

## Book Reviews

Canepa, Nancy L., editor. *The Enchanted Boot: Italian Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. Wayne State UP, 2022. <https://wsupress.wayne.edu/9780814334751/>

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*The Enchanted Boot: Italian Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, edited, translated, and introduced by Nancy L. Canepa, is an important contribution to the library of fairy tale anthologies. The introduction establishes the history of fairy tales in Italy, arguing that “the three most significant moments in Italian fairy-tale history occur at pivotal moments of construction, deconstruction, or reconfiguration of national identity” (22). From Baroque and Renaissance Italy to post-war Italy, Canepa effectively elucidates the waxing and waning interest in fairy tales as part of Italy’s literary and national history. Readers more familiar with the French and German fairy tale traditions will be interested to learn that Giambattista Basile’s literary versions of familiar tales such as Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, Rapunzel, and Hansel and Gretel precede Perrault’s and the Grimms’ versions. However, the initial flowering of literary fairy tales during the Italian Renaissance did not create the same sustained creative process that occurred elsewhere in Europe and they have fallen in and out of vogue in the literary tradition, which has contributed to the lack of Italian fairy tales in the canon. The lack of a comprehensive sampling in Italian fairy tales in English has also impacted this reduced presence in the European fairy tale canon. This anthology intends to expand the traditional European canon by reintroducing Italian fairy tales to English-speaking scholars. This accessible anthology features translations of key Italian fairy tales, ranging from the fourteenth to the twenty-first century. Although organized chronologically, Aarne-Thompson-Uther Index (ATU) tale types are identified in the preface to each fairy tale, as well as compiled in an appendix, which assists researchers in navigating this text.

This is an impressive compilation of Italian fairy tales. Part I begins the collection with an anonymous poem from the oral tradition alongside a novella from the latter fifteenth century to establish the origins of the Italian fairy tale tradition. Part II, one of the longer sections, showcases Giovan Francesco Straparola and Giambattista Basile, the authors who popularized the form in Early Modern Italy and laid the groundwork for literary fairy tales. Part III, aptly subtitled “Sleeping Beauty,” explores range and genre in this period of inconsistent retellings with a play by Carlo Gozzi. Part IV highlights the “golden age” in Italian fairy tales, in which readers may recognize Collodi’s *Pinocchio* (1883). This section also displays the contributions of female writers to the genre. Part V introduces Italo Calvino with excerpts from his monumental work, *Fiabe Italiane* (1956). Part VI closes the anthology by bringing the reader into the contemporary moment, with stories ranging from Gianni Rodari in the post-war period to authors writing in the 1990s and early 2000s. That this section also includes an excerpt of fairy tale scholarship discussing Propp’s functions and Italian fairy-tale storytelling techniques was a pleasant surprise and a worthy addition.

Acknowledging the impossibility of fitting everything desired into an anthology, I would have appreciated more fairy tales in some of the sections. The section lengths vary widely, with some sections over one hundred pages and others ranging from twenty to forty pages. Some of the longest sections feature authors already the most well-known, such as a nearly forty-page excerpt of Collodi’s *Pinocchio*. Since *Pinocchio* is already accessible in English translations and readily available, reducing the length of the excerpt would have enabled the expansion of the shorter sections. While the brevity of Part III makes sense, given the framing that this was a period of reduced output, Part I, on the origins of fairy tale motifs in early Italian literature, is the shortest section in the collection by a wide margin. While the introduction establishes that the focus is

predominately on literary fairy tales, an expanded exploration of links to the oral tradition and the groundwork that Straparola and Basile built upon would have enhanced the chronology that is established throughout. In addition, that would have strengthened the claims about fairy tales and Italian national identity, which is compellingly featured in the introduction but then lapses. Given the focus on building an anthology, the scholarship component set up in the introduction lacks full development, but it opens productive avenues for further research and consideration. As an anthology, this fills a lack in the canon and warrants a place on the shelves with Perrault and the Grimms.

However, the compilation of an anthology is always a delicate balancing act between inclusion and a manageable length. The breadth assembled here is formidable. This is an excellent teaching text with a sampling of fairy tales that provide accessible and engaging touchstones throughout Italy's literary history. No specialized knowledge of fairy tales or fairy tale scholarship is required to benefit from this collection. This anthology is not only for students, however. This is also an effective anthology for researchers who want to explore connections across European literary traditions, with ATU types ranging from the most anthologized to more specialized ones such as ATU 700 "Thumbling," ATU 441 "Hans My Hedgehog," and ATU 311 "Rescue by Sister" with links to ATU 312 "Maiden Killer." The consistent ATU notations make this text simple and efficient to navigate and it builds on existing scholarly collections well. The ability to use this book both for research and as a teaching tool is an asset.

In addition to folklorists, fairy tale scholars, and instructors of folk narrative classes, this book will also be of interest to adaptation scholars. Given the focus on literary retellings, as well as the emphasis on the way this literature grows out of contemporary social changes, this anthology is well poised to facilitate research into adaptation, cultural narratives, and genre. Indeed, some of

the tales included rewrite earlier stories in the anthology and also play with genre and form. Furthermore, this collection is useful for genre scholars, since the development of the fairy tale played out quite differently in Italy than it did in France and Germany, where the genre is more widely studied. Given the focus on national identity in the introduction, this volume also provides material for further study of the Italian literary heritage, the rebuilding of Italy in the post-war era, or a cultural studies approach. Although the collection of stories included is specific to Italy, the emphasis on national identity makes this work relevant to a broader study of interactions between politics and literature or war and literature. This is a thorough and skilled compilation that distills the wide variety of fairy tales, fairy tale motifs, and fairy tale retellings throughout Italian literary history into a complex, varied, and representative assembly of key stories and authors of the Italian fairy tale.

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