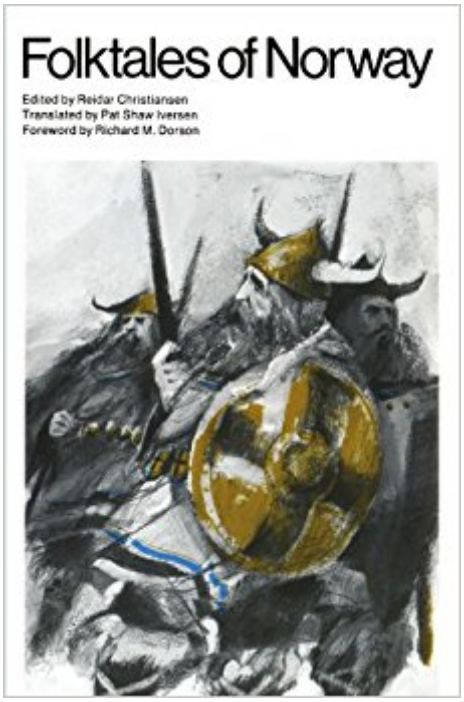
Folktales Of Norway (Folktales Of The World)



Synopsis

Often lacking the clear episodic structure of folktales about talking animals and magic objects, legends grow from retellings of personal experiences. Christiansen isolated some seventy-seven legend types, and many of these are represented here in absorbing stories of St. Olaf, hidden treasures, witches, and spirits of the air, water, and earth. The ugly, massively strong, but slow-witted trolls are familiar to English-speaking readers. Less well-known, but the subject of an enormous number of legends, are the more manlike yet sinister "huldre-folk" who live in houses and try to woo human girls. These tales reflect the wildness of Norway, its mountains, forests, lakes, and sea, and the stalwart character of its sparse population."The translation is excellent, retaining the traditional Norwegian style . . . the tales themselves will also appeal to the interested layman."Ã¢â ¬â •Library Journal

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Seems like the definitive readily available book for serious treatment of Norway’s folktales. None of the dumb-it-down treacle that is so often pitched at kids, even includes notes re where the tale was collected, how common such tales are, etc. Not necessarily tales that will amuse your 4-year old, but an interesting window into what interested folk in earlier times. Highly recommended.

I had to buy this book for a college class. It was an okay book if you are super into folk tales it is definitely the one for you! I thought it was very interesting and it did have some good stories to read

throughout the pages. Overall I would read it more in depth for another class but I would not read it just to read it.

I've owned a copy of this 1964 publication for quite a while; my paperback copy is of the 1973 third printing. It is a personal favorite among a shelf-full of folklore volumes. I no longer remember whether it was an impulse purchase, or I needed it for one or another undergraduate or graduate class, and if so whether it was in Scandinavian Literature, or Germanic Mythology, or Folklore Studies.And that should give you a clue that has used guesswork in rating it as suitable for 4 to 8 year olds. (Yes, I've reported / complained about it; maybe, against precedent, this will change soon.)Not that there aren't stories in here quite suitable for reading to young children; there are some. But the book is heavily weighted with historical and theoretical introductions, and elaborate notes to the stories, many of which are either aimed at adults, or chosen to illustrate traditional beliefs as much as to entertain. The volume was an early entry in the University of Chicago Press "Folktales of the World" series, well-produced volumes which featured forewords by the distinguished American folklorist Richard Dorson, and were generally edited by specialists from the nations covered. (It was officially number 5; but number 1, Kurt Ranke's "Folktales of Germany," did not actually appear until 1966!) Unfortunately, most other volumes in the series seem to be out of print; "Folktales of Ireland" (Sean O'Sullivan) may be the only other exception.The editor of this volume, Reidar Christiansen, an important Norwegian folklorist, drew on both earlier published collections and archival sources to illustrate a wide variety of genres of oral narrative in Norwegian tradition. He includes: Historical Legends (#1-#11, with sub-divisions); Legends About Magic and Witchcraft (#12-#20); Legends About Ghosts, the Human Soul, and Shapeshifting (#21-#23, again with sub-divisions); Legends About Spirits of the Sea, Lakes, and Rivers (#24-#30); Legends About Sprits of the Air (#31-#32); Legends About Spirits of Forest and Mountain (#33-#60); Legends About Household Spirits (#61-#66); and, finally, Fictional Folktales (#67-#82). The translation, by Pat Shaw Iversen, is, with some minor exceptions, extremely readable.Some pieces are anecdotes about supernatural beings, illuminating, but uninspiring if read in bulk for amusement. Some of the legends are extremely well told, and nicely localized in terms of Norwegian landscapes. The concluding portion is made up of first-rate wonder tales, mainly Norwegian variants of international fairy tales, told with unusual complexity and skill, which are closest to what the age rating would suggest.It is a rewarding book for adults, and probably for teenagers, and perhaps late pre-teens; anyone buying it for small children will not be so happy with it, with the exception of those comfortable with retelling the tales, or with drawing inspiration from them for your own. (Which is great, if you happen to be a

small-scale Tolkien...!)Some Norwegian folktales, although rarely identified as such, are surprisingly well known. According to my own completely unscientific survey, those which are remembered and recognized by their origin tend to be a couple of anecdotes about Trolls, bridges, and Billy-Goats, which is a shame, given the actual variety and sophistication of the tradition. (Of course, some of the best may tend to be lumped in with their fairly close counterparts elsewhere.) Those who enjoy the present work may wish to turn elsewhere for more stories; the seriously curious will look for more examples of beliefs and legends.Unhappily, what one will generally find are either retellings or shorter selections, more or less obviously chosen for children, and often directly or indirectly based on existing translations; I will mention one partial exception below. The most nearly comparable collection with which I am familiar is an old George W. Dasent translation, drawn directly from a great nineteenth-century collection by P.C. Asbjornsen and Jorgen Moe, "Norske Folke Eventyr." (First edition 1843-44, expanded edition 1852; also given as *Folke-eventyr* and *Folkeeventyr.* My apologies for anglicizing the spelling of Norwegian names at this point, and most other places; I'm not going to trust that everyone else will read this in Unicode!)The Norwegian original is a long-established classic in its native country. Dasent's translation (1858; expanded 1859; third edition 1888) was known to, and cited by, Tolkien, under its original title of "Popular Tales from the Norse." It was available for decades in an illustrated version from Dover Publications, under the title "East o' the Sun & West o' the Moon: Fifty-nine Norwegian Folk Tales from the Collection of Peter Christen AsbjÃƒÆ'Ã Â¸rnsen and JÃƒÆ'Ã Â¸rgen Moe, With 77 illustrations by Erik Werenskiold, Theodor Kittelsen and Others" (1970). The illustrations in the Dover edition -- taken from a 1936 three-volume edition of "Samlede Eventyr" [Collected Fairy Tales] -- varied from almost ethnographic (compare photographs in Janice S. Stewart's "The Folk Arts of Norway" [1953, 1972; third edition, 1999]), to whimsical, to weird, many displaying some combination of these traits.The strengths and weaknesses, and distinct character, of the Christiansen/Iversen volume can be illustrated by a brief comparison.The Victorian translation, stripped by Dover of some of its original (racist, and otherwise quite obsolete) introductory material, has many pieces not found in "Folktales of Norway," but there is overlap -- over a dozen instances. In some particulars, Dasent's translation is better than Iversen's renderings of the same passages. For example, in one story (#53a), Iversen has a white animal referred to in the title and in a critical moment as a "tabby," which, of course, implies a patterned coat, and in context makes no sense. In this case, Dasent had a more general colloquial term in the text, and a properly incorrect word in his story title. (Sorry to be opaque, but why spoil the tale -- which includes a species identification error beyond even Pepe LePew! -- for those who haven't read it?)Some differences may be in part due to variations in the underlying

Norwegian texts (subjected to varying treatment since they were taken down in regional dialects), others to Iversen’s attempts to provide completely new renderings. On the whole, Iversen’s judgment seems sound. "The Red Knight" is much more intelligible a designation than Dasent’s "Ritter Red," which, by incorporating an un-translated title (that looks like a loan-word from German), makes it sound like a personal name.The nineteenth-century collection is obviously weighted very heavily toward the (Norwegian) title category of "eventyr" -- essentially the familiar "fairy tales" of princesses and unlikely heroes, talking animals and magical helpers, known throughout the Old World. They are rendered in a style closer to Icelandic sagas than, say, to Perrault, or even the Grimms, and, although not treated in a strictly "scientific" manner by their collectors/editors, are utterly distinct from Hans Christian Andersen’s contemporary inventions.Some of the stories translated by Dasent incidentally include distinctly Norwegian material, but this is comparatively scarce -- ironic, given Dasent’s interest in England’s supposed shared Nordic heritage and the genius of the "Germanic race." The contents are mainly variants of widely distributed tale-types. It is in part for the localized legends and specifically Norwegian versions of the supernatural (which Asbjornsen, among others, had published separately) that ""Folktales of Norway" is so valuable.Iversen’s more modern English *might* make stories in the final section easier for some readers. On the whole, Dasent’s translation, although a bit old-fashioned, does lend itself to reading to children -- if the adult is familiar with the story first, and exercises a little judgment. (Dasent warned against some items, especially two he moved to the end when re-ordering the collection; he also seems to have omitted at least one tale. My list of possible problems would be completely different.) More advanced young readers, with appetites sharpened by, for example, Tolkien, Lewis, Lloyd Alexander, or Rowling, might want to tackle it for themselves -- which I would consider less likely, although hardly impossible, with "Folktales of Norway."Unhappily, the 400-plus page Dover edition, with its wonderful Norwegian illustrations, has been supplanted by a less expensive, but much less satisfactory, short selection ("Thrift Edition"), under the same main title, in the Dover catalogue. The full version can still be found on , at this writing, with a little searching; it is, and should continue to be, available used. But the hardcover edition to which currently has it linked is one of the more dramatically abridged modern editions (a new illustrated version of what looks like one story!). If it were not for the possibility of confusion among these different books, I might have urged ordering both Dasent and Christiansen -- but then, I’m used to thinking of the 1970s prices of the copies in front of me! -- or suggesting them both to your local library.As it is, the next best alternative to the Dasent translation currently (and unambiguously) in print is the much shorter (192 pages) "Norwegian Folktales" in The Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library (1982), thirty-five

tales selected from the work of Asbjornsen and Moe, edited by Iversen (again) and Carl Norman. This also includes illustrations by Werenskiold and Kittelsen: the introduction is on "The Norwegian Folk Tales and Their Illustrators." As previously suggested, it is at least packaged as suitable for children; for what it is worth, rates it for ages 9-12. I am perhaps too severe a judge of its merits; my choice of stories for re-translation would have been rather different, and I have sometimes wondered if some tales were selected over others because of more attractive illustrations available for them.(Speaking of illustrations again, I have long tried to ignore the pseudo-Viking stereotypes on the cover of "Folktales of Norway" -- accepting the art was an unusually bad decision by the University of Chicago Press.)Those with an informed interest in traditional oral literatures will certainly want to know "Folktales of Norway," and at least for now it seems to be quite readily available.

Skip Ibsen. The high point of Norwegian litterature is AsbjÃƒÆ'Ã Â¸rnsen and Moe's folk tales. Just like American litterature started with Mark Twant, truly Norwegian litterature started with AsbjÃƒÆ'Ã Â¸rnsen and Moe, and it is thanks to them we have what other peoples lack, a popular manner of speech that does not lack dignity. And if you want to get acquainted with the Norwegian way of thinking in the nineteenth century and earlier, AsbjÃƒÆ'Ã Â¸rnsen and Moe is the closest thing we have to a poll.Ferdinand Linthoe NÃƒÆ'Ã Â¦shagen.

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