



A review of
**The Golden Age of
Folk and Fairy Tales:
From the Brothers
Grimm to Andrew Lang**

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During his 2013 tenure as Leverhulme Visiting Professor of Storytelling, Fairy Tales and Fantasy at Cambridge's Anglia Ruskin University, renowned scholar Jack Zipes sat down to discuss *The Golden Age of Folk and Fairy Tales: From the Brothers Grimm to Andrew Lang*, his latest contribution to the field of folk and fairy-tale studies. Over tea and cakes in a charming local café frequented by customers as florid as those who populate the fairy-tale imagination, Zipes explained how an increasing sense of dissatisfaction had played a part in motivating and shaping this new anthology. He described what he had come to see as a 'gaping void' in the content of the edited collections available today. No single modern anthology offered multiple versions of well-known tales from diverse languages and cultures, and presented them based on typology. So Zipes set out to collate an edited volume of stories from the 'golden age' (the late 18th and 19th centuries) which would demonstrate the existence of multiple variants within any single tale 'type'. This anthology would be organised so as to be easily accessible, to specialists primarily, but also to a wider and more general readership. Finally, it was crucial to the project that the volume should retain the spirit of the 19th-century antiquarians, the ethos and the aims of those educated tale collectors who believed that the lower classes had something to offer: that their culture, folk culture, was something worth preserving for posterity.

In his extensive and illuminating Introduction, suitably entitled 'The Golden Key to Folk and Fairy Tales: Unlocking Cultural Treasures', Zipes makes the case for the monumental significance of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm as the first and foremost antiquarians. He delineates their role in capturing and cultivating many of the tales we now think of as 'canonical'. But he also cautions us against a tendency to view the Grimms' undertaking through the distorting lens of myth. This distortion was encouraged actively

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by the brothers, who sought to emphasise the supposed peasant purity of their collected tales through the use of paratexts. The trend continued with publishers and translators, most notably the English translator Edgar Taylor. In short, Zipes warns us not to “hype” the Grimms’. Because besides the Grimms, there were other important collectors – Giuseppe Pitrè, Laura Gonzenbach, Paul Sébillot, to name but three – who strove to preserve the told tales before (to borrow Zipes’ evocative term) they ‘evaporated’.

This belief in the need to collect and collate and make more widely available the stories that shape our culture is etched onto every page of *The Golden Age of Folk and Fairy Tales*. In this ambitious anthology we see Zipes as a modern-day antiquarian, sourcing a total of 182 tales from diverse languages (though there is a weighting towards Italian and German variants) and providing original translations. The tales are grouped into eighteen sections, according to ATU-type conventions. Additional descriptive section headings point the way through the narrative woods for those less familiar with this system of classification. Thus, ATU 410 (Sleeping Beauty) is recast as ‘The Fruitful Sleep’; ATU 327A (Hansel and Gretel) becomes ‘Abandoned Children’; whilst ATU 545B (Puss in Boots) springs into more animated life with its subtitle, ‘Shrewd Cats and Foxes’.

In each section there are buried treasures: new tales, different variations. Encounters with the unexpected, with the familiar in another form, make us rethink the tales we thought we knew, and make for a much richer reading. Most people can tell you what happens in the Grimms’ version(s) of ‘Little Red Cap’ (1812, 1857). But how many could describe Christian Schneller’s ‘Little Red Hat’ (1867)? Or ‘The True History of Little Golden-Hood’ (1888), by Charles Marelle? It is widely understood to be a fact that the stepmothers in fairy tales are predisposed to evil, and frequently display a penchant for inventive methods of filial poisoning. But how many of us can trace the variations on this theme in the Grimms’ three Snow White tales (1808, 1812, 1857), Gonzenbach’s ‘Maria, the Evil Stepmother, and the Seven Robbers’ (1870), Pitrè’s ‘Child Margarita’ (1875), to Isabella Anderton’s ‘A Tuscan Snow-White and the Dwarfs’ (1905)? And what about the perils and the pleasures of kissing frogs? ‘The Frog Prince’ (1815) is but one of many variants, including W. Henry Jones and Lewis L. Knopf’s ‘The Wonderful Frog’ (1889) and Ulrich Jahn’s ‘The Princess and the Scabby Toad’ (1891).

What makes the experience of reading through this anthology so rewarding, indeed (dare one say it?) so much fun, is the quality of Zipes’ prose: the authenticity and vivacity of the language. His translations (many of which render a tale into English for the first time) are polished yet unobtrusive. The texts reveal a delight in the dynamism of dialect, and signal an editorial commitment to preserving, in and as literature, the poly-vocality of the oral form. Eighteen original illustrations by students on Anglia Ruskin’s MA in Children’s Book Illustration programme, commissioned by Zipes during his visiting professorship, respond to the tales, and bring the words to more vibrant life. The images

are striking for their stylistic variation, but there is more to them than their aesthetic function. They interrupt the texts. And what emerges in the spaces, in the pauses in between, are moments of revision, of contemporary iconographic critique.

Those looking to this anthology for a scholarly and critical resource will not be disappointed. In addition to Zipes' substantive Introduction, editorial notes preface each chapter and outline the histories, themes and patterns of the variant tales to come. There are concise critical annotations and, finally, a veritable treasure trove of a research bibliography.

The Golden Age of Folk and Fairy Tales broadens and usefully complicates our knowledge of the tales we thought we knew. It demonstrates narrative and symbolic variation within canonical categories, and thereby alerts us to the mutable and migratory nature of folk and fairy tales. Zipes has crafted a kaleidoscope of stories: we look for, read for, and delight in, the distinctions as well as the patterns. And amongst the many-coloured pieces, what emerges intact is the value and the potency of the tales: a sense of their cultural significance, and of their 'utopian current'.

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