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## Collecting the Empire: Andrew Lang's Fairy Books (1889–1910)

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### Abstract

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books (1889–1910) not only contain implicit and explicit references to colonialism but also exhibit qualities similar to other nineteenth-century collections. Lang's collection offers opportunities to engage with the comparative method of folklore, addresses theories of cultural evolution, and collects narratives from various countries and cultures, thereby allowing the narratives to be possessed and displayed. Recognizing the colonizing presence implicit in the process of editing international narratives into a collection designed for a British readership, this article demonstrates that individual stories such as "The Glass Axe" acquire further signification when analyzed, first, alongside another narrative in the collection, "The Magic Mirror," and, second, when examined within the context of the Fairy Book collection as a whole.

SARA HINES

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In 1889 Andrew Lang edited a volume of fairy tales titled *The Blue Fairy Book*, published by Longmans, Green, and Company. Because of the success of this book, Longmans published eleven subsequent volumes, all identified as "Edited by Andrew Lang," with the final volume, *The Lilac Fairy Book*, appearing in 1910. The Fairy Books never had an official comprehensive title, and yet through the repetition of the title structure (*The Red Fairy Book*, *The Olive Fairy Book*, etc.), the uniform size and shape of the books, the single illustrator and editor, and finally the use of color to convey a rainbow, the twelve books function as a collection.

In the preface to *The Crimson Fairy Book* (1903), Lang offers an analogy. He writes, "A sense of literary honesty compels the Editor to keep repeating that he is the Editor, and not the author of the Fairy Tales, just as a distinguished man of science is only the Editor, not the Author of Nature" (v). In this quotation Lang ostensibly sets the parameters of his role in the production of the Fairy Books by reminding readers that the tales included in the collection have not been written, or authored, but are instead relics from previous generations. "Like nature," Lang continues, "popular tales are too vast to be the creation of a single modern mind. The Editor's business is to hunt for collections of these stories" (v). The analogy indicates that, like a scientist, Lang's role in the production of the Fairy Books is one of observer and collector and also that the tales are specimens to be examined. To collect an object, or story, effectively dislocates it from its environment. Once the story is collected it is no

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