Arthur Rackham,
'Jack the Giant-Killer'
(*English Fairy Tales*, 1918).

They Say England Has No Folktales

Jacqueline Simpson

The folklore of England, as compared with that of other parts of Britain, let alone Scandinavia or Ireland, looks scanty and fragmented. One reason is that the Industrial Revolution and mass education came early to England, disrupting traditional patterns of work and relaxation, causing much movement of population, and gradually destroying older customs and beliefs. Another is the deplorable lack of systematic recording in the 19th century. At that time most of our folklorists saw their work as a kind of mental archaeology, by which they would discover the long-ago origins of folk beliefs, tales and customs, and they argued energetically over theories as to what the underlying impetus had been – sun-worship, fear of the dead, a concern for fertility? Absorbed in these debates, they never got round to making a nationwide collection and archive, though some of them did good research in a few individual counties.

Of the various branches of folklore, some were much admired and studied, while others were neglected. One genre which was highly rated was the Wonder Tale or *Märchen,* more popularly known as the fairy tale, of which France and Germany had the famous collections by Perrault and Grimm, so English folklorists were dismayed to find very few examples in their own country. Hence the taunt that 'England has no folktales'. However, it is important to define terms carefully, for 'folktale' has two distinct meanings. In its broad sense it applies to all anonymous oral narratives following traditional storylines; it thus covers not only fairy tales but local and historical legends, memorates, fables, tall tales, and jocular anecdotes. The narrow definition restricts itself to the overtly fictional items in the above list, excluding legends and memorates, since these are presented (and often accepted) as true. This narrow definition is used by some scholars, especially in the USA, but from a British point of view it is inappropriate since, as I hope to show, legends are the major genre in this country – a fact which has been obvious ever since the publication of Katharine Briggs' *Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language* (1970-1).

But first, why is it that English versions of international fairy tales are so rare? There is reason to think that some of the standard Wonder Tales were circulating in England in the Elizabethan period, for there seem to be a couple of brief references in Shakespeare, and – more importantly – there is a play by George Peele, significantly entitled *The Old Wives' Tale* (1595), where the humour depends upon the audience

recognising a medley of fragmented fairy-tale plots. In the 18th century some of our native stories did get printed as cheap chapbooks; they were all comic ones, aimed at readers who liked down-to-earth stories, with coarse humour and violence: Jack the Giant-Killer, Jack and the Beanstalk, Tom Thumb. Some of the more magical and romantic Wonder Tales must surely have been in oral circulation too, but none were printed. Perhaps this is due to the unfortunate fact that foreign tales were flooding onto the market in cheap editions – French ones in the 17th and 18th centuries, those of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Andersen in the 19th. Cinderella, Red Riding Hood, Snow White, the Little Mermaid and all the rest were immediately adopted into our culture, together with Aladdin and Sinbad from the *Arabian Nights*. To this day, these foreign imports are the only fairy tales most English people know, and they are generally unaware that they are foreign.

However, the Victorian folklorists did discover a few native fairy tales scattered in various parts of England, and others have been recorded since. The best texts are of high quality. Tom Tit Tot, a Suffolk story printed in the *Ipswich Journal* in 1878, is our Rumplestiltskin; The Small-tooth Dog, collected in Derbyshire and published in 1893, is our Beauty and the Beast; The Rose Tree, from Devonshire and published in 1866, is our Juniper Tree; Mr Fox, printed in 1821, can be related both to Bluebeard and to The Robber Bridegroom. The best edition, with excellent source notes and commentary, is Neil Philip's *Penguin Book of English Folktales*; he also includes several collected from Gypsy storytellers, who by the nature of their life are as closely linked to Scotland as to England, and who only tell their tales among themselves, not to outsiders.

The performance context of English folktales in past generations is poorly documented, early collectors seeming hardly aware of oral storytelling as an art form or social activity. Certainly there were no formal gatherings such as were common in Ireland and Scotland, and only one group of professional storytellers is known, the wandering Cornish 'droll-tellers' of the early 19th century.

Passing references can be found to more casual storytelling situations. One writer in the 1830s describes how men, women and children in the Yorkshire and Lancashire dales would gather in one house for a knitting session after the day's work was over, and as they knitted they would enjoy telling 'all the old stories and traditions of the dale'; he unfortunately does not say what these were. Henry Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) gives a short, vigorous rendering of a version of The Master Thief, here entitled Clever Jack, which was told him by an intelligent-looking 16-year-old boy in a London workhouse. The boy said the inmates would sometimes tell stories among themselves – romantic ones, bawdy ones, and ones about 'some big thief who was very clever at stealing'. He added that they would always call the hero Jack.

By far the most commonly mentioned situation for storytelling was the domestic one, with older women as the narrators and children as the audience. Particularly significant in this connection is the role of the working-class nanny or nursemaid in a middle-class household; she would pass on the beliefs and stories of oral tradition to youngsters, some of whom in later life put them on record. Thus, the woman who sent Tom Tit Tot to the *Ipswich Journal* commented that she was writing it from memory, based on the way her childhood nurse used to tell it in the 1850s. One outstanding example of this channel of transmission is provided by Charles Dickens. In his essay 'Nurse's Stories' in *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1860), and again in his Christmas story 'The Holly Tree', he describes with comic gusto the sinister tales with which his nurse Mary Weller used to terrify him. They all involved crime and horror: an innkeeper who would cut a guest's throat as he slept, drop the body through a trap-door, and bake it into pies; a murderous burglar who was identified by a clever servant-girl who killed him with a red-hot poker, and so forth. She insisted they were absolutely true and had happened quite recently in the experience of relatives or friends of her own; this of course places them in the genre we now call Contemporary or Urban Legend, not the fairy-tale genre. But the two longest which she told, and which Dickens gives in full, do display the technique of a fairy tale, having much repetition of incident and of formulaic phrases, as in *Märchen* narration. The first, 'Chips', is about a ship's carpenter who owes his skill to a pact with a demonic rat, but fears that the rat will take him in the end; and so it does, since poor Chips, unlike other folktale heroes who have dealings with the Devil, cannot escape the consequences. The stages of the tale are marked by a repeated rhyme. The second is the superbly gruesome 'Captain Murderer', which is, as Dickens puts it, 'an offshoot of the Bluebeard family'. It tells of a bridegroom who kills and eats a succession of young brides, the last of whom ensures that he is spectacularly punished – knowing she is about to be killed, she swallows poison, so that when Captain Murderer eats her he swells up, turns blue, and bursts.

In contrast with these few gleanings, local and migratory legends are very abundant. Every collection of county or regional folklore compiled in the 19th and 20th centuries will contain at least a few, even though no folklorist made it a priority to study them; many get frequently repeated in popular books for the tourist market, and many do still circulate orally in varying versions. The first folklorist to bring together a substantial number of them from all over the country was Katharine Briggs in 1971; two of the four volumes of her monumental *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language* are devoted to reprinting legends scattered through many earlier sources. In 2005 Jennifer Westwood and I compiled *The Lore of the Land*, a book entirely devoted to English legends; it runs to 900 pages, and is only a representative selection. I reckon it could have been three times as long and still not be a complete collection.

It is fascinating to observe how many of these English legends share not merely motifs but their whole plots with Continental ones (see, for instance, Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 1958; *The German Legends of the Brothers Grimm* tr. Donald Ward, 1981; Bengt af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 2010). Most of the Migratory Legends classified by Christiansen on the basis of Norwegian material can be found in England too. Those relating to the Devil include ML 3015, The Card-Players and the Devil, and ML 3025, Carried by the Devil; the latter is told in Northumberland of the medieval philosopher and alleged wizard Michael Scot, and in Wiltshire of St Aldhelm, first Abbot of Malmesbury. ML 3070, The Devil and the Dancers, is used as an etiological tale to account for certain groups of standing stones, in the form typified by the German medieval tale of the Dancers of Kolbeck. The fullest English version is told about a circle of stones at Stanton Drew (Somerset), where it is said that Satan acted as fiddler for a wedding party, causing them to dance wildly all Saturday and on into the Sunday, when they were turned to stone in punishment for their Sabbath-breaking.

We also have cycles of anecdotes about some locally famous wizard, such as Jack o' Kent in Herefordshire or Tommy Lindrum in Lincolnshire, who may or may not be based on some real-life person. Jack and Tommy both made a pact with the Devil, used him as a servant, made a fool of him, and cheated him in the end. Such stories were included by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson in their classification *The Types of the Folktale* (AT 756b, 1030-40). The tale of how the Devil agreed to build a bridge in exchange for taking whoever would be the first to cross it, but got only a dog or cat as his pay (AT 1191), is told of Jack o' Kent at Kentchurch in Herefordshire, and of anonymous wizards at Tarr steps in Somerset and Kirby Lonsdale in Westmorland. Cockerham in Lancashire has the story of a man who rashly summons the Devil but gets rid of him by setting him an impossible task, weaving ropes of sand (AT 1174). The very similar migratory legend of the Sorcerer's Apprentice (ML 3020) is found in Lancashire, told of schoolboys and their teacher at Bury; there, the impossible task is to count the letters in the church bible.

Other very widespread stories explain landscape features as due to the actions of a giant or of the Devil; for instance, that he set out to bury a town but was tricked into dropping his shovelful of earth elsewhere, or that he flung a large rock that missed its target, or dropped one through stupidity. All such stories come into Christiansen's category ML 5020, Giant or Devil creates a Hill, Ditch etc. Another type found again and again is ML 7060, The Disputed Site for a Church: this tells how men set out to build a church at a certain spot, but every night their work was destroyed by some supernatural force and the stones transported to a different site, where the church now stands. The story is etiological in intent, being told of

churches that are rather far from the villages they serve, or on a hilltop, or in some other way inconvenient. Sometimes the site supposedly first chosen has some physical feature suggesting ruined foundations, for though the content of a local legend may be fantastic it is always firmly linked to topographical realities, the alleged proofs of its truth.

Other legends incorporate ideas about witchcraft. Fear of witchcraft remained part of living folk belief for several generations after the law ceased to define it as a crime at the beginning of the 18th century, but the stories as we now have them mostly sound quaint and light-hearted, presumably reflecting both a change in attitude by tellers of later generations and the mediating influence of the collector. One that is widespread in England deals with shape-changing – ML 3055, The Witch who was Hurt. It tells how the witch, in the form of a hare, constantly eludes pursuit until one day she is wounded in the hind leg just as she is taking refuge in her own cottage; a corresponding wound on her human body gives the secret away. There are also anecdotes about witches keeping mice, toads, or (less commonly) cats as familiars, halting horses, preventing cream from being churned into butter, and riding through the air on various objects such as hurdles and broomsticks – though the latter is far more common as a stereotype in children's literature than in actual folk tradition.

It is hard to tell how deeply, and for how long, the English believed in elves and fairies, for the evidence is confused. The 12th-century Yorkshire chronicler William of Newburgh gives a detailed account of a countryman who sees fairies feasting inside their hillock, accepts a drink but refrains from drinking it, and gallops away with the goblet, which is later given to a king – a fully serious and allegedly historical version of a well-known international legend (ML 6045). In Elizabethan times, Reginald Scot writes in 1584 that 'some 70 or 80 years' before his own time people used to be terrified of a whole host of supernatural beings, some of which are obviously types of fairy – for instance Robin-Goodfellows, hobgoblins, redcaps, pixies and knockers. In contrast, Shakespeare describes fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet* in a completely light-hearted way.

When we turn to local legends recorded in Victorian or more recent times, we find good examples of international stories which describe the interaction of fairies and humans, including ML 5070, Midwife to the Fairies; ML 5080, Food from the Fairies; ML 5085, The Changeling. There are several relating to house-fairies, a species which in England can be called hobs, pucks, dobbies or pixies – ML 7010, The House-Fairy's Revenge; ML 7015, The New Suit; ML 7020, Vain Attempt to Escape the House-Fairy, and ML 6035, Fairies Assist a Farmer in his Work. Interestingly, the late 19th-century versions of this last one collected in my own county, Sussex, stress that

the farmer was severely punished for spying on the fairies at their work, and laughing at their efforts; in one case he dies of the stroke they give him, and the narrator claims that it was his own wife's great-uncle to whom this happened. So it seems that actual fear of fairies still persisted in some areas.

Not all legends involve magical creatures or demonic forces, of course. There are many where the events are astonishing but not supernatural, which are well represented among English local legends. Those recorded here, often in several different places, include AT 736a (= ML 7050), where a rich man tries to placate fate by throwing a precious ring into the sea, only to find it soon after inside a fish; AT 939a, where a wicked couple kill a traveller who is lodging with them in order to steal his money, only to discover that it is their own soldier son who has returned home incognito to surprise them; AT 960a, where the behaviour of birds startles murderers into revealing their guilt; AT 974 (= ML 8005), where a soldier long assumed to be dead returns home unrecognised in the nick of time to prevent the remarriage of his wife; and AT 990, where an apparently dead woman revives in the grave when the sexton tries to cut a valuable ring off her finger.

A considerable number of supposedly true tales are attached to local landowning families, especially to their founder. Some purport to explain the heraldic devices on their coats of arms, and are therefore very various in content – a horse's head supposedly commemorates a daring escape on horseback from a rising flood; a Turk's head, a Crusader's exploit; a red hand, the valiant act by which the family founder, racing against a rival to claim some land, cut off his own hand and threw it ahead of him, thus being the first to 'lay hands on' the prize. Monster-slaying is a common theme; I am particularly fond of stories where someone gains lands and a title by killing a dragon, often by an ingenious trick. Typically, tales of this kind will be reinforced by an appeal to the supporting 'evidence' of material objects such as tombstones, statues, and landscape features, or of local place-names supposedly referring to events in the tale.

Several places have versions of The Sleeping Hero tale, with Arthur as the warrior king who will one day awake to save his country in its hour of need. It tells of a man who happens to find a way into the cavern where Arthur and his men are sleeping, with horses, treasures and weapons. Accidentally, he partially rouses them, but fails to perform the correct action which would have brought them wholly to life; he is expelled from the cavern, and can never again find the entrance. Christiansen did not include this story in his list, from which I presume it does not occur in Norway, but it is famous both in Germany and in Denmark. Tales of buried treasure (ML 8010) are abundant in England, firmly localised and with well-known international motifs such as the supernatural animal treasure-guardian, the supernatural phenomena which scare away the treasure-seekers, and the ritual conditions (especially a rule of

silence) which when broken cause the treasure to be lost at the last moment. Several of the same motifs occur in the equally common legends about church bells sunk in rivers, lakes, or the sea (ML 7070). Since these are usually given a plausible historical setting, claiming that the bell was stolen and sunk in specific real-life circumstances such as a Viking raid or the destruction of monasteries at the Reformation, many people are convinced that there must be some truth behind them; in the 1970s there were persistent efforts by metal detectorists and dowsers to find and recover the bell allegedly sunk in marshy land at Alfoldean in Sussex.

It can in fact be almost impossible to tell whether a realistic, non-supernatural local tale is fact or fiction, unless one has access to further material for comparison. When I was gathering material for my *Folklore of Sussex* (1972), I failed to include an item I had come across about a traveller lost in a mist being guided home by the sound of a distant church bell, who then donated funds in gratitude for the bell to be always rung at sunset. I took it to be true; I now know it is recurrent folklore. Similarly Bob Copper, the well-known Sussex folk singer, in his *A Song for Every Season* (1971), assumes the truth of a dramatic tale told in Rottingdean, The Hangman's Stone – a thief who is leading home a live sheep he has stolen stops to rest against a certain boulder, but while he sleeps the movements of the sheep cause its tethering rope to twist round his neck and throttle him. But the archaeologist and folklorist Leslie Grinsell found twenty further examples in England, and I am aware of one Danish and one Irish parallel, so this again must be an international story pattern.

In England, certain short narratives included in the Aarne-Thompson index are commonly grouped in cycles about specified persons and places. I have already mentioned those told about fictional wizards such as Jack o' Kent who could command the devil and perform feats of magic, and there are stories ascribing similar powers to real persons such as Sir Francis Drake and the medieval friar and scholar Roger Bacon, who after his death was rumoured to have been a magician. Other cycles are made up of stereotyped jokes about fools (numskulls), told against the people of various villages, most famously Gotham in Nottinghamshire, where they go back to medieval times. The fools, it is said, once tried to drown an eel in a pail of water; they piled manure round their church to make the spire grow taller; they rolled their cheeses downhill so they would get to market on their own; they saw the moon reflected in a pond and tried to rake it out, thinking it was a cheese that had fallen in; they set up a fence round a tree where a cuckoo was calling, to stop it flying away so that summer would never end, and when it did fly off they lamented that if the fence had been just a little higher it could not have escaped.

Finally, I come to the topic of ghost-lore. Here the folklorist has to tread very carefully, since many English people today not only believe that ghosts exist but claim to have had direct experience of them. Some have sensed the comforting presence

of a dearly loved partner or relative, others have been alarmed by uncanny sights or sounds which they attribute to a hostile ghost, whose identity is often left vague. To treat personal narratives about such matters as 'legends' risks being offensive, for it seems to imply that those who tell them are either deluded or lying. Folklore collections therefore concentrate on what may be called the 'communal' and 'historical' ghost legend – a story about the ghost of someone whom the narrator identifies as belonging to a period at least two generations previous to his or her own times; this may be either a named individual, or an anonymous member of some historical group recognisable by its distinctive costume – a Roman soldier, a monk, a highwayman. The most interesting are those that have a well-defined narrative structure.

Among these, two well-developed narrative types recur. One is attached to old houses where a skull is (or was) preserved and displayed; it explains why the person whose skull it is had insisted it be kept there and not buried, and how attempts to remove it caused psychic disturbances and were abandoned (AT 407B). A popular writer in the 1920s referred to these as 'Screaming Skulls', and the nickname has stuck, even though it is only at Bettiscombe Manor in Dorset that some narrators actually mention screaming. I shall give the story in some detail, as I did in *Lore of the Land*, because it is a typical example of the way our local legends exist in multiple versions, with varying details clustered round the central fixed core – in this case, the presence of the skull.

For several generations the owners of Bettiscombe Manor House (who, until recently, were the Pinney family) have declared that its luck depends on a certain skull, the true age and history of which is unknown. The house was built around 1694, replacing an Elizabethan one; there is no record of whether the skull was there at that period. It was first described in 1847 by Mrs Anna Maria Pinney; it rested on a beam in an attic, near a main chimney, and she was told it brought good luck 'and while this skull is kept, no ghost will ever invade Bettiscombe'. Later, a niche was made for it in the attic; by the 1980s, it was being kept in a cardboard shoebox in the study, but still fairly close to a chimney. This may well reflect old customs, for when objects credited with magical powers of protection are hidden in buildings, they are often in the brickwork of a chimney, or in the roof-space, to guard these vulnerable points from supernatural attack.

In 1872 J.S. Udal, a Dorset antiquarian, wrote to the journal *Notes and Queries* about the skull, saying it had remained in place because of a belief 'that if it be brought out of the house, the house itself would rock to its foundation, whilst the person by whom such an act of desecration was committed would certainly die within the year.' He had been told it was the skull of 'a faithful black servant of an early possessor of

the property, who, having resided abroad some years, brought home this memento of a faithful follower'. Udal's informant was an eighty-year-old woman who had often stayed at the Manor in her youth and had 'learnt and treasured up the legend'. Later sources say the Negro had been brought to England alive, to be a servant at the Manor. Here he soon fell ill, and asked that his body be taken back to Nevis after death. His request was ignored, and he was buried in the local churchyard; at once, the house was plagued with bad luck and ghostly noises. The body was exhumed and decapitated, and the skull placed in the attic with instructions that it must never be removed; this put an end to the trouble – a rather illogical conclusion, if the poor man had really been asking to be taken back to the West Indies.

In the 1880s Udal re-examined the skull, concluding that it looked like a woman's, not a Negro man's (he was right, as modern scientists have confirmed); indeed, some informants now told him it was the remains of a woman imprisoned or murdered in the attic. He also recorded a story that one of the owners had thrown the skull into a pond, but a few days later went stealthily to fish it out again and put it back in its place, for, though he was embarrassed to admit it, he had been 'disturbed by all kinds of noises'. Udal noted that in the ten years since he first saw the skull 'the legend has gained both in volume and romance. It has – without any justification from local sources – gained the reputation of being a "Screaming Skull"'. By the 20th century this term had become firmly established; one farm worker in the 1960s claimed that he used to hear it 'screaming like a trapped rat in the attic'. Further variations have developed. Some now say the Negro was beaten to death by his master, or imprisoned in a barred recess by the fireplace; some believe that the skull sweats blood before national calamities. Possibly, it could be prehistoric – a curio from some local archaeological dig. Whatever its true origin, it still features prominently in local tradition, journalism, and TV documentaries.

My second chosen type of ghost legend concerns the exorcism of a fierce spirit which has been terrorising the neighbourhood; often this is said to be the ghost of a notoriously wicked aristocrat or landowner. It tells how a priest or group of priests, or occasionally a local Cunning Man, confronts the ghost, weakens it by fearless prayer, and then either shuts it in a small box or bottle which is then thrown into deep water, or sets it some endless, impossible task. A few variants from the south-west counties add that the ghost has escaped and is returning home, but only by the measure of one cock-stride per year. There are many examples to choose from; I will take the 19th-century stories of Black Vaughan at Hergest Court, a 15th-century manor house in Herefordshire.

The house and its surroundings were said to be badly haunted because one of its past owners, Black Vaughan, was too wicked to rest in his grave. This may refer to a

Sir Thomas Vaughan killed in battle in 1469, whose effigy is in Kington church, or to his son, another Sir Thomas, who was beheaded in 1483 as a traitor to Richard III. Always malevolent, Black Vaughan would manifest himself as a bull or as a fly; he would haunt the lanes, overturning wagons and terrifying women as they rode home from market at dusk by leaping onto the crupper of their horses; he would lurk by a certain oak, where his footprints showed as two bare patches burnt into the grass. Those who thought he had been beheaded would say that the disembodied head was sometimes to be seen hovering above the moat. There was also a sinister black dog which prowled through the house and grounds, clanking its chains, and would appear as an omen before any deaths in the Vaughan family; in life it had been Black Vaughan's favourite hound, though now it was a demon.

Vaughan's fearsome spirit was eventually laid, though it took the combined force of twelve parsons, a woman, and a newborn baby to do it. Armed with a silver snuff-box, and each carrying a candle, they summoned him and tried to master him by their prayers and 'read him down' into the box, but he only grew more and more menacing. One version of the tale was told to the Rev. Francis Kilvert in the 1860s by a mole-catcher in Radnorshire, and is recorded in his *Diary* (ed. W. Plomer, 3 vols, 1960); another is given in Ella Leather's *The Folk-Lore of Herefordshire* (1912). It tells how the twelve parsons assembled, each carrying a candle, and began reading from their prayer books:

> Well, they read, but it was no use; they were all afraid, and all their candles went out but one. The parson as held that candle had a stout heart, and he feared no man nor sperrit. He called out, 'Vaughan, why art thou so fierce?' 'I was fierce when I was a man, but fiercer now, for I am a devil!' was the answer. But nothing could dismay the stout-hearted parson, though, to tell the truth, he was nearly blind, and not a perticker sober man. He read, and read, and read, and when Vaughan felt himself going down, and down, and down, till the snuff-box was nearly shut, he asked, 'Vaughan, where wilt thou be laid?' The spirit answered, 'Anywhere, anywhere, but not in the Red Sea!' So they shut the box, and took him and buried him for a thousand years in the bottom of Hergest Pool, in the wood, with a big stone on top of him. But the time is nearly up!

A tradition so vigorous and multi-faceted is likely to have grown over several generations, though there is no way of knowing whether it actually goes back, in any form, to the 15th century. The folklorist and local historian Roy Palmer, collecting material in this area in the 1990s, found that even at that late date some people thought Vaughan still manifested himself, in spite of the exorcism:

> In the 1930s his ghost was regularly seen by the pool at Hergest Court, and horses were known to refuse to pass the spot. Half a century later [1980s] a visitor to the district … was terrified to see in Kington Church the ghostly figure of a bull outlined against the blue curtain covering the north door. The daughter of the present owner of Hergest Court told me that her father … decided some years ago to have the pool filled in but abruptly changed his mind and dismissed the contractors when, as JCBs prepared to begin work, the water started to bubble ominously.

Once one starts telling local legends one can go on, and on and on. But I hope I have shown that though the classic fairy tales are comparatively rare in England, we are amply provided with other forms of traditional narrative. England does have folktales!

Jacqueline Simpson

Note

Versions of this lecture were given at the University of Iceland, Reykjavík, in 2012, and at the Sussex Centre for Folklore, Fairy Tales and Fantasy at the University of Chichester in 2014. Some passages appeared in my article on 'English Tales' in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, ed. Donald Haase (2008), vol. 1, pp. 295-303.