

Enchanted Ideologies: A Collection of Rediscovered Nineteenth-Century Moral Fairy Tales. By Marilyn Pemberton. Lambertville, NJ: True Bill Press, 2010.

Reviewed by Jan Susina

There is something about the fairy tale that continues to fascinate and delight us. From oral tales to printed collections, illustrated picture books, and film adaptations, these short tales of wonder appeal to children and adults alike. We keep telling, retelling, and revising fairy tales. But as scholars of children's literature have often noted, there has been a continuing debate over the merits and value of fairy tales as appropriate children's literature: one group sees them as too violent, too sexual, too superstitious, or lacking in worthwhile content; another believes the fairy tale to be the ideal genre for children. At the beginning of 2011, National Public Radio ran a feature, "The Fairy Tale Struggles to Live Happily Ever After," which suggested that after the mixed success of *Tangled*, Disney had no plans to make another animated fairy tale film (Weeks). But like the death of the novel, this announced decline of the fairy tale film was premature. Within months of NPR airing the story, two live-action adult features, Catherine Hardwicke's *Red Riding Hood* and Daniel Barnz's *Beastly*, were released in theaters. These contradictory events suggest that while the popularity of the fairy tale waxes and

wanes, the genre remains flexible and is constantly reinventing itself. Each generation writes its literary fairy tales in its own image.

Enchanted Ideologies enters the already crowded bookshelf of collections of reprinted literary fairy tales from the nineteenth century. While Pemberton's selection of fairy tales differs, *Enchanted Ideologies* has much in common with previous anthologies of literary fairy tales—Roger Lancelyn Green's *Modern Fairy Stories* (1965); Jonthan Cott's *Beyond the Looking Glass: Extraordinary Works of Fairy Tales & Fantasy* (1973); U. C. Knoepfelmacher's *A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens and Other Victorian Fairy Tales* (1983); Jack Zipes's *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves* (1987); Michael Patrick Hearn's *The Victorian Fairy Tale Book* (1988); Mark West's *Before Oz: Juvenile Fantasy Stories from Nineteenth-Century America* (1989); Nina Auerbach and U. C. Knoepfelmacher's *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers* (1992); and Alison Lurie's

The Oxford Book of Modern Fairy Tales (1993)—and with the facsimile editions of single-author collections reprinted by Dover and Garland's "Classics of Children's Literature" series. Given the increasing number of titles and accessibility of Google Books, I wonder if publishers will continue to commit to the publication of carefully selected and annotated anthologies of Victorian fairy tales, or of other out-of-print children's books. I see a great value in such republication, since these volumes help reintroduce some significant children's texts to

contemporary scholars and general readers. Pemberton points out that none of the fairy tales in her collection are well known, although many of the authors are—Alice Corkran, Mary de Morgan, Evelyn Sharp, Mary Louisa Molesworth, and E. Nesbit—and several of their other fairy tales have been reprinted in the collections listed above.

The nineteenth century, particularly in England, was the golden age of the fairy tale, as Pemberton makes clear in her useful introductory essay, "Nineteenth-Century Fairy Tales as Indicators, Instigators, and Inhibitors of Social Change." She provides a general history of the development and popularization of the fairy tale during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and shows how the fairy tale often battled against the moral tale as appropriate reading material for young people. The success of the publication of Edgar Taylor's translation of the Grimms' collection of folktales in English as *German Popular Stories* (1823/26) and multiple English translations of Hans Christian Andersen's literary fairy tales in 1846 set the stage for the publication of children's literary fairy tales by several well-known authors—William Thackeray, John Ruskin, George MacDonald, Christina Rossetti, Lewis Carroll, Andrew Lang, and Oscar Wilde—and a host of lesser-known writers as well.

What makes Pemberton's selection of literary fairy tales from the Victorian period different from previous collections is that they are chosen to show how the fairy tale could be used to promote educational content to children. One of the ways in which

the literary fairy tale became acceptable to middle-class parents was its reconfiguration of the lessons of the moral tale. Pemberton points out that in order for the genre to become respectable, publishers were willing to create fairy tales that provided social lessons. While this was certainly not the case with all Victorian literary fairy tales, I think it was much more often the norm than many critics have assumed. While most critics have praised the liberating quality of the Victorian fairy tale in contrast to the heavy-handed moralizing found in many of the children's texts from an early generation, there remains a pervasive moral tone to most of this genre, even in those written by well-known children's authors. The Victorian middle class who purchased these literary fairy tales for their children valued respectability over subversiveness. This isn't new information; Gillian Avery made this point quite clearly and in more detail her *Nineteenth Century Children* (1965), in which she provided two separate chapters on nineteenth-century fairy tales: "Fairy Tales with a Purpose" and "Fairy Tales for Pleasure." Most of the other anthologies of Victorian literary fairy tales have emphasized the second category; Pemberton's selections clearly fall into the first. The reprinting of these literary fairy tales is an important corrective to the overstated assumption that after the success of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), the shift in children's literature, and literary fairy tales in particular, quickly become geared more toward entertainment than instruction.

The majority of the literary fairy tales that appear in *Enchanted Ideologies* are from the 1870s or later, and they are as didactic and overt in their moralizing as any moral tale; the elements of fairyland are simply sugarcoating for these lessons. Ascott Hope's "Humpty-Dumpty," which was published in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* in 1877, features a poor widow's son's desire for wealth and power gratified by a mysterious little man, only to discover that he was far more contented and happier when he was poor than when he becomes a duke. This "Humpty-Dumpty" has more in common with Hannah More's *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* than with the Humpty Dumpty who appears in Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. Sometimes critics have tried too hard to find the subversiveness in many nineteenth-century children's texts. In these literary fairy tales, fairies are just governesses with wings; Pemberton shows that many of these stories promoted middle-class values such as "thrift, self-control, restraint, personal ambition, and deferred gratification" (31). While these may not be the best-written or most memorable of the literary fairy tales of the Victorian period, they do show that the genre could be conservative and overtly educational as well as subversive and entertaining. In considering these fairy tales as literary texts, it is not surprising that they are not well known. But viewed as examples of representative children's texts from the late nineteenth century, they provide a more nuanced literary context to appreciate the rise of popularity of the fairy tale as an acceptable form

of children's reading. The established dictum of "Instruction with Delight" did not disappear from children's literature in the nineteenth century—or in the twentieth, for that matter. *Enchanted Ideologies* confirms Carroll's Duchess's opinion when she observed, "Every thing's got a moral, if you only can find it" (78). When it comes to the Victorian literary fairy tales reprinted in *Enchanted Ideologies*, these writers make this search fairly easy.

Works Cited

Carroll, Lewis [Charles Lutwidge Dodgson]. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass*. Ed. Hugh Haughton. 1865/72. New York: Penguin, 1998.

Weeks, Linton. "The Fairy Tale Struggles to Live Happily Ever After." NPR: National Public Radio, 21 Jan 2011. 25 Jan 2011. <<http://www.npr.org/2011/01/21/132705579/the-fairy-tale-struggles-to-live-happily-ever-after>>.

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