

Reviews

■ Niels Ingwersen. *The Scandinavian Magic Tale and Narrative Folklore: A Study in Genres, Themes and Sources*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008. Pp. viii, 243, index.

In his recent addition to the growing body of critical work on Scandinavian folk narrative, Niels Ingwersen provides the insight and wisdom that comes from several decades of teaching, thinking, and writing about the narrative traditions of the Scandinavian countries. By his own admission, Ingwersen came late to the game of folkloristics having been trained as a literary theorist and literary historian. He was drawn to the field by a series of developments including the increasing importance of structuralism in the study of literature, the emerging emphasis on the study of genre, and his deepening interest in the literary works of Martin A. Hansen and Hans Christian Andersen. Consequently, he decided to pursue more systematically the study of folk narrative traditions. The current volume is a distillation of his thoughts on four folk narrative genres and their expression in Scandinavia.

Ingwersen's approach is informed by two main approaches: the study of folklore genre and world view as expressed in narrative tradition. Describing one of the first courses that he taught in folklore, Ingwersen notes that "genre and world view became the guiding lights for my course" (14). He was not alone in this burgeoning critical approach to the exploration of the meaning making processes of folklore. This shift toward analysis and interpretation marked a sea change in the largely descriptive approach to folk narrative tradition that had dominated scholarship in the early part of the twentieth century. In a brief survey of folklore scholarship at the beginning of his book, Ingwersen recognizes the importance that Nordic scholars including Lauri Honko and

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Bengt Holbek and American scholars including Alan Dundes and Roger Abrahams played in the development of his thinking.

Unlike many folklorists, Ingwersen has the benefit of considerable insight into literary theory. Accordingly his discussions of genre and interpretation are tempered by readings of theorists ranging from Northrop Frye's thoughts on genre, to Frederic Jameson's comments on the role narrative plays in our understanding of the world, to Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of the carnivalesque, through Jacques Derrida's conception of slippage, and Susan Sontag's interrogation of the problem of interpretation. His engagement with this broad range of theoretical perspectives and his ability to couple these perspectives to his understanding of folk narrative and the myriad meanings produced through the telling, recording, editing, publication, and retelling of stories is impressive. In the course of the book, Ingwersen develops a series of theoretical positions that straddle the significant divide between literary scholarship and folklore. One of the intriguing aspects of Ingwersen's study is his willingness to discuss stories collected, edited, and published by largely romantic nationalist folklorists on the one hand (as in the case of his discussions of the stories published by Asbjørnsen and Moe) and stories that are inspired by folk tradition but are largely part of literary tradition (as in the case of his discussions of the tales of Hans Christian Andersen) on the other hand as largely equivalent. This broad stance allows Ingwersen to present generalized and normative readings for a wide range of folk narratives.

Ingwersen presents a theoretical overview of folk narrative and its interpretation in the first two chapters of the book. His defense of the archive at the end of the first chapter is particularly worth considering, as for several decades many scholars—Nordic scholars among them—have been ready to abandon the archive and the rich narrative traditions recorded by earlier folklorists. To counteract this trend, Ingwersen cites Ulf Palmfelt, who quite accurately notes that "a legend lifted out of its continuous, dynamic, dialectic process ... for instance by a collector writing it down and filing it in an archive, will be like a still photograph. But any scholar ... will be able to squeeze a lot of understanding out of such a photo collection" (16). This recognition of the pressing need to rehabilitate the archive is an important correction to earlier trends in folklore study. Yet Ingwersen has perhaps erred in his own interpretive work by relying on published collections without any meaningful engagement with the archival resources that lie behind those narratives. Consequently, few if any of his readings are informed by an understanding of narratives as the expression of specific storytellers or emerging in specific historical periods. The second chapter of the book is, by his own admission, a hodge-podge

of theoretical “left-overs” (32). The two main considerations in this chapter concern representations of “the other” in various genres, and Bakhtin’s discussion of the topsy-turvy nature of the carnivalesque; he does little to integrate these concepts into his general discussions of genre, limiting his later discussions of the carnivalesque to the fabliau.

Apart from a brief conclusion, the remaining chapters of the book focus on four main folk narrative genres: the magic tale (generally referred to as fairy tale or *Märchen*); the fabliau or *Schwankmärchen*; the legend; and the ballad. Ingwersen is at his best in his discussion of the magic tale and the fabliau. Earlier in the work, he discusses his understanding of the differences between versions and variants of a tale and introduces his idea of “slip-sliding” to account for the fluid nature of variation in folk narrative. In this discussion, he also engages the concept of the dialectic but unfortunately backs away from using this term consistently in citing Linda Dégh’s frequent use of the term (14–15).

In his chapter on magic tales, Ingwersen provides a series of close readings of magic tales that reveal his knowledge of the genre. Although Ingwersen is known mostly as a scholar of Danish literature and folklore, he shifts his geographic focus and concentrates his discussions on the tales of the Norwegians Asbjørnsen and Moe. In the opening pages of the chapter, he proposes that one of his major ambitions “is to study the nature of individual genres and the world-views they promote, as well as the dynamics between them” (32). The subsequent close readings of magic tales succeed well in presenting a series of interpretations that explore the world view presented in each story and in the genre as a whole. The only caution here is that these readings are overly normative. Since the individual storyteller is largely a theoretical construct in his discussions, Ingwersen is unable to situate any of these stories in the larger context of the individual lives of specific tellers. This approach is reminiscent of the super-organic theory of folklore in which aspects of tradition have “lives” outside of the people who create and perpetuate them. The approach also fundamentally separates Ingwersen from the work of recent Nordic folklorists—most notably Bengt Holbek—that aims for an understanding of stories of named individuals in the context of specific historical periods. Apart from Holbek, this emphasis on the individual and individual repertoire is perhaps best known from the work of Carl-Herman Tillhagen, Anniki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, Juha Pentikäinen, Reimund Kvideland, Gun Herranen, Anna-Leena Siikala, Marisa Rey-Henningsen, and Jens Henrik Koudal.

Instead of considering the relationship between teller and told in this chapter, Ingwersen emphasizes a largely structural reading of the tales and provides his own notion of a “move” (a term already defined by Holbek in

his *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*). For Ingerwsen, the “move” is a “series of functions from initial disharmony or lack to test failed or reward” (39). As with Holbek, Ingwersen extrapolates the “move” from Vladimir Propp’s influential *Morphology of the Folktale*. In Ingwersen’s model, the magic tale proceeds in a series of primary and secondary moves toward a largely positive resolution. He likens this positive resolution to the *Bildungsroman*, a conclusion that is interesting but hardly revolutionary. His decision to use an already well-defined concept in the study of the magic tale—the “move”—is unfortunate as it will undoubtedly lead to confusion among students and researchers alike.

Ingwersen shifts his attention in the second chapter from the magic tale to the darker and more cynical fabliau or *Schwankmärchen*. In his broad reading of these stories, Ingwersen emphasizes the carnivalesque and concludes by proposing that, in these stories, “ethics is defunct” (105). The chapter includes a wide range of stories, from a discussion of H. C. Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” to Knut Liestøl’s “The Master Thief.” One of the most interesting tales discussed in this chapter is Asbjørnsen and Moe’s “Big Per and Little Per.” Ingwersen traces how the increasingly psychopathic actions of Little Per in Asbjørnsen and Moe are attenuated in later literary retellings, particularly in the tales of H. C. Andersen. It might have been productive to explore some of the recordings of this tale that can be found in Evald Tang Kristensen’s large collection of Danish folklore as those variants are closely linked to individual storytellers about whom quite a bit is known.

Ingwersen’s chapter on legend is his least successful. His reliance on small, heavily edited collections that elide the identity of the storytellers forces him into presenting normative readings of legends that fail to capture the dialectic nature of legend tradition. Although he discusses the ambiguity inherent in legend, his discussion skates across the surface of some fairly significant issues. Ingwersen is correct in noting that “legend is an exploration, endless and ongoing, into the unknown” (139). All the same, this characterization ignores the frequent contradictions that emerge in performance between different narrators; these contradictions in the telling are closely related to the world view of the individual narrator or the negotiation of a group’s world view and not the “world view” of the genre. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how a genre can have a world view. Legend is largely deployed rhetorically by storytellers in politically charged situations—these situations need not be related to national politics and instead focus frequently on local politics. It would be more accurate to propose a dialectic model of the legend, one where the understanding of the unknown is part of a negotiation of cultural ideology.

Ingwersen is back on more solid footing in his discussion of ballad tradition. His interpretation of ballads as “perfect, or nearly perfect, works of art” is tinged by the romanticism of the early Nordic folklore collectors. His observation, however, that “in Scandinavia, tragedy is relegated to the ballad,” is worth considering (164). Interestingly, this may be countermanded by a Danish author that Ingwersen does not include in his study, namely Karen Blixen. Her short story, “Sorrow Acre,” takes up the issue of tragedy and comedy directly. In that story, she includes a conversation between a manor lord and his nephew that situates comedy largely in classical mythology and tragedy in Nordic mythology. This largely philosophical discussion is set against the tragic story of a peasant woman who agrees to a deeply unjust task in order to save her son from execution. An ideological focal point of the story is the arrogance of the manor lord who proposes that his intervention in real tragedy would render it comic. Importantly, this front story is based on a widely attested legend in Danish tradition—not a ballad. At least for Blixen, the concept of tragedy is closely related to legend. Despite this surprising oversight, Ingwersen’s proposal “to chart the tragic rhythm of a few ballads” through five “stages” is an engaging exercise and one that sheds considerable light on the contours of several well-known ballads from Scandinavian tradition. Unfortunately, the approach is highly idiosyncratic and may not be extensible to other ballads in the various traditions of the Nordic region.

Ingwersen’s concluding chapter explores Susan Sontag’s essay “Against Interpretation” (1961) and offers the interesting idea that analysis does not necessarily fall into the interpretive trap that Sontag avers. Ingwersen’s project of providing an overview of his own interpretive stance on a limited scope of Nordic folk expression is largely successful, and his incorporation of anecdotes from his own teaching enlivens his discussions. The otherwise handsome volume is marred by several production flaws. The printing is reminiscent of the photo-reduction process of dissertation reprints, and the cover photographs do not reproduce well on cloth; given the sophistication of desktop word processing programs and self publishing sites, there is no reason for a book not to be presented in a more professional manner. The manuscript is also replete with spelling errors—the copy editor seems to have relied on a spell check program rather than spending a little extra time to do an actual read-through of the text. These minor quibbles aside, the volume is an excellent overview of Ingwersen’s ideas concerning folk narrative. He includes a useful series of bibliographies and a short, helpful index. The book will be a welcome supplement to undergraduate courses on Scandinavian folklore and nineteenth century Scandinavian literature.

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■ Gregg Bucken-Knapp. *Defending the Swedish Model: Social Democrats, Trade Unions, and Labor Migration Policy Reform*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009. Pp. 179.

Defending the Swedish Model explores a controversial issue in Sweden's social democratic welfare history: how does a universal welfare state manage a multi-ethnic labor force? The preferences of the most critical actors from the trade unions, and employers to the major political parties towards labor migration policy are empirically documented in a thorough analysis of this pressing issue.

Gregg Bucken-Knapp effectively captures the interaction of domestic and international politics that structure the direction of Sweden's labor market policy reforms. In one instance described by the author, Sweden anticipates a labor shortage and political parties and interest groups advance proposals to promote a flexible supply of labor. In another instance after 2005, the expanded number of EU member-states and anticipated influx of new migrant labor raised issues about who should come and under what circumstances. The policy response targeted "specific categories of migrants ... highly skilled workers, seasonal workers, intra-corporate transferees, and remunerated trainee" (159).

Throughout Sweden's labor policy reform periods (1960–2005), the Trade Union Confederation (LO) played a critical role as gatekeeper. During the 1970s, LO turned down requests for work permits that would have created a "non-Nordic workforce" (34). In later years, special concerns regarding unemployment, the regulation new types of laborers, and the integration refugees into the labor market became more politically salient, and LO continued to define the terms and resist reform. Compared to other societies, the threshold for entry into the Swedish labor force has been particularly high.

As societies throughout Europe debate how to regulate legal and illegal migration as well as the desired influx of third-country nationals, the Swedish case should be better understood because of the way this two-level game has played out. Swedes can no longer retain a "national" model of welfare capitalism since the government pooled its sovereignty within the EU. However, as the author effectively argues, the Swedes are also participating in key decision-making roles with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) to structure the ways the European Union collectively manages these questions—whether it does so as a collective or reserves power to the member-states.

For scholars looking for an in-depth policy analysis of the relative power of actors within the Swedish version of "democratic corporatism" (Katzenstein 1985), the role of labor in Bucken-Knapp's analysis appears