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## ***The Fairy Tale World*, edited by Andrew Teverson**

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## Online MidSummer Seminar 2025

### More Perilous and Fair: Women and Gender in Mythopoeic Fantasy

August 2-5, 2024

Via Zoom and Discord

<https://www.mythsoc.org/oms/oms-04.htm>



*The Fairy Tale World*, edited by Andrew Teverson

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**BRIEFLY NOTED**

**THE FAIRY TALE WORLD.** Edited by Andrew Teverson. Routledge, 2019. Hardback 9781138217577; paperback 9781032475707. \$216 hardback; \$58 paperback; also available for eTextbook rental.

FAIRY TALES ARE SISTER, SOURCE, AND SHADOW TO FANTASY. Boundaries between the categories blur, and one of the core texts in our own particular canon, J.R.R. Tolkien's "On Fairy-stories," is equally essential to our understanding of both fairy tales and mythopoeic fiction.

This substantial volume, part of the Routledge Worlds series, is an excellent resource: at once a history of global fairy tales and scholarship about them, and a survey of the current state and future direction of the field. The contributors are admirably international and include both well-established names and early-career scholars. Teverson's introduction lays out a major historical problem with which the field continually struggles: how is one to "articulate the international and cross-cultural character of tradition whilst simultaneously contesting the universalising gesture that writes the self onto the globe" and flattens out diversity into monomyth? The "Euro-American focus of fairy-tale studies to date" needs to be deliberately de-centered (10) so that "students of the genre may approach the international fairy tale in ways that are knowledgeable about the specificity of local cultural production, whilst simultaneously grasping the importance of global exchange in the formation of the genre" (13).

The first section of this collection addresses this problem of appropriation, marginalization, and Eurocentrism. As Donald Haase puts it in his essay, "Questions of belonging become more acute when stories from marginalized and indigenous cultures or from outside the Anglo-European canon are appropriated for an alien public by collectors, editors, and translators" (18). Sensitivity to these issues means seeking footing on ever-shifting ground—a continuous process of remaking and "decolonization" of the canon, as Cristina Bacchilega details in her contribution to the conversation. Rounding out this section are papers on major and relatively familiar sources of our common fairy-tale canon—the Middle East, the literary fairy tale movements in Italy and France, the collecting and translating work of the Grimms and others. Subsequent sections group essays under broad geographical areas and around other themes, including Disnification, digital culture, and fan fiction.

Particularly intriguing is an essay pointing to what seems to me a source for Tolkien's lament (in his letter to Milton Waldman) that England "had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil)" (*Letters* 144, #131). Jonathan Roper's "'No fairy tales of their own?': The English and the fairy tale

from Thoms to Jacobs” quotes the first line of Joseph Jacobs’ 1890 collection *English Fairy Tales*: “Who says the English have no fairy tales of their own?” (402). Obviously someone did, to elicit such a comeback. Perhaps it was Sabine Baring Gould who, in 1865, expressed what Roper calls “Märchen envy” (409)? The essay expands on the issues of what is a fairy tale and what is not (folklore, ballads, etc.), the politics of collection and the relegation of such tales to the nursery, and an overall deplorable lack of Grimm-level documentation of sources among English collectors. In fact a further quote presages Tolkien: George Douglas in his 1893 collection *Scottish Folk and Fairy Tales* describing the “fragrance” of stories “in their native air, their native soil” (412), as Tolkien goes on in his aforementioned letter to speak of “our ‘air’ (the clime and soil [...])” of England and northwest Europe (144, #131). But Roper does not cite or mention Tolkien, leaving it up to us to make that connection.

—Janet Brennan Croft

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien: A Selection*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, Houghton Mifflin, 2000.



## ABOUT THE REVIEWERS

**DAVID BRATMAN** is co-editor of *Tolkien Studies: An Annual Scholarly Review* and was Scholar Guest of Honor at Mythcon 52. His writings on the Inklings include biographical articles on Hugo Dyson and R. B. McCallum for *Mythlore*, the bibliographical appendix to *The Company They Keep* by Diana Pavlac Glyer (Kent State, 2007), the article on authors contemporary with Tolkien for *A Companion to J.R.R. Tolkien* edited by Stuart D. Lee (Wiley Blackwell, 2014; 2nd ed., Wiley Blackwell, 2022), and the article on the Inklings for *C. S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy* edited by Bruce L. Edwards (Praeger, 2007), the last reprinted in his new collection, *Gifted Amateurs and Other Essays: on Tolkien, the Inklings, and Fantasy Literature* (Mythopoeic Press, 2023). A retired university librarian, he occupies his non-Tolkien and Inklings time writing concert reviews for San Francisco Classical Voice ([sfcv.org](http://sfcv.org)).

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