

Leland, Charles Godfrey. *The Hundred Riddles of the Fairy Bellaria*. Jack Zipes, ed. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2018. Introduction. Note on the Text. Author and Editor's Biographical. 7–169. \$24.95 (hardcover). ISBN: 978-1-5179-0608-5

Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903) was an American writer, journalist, and folklorist. In popular culture, he became famous for his humorous book titled *Hans Breitmann's Ballads* (1869), which depicted the adventures of the main character in an unusual German-English dialect. The book was a success and continued to be well liked in America and England through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Humorous fiction was not Leland's only talent. His interests lay in many fields such as classical and foreign languages, philosophy, myths and beliefs, and magic and the occult. For this reason, the academic community looked upon him with scorn for having "too many irons in the fire" (p. 7). Nevertheless, Leland's contribution to folklore studies cannot be overlooked as he also wrote extensively about the English Romany – *The English Gypsies* (1873), *English Gypsy Songs* (1875), *The Gypsies* (1882), *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune-Telling* (1891), – Native Americans – *The Algonquin Legends* (1884), and Italian culture – *Etruscan-Roman Remains in Popular Tradition* (1893), *Legends of Florence* (1895-96), *Aradia, or the Gospel of the Witches* (1899). However, the book which I present in this review is quite different from Leland's previous work. Edited by Jack D. Zipes (b. 1937), well-known folklorist, academic, and fairytale specialist, it introduces the readers to one of Leland's lesser-known literary work: *The Hundred Riddles of the Fairy Bellaria* (1892).

*The Hundred Riddles of the Fairy Bellaria* tells the story of a very wise fairy named Bellaria who falls in love with a king whom she eventually marries. One day, a cruel and evil king named Ruggero marches with his army and takes their kingdom. Ruggero loved wisdom and cleverness and once vowed that he would never harm anyone who could outwit him. Hearing that the queen was extraordinarily clever, Ruggero decides to test her wisdom by having her answer one hundred riddles. Should she answer them all, he would depart in peace and leave her and her family unharmed. In the case that she could not complete the task imposed to her, she and her husband would be executed. Bellaria agrees but demands instead a life for a life: should she answer all the riddles, Ruggero would be executed. Thinking that no one could guess his many riddles, the angry king agrees with the queen.

The rest of the story essentially consists of the many riddles which Bellaria answers. Every riddle is introduced by Ruggero's ritual introduction: "Off with your head, oh Queen, unless you answer me this riddle: [...]" As the riddles unfold the Queen's answers become more and more complex creating individual narratives framed within the main story, thus resembling the structure of the canonical collection of tales *One Thousand and One Nights*. Through her stories, the fairy mocks the king, teaches him lessons and makes him reflect on her philosophical words. The rhythm and beauty of Bellaria's answers sharply

contrast with Ruggero's simplistic and repetitive introduction. They show her superiority in wit and in poetry but also create dynamism to an overall repetitive story. Only at the end does the fairy change her answer from a poetic form to a text in prose with which the story ends.

The Hundred Riddles was first published in London by T. Fisher Unwin. Surprisingly, this 2018 edition by the University of Minnesota Press is only the second one available. According to Zipes, this situation is due to Leland scholars' lack of interest in the book which, he finds, brings together Leland's elements of research on Etruscan mythology and personal beliefs about women's strength and intelligence, as expressed in his work *The Alternate Sex or The Female Intellect in Man, and The Masculine in Woman* (1904). Unfortunately, Zipes does not offer more explanation or examples for the readers who are not familiar with Leland's work to support his argument.

The Hundred Riddles is a light story, easy to read, and has all the elements of a classical fairy tale: a wise hero, a tyrant oppressor, some magic, a quest (the one hundred riddles challenge), and the success of good over evil. While it remains repetitive, it is still an interesting read. However, the reader who first tries to guess the riddles (I did!) will soon become discouraged by the complexity of the answers and the impossibility to guess them correctly. In this way, Leland's work keeps the reader in a very passive role; which can be frustrating at times.

Like many of Leland other works, *The Hundred Riddles* also includes Leland's own engravings; 102 in total, including the title page. Each riddle has its own illustration and this visual addition also contributes to the reader's interest. However, Zipes' claim that they were made in the Arts and Crafts movement's style remains dubious to me. The cover of the book certainly shares similarities to the work of William Morris in its use of interlaced vines, animals, and title framing but most of the illustrations inside the book are not as refined. It seems to me that the reader would get a better sense of Leland's interest in the Arts and Crafts movement by comparing the covers he produced for his different studies in folklore. To my knowledge, no study of his artistic style and approach has been undertaken and it certainly would have been interesting to know more about it.

To conclude, I believe Zipes enthusiasm in *The Hundred Riddles* might come from his own specialty in fairy tales, but one can only applaud at this second long-awaited new edition. As a folklorist, I found this book particularly interesting, but mostly because of Leland's prose and because of his general background and research interests. The author's incredible life story and career path is something that could have been more developed, especially for the non-specialists. But overall, the book succeeded in sparking my interest in Charles Leland and left me hungry for more of his work. For this, one can say to Zipes, "bravo!"

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