Book (1892) shows that Andrew Lang, for one, was entirely sold on the notion that the Grimm Brothers wrote down tales told by ‘old women’, just as the belief that the Grimms spent their time collecting stories in the fields and farms of Hesse remains widespread today. Children’s literature and fairy tale scholars may know better, but a concise ‘new history’ that traces literary connections will convince those who do not. One fundamental question, however, remains unanswered: is there really no evidence for the pre-literary existence of fairy tales as defined in this book, and no cross-fertilisation of oral and literary fairy tale traditions?

Bottigheimer claims that there has been no recent, systematic re-examination of fairy tales’ origins and dissemination by anthropologists or folklorists. Yet surely the literary-oral interface has always operated in two directions, so that folk elements or folktales inevitably became constituents of authored tales just as literary influences determined the stories told by many of the Grimms’ sources. Can oral and literary traditions be separated with any reliability? Alida Assmann’s (1983) concept of ‘written folklore’ highlights the fluidity of written versions of well-known stories, often called ‘retellings’, that links their constant renewal and reconstruction to storytelling. Stories move back and forth between voice and page, with old and new media joining the loop in recent times. Authors borrow, and it is hard to imagine that even the very first city-oriented authors of fairy tales did not mine existing oral traditions. What role, for example, did extant Cinderella-type tales told by storytellers across the world play in the composition of the first written versions in Europe? Bottigheimer is absolutely right to draw attention to the primacy of the written word in the creation of the modern bourgeois fairy tale – but that cannot be the full story.

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WORKS CITED


This critically astute exploration of the ways in which death functions in literature produced for adolescents both begins and ends with a quotation from French historian Philippe Ariès: ‘death loves to be represented’. Yet despite the frequent occurrence of death in young adult fiction, until now very little critical attention has been paid to the ideological representation of this complex subject. Kathryn James’s book adeptly fills this void, offering readers a critical examination of the role that death plays in young adult fiction in a manner that, as she herself
suggests in the conclusion, provides ‘complex insights, not only into a culture’s attitudes towards death, but also into the systems of order, governance, value and meaning of the culture itself’ (177). The result is a truly fascinating study of the cultural and social meanings of death in Western society and the various ways in which adolescent literature seeks to enculturate its readers by privileging particular ideological understandings of death and dying.

Death, as James regularly acknowledges, is ‘a difficult topic to pin down’. However, she has done a remarkably good job in doing just this and the scope of her project is very clearly defined. Rather than including literature produced for children of all ages, the focus is young adult fiction. Further, death is examined only in relation to gender and sexuality. Accordingly, the trope of woman and death, the eroticisation of death and the constructions of masculinity and femininity associated with these representations constitute the study’s primary thematic concerns. Elisabeth Bronfen’s pioneering study of femininity and death, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992) is a strong influence on James, who contends that many young adult texts are implicitly patriarchal because of the anxiety they exhibit in relation to powerful female teen subjects. There is also a tendency to punish female characters whose gender and sexual behaviour is socially transgressive. At the same time, however, death can be a marker of growth when it is used to restore the subjectivity of others. Although largely reliant on Australian texts for its corpus, James correctly asserts that ‘what I have to say goes beyond the specificity of “local” criticism and thus has broad applicability to other Anglophone adolescent fictions’ (5).

Tracing the function of death across various genres, James devotes chapters to historical fiction, realism and fantasy (drawing on John Stephens’ work regarding the conventions which define each of these genres). In an extension of her discussion about death and fantasy, James concludes with a specific analysis of the role of death in post-disaster fiction—a subgenre which lends itself to an investigation of death because ‘the future societies imagined in post-disaster fictions are built upon the ashes of others and thus engage at a fundamental level with notions of life and death’ (154). Chapter Two, which deals with death in Australian historical fiction, is the outstanding chapter of the entire book. Exploring the officially endorsed set of cultural images that exist in Australia regarding death, this chapter looks at the depiction of death in Australia as masculine, middle class and private or interior—and at some of the strategies used in more recent young adult fiction to broaden this experience of death to include the previously marginalised voices of Aborigines and women.

The only fault of this otherwise excellent critical study lies in the formulation and position of Chapter One. Providing readers with an adept introduction to the subject of death and how it has been viewed by leading philosophers, historians and scholars (such as Michel Foucault, Philippe Ariès, Georges Bataille, Jean Baudrillard, Sigmund Freud and Julia Kristeva), this chapter nevertheless fails to relate this discussion of the differing social attitudes to death to adolescent fiction. While this methodology of first identifying a particular theoretical position, then proceeding with relevant textual analysis is common in literary criticism, an
approach that sought to integrate textual analysis with theory would result in a much more cohesive project. Aside from this minor objection, *Death, Gender and Sexuality in Contemporary Adolescent Literature* makes an important contribution to the field of children’s literature criticism and deserves to be applauded for its lucid, thoughtful and, at times, quite provocative critique of the role of death in fiction produced for adolescent readers.

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The subject of this publication is popularity, and how the popularity of literature for children is created, shifts and alters over time. M.O. Grenby's lucid and beautifully written introduction, together with the physical entity of the volume—heavy, lovely to handle, tasteful design, high-quality paper—inspires immediate confidence in the credibility of both the project and the product. Carefully planned to assist the reader, with footnotes rather than endnotes, an introduction to each section and a list for further reading, it commends itself as a valuable addition to the academic study of children’s literature. Through its first three sections, the structure is balanced.

‘Old Tales Retold’, the first section, covers such material as chapbooks, Robin Hood stories, Madame d’Aulnoy and pantomime. An impressive group of writers, including Grenby himself, Kevin Carpenter, Brian Alderson, George Speaight and David Blamires—some names well-known and a few less familiar—contribute thorough, well-developed studies, making this section an essential reference for students interested in the historical development and classifications of the genre. In Section Two, ‘Forgotten Favourites’, Julia Briggs, Dennis Butts, Elaine Lomax and Judy Simons address the popularity of four writers of fiction: Barbara Hofland, Hesba Stretton, Angela Brazil and G.A. Henty. The work of these writers, once extraordinarily popular, has now passed into the mists of time or become culturally less relevant. Again, the quality of the criticism and scholarship is high. The focus remains firmly on the creation, maintenance and decay of popularity, considering why these texts were popular in their time, rather than assessing their literary merit. Section three, ‘Popular Instruction, Popularity Imposed’, with contributions from Kimberley Reynolds, Aileen Fyfe and Gillian Avery, considers the role of literature as reward and instruction, giving appropriate attention to information texts, such as the works of Arthur Mee, and to ways in which books as prizes created both a market for and a dissemination of works of a particular kind, leading to a link, of either acceptance or resistance, between reading and morality.

To this point, the volume is excellent. The stable of contributors is impressive, the standard of writing and scholarship high, and the purpose of