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***War, Myths, and Fairy Tales*, edited by Sara Buttsworth and Maartje Abbenhuis**

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REVIEWS:
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WAR, MYTHS, AND FAIRY TALES. Edited by Sara Buttsworth, Maartje Abbenhuis. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 243 p. 9789811026836. \$89.00.

THIS COLLECTION OF ESSAYS, INTERNATIONAL IN SCOPE both in its roster of authors and the material that they cover, examines the complex relationships between war and fairy tales as they have developed from the eighteenth century into contemporary culture. This is the third volume Sara Buttsworth and Maartje Abbenhuis have produced that explores representations of warfare in literature and culture. Their first, *Restaging War in the Western World: Noncombatant Experiences 1890-Today* (2009), focuses on historical experiences of war from the perspective of those outside of combat roles, who are often “depicted as having very little agency of their own” (2). Their second, *Monsters in the Mirror: Representations of Nazism in Post-War Culture* (2010), offers a broader survey of literature and film that incorporates Nazism and Nazi-iconography, considering the significance of those tropes and asking why “Nazism [is] part of the furniture of living in our popular culture and why [...] the presence of Nazism [...] [has] not been questioned in a systematically critical way” (xiv). In their introduction to this volume, the editors articulate the different purpose of this book, which “posits not only that warfare is a key element of the fairy tale genre as it has developed since the turn of the eighteenth century, but also that fairy tales offer important insights into modern warfare” (4). The authors within the volume examine this reciprocal relationship between warfare and fairy tales from within multiple disciplinary perspectives: literary studies, anthropology, film studies, history, and folklore. As a result, the collection examines multiple media and considers the varied purposes of fairy tales within larger discourses about war, including the ways in which fairy tales can serve propagandistic national or therapeutic individual purposes. Throughout all the essays, the authors examine the impact of warfare on youth and the special role that fairy tales play in providing interpretive frameworks for young people, especially children.

The editors thoughtfully construct a volume that makes significant contributions to comparative studies of film and literature and the treatment of

war within them across multiple time periods and national traditions. As the editors outline, the collection serves to link two genres of cultural discourse—that of fairy tales and that of war. The formatting and structure of the essay will assist scholars who seek out individual essays in their subject areas, but readers coming to any individual essay within the volume will be well-served by reading the introduction, no matter their area of interest. Buttsworth's and Abbenhuis's introduction illuminates the thematic and critical strands that link the chapters together across multiple interpretive axes. They suggest that "all of the chapters in this volume use fairy tales as lenses through which to analyze, critique, and reflect on modern warfare and modern society" (6). This notion of the fairy tale as an "interpretive lens" is an important one to consider when contemplating the way in which audiences might use this volume. While the editors and authors acknowledge their debt to major theorists and historians of the fairy tale as a form, including Bruno Bettelheim, Maria Tatar, and Jack Zipes, the essays do not specifically advance the study of fairy tales themselves but the study of the uses of fairy tales in other media. As a result, this volume serves as a useful bridge between studies of fairy tales and broader cultural criticism and should be a welcome addition to personal and institutional comparative literature collections.

Only one essay in the collection, "'The Boy with the Bread': Consuming Hansel and Gretel in the Twenty-First Century," by Sara Buttsworth, provides extensive discussion of a single fairy tale and argues for its continued relevance in literature and culture. Buttsworth examines the history of "Hansel and Gretel" across recent retellings and argues that Susan Collins's *The Hunger Games* is a contemporary iteration, despite its more familiar identification with the story of Theseus. Through her reading of the novel, Buttsworth suggests that fairy tales frequently lie beneath the surface of literature for children and adolescents as a persistent cultural influence, even when other sources are more commonly known. The essay provides significant analysis of the relationship between the tale of abandonment and starvation with historical trends in warfare and anxieties about cultural change. Buttsworth asserts that Collins contributes to the "Hansel and Gretel" narrative by "the questioning of what security really is and an acknowledgement of 'home' as a compromised ideal, rather than a stable reality" (53). Buttsworth also addresses a number of other recent retellings, including the picture book by Neil Gaiman and Lorenzo Mattoti (2014) and Philip Pullman's *Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm: A New English Version* (2012). Buttsworth concludes that contemporary retellings of "Hansel and Gretel" critique "nationalist fairy tales of war" that "feed capitalist and military-industrialist coffers" and teach that "in being returned to the parent who abandoned you, or who [...] pushed you into harm's way [...] the odds are definitely never in your favour" (66). Buttsworth demonstrates,

convincingly, that as long as children are affected by war, "Hansel and Gretel" will be relevant and available as the substrate of new literary representations of war.

Although the essays in the volume address literature associated with a number of conflicts, two essays specifically address the presence of fairy tale tropes in representations of the Holocaust. In "And They Lived Happily Ever After? The Fable as Search for Meaning in Holocaust Cinema," Giacomo Lichtner departs from his prior analyses of the Holocaust in film, which have relied on representations of politics, to consider the "language of fairy tales" and to contemplate whether it may be "possible that the language of legend may undertake this hardest of tasks"—the representation of the horror of the Holocaust—"with as much hope of success as the language of history" (26). While much of Lichtner's other work has examined "an aesthetics centered on reality and a narrative inextricably linked to society and politics" (Lichtner, *Fascism* 61), the essay in this volume considers how fairy tales provide a way to "speak of crimes that rational thought dare not picture" and to "ensure accessibility" for a young audience who needs to hear the story of the Holocaust (27). Lichtner identifies and describes "three types of Holocaust fable: one that protects innocence by concealing the truth; one that celebrates innocence by reading the truth through it; and one that denounces the permanent demise of humanity's innocence" (28). Throughout the remainder of the essay, Lichtner discusses cinematic examples of each of these fable types: *Life is Beautiful* (1997) and *Jakob der Lügner* (1975)/ *Jacob the Liar* (1999); *Train of Life* (1998); *The Notebook* (2013). Lichtner concludes that, unlike other fairy tales, where the "happy ending" is a possibility, "The Holocaust fable is a post-traumatic genre, concerned more with psychoanalytical elaboration than with the communication of historical facts" (42). Lichtner's conclusions, in many ways, provide the most provocative of the volume because they suggest possibilities for application to art that emerges from other traumatic historical events and because they suggest possibilities for a critical revisitation of the fairy tale as genre.

While Lichtner examines cinema from multiple national traditions, Simon Heywood and Shonaleigh Cumbers consider an individual storyteller working within a specific linguistic, cultural, and family tradition of storytelling and the way that storytelling tradition survives from and speaks to the Holocaust. In their essay, "War and the *Ruby Tree*. The Motif of the Unborn Generations in Jewish Women's Story-Telling," Heywood and Cumbers describe Cumbers's work as a storyteller, known as Shonaleigh, who continues her family tradition. This essay is somewhat unusual, especially in comparison with the other pieces within the volume, so its place as the final essay is appropriate. Heywood and Cumbers offer something akin to an auto-

ethnography that describes Shonaleigh as a *drut'syla*, "a hereditary female Jewish story-teller of a particular type" (219). The authors focus specifically on a story cycle called *The Ruby Tree*, which they assert is "qualitatively distinct from the numerous original and literary works of narrative art that use folktale and fable-like tropes to tell stories about the Holocaust" (220). Within the essay, the authors provide a summary of *The Ruby Tree's* plot, its relationship to other stories in its cycle, and contemplate the particular resonance of them as "tales of survival that have been transmitted over centuries" (Zipes 133-134). According to Heywood and Cumbers, *The Ruby Tree* explores "the concept of unborn generations" that "existed in European Jewish Culture" (231). To a culture continually facing the threat of disruption caused by expulsion, pogroms, and persistent anti-Semitism, *The Ruby Tree* suggests the grief and promise of what might be for European Jews. Heywood and Cumbers conclude that "The story itself, in the context of the Holocaust and the long history of anti-Semitism, amounts to more than a compensatory fantasy. Under dehumanizing circumstances, the mere act of telling a story of humanity restored can itself constitute a restoration of humanity" (234). This essay offers a window into a little known story-telling tradition and suggests productive routes for research that combines anthropological method with literary analysis. In addition, this essay fills a significant gap in the scholarship, since much of that available about Yiddish storytelling either addresses the "*Mayse Bukh*, first published in Basel in 1602 [...] the best-known and most popular Yiddish collection of hagiographic stories about Talmudic and medieval rabbis" (Faienstein 94) or the appearance of folktales within the work of major Jewish authors, such as Isaac Bashevis Singer (Gottesman).

Heywood and Cumbers are not the only authors who provide access to an area of research typically unknown to English-speaking scholars of fairy tales and folk tales. Dannelle Gutarra, in the essay "Abelardo Díaz Alfaro's Tales: The Tragicomedy of the Dawn of US Intervention in Puerto Rico," provides non-Spanish speaking readers with access to Díaz Alfaro's work that is otherwise not available in English. Gutarra demonstrates how Díaz Alfaro's "fables metaphorically depict the inherent violence of colonialism and denounce the economic exploitation of the Puerto Rican people in the twentieth century" (72). According to Gutarra, Díaz Alfaro employs "folkloric tropes" such as "animal personifications, the presence of monstrous entities, the celebration of knighthood, and the centrality of the culture of childhood [...] to portray daily life in Puerto Rican rural regions and to condemn the extreme poverty" and oppression faced by Puerto Rican people in the early 20th century (75). Within the essay, Gutarra provides both extended translations of Díaz Alfaro's work and explications of his text within a theoretical framework provided by postcolonial criticism and theory. Gutarra's essay makes an important

contribution to understanding of literary traditions within the sphere of American imperial influence and to scholarship that examines wars that use language and culture instead of munitions as weapons. Gutarra's essay also demonstrates the urgent need for full translations of Díaz Alfaro's work into English.

While Gutarra explores the impact of American colonization on Puerto Rico, Paul E. Blom, in the essay "'A Trap of Our Own Making': Mark Twain and the Mechanized Warfare of King Arthur's Court," considers Twain's ambivalence toward fairy tale tropes in his 1889 novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Blom argues "that the Arthurian legends should be considered as fairy tales" because of the presence of "magical swords, noble quests, and mystical artifacts" (176). In addition, Blom contends that Twain's "condemnation of warfare stretches across the centuries" and his "ultimate target of criticism is [...] the American fairy tale: the enduring grand narrative of American culture that celebrates technology as a vehicle for social progress" (177). After providing brief historical context for his reader, Blom offers a summary of the novel and a brief rebuttal to critics of the novel. While Blom's treatment of the novel is quite thorough, he relies on his readers' acceptance of the core premise that the conventions of fairy tales are identical to those of Arthurian legend, and his argument stumbles at those moments.

Blom is not the only author in the volume to examine the role of medievalism in contemporary art and culture. Peter Burkholder and David Rosen's "Child Soldiers in Medieval(esque) Cinema" examines the role of the "child soldier in medieval fantasy films" such as *Braveheart*, *Lord of the Rings*, *King Arthur*, *Kingdom of Heaven*, and *Robin Hood* (147-148). Although these films vary in their attempts at historical accuracy, "[w]hat is central to all these films is that the fairy tale structure, set within a distant but familiar medieval context [...] allows the representations of child soldiers to be crafted in such ways that the audience unquestionably accepts the moral necessity of recruiting youths for mortal combat" (148). While Burkholder and Rosen provide a firm foundation of historical and legal information outlining the role of children in medieval war, they, like Blom, rely on an undefined "fairy tale structure." Nonetheless, the essay provides an insightful and thorough reading of Peter Jackson's use of child soldiers in the staging of Helm's Deep in *The Two Towers*. According to the authors, Jackson uses child soldiers as a compositional element that "serves to magnify adult tribulations" (161). Thus, child soldiers are not a narrative element but a visual signifier that suggests exactly how dire the circumstances are at that moment in the battle. In addition to the "medieval(esque)" films, Burkholder and Rosen also provide an extended reading of films in the *Harry Potter* series. They suggest that the volunteers of "Dumbledore's Army" are qualitatively different than "Draco" who "is the

embodiment of the manipulated and exploited child soldier" (166). Although the authors' focus is primarily fantasy films, they also address the reality of children in combat. Burkholder and Rosen consider the memorial to "The Little Insurgent" which "pays homage to the children who participated in the 1944 Warsaw Uprising in Poland" (162) and films that "are largely oriented towards adults, and are typically set in darkly dystopic contexts" that explore the plight of African child soldiers (166). Despite the broad sweep of topics and films the authors address, Burkholder and Rosen provide one of the most extensive treatments of children and war within the volume.

The final three essays in the volume all address literary responses emerging from North America (Canada and the United States) and Great Britain to the two World Wars. Lindsay Thistle, in "Once Upon a Nation: Fables and Fairy Tales in Canadian Plays about War," examines the myth-making functions of drama in Canada and "investigates the connections between histories of war, myth, and identities in Canada as represented in contemporary theatre" (94). Thistle examines five plays written after 1970: Ken Gass's *Hooray for Johnny Canuck* (1974); John Gray's *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (1978); Kenneth Brown and Stephen Scriver's *Letters in Wartime* (1994); Norah Harding's *This Year, Next Year* (1995); and R. H. Thomson's *The Lost Boys* (2000) (95). Thistle suggests that war is part of the core of Canadian national identity and that, even with "the country's identification as a 'peace-keeper,'" Canadian responses to war remain central to the country's identity as an independent nation (96). Thistle frames her argument around three elements of fairy tales that she considers significant: the "everyman figure," the "love story," and "sacrifice." She contrasts the "everyman figure" exemplified by the heavily mythologized characters Johnny Canuck and Billy Bishop, the protagonists of the earliest plays she treats, with the fairy tale love narratives explored in the later plays. While the mythical everyman serves as the representative of Canadian forces in the theatre of war, the fairy tale love story plays out in the domestic sphere (107). The final play, by contrast, "mythologizes the sacrifices of the everyday soldier and remembers them with pride as heroes for the whole nation" (109). Thistle concludes that the familiarity of fairy tale tropes helps playwrights "to express the totality and immensity of the war experience and recreate them for the audience in nationalizing and familial perspectives" (111). This essay contributes to scholarship about Canadian drama in meaningful ways, but it also hints toward rich opportunities for the study of Canadian popular culture in the 20th century.

In much the same way, JoAnn Conrad opens up possibilities for the analysis of wartime picture books in "Flying Home: Aestheticizing and Americanizing Experiences of Exile and Migration in the Second World War as Fairy Tales of Return and Restoration." Conrad suggests that "children's literature about" World War II "has been aestheticized, often by adapting stories

of the war to fairy tale formats and themes," in such a way that the reader does not have to come "face to face with" and, take "responsibility for, human-inflicted horror by displacing it onto the realm of fantasy" (118). Conrad focuses on two works, "*Wings for Per* (1944) by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire and *Wheel on the Chimney* (1954) by Margaret Wise Brown," although a significant part of her argumentation related to the latter book focuses on the illustrator, Tibor Gergely, a Hungarian Jew (118). She argues that these two works, "conceived as stories about the trauma of dislocation and forced migration experienced in Europe at the hands of the Nazis" become "fantastical adventures, which reaffirmed the stability of the family and reinforced" American nationalism (118-119). Although Conrad provides extensive biographical and historical context for and close analysis of the d'Aulaires and Wise Brown books, she also considers the "Freudian/Bettelheimian interpretation of fairy tales as stories of trauma," and the history of children's books in the United States in the early twentieth century (120). After extensive and careful readings of *Wings for Per*, Conrad concludes that the d'Aulaires' efforts to create "the appearance of verisimilitude" in representation of Norwegian resistance failed, while books published in Norway that included animal protagonists who resisted hegemony succeeded (132). Thus, a highly aestheticized representation of war fails to capture the imagination and attention of readers. In her consideration of *Wheel on the Chimney*, Conrad considers the illustrator's representation of migration in multiple works, not only Wise Brown's. Gergely provided the illustrations for multiple books intended for children in the 1940s, including Jane Tomkins's *The Storks Fly Home* (1943). Gergely explores the "overlapping themes of evacuation and displacement [...] and 'return'" (135) in both this work and Wise Brown's. Conrad's essay also includes sources drawn from the Tibor Gergely Papers, including a story written by Gergely's wife, Anna Lesznai, who "was a prolific and well-loved children's book author and artist in Europe" who "continued to write and occasionally teach" while in exile in the United States (138). Lesznai's story, "The Three Little Refugees," according to Conrad, provides the ultimate source material for Wise Brown's work, wherein "both credit to Lesznai and references to Hungary disappear" (138). In aestheticizing wartime experience, specificity disappears. While Conrad makes her point about the aesthetics and ideologies replicated in children's book clearly, the relationship between fairy tales and those aesthetic and ideological decisions is underdeveloped and somewhat unsatisfying. Nevertheless, Conrad provides an important service to discussions of post-war children's literature by foregrounding the importance of exiled artists.

By contrast, the connections between myth, fairy tales, and the work of A.S. Byatt is entirely clear in Charlotte Beyer's essay, "'Life Was a State in Which

a War Was On': A.S. Byatt's Portrayal of War and Norse Mythology in *Ragnarok: The End of the Gods*." Beyer provides a foundation for future scholars examining the reuse and reimagination of fairy tales and myths in contemporary fiction, particularly in the substantial catalog published in the Canongate Myth Series. According to Beyer, Byatt's "portrayal of war through myth [...] presents an innovation in and expansion of the genre of the historical novel [...] and draws attention to the significance of the historical novel in the area of war studies" (197). Building upon scholarship from critics of contemporary literature, Beyers also weaves Byatt's own words into her argument and demonstrates Byatt's acuity as a critic and scholar of contemporary literature and myth. According to Byatt, "Myths, like organic life, are shapeshifters, metamorphic, endlessly reconstituted and reformed" (213). For Byatt, Ragnarok becomes a metaphor for recovery from war, as well as the continuing threat of "environmental destruction and possible extinction" (205). Readers interested in "the current interest in Scandinavian culture and literature" will be particularly well-served by Beyer's level of detail (195).

Although the essays in this volume do not contribute dramatically to scholarship solely about fairy tales or folklore, this volume provides so many valuable and diverse resources about literature, film, and storytelling, particularly that which responds to World War II, that it will be a significant addition to any academic library. Moreover, the volume suggests possibilities for productive dialogue among scholars of children's literature, film, and literature from around the world.

—Felicia Jean Steele

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