

the copyright holders definitely hamper academic investigations. Against this background, Thomas' lively written contribution elaborates on the nearly unsurmountable problems he faced when contacting the estate of Shel Silverstein, which finally led to the author's decision to cancel his research project.

Looking back, this accumulation of chapters gives a rather mixed impression. The arrangement of the chapters seems to be coincidental, since a clear concept of the structure of the volume is not discernible. Apart from this, in discordance with the statements in the preface, most of the chapters only pay lip service to Nodelman's achievements. Exceptions are the contributions by Beveridge, Christensen, Høyrup, and Janson that comprehensively discuss Nodelman's theoretical thoughts in relation to picturebooks and the pleasures of reading children's literature. While some chapters are distinguished by a thorough analysis of individual picturebooks, others create a bridge from picturebook research to related disciplines, such as comic studies, art education, and literacy studies. However, very often, these specific chapters lack a thorough knowledge of current research in these fields. Although the chapters demonstrate that big efforts still have to be made to raise the academic level of picturebook research, at the same time the contributions in this volume touch on promising topics, such as the interfaces between picturebooks and related art forms, the material aspects of picturebooks, and the ideological and cultural messages picturebooks convey.

## References

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## Celtic Origins of “Celtic” Fantasy

**Dimitra Fimi. 2017. *Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children's Fantasy: Idealization, Identity, Ideology*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. XIII, 305 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-55281-5**

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Dimitra Fimi's clear, concise, highly readable *Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children's Fantasy*, published by Palgrave Macmillan as part of its series of Critical Approaches to Children's Literature, is a precious addition to a substantial quantity of theoretical texts on Celtology, fantasy studies and children's literature studies. In one sense, this book explores the reception of “Celtic” myth in contemporary fantasy literature written for children or young adults; and in another it also seeks to build on recent theoretical ideas around the

notion of adaptation and the complex relationships between “original” source and adapted text. Building on work by Lorna Hardwick (*Reception Studies*, 2003), Linda Hutcheon (*A Theory of Adaptation*, 2006), and Brian Attebery (*Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, 2014), Fimi goes beyond mere source criticism and focuses on the profusion of ways in which Irish and Welsh myth have been transmitted, interpreted, and adapted in twentieth-century “Celtic”-inspired fantasy.

*Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children’s Fantasy* addresses questions such as why so many contemporary fantasy authors have turned to “Celtic” myth for inspiration, what stereotypes about the “Celts” they are reproducing or challenging, and how they have reshaped Irish and Welsh mythological texts to fit new contexts and to suit particular readerships. Based primarily on adaptation theory, reception studies, archival research, and interviews with authors, the research presented in Fimi’s book encompasses a corpus of twenty-four contemporary fantasy novels for younger readers, set both in the British Isles and in their diasporas. The book is divided into seven main chapters, which are subdivided into smaller sections with their own subtitles, and followed by two appendices (sections containing a bibliography and index). The first, introductory, chapter is a thoughtful and concise overview of the key issues that underlie this book. With simplicity of tone and conceptual precision, Fimi clarifies the critical and theoretical tools she used to “illuminate some of the most exciting and significant children’s books of the last fifty years” (2). She discusses the complex relationship between myth and fantasy, and issues of power and ideology that are central to the critical tradition of children’s literature. However, her prime concern is with the perceptions of the “Celtic” past each fantasy author embraces. The term “Celtic” has been placed within quotation marks and is interrogated in light of recent debates in Celtic studies, in order to explore the cultural/racial stereotype of the “Celts” developed in the nineteenth century by writers and scholars such as Lady Charlotte Guest, Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats, Ernest Renan, and Matthew Arnold.

The following two chapters that constitute the first part of the book are dedicated to the Irish tradition. Chapter 2 explores two fantasy novels that engage with the so-called Mythological and Ulster Cycles of medieval Irish literature. Pat O’Shea’s *The Hounds of the Mórrígan* (1985) and Kate Thompson’s *The New Policeman* (2005) rewrite and reimagine tales of legendary Irish deities and heroes and are especially concerned with Irish history, culture and landscape. As Fimi points out, “the child-protagonists of both books traverse a parallel Ireland, in which the landscapes they know so well become entwined with their national and cultural ‘Celtic’ heritage” (27). Both fantasies use Irish myth, legend, and folklore to engage with perceptions of Irishness that depend on heritage and tradition, and offer representations of “Celtic” homelands that are associated with rural, pastoral spaces, where older, traditional ways of life are current. The main point Fimi succeeds in making is that O’Shea and Thompson not only bear the influence of their source texts, but were equally influenced by nineteenth and twentieth century romanticised versions of medieval Irish literature.

The third chapter turns to the Irish diaspora, delving into an exploration of two series of books written by American authors and which feature American youngsters as

protagonists. Fimi's analysis of Mary Tannen's *The Wizard Children of Finn* (1981) and *The Lost Legend of Finn* (1982) and Henry Neff's *The Tapestry* series (*The Hound of Rowan*, 2007, *The Second Siege*, 2008, *The Fiend and the Forge*, 2010, *The Maelstrom*, 2012, and *The Red Winter*, 2014) is of great interest; she shows masterfully how Tannen's and Neff's world-building amalgamates pagan motifs and Ireland's Christian tradition. The mythological foundation of both series rests on its adaptation of the life and deeds of "Finn mac Cumhall, the main hero of the Fenian Cycle, and Cúchulain, the legendary hero of the Ulster Cycle" (71), while at the same time relying on nineteenth and early twentieth century popularisers of "Celtic" mythology. The two series of books explored in this chapter are not linked thematically. What unites them is "their concern with ancestry and family history", and "their much stronger focus on the figure of the (male) hero" (71). As Fimi argues, "evocation of mythological heroes in this series both explores and questions the concept of the hero himself" (17), and educates children of the American Irish diaspora about their cultural roots.

Shifting away from the Irish context, the second part of the book turns to Welsh medieval material. Chapter 4 examines Lloyd Alexander's series *The Chronicles of Prydain* (*The Book of Three*, 1964, *The Black Cauldron*, 1965, *The Castle of Llyr*, 1966, *Taran Wanderer*, 1967, and *The High King*, 1968). Here, Fimi focuses on Alexander's "engagement with 'Celticity' and his contribution to the popular understanding of Celticism", and quite convincingly argues that his "construction of the 'Celtic' past, on which he draws freely to create the secondary world of Prydain, is a blend of a number of sources, spanning several centuries" (116). She goes on to identify a number of Alexander's borrowings: the Welsh *Mabinogion* and other early Welsh medieval prose and poetry, dubious misinterpretations of these medieval texts by eighteenth-century scholars such as Edward Davies and Iolo Morganwg, and popular reinterpretations of the Welsh tradition by Sir John Rhÿs, Charles Squire and Robert Graves. Fimi's view of this complex, multi-layered chain of transmission seems somewhat tinged by disapproval, which might be debatable, but she makes some astute points regarding the problematic status of Alexander's source material, especially because his target readership is children and young adults.

Concentrating on *Pedair Cainc y Mabinogi* ("The Four Branches of the Mabinogi"), the four oldest tales in the Welsh *Mabinogion*, as well as the tale of Taliesin, in Chapter 5, Fimi explores three Welsh-themed fantasies: Alan Garner's *The Owl Service* (1967), Jenny Nimmo's *The Magician Trilogy* (*The Snow Spider*, 1986, *Emlyn's Moon*, 1987, and *The Chestnut Soldier*, 1989) and Catherine Fisher's *Darkhenge* (2005). The chapter is analytically very rich and particularly compelling in its attempt to explore the significance of (and the new meanings generated by) Garner's, Nimmo's and Fisher's adaptation of the Fourth Branch. Fimi argues that with these fantasies "a tradition of low fantasy has been created in which the supernatural erupts into the mundane and intrudes into family and/or romantic relationships of teenagers, appropriately expressing the angst and soul-searching of adolescence" (158). As delineated by Farah Mendlesohn, "[i]n intrusion fantasy the fantastic is the bringer of chaos [...]. It takes us out of safety without taking us from our place" (2008: xxi–xxii). Taking into account Mendlesohn's taxonomy, Fimi examines the convoluted ways in which all three fantasies allow the "sheer power of Welsh legend to intrude into the present and compel its reenactment by people in our modern, secular world"

(199). Garner's, Nimmo's and Fisher's mythopoeia in these novels is highly syncretic, and Fimi does an excellent job in unfolding various strands of the fascinating and rich fields they combine: archaeology and medieval literature.

Chapter 6 examines closely Susan Cooper's reimagining of the Arthurian legend in the sequence *The Dark is Rising (Over Sea, Under Stone, 1965, The Dark is Rising, 1973, Greenwitch, 1974, The Grey King, 1975, and Silver on the Tree, 1977)*, and makes the interesting observation that this sequence is particularly appropriate to be considered in this study of "Celtic" myth and Celticity, because Cooper presents us with a specific incarnation of Arthur. Not the Arthur of medieval romances – the king who drew the sword from the stone, but the semi-historical Arthur of the *Historia Brittonum* and the Welsh *Triads*. Fimi then discusses Cooper's use of "Celtic" myth and the "complex tapestry of myth, legend, folklore, history, and archaeology" (219) that form the backbone of the entire sequence. Cooper's use of "Celtic" myth combines Welsh and Irish medieval literature with modern folklore, history, geology, and Gravesian myth-making, and is tied with the entwining of Irish and Welsh landscape. In this case, "the end result is a (re)construction of the past that is both progressive and conservative, both warning against the dangers of nationalism and reproducing old stereotypes" (219). Fimi acknowledges that "these books offer a 'Celtic' pedagogy, and have inspired many readers to delve deeper into their own cultural heritage" (250), but emphasises that the romanticised and backdated presentation of this heritage is part of the ideological role (however unintended) that the series plays.

In the concluding chapter, Fimi sums up and further speculates on the intricate ways in which modern fantasy has recontextualised and reconceptualised "Celtic" myth. Taking a comparative approach, she delineates the common threads that link all the fantasy novels examined in this study, and stresses that "the focus has been not so much on tracing every single motif from Irish or Welsh myth that twentieth-century fantasists have creatively reshaped, but on the new political and ideological meanings this process has generated for a child or teenage readership" (266).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that *Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children's Fantasy* was runner-up for the Katharine Briggs Folklore Award and was shortlisted for the Mythopoeic Scholarship Award in Myth and Fantasy Studies. Clearly, this is a book by an author who is very passionate about her field. Fimi demonstrates extensive knowledge of modern storytelling on mythic themes, and offers fresh insights on almost every page, which she communicates in an eminently readable manner. Thus, this volume is a valuable interrogation of its subject, whether for those requiring an introduction to a fascinating topic, or for those who want to strengthen and enhance existing knowledge.

## Reference

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