

Ceallaigh S. MacCath-Moran
csm@csmaccath.com | csmaccath@gmail.com
902.982.1053

"THE BELT AND THE NECKLACE" INTRODUCTION

C.S. MacCath

"The Belt and the Necklace" is adapted from a German tale of magic by the same name, collected from oral tradition by a civil servant and folklore enthusiast named Franz Xaver von Schönwerth in the nineteenth century. While Schönwerth was inspired by the work of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, he didn't rework or sanitize the folk narratives he collected as the Grimm brothers did. So we have in them a more reliable record of the tales country folk, labourers, and servants were telling at the time, and it's clear that many of these were transcribed exactly as they were told to our thoughtful civil servant. Among the folk narratives he collected were five hundred fairy tales, which he deposited in the Regensburg municipal archive along with his other papers, where they were lost to time until 2009 when a writer, poet, and storyteller named Erika Eichenseer discovered

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them there. Many of these tales are now available in *The Turnip Princess and Other Newly Discovered Fairy Tales*, and much to the delight of this folklore scholar and playwright, they haven't been heavily adapted in books, television, or film.

Tales of magic are short narratives passed down from oral traditions that weave elements of the supernatural into the everyday lives of people. These tales are infused with moral lessons, and they're resolved by rewarding characters who behave morally according to the story world's standards and punishing characters who do not. This might come as a surprise to those who believe fairy tales have happy endings, but it's worth asking ourselves who gets those happy endings and why. Folklore scholars answer that question by engaging with the social, political, and ideological contexts of folk narrative creation and performance. This helps us understand why tales of magic brand some behaviours good and others wicked, how morality shifts between tale variations over time, what national, religious, and other ideological trends influence the tale's audiences, and where the tale fits among other stories of the period. That information is useful for writers too, because it illuminates differences between historical and modern contexts, which helps us better adapt these tales for

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contemporary audiences.

However, careful readers of "The Belt and the Necklace" will find the moral of the tale missing along with its associated reward and punishment, so I thought it important to reintroduce them in my theatrical adaptation. Given that the Odyssey Theatre's *Other Path Podcast* series combines the aesthetic of traditional folk tales with contemporary settings and themes, another important task was to bring "The Belt and the Necklace" into the twenty-first century. I combined these two tasks by giving some thought to the heroine's plight and the ways it might be adapted for modern audiences, which also gave me insight into the kinds of villains who might oppose her. The mermaids in the tale were of interest to me as well. Because they're the source of transformative magic in "The Belt and the Necklace," they also needed to be a source of reward and punishment, and for that they needed motivation. So I gave them a good one. As for the magic itself, it changes a bit from the original tale to my theatrical adaptation, but I endeavoured to remain true to its spirit.

I won't spoil the play by giving you any details, but I *will* write that I was delighted to adapt a fairy tale I doubt any modern storyteller has touched. Having been a part of both theatrical workshops for the production, I can also

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write that the cast is stellar. It was a privilege to watch them bring my adaptation of an old, wonderful tale to life, and I can't wait for you to hear it.