

**Brothers and Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales.
Edited by Kate Bernheimer. (Detroit: Wayne State University
Press, 2007. Pp. xx+191, table of contents, contributors, ISBN
0-8143-3267-6, pbk.)**

Jeremey Stoll

Volume 32, Number 2, 2010

Tourisme culturel
Cultural Tourism

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1006314ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)
1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Stoll, J. (2010). Review of [Brothers and Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales. Edited by Kate Bernheimer. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007. Pp. xx+191, table of contents, contributors, ISBN 0-8143-3267-6, pbk.)]. *Ethnologies*, 32(2), 296–298.

Brothers and Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales. Edited by Kate Bernheimer. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007. Pp. xx+191, table of contents, contributors, ISBN 0-8143-3267-6, pbk.)

In the Introduction to *Brothers and Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales*, Kate Bernheimer describes her own experiences with fairy tales, telling how she sympathized first with brothers like Hansel and Blockhead because of an underlying affinity with the underdog. She draws on this affinity in describing the importance of fairy tales, as an underdog among narratives, and in noting that traditions of telling tales continue as long as people continue to return to them in their daily lives. This collection demonstrates just this transformative power of reading and telling fairy and folk tales in providing new insights that preserve traditions. As Maria Tatar writes in the Foreword, the excitement of this experience leads "...to a transformative experience that recognizes the degree to which language – 'strange words' – is the portal to knowledge and to an understanding of what really matters to us" (xx). Both Bernheimer and Tatar provide a strong context for the stories that follow; over the course of this anthology, each contributor demonstrates how and how strongly the words that constitute stories, most especially fairy and folk tales, change us, as readers and writers, and as adults and children.

As an anthology that lies at the intersection of Creative Writing and Fairy Tale Studies, if not Folklore more generally, *Brothers and Beasts* grows out of the previous collection, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favorite Fairy Tales*, after men's voices were pushed out of the original anthology. However, Bernheimer notes the importance of these essays, poems, stories, and otherwise in working together to unsettle prejudices against men, fairy tales, and men's relationships with "feminine" tales. As a result, though, the submission process for this collection posed more problems since male authors were more difficult to get to submit work, due to a range of responses, from embarrassment at the fairy tale roots of their own work, to a sense that the topic was either too big or too personal to put into words. Bernheimer thus highlights the importance of questioning such a bias, although she directly states that this collection will not focus on gender and fairy tales. Instead, *Brothers and Beasts* provides a space for men who love fairy tales to participate in "a diverse dialogue about what

fairy tales mean to our lives” that does not provide easy answers about men and these tales, but instead demonstrates a diversity of approaches.

While the voices in this collection clearly do not provide easy answers for scholars, they do provide a space for men to consider how they live with these tales. Further, the structure pushes the reader to include him or herself in this negotiation, as the chapters are arranged in alphabetical order, with the first few lines provided in the Table of Contents. The stated goal is that readers may pick up wherever they find their own interests lie and create a structure all their own. While this collection tends toward an interest in writing, as demonstrated by Jirí Cêch’s rambling description of his father’s rambling Czech tales, the reader provides the structure for the dialogue. Further, Tatar’s Foreword, Bernheimer’s Introduction, and Jack Zipes’ Afterword provide an additional road map, giving structure and meaning to a potentially confusing diversity of responses.

Although every author in this collection writes on the integration of storytelling and tales in men’s lives, not all of the authors deal explicitly with fairy tales, but each instead begins with the same question: how do I live with storytelling and tales? All twenty-three authors involved thus take very different routes to revealing the importance of fairy tales in their own works and lives. Whereas authors like Alexander Chee and Gregory Maguire mainly reflect on the influence of fairy tales in their writing, many contributors take a more personal approach. From Michael Martone’s personal narrative of relating to his son through fairy tales to Greg Bills’ reflection on relating to his father through “Jack and the Beanstalk,” these more personal contributions highlight the importance of folk and fairy tales to finding meaning in everyday life. Neil Gaiman, among others, pushes this farther when he notes, like Bernheimer, that “Stories are made up by people who make them up. If they work, they get retold. There’s the magic of it” (67). However, others like Johannes Göransson and Norman Lock point out the importance of tales and storytelling more generally, with their own lives as mere examples, and Kieran Suckling even notes the potential for ecological readings of fairy tales.

Despite this broad diversity, including some revisions of existing tales like Jeff Vandermeer’s three versions of “Mash and the Bear,” all of the contributors demonstrate the importance of storytelling for men both as writers and as people. At this crossroads of Creative Writing

and Folklore, *Brothers and Beasts* represents not merely a scholarly exploration of how men relate to fairy tales, but also an illustration of the overlap between creativity in stories and in one's own life.

For both this and the previous collection, submissions focused on the need to express the tenderness and urgency of tale-telling in order to prevent losing that personal connection. As Jack Zipes notes in the Afterword, though, this diversity of personal connections leads to a lack of focus and, in this case, no clear "masculine approach" to fairy tales. However, the contribution of *Brothers and Beasts* is to show how fairy tales continue to play a vibrant role in men's lives, since, as Zipes notes, the fairy tale "cannot thrive without innovation, just as we cannot thrive without innovation" (185). The authors in this collection demonstrate that fairy tales remain alive today in their many, often contradictory relationships with the telling of tales, and further show that each engagement both sustains and transforms reader and tale. This anthology demonstrates how men, as creators and receivers of stories, relate to tales and thus provides a precedent for scholars to more clearly understand how tales remain an active, lived part of day-to-day life.

Jeremey Stoll
Indiana University

Making Witches: Newfoundland Traditions of Spells and Counterspells. By Barbara Rieti. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. Pp. xx + 149, coda, notes, index, ISBN 978-0-7735-3360-8)

Years in the making, *Making Witches: Newfoundland Traditions of Spells and Counterspells* delves into archives and memories to explore an underrepresented aspect of Newfoundland folklore. As the title implies, Rieti sees witches as being "made," having that designation applied by others when circumstances and behavioral anomalies leave them marginalized and thus open to suspicion within the community. She problematises the term "witch" by recognizing that the "quintessentially dyadic scenario" of witch and victim is in actuality "a one person affair" (3) wherein the victim/accuser asserts the power of the mainstream over the marginalized witch, resulting in alterations to perceptions and treatment of the "witch" within the community. While