medieval commentators, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries they have been explained as everything from fairies to extraterrestrials, from lost, foreign humans to medical oddities. John Clark’s work represents the most comprehensive and thorough analysis of the evidence and theories available, offering readers an in-depth look at what is known, what is supposed, and what may be concluded in relation to the source material.

Clark uses the body of his text to explore both the green children’s story and the myriad ways that story has been reworked, retold, and reinterpreted. Beginning by establishing Clark’s own history with the tale and reasons for choosing the topic, the book’s introduction sets the tone for what follows and raises questions about the how well or poorly it may fit into the categories people apply to it. Is it fairy lore? Ufology? A Fortean mystery? A medical issue misunderstood and transmuted into a marvel tale? The green children prove as mysterious and misunderstood today as they were 800 years ago, and Clark embraces this ambiguity instead of fighting against it. From the introduction we segue into the original story itself, presented through the similar but divergent lenses of William of Newburgh and Ralph of Coggeshall who both wrote of the strange green-hued children found near Woolpit and adopted into the community. Appearing seemingly from the earth itself the children not only had green skin and spoke no familiar language but also initially refused

all food except raw broad beans; eventually, they adapted to life in Woolpit, their skin lost its odd color, and they were baptized, after which the boy died. Newburgh and Coggeshall differed in a few details, likely an artifact of writing thirty years apart from oral material, but both presented a fairly similar story. Clark then goes on to explore the way the tale was preserved and transmitted across the ensuing centuries, noting the way that commentators interpreted the story through their own particular lenses, moving it back and forth between different categories. Clark also explores its modern appearances as fairy belief, mystery tale, fiction, alien lore, and an example of folklore motif F103.1. Each subsequent chapter through the ninth and final “Strangers in a Strange Land” works to share what has been said about the children, their story, and their origin while analyzing the range of possibilities attached to them.

The real brilliance of this book is its even-handed approach to the various theories it explores. Sources are put into vital context, with the author explaining prevailing contemporary beliefs relevant to each textual appearance of the children’s story. The ideas that it eventually debunks or disproves are given fair voice, offered and rebutted without being dismissed out of hand or disparaged. Theories that exist entirely in the realm of belief or disbelief, such as the idea of the children as fairies or aliens, are presented for consideration, and although Clark does ultimately suggest a reductionist approach to the issue that strips the tale down to a rational historic core he also acknowledges that the place the green children had and maintain within folklore is diverse and complex. They are simultaneously as simple as the historic accounts might imply and as convoluted as the various interpretations imagine, children who lived and died in Suffolk and also folkloric figures that populate media still, dancing across the lines that might separate each category they are pressed into.

In the end *The Green Children* offers no answers to the mystery posed by the story but allows readers to form their own opinions based on the range of evidence, directing the curious toward likely possibilities and carefully unwinding less likely options. This is a book whose strength lies in its objectivity, its willingness to consider all possibilities within the wider context of the folklore that forms the tale’s foundation and current state without requiring that any particular viewpoint be wholly dismissed. While offering no clear explanation Clark also reminds readers that whatever else they were or might have been the green children were *children*, two lost children whose story wasn’t their own but became a tale in which they only played a small part, dehumanized and manipulated by the adults around them who overlayed their own beliefs onto the children’s reality, whatever that might have been.

Morgan Daimler
Independent folklorist

Vigilante Feminists and Agents of Destiny: Violence, Empowerment, and the Teenage Super/heroine. By Laura Mattoon D'Amore. Lexington Books, 2021. 165 pp.

Regular readers of *Marvels & Tales* will recall Laura Mattoon D'Amore's intriguing 2017 article titled "Vigilante Feminism: Revising Trauma, Abduction, and Assault in American Fairy Tale Revisions." This book is an expansion of that article's core ideas, with additional texts and theories to supplement the original focus on fairy-tale texts. In its current form, the book contains an introduction, four body chapters, and a conclusion, with explicit fairy-tale retellings comprising two of the body chapters. A bibliography and index complete the slim volume.

In a departure from D'Amore's earlier article, the introduction situates D'Amore's work not only in terms of fairy-tale studies and feminist theory but also trauma studies, theories of agency (especially embodied agency), and literary studies (particularly YA literature). And while D'Amore's article included three main case studies—that of Ravenna from the 2012 film *Snow White and the Huntsman*, Gretel from the 2013 film *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters*, and Scarlett from the 2010 novel *Sisters Red* by Jackson Pearce—the book retains only the *Sisters Red* example, including another book by Pearce in that chapter, discarding the film texts. One benefit of the years that passed between the article's publication and that of the book is that new advances in feminist theory were made, such as Kate Manne's stunning contributions to the study of misogyny in her 2018 book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, a reference that shows up frequently in D'Amore's book. Additionally, some of the texts that would become centerpieces of D'Amore's analysis had only just been published in 2017.

D'Amore's introduction also accomplishes the necessary task of not only defining vigilante feminism but also justifying its inclusion within the realm of what might be considered feminism. There are two important connotations to vigilante feminism: the character of the vigilante feminists, young women who are forced to take on the role of vigilante in response to violence they personally experience, and moreover, "to do so outside the parameters of law and society (as vigilantes), because the institutions that are supposed to protect them against violence—and bring justice to aggressors—have systematically failed them" (4), and the nature of a vigilante feminism itself, "as a sort of vigilante or outlaw, because it exists at the edge of what is considered acceptably (dogmatically, theoretically) feminist" (4). D'Amore has harsh words for those who promote nonviolence as the only acceptable response to violence: "If we grant as feminist only that which dismantles patriarchy, we fail our girls and young women with definitions that are unreachable and untenable, and

which do not include these vigilantes who are deeply empowering, and fighting for them" (13). While I agree with D'Amore in considering that a truly empowering feminism must not only be composed of reactive violence (and in sharing the classic Audre Lorde quote about how the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house), I applaud her for taking the time to unpack the sadly relevant question of whether restorative violence is ever acceptable. As her analyses throughout the book show, the characters in these texts are deeply traumatized by the violence they have endured, but it is in wielding violence as a weapon of agency and empowerment, types of violence "often explicitly related to feminism and female solidarity . . . towards a greater collective good" (9), that these women find more healing than simply remaining passive victims.

The four body chapters each address a different text (or set of texts by the same author) with vigilante feminist protagonists. The first chapter interprets the evolution of Feyre (from the new adult series *A Court of Thorns and Roses* by Sarah J. Maas) from traumatized victim to empowered savior of others. The second examines the character X-23, a clone of Wolverine, in the *X-Men* universe, who starts life as a killing weapon without any agency and eventually not only takes vengeance on her captors but becomes able to determine the course of her own life. The third analyzes the teenage girls in Jackson Pearce's *Retold Fairytales* series, specifically *Sisters Red* and *Sweetly*, which retell different fairy tales ("Little Red Riding Hood" and "Hansel and Gretel," respectively), in which teen girls survive attacks by the violent and rapacious Fenris (werewolf-like creatures) and become fighters on behalf of other girls. The fourth studies the MTV series *Sweet/Vicious* in which two college students, one a rape survivor, team up to become vigilantes on their campus. While only the first and third of these are focused on fairy tales, all of the chapters cohesively extend the premise of the book, that it is worthwhile to study and understand these patterned ways in which young heroines undergo and are transformed by violence.

While I would have loved to see a book like this devoted entirely to vigilante feminism in fairy tales, D'Amore does persuasively link all these narratives as being "about the way that violence empowers the super/heroines to forge better endings for their own stories, and the stories of their communities" (149). The conclusion ties together all these threads and also places the book in the larger context of not only intersectional feminism, citing examples of feminist vigilante gangs in the real world, but also racial justice in particular, linking histories of misogyny with histories of white supremacy. This is a good move, even if it comes at the very end of the book, given recent critiques of how fairy-tale studies scholars have largely ignored race and ethnicity.

My other main critique is a mild one, for in the chapter on *A Court of Thorns and Roses*, D'Amore mistakenly claims that Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" dates from 1783 (37), which indicates that a bit more time spent in fairy-tale studies might benefit D'Amore's next project. More input from queer theory and disability studies would have also been nice, but I acknowledge that no one book can do everything.

Overall, this is an invigorating read, and I recommend it for those interested in feminist fairy-tale studies, feminist and gender studies, young adult literature, trauma studies, or popular culture more generally. D'Amore's convincing close readings and deft wielding of feminist theory make for a scintillating but accessible book, one that makes a novel contribution to a series of fields that are often overlooked as trivial.

Jeana Jorgensen
Butler University

Ebony, Blood, and Snow: New Stories from Old Tales. Tish Black. Sharpest Tooth Publishing, 2025. 156 pp.

Ever since the fairy-tale revolt by such writers as Anne Sexton and Angela Carter in the 1970s, there has been an explosion of feminist fantasy stories that have made readers think, once or twice, that the world is being turned upside down and inside and out. In short, the world is not moving toward fulfilling our dreams of happily ever after. Meanwhile, numerous radical writers of fairy tales have adapted and interpreted the classic fairy tales of Perrault, the Grimm Brothers, Andersen, and *The Arabian Nights* in a way that reflects how much we still need to change the inequalities in our social relations, especially when it comes to women.

In keeping with this radicalism, there are gifted feminist authors who self-publish their views in blunt language to remind us that fairy tales are not for children but for adults who should be rethinking the way they act in a lopsided world. For instance, Tish Black, a young, relatively unknown author from Ottawa, Canada, has dedicated her collection of new stories from old tales to angry feminists, who still have not received their due and recognition. She demands attention.

There are thirteen remarkable fairy tales in Black's collection based primarily on the works of Perrault and the Grimm Brothers, and she transforms them into tales that remind us just how patriarchal the early stories were and how much more women must still struggle today to obtain their freedom and respect. Five of the tales are demonstrably told in the first person.

In "Indigo," a young witch reveals how a rich, powerful man had brutally taken her magic from her. She does not gain revenge until she learns from an

older witch that there is a difference between justice and revenge. In “Ash,” the Cinderella character defeats her stepmother and embraces her stepsisters as her friends. In “Red” the narrator reveals how she discovers that a preacher collaborates with wolves to abuse and devour children. Thanks to her efforts, the preacher is exposed and children are no longer abducted. For the most part, all the tales in Black’s collection reverse the typical gender roles played in older fairy tales, and while many incidents are gory, they remind us that Black is only imaginatively reflecting on how devastating relations are still being perpetuated throughout our real world.

In her final story, “Lapis,” based on *The Arabian Nights*, Black portrays a mad king who, to repay the infidelity of his wife, marries a woman every day and then kills her the next morning. Then, two sisters, Scheherazade and Dunyazad manage to entice the king through storytelling for 1,000 nights and to save the lives of many women. On the 1,001st day, Scheherazade plunges a knife into his chest. It is not the end of the story, but it certainly marks a line drawn by angry feminists like Tish Black, who seek to correct attitudes held toward women.

At times, Tish Black can be somewhat pedantic in her writing. However, her stories are significant because she courageously addresses a problem that needs to be addressed. Despite the progress that feminism has made in the past fifty years, we still live in a world in which women are dominated by men, some who are sinister and yet serve as models in high offices of government. When exposed, they laugh at their accusers. Such immorality needs to be exposed, and Black’s tales resist this kind of laughter and depicts how women artfully need to confront this situation to have the last laugh.

Jack Zipes
University of Minnesota