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## Briefly Noted

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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### Abstract

*The Wanderer's Hávámál*, translated by Jackson Crawford; *Cinderella across Cultures: New Directions and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère et al.; *A Palace of Pearls: The Stories of Reb Nachman of Bratslav*, retold by Howard Schwartz; *Electra: A Gender Sensitive Study of the Plays Based on the Myth*, by Batya Casper; *Forschungsdrang und Rollenspiel: Motivgeschichtliche Betrachtungen zum Fantasy-Rollenspiel Das Schwarze Auge*, edited by Stefan Donecker et al.

a wallpaper print by William Morris—a nod to one of the authors that spurred Jack’s imagination. The front endsheets have reproduced a photograph of Royal Avenue in Belfast around the time of Lewis’s birth, and the back endsheets reproduce a photograph of Lewis with his officer cadet battalion at Keble College in 1917. These images effectively bookend the scope of the biography. The overall aesthetic quality of the book coincides nicely with Poe’s observation about young Jack’s “attachment to a pretty binding” (209). This is no doubt a book of which Jack would have approved.

*Becoming C.S. Lewis* treats Lewis’s childhood with a depth that no other biography approaches. Poe is to be thanked for his careful scholarship, his original insights, and his overall contribution to our understanding of Lewis. I am left with a question and a hope. The question is, given the number of biographers who have already covered Lewis’s adult life, will Poe be able to offer something substantial and original in the next two volumes? My hope, given the quality of this initial volume, is that he will prove more than capable of bringing to life the writer, academic, husband, brother, and friend.

—Andrew C. Stout

#### WORKS CITED

Brock, Brian and Stanley Hauerwas. *Beginnings: Interrogating Hauerwas*. Edited by Kevin Hargaden. T&T Clark Enquiries in Theological Ethics. Bloomsbury, 2017.



#### BRIEFLY NOTED

**THE WANDERER’S HÁVÁMAL.** Translated by Jackson Crawford. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2019. 216 pp. 978-1-62466-842-5, \$26.00 cloth; 978-1-62466-835-7, \$12.00 paper; \$9.95 Kindle ebook.

THIS COMPACT VOLUME INCLUDES the original Norse text of the poem with English translation on facing pages. “The Words of the High One,” as the title is sometimes translated, has often been “billed as a ‘Viking code of ethics’” (xi). The Introduction includes notes on the translation, rhyme structure, pronunciation, and further reading. A commentary and excerpts from related texts follow. Like Tolkien’s “Sellic Spell” appended to his *Beowulf* translation published in 2014, there is an added delight at the end: “The Cowboy *Hávámál*,” a condensation and retelling in Western idiom as inspired by the author’s family heritage. Imagine it read by Sam Elliott as The Stranger in *The Big Lebowski*, and you’ll have the right tone. “Don’t be unkind to a wanderer” (162).

**CINDERELLA ACROSS CULTURES: NEW DIRECTIONS AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES.** Edited by Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère et al. Wayne State University Press, 2016. *Series in Fairy-Tale Studies*. 978-0-8143-4155-1. 421 pp. pbk. \$34.99; Kindle ebook \$14.99.

THIS WIDE-RANGING COLLECTION gathers papers about the Cinderella story across different cultures, in different media, and from various scholarly perspectives (including such perspectives as translation studies, printing history, queer studies, and visual art history). Sections include “Contextualizing Cinderella,” “Regendering Cinderella,” and “Visualizing Cinderella.” Essays address retellings by Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter, among others. There is a section of color plates. Contributors include well-known names in the study of children’s literature and fairy tales like Ruth B. Bottigheimer and Jack Zipes. A retelling too recent for this book, but one that would be fascinating to consider in light of some of these essays, is *Cinderella Liberator* by Rebecca Solnit (2019).

**A PALACE OF PEARLS: THE STORIES OF REB NACHMAN OF BRATSLAV.** Retold by Howard Schwartz and illustrated by Zann Jacobrown. Oxford University Press, 2018. 978-0-19-024356-2. \$34.95; Kindle ebook \$23.99.

REBBI NACHMAN (1772-1810) WAS A HASIDIC VISIONARY and storyteller inspired by the Kabbalah. This collection gathers together his thirteen major stories, his parables and visions, traditional stories he retold, stories about him, and much other additional material. These stories are imaginative, allegorical, and full of folkloric elements; dust jacket blurbs and introductory material compare them to the stories of Hoffmann, Kafka, Gogol, and Andersen, and to Zen koans. The ones I sampled reminded me most of the Sufi teaching-tales of the Mullah Nasrudin as collected by Idries Shah.

**ELECTRA: A GENDER SENSITIVE STUDY OF THE PLAYS BASED ON THE MYTH.** Batya Casper. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. McFarland & Company, 2019. 978-1-4766-7674-6 \$55.00; Kindle ebook \$29.99.

THE ELECTRA STORY IS ONE OF THE DEEP, ANCIENT TALE COMPLEXES which evolves and mutates over and over again to inspire story-tellers and trouble listeners. In its most basic form, the true king is murdered by the queen and her lover, and the displaced son and daughter seek revenge. The myth, in its varied interpretations, can have much to say about patriarchal rule, gender relations, fundamental binaries, rituals of death and rebirth, justice, female sexuality, superstition, tyranny, and passion. Some twenty-five years after the first edition, Casper has revised her study to include all three plays in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*

and to give more attention to the figure of Queen Clytemnestra. Among the many other plays considered are Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Wilde's *Salome*, O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Eliot's *The Family Reunion*, and Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*. The introductory chapters provide a quite useful foundation for the discussion, covering relevant aspects of the theory of myth, ritual, mystery, and sacred drama.

**FORSCHUNGSDRANG UND ROLLENSPIEL. MOTIVGESCHICHTLICHE BETRACHTUNGEN ZUM FANTASY-ROLLENSPIEL DAS SCHWARZE AUGE.** Edited by Stefan Donecker et al. Waldems: Ulisses Spiele GmbH, 2019. 9783963312090. 204 pp., illustrated. pbk. \$41.82.

**G**ERMAN-READING, CAVE SCHOLARS may find this title of great interest. "Das Schwarze Auge" ("The Dark Eye") is a pen-and-paper RPG roughly equivalent to "Dungeons and Dragons" in its influence on fantasy game development in German-speaking countries, but there are key differences in the sophistication of its in-game politics and history. According to one of the editors, the contributors "focus particularly on the relevance of historical motifs and real-world inspirations" and the collection is "dedicated to the interrelation between popular concepts of history and fantasy gaming."

—Janet Brennan Croft



## ABOUT THE REVIEWERS

**MARIA ALBERTO** is a third-year Ph.D. student in literary and cultural studies at the University of Utah, where she is pursuing research interests in fan studies, adaptation, and popular culture. Some of her recent projects have focused on fans' use of platforms, canon in tabletop roleplaying games, and mythmaking in Tolkien's work.

**EMILY E. AUGER** (Ph.D.) is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Cartomancy and Tarot in Film 1940-2010* (2016) and *Tarot and Other Meditation Decks* (2004), editor of the multi-author *Tarot in Culture Volumes I and II* (2014), and the area chair for Tarot and Other Methods of Divination at the Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association conference.