



The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of her Own Making

Books Reviewed:

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New to Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This tale, as you might guess from the antique mode of its title (and its chapter headings), owes its inspiration to the journeys to fairyland, in some shape or other, that had their heyday in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this a girl named September is whisked away from her Omaha home by the Green Wind, pointedly not a tornado, for an initially unspecified adventure in Fairyland, a realm ruled by a wicked Marquess who has replaced a lovely and considerate Queen. As in its literary antecedents, the tale involves quests, tests of courage and resolve, weird and wonderful places and events, and meetings with extraordinary characters, including Death who (pace Bergman) makes clear that chess is not his preferred game. Valente has a rich imagination and has certainly created remarkable characters, like A-Through-L, September's closest companion, who has memorised the first part of an encyclopaedia, and, to all appearances is merely a Wyvern, yet believes his father was a library, hence he is a Wyverary.

The book has attracted considerable enthusiasm since it first appeared online: its instalments being 'crowd funded' by its readers. As an online text, it won the Andre Norton Award in the U.S. in 2009 for 'superior achievement in science fiction and fantasy writing for young adults'; and, since its publication, has made the New York Times bestseller list. However, such homage to past masters is fraught with difficulties that Valente doesn't always avoid. There is the temptation to signal over the heads of your younger readers to the adults who may know the earlier books better. There is also the temptation to try to be cleverer and stranger than what has gone before: and, if you are talking about Carroll and Baum, to name just two creators of such classic texts, that's a tall order. Here I don't feel the narrative line is quite strong enough nor the individual incidents and characters intriguing or surprising enough to stand the comparisons that the book invites. Fantasy fiction enthusiasts may disagree.

[Read our Q&A with Catherynne M. Valente](#) [4]

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