

Lindahl includes lots of different kinds of genres, or different kinds of “stuff,” under the umbrella term “folktale.”

Like the stories themselves, these volumes can be read on many levels, which makes them excellent source material for both undergraduate and graduate folklore and narrative courses, particularly introductory or folk narrative courses. I’ve used these volumes in my own research, and I direct students to them. Reference librarians should be forewarned, however: the volumes almost demand to circulate so that readers can curl up with them in front a fireplace or on a front porch swing for a long, satisfying read.

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Matthew G. Schoenbachler. *Murder and Madness: The Myth of the Kentucky Tragedy*. 2009. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky. 371 pages. ISBN 978-0-8131-2566-4 (hardcover).

This fascinating and highly readable study sheds new light on the nature and aftermath of one of the best known crimes in the early United States: the 1825 murder of Solomon P. Sharp, Kentucky’s attorney general, by Jereboam O. Beauchamp. This gory murder, followed by the killer’s wife’s suicide and his subsequent execution, captured Americans’ interest and inspired the writing of numerous novels and plays. Since the violence began with a rumor that led to legend-telling, the Kentucky Tragedy is a subject of considerable interest to contemporary legend scholars.

Schoenbachler, a history professor at the University of North Alabama, has devoted close attention to the Kentucky Tragedy’s three central documents: the murderer’s confession, the transcript of his trial, and a pamphlet by Dr. Leander Sharp, the brother of the slain attorney general. Examining all of these documents with insight and care, the author tells a compelling story. Although Beauchamp’s confession dramatically states that he killed Sharp to avenge dishonor of his innocent wife, evidence suggests a very different reason for the murder.

The author explains that the Kentucky Tragedy “was nothing but a sad farce unleashed because an unstable and capricious couple were pushed off the deep end by a rumor that the wife had had sex with a black man” (281). The murderer’s wife, Anna Cooke Beauchamp, had stated earlier that Solomon P. Sharp was the father of her stillborn child. Although it is never easy to pinpoint the source of a rumor, it appears that political supporters of Sharp started the rumor that Mrs. Beauchamp’s child’s father had been a black man. In retaliation against this rumor, Beauchamp and his wife prepared a confession in which she

emerged as a wronged, innocent victim of dishonor and he became an impassioned defender of his wife's virtue. This was "a better story than the truth. That was what the people wanted to hear; that was how the Beauchamps, in the end, got away with murder, and that is how, for generations of Americans, madness was made beautiful" (281).

Why did Americans prefer this fabricated story? Schoenbachler helps us understand the impact of sentimental literature of that era, which both Beauchamp and his wife found very appealing. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, sentimental literature "struck a chord for readers far beyond dreamy-eyed adolescents roaming the halls of plantation houses or curled up in drawing rooms; it appealed to many Americans confined to society's margins" (82). This emphasis on social marginality is one of the book's most interesting points. Anna Cooke Beauchamp, who resisted conventional restrictions on women's behavior, enjoyed immersing herself in melodramatic literature, while her husband favored the moral code established by Lord Byron: "retreat[ing] from a larger and corrupt world, very often followed by a beautiful and adoring companion" (86).

Certainly the combination of sex, violence, race, and passionate oratory makes the Kentucky Tragedy a drama of extraordinary intensity. The author eloquently explains the social, cultural, political, and legal factors underlying the melodramatic tale of imperiled virtue that Americans enjoyed for so many years. His book provides a fine model for examining "true crime" embedded in cultural ambiguities.

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Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix. *Fairy Tale Films: Visions of Ambiguity*. 2010. Logan: Utah State University Press. xiii + 263 pages. ISBN: 978-0-87421-781-0 (paperback). Foreword by Jack Zipes.

In this first collection of scholarly essays specifically focused on fairy-tale films, editors Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix trace fairy-tale themed films' porous boundaries and provide a rudimentary map of the enchanted hills and dales, the deep forests and slippery glass mountains, the wishing wells and dizzying whirlpools of fairy-tale inspired cinema. Classic fairy tales have been continuously revised, retold, and revitalized on screen since the beginning of film production. The study of this phenomenon and the processes through which it occurs have until quite recently been neglected as a legitimate field of study. This is curious given the fact that fairy-tale inspired films have been a popular staple in Euro-North American film production since the infancy of cinema. *Fairy Tale Films: Visions of Ambiguity* will thus