

**Seven Miles of Steel Thistles: Reflections on Fairy Tales.** By Katherine Langrish. Carterton, Oxfordshire: Greystones Press, 2016. 292 pp. £12.99 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-91112-204-3

'Fairy tales', writes Katherine Langrish, 'are emotional amplifiers ... [They] work as music does, directly on our feelings' (197). This collection of her essays (plus three poems) illustrates the psychological subtlety and poetic force of her own responses, and will surely guide readers towards similar sensitivity. She can also, on occasion, cast light on relationships of sources and analogues, notably in her discussion of the ballad of 'The Great Selkie of Sule Skerry' (158–87), but her main concern is usually with the deeper themes which she perceives as underlying fairy-tale plots—such themes as time, hunger, death, and rebirth. Alongside these, she can provide sudden sharp insights and speculations which even if unprovable will remain memorable and interesting. For example, in an essay on water spirits she wonders whether the fact that a stick plunged into water will appear broken although it is in fact unharmed could have inspired the prehistoric custom of bending or breaking weapons before throwing them into sacred pools (262). She boldly tackles even the apparently distasteful tale of 'The Juniper Tree', which 'acknowledges terrible evil but ends in hope' and which 'haunts' her (145). Of course, one's own responses may not always match hers; for example, she has never met anyone who likes the tale of 'Bluebeard' (198), whereas I enjoyed it as a child—largely, as I recall, for Sister Anne's recurrent rhyming reply, 'Je vois l'herbe qui verdoit et la route qui poudroit' (I see green grass growing, and on the road dust blowing). We are all subjective readers, and I am grateful to Katherine Langrish for showing how fruitful this can be.

Her writing throughout is elegant, vivid, and frequently witty; there is much pleasure, as well as much information, to be obtained from *Seven Miles of Steel Thistles*.

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**Seven Demon Stories from Medieval Japan.** Translated and with commentary by Noriko T. Reider. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016. xiii + 292 pp. Illus. Glossary of Japanese and Chinese names. \$33.95 (pbk), \$27.95 (e-book). ISBN 978-1-60732-489-8 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-60732-490-4 (e-book)

Demons in Japanese folklore and literature have been the major theme of the academic work of Noriko T. Reider, the author of *Japanese Demon Lore: Oni from Ancient Times to the Present* (2010) and *Tales of the Supernatural in Early Modern Japan: Kaidan, Akinari, Ugetsu Monogatari* (2002). *Seven Demon Stories from Medieval Japan* continues in this vein and is a welcome addition to the growing body of research on folklore themes in traditional East Asian, particularly Japanese, literature.

Dr Reider's work focuses on the *oni* (鬼, daemon) as a motif or character in pre-modern and early modern Japanese literature—as a symbol of 'the other'. This book is a thorough examination of seven different stories which are part of a genre of pre-modern Japanese literature called *otogizōshi* (御伽草子, 'companion literature') in which the supernatural played an important part in the narrative of the story. Collections of these stories were published from the eighteenth century onwards and were often illustrated with wood-block prints. The book is divided into topical sections based on the principal type of non-daemon character, thus *samurai* (two stories), scholars (two stories), women (two stories), and inanimate objects (one story). The section on each story provides a rich background to the actual translation of the tale. There is information about the different printed versions of the tale, including a discussion of picture scrolls with the narrative illustrated by calligraphic art, an explanation of the characters in history (warriors, scholars and bureaucrats, women of status), and references to the story type in classical historical

documents, *Noh* play narratives, and other literary and documentary sources. Where there is a picture scroll of the story, there is a separate and extended examination of the text and pictures of the scroll as part of the overall discussion of the story type. The analysis of these tales is thorough and comprehensive, providing not only the background to the tale and its printed versions, but also demonstrating how the narratives of the oni tales formed a major element of traditional Japanese pictorial art.

The examination of the seven tales is framed by a brief introduction to the genre of otogizōshi tales and the daemon in Japanese literature, and at the end by a conclusion, which draws together the themes about the oni as a narrative character. The second tale is of interest to Koreanists for its similarity to a Korean earth-monster tale, while the sixth tale ('Blossom Princess') is a kind of Cinderella story of interest to the comparative researcher. *Seven Demon Stories* is recommended to researchers in all areas of narrative folklore for the historical comparative information which it provides about East Asian and world folklore.

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**The Rise of the Vampire.** By Erik Butler. London: Reaktion Books, 2013. 175 pp. Illus. £10.00 (pbk). ISBN 978-1-78023-110-5

Like any new book on vampires, Butler's volume—itself following on from the same author's *Metamorphoses of the Vampire in Literature and Film* (2011)—enters an overstocked market catering to a wide range of readers. From the most densely footnoted academic texts to garish pop-up books, studies of the vampire, once confined to the odd second-hand volume by Montague Summers, now jostle for their readership's attention. Although engagingly collusive in style, with endearing flashes of authorial prejudice—'Twilight is about scaring girls into traditional roles and showing them . . . the joys of masochism' (73)—*The Rise of the Vampire* does not seem to add much to what has already been said. Indeed, as a fairly brief synthesis of various earlier studies, its best role might be as an introduction to the simple notion that vampires represent a slippery concept constantly changed by context.

As the title indicates, this offers the history of the vampire not in terms of origins and oral traditions, but as a success story where the cultural codification of the idea leads to an ever-widening dissemination that can encompass radical re-interpretations. Once we know what the vampire is, it can be anything. Mostly, however, it is a creature of page or screen; so inevitably Butler discusses just those texts that any vampire enthusiast will already know. From Polidori to Rice, these works are probably on the reader's bookshelf, so that the plot synopses and lengthy quotations feel redundant. The decision not to retread the well-worn path of chronological development does permit a more thematic grouping, but also means that the same texts turn up in different chapters, with Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1871–72), so suggestively equipped with victim and vampire of the same gender, being described in both introduction and conclusion. The author's dialogue with even the best-known fictional treatments can also be rather slipshod. Do we really know that the marriage of Jonathan and Mina Harker remains unconsummated until after Count Dracula has been despatched, when Stoker clearly has them sharing a bed? In the same novel, while fashionable theorizing may debate whether ambiguities in the presentation of Texan character Quincey Morris cast him as Dracula's undeclared vampiric ally, reference to the reading experience of Stoker's original audience would surely undercut this unlikely sophistication. The inclusion of a noble Texan adventurer more probably reflects the marketable popularity of theatrical American heroes such as Buffalo Bill Cody, and shows the author to have an eye on