

## **The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales**

***Folklore Forum* 37.1 (2007).**

**David Elton Gay**

*Indiana University, School of Continuing Studies*

*The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* is a handy compendium of information on the literary fairy tale covering materials and authors from the medieval to modern world. As the subtitle on the cover of the paperback (which is not given on the title page) makes it clear, this is a companion to the “western fairy tale tradition.” Thus--though there are, for example, entries for some non-Western European literary works such as *The Arabian Nights*, and for Russian and other Slavic literary fairy tales and authors--this companion is very much a companion to the western European and American literary fairy tale, not to literary fairy tales in general. It is arranged, as with other Oxford companions, in a dictionary format, with offset entries in larger type for special topics. And also, as with reference works of this sort, the entries are typically intended as quick surveys of their topic, whether that is a particular book, author, or more general subjects such as “Fantasy Literature and Fairy Tales.” For the most part the entries are well written and will serve as useful entry points for the study of the literary fairy tale and its authors.

One noticeable problem in the book is the inconsistency in bibliographic references. A reference work of this kind is used mostly to find out information and leads on specific topics or writers: having good bibliographic references is thus an especially useful quality. The bibliographies for some of the entries are in fact very good, but those for others are too brief or idiosyncratic, and many, including several of the surveys of national traditions, have no bibliography: for instance, although the entry for Germany has a short bibliography, it is too brief and too oriented towards German language writing. While German scholarship on the literary fairy tale should, of course, be cited, it seems better, as this book will be used primarily by English-speaking readers, to include more of the

available English language research on the topic—and these works could then lead the reader to the voluminous German language scholarship on the topic. There is, on the other hand, no bibliography at all for the entry on Scandinavia. While the resources for Scandinavian folktales and literary fairy tales in English are considerably more limited than those for many other countries, there are nonetheless some very good works that might have been cited. And, though knowledge of Scandinavian languages is more limited in the English-speaking world than knowledge of German, it would also have been good to include some references to the Scandinavian language scholarship on the literary fairy tale in Scandinavia. The entry on Slavic and Baltic countries also lacks a bibliography. (Baltic is here a reference to the region, not to the Baltic languages specifically, and so the entry includes information on Estonian fairy tales.) The English-language scholarship on Slavic and Baltic fairy tales is also somewhat limited, but, even so, there are a number of good books that should have been referenced here.

Though the lack, or limitations, of the bibliographies limit somewhat its usefulness, the breadth of coverage makes this a very good quick reference for the western literary fairy tale. There is no doubt that *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* is a work that anyone with an interest in the literary fairy tale will want to have.