The Devil is a Myth:

The Dynamic Uses of the Folkloresque within *Hellboy* and *Fables*

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Abstract

This thesis engages with the theoretical concept of the folkloresque, which considers the way in which folklore, folkloric tropes, motifs, and fuzzy allusion are integrated into popular culture materials to differing ends. Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* and Bill Willingham's *Fables* are considered in the vein of the folkloresque. As comics as a medium has different attributes form prose or other folkloresque products, this thesis considers the content, characters, prose, and artwork within the two series.

Hellboy uses the folkloresque categories of integration and portrayal. The series uses legends and folktales to different ends in a number of different narrative arcs. *Fables* plays with the folkloresque category of parody to expand upon readers' preconceived ideas of folktale characters. Intertextuality plays heavily into folkloresque texts, adding differing dimensions depending on the reader's already-known knowledge of folklore and this dynamic influence is examined.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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1. Introduction and Overview

"I enjoy Hellboy and Fables, because they take the stories and themes we know and love and are comfortable with and shift our paradigm. Heroes are flawed, villains are misunderstood, how would someone like x be interpreted through today's notions of good and bad" (Anonymous Survey Respondent 2018, 1.26.).

Michael Foster defines the folkloresque as "popular culture's own (emic) perception and performance of folklore. That is, the term refers to creative, often commercial products or texts that give the impression to the consumer that they derive directly from existing folkloric traditions" (Foster 2016, 5). He then describes the three meanings of the folkloresque: "(1) that an item (or element of an item) is in the 'style' of folklore; (2) that it is connected to something beyond/before itself, to some tradition or folkloric source existing outside the popular culture context; (3) that the product itself is potentially of folkloric value, connected in some way with processes of folklore creation and transmission" (Foster 2016, 5-6).

Comics as a medium has a long history of censorship, enacted by North American comics publishers to avoid state censorship, beginning with the Comics Code Authority of 1954. The Comics Code was inspired by the backlash resulting from the argument that reading comics was harmful to children put forward by Frederic Wertham in his book *Seduction of the Innocent*. This perception of comics as a "low art" held firm from the middle of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries; the medium retains a tarnished reputation in the eyes of some elitist critics. It has taken comics a long time to finally overcome that undeserved stigma.

As Henry John Pratt writes, "the creators of comics have tended to come from backgrounds of low social and economic status. Many of the pioneers in comics were immigrants to the United States or children of immigrants, and often Jewish (at a time when this put one at significant disadvantage). Others were women, homosexuals, or African Americans… the lack of respect typically afford to comics artists has also provided job opportunities for talented by marginalized individuals" (Pratt 2009, 100). Comics have a storied history in giving voices to different groups of people while affording them connections to people like them.

This thesis interrogates the ways that contemporary comics are able to use character, whether they are unique or originate in oral tradition, to create works of different types of the folkloresque. Both *Hellboy*, created by Mike Mignola, and *Fables,* created by Bill Willingham, exhibit unique properties of the various categories of the folkloresque: integration, portrayal, and parody. These two series were chosen because of their high status in the comics community. The goal of this thesis is to expand on the ways that the folkloresque can be used in different media, in this case, comic books. The unique nature of comic books, with the mixture of prose and art, creates folkloresque products different from film or pure prose. The exclusive qualities of comics, especially in the rising acceptance of the medium through the proliferation of superhero films and continuing success of e-book and physical texts, grants folklorists many avenues to take when considering the folkloresque.

As with folklore, the medium of comics has a long history of many storytellers telling and retelling stories of the same characters, especially within *Hellboy* and

Fables—writers must understand what a character stands for and is known for, but they are able to rethink the characters' experiences and put them into situations that they (the writers) want to explore. This storytelling process allows for treading new ground and giving readers new and interesting content, but with so many differing story lines and alternate universes, it can make the superhero genre medium hard to approach for new readers, especially considering the complicated nature of superhero comics and their many different arcs and universes.

Comics studies is a newer, dynamic field, with its scholarship building day by day. Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985) and *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (2008) along with Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1994) and *Making Comics* (2006) form the bedrock of my academic understanding of comics. Although these two authors' texts are cited frequently as the foundational texts of comics studies and both men are/were comics creators themselves, the scholarship in comics studies is being influenced by many different disciplines, such as Jungian theory, English literature, art theory, and many others. Charles Hatfield writes, "Despite the important differences among its participating disciplines, comics studies constitute a field of shared activity. Comics scholars from disparate fields do share a sense that they have something in common" (Hatfield 2010, 3). He adds:

> Despite their disciplinary differences, comics scholars in
> the academy, at least in today's North American context,
> share what is widely perceived to be a common set of
> "circumstances." These circumstances include comics'
> improving yet still disputed (or at least still unsure)
> intellectual status; the growth of cultural studies and
> interdisciplinary work in academia in general, which have

provided a supportive context; and a desire for comics scholars scattered across disciplines to recognize and commune with each other (Hatfield 2010, 4).

The interdisciplinary nature of the comics studies field aligns with folkloristics' history of picking and choosing scholarship from other disciplines to help develop our own. My particular focus within comics studies hinges on form—I am most interested in the characteristics particular to comics—like the gutter, panels, art style, color use, panel borders, page layout, etc., and how they exhibit or contribute to a folkloresque tone.

In the first issue of the journal *Inks: The Journal of the Comics Studies Society*, the roundtable discussion "Comics Professionals on Comics Studies" (McGurk 2017) illustrates the varying opinions on theory, the relationship between comics artists and scholars, and the need to move forward with current scholarship. One professional, Whitney Taylor, says, "I think it's easy for scholars to assign intention to artists' work, but this can be inaccurate or overblown. I've had meaning assigned to work I've done that has assumed that I put deep intellectual thought and planning into something, when really it was an intuitive, emotional act that lead to that result" (McGurk 2017, 105). This roundtable discussion shows that the theorizing of comics must be taken on a case by case basis, utilizing a clear theoretical framework to avoid the "Death of the Author" concept, but also to understand that in some cases comics *are* personal and should be regarded as such.

In the case of my research, an audience's response to comic work is invaluable in understanding personal experiences with comics and what value readers gain from

comics. This audience viewpoint is helpful in getting a broader understanding of how readers reflect on intertextual folklore-inspired media. The folkloresque plays with the idea of the authentic—characters, folktales, and legends are reused in varying ways to varying ends, which fit into a readers' intertextual understanding of these folkloresque products.

The authenticity of folklore has long been at the forefront of folklore discourse and many different terms have been theorized to combat what constitutes "real" folklore and what does not. Folklorism/folklorismus, fakelore, and now the folkloresque have approached the varying folkloristic attitudes toward cultural artifacts that don't come directly from oral tradition, but contain some characteristics of folklore. Folklorism can be understood as occurring when "(1) a phenomenon which is examined in an ethnological study has ceased to be part of its authentic environment; (2) therefore, its original function changes; (3) having lost its local identity, the phenomenon acquires a broader character, such as regional identity" (Stanonik 1996, 72). Hermann Bausinger (1986), in his article "Toward a Critique of Folklorism Criticism," attempted to grapple with the ways recontextualizations of folklore can be used politically. The concept of folklorism allows us to look at how traditions can shift out of their original context and change meanings. Linda Degh's research on the American-Hungarian revitalization movement (Degh 1984), Mihaly Sárkány's research on shifting Hungarian wedding customs (Hann, Sárkány, and Skalník 2005), and Michael Sozan's work with the changing work ethic of Hungary (Sozan 1977) all helped to illuminate the negative ways in which folklorism can be used by state powers.

According to Regina Bendix: "The term folklorismus has been applied to visually and aurally striking or aesthetically pleasing folk materials, such as costume, festive performance, music, and art (but also foods) that lend themselves to being extracted from their initial contexts and put to new uses for different, often larger audiences" (Bendix 2010, 537). This popularizing of folk dress, performance, etc., brought to light the question of "authentic" transmission and the importance of context in folkloristics. Foster writes, "the folkloresque represents a simultaneous broadening and refinement—and continuation—of the discourses created by these early pioneers" (Foster 2016, 10).

Richard Dorson, in *Folklore and Fakelore*, states "The folklorist sets himself as a primary task separating out the folktales from the literary writings, the folksongs from the art songs, the folk art from the fine art" (Dorson 1976, 11). The concept of folklorism also points to this idea of folklore being out of context, but fused with mass culture to create a sense of nostalgia (Newall 1987). Dorson's labeling of collections of folktales and the like as being "fakelore" gave folklorists the opportunity to consider their ideas of authenticity within the field. Regina Bendix, in her book *In Search of Authenticity,* states, "Dorson could still claim that unadultered texts collected in the field, and then transcribed and printed, constituted authentic testimonies. Author texts, even when inspired by folkloric themes but composed by 'literates,' were fake for him. If it was not text, social class, or anonymous composition that made something genuine folklore, but the process and context in which the text came into being, then authenticity, too, had to reside elsewhere" (Bendix 1997, 194). The discourse on fakelore intended to limit folklore scholarship, but inevitably led to more questions arising about what should constitute

folklore scholarship. The move to look at popular culture representations of folklore gives folklorists the ability to look outside what is perceived as "authentic" folklore and examine how creators and audiences alike view folklore.

Foster writes "At what point, one might ask, does the individual artistic voice overshadow traditional material? Certainly, there is a continuum between these two modes of expression" (Foster 2016, 15). Dorson's hard line on "authentic" folklore can be placed on a continuum of folklore scholarship, with the folkloresque being on the opposite end. Foster and Tolbert's scholarship allows a shift in focus from direct transmission via oral tradition toward the global, intertextual, commercially successful utilization in popular culture projects. The folkloresque is not limited to works of fiction like comics, films, or prose, but extends into the realm of humor (see Blank and Kelley's articles in Foster and Tolbert 2016), restaurants like the Cracker Barrel (Foster 2016, 55), and can be used to examine other types of cultural products.

My analysis of *Fables*, created by Bill Willingham, focuses on the use of parody as a category of the folkloresque, which is described by Michael Dylan Foster as "a seemingly intentional appropriation of folkloric motifs and structures for the purpose of caricature or similar modes of critical commentary" (Foster 2016, 18). *Fables* centers around the lives of a group of fairy tale characters who have been driven from their ancestral lands into New York City. The mature nature of these comics, which are published by Vertigo, an imprint of DC comics that prints stories for mature audiences, compared to Disney's use of fairy tales in their many family friendly films, can reveal readers' sensibilities with regard to folklore, as well as the act of repurposing and

recreating. I chose *Fables* as it is one of the clearest examples of the use of the folkloresque, especially considering its use of well-known folktale characters.

My analysis of *Hellboy*, created by Mike Mignola, will focus on its use of legend and its use of folkloresque integration and portrayal. The integrative category of the folkloresque is described as "how popular cultural producers integrate or stitch together folkloric motifs and forms to make a product that appears to be inspired directly by one or more specific traditions. The folkloresque of this mode works through the mechanisms of allusion and pastiche" (Foster 2016, 15). *Hellboy* also exists within the popular culture tradition of the occult detective (i.e., the protagonists of series such as *the X-Files*). Hellboy's occupational journeys around the world allow Mignola to use stories, images, and characters from different traditions to new and varied ends. Mark Fenster, in his book *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in America Culture* says on this subject: "[occult detective structuring works] as a recurring explanatory and organizational logic, playing an integral role in the cause and effect that propel a narrative forward, and enabling a text to develop a particular set of oppositions to and challenges for the central protagonist" (Fenster 1999, 109). In *Hellboy*, Mignola utilizes another category of the folkloresque, portrayal, which, Foster writes, "reminds us not of what folklore is but of the popular culture *image* of what folklore is" (Foster 2016,17).

1.1. Method

Hellboy and *Fables* both exhibit important differences from one another and unique qualities of the folkloresque. In this master's thesis I will be looking at the

content, characters, and plot of each comic series. I will also look at the comics' artwork, as the combination of written word and images is what separates comics from other readable media.

For this thesis, I administered an anonymous survey to *Fables* and *Hellboy* fandom groups via reddit (subreddits: Mignolaverse, Hellboy, Fables, and The Wolf Among Us) and through Tumblr tags (Hellboy, Fables, comics, The Wolf Among Us, comics, folklore, folkloresque, Vertigo). I chose to keep this survey anonymous for a number of reasons: 1) to gain broad, general feelings on why readers are attracted to these works, 2) to avoid broadening the scope beyond manageability, and 3) as a comic reader myself, and a woman, I wanted readers to be able to share their experiences without any perceived gatekeeping because of their sex or gender identity. The full survey responses can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

As there is much to consider in the study of the folkloresque, my use of anonymous surveys was to gain some opening ideas of how the readers of these comics series understand these comics, why they enjoy them, and ask if they see folkloresque comics in a different light from, say, superhero comics. The results of the survey are included in the appendix. I chose to contrast folkloresque comics with superhero comics simply because of the great amount of superhero comics, their current financial success, and the simple fact that many comics readers either read or have crossed paths with superhero comics at some point. My point of contrasting the two was not to create a value system between superhero comics and folkloresque comics, but to use superhero as a common point of reference.

Readers' conceptions of folklore, which are developed by these popular culture products, are important for folklorists to grapple with. This is important because folkloresque scholarship has yet to address audience experiences with these types of work. I've created a false dichotomy between superhero comics and folkloresque comics within this survey to see if readers see a perceived higher value in folkloresque comics. I chose superhero comics for comparison with folkloresque comics because of their wide dissemination—most comic readers have at least read some superhero comics, whether that was only as a starting point in their comic reading experience or a current interest. Superhero comics, whatever critiques one may have of them, are predominantly the most successful, commercially, of any comic genre.

Many readers of both *Hellboy* and *Fables* cited a connection to folklore as one reason for their interest in these comics. I would posit that a similar intertextual connection exists for superhero comics, as readers of, say, a volume of *Deadpool* or *The Unbeatable Squirrel Girl*. Readers of various Marvel comics typically bring with them an intertextual knowledge of the Marvel universe, in much the same way that readers of folkloresque comics possess an intertextual knowledge of popularized Western folklore. These implicit understandings of the intertextual relationships of these types of comics point to a desire for readers to approach these comics with a range of lore and knowledge about folkloric characters and texts. Because the worldbuilding involved with *Fables* and *Hellboy* has its perceived origins in oral tradition, readers may have an increased sense of "authenticity" regarding these reconfigured tales.

The first chapter focuses on *Hellboy*, discussing his folkloresque qualities as a character, Mignola's use of contemporary legend in regard to Rasputin and Nazi Germany, and the folkloresque categories of integration and portrayal. I posit that another type of integration exists—veiled integration—that functions with subtle differences from straight-forward integration. Conspiracy also sits at the forefront of *Hellboy*, when considering the nature of the B.P.R.D. and its duty to the American people. The B.P.R.D. stands for "Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defense" and is a classified unit of specialized agents within the United States' government; Hellboy is a main member, along with Abe Sapien, Liz Sherman, George the Homunculus, and many others. Finally, I look at how the creators uniquely use the medium of comics to produce the folkloresque.

The second chapter concentrates on *Fables* and its connection to the parody category of the folkloresque. As *Fables'* main focus throughout the series is the reutilization of folktale characters, intertextuality and Willingham's changes to the characters will be the main focus of the chapter. The characters analyzed within this chapter are Snow White, Bluebeard, Bigby Wolf, and Baba Yaga/Little Red Riding Hood. Functionally, *Fables* creates contemporary versions of these well-known folktale characters by playing with readers' expectations and developing them in a modern setting.

The first half of the third chapter looks at the images of *Hellboy*, breaking down the static nature of the series (Bukatman 2016), how the covers of *Hellboy* add to the folkloresque nature of the series, and how the influences of the grotesque and chiaroscuro

art styles contribute to the tone of the folkloresque within *Hellboy*. The second half of the third chapter centers on *Fables'* comic art; it discusses the use of stylized panel borders in telling stories within the series, how the series has had a number of guest artists doing stand-alone tales, and its film noir influence.

This thesis is only a first foray into the discussion of folkloresque within comics. This medium deserves equal representation by scholars in folkloristics, considering its tumultuous history as a perceived "low" artform and because of its current success in the mainstream through superhero movies, the flourishing of many independent comics publishers (Image, etc.), and the proliferation of the graphic novel. *Hellboy* and *Fables* are only two folkloresque series within the medium and many more will need be approached in order to understand the unique characteristics of the folkloresque within comics.

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2. Legend and Conspiracy: the Folkloresque within Mike Mignola's *Hellboy*

The word folklore has been long been semantically charged—hanging between an academic understanding and the common person's understanding. It is telling that authors, writers, artists, poets, and many creatively-minded artists continue to bring folklore—its legends, folktales, songs, art—into their work. This reworking of folklore into something new has long been a facet of popular culture, but it is only recently that folklorists have approached it, trying to understand it better.

In 2016, Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert set out to engage with the popular culture understanding of folklore in their book *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*. They describe this concept of the folkloresque as "popular culture's own (emic) perception and performance of folklore" (Foster 2016, 5). The idea is that through the folkloresque, the consumer gains the impression that popular culture uses of folklore are derived directly from actual folkloric traditions.

Mike Mignola's *Hellboy* stands out as a comic series that has showcased, repurposed, and created new folklore and mythologies time and time again. This series, spread out between twelve volumes and ending in the crescendo of *Hellboy in Hell*, is an excellent example to use to better understand the folkloresque and its utility, which is the focus of this chapter. *Hellboy* not only exists on the page of the comic but has migrated into both live action films by Guillermo del Toro and animation. In 2019 a reboot starring David Harbour as Hellboy uses the arc of "The Wild Hunt."

The adapted nature of the Hellboy franchise makes it ripe for an even more complicated understanding of the folkloresque—not all the details from the comics are used in the movies and vice versa, which inevitably affects the consumers' understanding of the franchise and its characters. These warring details add a layer of ambiguity as to what is canon, and fans, no doubt, grapple with these variations.

2.1. About *Hellboy*

The creator of Hellboy, Mike Mignola, published the first Hellboy comic in 1994. His art style and writing are heavily influenced by Jack Kirby, one of the creative forces behind many of the superheroes of Marvel comics. Jack Kirby, a Jewish American, with Joe Simon created Captain American in response to the rise of Nazism and fascism during the second world war, and it is clear that Mignola's work explores this same theme. Mignola uses these overwhelming forces of evil—i.e. Nazism—and conspiracy surrounding them, as a place of exploration. Mignola's interest in folklore comes from childhood reading of both collections of folklore and also literary depictions of folkloric characters, such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (NPR 2004). Folklore is one of Mignola's greatest inspirations, as he directly cites the folktale or character from folklore in narrative captions before some of his short stories. There are a few stories where he does not explicitly cite a source, but the name of the chapter or short can reveal its original inspiration.

This direct citing of the source before his rendition of the story creates an interesting dynamic of transmission. Mignola cites various books of collected folklore,

but he also sometimes uses the name of story—guiding readers to look for a version to read on their own. It is as if Mignola is telling his listeners about the traditional story but priming them for the departure from it. It also creates a dynamic relationship between him and the audience through the story, as it gives his readers the ability to find the original story and in turn come with a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play within Mignola's version. Mignola's openness allow for his readers to be informed in a way that other authors do not.

2.2. Folkloresque Meanings

In the "Introduction" to *The Folkloresque*, Foster articulates three meanings of the term folkloresque: "(1) that an item (or element of an item) is in the 'style' of folklore; (2) that it is connected to something beyond/before itself, to some tradition or folkloric source existing outside the popular culture context; and (3) that the product itself is potentially of folkloric value, connected in some way with processes of folklore creation and transmission" (Foster 2016, 6). All three of these meanings are present and easily identifiable in Hellboy.

In chapter two of *Hellboy: Seed of Destruction*, which is the first volume of the series, we're given an establishing shot of a great old Victorian house sitting starkly in the middle of nowhere. The windows glow yellow with the sun just having set on the horizon. Hellboy's narration gives readers an idea of what this house is. ["The house is called Cavendish Hall. It was built about 150 fifty years ago by the first of the Cavendish family to come to America. Back then it stood on a high promontory commanding a wide

view of the lake and all the land around as far as the horizon. These days it's well on its way to having a swimming pool for a basement. It's been sinking since the day it was finished."] (Brackets indicate panel start and end.) The house looms between this top panel and four at the bottom that are much smaller, spaced out sporadically from one another, giving readers a chance to pause and view the house like a legend-tripper would if they were easing by an old house on a far-off lane.

Hellboy's dry but comedic tone suits the telling of a legend. ["Oh, did I mention there's supposed to be a **curse** on the place? Not the house itself. The land. The lake."] The following panel juts out beneath the previous one, like a side note. ["The local Indians kept well clear of this area for a couple of thousand years before the Cavendish family arrived."] The following panel speaks in what Elliott Oring describes as "a rhetoric of truth" (Oring 2008, 129). ["You may think curses are just so much eyewash, but I don't. I've seen too much that makes me think otherwise."] The next panel is the smallest and sits below the following panel on a pitch-black section of the full-page depiction of the house, aptly within the road. ["Way too much."] The reader is given a solemn warning from Hellboy that sets them up for the entire series—all those tales and legends you've heard about? They're true, and Hellboy has probably had experience dealing with them himself.

In Oring's article "Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth," he delineates the types of language used by tellers of legends—tropes falling into the categories of ethos, logos, and pathos. The purpose of this language is "the deployment of a rhetoric to allay doubts and foil challenges" (Oring 2008, 129). Hellboy's use of language falls under the ethos

category, specifically with his authoritative account of his experiences. Oring describes the outcome of such an authoritative voice: "The more risk a narrator takes in telling a tale, the more likely the story would be perceived as true" (Oring 2008, 133). Mignola's adept use of this rhetoric of truth early on in Hellboy's many adventures both legitimizes the story and gives readers an expectation on what is to come from the series.

This chapter is the beginning of Hellboy, with the previous chapter being entirely exposition, and so Mignola is using this folkloric telling of the story to set the tone as he wills the readers to see if Hellboy is a liar; although considering his status as a 7-foot-tall red-skinned demon, there should be some anticipation of departure from reality. This sequence illustrates the first meaning articulated within the folkloresque: that it is in the "style" of folklore, specifically in this case by presenting the narration in the style of an oral performance.

In volume three, *Hellboy: The Chained Coffin and Others*, Mike Mignola uses the Irish folktale "Teig O'Kane and the Corpse" (whose title he directly cites in the preface to the story) in his story "The Corpse," directly connecting it to the Irish folkloric tradition, and exhibiting the second meaning of the folkloresque. Mignola uses the source citation before the short to connect his tale with the folktale. It is not a direct adaptation but rather the tale is repurposed as a way to move the plot forward. In this story, Hellboy has been called to a small cottage in Ireland to help a woman who claims that her baby is a changeling—which comes from an Irish folk belief (Glassie 1997, 144). Hellboy uses iron tongs—which are known in oral tradition to have power over faeries— to lift up the baby, and the baby cries out "STOP! STOP! It burrrrrrns! Oh, you're killin' me!" which

showcases the baby's altered state and proves that the changeling legend is true—and that Hellboy's on the right track to finding where the real baby has been taken.

The changeling runs out of the cottage, and Hellboy hastens after it but loses its trail. Hellboy stumbles across three men dragging a corpse to be buried. He asks them for their help in finding the baby, and they strike a deal that if Hellboy finds a good Christian burial spot for the corpse by dawn, that they'll get him the baby. Immediately, when he takes the corpse on his back, the corpse hugs around his neck and shoulders tightly, and it is clear to readers that this is no average, everyday corpse. Tam O'Clannie, the name of the corpse, ends up guiding Hellboy through multiple churches, where he tries to find a place to bury Tam, but fails. The changeling from before, Gruagach attempts to stall Hellboy, calling out to Jenny Greenteeth, a river hag from English folklore. She unlocks a chest that releases Grom, a massive anthropomorphic pig that Gruagach commands to kill Hellboy, but to no avail. Hellboy uses a Christian charm to defeat the pig and eventually gets to the final church to bury Tam in time.

The pointing corpse not only appears in *The Chained Coffin and Others*, but also appears in Guillermo del Toro's film 2004 adaptation, *Hellboy*. Laura O'Connor, in her 2010 essay "The Corpse on Hellboy's Back: Translating a Graphic Image," points out the transmedial nature and what it provides for readers/viewers.

> For Hellboy fans, the corpse's cameo appearance makes visible the palimpsestic relationship between the Irish corpse of the comic book and the Russian corpse of the movie, and their pleasure in the movie is increased by the play between both texts and by the recognition of the adaptation as an adaptation. Introducing the presence of the folktale… in the palimpsest enhances that pleasure…because it makes the pointing-

corpse fabula apprehensible in the light of the respective media and
culture moments of the three adaptations (O'Connor 2010, 542).

Not only is the tale originally repurposed in the graphic novel by Mignola, but

repurposed again for the movie, adding another layer of understanding for consumers of

the books and movies. Del Toro's nod to Mignola's tale serves to create a feeling of

cultural capital for readers of the graphic novels, potentially establishing a feeling of

superiority, or at least of knowing some secret or inside joke that sets them apart from the

average movie-goer.

Mignola adeptly uses folktales and characters from folklore, but not always to the

same end. In "The Corpse," Mignola uses the tale of the corpse needing to be buried,

going to three churches, and then being buried by the hero, but it is interlaced within the

tale of the changeling, Gruagach. Not only is a story of the changeling and the corpse

used, but Jenny Greenteeth works her way into the tale as well; she is a figure who comes

from British oral tradition, as the fairy lore he uses comes from Irish oral tradition. This

combination of differing traditions in one tale exhibits Foster's folkloresque category

called integration, which will be detailed at length.

The third meaning of the folkloresque, "that the product itself is potentially of

folkloric value, connected in some way with processes of folklore creation and

transmission" (Foster 2016, 6), is less evident than the first two meanings, but present,

nonetheless. Foster describes the distinction between popular culture and folk culture:

"the processes and products of folklore tend to be oriented toward *informal, unofficial,*

noncommercial, noninstitutional modes of production, transmission and consumption.…

the processes and products of folklore are rarely created with official, institutional, or commercial sanction and mass sales or major profit in mind" (Foster 2016, 7). Although I was unable to find any information on gross profit on Hellboy graphic novels and single comic issues, I was able to find information on the box office sales on the two Guillermo del Toro films that will put this franchise's history of commercialism into perspective. I also found information on Dark Horse, Hellboy's publisher—which makes around fifteen million dollars annually (via owler.com).

The worldwide box office amount for the Guillermo del Toro Hellboy films combined came out to $260,212,021. When one googles "Hellboy Merch," Dark Horse's official merchandise store comes up at the top, revealing four pages of different Hellboy merchandise: action figures, t-shirts, Ouija boards, hats, Christmas ornaments, and so much more. Not to mention that Hellboy has spawned many limited run posters from printing companies such as Mondo; these posters, and other limited run Hellboy items are frequently posted in online marketplaces such as eBay and sold at a large profit. This is all to say that one aspect of the Hellboy franchise is its commercial success, regardless of its value as a text incorporating the folkloresque.

It should also be mentioned that Hellboy is a widely acclaimed work. Mike Mignola himself has received upwards of thirty awards over a twenty-five-year period. This includes nine Eisner awards, awards which can be equated to the Academy Awards of the comics industry. The franchise is clearly multi-faceted. It is a product of capitalism—and has been wildly profitable, but it is also viewed by individuals in the comic industry as being an important text, considering its award-winning history.

Although Hellboy is a commercial success, it does have folkloresque creation and transmission at its core. Mignola, in an NPR radio broadcast titled "Intersections: Hellboy Meets Dracula," discusses his relationship with folklore. He says, "That, I really like. That I've gotten to go in and expand on folklore, blur those lines. That's one of the beauties of folklore, that it is usually an oral tradition and it does change as time goes along, so I just feel like I'm doing my little part." Mignola acknowledges the oral nature of folklore, but he discusses the important part of the folkloresque—that these texts, although not technically folklore, can change reader's understanding of folklore and the tales that are used. Regardless of where a tale is coming from, commercial or not, it will influence the reader's experience with and add a depth of how these tales are delivered and reconciled in the reader's mind. Mignola does something interesting as an author, specifically for the comic shorts in a volume; at the start of the short, he will describe where inspiration for the story came from—whether it be from a folktale or literary work. The dynamic of Mignola showcasing his muse for a particular story allows readers to feel completely filled in on what they can "get" out of story. This intertextuality that Mignola brings to his work mirrors the personality that a narrator brings to a performance of oral tradition—it *is* Mignola who is giving readers more information, unlike a narrator in a novel dictated through the first-person point of view.

Mignola, much like an oral storyteller of traditional folklore, uses Hellboy, who although is not related to any folkloric tradition explicitly, as a figure crossing from tale to tale, similar to the Jack folktale character. Hellboy's legendary status comes from his origin but also his experience with the folkloresque plot scenarios he ends up in—

whether they are folkloric in origin or not. This is a complicated web of understanding, but it is important to acknowledge that these many levels are important to understanding a text with embedded folkloresque meanings. This web of understanding within a text can be understood in Foster's terms: "Intertextuality, transtextuality, mediation, and multiplatform functionality suggest that genres of expression are temporary and porous, and that transmission and transformation between them is the rule rather than the exception" (Foster 2016, 26). This web includes all of these different ways of textual expression and transmission and is vitally important in understanding the folkloresque, since it is the combination of these strategies that creates the folkloresque itself.

This web of understanding is paramount in understanding the folkloresque, because these threads connect to one another and create something complex and unique—and clearly very well-liked by readers. Scott Bukatman, author of *Hellboy's World*, one of the few academic works on Hellboy, writes: "*Hellboy* and its spin-off series (*B.P.R.D*) now form a deeply intertextual enterprise that incorporates a broad range of literary, visual, and cinematic influences, including classic horror fiction, war films, folklore, monster movies, other comics, and Mexican *luchadores"* (Bukatman 2016:9). Folklore is not the only inspiration for Hellboy stories, and the fact that the series works within this greater web of textualities makes it as dynamic as it is. Folklore, like popular culture, is embedded in a person's understanding of characters, tropes, situations, and motifs.

In an interview (Grannell 2008) Mignola describes these multiple facets coming together to create Hellboy:

When I was a little kid, I read Dracula, and I said this is a world I wanna live in—obviously not really with him—but this is my kind of subject matter. And there's always been something about not just gothic literature but folklore and myth that that I've found fascinating.

I think one of the things I love about it is that there's an element of the absurd—in the stuff I like anyway. There's stuff that happens where you just go: "wow, there's no way in hell I'd have made that up! It's like, I don't know why that works, I don't know why that happens, but the beauty of that stuff to me is that it does happen.

For some reason, somebody made up a story where the Russian witch Baba Yaga sneaks into a guy's house every night to count his silverware. God knows why, but there's some other logic going on—something I always refer to as "fairy-tale logic." Things just happen and you go: yeah, OK, I buy that, even if I don't understand it.

These inspirations come from many different places— Baba Yaga from Russian folklore, Dracula representing the supernatural literary canon (with vampires coming from folklore), H.P. Lovecraft informing Mignola's monstrous Ogru Hem. These different inspirations create a world that encompasses the strange and unknowable— characters, situations, and environments that are out of reach from everyday readers. A work like this expands a reader's understanding of folklore by placing it on the same playing field as Mignola's other inspirations. Seeing folklore exist alongside literary themes and characters gives readers the chance to experience new work in relation to characters and stories from oral tradition in a new, nuanced way. Just because these folkloric aspects are coming from a commercial work does not mean they do not inform reader's understandings of them, which makes the folkloresque a vital concept for folklorists to use to expand their scholarship in expanding post-modern folklore terms.

2.3. Folkloresque Integration

Foster brings up three different types of folkloresque discourse: integration, portrayal, and parody. Integration is the most active way the folkloresque is used in *Hellboy*; Foster describes integration as "how popular cultural producers *integrate* or stitch together folkloric motifs and forms to make a product that appears to be inspired directly by one or more specific traditions. The folkloresque of this mode works through the mechanisms of allusion and pastiche, a hodgepodge suturing of bits and pieces of other things to create a coherent new whole" (Foster 2016, 15, emphasis in original). Mignola's use of integration draws inspiration from and direct connections to legend.

Rasputin is one of these direct connections to legend. Rasputin, as a character in Hellboy, is rife with different textual understandings. Grigori Rasputin, a politically charged character and man from Czarist Russia, has many legendary qualities associated with him. He was thought to be a miraculous healer of Czar Nicholas II and Czarina Alexandra's hemophiliac son Alexei. His death is more legendary still: according to legend he was poisoned, shot, beaten, and drowned, and was still breathing when his body was dumped into a river. Mysticism and fear surrounded Rasputin during his lifetime, rumors fostered by his political enemies, and those rumors clearly built him into the legendary character that he is today, being the focus of many books and films (Moynahan 1999).

Mignola, though, changes Rasputin's narrative by having him hear the whispers of the Ogdru Jahad, also known as the Dragon, a Lovecraftian god of Mignola's invention, while he lies in the frozen river after his murder. He is brought back to life by

the Dragon and goes onto to be its advocate on Earth—trying and failing again and again to bring the Ogdu Hem back to life, which would bring about the end of the world.

The legendary status of Nazi occultism and the use of folklore also play into Rasputin's narrative; he is recruited by Heinrich Himmler to join the Occult Bureau in Germany, thinking that the Nazi resources will allow him to successfully bring about the end of the world. Mignola even directly addresses the folklore surrounding Nazis in the NPR interview: "Dealing with the Nazis, there's so much almost folklore about them and legends and rumors and conspiracy things." What Mignola means by "folklore" seems to be the secrecy, mystery, and archetypally evil actions they perpetrated—the narrative behind Nazism is almost larger than life.

In *Hellboy: The Companion*, which gives character descriptions, a comprehensive timeline, and a couple of short articles, Stephen Weiner describes this specific dynamic of Rasputin: "Mignola expands the mythic status associated with the historical Rasputin by elevating him to an incredibly powerful force of evil… Mignola does not just pepper his tales with details borrowed from folklore—he empowers them with the ambience of mythology, as in the way he transforms Rasputin from a historical holy man, to self-proclaimed god, to tragic, inhuman husk. Mignola's stories have a folkloric quality that can make his work seem like retellings of older tales" (Weiner 2008, 214). Weiner touches on something important here—that Mignola's changes to characters of legend like Rasputin, although they occur in a commercial medium like a comic book, create a family tree of retellings. A reader's sense of what Rasputin stands for and who he is

changes as one reads *Hellboy*, creating another dimension in a reader's knowledge of Rasputin as a historical, legendary, and literary figure.

It is important to analyze why Mignola chose a character rooted in legend such as Rasputin, for the role he plays throughout the series. Mignola also partakes in an almost folkloric process when writing his version of Rasputin—he plays with Rasputin's legendary and historical death and creates a life after it. He plays with the American fear of Nazism with Rasputin; four pages into the first volume of Hellboy, *Seed of Destruction*, we're given the ominous view of a robed man adorned by a pentagram with a swastika in the middle. He is immediately coded as being evil for American readers, and his actions throughout the series prove time and time again that complete destruction of the world is his goal.

Bill Ellis, in his book *Aliens, Ghosts, and Cults*, describes the nature and role of legend: "Legends more than any form of oral discourse are subject to communal composition and performance, and the specific interests of one group, which determine to a large extent the text being narrated, may have little in common with the interests of other groups" (Ellis 2001, 9). The use of legend within Hellboy is particularly American in nature, in that the legends speak to the conspiracy theories always circulating regarding the secrets that the U.S. government keeps from the American people. An example of the conspiracy theories that circulate would be the "Lizard People" conspiracy—which entails a race of lizard-like humanoids holding significant positions of power to control the American (human) people (Abad-Santos 2015).

Mignola uses characters like Rasputin in his main story line to heighten senses of anxiety and in the case of Rasputin specifically, to emulate American anxieties of foreign power, i.e. Nazi Germany and Russia. It is no surprise that Baba Yaga's usually ambiguous stance in folktales is shifted into wanting Hellboy to accept his destiny as the bringer of the end of the world, as she is also a Russian figure. Mignola's version of Rasputin is completely devoid of his historical personality—he is recreated in his death as a person with a simple goal, the destruction of the world.

The narrative within Hellboy with Rasputin being called by evil gods to bring about the end of the world sounds like a legend that would be passed around by conspiracy theorists. Rasputin works alongside many other folkloric characters, like Baba Yaga, to create a folklore-rich world that centers heavily on the desires of evil entities—ones that Hellboy, a character cut from the same cloth as other protectors of the American people, such as Fox Mulder and Dana Scully from The X-Files or any detective character from one of the many crime shows on TV, must defeat. Hellboy, foundationally, is a character willing to go the extra mile to protect the innocent American people from the dark, unknown things that surround them. It would not be unheard of to imagine that the monsters that Hellboy fight be the subjects of conspiracy theories passed around by concerned Americans.

The image that appears on Rasputin's robes also speaks to the Satanic Panic of the 1980s. The pentagram—used in many different belief systems, such as Satanism, paganism, and Wicca—was a symbol that struck fear into the hearts of parents afraid for their children playing *Dungeons and Dragons* and listening to Heavy Metal Music.

Mignola uses characters from all sorts of different traditions—readers are met with the Baba Yaga, Greek goddess of sorcery Hecate, Roger the homunculus from alchemical traditions, the vampire Vladimir Giurescu of Russian folklore, fairies of all kinds, quite a few animated skeletons, werewolves, Norwegian folktale kings (King Volmer), and the list could go on and on. Some of these characters (like Baba Yaga, Hecate, and Roger) are recurring characters in the ongoing narrative of Hellboy's attempt to stop Ragna Rok and fight against his destiny, but the others cross Hellboy's path in smaller ways.

In chapter three of the final collection of Hellboy's saga, *Hellboy in Hell*, the tale of "The Three Gold Whips" is told. This story is a one-shot, and when looking at Hellboy's main arc, seems almost a distraction in a volume that includes Hellboy's death and his killing of his father, Satan. This casual use of folkloresque integration is equally important to Mignola's world building as the major main arc uses—i.e. Rasputin, Baba Yaga, etc. This example serves to show that integration can be outright, like the use of Rasputin and also subtle, in the case of "The Three Gold Whips."

In "The Three Gold Whips," we're given the story of a captain abandoning his duty along with two soldiers. After a difficult battle, they decided it is time to desert. They run off and hide in an old church, where a Devil—no doubt a lesser demon—gives them three whips. These whips, when cracked produce gold coins. The demon gives them seven years and when he returns, he'll take their souls. The demon will ask them a riddle and if they get it right, they'll keep their souls. In a panel that takes up a quarter of the page, the demon, shaped like a small impish dragon with massive pale eyes, says: "When I come to take you to hell I'll have you guess what meal waits for you there, how you

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shall eat it, and how you shall drink. Guess correctly, and I'll let you go, let you keep your souls. Dispose of them however you like" (Mignola 2016, 109). Hellboy helps the captain find the grandmother of this demon, and she shrinks them down, hiding them in a skull as the demon comes to chat with her. She asks the demon about what he plans to do with the souls, and he reveals the answers to the riddle, thus the Captain is able to maintain ownership of his own soul.

This use of folkloresque integration is different from the use of well-known characters and tales. When I originally read this story, I had the sense that it was probably from folklore, but I did not personally know what tale it could be from. After some preliminary searches, I found out its origin. No doubt, most readers are less likely to know this tale: the Grimms' "The Devil and his Grandmother," or ATU Tale Type 126. This tale is basically the same as Mignola's version, except the men leave the army because they are not being adequately paid. The grandmother hides one of the men and he's given the answer to the riddle as the demon talks to his grandmother.

When considering what these mostly direct adaptations *do* for the comic, Bukatman writes: "Hellboy's task is to enter other narratives and reanimate them" (Bukatman 2016, 148). He also states, "The rich history of Hellboy enriches other stories" (Bukatman 2016, 144). This aligns with the concept of a web of understanding in reading these comics. It is important to consider the tale "The Devil and his Grandmother," in conjunction with this.

I asked a couple of friends if they'd ever heard of the fairy tale "The Devil and his Grandmother," most of them paused and responded in the negative. Of course, this isn't

indicative of all readers' experiences, but it would not surprise me to see that most readers were not familiar with this tale. When folklore falls out of wide circulation like this tale has, compared to other famous tales like "Cinderella" or "Sleeping Beauty," it can be safe to assume that those of us interacting with it who don't know it could read it in the same way as fuzzy allusion is used in the folkloresque. Foster describes how the film *Spirited Away* creates a text of fuzzy allusion: "Through a subtle incorporation and integration of elements from a number of folkloric traditions, the film projects an aura of 'authenticity': it seems somehow *based* on folklore or *like* folklore. It is, in a word, folkloresque" (Foster 2016, 47, emphasis in original).

When I read "The Three Golden Whips" section in Hellboy, I did not recognize it as a folktale. As a reader, though, I did notice the folkloric elements that Foster describes above. Although this tale is included in a collection of Grimms' tales, how can it be seen as functioning the same way as normal folkloresque integration does if there is not a direct relationship to the tale in the reader's experience? Normal integration is not occurring here, I would argue, in this case, veiled integration is occurring.

Veiled integration occurs when an author uses a direct link to folklore that is not transmitted broadly in the popular culture lexicon of folklore. This type of integration showcases how authors can reanimate old, out of use material from folklore. Instead of repurposing the material, authors can draw attention to folklore in a way that reads as uniquely created by the author in the vein of fuzzy allusion.

Veiled integration in the example of "The Devil and his Grandmother" works to reinforce Hellboy's character as helper and protector. He gains nothing, but he chooses to

aid the man. It also works to place Hellboy in a deeply charged situation, one that *feels*

like it has something folkloric attached to it, but without making a direct connection in

the story itself. Mignola does cite the source in his notes on the tale. This obscured

connection adds to the mystique of the story, giving readers a sense that they know that

trickery will be used to save the man's life, just by intuiting its perceived status of

folktale.

Mignola's use of integration creates a web of different traditions, making for a

vibrant world filled with creatures, stories, and intrigue. He melds literary influences

seamlessly into his world, creating a dense mythology inlaid with Lovecraftian figures,

pulp characters like Lobster Johnson, and gothic horror influences. It is important to

acknowledge that it is not only folklore that paints the pictures that Mignola creates by

combining all these inspirations; Mignola creates a world that is both dark and unnerving,

but equally action-packed, hopeful, and comedic. He uses these influences in similar

ways to his use of folklore.

2.4. Hellboy: The Character

Hellboy as a character must be looked at in relation to the folkloric characteristics

he possesses and how he subverts them. He is the literal son of the Devil, with horns, red

skin, a tail, and strange two-toed cloven feet, but is the good guy. He is a character of

legend within his narrative, considering his birthright and the prophecy attached to him

that says he will bring about the apocalypse. In the vein of outside forces controlling the

hero/heroine of the fairy tale, forcing them into challenges and tasks that they must

complete, Hellboy rebels against the grand, overwhelming forces that surround him.

Maaheen Ahmed, the principle COMICS investigator at Ghent University writes: "Hellboy… is a demon choosing to fight on the side of the good… Hellboy's identity is based on negating the demon he was destined to be. This in turn demonstrates the possibility of choosing and molding oneself and one's life" (Ahmed 2015, 1). He also "negotiates the binaries of self and Other by adopting American principles and values" (Ahmed 2015, 2). His red skin "others" him from other Americans, both in a fantastical way—as no human has bright red skin— but also from the white hegemony of the United States.

In "'Black Skins' and White Masks: Comic Books and the Secret of Race," Marc Singer writes: "Superhero comics represented every fantastic race possible, as a means of ignoring real ones" (Singer 2002, 111). Counter to that tendency, Hellboy's red skin places him in ways like immigrants to America. In the volume *Right Hand of Doom*, Hellboy faces Hecate, and, as she bites into him, he is sent to "the Pit," where his horns begin to grow back, and his destiny is yelled to him again. In a powerful moment, he yells, "I choose door number **three**! It's **my** goddamn life, I'll do what I want with it!" Three of his adversaries stand together in a bottom left panel below this and say: "Impossible. Born of human woman in Hell, reborn of human design on Earth… And now, finally… …He gives birth to himself." He then tears off his horns that had regrown in the Pit with a yell and a "KRAK".

Hellboy's actions, both serving the B.P.R.D. and then leaving it due to malpractice within the Bureau, serve to humanize him, proving to readers (specifically White, religious ones) that you can't judge a book by its cover. These powerful outside

forces, which can be seen as functioning similarly to popular discriminatory sentiments,

allow for Hellboy's rebellion against negative preconceptions about himself. Hellboy's

clear physical "othering" allows for a more dynamic arc of growth and change—it also

codes him as a complicated example of devil figures. In many ways, Hellboy's assertion

of autonomy aligns with the sentiment of rugged individualism that Americans have full

control over their destinies—that no matter your background—you can find fulfillment

and success.

The physicality of *Hellboy,* both the character and the series at large, within

comics is an important factor implicit to the medium over, say, prose. Comics as a

medium stands out in its ability to emulate oral storytelling. Gail de Vos in her article

"Storytelling, Folktales and the Comic Book Format" writes:

> Both the comic book and the oral tale depend on dialogue and tone of
> voice, body language and gestures, and timing for an effective experience
> for the audience. Both of these storytelling forms require the audience to
> actively participate in the understanding of the story; the listening
> audience must decode the words and silences, the body language and the
> voice to make their own images of the characters, the stage and the action
> that is taking place in the tale (de Vos 2001, 1).

The medium of comics allows for visual depictions of orality. De Vos states:

"…regular dialogue balloons, [are] directed at the reader as if the reader is sitting

on the steps with the speakers" (de Vos 2001, 1).

One of the constructs within comic page layout is the gutter. The gutter is

the space between panels, and comics writers and scholars have long puzzled over

its importance. Nate Powell, in "Comics Professionals on Comics Studies,"

writes: "I agree that so much of the magic does happen in between panels, in

physical space not used to render visuals…Gutters, margins, negative space, and (some) formal design and flow considerations are part of what I love about the physicality and limitations of the page itself" (McGurk 2017, 104). The gutter, which does not appear in any other medium, allows space for readers to imagine the movement between panels—giving readers freedom to build the stories themselves, which functions similarly to oral storytelling—where listeners have to imagine the story, creating movement and visuals within their minds.

The gutter connects readers to orality due to the readers' implicit understanding that they are expected to internally fill in the space between comic panels. Within prose, readers are given a clearer path to follow—if the author writes in a time-jump, readers know that they aren't missing anything. Within comics, readers are given panels that function as a storyboard. Readers know that movement and time takes place between the panels, but that they mentally have to fill that space in with what they know about the situation/characters/environment. This same sort of agency over experiencing a story occurs similarly in an oral tradition context—an audience is given the text and performance of a folktale or legend, and there is an expectation that they connect the dots to fully understand the story.

Mignola's artwork is some of the most recognizable work in comics, as color artist Dave Stewart frequently uses muted color palettes that contrast with Hellboy's red skin. The use of the gutter and silent paneling creates an introspective and mysterious tone. Scott Bukatman, in his article "Sculpture,

Stasis, the Comics, and Hellboy," writes, "The colors are largely flat, the palette is more expressionist than naturalistic, the art remains tidily framed within panel boundaries, the heavily stylized artwork is far from the realist norm, the battery of devices for representing movement in comics, such as motion lines or digital blur, are absent, and the dialogue is comparatively minimal" (Bukatman 2014, 108). Mignola's work clearly sets itself apart from superhero comics. "Everything is quite still. Indeterminate time passes, and sequentiality itself is presented in a weakened form" (Bukatman 2014, 108).

The gutter creates a sense of unquantifiable liminality, readers move from panel to panel, unsure of how much time has passed on some pages. This allows readers to fill in the gaps with their own understandings of the narrative, but also creates a tone of ambiguity and lends itself well to the subject matter of the comic at large. This stasis gives Hellboy a sense of introspection that does not appear in many other comic titles and adds depth to his character and his world. The muted color palettes against the stark red of his skin also creates a sort of spotlight on him; the reader's eye is always drawn to him first.

Hellboy's appearance places him in a long history of "devilish" figures. One tale within the Thompson motif index suits him especially well: in "The Orange Tree," an ogre is described as being tall with "bulletproof skin," a characteristic that does not frequently appear in the devil or ogre sections, or even in folktales in general. Other motifs that Hellboy embodies are: U110 Appearances deceive, U119.4 An Ugly face does not mean an Ugly soul, L112.1 Monster as Hero, and G303.3.1.1 The Devil as Large

Strong Man. Hellboy's lack of nationality also opens up avenues of understanding in dealing with traditions from many cultures—there is a sense of Hellboy as colonizer fighting back against non-western folkloric creatures, which would put Hellboy in the category of white savior. Hellboy long struggles with his appearance and the prophecy that calls for him to bring about the apocalypse, but his own free will surpasses anything that the outside forces, like Hecate, see as being set in stone.

Bill Ellis describes the "Luciferian dialectic," which can be understood as being when "the occult and religion perpetually attract each other, but without either ever absorbing or destroying the other" (Ellis 2004, 229). Hellboy's occupation as an occult detective confounds this dialectic. He *is supposed* to be the evil, apocalypse harbinger, but through free-will and a lot of back talk, Hellboy rallies against prophecy. In considering the history of the occult detective genre, Fox Mulder and Dana Scully of *the X-Files* create a perfect balance of skepticism and belief, while Hellboy upends their balanced binary; Hellboy *knows* that these things are real, but he couldn't care less—his only objective is to stop them. Hellboy's close connection to the "evil" occult dismantles the need for the belief vs skepticism binary, as his closeness allows him to override any doubt in the existence of the occult or paranormal.

Hellboy's charged belief *against* the prophecy also opens avenues of exploration in the world and in his character. His agency pushes him forward, fighting monsters and spirits, proving to readers that he is not defined by his parentage. Hellboy's insolence against the prophecy gives Mignola the opportunity to flesh out Hellboy's personal beliefs and gives readers a wide showcase of the occult beings that plague Hellboy's

world. This sort of set up is especially conducive to the use of the folkloresque, as it gives Mignola full artistic freedom to integrate and portray creatures and persons from folklore. Just like *the X-Files*, the formula of Hellboy's adventures revolve around different entities putting the world in danger.

Hellboy's characterization within the del Toro movies and the graphic novels are different. In the movie, Hellboy is himself a legend to the public. The B.P.R.D. has long kept his existence hidden, save for a few times that Hellboy actively reveals himself in public, while in the book the knowledge of his existence is widespread after his childhood. Hellboy's nature as legend is playful within the film, but he desires to be acknowledged as a reality. Hellboy lacks the alter ego of his superhero contemporaries. He is always red, large in stature, with (shorn) horns. This creation of his legend within del Toro's film showcases how the world reacts to the hidden; Hellboy eventually reveals himself quite publicly on a street and he's immediately surrounded by people with cameras and cell phones, indicating the modern reaction to legend, which will inevitably end with Hellboy's image being shared on YouTube, Twitter, and all over the internet, like videos of cryptids.

Bill Ellis, in his book *Lucifer Ascending*, writes of the nature of legend: "A legend is *a story that embodies some controversial element of a culture's worldview.* Folklorists have often disagreed about whether a legend is 'true' or not, or whether people 'believe' in it or not, but both criteria have inevitably broken down over their intrinsic subjectivity… *legends clearly do function in discourse*, by initiating debate or discussion of current topics" (Ellis 2004, 18 emphasis added). Hellboy's hidden nature in the del

Toro film harkens to some of the legends surrounding the United States government and its "hidden" operations like Area 51.

Hellboy subverts the expectation that the government is involved with "shady" dealings, as Hellboy is a protector of the American people. Although in the graphic novels Hellboy is not hidden, the nature of the occult detective will inherently point to the conspiracies surrounding the government's top-secret dealings, as throughout the comics the B.P.R.D. must work quickly to cover up large-scale public events to the best of their abilities. Mark Fenster in his book *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*, touches on the utility of conspiracy within fictional works: "Conspiracy emerges across a limited number of related fiction genres as a recurring explanatory and organizational logic, playing an integral role in the cause and effect that propel a narrative forward, and enabling a text to develop a particular set of oppositions to and challenges for the central protagonist" (Fenster 1999, 109). Not only does Mignola integrate and portray folktales in his work, but all the uses of the folkloresque exist within this greater realm of conspiracy and legend revolving around the United States government.

2.5. One-shots

Mignola uses one-shots, shorts that stand alone from major comic arcs, quite frequently throughout Hellboy. Annually, a Christmas-related one-shot issue drops, and one from 2017, *Hellboy: Krampusnacht*, follows the same formula that most of Mignola's one-shots adhere to. Hellboy is asked to help a place or person, he goes there, and he kills the monster. This tale takes place in 1975 in Austria. Hellboy has been

directed to meet with a man who claims to be Krampus—Saint Nicholas' lawful evil

sidekick who punishes or kills children who haven't been good that year. Krampus

reveals himself to Hellboy and begs for Hellboy to kill him. As the fight ensues, Hellboy

is suddenly thrust into a snowy forest, no Krampus in sight. Children who had been

punished by Krampus crowd around him and beg him for help, but then one gives

Hellboy a knife and tells him to kill Krampus. Hellboy is immediately blipped back to

Krampus and stabs him in the chest.

Krampus dies, the page showing him transform into a normal sized goat. Back at

B.P.R.D. headquarters on Christmas, Trever Bruttenholm and Liz Sherman sit with

Hellboy in a richly decorated living room and discuss the nature of Krampus.

Bruttenholm posits that Krampus is a variation of a "Scandinavian Yule goat," creating

an atmosphere of academia. Hellboy disregards this and says that Krampus was "just a

goat." Bruttenholm brings up the fact that the children Krampus had punished would

finally find peace and Hellboy agrees but adds "That **thing** [Krampus], too. Whatever it

was" (Mignola 2017: 24).

Readers see Hellboy triumph over yet another monster, but in this story the moral

gray area comes to the foreground. Frequently, the monsters in *Hellboy* are clearly

villains—there are no questions as to whether or not they are evil or that Hellboy is doing

his job as protector of the American people. This tale, though, turns that easy evil-coded

villainy on its head. Krampus wishes to be released from his duties through death, and

Hellboy does accomplish that feat. However, this leads to a cerebral response on

Hellboy's part. The fact that he hopes that Krampus finds peace, along with the children he imprisoned, proves that Hellboy is not a cold-blooded killer.

This is a double-edged scenario; *Krampusnacht* follows the typical one-shot structure, but the cerebral nature of his response is indicative of the depth in the series. Hellboy has a job, one that is fairly simple to do: to kill the monster. Readers enjoy this job; they want to see Hellboy conquer explicitly evil figures. This one-shot in particular gives the nuanced cerebral quality that also sets *Hellboy* apart from many superhero comics following similarly structured plots. Hellboy, regardless of his origins, is a character who has developed a moral and ethical code throughout his years at the B.P.R.D. and this code allows him to kill indiscriminately when necessary and to mourn or pity creatures who must die because of their nature.

Really, this conflict is at the forefront of *Hellboy*. Hellboy is constantly weighing and measuring his parentage, his skin, his inhuman body, against a world of constructed humanity. What these sorts of one-shots point to is that Hellboy's integrity sets him apart from his monstrous peers who seek out and perpetrate violence in order to bring about a new, more monstrous world. Physically, Hellboy is a monstrous man, but internally, he is as nuanced and human as any "normal" human can be. Certainly, Hellboy kills the monsters, but he never becomes one.

2.6. Function of the Folkloresque

What does the folkloresque *do* in *Hellboy*? By exhibiting the three meanings of the folkloresque and the categories of portrayal and (sometimes veiled) integration, the series creates a specific mood that establishes it as the comic that it is today. This mood

is what the folkloresque works to create. I would argue that different iterations of the folkloresque work to produce different moods—which I will explore in more depth by looking at *Fables*. It's not only the use of the folkloresque within comics that creates the mood, but also the iconography, artwork, and function of words that work to develop the tone and attitude of a work. In my third chapter, I will look at artwork in depth, as the images are important in better understanding the full experience of comic reading. *Hellboy* and *Fables* have two very different art styles.

I posit that the tenor created by the folkloresque in *Hellboy* is unique in that the combination of all aspects of the comic work together to create a somber, un-romanticized world that sits in opposition of the *Fables* world. *Hellboy*'s use of folkloric characters and motifs does evoke wonder at all of the magic in the world, but they demonstrate that the magic is mundane. It is sometimes helpful and sometimes dangerous, and the readers must decide which. Hellboy's grim humor, silence, and red skin set him as an inhuman character—he is without creed, without religion, without any real defining factors other than his father being the devil—and his rebellion against that detaches him even more. Hellboy is an excellent character for readers to accompany on a journey, as he opens up a world before readers that shocks, inspires, and challenges them. The world of *Hellboy* seems very close to our reality, but just far enough away to bring readers somewhere new, but familiar—a world of legend, pulp superheroes, Eldritch horrors, folktales, and more—a world that mirrors the creativity of humanity and brings forth new adventures and triumphs.

Hellboy's use of folklore is an excellent example of media expanding readers'

scope of folklore in a globalizing way. Readers may come from a certain country or

ethnic group, and being that *Hellboy* plays with folklore from many different traditions,

readers gain a sense of the interconnectedness of beliefs, stories, and customs. Folklore

becomes less of the solitary ownership of one group and becomes a part of a greater

folkloric canon for humanity at large.

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3. Parodic Folkloresque, Intertextuality, and Character in *Fables*

Fables, created by Bill Willingham, is a sprawling comic spanning twenty-two volumes and a dozen spinoffs and related publications. This comic centers on the Fables of Fabletown, a fictional neighborhood in New York City. These Fables are characters from well-known folktales and literary fairy tales, such as Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*. In this paper, I will be analyzing the use of folkloresque parody through characters in *Fables.*

In the introduction to *The Folkloresque,* Michael Dylan Foster describes the category of folkloresque parody. "Folkloresque parody reflects a seemingly intentional appropriation of folkloric motifs and structures for the purpose of caricature or similar modes of critical commentary" (Foster 2016, 18). He writes that "a common characteristic of folkloresque parody is its evident awareness of its own derivativeness. Indeed, the parodic folkloresque is often characterized by an explicit self-referential quality, a kind of insider/outsider knowledge into which the audience is invited to enter" (Foster 2016, 18). The parody inherent in this work is emphasized because the Fables know that humans read and know their stories. This category of the folkloresque comments on contemporary culture by not only connecting itself to a known tradition, but also through stressing the differences between them.

This category of the folkloresque problematizes "original" source materials, as readers' conception of folktale characters comes from not a specific source such as the Grimms' or Perrault's volumes. There is no "original" source text being referred to and

therefore displays the unique nature of readers' conceptualizing of folktale characters. In a way, *Fables* just acts as another popular culture version, pointing to the repurposing that not only authors, but any one is capable of doing. Folkloresque parody is a reminder that these texts are commercial products and products of capitalism, but they serve to invigorate people's understandings of folklore and subjects within folklore.

It is valuable to look at what constitutes a folktale and how *Fables* has moved away from those rules. Max Luthi, in his book *The European Folktale*, outlines what qualities make a folktale and what constitutes a shift into legend. He writes "The persons and animals depicted in folktales, similarly, lack physical and psychological depth" (Luthi 1982, 12). As he points out, "Folktales break down the rich complexity of human beings. Instead of different possible modes of behavior being combined in a single person, we see them sharply separated from one another and divided among persons who stand side by side. One cannot even speak of the characters of folktale as being intelligent" (Luthi 1982, 16). Within *Fables*, we still see hints of this flattening of character depth in use of significant details in character design. Flycatcher, inspired by "The Frog King," wears a reversed green baseball cap with two bulbous white eyes on either side—the hat obviously connects to his amphibious past. The characters of *Fables* may not be totally devoid of personality, but they all still maintain qualities that come from their folktale—Snow White is still elegant and beautiful and lived with dwarves for a spell (albeit a traumatic experience for this Snow White), and Bluebeard is still a brute.

According to Luthi, "The hero has no inner or outwardly visible relationship to his family or even to an ethnic community. His bride or spouse is only of interest as the

instigator or goal of the plot" (Luthi 1982, 17). This is when there is a massive departure from the rules of the folktale in *Fables*. Interestingly, this comic ignores this rule completely; *Fables* is about Fabletown, the relationships therein, and the characters themselves. Bill Willingham's choice to create a community of folktale characters and others helps to develop readers' understanding of these characters. Although there are superficial relationships within folktales, *Fables* creates a community that develops them by sometimes pitting them against each other and other times having them work together.

In looking at the physicality of folktales, Luthi writes, "Since the blows of fate that afflict the folktale hero—all his battles, dangers, losses, or privations—propel him forward physically, but have no effect on his psychic depth, they have no power to change him" (Luthi 1982, 21). Movement, from place to place, and sometimes from dimension to dimension, is one of the folktale's qualities that *Fables* does use. This movement, which indicates the movement of plot and also the movement of the folktale hero/heroine's journey, indicates a shift in a folktale character's life. Although within *Fables* there is interdimensional travel when Fables return to their Homelands to fight against the Adversary, frequently the movement between dimensions does not constitute anything but a shift in setting. One character—Flycatcher—has his journey lead up to him being the leader of an army that fights against the Adversary, and in this way the interdimensional travel correlates with the personal growth of his journey.

The use of the comic medium allows for the shifting of understanding in these well-known folktale characters. Adam Zolkover, in his article "Corporealizing Fairy Tales; The Body, the Bawdy, and the Carnivalesque in the Comic Book *Fables*," points

out an interesting phenomenon that occurs when shifting from oral tradition to the comic

book:

> *Fables…* presents an inversion: whereas fairy-tale characters tend to be
> flattened, stylized, stripped of all but the most essential references to the
> sensual and the psychic, the characters in *Fables* are emotionally complex,
> sexually explicit, and physically present. In their transition to the comic
> book page, they are fleshed out, corporealized…. Through dialogue,
> through plot transformations, and most significantly through sequential
> artistic rendering, they are given psychic depth—desire—that makes
> manifest that which was, at best, latent in the fairy tales from which these
> characters come (Zolkover 2008, 42).

This corporealizing of folktale characters serves to invigorate the folkloresque

parody happening in the series. The physicality inherent in comic books allows for what

readers already know about characters to shift into new territory. Even when characters

have not been frequently depicted, the artists involved with creating *Fables* made creative

choices that would both signify the nature of the character and also make it easy for

readers to conceptualize the character. Zolkover writes, "Rose Red's adornment in the

comic book is an invention of the creators, not explicitly referential to any previous

rendition, but still interested in maintaining fairy-tale continuity… Her look here is

different from Snow White's in that it does not—cannot—allude to previous iconic

representations. At the same time, however, it does establish her identity with readers of

the series, maintaining some semblance of continuity with the character's abstract past,

even as it lends her corporeal form" (Zolkover 2008, 45). Folkloresque parody, in this

instance, allows for full creative control to create a look for a Snow White that signifies

her character traits, as the other folktale characters' designs do.

3.1. Bluebeard

Mark Buckingham, the longtime penciller for the series, gives characters physical attributes emblematic of their folktale, but also steps away from some details in order to play with readers' understandings of character. One such character, Bluebeard, is depicted throughout the comic with glasses, a shaved head, and a small goatee instead of a large, obvious beard. Bluebeard, although a folktale frequented by critics and scholars, is not as well-known as say "Cinderella" or "Little Red Riding Hood." Interestingly, he does not show many signs of rehabilitation from his violent past and does not appear as nuanced and three- dimensional as some of his fellow Fables.

Willingham's choice to include Bluebeard seems not to hinge on giving nuance to him—but parodying him through exaggeration in response both to Perrault's moral and to the scholarly work about him that focuses only on the curiosity of the final wife and how that curiosity is seen as negative even though it saves her life. There appears to be an intertextual nod to Perrault's second moral included behind the tale: "It is easy to see that the events described in this story took place many years ago. No modern husband would dare to be half so terrible, nor to demand of his wife such an impossible thing as to stifle her curiosity. Be he never so quarrelsome or jealous, he'll toe the line as soon as she tells him to. And whatever colour his beard might be, it's easy to see which of the two is the master" (Carter 2008: 10). Bluebeard is very much still a violent misogynist and is consistently sadistic throughout Fables. His over-willingness to torture Jack to find out where Rose Red is appears in the first volume (Willingham 2002), immediately setting him up as violent as he is in Perrault's version of the folktale.

Maria Tatar aptly discusses Perrault's second moral:

The other moral appended to "Bluebeard" is less a moral than a disavowal of any lessons transmitted about husbands. If women's curiosity formed the subject of the first moral, men's behavior would logically serve as the subject of the second moral…Bluebeard's behavior is framed as exceptional, deviating from the norm of masculine behavior. The second moral insists that no husband today has the 'terrifying' qualities of a Bluebeard. It invalidates the notion that men could draw and lessons at all from his behavior (Tatar 2004, 24).

Bluebeard, within *Fables*, contradicts Perrault's moral entirely. Bluebeard's behavior as a rich, sadistic man, links him to society's interest in serial killers and the advice given to women about dating men: if it's too good to be true, it probably is. Bluebeard's relationship status as a single, white, rich man places him in a dating pool that female and homosexual male readers have been warned about time and time again.

Interestingly, curiosity does not play much into Bluebeard's character arcs within *Fables*. Consistently, until his death and then still until his ghost is banished, Bluebeard exhibits a strong proclivity toward violence to get answers and as leverage in political issues. In fact, he's very much reduced to his violence throughout *Fables*. There are explicit references and even depictions of his past action of murdering his wives.

Considering Bluebeard is rarely an adapted/illustrated folktale to appear in children's collections, it is fair to assume that Willingham came across the tale within a collection of fairy tales, perhaps Perrault's "Bluebeard" or the Grimm's "Blaubart." Even so, if Willingham came across the Grimm's version originally, it would make sense that he would inevitably be led back to Perrault's and his odd use of two morals. The fact that the first arc within *Fables* hinges on the disappearance of Rose Red—who had secretly

promised to marry Bluebeard after a period of one year but disappeared just as that year was ending—connects to Bluebeard's missing/murdered wives from the folktale.

Even with Bluebeard's violent characteristics emphasized, Willingham plays with his nobleman status in a modern way. Bluebeard had a contract drawn up that Rose Red signed, he paid a handsome "dowry" to her, and so a reason for her disappearance is revealed. Rose Red disappeared because she did not want to marry Bluebeard, considering the implications that their marriage would have, i.e. her death, and because the marriage was always a sham in ordered to get some of Bluebeard's massive wealth.

On page twenty-one of volume one (Willingham 2002), readers are shown a ghastly crime scene—Rose Red's apartment has been torn apart and a large amount of blood covers the floor and the walls. One might call it a "bloody chamber," but the reference to Bluebeard may be lost on some readers. Drawing on modern media, this page links readers to all of the detective/crime shows like *NCIS* and *CSI*. Creating this intertextual link to the past ("Bluebeard") and the present (modern media) shows that the violence of old is still very much at the forefront of human experience.

Even though it turns out that Bluebeard did not kill Rose Red—the murder scene was staged by Rose Red and her boyfriend Jack—anger and violence permeate Bluebeard's character throughout Fables. The duping of Bluebeard also seems to connect to the modern media expectation that women rebel against subservient gender roles, that women's wiles—just like the heroine in Perrault's "Bluebeard"—are what have always kept women out of harm's way. Who's to say what would have happened if Rose Red

had married Bluebeard? But readers and even the Fables within the story like Snow White and Bigby Wolf (The Big Bad Wolf), expectated that he would go through with another wifely murder.

Not only does bringing Bluebeard into a modern context change his appearance, it changes his status. He is still quite rich in *Fables*, but he cannot always use his money or influence to get his way. Snow White and Bigby Wolf both approach crime solving ethically (albeit sometimes things do get unethical), which connects them to the contemporary understandings of justice and law enforcement, while Bluebeard's character is aggressive and violent. The depictions of violence on Bluebeard's part align more with modern expectations of gore and violence, as opposed to the violence in fairy tales, which lacks the same kind of physicality.

In many ways, Bluebeard's violence of old aligns with modern audiences' expectations of violence. The grisly and the dark are incredibly common in modern media. Though Maria Tatar described the history of the Grimm brothers removing sex and adding violence to their tales in her book *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Tatar 1987), sex has been added back into the folktale characters' lives in *Fables*. Bluebeard and Rose Red are the first characters in *Fables* to be depicted in a sexual encounter (Willingham 2002, 49)—with Prince Charming's exploits being shown shortly after. The page depicts Bluebeard revealing their hidden relationship and impending marriage. The panels are at odds with each other; Bluebeard in his present depiction is fuming with anger and the Bluebeard of the past smiles, albeit still shrewd.

Willingham's choice to depict Bluebeard as a sexual character inevitably links him to Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, as his sexualization is not something new in literature. This link also connects to his predatory nature. There is always an inherently dangerous aspect of Bluebeard's character, as his actions always circle back to his past violence and that cycle of violence. Bluebeard's character links both to the past (oral tradition) and to contemporary fears surrounding privileged straight white men— although they have power in society, that does not mean they adequately use their power for good. Bluebeard's character within *Fables* is completely driven by his desire for power and control, as his folktale characterization was, which goes to show that different types of folktale characters still have a place in modern media.

3.2. Snow White

Snow White, a well-known folktale character because of Disney's 1937 adaptation of the tale, is one of the main characters throughout the *Fables* series. As leader of operations of Fabletown, as deputy mayor, she is always the first to hear about current drama between Fables and their situation in the mundane world. Willingham described Snow White in an interview with Jordan Calhoun in 2015: "Snow White became kind of a hard-ass with a giant stick up her butt, because for the last thousand years or so, it's filling in the fact that everyone she's known or loved has betrayed her in some way, so she's going to rely solely on herself (Calhoun 2015)." Willingham's description is apt, but not nuanced.

Snow White's refiguring in *Fables* paints her as "a hard ass," certainly, but she appears throughout the comic as a woman who has dealt with her past traumas and wishes to move forward. She lacks the one-dimensional characterization that Bluebeard possesses—she is not transfixed by one goal or desire. Within the first volume, we see Snow White deftly manage a difficult group of Fables, become one of the major investigators of her sister's untimely disappearance/death, and also deal with interpersonal relationships with her ex-husband Prince Charming (Willingham 2002, 78) and inappropriate work behavior with Bigby, which she sharply shoots down (Willingham 2002, 118-119). These sorts of issues and relationships help place Snow White in a contemporary world, where readers are able to sympathize with her struggles.

Interestingly, within the first narrative arc, in which readers are reintroduced to the folktale characters they heard about growing up, the narrative establishes the difficulties that come about residing in the mundane world with the war back in the Homelands. Although magic still exists in the Homelands and magical items and magic itself are available to Fables, there is a ban on their use. Animal Fables must appear human or be sent off to "The Farm." To appear as humans, the animals must pay a witch for a glamour. Already the magic at hand has been shifted from the type of magic in folktales—the magic at work in Fabletown is explicitly transactional, which points to their melding into a capitalist society out of their feudal homeland.

Vanessa Joosen, in her article "Disenchanting the Fairy Tale: Retellings of 'Snow White' between Magic and Realism," describes the interesting dynamic in modern retellings of fairy tales that have magic at their core: "We have seen that the

disappearance of magic helps to increase the contact with contemporary reality, and that the intertextual references in retellings bring with them a certain degree of (intentional) indeterminacy, open-endedness, humor, and irony" (Joosen 2008, 237). Although magic is not fully absent in *Fables*, it is positioned on a continuum of magic and realism, somewhere in the middle.

The Fabletown authorities enforce the magic ban because the mundane world is inherently non-magical and to go against that would threaten the Fables' livelihoods— although for all intents and purposes their magic could be used to overwhelm the mundane world and give them power over the people of this reality. Fortunately, the leaders of Fabletown, King Cole and Snow White, do not desire dominion over New York City or anywhere else. This playing by the rules quietly links itself, though subverting it, to the rules of a folktale. There is an expectation of what will and will not occur in a folktale setting, so in this case—in a contemporary setting—the Fables must concede to the already set rules.

You see this expectation of contemporary setting in the depictions of the many Fables. Snow White appears as a blended femme fatale and businesswoman throughout the series. She still possesses the black hair, pale skin, and red lips of the folktale's character, but her lips are painted with lipstick in the real world. Her hair is longer than her depiction in Disney's adaptation—showing that this Snow White is different from the Disney version. She also wears tight clothes (although not revealing), business suits, and fine formal attire throughout the comic, defining her as a business-oriented woman one who is unwilling to concede to the demands of men around her. Although she dresses

somewhat provocatively sometimes, it seems to be in the vein of a liberated woman as opposed to a flirt. Snow White's goals are always for her community's and she is not one of the Fables who's out to sleep around. Snow White uses the expectations of her folktale character's appearance but pushes them further into a contemporary setting through the use of contemporary fashion, makeup, and body image.

Figure 3.1: *Snow White in* Fables #1, penciled by Lan Medina

Considering her sister Rose Red's many depictions in sexual relations with multiple men, Willingham clearly determined that one of Snow White's characteristics of

import was her conservativeness. Although this Snow White is not demure or submissive like the Snow White of past versions, there is a sense that she is more uptight than other Fables. Remember, Willingham described her as having "a stick up her butt," which comes across as rather insensitive, as Willingham wrote sexual assault and abuse by the dwarves into this adaptation of her tale. *Fables* has been called a "feminist" work, but Willingham denies that, saying in an interview with Jim Vorel for Paste Magazine, "Our goals were never to show men or women in any specific way, I just wanted to tell good stories. What shows up in *Fables* is just how I see the interaction between men and women" (Vorel 2015). Although Willingham's history of sexist remarks and behavior is well known in the comics world (Cox 2015), his conservative views do not always align with those of his characters. Although Snow White displays conservative feminine attributes in many ways, she does fight against the dominant male powers of Fabletown, displaying a contemporary understanding of progressive gender roles.

Michael Dylan Foster mentions how contemporary parodic folkloresque films like *Mirror* (2012) or *Maleficent* (2014) should be "analyzed productively…as commentaries on contemporary American culture that work their critique not only through reference to a known folkloric precedent but through highlighting their difference to this earlier 'text'" (Foster 2016, 18-19); furthermore, "folkloresque products also problematize the stability of the 'original' folkloric source" (Foster 2016, 19). Yet we can also connect these ideas to the intertextual nature of current folkloresque texts. Snow White, as the first Disney adaptation of a folktale, inevitably plays into readers' understanding of the character.

Looking at *Fables*' intertextuality allows us to notice the relatively small role played by Snow White's antagonistic stepmother; the past traumas that Snow White deals with mostly surround her difficult relationship with Prince Charming and, less sporadically, her relationship with the dwarves (who are depicted as being frightening and manipulative, as opposed to Disney's depiction of the dwarves as hard workers and allies of Snow White). Readers know the tale of Snow White, whether it be from Disney's adaptation, from reading a folktale collection, or hearing the tale told to them by an adult. Because of the variable nature of readers' understanding of the tale, Willingham is not bound by any specific details. Foster, while talking about the fuzzy allusion of folkloresque, describes the collage-like nature of some folkloresque texts as they "borrow motifs from tradition but use them in ways different from the tales they explicitly reference" (Foster 2016, 44). Snow White's iconic characteristics of pale skin, red lips, and dark hair remain, but they only go to show that she *comes* from the tale in circulation, not that she is *bound* to persist in a way similar to the folktale. Collage makes intertextual connections that give readers a base understanding of the character while allowing Willingham to craft his own version of Snow White as a character.

This push forward into the present, however long has passed between the "original" folktale's time and the modern present, indicates a weightiness or immortal nature to the characters throughout *Fables*. There is frequent discussion about the fact that when a character does not exist prevalently in humanity's imagination, it opens that character up to mortality. This frequently plays into the comic, as characters' lives are at stake when they come from a lesser known tale.

Willingham is clearly critiquing the nature of a story's lasting power by including this mechanic in his tale. This parodying of the telling and retelling of tales through this mechanic does bring readers to the understanding that the life of a story is entirely based upon their lasting power. Snow White is one of the major Fables surely because of the popularity of her tale and its many adaptations in popular culture. Cristina Bacchilega, in her book *Fairy Tales Transformed: Twenty-First-Century Adaptations and the Politics of Wonder* writes, "fairy tales are seen to project social delusions that hold us captive under their spell; or else they promote a sense of justice by narrating the success of unpromisingly small, poor, or otherwise oppressed protagonists" (Bacchilega 2002, 4). Snow White is both privileged and oppressed within her tale—her mother is a queen (Grimm 2014, 170), but this same mother who desired a beautiful daughter turns into a spiteful, jealous queen who asks for Snow White's life. Although most readers wouldn't relate to her royal blood, they would be able to empathize with the oppression by her mother and unfortunate servitude to the dwarves.

The interesting thing about Willingham's immortalizing mechanic is that the livelihood of a single Fable is based on the well-known nature of their "original" text, which "problematizes the stability of the 'original' folkloric source" (Foster 2016, 19). As *Fables* does take place in *our* modern society, there is no doubt that Disney adaptations and other adaptations would be a part of the lives of the non-Fable humans living out their lives in the same hyper-capitalist climate. The idea that a "pure" and "authentic" version of a folktale or other piece of folklore (i.e.: Nursery rhymes about

King Cole) is both still circulating unchanged and that all of the non-Fable humans know this particular tale and enjoy it in particular is rather absurd.

It is also telling that the Fables Willingham uses are ones that have frequently been adapted into popular works—"Snow White," "Cinderella," "Little Red Riding Hood" (Bigby in particular from this tale), Prince Charming, "Sleeping Beauty," the "Frog Prince," and many others. One character who plays an integral role in the protection of Fabletown is Boy Blue—a character who has not appeared in any major adaptations. Boy Blue does pass away in military service—which makes sense within Willingham's mechanic, as Little Boy Blue from the nursery rhyme is not on the same level of popular familiarity as the Fables mentioned above. Bluebeard also dies in *Fables,* his death showing the lack of familiarity readers most likely have with him. Interestingly, though, many well-known works of fiction like Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* use the trope of a forbidden chamber to great effect, so that is not to say that the tale of Bluebeard does not connect to many fictional works out today (Tatar 2004).

3.3. The Big Bad Wolf

Bigby Wolf, aka the Big Bad Wolf of "Little Red Riding Hood" fame, is given a new life in *Fables* as a man who transforms into a wolf—thereby intertextually linking him to Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, werewolf folklore, and popular culture sources of werewolf folklore. Considering the nature of the Big Bad Wolf (BBW from here) as being a wolf who is able to speak to Little Red Riding Hood, the development that the BBW is a werewolf does make some sense. It also opens doors in

developing the BBW as a human character with a violent, animalistic side, like it does for Bigby.

This choice by Willingham to humanize a character known purely for his violence on a woman and the Three Little Pigs is an interesting one. Although Bigby is more sympathetic than most villains and he considers himself rehabilitated from his past, with there being an amnesty passed in Fabletown to allow him back into their society, there is still a lurking sense of fear among other Fables when he's involved. Bigby's progression also centers on his relationship with Snow White—after the two of them are secretly drugged by Bluebeard they end up leaving Fabletown, going out into a remote wooded area, and conceiving seven children in what was not a consensual coupling for either of them considering the fact that neither of them remember it.

Bigby accepts the responsibilities of being a father and reconciles his hard feelings with his father, the North Wind. Willingham's choice to domesticize the BBW in form of Bigby seems hopeful, even though his character narrative starts on very shaky ground. This all takes place in volume three, "Storybook Love (Willingham 2004), and their relationship lasts until the end of the series—being one of the bedrock relationships throughout all of *Fables*, even though it started with Snow White's repulsion to him (Willingham 2002, 119; Willingham 2004, 105) and Bigby's pessimism about being taken seriously by her.

What are contemporary readers getting out of this sort of relationship? What is it indicative of in modern society? Perhaps having a romantic relationship develop between

Snow White and Bigby Wolf points to contemporary society's expectation for heterosexual romance (no LGBT Fables exist in Willingham's world). Foster, in his chapter on fuzzy allusion, writes, "At what point, one might ask, does the individual artistic voice overshadow traditional material? Certainly, there is a continuum between these two modes of expression" (Foster 2016, 51). This relationship between Snow and Bigby may be indicative of the expectation of heteronormative romance in contemporary media, but it also just may be an example of Willingham's individual artistic voice overshadowing any sort of ties to oral tradition's folktales.

3.4. Little Red Riding Hood and Baba Yaga

Another interesting use of character within *Fables* happens in volume four, "March of the Wooden Soldiers" (Willingham 2004). This arc hinges on the return of Little Red Riding Hood as a refugee from the Homelands after having been enslaved by the Adversary, whereupon she resumes her old relationship with Boy Blue. She returns, and she and Boy Blue reunite—but she reacts harshly, claiming that he left her to die in the Homelands. Immediately, there seems to be something off about her. She also reacts harshly to Bigby, although that can be attributed to the trauma from her original tale—in the *Fables* version, the Big Bad Wolf is sewn up with rocks by the Huntsman and thrown into the river, but because Bigby is the son of the North Wind, he is able to hold his breath long enough to survive as the stones pass so he's able to free himself from the river.

Little Red Riding Hood approaches Boy Blue after her blow-up at him and they rekindle their relationship. On pages 140-141, Boy Blue questions her sincerity and legitimacy—he claims, "I've already been awake too long—thinking. Trying to convince myself I'm mistake about you" (Willingham 2004). The fake Little Red Riding Hood says, "I warned you I'd changed. **Centuries** of torture—" but Boy Blue cuts her off, certain of her falsehood. She then shocks him with a touch—showing a grisly panel that depicts Boy Blue's bones on his right side visible through his skin, and he passes out. Three wooden soldiers come out of the woodwork and ask her what to do with him. It is now very clear that this woman is an ally of the Adversary, and not Little Red Riding Hood.

Later on in the volume (Willingham 2004, 184) readers see that this woman has led in the wooden soldiers to overthrow Fabletown. Because they are all similar in appearance—white with varying hair colors, a family looks out of their house and the father exclaims, "It's the young republicans! They're marching in—taking over New York." "Just like when they marched on Paris in '39," the mother says. The son asks, "Weren't those the Nazis?" The mother responds, "Is there a difference?" This is one of the few times that "mundies"—normal humans in the mundane world—get a glimpse at the turmoil in Fabletown. This link to Nazism supplies readers with another level of understanding of the Adversary's conquest through the Homelands and now this attempt in the mundane world. It also interestingly paints the mysterious imposter Little Red woman as especially evil.

A great amount of violence takes place, and then a showdown occurs between Frau Totenkinder and the imposter Little Red, who is revealed to be Baba Yaga. Frau Totenkinder and Baba Yaga duel magically, and Baba Yaga is defeated. There's shock from Baba Yaga's side at the defeat, as she claims her folktale is better known that Frau Totenkinder's, but Frau points out the prevalence of Hansel and Gretel; she was the witch of that tale, which proves the popularity mechanic Willingham included. By this logic, Frau's story is better known in North America, so she is more powerful than Baba Yaga.

Jill Terry Rudy and Jarom Lyle McDonald describe Baba Yaga: "With her iconic huge nose, iron teeth, and other ugly features, along with her mortar and pestle flying contraption, and her chicken-legged hut, she is distinctive and easily recognized" (Rudy and McDonald 2016, 1). Willingham stripped Baba Yaga of all of her emblematic features and put her into the body of Little Red Riding Hood—who also lacks all emblematic features as well, as she is merely a brunette white woman in red contemporary clothing. Megan Armknecht, Jill Terry Rudy, and Sibelan Forrester in their article "Identifying Impressions of Baba Yaga: Navigating the Uses of Attachment and Wonder on Soviet and American Television," write, "There could be many reasons for Baba Yaga's enduring presence and popularity. One cause is pure curiosity and wonder about her character. Baba Yaga is ambiguous" (Armknecht, Rudy, and Forrester 2017, 63). They posit that she is also especially intriguing to Western audiences because of "her foreign, Other status" (Armknecht, Rudy, and Forrester 2017, 64). As Baba Yaga's many tales center around her testing the protagonists—although this does not always place her

as an antagonist—she plays an important part in giving the protagonists opportunity to prove themselves where they would otherwise have no such opportunity.

Baba Yaga in *Fables* does test the strength of Fabletown—the many different characters heroically band together to fend off the wooden soldiers—but there is little ambiguity in her status as explicitly antagonistic. The fact that Baba Yaga is stripped of all Slavic indicators to masquerade as the Western Little Red Riding Hood does queer the conception of Baba Yaga's ambiguity. Baba Yaga's chicken footed hut is mentioned in passing, but there is no focus on location that typically appears in tales surrounding her. Forrester, in the introduction to *Baba Yaga: the Wild Witch of the East in Russian Fairy Tales,* points out one of the important aspects of Baba Yaga's home: "Baba Yaga's house can be in the forest, in an empty field, or on the seashore. These locations all signify the same thing: they are far from the original home of the hero or heroine, on the border of another world" (Forrester 2013, xxviii). The liminality of Baba Yaga's home, in that is never fully stationary, and the testing of the protagonist are connected. But, without her classic hut and the opportunity for the protagonist to stumble upon her, what purpose does she serve and what is different? Willingham's depiction of Baba Yaga—she never transforms into the description mentioned above—allows her to be reduced down to her purpose of testing the protagonists. It does, in the process, strip her of her nuanced ambiguity—as it is clear throughout *Fables* that she is a friend of the Adversary and more than willing to cause suffering and death to his enemies.

Jack Zipes, in *The Irresistible Fairy Tale*, writes, "in many tales there are three Baba Yagas, often sisters, and in some tales a Baba Yaga is killed only to rise again. And

no Baba Yaga is exactly like the other. A Baba Yaga is inscrutable and so powerful that she does not owe allegiance to the devil, god, or even her storytellers" (Zipes 2012, 61). The first observation holds true—this Baba Yaga is not like any other Baba Yagas, but she does position herself as a friend of the Adversary, which disconnects her from the tradition of ambiguity and independent power. Although her reasons for joining the adversary are never fully explained within *Fables*, it seems fairly certain that she joined the Adversary willingly.

One of the particularly interesting aspects of Baba Yaga in *Fables* is the choice of Little Red Riding Hood's identity for infiltrating Fabletown. Baba Yaga within *Fables* is a clearly antagonistic figure, and her choice to appear as Little Red Riding Hood—a woman defined by her trauma in her original folktale and then defined by her trauma by the Adversary—is interesting. Looking at Perrault's version of the tale, we simply see Little Red being eaten and that's it—no rescue by the huntsman. I chose to look at Perrault's as opposed to the Grimms' because of the editorial choice to add the huntsman by the Grimms. Being duped by evil forces seems vital to Little Red Riding Hood's character in this way, and the fact that Baba Yaga delivers another duping in a different way adds another layer to Little Red's track record. The choice by Baba Yaga to appear as her also serves to define Baba Yaga as without remorse or empathy, she has no qualms in making a caricature out of Little Red to get back at other Fables. Her willingness to perform Little Red's traumas in the volume prove this, as she reacts dramatically to seeing Bigby, asking King Cole how they could have forgiven him, and continually brings up her years of torture to Boy Blue. Even so, her acting is not flawless and does

immediately give her up as a fraud to both Boy Blue and Bigby—even they know that

Little Red had more depth than Baba Yaga was portraying.

Baba Yaga, Little Red Riding Hood, Bluebeard, Snow White, and Bigby Wolf all

share the same common denominator—they are folktale characters who have been widely

popularized in all sorts of media. The cultural understanding of these characters come

from many different sources, and their intertextual nature makes them more dynamic

than, say, a new character in a sci-fi film.

3.5. Survey Response

In order to get some specific feelings and experiences on the public's reading of

Fables, I distributed a survey to fans of the comic. One response in particular refers to

many different aspects of *Fables* and its complicated nature:

> I love the creative use of traditional fairy tale characters within the Fables
> comics, specifically the hints to their previous stories that provide context,
> but also their new stories within an unusual plot that expands their core set
> of tales. For me, whenever I think of Snow White, *I inevitably think of*
> *three things: the Grimm's Version, the Disney Version, and the Fables*
> *Version*. (my italics) These for me are three key parts that make up the
> Snow White character identity for me. No part is more important than the
> other and all are interrelated. It serves for me, to show how fairytales can
> grow and evolve over time to reach newer generations of readers and
> listeners. Fables also mixes folk tales, fairy tales, and nursey rhymes
> together. Boy Blue who is a nursery rhyme, plays a key role in Fables but
> is almost nonexistent in literature and academia save for mother goose.
> This allows Fables to expand on characters that childhood rhymes
> established familiarly. Fables also introduces characters that are not
> usually the focus of today's society and makes them a focus—Rose Red
> being a prime example. The Big Bad Wolf is another. This allows for a
> process of redemption for the readers as Bigby isn't really "bad," just
> super moody (Anonymous survey respondent 2018, 1.72., emphasis
> added).

The sentence I italicized stands out for many reasons. It is undeniable that these Disney films maintain a hold on popular culture's understanding of the folk tales. Yet, this survey respondent acknowledges that their understanding of these characters is developed by both *Fables* and the Grimms' collection. This sort of intertextuality is inherent to the parodic folkloresque form, but not every audience member brings the same background connections to their reading.

Jeffrey A. Tolbert writes in an introduction on Parodic Folkloresque that "complicity between the creator of a text and its audience and extrinsic factors that depend wholly on the reader (i.e., a knowledge of contemporary events) are articulated through the parodic form" (Foster 2016, 176). Not every reader will bring the same understanding of folktales to their reading of *Fables*, but at the very least they will bring some emblematic knowledge of folk tale characters.

Baba Yaga, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White, Bluebeard, and the Big Bad Wolf all have been used in *Fables* to different ends with varying amounts of intertextuality. This fact, in consideration with all of the other aspects of parodic folkloresque, gives every reader a unique intertextual experience, adding to the gravitas and dynamism of the folkloresque in contemporary media. The function of the folkloresque varies from work to work, but the familiarity it gives to readers always positions them as in-the-know, allowing for nuanced understandings of characters long known intersecting with contemporary fears, values, and hopes.

Fables not only plays with Western folktale characters that have been used frequently throughout popular culture, but it also combines folklore with literary canon, positing that the two go hand in hand. This goes to show that popular culture readily distorts the barriers between certain types of media/culture, and shows its strengths (and what can be weaknesses) in creating an all-encompassing world where stories all stand on equal footing, as long as they are widely disseminated.

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4. **The Dynamics of Comics Artwork: How Artwork Contributes to the Tone of the Folkloresque**

Without images, comics are mere prose. The medium's unique quality as a melding of words and images sets it apart from prose or film. Comic panels do not necessarily run against each other as the frames of film do. There can be no true indicator of what happens between frames. It allows for readers to fill in the gaps and play a part in creating their own reading experience. Time is not necessarily linear. Scott McCloud says: "Comic panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, Staccato rhythm of unconnected moments" (McCloud 1993, 67). All of these aspects make comics a medium for the reader—it allows for great amounts of experimentation, creativity, and interpretation. What a creator creates is not set in stone—the liminality of gutters opens up doors for great amounts of freedom for the reader's experience.

All of these things culminate in unique ways of delivering a creator's vision. In *Hellboy* and *Fables*, we are given unique artwork, different uses of panel, of the gutter, and of panel borders in comparison to more mainstream comic titles. Speech/thought bubbles and lettering also play a part in the cohesive delivery of either comic. The use of color also helps set the mood and create the ambiance of the folkloresque in both comics. The art of a comic or film has not been dutifully analyzed in the vein of the folkloresque, so this chapter aims to fill in some of that gap. How does artwork contribute to the folkloresque in a work of fiction? The art is just as valuable to the success of a folkloresque work as the written aspects. The differences between the two comics will also be noted and analyzed—as this comparison will be helpful in understanding the two comics' aims.

4.1. The Artwork of Hellboy

Hellboy's creator Mike Mignola has a style that stands out from the mainstream comics of Marvel and DC. The lines and shapes are slightly more amorphous, less certain, than the straight, precise lines that you might find in classic comics like Batman or Wonder Woman. Speech and thought bubbles, lettering, and color all contribute to the folkloresque mood of this comic series. The lack of action lines in many cases also sets Mignola's work apart, giving it a more reverent tone, one of silence and solitude.

The red of Hellboy's skin stands out as one of the signatures of Mignola's work. His shaved horns, the Right Hand of Doom, his devilish tail, small yellow slits for eyes, trench coat, utility shorts, and not-so-human feet—all of these aspects contribute to the iconic form of Hellboy himself. The clothing that Hellboy wears allows for more of his red skin to be seen—reminding readers of Hellboy's nature as a liminal hero, caught between the two worlds of his parentage, Hell and Earth. This sense of liminality serves the folkloresque well throughout the series, and in other ways as well.

Figure 4.1: Hellboy's classic look

Hellboy's design severs him from his more physically human peers. There are many other icons within *Hellboy* that I will to return to later, but his physical features reflect one of the major styles at play within the work: the grotesque. Within the art canon, the grotesque is an amorphous and intriguing idea, and contains many qualities that make it hard to pin down. Frances S. Connelly outlines the nature of the grotesque in his 2012 study, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: The Image at Play*. Connelly states that "the grotesque is culturally relative, and the notion of what constitutes the grotesque can vary from one culture or era to another" (Connelly 2012, 4). Nonetheless, "It always represents a state of change, breaking open what we know and merging it with the unknown. As such, the one consistent visual attribute of the grotesque is that of flux. Whether aberrant, metamorphic, or combinatory, grotesques are all in a transitional, in-between state of being. Blurring categories, the grotesque pulls us into a liminal state of multiple possibilities" (Connelly 2012, 5). This sort of incongruous genre of art suits

itself well to the mood, style, and content of the folkloresque; *Hellboy* brings tropes from the occult detective, pulp fiction, and horror into its repertoire of tropes to create its sense of the folkloresque. Connelly goes onto say that "Paradoxically, we perceive something as grotesque when it breaches the boundaries of the reality in which we are immersed…the grotesque confounds language and logical sequence as it fuses together disparate realities" (Connelly 2012, 12). The use of the differing styles within Mignola's texts creates a world that does not have immediately clear rules. Similarly, Hellboy's world is in conflict with itself as it eliminates realistic boundaries (i.e.: no magic or paranormality) that typically exist within superhero comics—at least the boundaries that are understood by readers.

Connelly brings up an interesting point in relationship to folklore and the grotesque:

> Renaissance artists appropriated the Roman *grottesche* and used them as a vehicle to demonstrate their own genius. At this same time the elements of the grotesque that had long flourished in European folk culture began to be assimilated into emergent fine arts traditions by writers like Francois Rabelais and artists such as Hieronymous Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder… Moreover, the assimilation of the grotesque into the fine arts signaled a dramatic shift. In premodern Europe, this was experienced as a collective in specific ritual times and spaces, set apart from the everyday (Connelly 2012, 17).

What had been an aspect of folk belief/ritual of liminality became transposed onto the grotesques of mainstream—a shift that caused this art to be used as a way of vicariously experiencing the liminality of ritual spaces. Justin Edwards and Rune Graulund, in their book *The Grotesque*, (which focuses on the theory of the grotesque in gothic studies), discuss the nature of hybridity and monstrosity:

Monstrosity and grotesquerie merge in the hybrid forms that disrupt the borders separating what is acceptable within the categories of "human" and "non-human". Many early depictions of monstrous forms take the literal forms of hybrids, mixtures of man and animal… Such figures foreground the limits of the human body, policing the margins of human classification, but they can also engender fear, rather than stability, through frightening depictions of what happens when the boundaries of classification give way to monstrous hybrid figures (Edwards and Rune 2013, 40).

This description harkens to animal bridegrooms, ogres, and internally bestial characters in the scheme of folktale studies. Within the folktale, beast-like characters are not uniformly good or bad. Ogres can go either way, an example being in Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty," she is the mother-in-law of Sleeping Beauty and from a "race of ogres." Ogres are not always clearly illustrated or explained—but listeners understood that their coding was explicitly negative; the mother-in-law, like many other ogres, craves human flesh. Animal bridegrooms (ATU 425), although negative in appearance, (such as the "Frog King" in the Grimms' *Nursery and Household Tales)* are typically positive forces on a heroine or hero. Then there are the internally bestial characters—such as Perrault's Bluebeard—who although visibly coded as "Other" (specifically "Oriental"), is a rich noble and at first appears to be an excellent choice for a husband because readers are unaware of his crimes.

Hellboy's hybrid origin places him into the same category as the Animal Bridegroom—he appears evil, but internally he is good, although not infallible. The choice to depict Hellboy in this way suits the taste of oral tradition—readers understand that his actions are more important than his looks and he should thus

not be reduced to his parentage or skin color. Hellboy's ambiguity and hybridity

paints him as a grotesque hero. Geoffrey Galt Harpham states "Grotesque forms

in fact almost always inspire ambivalent emotional reactions" (Harpham 1982, 8).

The ambiguity comes through strongly in *Hellboy*, as opposed to contemporary

superhero comics, where clarity in art—both drawing, panel use, and

speech/thought bubbles are typically clear and concise.

　　　Scott Bukatman discusses the stasis (what I would consider ambiguity)

within Hellboy:

> Mignola's *Hellboy*, while emphatically remaining an action comic, is
> steeped in a stasis that could indeed be called contemplative. That this
> innovative exploration of page, movement, sequence, and figure takes
> place in the pages of a monster-adventure-action comic is remarkable.
> *Hellboy* creates something of a ruminative and intertextual space for the
> reader to occupy (Bukatman 2016, 151).

Bukatman's word choice is telling: "ruminative" elicits a not specifically positive

or negative thoughtfulness—ambiguity. The internal struggles of Hellboy's

hybridity are showcased on the page by Mignola through this very use of stasis. It

is especially telling that time and time again readers are given entire pages of

three or four panels that showcase Hellboy's struggles with monsters and

cataclysmic forces. These pages sometimes host no word/thought bubbles, and the

action seems to take place in the gutter. We see Hellboy winding up for a punch

or falling, but there are no action lines drawn into the panels. Action is clearly

happening, but readers are given the moments in between moments of action (see

Figure 4.2)—the moments where Hellboy is thinking about the futility of fighting against his blood, against the powers that seems to overwhelm the future.

Figure 4.2: Example of Stasis, Hellboy in Hell, Mike Mignola

This ambiguity is more than just a decision between one or the other. In the case of *Hellboy*, ambiguity elicits from readers the consideration of the arbitrary positive/negative binary. The nuance of this elicitation is that in this reality, although Hellboy is physically portrayed in an "evil" way, the text provides few indications of whether any one person or situation falls firmly on

one side of this arbitrary binary. Readers should take the different arcs and one-shots as they come; the world of *Hellboy* is like our own—constantly shifting in constructs of morality and requiring contemplation.

It's not just action sequences where Mignola's visual depictions of ambivalent rumination come through. Hellboy's journey ends with *Hellboy in Hell* (2017), and this arc in particular is indicative of this static, ambivalent tone that Bukatman discusses. On page 54 in the lavish first library edition—whose pages extend past the normal trade paperback size, we're given the scene of Hellboy being given the right hand of doom from his father, Satan (see Figure 4.3).

Hellboy is led to the home that he was born in on October 5th, 1617, which is revealed on the pages beforehand. Up until then, Hellboy's "creation" was subject to debate, but the spirit that has led him here shows him a vision of the past. This page is divided into 9 panels in 3 rows, and none of them are of the same size. The first is a black panel with red writing that says "wok," it extends across half of the top row. The following panel, in white, shows Hellboy's severed baby hand, which has been cut off so he can receive the right hand of doom. This panel is 1/3 of the previous panel's side, but stands out as much as the first, because of its white background. Next, a fully black panel sits above a red one of the same size—but the red one shows baby Hellboy with his hand cut off— but the panel borders also cuts off his face and legs. This is the first row of panels and even with the sound effect of his hand being removed, the vast

emptiness of the negative space in all of the panels (the only subjects in the two are Hellboy himself), depicts the great, solemn gravity of the situation.

Figure 4.3: Hellboy in Hell, Mike Mignola (page 54)

Two panels rest underneath this row and are the same height. One depicts Satan holding the bloodied sword that had just removed the hand, and he states, looking at the reader, "All my hopes," indicating that he has put all his faith in

Hellboy to bring destruction to the world. This panel also has a red background—a seeming reflection of the blood that has just been spilled. This panel takes up 2/3rds of the row, and the last third is taken up by a black panel showing Hellboy's hand falling along with a couple of drops of tears trailing behind it.

The bottom row contains three panels, and this row extends past the halfway mark of the page, eclipsing the size of the first two rows combined. The final three panels depict (1) his uncle and two siblings, (2) the spirit that is holding the right hand of doom, and (3) the same panel as the first minus the uncle (it has also been thinned compared to the first two panels). The second panel, with the spirit, sits starkly against the rest of the page because of its coloring—the spirit is almost golden against the red and black, which seems to reinforce the importance of the moment—that Hellboy is being handed the appendage that will allow him to bring about the end of the world.

A unique thing happens at this point in *Hellboy in Hell*. Readers are transported backward through time literally through the tale and also via Mignola's art style. Volume 6 of Hellboy, *Darkness Falls*, features a much more detailed art style than *Seed of Destruction*, the first volume. An interesting thing happened through the progression of Hellboy (one that is typical, really): Mignola's art style changed, becoming more polished. Yet, on these pages in the final volume, the story takes place before the beginning of Hellboy, which the artwork indicates through its simplified style.

As a reader, this scene is the payoff of years of waiting—we're given ideas of Hellboy's origins and we explicitly understand the story behind his mother and father, but this moment is when Hellboy is *created.* This sort of flashback holds a shift in tone from surrounding in pages, and, although there are a couple of words uttered by Satan himself, we are being told the tale by the spirit that lead Hellboy to his old home, like a storyteller.

I would argue, also, that this page in particular allows Mignola to employ his heightened grotesque style such as his earlier artwork, which exhibits a more amorphous use of line and form which contributes to ambiguity. The page is framed on the sides by more muted tones, with the golden, red, and white panels forming the center, which directs the eyes in a way that would still allow for a clear understanding of the movement of the story, even. These nuanced choices heighten this retelling of Hellboy's origin. The quiet, "ambiguity" of this page also serves to mirror the orality of storytelling—a listener hears the story but can only really imagine what happens in their own minds. The silence on the page— the almost complete lack of sound effects even—creates a cerebral, contemplative experience for the reader.

4.2. *Hellboy's* Covers

Covers also serve to exert the folkloresque nature of the comic, as they allow Mignola and other artists to display what they see as being important artwork to express atmosphere, content, and tone. Let's start with volume one,

Seed of Destruction, as this is typically the first collected volume that readers would pick up when starting their journey with Hellboy.

The cover for the trade paperback of this volume shows Hellboy standing in the middle of the page, right hand of doom clenched, with paraphernalia hanging from his belt, such as two horseshoes and cross—both of them being items of protection. Behind him stands Rasputin, arm extended holding a staff. A dragon with a skull on its chest and floating crown seems to sit on Rasputin's shoulder. To the left of Hellboy is positioned one of the frog creatures that ends up killing his surrogate father, Trevor Bruttenholm. A man holding a harpoon stands to Hellboy's right but is dwarfed in comparison. He casts his eyes downward, seemingly in fear. All of the figures behind Hellboy display muted colors, with black serving to fill in most of the forms, and tan being used for highlights. As will be typical for most Hellboy covers, Hellboy's red skin is the focal point, as it is the brightest color on display.

This cover emphasizes quite a few things: the frog creature in the front left tells readers to expect monsters; Rasputin's looming form mirrors his position as antagonist for the long term, and the man with the harpoon, who is dressed in old clothing, hints at the backstory that readers will be given within the volume. Part of the pentagram on the front of Rasputin's robes is also visible—and would be recognized by some readers as an occult symbol. It was a clever choice to have the pentagram at Hellboy's back, with the cross hanging from Hellboy's belt; Mignola no doubt wanted to create tension between the good and evil forces that

Hellboy is constantly at odds with and especially the internal tension Hellboy combats.

The Chapter division pages within this volume are also unique to the series. The Chapter Three page depicts a grey and black hydra. This water serpent with seven heads hails from Greek mythology and is slain by Heracles. When the reader turns the page from this, on the backside they see Rasputin standing among the curling tentacles that he has summoned. Hellboy's body lays in some sort of liquid at the bottom of the page, having been paralyzed by the tentacles. Mignola no doubt knew that most readers would recognize the Hydra and understand the great task that Hellboy would be up against. The Hydra is an apt metaphor for Rasputin and his disciples—when Hellboy stops one of the heads, it almost always grows back. Rasputin and his followers also are like the Hydra, in that there are many moving parts always as work. The connection between the Hydra and Rasputin's group also alerts the reader to the fact that this group is important in the Hellboy mythos—they are the antagonists, and his fight against them will be as difficult as Hercules' against the Hydra.

Chapter four's heading page depicts angels, positioned at the top, fighting and killing demons below them. The choices that Mignola made here—to connect Hellboy to both the Christian and Greek traditions— allow him to work in a broader sphere than is possible in a solely Christian world. This choice by extension places Hellboy in a world similar to ours—one of folklore and unclear lines of what is real and what is not.

Two volumes of *Hellboy* collect short tales frequently inspired by folktales

and legends. The four volumes are *The Chained Coffin and Others*, *The Troll

Witch and Others, The Crooked Man and Others,* and *The Bride of Hell*. I think

it's especially pertinent to look at these covers and the images within *The Chained

Coffin and Others* and *The Troll Witch* because they are indicative of the use of

the folkloresque in the series. These two volumes, with their collected short tales,

in many ways mirror collected books of folklore—as there are no arcs connecting

the stories in the books, just snippets of Hellboy's adventures and their quick

resolutions, similar to folktales. Their covers also mirror their folkloresque

content.

An image from "The Chained Coffin," which I discussed in an earlier

chapter, appears on the cover of the volume. As with almost all of the *Hellboy*

covers, Hellboy stands large in the middle of the cover with his classic outfit and

look. A black coffin with a large grey cross printed on it juts out from behind

Hellboy. He holds a large bundle of chains and skulls seem to hang off of them. A

cross headstone and other grave markers appear around him, with a cemetery

fence off to the right side. The moon hovers above the crucifix headstone, which

also appears on a couple of other covers (*The Troll Witch and Others*, and *The

Right Hand of Doom*). This cover stands out in particular due to its bright yellow

background. Of the eight main volumes and *Hellboy in Hell*, this is the only cover

with a light-colored, bright background. The color choice connects to the story

"The Christmas Underground" and specifically to a scene in which a woman is

released from the hold of faeries—a ring (the same color as the background of the cover) is removed from her hand, the ring turns into a lizard, which Hellboy disposes of.

The color choice cast against the dark colors of the cemetery paraphernalia creates a sense of dusk implying that Hellboy stands between the safe light of day and the darkness. The imagery of this cover is not explicitly folkloric—but it does connect to the folkloresque aspects within the stories, especially the tale the volume is named for. *The Troll Witch and Others* mostly features imagery from the story "The Troll Witch," but there is something more intrinsically folkloresque about it—it showcases explicit, specific images from the tale, and there is something ambiguous and mystical about them.

Mignola includes a note after the "The Troll Witch":

> This is one of my favorites. The story of the two sisters is based on a Norwegian folktale. In the original story, the one sister *does* rescue the other's head and she does turn back into a person and she marries a prince, etc. I liked her better as a cow. The reveal of the sister's head was probably unconsciously inspired by the end of John Huston's *The Man Who would be King,* my all-time favorite 'boy movie.'

This tale takes place in 1963 in Norway. Hellboy comes to visit a woman; readers are unsure of his purpose. "Hellboy. Have you come to kill me?" she asks. "Maybe," he responds. The first page establishes the magical nature of the troll witch. We're shown spoons, a bone, hanging herbs, a bird's talon, and a mortar and pestle—something that links to a common character in *Hellboy*, Baba Yaga, who rides on a mortar and pestle.

It is then revealed that Hellboy has come because of a series of murders. The woman goes on to tell the story of a woman who was struggling to have children. The woman sought out a witch and was given two flowers—one ugly and one that is good. She eats the good flower and has a daughter, but desires to give her husband a son, so she eats the ugly flower. She gives birth to a second girl who is "ugly, stunted, troll-like." The two sisters grow up and remain close all the same. Many years later, a ruckus is heard outside, and the mother says, "It is the trolls come to hold their Yule celebration. Leave them be and no harm will come of it." The ugly sister cannot leave be and heads out to fight the trolls.

The witch then ponders: "I wonder why? Do you think she saw in them the thing that was monstrous in herself?" This aside questions the moral of folktales and wondering what purpose they serve—exhibiting the quality cited by Michael Dylan Foster: "the folkloresque concept includes products that, while clearly born through commercial processes, explicitly or self-consciously showcase their relationship with folklore by alluding to folk knowledge or jargon" (Foster 2016, 5). The woman tells the folktale to Hellboy and ponders its purpose.

The story moves forward; the woman tells Hellboy about how the beautiful sister sticks her head out the window to see if the ugly sister is alright, and as she does, a troll snatches her head off and puts a cow head in its place, and so the sister becomes a cow. Hellboy takes the lead on telling the story at this point. The ugly sister, "taking a wooden spoon and riding on a goat," rides down into Trollheim, the kingdom of trolls. The Troll Witch (who is the ugly sister)

tells Hellboy that the ugly sister takes her sister's head back and turns her back into a person and then the beautiful marries a prince, "or something. I **have** heard that story." The witch replies, "A fairy tale. She lived and died a cow... her bones lie there." This final piece of dialogue sits in the corner of a panel with a black background and the dark grey bones of a cow, which goes to prove the fairy tale false—the woman knows where the cow's bones are, and they are real.

The story moves forward when the old women reveals her sister's head preserved behind a small curtain in what looks like a reliquary. This one panel looms large on the page—the shriveled, preserved head with the same type of beautiful flowers that the mother ate. The witch says, "Someday a woman who is wanting children will come to me. I will give her these flowers to eat, and all her children will be beautiful… not trollish," confirming reader's suspicions that she is the troll daughter herself. She gives Hellboy the soup ladle that she had used to attack the trolls years ago and makes the comment that "It is still wet [with blood]. In the wood is the sound of their breaking bones." She instructs Hellboy to lay it at the entrance of the cave so that the trolls will not be able to cross back into the cave during the night—leaving them in the sunlight to turn to stone.

The cover of this volume speaks to all of the stand-out aspects of the tale. The troll-witch looms as large as Hellboy—a visual acknowledgement that this tale is hers and that Hellboy is merely a listener. The shadows of the reliquary behind Hellboy depict loss. The beautiful flowers are a yellow, but they are still dulled by the color palette choice, while the ugly, shriveled flowers fade into the

darkness below them; perhaps an indication of the fleeting nature of beauty and precariousness of life, considering the beautiful sister's premature death. The troll-witch also holds the ladle, cradling it in one of her arms and gripping it with her other hand.

On the final page the troll-witch comments on what Hellboy is tasked with: to leave the ladle at the opening of the cave. "No blow struck… No drop of blood spilled… and I wonder how will you feel about that?" There are four panels, with the top, taking up about two-thirds of the page vertically and extending fully across. In this panel Hellboy looks out over a cove to another stretch of land where four large stones stand—stones that harken to Stonehenge or other ancient megalithic structures.

Three panels sit underneath this one—the first being a picture of Hellboy, cigarette hanging out of his mouth with smoke billowing up; his facial expression is inscrutable. This page is a particularly strong example of the ambiguity that pervades Mignola's work. The combination of these two panels serve to instigate the reader to question Hellboy's actions. Are his actions not heroic if they are not violent? Was his decision to follow her directions the "right" choice? This is an excellent depiction of Hellboy's constant struggle with his place in his own story—are his choices the correct choices? There is a sense of futility in the scene, that Hellboy is trapped between forces that will never see him as a person.

Choosing to depict this story on the cover on was a wise choice—it delivers image after image rooted in the troll witch's folktale, creating a dynamic collage of artwork that seem esoteric in nature and mysterious enough to draw in readers. The flying frog and snake, along with the witch's helpers also add a sense of whimsy and play on the reader's understanding of their symbolism, especially the snake. The snake, as the Christian instigator of the fall of man, serves to let readers know that the concept of good and evil will be at play in this tale.

This compilation of images occurs on most of the *Hellboy* covers, connecting back to the epic *Star Wars* movie posters showcasing the important characters. Because of this, there is a sense that *Hellboy* has an epic nature—a sign that this is an adventure tale at its roots. Though these images are somewhat specific, they are easily interpreted by a reader who doesn't know anything about "The Troll Witch" tale: the hag/witch figure, the flowers, the snake, and the moon suspended behind Hellboy are all straightforward symbols that allow readers to understand a general *mood* of the piece, and this mood is particularly folkloresque in nature.

These images align with Foster's approach to the three meanings of folkloresque, but especially the first: "that an item (or element of an item) is in the "style" of folklore" (Foster 2016,5). This meaning is not particularly well defined, but when considering the artwork of a piece, the style—dark and stormy with images that link to readers' preconceived ideas and notions about folklore— it suffices to say that the folkloresque is present in Mignola's artwork. The

amorphous nature of his drawings—in that he leaves out details that other artists might painstakingly include—allows for greater interpretation of tone and meaning by readers.

Within this same volume—*The Troll Witch and Others*— there are two stories not drawn by Mignola: "The Vampire of Prague," drawn by P. Craig Russell, and "Makoma," drawn by Richard Corben. Both of these artists' styles differ from Mignola's.

"The Vampire of Prague" centers around a man who was an obsessive gambler; he lived through the plague and, so desirous of a game of poker, played with a number of dead men, thereby cursing him to roam forever as a vampire until someone can beat him at a hand of poker. After a subtle nod to the folkloric creature Rabbi Loew's golem (Cohen-Janca 2017), readers follow Hellboy in his chase for the vampire.

The vampire ends up getting hurt by Hellboy and, by shifting into a bat, drops his deck of cards. A hand falls out, indicating a straight—which Hellboy assigns to the vampire. Hellboy, throughout the chaos of the vampire trying to get away, has picked up card after card, and yells, "Full house, dumb ass!" as he reveals his hand beats the vampire's. This happens as the sun rises, and readers are given a comedic montage of the bat screaming past a bell and clock and then slamming into a wall and exploding into a puff of air—indicating that Hellboy *did* beat him at cards. The next page reveals that the "wall" the bat flew into was part

of a cross held by a statue of Jesus. Hellboy smiles at the end and lets the cards drift away.

I thought it was important to give a description of this tale because it reveals more than just a shift in an artistic style. This tale, settled among the others in this collection, is told in a particularly light, comedic tone, which certainly stands at contrast with the rest of the stories. Mignola discusses his relationship with the artist, P. Craig Russell:

> I originally planned to draw this one myself, but when it became clear that was never going to happen, the only artist I could think of for it was P. Craig Russell…This was my first time writing for him, and to say I was intimidated, well, that doesn't even begin to cover it. I gave Craig a script with all the dialogue (I usually write the dialogue after it's drawn) and then a very loose description of the action. I didn't try to tell Craig how to do anything. I didn't break the plot down by pages. I didn't even say how many pages the story had to be. I just turned it over to Craig (with some pictures of that gambler-ghost puppet) and got the hell out of his way (Mignola 2007, n.p.).

It's interesting to see that Mignola was both excited and apprehensive about passing the story onto Russell, but open to changing his creative method to best allow Russell to develop the tale in a way that he saw fit. He also describes his experience traveling to Prague with Guillermo del Toro and seeing a "pop-eyed, green-faced thing" (Mignola 2007) of a puppet, holding a little book telling the legend of the gambler ghost of Prague.

This story is not grim like so many others—this one is a snippet of the absurdity that Hellboy has to deal with regularly, and Russell's artwork, with its cartoonish style and more frequent use of sound effects than Mignola, suit the

narrative. After reading Mignola's description of the absurd puppet he saw with del Toro, it's clear that he sees this whole story as a little goofy, and Russell succeeds in drawing that tone. The art style is less solemn than Mignola's, in that it plays with color, movement, and the nature of the story itself. Another difference between the artists is Russel's background depiction. These clouds of fog are thin, but very much encroaching on the city, which adds an air of mystery and also sets the time of day being depicted—just before dawn.

The colorist used for this tale, Loverne Kindzierski, was also different from Mignola's usual colorists, Dave Stewart and Matt Hollingsworth. Kindzierski's colors are more vibrant, less muted, and very effective—like in the scene when the sun is rising, and the vampire is facing his impending doom, where the colors are vibrant and indicative of the sun's inevitable rise and the vampire's imminent fall. It also stands in contrast to the humorous image of the bat screaming his way into the Jesus statue.

It seems natural that the folkloresque and grotesque would work so well within *Hellboy* as a vehicle for creating a specific tone and atmosphere, but an art style is not the only aspect of importance in understanding the artwork of a comic. Panel use, gutters, margins, thought/speech bubbles, color, covers, and imagery all play an important part in fully grasping the nature of *Hellboy*. Hellboy, as (mostly) the creation of a single creator, stands in opposition to *Fables* and the *Fables* universe. These differences are important to identify, as they have an effect on the stories and art created.

4.3. *Fables* and its Artwork

      Fables, written by Bill Willingham and drawn by a number of different pencillers, but predominantly Mark Buckingham, brings a very different art style to the table in comparison to *Hellboy*. I will be looking at a number of volumes to give a comprehensive look at the art style and how it effects the telling of the narrative. *Fables*, like *Hellboy,* sometimes has peculiar covers that help to set the mood for the tale. *Fables* uses panel borders in ways that set it apart from most other comics, which also fuels its folkloresque nature by creating a strong "fairy tale" tone.

      Fables: Legends in Exile is the first volume of the series and came out in 2002. This volume was drawn by Lan Medina and introduces readers to Fabletown, many of the Fables, and the current crisis at the forefront of the town's troubles. Rose Red has apparently been murdered, and Bigby Wolf and Snow White must figure who did it. Readers meet characters like Beauty and the Beast, Bluebeard, Jack, and Boy Blue. The conquest of the Fables' homeland by the Adversary and their uniting with one another is also discussed in this volume—setting up a long-term arc that will define the series as a whole.

      Fables is also significantly more dialogue-driven than *Hellboy*, which works to change the tone of the work. Panels typically display two things: an action and a piece of dialogue. *Fables*, by and large, is a plot- and character-centered work that focuses on moving the plot forward; it is uninterested in the kind of stasis apparent in *Hellboy*. The conflicts between the different Fables are at the forefront of this comic. The folkloresque

comes through in this comic mostly through the "parody" (Foster 2016) category and the art of fairy tales are parodied throughout as well.

Legends in Exile displays multiple instances of stylized panel borders that are unique to this series. The first instance of this is on page 39 (Willingham 2002). Bigby is interrogating Jack as to Rose Red's whereabouts—she has evidently been murdered quite brutally, and an entire page dedicated to the carnage of her bedroom (Willingham 2002, 21). This page (39) has ornamental shapes that encircle three out of the four panels on the page (see Figure 4.4). The stylized borders always denote flashbacks within this volume. The top panel shows Jack and Rose Red arguing loudly on the street—Bigby says within a caption that "It nearly got to the point where I would have had to intervene," (Willingham 2002, 39). This statement speaks to Jack's motive for killing Rose Red— they've clearly had a rocky relationship.

Figure 4.4: Fables (page 39), Lan Medina

The second stylized panel shows a view of the Fables' Remembrance Day celebration with Rose Red walking with Bluebeard. Most of the Fables in the panel look at the couple and a woman in the background leans toward a friend, whispering in her ear—clearly indicating that this is a scandalous moment. The third and last ornamented panel is of Jack, all in green, watching Rose Red and Bluebeard dance. Rose Red wears red and Bluebeard wears blue. These simplistic color coding of the characters of interest identifies them as important and invokes the one-dimensional quality of most fairy tale characters, a reinforcement of parody. The fourth panel sits small in the bottom right corner. It shows Bigby and Jack discussing Bigby's next move and brings the reader back to the present.

Michael Dylan Foster writes, "Folkloresque parody reflects a seemingly intentional appropriation of folkloric motifs and structures for the purpose of caricature or similar modes of critical commentary" (Foster 2016, 18). The flourishing, golden, ornamental boarders on this page harken to the intricate ornamentation seen in fairy tale books for children and to the finely crafted hardbound books of old. The content of the panels on page 39, though, stands harshly against the content of fairy tales for children— this is an arrested man telling a detective that the man that Rose Red was with is a serial murderer and that Bigby should be looking to talk to Bluebeard. The image of two lovers dancing is idyllic usual, but in this case, the image is undermined by the reader's knowledge of who Bluebeard is and the jealous Jack watching it all unfold.

Foster writes that "commercial objects integrated into a folk assemblage create subtle hypertextual links to the contexts out of which they came" (Foster 2016, 54). What

he's referring to is the kind of fuzzy allusion within the film *Spirited Away* (Miyazaki 2001), but this statement is also relevant when considering these more direct parodies within the folkloresque. The color choices, the idyllic settings, and the well-known characters all work together to create a world for the reader that is both familiar and new, which is one of great appeals of the folkloresque.

The entirety of page 55, except for the final thin panel on the bottom right, shares similar characteristics to page 39, but this page takes a darker turn. It recounts what has happened during the investigation into Rose Red's death so far. It depicts the interrogation of Jack, followed by the investigation of Bluebeard. It recounts how Bluebeard is contractually obligated to marry Rose Red, and then a large panel at the bottom of the page shows Bluebeard revealing one of his dead wives to his most recent (and still living) bride, knife in hand.

The ornamentation on this page is less gilded and more ominous. The decoration around the panels is white, a mix between twisting vines and banners. It stands out brightly against the black background. The panels also intersect on the top row, with the three small panels overlapping one another. The largest panel, at the bottom, revealing Bluebeard's past murders has especially large, flourishing decoration around it. The last panel, which is a sliver of Snow White bringing readers back into reality, does not have any decoration. She points out how Bluebeard's modus operandi was always killing his wives *after* the wedding, so killing Rose Red would diverge from his past actions.

This page, in comparison to the previous ornamented page, has a significantly darker tone. The colorist's choice to use a purple tinge over the entire page creates two differences between this page and those surrounding it. Readers are shown what led Bigby and Snow to this point in the tale. The coloring also serves to indicate the ambiguity of the investigation so far—purple is not a color that is distinctly associated with emotion. When considering the context of the content and the coloring mixed together, it is clear that purple equates mystery and ambiguity.

The white ornamentation with the black background, combined with the purple coloring, makes for a fantastical page. The fairy tale nature of the characters, especially Bluebeard's grisly reputation, comes through here—this page's content indicates the movement of the story toward the inevitable climax and discovery of Rose Red's whereabouts. This is the point in the story where Snow and Bigby feel as if they have nowhere else to turn; they are stumped by what could have happened.

With the turn of the page, we see that the purple coloring and white ornamentation continues. The next two pages depict how Bigby and Snow White visited The Black Forest Witch, questioning her about her history of cannibalism and if she might've taken it up again. The next row of panels shows Bigby questioning Prince Charming, Snow White's ex-husband, who cheated on Snow White with Rose Red. Bigby says: "She disappeared a few days after you got back into town. Nice coincidence, huh?" (Willingham 2002, 56), but Prince Charming merely waves off the allegation.

Bigby confronts Snow White with the fact that she has long been at odds with Rose Red and that this might be enough to implicate her—but she calmly rebuts it. The last large panel, which finishes the sequence of the ornamentation/purple tint combination, depicts the carnage wrought back in the Fables' homeland by the adversary—Bigby mentions that it is pertinent that they consider that the adversary might've had a hand in Rose Red's death. This last panel, although ornamented, extends to the edge of the page because of the lack of gutter, showing a transition back into reality and the present.

This three-page section is folkloresque in a unique way, parodying what readers know of the characters and dark grittiness of this version of them. One survey respondent wrote: "Putting the Fables characters in a modern setting was really interesting, even though it has been done before. It just seemed very fresh and thought out. Most of the characters aren't carbon copies of their classic counterparts" (Anonymous Survey Respondent 2018, 1.23.). The massive amount of fairy-tale-related movies, TV shows, and other media demonstrates that there's a market for the folkloresque. In recent history, there's been a rise in "grittiness" coming through in media—the desire to make characters who might seem silly and superfluous more real through a darker, "grittier," tone and context. Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight* heralded the move in superhero movies to challenge the light-heartedness and childishness that many people considered inherent to superhero comics and films. Although other films like *Blade* (1998) or *X-Men* (2000) also played with the grittiness of superhero films, *The Dark Knight*, brought this

grittiness to the forefront of popular culture—reaching audiences that hadn't watched older gritty superhero films.

Fables challenges readers' assumptions of the familiar characters' actions and traits. The artwork, especially in this example, creates a magic mirror for readers to look through—the Fables are creatures of folktale, but shown as people in the current, modern, storyline, which marks them as transtextual beings. The contrast between the fairy tale ornamentation and the ugly truth of a missing person's case changes readers' interpretation of the characters. They are not simply one thing or another, these characters have been given depth beyond their original folk tale.

This sort of visual contrast is an excellent example of the parodical folkloresque coming through. Michael Dylan Foster writes that "the parodic folkloresque presumes a readership/audience with a sophisticated awareness of the popular culture product being critiqued in addition to familiarity with the folkloric elements invoked to enact the parody" (Foster 2016, 18). Readers see this ornamentation as linking back to the fairy tales they knew as children, and, in the case of the second example of ornamented pages, readers understand that their magical natures are at odds with the reality they now live in. There is no simple ending for these characters, considering their (mostly) immortal nature—they may last as long as their stories are perpetuated by "mundies," but there are forces that challenge their safety.

These two examples of panel ornamentation were used for contrast, while later in the volume, the ornamentation is used for a complete departure from reality through

flashback. Towards the end of the first volume (Willingham 2002, 79), readers are given a stretch of five and one-third pages that exhibit ornamentation and page bleed that makes these flashback pages stand out sharply against the present, human world reality. The page before shows Snow White at odds with her ex-husband Prince Charming at a ball. She questions his integrity as a Fable and starts reminiscing about the Homelands.
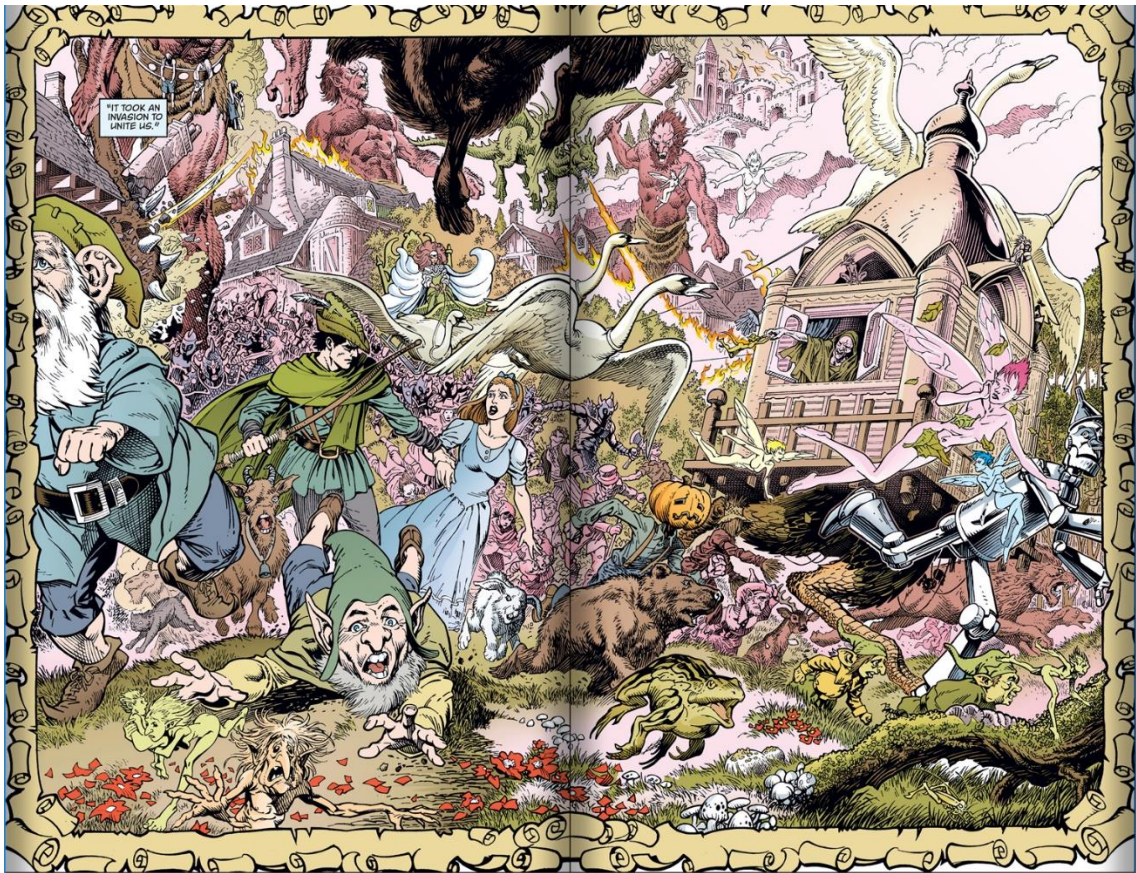

Figure 4.5: Fables, Lan Medina *(pages 79-80)*

Pages 79-80 (see Figure 4.5) reveal an earthy, green colored page depicting the people of the Homelands. A panel with Jack climbing up the beanstalk is positioned in the middle of the page but bleeds out underneath the other panels and off the edges of the pages, creating a sense of this world enveloping the reader. The ornamentation is not as

fine as the previous examples—more scroll-like in appearance, connecting to the stories

told of Fables and their longevity. Turning the page reveals a massive, two-page spread.

The bordered ornamentation of the last page is replaced by more clearly depicted scroll

motifs, but these scrolls are crumbling. This two-page spread depicts a massive panic in

the Homelands—massive giants, dragons, and other monsters stalk the horizon toward

the fleeing Fables.

This page shows Willingham's world, and it isn't just folktale characters. Baba

Yaga is fleeing in her chicken-footed house and the Swan Queen is being pulled by

swans; we also see characters like Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* and the Tin Man from

The Wizard of Oz—showing that Willingham's conception of *Fables* includes literary

fairytales.

Interestingly, this spread is mostly monochromatic, like the page before—green

takes up the majority of the page. One important detail is that in the foreground, three

patches of poppies can be seen. Two of these patches appear to have been damaged by

running and petals are splayed around, which looks similar to the splattering of blood—

this attack by the adversary causes a dramatic loss of life. This is the only use of red on

the page, which is strikingly set against the green of the rest of the page.

This spread also contains a massive depth of field that has not yet existed in the

comic. The dwarves, frog, and sprites in the foreground look large even for their small

size because they approach the reader's vantage point. In the background, through

massive, billowing clouds of smoke, a castle is on fire and is dwarfed by the looming

giants. One of the giants positioned in the far-left corner wears a belt with humanoid corpses laced into it—showing the violence that has already been done.

This violence continues in a crowd fleeing giant; the coloring is like that of the last example, purple and blue hues indicate depth of field but also contrast against the dominant greens of the page. This use of color harkens readers back to the negative side of fairy tales, like Bluebeard's crimes, reminding readers that, even though folk tales exist in a world apart from our own, that world is not always better. This is the first depiction of the adversary's invasion of the Homelands, and it is clearly meant to be shocking; the page beforehand was idyllic and peaceful, and this one is utterly chaotic.

The following two pages expand on the adversary's invasion. On page 82, the narration describes the legendary status of the adversary: "Some say he was a mere woodland sprite, while others claim he was once a god, thrown down from the vast heavens when his corruptions had become too great for his lofty brethren to tolerate." King Cole's narration sits on top of a panel that depicts a massive Pan-like figure with dark red eyes looking down at a normal-sized satyr. The panel below spreads across the page, and the satyr leans forward in a contorted way. Its hands are curled like claws and its eyes glow red on a black, featureless face. This is one of the first time that the comic uses (fantasy) horror imagery.

These images allow for the adversary's legend to be reduced to a horrifying image. There's no proof that he was a satyr, and as the adversary's true nature is revealed further into the series, these images are verifiably incorrect. The use of the satyr connotes

a hedonistic, libidinous nature. The adversary pushes forward because of his own desires and to the clear detriment of many others. The use of the satyr does not speak to the adversary's strategic strengths as a leader or his unwavering attitude of progress; this image reduces him to a licentious monster.

The following page increases the horror—in the top panel, Aslan, the lion from C.S. Lewis's *The Lion*, *The Witch, and the Wardrobe* series, is depicted dead on the ground with arrows sticking out of him. This again expands the canon that Willingham is working from. This decision on his part is thought-provoking because it considers these newer works of fiction to be as important to the popular tradition as folktale characters like Snow White and the Big Bad Wolf. The image of Aslan dead on the ground is also particularly horrifying, as any reader with a background reading Lewis' books will look favorably upon the character to some extent. This death is a way of reinforcing the ruthlessness of the adversary; it seems to say, "None of the characters you loved as a child are safe here."

Three panels are situated below this top panel. The first is a tall panel depicting the adversary's army marching, in full armor, toward the next land. The next panel, which sits atop the third, depicts shackled prisoners. Whether or not they are to be enslaved is not clear, but the large soldier in the background holds a cat-of-nine-tails whip. It blows in the wind and it is clear that it has made contact with the last man chained to the group. He leans forward, his hands stretched out in pain. Again, like the panel with Aslan, this reinforces the idea that readers should be nervous about this adversary—his actions are clearly malicious and powerful. The narration on this panel is

especially dire: "By the time we realized that he wasn't merely interested in conquering **that** land, or **those** people—that he was coming after all of us—it was too late." This connects the Fables' inaction to that of the allied powers during World War II—staying out of it allowed the violence and domination to spread.

The final panel on this page shows a couple of the adversary's soldiers bathed in black, silhouetted against a roaring fire. One of them swings an axe at a tree that falls, again reinforcing the destruction the adversary has directed his men to perpetuate. Below the falling tree, the narration states "Many of us didn't have the **chance** to run." The Fables' inaction clearly doomed many of them. This panel reminds readers that casualties were a fact of this war.

As agents of this war, the soldiers are depicted in a way that connects it to medieval fantasy books like J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series. They possess red eyes, sharp teeth, and dark, pinkish skin. Throughout the two pages, they are always depicted in movement—indicating their obedience to the adversary and their willingness to deliver his plan. Like the orcs from *Lord of the Rings*, they seem to lack total agency. Their violence seems to be their only pertinent characteristic. This image is easily understood by readers and also indicates a potential for impending violence. The soldiers marching forward is a reminder that Fabletown is never safe, and that the adversary's story will come to the forefront of the comic at some point. This very specific example is telling as the predominant art style in *Fables*.

Fables, being the monstrously large tale that it is, uses many different artists and art styles. The volume *Legends in Exile* displays some of the most important stylistic choices because it is intended to be readers' initial foray into Fabletown. Film noir and the ornamentation of collections of children's fairy tales intersect in interesting way in this volume. I have discussed the ornamentation above, but the influence of film noir must be described. Mark T. Conrad, in the book *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, describes some of the philosophical themes at play in film noir: "themes like moral ambiguity, reason versus passion in human decision making and action, the meaning of life, and pessimism" (Conrad 2007, 2). He also brings up "bleak, melancholic atmosphere and anxiety" (Conrad 2007, 51) as being a part of the film noir dialect. Moral ambivalence is also at the forefront of the film noir (Conrad 2007, 51), which reinforces the mystery and pessimism involved with film noir. *Legends in Exile* as a volume draws particularly from film noir, especially considering the plot line of Bigby Wolf and Snow White attempting to find out who killed Rose Red. The process of them questioning and interrogating Fables reveals the bleak nature of Fabletown and the lives of its inhabitants—many Fables are deeply in debt, others have been stripped of their titles, and others still must work difficult jobs to get by. This is an incredibly pessimistic view of the lives that folktale characters would be living if they lived in our world, but most likely an accurate one, considering the nature of contemporary society at large. "Happily ever after" is a dream, but an unreachable one for many. *Fables* employs the visual conventions of Film noir—Bigby is a chain smoker, the female Fables dress provocatively, and harsh shadows depicting a contrast between light and dark appear throughout the series.

Legends in Exile is important to look because it is the first volume of the series,

but it was not drawn by Mark Buckingham, the artist who would end up drawing the vast

majority of the series. Volume seven of the series *Fables: Arabian Nights (and Days)*,

which was drawn by Buckingham, chronicles Fabletown's process of reaching out to the

Arabian Homelands, which have not yet been overrun by the adversary. With the identity

of the adversary revealed by this point, this volume focuses on the preparation of

Fabletown's defenses against the adversary's inevitable attack.

Buckingham's style is not abstracted like Mike Mignola's—it is figurative, which

means that it depicts what is present in *Fables*' reality in a straightforward manner.

Flipping through volume 7, a number of things stick out. First is the lack of

monochromatic color in flashbacks, like you would find in *Hellboy*. Another technique

that stands out distinctly about this volume in comparison to *Legends in Exile* is that there

are elaborate panel borders that are panels in themselves (Willingham 2006, 54). They

follow along the edge of the page, in a rectangular shape, and typically have images

related to the page's content. They might contain a direct reference, like a depiction of

what the lighting is like in the setting on page 54, or the messiness of a storage room like

on page 86. Page 47 uses these side panels as well, but includes a rabbit dressed in

renaissance clothing sitting at the bottom of the rectangle, reading. Above it you can see

houses and buildings at The Farm. This rabbit appears within the main page in passing;

Bigby and Snow White's children run off, stealing the object the rabbit had been looking

at. Clearly, Buckingham understands that these side panels can be used to set the tone or

mood, but they can also serve as extra panels in this case.

Page 45 also uses these side panels in an interesting way. The page layout is set up with three rows of panels. The top and bottom rows depict King Cole meeting with the Arabian Fables and also the scheming going on behind the scenes between two of the Arabian fables. The row in the middle shows Boy Blue playing the trumpet, reminding readers of Fabletown and the situation there. Fascinatingly, the side panel that usually goes down the entire side of the page, is broken up into three pieces, extending the different rows out. The top and bottom rows show the Architectural details of the Arabian Fables' land, while the middle panel depicts Boy Blue, sword in front of him, with trumpets around him in a pattern, clearly abstracting his character as a protector of and fighter for Fabletown. One of the effects of this page is a sense of busy-ness. By using these broken upside panels, Buckingham shifts readers' views quickly and significantly. This set up is a visual reminder that much is going on, and although a page can only show so much, it's important to acknowledge that this is a complicated situation that Fabletown is in.

Pages 14 and 38 both use the side panels as symbols of the characters depicted on the page. Page 14 shows Flycatcher's (i.e., the Frog Prince) attempt at being brave by approaching the Arabian Fables. The side panel shows a frog, colored in a peculiar green color compared to a muted green background, latched onto the handle of a broom, as Flycatcher is the janitor of Fabletown. The frog has a small crown on, but it is clear that his status has been reduced, just as Flycatcher's has. At this point, Snow White has left as deputy mayor and King Cole has bestowed power on Beauty and the Beast. Page 38 depicts Beauty and the Beast talking about their failings as leaders of Fabletown, and

Beauty suggests moving forward with their own style of ruling different from their predecessors Snow White and Bigby Wolf, implying using the Beast's violence as leverage. The side panels of this page depict Beauty on the bottom half of the page, fiercely looking forward, while the beast looms above her, in muted grey tones, holding a book of law—indicating a change of plans when it comes to leading Fabletown. She may be at the forefront of leadership, but Beast, as he is positioned, will be used when necessary.

One other interesting use of these side panels is on page 51. Yusuf, one of Sinbad's colleagues, has just been told that Sinbad intends to free his slaves in concession to Fabletown leadership. Yusuf is convinced that "Sinbad is **obviously** transfixed by western devils!" (Willingham 2006, 50). On page 51, the genii that Yusuf has called upon comes out of the bottle and he commands him to kill all of the Arabian diaspora leaders so that he will become the new leader of the Arabian Fables, kill Sinbad and some others back in Fabletown, and thirdly, to increase his riches and women until he is "satisfied." The genie takes up over half of the page, swirling above Yusuf, waiting to be commanded. Although the genie agrees to do Yusuf's bidding, there's a chance that Yusuf's desires will not be met because of loopholes in his command of the genie. The genie looks down at Yusuf with red eyes and a smile on his face and Yusuf looks back with a grim look.

Dynamically, Buckingham has used this genie figure to play with the readers' spatial understanding on the page. The genie's billowing tail extends out onto the side panels, along with his arms. The edge of the top panel is not crossed over by the genie's

hair, which should billow out. All of Buckingham's choices of composition have created a deep field of focus. The genie's body has movement that would otherwise be flat without this creation of depth. He is flying upwards—he's going to fly off the page, at the reader, and out into the night to commit murders for an antagonist. Although this is not a specific folktale reference, the genie and its depiction align with readers' expectations of what a genie is and what it does (for most western readers that would be Disney's *Aladdin*). It also plays with the reader's understanding of the panels. On this page they depict generic, abstract Arabian art and architecture. Considering the side panel is not depicting a direct image of the setting of the page, like mentioned earlier, the genie appears to transcend the construct of the comic entirely.

Genies, as extremely powerful and treacherous creatures, have an incredible knack for playing with our understandings of space. This page, which reveals the genie coming out of the small bottle and then being revealed as a large entity also shows that this genie can play with the rules of comics. Interestingly, no other characters make this same sort of bodily shift onto the side panels, which reinforces the genie's unique abilities and by extension, its incredible power.

Tone and voice develop differently through different art styles. Looking at Mignola's work in comparison to Buckingham's makes it clear that these are two very different artists with very different goals in mind for their artwork. This idea of artistic voice comes through multiple different times within *Fables,* one example being at the end of *Arabian Nights (and Days).* On page 98 of this volume, we're given a separate story titled "The Ballad of Rodney and June," which was penciled by Jim Fern and inked by

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Jimmy Palmiotti. Although Bill Willingham has written the dialogue for this section, the drastically different art style presents a different voice, like a new storyteller has stepped to the fore. In the case of this section's artwork, there is an almost total lack of shading involved, giving a two-dimensional look to the comic. It also lacks the varying thickness of lines that Buckingham uses to signify depth and light/dark. The color is almost entirely flat, minus some very slight gradients used to show where light sources are coming from.

In "The Ballad of Rodney and June," readers follow two wooden folks, products of Gepetto's ambition to create perfect soldiers. Rodney, a lieutenant in the Empire's army meets June, a sort of wood person doctor who sands body parts and replaces limbs when necessary. The two of them fall in love and find that their love is lacking without physical intimacy. Gepetto is capable of extending the gift of flesh to wooden soldiers, and the two lovers desire it so that they may lead a happy married life.

Rodney writes a letter describing their desire to Gepetto, but the sending of the letter is halted by his superior, who points out the controversy that could spread if this letter was seen by many. This superior, Arturo, is a close friend to Rodney, so he sends Rodney and June on a journey to meet Gepetto in person and "inform" him of the letter's contents so that the controversy does not make its way back to Gepetto and cause an uproar from him. Rodney and June go on a many month-long journey, being welcomed by peoples under the rule of the Empire and are given royal treatment.

Eventually they make it to the Sacred Grove, where Gepetto first succeeded in his creation of the wooden soldiers. They ask him for the gift of flesh, and he gives it to

them, stating that there will be a catch—a price that they must pay up eventually. A period of love and contentedness follows but is cut short when the two of them are sent to the Mundane world to spy on Fabletown. Their superiors in the Empire ask them to do degrading, brutal tasks to prove their loyalty, which strains their happiness. The final sequence shows June crying in bed and regretting the choice of becoming flesh and being able to cry.

This tale, interestingly named a "ballad" by Willingham, gives readers a perspective from the other side. Jan Harold Brunvand, in *The Study of American Folklore*, defines the ballad as "a narrative folksong—a folksong that tells a story" (Brunvand 1968, 149). He goes onto write, "A ballad is one of some 950-odd narrative folksongs that have been arranged by scholarly indexers in three categories, British traditional ballads, British broadside ballads, and native American ballads" (Brunvand 1968, 150). According to Brunvand, if a ballad is not already documented by scholars then it *isn't* a ballad. Obviously, this remark is a critique of ballad scholarship, but interestingly, it paints an interesting dichotomy of understanding the ballad. Scholars and lay folk define the ballad quite differently—as we see in the "Ballad of Rodney and June."

Foster writes, "if folklorists study people (=folk), then it is critical to explore what people think of *as* folklore—regardless of how a folklorist might categorize it" (Foster 2016, 9), and this goal is pertinent to this "ballad." He continues, "Whether or not the product in question can be traced back to an oral tradition or to some other "genuine" source is less important than the fact that people *feel* it is folkloric" (Foster 2016, 9).

Obviously, this "ballad" cannot be traced back to any tradition, as it is entirely fictionalized—no human being has ever had to deal with the transformation from wood to flesh, but it is revealing about what popular culture's view of a ballad is.

Interestingly, there is no singing involved with this ballad. It does follow Brunvand's description as being narrative, but other than that, it fails to truly identify with any of the markers of the ballad genre. This, paired with its drastically different artwork, makes for a tale that does stand out in the volume and surrounding volumes. Whoever decided on this distinctive change in art knew the effect it could have on a reader.

Regina Bendix, in her book *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*, which focuses on the relationship folklore scholarship has had with the idea of authenticity, describes how folklore scholars and scholars before the discipline saw the folk as being simplistic, but "pure" in its authenticity (Bendix 1997). The ideas of authenticity and purity can no doubt be linked to the choice of art style in telling this "ballad." This simplified art style hints at an attempt to connect with the idea that the folklore passed along was simple and pure—there is no question in the telling that it is fully true and can be truly regarded as being the original of the ballad—there is no indication that it has been changed into differing variants, although if the Fables' world is like ours there would.

The choice in art style mirrors the "simple" tale of love between two wooden soldiers, but dynamically, this is no simple tale; it reveals the harsh realities of the

followers of Gepetto, that the empire expects a return on their investments. If this "ballad" were to follow the typical happily ever after scenario expected from fairy tales, it would not carry the weight and depth that it does. The "ballad" also reveals the racism and disgust that the wooden soldiers hold toward humans, which enables Willingham to critique these sorts of world views. Although their choice to become human is easy, the lives that they are given are nothing but difficult. The simplistic line work and simple gradient shading contrasts with the complicated tale—if only their lives were as simple as the art style.

This shift in art style for a particular story also appears in a number of other volumes, but *1001 Nights of Snowfall* is especially indicative of this artistic choice. A quick flip through this volume reveals multiple shifts in art, and the long list of illustrators on the front of the cover confirms that. Bill Willingham continues to write for this special volume, but Esao Andrews, Brian Bolland, John Bolton, Mark Buckingham, James Jean, Michael Wm. Kaluta, Derek Kirk Kim, Tara McPherson, Jill Thompson, Charles Vess, and Mark Wheatley all get credit for illustrations.

The introduction, spanning 21 pages, is interestingly not in comic format. Willingham writes in prose, telling the tale of Snow White finding herself in a position similar to Scheherazade—having to tell a tale night after night to keep her master from murdering her like his previous wives. The artwork of this introduction is seemingly inspired by the art nouveau movement. Golden light, starkly positioned side views of characters, and richly detailed and ornamented settings confirm this. Throughout the volume, pages of prose with these styled illustrations bring the focus back from the many

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different tales. This framing, with the use of prose and the art nouveau style, of the main narrative of Snow White successfully naturalizes the shifting of art styles. Interestingly, in the case of *1001 Nights of Snowfall*, the shifting of art styles between the different tales do not indicate a different storyteller, as is the case in "The Ballad of Rodney and June." In this case, the artistic shift can perhaps be read as Snow White's differing modes of performance and tone in her telling of the stories. Two tales: "The Christmas Pies" and "A Mother's Love," have strikingly different styles to different ends.

"The Christmas Pies," starting on page 56, is a tale about Reynard the fox, among other forest animals, tricking some of the adversary's forces into giving him and his animal counterparts pies. The folkloresque dips in conspicuously in this tale, as Reynard tells one of the adversary's captains that there is a "folk-legend" (Willingham 2006, 59) of the miraculous Christmas pies. This is merely a trick on Reynard's part to provide his starving animal friends food, but the captain believes the story and provides pies.

This tale shows the triumph of Reynard as he provides food for his animal friends and also helps lead them to safety. Mark Buckingham is the illustrator for this tale, but interestingly, he departs from his normal style of illustration found throughout *Fables*. In the case of this tale, he has used watercolor paint, which lends itself to the fanciful tale depicted. The colors are much brighter than the average *Fables* style and much lighter, as watercolor fades from its first laydown on the page, leaving an ethereal, bright style of artwork. In comics, watercolor painting is a rarity, as it is very time consuming (i.e.: waiting for it to dry and adding more paint to increase pigment). One of the only major illustrators to use watercolor is Dustin Nguyen for Lemire's *Descender*, but its style is

darker and bleaker for its sci-fi setting. The light, simplistic style of "The Christmas Pies" is not commonly seen in any large or even successful indie comics.

Buckingham also depicts movement frequently in this tale—with the fox hopping from place to place or the adversary's captain smashing things. Even though the oppression of the adversary is visible within the comic, the art style tells readers that there is not much to fear. Of course, Willingham could've written this tale to be at odds with its style, but he did not. Almost childish in nature and having the animals fit their allegorical expectations gives readers a moment of triumph in a volume that has many dark endings. Although one might read this tale as superfluous, it shows that the Fables of the Homelands were sometimes witty, sometimes brave, and that not all of the adversary's leadership are competent.

Another tale within the volume contrasts its art style and narrative content in humorous ways. The tale "A Mother's Love," illustrated by Derek Kirk Kim, stands quite starkly against the surrounding pages, because the gutter space is blackened and seeps off the page. The tale has a description, like all of the tales in the volume, that states, "In which a bold commander of war suffers one of the prices of leadership." The tale follows Thunderfoot, a leader of a small rabbit force fighting against the adversary. Although the rabbits are small, they are large enough in number to take down one of the adversary's larger monsters by swarming it. A massive amount of rabbit casualties is revealed. One of the slain is avenged by his mother, who curses Thunderfoot with "darkest magic."

Up until this point, the art has been very dark, with dark silhouettes of rabbits and a fiery looking sky framing them. There is a somber tone to the rabbits' deaths, but the panel that the mother curses Thunderfoot is rather absurd. At the bottom of page 87, readers see the mother, shooting red laser beams from her eyes at Thunderfoot. A halo of red extends all the way around Thunderfoot as it is clear he is being affected by the mother's magic. He is transformed into a human. This seemingly dark tale, in the panel of the laser beam eyes, takes a foray into humor. The absurdity of a rabbit being forced to become a human and find a rabbit mate is palpably absurd. The dark art involved with this tale also works in an interesting way—there's something equally absurd about seeing rabbits fight in a war and listening to Thunderfoot solemnly fulfill his duties as leader. The artwork juxtaposes the absurd content and the genuinely dark setting. Yet, when the tale moves to Thunderfoot's search for a mate, the artwork still remains dark—dramatic shadows of different colors makes the art otherworldly. This style choice for a folkloresque tale depicts how art style—coloring, linework, and shadows—can create tone and voice that would come through in performing a tale. Although there is no physical, human performer in telling these tales, readers can interpret what kind of storyteller would be sharing them and how.

One final aspect of interest in *Fables* is their covers. Like *Hellboy*, they use montages of characters and story elements to reveal clues about the interior story. Although *Hellboy*'s covers are stark—with negative space surrounding the main collage of characters and elements, *Fables*' collage layout extends to the end of the page, never laid out in the same way as previous covers. Volume 3 *Storybook Love*'s cover depicts

Snow White and Bigby massive wolf head coming out of the smoke of a crime scene. A woman is being held in a man's arms and a limousine with red tinted windows is in the background. The art, in a somewhat realistic (at least more so than the comic) style mixes with symbolic, highly stylized elements. On the cover of Volume 2, *Animal Farm*, the cover artists James Jean and Aron Wiesenfeld create a dynamic cover that depicts elements of the tale without being very explicit. The covers are dynamic enough that readers need to stop and look closely at their contents. Japanese-styled nature motifs make up the background of *Volume 2*, while the cover of *Volume 3* has dark leaves on a black background behind Snow White and Bigby.

Elements of intrigue, treachery, and violence are depicted in these covers. Both depictions of Snow White have her looking fearfully in one direction, eyes glistening. Although collage is used on the covers like in *Hellboy*, there is clearly something different going on here. The dynamic mixing of realism and symbolism modernizes the texts in a way *Hellboy*'s covers do not. This style is unique to *Fables*, for comic covers at the time typically explicitly depicted characters and situations from the comic in question in a straightforward manner. The folkloresque nature of this comic series comes through its covers in a less overt way than *Hellboy*. The symbols, characters, and images are familiar, which allows readers to make connections to the folktale characters they know, but the choice of art style defamiliarizes everything they know about the character, opening readers up to the intrigue, sexuality, and violence of Fabletown.

4.4. Conclusion

One of the reasons I chose to look at *Hellboy* and *Fables* for this thesis was that they differ substantially from one another in artwork. The job of *Fables'* illustration passed between Lan Medina, Craig Hamilton, Steve Leialoha, and predominantly Mark Buckingham, while *Hellboy* has been mostly drawn by Mike Mignola, except for some one-shots done in collaboration with other artists. As mentioned above, *Hellboy* goes against the grain of what comics are expected to be; *Hellboy*, even though it is an action adventure comic, uses stasis and ambiguity to cause readers to experience the internal world of Hellboy; it pushes the envelope of what you expect from an action adventure comic.

Fables, on the other hand, does not share this same quality; it is much more typical in standard pacing, straightforward use of gutters, dialogue, and panels. Unique uses of color are present, but not to the same extent as *Hellboy*. *Fables'* covers are artful, beautiful, and typically chaotic but revealing about what readers can come to expect from the volume or next chapter. Their compositions are collage-like, allowing for the cover artist to play with placement, form, and lighting to make particular characters—usually the subject matter for the chapter—stand out from others. *Hellboy*'s covers are traditional in the sense that, like *Star Wars* movie posters, they dutifully show images and characters relevant to the story, but in a (typically) tightly composed composition with Hellboy in the middle.

Looking at these two comics allowed for a broad scope of how the Folkloresque can be brought to audiences—there is no clear formula of how images must be used to create the mood that the folkloresque brings. The mood that the folkloresque can vary

from comic to comic, as is clear from looking at the differences between *Fables* and *Hellboy*.

Visuals, though, play an integral part in creating a story such as these. Oral tradition, with tellers only communicating orally to their audiences, allowed for listeners to create the stories in their minds with all of the artistic freedom they could muster. Using folklore in comics, though, takes away that freedom of imagination and guides readers into a particularly composed world that aligns specifically with a creator's vision. This departure opens doors in which fans of these comics can draw in the style of an artist to create works of fan art that fit specifically in, say, Mignola's world. This shifting of how folklore spreads certainly changes in the context of comics, but opens other doors for human creativity.

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5. Summary and Conclusion

Why are folkloresque works successful? Although the reason shifts from text to text, there are a number of reasons for folkloresque works' continued success. The folkloresque can exemplify the beliefs and feelings of their creators in an appealing way, because of the folkloresque's feeling of familiarity. Mike Mignola's expression of ambiguity and wonder within *Hellboy* comes through the in a similar way to readers' feelings of wonder while listening to a folktale. Bill Willingham's mashing of the contemporary and characters from oral tradition create a doubly familiar experience for readers in a new way. These are just a couple of examples of how the folkloresque can contribute to popular works.

5.1. Contributions to Folkloresque Study

This thesis expands upon the categories of interpretation, parody, and portrayal outlined in Michael Dylan Foster and Jeffrey A. Tolbert's *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*. My focus on comics was chosen to better expand the folkloresque in under-analyzed types of media and to address the fact that the folkloresque is exhibited differently in accordance to its type of media. Within the collection *The Folkloresque: Reframing Folklore in a Popular Culture World*, Timothy H. Evan's "Folklore, Intertextuality, and the Folkloresque in the Works of Neil Gaiman" expands on the relationship between the intertextual and folkloresque, and my thesis also serves to better develop this important relationship. Daniel Peretti's chapter "Comics as

Folklore" illustrates the folkloric process within comics production and comics' fandoms but did not address on the folkloresque nature of comic texts, which my thesis does.

Textual analysis of the folkloresque is helpful in further developing how and why the folkloresque is successful in fictional creations. The fact of the matter is that the folkloresque, in the case of the two series I analyzed, functions to create a certain type of tone. The nature of the folkloresque in these series is that it harkens back to something folkloric, whether that be folktales or legends. The intertextual aspect of the folkloresque creates depth in character, environment, and plot, and also allows for readers to feel as though they are "in the know," which does not always appear in works of fiction. One survey respondent spoke to this: "As long as the stories and characters are compelling, they will keep a reader interested. *Hellboy* and *Fables* benefit from basing a lot of their tropes and plots on a bedrock of stories that the reader is usually already well associated with. It lends a great gravitas to the story to the story arcs and it's like the reader is 'in on it'" (Anonymous Survey Respondent 2018, 1.25).

In the case of the folkloresque within the medium of comics, it is necessary and valuable to consider both the verbal and visual portions of the medium, as it would be for analyzing a folkloresque film. Not fully approaching all of the qualities of a medium will leave undesirable gaps of scholarship. The folkloresque does not merely come through the written word—it comes through structure, pacing, artwork, and a great many other number of things. The folkloresque is a house—built with different materials for different texts, but all resulting in a clear structure at the end. This structure is clearly identifiable as folkloresque.

5.2. Further Scholarship

    My survey of comics readers was preliminary—there is a great amount of work to be done in gleaning readers' experiences and conceptions of the folkloresque. Folklorists should strive to better understand the emic understandings of folklore that come through popular culture as these understandings are just as valid and valuable to scholars as conceptions of folklore coming from "authentic" places such as oral tradition.

    Many different comics series currently running would be excellent choices for further folkloresque study—among them *East of West* (Hickman 2013-)*, The Wicked + the Divine* (Gillen and McKelvie 2014)*, Harrow County* (Bunn 2015-2018)*,* Emily Carroll's *Through the Woods (*2014)*,* Isabel Greenberg's *The One Hundred Nights of Hero* (2016) and *Encyclopedia of Early Earth* (2013). The prerogative to make works of folkloresque will no doubt continue for as long as stories are told. It's the job of the folklorist to approach these stories and adequately consider the (new) media that these works are being created in.

    Using a specific folkloresque category as the analytical structure of a master's thesis or PhD dissertation would be helpful in further scholarship. My choice to approach the three different folkloresque categories was in order to broadly approach the folkloresque in comics and see how different comics can affect the folkloresque in unique ways. My choice to use *Hellboy* and *Fables* was because of their accessibility and reputations as well-liked comics. Their art styles are incredibly different, and that allowed

me to give a broader understanding of how the folkloresque can be worked into and utilized in comics.

5.3. Potential Criticism for this Thesis

Although personal, biographical information is paramount to folkloristics, my choice to leave it out was due to the fact that this thesis was merely dipping its toes into readers' conceptions of the folkloresque. Considering page constraints and time, it was not possible for me to fully develop this study to the level that it would have been if I had taken biographical information into account. I also wished to avoid gendering readers, as comics fandom has long been considered a sometimes-misogynistic boys club—I wanted female readers to be able to give their honest responses without having to prove their worth as a comics reader, hence the choice of anonymity for my survey.

Biographical interviews are necessary for understanding personal viewpoints on the folkloresque are needed, but would result in a project of greater magnitude. This thesis's goal was to consider folkloresque texts and gain some initial viewpoints, but a future PhD dissertation would be appropriate for furthering this mission of text-based and eventually interview-based analysis.

5.4. Final Thoughts

This thesis was an obvious choice for me—I have long been an avid comic reader, reading *Peanuts* strips as a child and then picking up *V for Vendetta* at fourteen years old and never putting comics down after. The intersections of popular culture and folklore are striking and pervasive. Creators want to keep utilizing products from oral tradition,

perhaps to keep the folkloric process alive, but also perhaps because the mysticality of folktales propels them forward.

Intertextuality lies at the heart of the folkloresque. Having background knowledge of stories or characters from oral traditions allows readers to engage with these texts more fully than someone lacking that knowledge. This intertextuality extends past the obvious, though, as a reader's understanding of motifs, themes, and tropes can also link a work of fiction to the amorphous idea of the folklore (see "The Three Gold Whips" in Chapter 1). These different levels of intertextuality can be used to repurpose or resurrect materials from oral tradition for contemporary audiences.

As I quoted Foster earlier: "At what point, one might ask, does the individual artistic voice overshadow traditional material? Certainly there is a continuum between these two modes of expression" (Foster 2016, 15). Foster's question is pertinent to this thesis as *Fables* and *Hellboy* exist on different spots within this continuum of artistic voice and traditionality.

Fables explicitly engages with characters that we've all heard of—whether this intertextuality be from Disney's films, fairy tale collections, or from listening to your parents tell you a story before you go to sleep. *Hellboy*, on the other hand, engages with material from oral tradition differently. We get characters like Rasputin, Baba Yaga, and Hecate. Hellboy's journey intersects with the darkness of oral tradition more so than *Fables,* but *Fables* directly engages with readers' notions of folktale and character. Willingham's *Fables* is a study of folktale characters and how they shift into a modern

setting—much like a folktale itself; *Hellboy* humanizes a monster by having him fight against the darkness of humanity's stories and beliefs.

It's difficult to deny Mignola's individual artistic voice—his writing and art are unique among comics, and the fact that he writes and draws most of *Hellboy* sets him apart from *Fables*, which has never been written and drawn by a single person, but by a team of many different creators. The choices Willingham made in developing the folktale characters of *Fables* is no doubt different than what someone else would have made.

Willingham, though, does engage with these folktale characters in a traditional way by changes their tales to suit the needs of his audience—he places them in situations that modernize them for audiences, which allows for the characters to continue forward in the minds of modern readers. He also uses the contemporary setting to deconstruct the folktale genre, while Mignola deconstructs the legend genre. The understanding of their folktales of origin keeps those older tales fresh in readers' minds as well. Mignola uses folklore as a backdrop, as a way of developing a world more magical and fantastical than ours.

In considering these differences, I would argue that *Fables* engages with folklore in a more traditional way than *Hellboy*, which is a powerhouse showcasing unique creative voice. But why does this distinction matter? What does this continuum serve to do in understanding the folkloresque? Does this mean that one is more folkloresque than the other? To answer the last question, no, but the first two questions are more difficult to answer. This continuum speaks to the creative process of certain individuals—how far

their work strays into new territory from the familiar. It identifies the broad scope that the folkloresque envelopes and the great capacity for creativity in folkloresque texts and this case of this thesis, folkloresque comics.

The medium of comics has a long history of being demeaned, seen as a lesser art form, and as a seductress of the youths reading them. Folklore and comics have much in common—they persist, whether folks want them to or not, and although comics are certainly a newer creation, the medium will continue on into the foreseeable future. Engaging with folkloresque comics that display more creative voices or more uses of traditional folkloric expression will allow for folklorists to develop more cohesive understandings of what the folkloresque does.

Readers will continue to be enchanted by the art and prose of the medium. As the folkloresque snaked its way into Mike Mignola's and Bill Willingham's work, *Hellboy* and *Fables* took root in popular culture's conceptions of folklore. A young person reading these comics now may one create work in the vein of Mignola's—grasping onto the stories of old, reigniting them into contemporary works of the folkloresque.

Figure 5.1: Hellboy in Hell #10, Mike Mignola

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Note: The survey responses appear underneath the particular question asked in my survey. No biographical information was taken from any respondents, so a space between responses indicates a response by a different individual. Minor spelling mistakes have been corrected within the responses.

Respondents were not required to answer all questions, so there are more answers for the first question than the second. The responses are ordered chronologically by their return, so 1.1 was the first response to the first question via SurveyMonkey and 2.1 is the first response to the second question. The answers were not linked to each other via respondent, so 1.14. and 2.14. are not necessarily from the same respondent.

Question 1: What do you find engaging/interesting about Hellboy and/or Fables?

1.1. I was really interested in the world building.

1.2. I like how there's always some sense of discovery involved. In Hellboy he has to learn a bit about what he's going to face and sometimes even go in without knowing anything about the potential threat. In Fables we have some knowledge about the characters but they're in a very different situation and a different interpretation from what we see in their stories. I like how they use some magic elements in a not so "flashy" way in both series.

1.3. The characters

1.4. That it changes or challenges pre conceived ideas of old story's like the devil being bad when Hellboy is a nice guy that just happens to look like the bad guy or Bigby the big bad wolf is just some old sap that fell in love with the fairest girl in the land

1.5. The Fables story line is more interesting and engaging. It grounds the characters instead of having to rely on a god like Superman.

1.6. I liked the game Wolf among us and the concept, so I read Fables. The concept, characters (esp. Bigby) and story was good. It went to shit after a couple of chapters.

1.7. In Fables, I really enjoy seeing the characters that I knew growing up but seeing them differently.

1.8. The storytelling, the characters and the interpretation of what are considered developed and known characters is astounding to me. I love the personality within each character and what these characters would be in a modern world and how they develop within the story.

1.9. For fable it's the approach taken on some of the most popular character ever known in a way darker way

1.10. The way Fables took many already established stories and made something completely original.

1.11. I'm very interested in folklore and fairy tales, so naturally, I find Fables more interesting.

1.12. It brings the folklore and folktales that I grew up with into a modern context. I love Hellboy comics because they also mix impending doom with a very human cross that bridge when we get to it attitude.

1.13. For Hellboy specifically I am fascinated with Mike Mignola's deep engagement with literature and folklore, and how he uses it in his comics to construct modern fairy tales/ monster stories. The gothic imagery and compelling art style married with a very understated approach to storytelling in Hellboy comics are also major draws.

1.14. The use of folklore/mythology/the occult in new and modern ways as well as Mike Mignola's style.

1.15. The focus on individual characters and their interaction with symbolism across several stories, that create a mythic fantasy story while still presenting ordinary human emotion

1.16. Use of and tweaking of mythology to fit story.

1.17. Unlike most mainstream superhero comic universes, the Hellboy universe is very well-defined and controlled. It was able to grow organically, under the direction of a handful of passionate auteurs.

1.18. I like the new interpretations of old tales I already know (and I also like to get to know others I have not yet known). I like the theme of choice vs destiny, and how good people have to work for being good people. The (family) relationships are heartwarming to me. The dry humor is my taste too.

1.19. (Fables): clever utilization and blending of existing folklore and tales in a new and original setting and story. Combining concepts found in myths and tales and integrating them into an 'alternate universe' woven into reality.

1.20. I believe the two comics are vastly different in terms of tone, style, and substance, so I enjoy them for different reasons. For Hellboy, it's the world that fascinates me. Where monster, daemons, and eldritch horrors are real, but humanity has developed methods and organizations to fight back. Its world building is fantastic, and a lot of that has to do with its clever use of folklore and myth. Its main character is also a nice contrast to the tropes of mythology, being a hell spawn who gets to choose if he wants to be good or evil. Meanwhile, I find Fables engaging due to the way that it modernizes and philosophically explores the fairy tales it uses, while also trying to be faithful to their roots. Its many references encourage me to explore more classical literature to fully understand. I'm just a huge fan of crossovers in general.

1.21. The unexpected uses for preconceived characters in a new setting

1.22. I enjoy the reimagining of well-known folk/fairy tale characters/conceits.

1.23. Putting the Fable characters in a modern setting was really interesting, even though it's been done before. It just seemed very fresh and thought out. Most of the characters aren't carbon copies of their classic counterparts. That's what I think really sets it apart from Superhero comics.

1.24. The characters and how they are portrayed to how I viewed them as a child

1.25. As long as the stories and characters are compelling, they will keep a reader interested. Hellboy and Fables benefit from basing a lot of their tropes and plots on a bedrock of stories that the reader is usually already well associated with. It lends a great gravitas to the story arcs and it's like the reader is "in on it."

1.26. I enjoy Hellboy and Fables that take the stories and themes we know and love and are comfortable with and shifts our paradigm. Heroes are flawed, villains are misunderstood, how would someone like x be interpreted through today's notions of good and bad.

1.27. It's taken me back to the time when I was a kid and my mother would tell me all those fables. I like the modern twist of the comics and giving me the chance to revisit them in an 'adult' setting.

1.28. Hellboy - Mignola's art which I'd put as the #1 factor; his use of modified versions of actual myths/folklore (as opposed to exclusively using original stuff); the story progressing and having consequences (and eventually ending); the lack of cohesiveness between the various myths/folklore, like they're not all Greek myths, or Slavic folklore, they come from all corners of the Earth; there's not a strict rule system to govern how the

supernatural works, it's always vague and mysterious; I really love how things will shift and change between panels, give this feeling of surreal transformation to a lot of scenes; I could go on but I think this might be enough lol Fables - I've only just started Fables, so I don't have much on this yet, but what drew me in was the modernized take on the classic folklore characters; it seems somewhat similar to American Gods by Neil Gaiman which I loved so I thought I'd give it a try

1.29. I am a real fan of twisted/retold fairy tales, so they fit in with my interests. I also liked the focus on character development

1.30. I love being able to see characters in fables that I've heard of being portrayed in such a different way

1.31. They pull from established folklore that is older than just the 20th century and modernize the texts to be applicable to the current generation. Plus, as creator owned series, they can have clear and defined endings instead of being perpetual. Comic writes don't get to choose when to end Superman, Batman, or Spider-man. Mignola and Willingham have that power.

1.32. I love how characters I've read about since a kid and their stories are brought together in a modern world. I become totally immersed & more invested because I feel like I know them as I've read about them for much longer. There are only so many times I can read about how a superhero came about but with Fables (folklore) I feel like I could never get bored.

1.33. The mix of age-old stories being mixed into today's society bringing a feeling of magic to our world, and giving more depth to some characters who may not have originally had any

1.34. I personally feel though in fables and Hellboy the lore of the story's universe adds much more depth than your standard comic book series.

1.35. Cohesive storylines driven by a single author / team of authors. Plot that is going somewhere.

1.36. Relation between myth and stories

1.37. The roots in pulp, Lovecraft, folklore. And the artwork.

1.38. I love how Hellboy incorporates real folklore into the stories. Other comics do this, but I feel HB does it better and with more stylization

1.39. The setting and the types of stories it lends itself to.

1.40. The combination of cosmic horror, mythic twist and the classic superhero subverted.

1.41. The use of real-world folklore (especially in earlier Hellboy comics), as well as the artistic style and writing of Mignola

1.42. I enjoy Hellboy's reinterpretation of classic horror/crime/pulp tropes in new and exciting ways. Hellboy, as a character, seems to me like a classic noir/pulp detective. Cynical, bit of trauma in his past (like from Hellboy in Mexico), wears a trench coat etc. While this is cliched, it becomes interesting again when that stock character is placed in a "Chosen One" narrative (This is something that I think that strong examples of the superhero genre do as well). I also like the art, but I mean who doesn't.

1.43. Willingness to take risks with stories and characters

1.44. Use old mythology like vampires and trolls in conjunction with real world events like the second world war and the Nazis. It weaves a much believable and realistic alternate universe to dive in. Also, as a European it is a nice change to have some things happen here instead of the USA where most of the superhero -type comics are situated.

1.45. Gimme dat spooky shit any day yo. Also, it's funny.

1.46. Specifically regarding Hellboy, it is the original Mignola art in relation to the folklore context.

1.47. What different lore they draw from. The tone and art especially

1.48. I'm a huge fan of the occult in Hellboy. I love the use of classic storybook characters in Fables.

1.49. The use of many different types and tellings of folklore to tell a grand story.

1.50. By and large I think find these types of stories to have more meaningful stakes, more creative plot devices, and more relatable characters. They also usually have less exposition.

1.51. Ongoing story being woven for both. For HB specifically, the way that different myths/folklore are woven in with the comic mythology keeps me coming back. That, and the giant monsters.

1.52. The storytelling in Hellboy is rich & diverse, achieving a mythic quality without coming off as self-important. Many of the stories operate under a fairy tale logic that's otherwise absent from modern storytelling. Also, Mike Mignola is my favorite artist.

1.53. Hellboy convincingly blends iconography and mythology from many different cultures while adding its own unique interpretations of cosmological concepts.

1.54. It's uses of folk stories, biblical stories and fables to create something brand new.

1.55. I can only speak about Hellboy, but I love Mignola's use of folklore and mythology. The comic book medium is the perfect place to tell the stories of Hellboy. It is obvious that Mignola is inspired by folklore, gothic literature, cosmic horror, monster horror, and the comic medium. Unlike film, reading a novel or comic requires the reader to fill in a lot of the gaps that films force on the viewer, and that is what makes comics so interesting and enjoyable.

1.56. Characters. Mysteries.

1.57. The art style and mythos. I am more interested in the Lovecraftian aspect of Hellboy.

1.58. I love the mix of familiar stories with original elements and the new takes on familiar characters.

1.59. The use of historical fiction to place characters and events in a real timeline and the rich interconnecting story/characters

1.60. the world building, unique characters, dark artwork, mythology, cool monsters, sense of mystery

1.61. That they are, ultimately, about one's humanity.

1.62. The ability to reward an attentive reader's knowledge of established myth and folklore and mix it into new and exciting stories where change is permanent. Not something to be erased with the next marketing movement. It just doesn't feel as silly as most superhero books to me. I never read traditional superhero books growing up though I was introduced to fables and Hellboy and other comics in my 20s.

1.63. Hellboy and Fables have done an excellent job in building a believable world for their stories to take place in. Hellboy, even better than Fables, uses folklore from around the world in its stories to enrich those. With Fables, this is the main theme of the comics, so it is a little more on the nose.

1.64. They really develop a world that brings a sense of wonder akin to that of a small child. Plus, in the modern U.S. I feel it is the closest to folklore we have for more urban areas and it exposes you to some other cultures folklore that you may want to read up on separately. Because of this some legends are brought into the modern age which I feel keeps them alive.

1.65. Hellboy comics don't have easy resolutions, where problems are solved and a new one presented next week. Rather when something breaks it breaks, and it doesn't get repaired next time.

1.66. I find the Lovecraftian mystery very compelling. The various myths and references I also find engaging.

1.67. If you're a fan of folklore and mythology, there's a lot of cool moments in the comics that have a greater pay off if you know the stories it's referencing. The only equivalent to that in superhero comics is when they reference obscure continuity that you are familiar with.

1.68. Hellboy and the related Mignola comics are interesting and engaging to me because of 3 big reasons. First, Hellboy himself is what could be considered a 'monster' and seeing his interactions and compassion to other 'monstrous' characters gives a very human element and makes almost every character relatable (except all the Nazis of course). Secondly, Mignola uses a huge depth of folklore from all kinds of regions and parts of the world, and his writing brings to life all of these myths and stories that otherwise are fairly underrepresented in a lot of contemporary stories. The third and final reason is because Mignola and his other artists all have a very strong sense of pacing which always provides for an engaging story.

1.69. These series have more depth and are far more interesting than most other series published today, especially mainstream Marvel/DC series

1.70. I have much more passion for the Mignolaverse than Fables, but I love both comics' use of folklore, art, and extensive plots

1.71. I've always found adaptations of fairy tales and other folklore interesting because I enjoy seeing how people take a well-known character/story/etc. and add their own twist, especially when they're taking the characters out of the original time period/context. It's interesting to see how the Fables characters navigate a modern-day society that doesn't know they exist. I also really enjoy the crossover of characters that happens in Fables, where the characters are all intermingled and have built or eroded relationships with those from their original storyline and those from different ones.

1.72. I love the creative use of traditional fairy tale characters within the Fables comics, specifically the hints to their previous stories that provide context, but also their new stories within an unusual plot that expand their core set of tales. For me, whenever I think of Snow White, I inevitably think of three things: The Grimm's Version, The Disney Version, and The Fables Version. These for me are three key parts that make up the Snow White character identity for me. No part is more important than the other and all are interrelated. It serves for me, to show how fairytales can grow and evolve over time to reach newer generations of readers and listeners. Fables also mixes folk tales, fairy tales, and nursery rhymes together. Boy Blue who is a nursery rhyme, plays a key role in Fables but is almost nonexistent in literature and academia save for mother goose. This allows fables to expand on characters that childhood rhymes established familiarly. Fables also introduces characters that are not usually the focus of today's society and makes them a focus - rose red being a prime example. The big bad wolf is another. This

allows for a process of redemption for the reader as Bigsby isn't really 'bad' just super moody.

1.73. Long form narrative. Engaging characters. Depth of mythology (the world feels big)

1.74. The art style and the narrative. There is quite a bit more boxed text then there is speech, so it's more like reading a story with pictures then most comic books. The stories also tend to be a lot more well thought out and engaging. And the art style is extremely unique in the best way

1.75. Folklore. Setting. Mood. Art style.

1.76. Besides the artwork and style of these works, I appreciate the effort and research put into these tales. It's educational and fascinating to explore tales from various cultures.

1.77. The structure of the worlds created are an amalgam of folklore, faiths, and fantasy. History is blended in the narrative, which makes these stories have a weight that other books, like classic cape comics often fail to incorporate successfully.

1.78. I feel like they both relate to our world better than superhero comics. While Hellboy and the fables characters are superhuman in nature, they are still heavily influenced by what affects us too. Loneliness, fear of death, desire for wealth, love, hate, all things that are sometimes ignored by superheroes.

1.79. They have more artistic freedom

1.80. Sometimes when I'm reading Hellboy, it feels like I'm reading a work of classical literature

1.81. What I most enjoy about Hellboy are the various folklore and mythological figures riddled throughout the world. I've always been a fan of these things so seeing them exist together is really cool.

1.82. The stories and mythology

1.83. Right hand of motherfuckin DOOM

1.84. The World-expanding capabilities. Not just world building, the stories tend to add on to ideas I am already familiar with.

1.85. The approach to the mythos, and the skill in mixing story and folklore

1.86. I know about Hellboy, but I haven't read those comics. I love its paranormal vibe though and how it involves the underworld and demons. I read a few Fables comics a long time ago, and I'm always a fan of stories that re-imagine fairytales and myths into a modern setting. The characters tackle real world issues and realize that there are no happy endings and life is more complicated.

1.87. I like Hellboy because I can enjoy what is happening in the plot without having to read other comics to know what is going on. It also has piqued my interest several times in the folklore

1.88. The characters, especially in Fables. Loved the focus on the characterization and stories of each fable.

1.89. The main reason I got into Hellboy is due to the mythology that is used in it. Mignola used multiple religions and mythologies in Hellboy, which in turn made me interested in it. Plus, his artwork his detailed and simple at the same time. His use of shadows is amazing.

1.90. Their exploration of old stories set in new context, rich worlds, mature themes (mostly in Fables), H. P. Lovecraft connections (in Hellboy), exploration of folklore.

1.91. Their use and subversion of archetypes and the depth of their characters, among others.

1.92. The deep dive into varying mythologies and the ideas and ways though could potentially intersect with one another. Hellboy's unique art style is also a plus.

1.93. I enjoy the stories of the Hellboy comics. I think they are fascinating. I didn't have much interest in the types of mythical stories before I read Hellboy, but after reading Hellboy comics, I now do.

Question 2: Does the fairy tale/folk tale material in Hellboy and Fables appeal to you? Why? Can you think of other comics series that have folkloric material?

2.1. I'm a big fan of taking existing properties and watching them interact or seeing existing franchises apply themselves to different genres. Them being Fairy Tale characters didn't matter to me much. For example, I was a big fan of Telltale's Batman series because they warped the existing relationships between the characters. Sandman, The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Lost Girls, and basically any series distributed by Zenescope.

2.2. It appeals a lot, in different ways. I know or have heard of most of the characters in Fables, but the characters in Hellboy are mostly unknown, so I'm not sure when they're new creations of from folklore. Another series with folkloric material is Hinterkind, from Vertigo, and in Brazil we have "Turma do Pererê" and "Sítio do Picapau Amarelo" (both with Wikipedia articles in English).

2.3. It has such a rich pool of lore and ideas that you can play with endlessly and can make little twists to the stories of old

2.4. The story and the characters were good, but I wasn't appealed just because it was folkloric. I loved the game and continued the comics. If the story was no good, I wouldn't read the comics.

2.5. I like it because it takes stories I was told as a kid and gives them a more adult twist. It definitely triggers nostalgia.

2.6. Yes. I very much enjoy folklore, whether it's pre-defined or customized characters. I can't think of any other comics with folkloric material.

2.7. Fables appeals to me because it took such innocent and mundane tales and made an interesting and compelling story.

2.8. Yeah, that was the angle that got me to read the Hellboy and fables comics in the first place. I was raised on old Greek myths and Grimm fairy tales, so I've always had a soft spot for that sort of stuff. The comic series sandman has Norse, Greek, Egyptian, and old Celtic legends in it

2.9. The fairy/folk tale imagery are one of the chief draws for me, in engaging with this cultural fabric by which we all are at least dimly aware of, Mike Mignola's Hellboy feels familiar to even first-time readers. I cannot think of any other comics that so deeply involve folklore, though a little folklore does bleed into quite a lot of comics.

2.10. The mysterious and dark have always had a deep appeal to me, both storytelling-wise and artistically. Another such comic includes Hellblazer.

2.11. Yes, the folklore element allows for great variation in cultures through different stories, that can be almost educational. They also make for colorful and memorable characters/places that make for good escapism

2.12. Yes, I enjoy folklore and how it's shaped to fit the narrative. Grimm's Fairy Tales, Thor.

2.13. I enjoy works of fiction that explore myths, legends and folklore in a modern setting, Hellboy included. Other works I enjoy for this reason include Percy Jackson and Gravity Falls. Both the Marvel and DC universes have characters either directly from or inspired by folklore, myths and legends, including Thor, Mephisto, Ares and many others. However, these universes are not focused on folklore the way Hellboy and Fable are.

2.14. I like the idea of stories, and how we use the same or similar tropes/characters/etc. to say different things depending on social/et. context, or the other way around. There is

also the simple joy in recognizing fairytales (like watching a Pokémon movie and being "there in the background that's a butterfree, and there that's a Tropilus!").

2.15. Yes, because both have a very interesting take and re-imaginings of folklore in a modern setting. The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen by Alan Moore is another series with a similar concept.

2.16. Definitely, I'm a fan of bringing together lots of little stories and characters found elsewhere into a new and fresh story. Not a prolific comic reader but there are several examples of a similar concept in other media (e.g. Marvel Universe tv shows, Kingdom Hearts games etc.).

2.17. It appeals greatly to me. The use of preexisting cultural stories and legends is actually really hard to pull off right, but both comics do it fantastically. I guess I enjoy it because it helps the world's feel like they have a stronger connection and basis to our real world, instead of being entirely the invention of some writer. For other comics that use some elements of folklore, League of Extraordinary Gentleman comes to mind, though it mostly focuses on literary references it also explores ones from folklore.

2.18. The unwritten is a similar type of comic but establishes its own new folklore to build folkloric material off of

2.19. Very much. As a child, I was tremendously into world mythologies and folk lore. It's fun for me to return to those stories/themes/characters in different circumstances. I think Neil Gaiman's Sandman series (and Stardust) incorporates folkloric elements, as does Mike Carey's The Unwritten.

2.20. Yes, particularly forcing all these different fables to live together and their interactions are amazing.

2.21. Like I mentioned above, these stories build off material that is usually already known in the public sphere. So they tweak it enough to make it fresh and new and go from there.

2.22. Yes! It's nice to slip into stories we know and feel comfortable with. We get a sense that we already know what we need to know, the prerequisites are met. Then we get to enjoy these characters and themes and tropes on a different level, and even go back and think of the original stories in a new light. A great example of this in comics is "Sandman" where dreams/stories are so integral to human existence. It's not a comic, but "the stinky cheese man" has similar tones, much like "Grendel" showing the stories from a different point of view. These types of stories, in my opinion, reward the reader for having prior knowledge and I think make us better critical thinkers because we are enjoying looking at multiple perspectives to discover the truth.

2.23. Like I said before. It reminds me of my childhood. compared to marvel or D.C. comics it's not just about good vs evil.

2.24. Yes, I'm very interested in folktales, and it's great to see writers'/artists' take on them. I think melding these into a cohesive story within their own original universe is super interesting, and in a way adds to the tradition of passing these stories down.

2.25. I love being able to see character in fables that I've known before being portrayed in a completely different way

2.26. It appeals to me for the reason I listed above about re-contextualizing. Other series that contain folklore material include the Hellboy spin offs (BPRD, Lobster Johnson, etc.), Beasts of Burden, Blackmoor, Hellblazer, House of Mystery, Sandman and all of its related books, the Fables spinoffs (Jack of Fables, Everafter, etc.), Swamp Thing, The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Elementals, Mage, American Vampire, and many more.

2.27. Yes, I've enjoyed folklore tales since being a kid. There is the magic that the stories are based upon something that happened once a long time ago and over the years been turned into a legend. I would say Neil Gaiman's Sandman interweaves folklore.

2.28. I'm drawn in because it is the best type of story to escape from real life with, only other prominent feature of folklore in comics I can think of is any story involving the queen of fables who is a JLA villain

2.29. Yes, the material in Hellboy/fables appeals to me. The materials appeal to me because often these are fresh takes on long established stories. As far as other material that has folkloric material the first series that come to mind are Sandman by Neil Gaiman and Lucifer by Mike Carey.

2.30. It is appealing because of its connection to history. Manifest destiny deal with American folklore

2.31. Yes. It's an interesting way to build a universe and adds a layer of depth. Makes me want to go read the sources. Sandman? Some Alan Moore's stuff?

2.32. Absolutely, especially stories like "The Chained Coffin" which blend modern storytelling with traditional mythic archetypes, narratives and content. Although comics like Sandman and Lucifer also include traditional folklore content, their story structure is more modern/postmodern

2.33. The folkloric aspects of Hellboy do appeal to me. This plays into my previous answer, as the fairy tale aspects of Hellboy are reinterpreted in new and exciting ways. I also feel that folkloric stories have a kind of macabre and grotesque feeling to them that work well with horror.

2.34. The material is appealing because it adds an ages old connection and mythical source of to the powers of individuals instead of the boring mutations, genius or money present in the typical superhero material. Sandman, though I am not a fan of it. Bone has dragons too. PvP has Skull the troll too.

2.35. I'd say it's more of the supernatural themes really. Sandman is the only one I can think of off the top of my head.

2.36. Yes. Works very well with the setting and art.

2.37. Yes, because it is a modern take, and blends a lot of different ones together.

2.38. It very much appeals to me. I've loved myths and legends from a young age. From the Egyptians to the Greeks. None that come to mind atm.

2.39. Forming by Jesse Moynihan, Sandman by Neil Gaiman, Harrow County by Cullen Bunn.

2.40. Yes - mixing familiar folklore with original folklore and/or remixing it slightly is very interesting. Other series: Ellis' Wytches, Ellis' Injection are the two big ones that come to mind, the latter especially.

2.41. It does in Hellboy, less so in Fables which I don't feel is as well written. It makes the world feel both grounded in our own reality because the stories it works with are our stories but gives it a magical quality as well. I can't think of any other comics that do this.

2.42. Yes, I find it very wholesome and while not educational on its own, it does inspire me to learn more about the concepts that are alluded to in the stories.

2.43. The folk tale material does appeal to me because I enjoy listening and reading old folk tales.

2.44. The material does appeal to me. I have always loved comics but growing up I mainly read superhero comics. As I got older, and my tastes broadened, I found stories about folklore to be so interesting. The only other comics series that I can think of would be Neil Gaiman's Sandman

2.45. It does, as it is not as prevalent in other series. I can't think of many others that have the same roots for influence that are so obvious.

2.46. The folk tale elements are a big draw for me to the Hellboy series. I've also liked the use of folkloric elements in the Neil Gaiman "Sandman" series.

2.47. It appeals to me because it conveys a sense of lost tradition and valuable knowledge long lost to the world. It really makes the reader believe that these supernatural aspects "could" actually exist in our world, beyond our understanding.

2.48. Love it. Hellboy actually got me interested in learning more about folklore and mythology.

2.49. The connective tissue between the folklore that's created throughout the new works appeals very strongly. Connecting themes can be explored in very interesting ways by these series. Another series that draws inspiration from non-European folklore is Marjorie Liu and Sana Takeda's Monstress.

2.50. Yes, it provides some of my primary enjoyment. Both titles taught me so much about folklore from my own background as well as tales I'd never heard from outside the western world. Other books, there are so many, but Sandman jumps immediately to mind.

2.51. Absolutely, yes. Without Hellboy, I would never have heard of the Penanggalan for example. Fables uses fairy tales as a basis for an incredibly rich universe and gets me to re-live those stories I read back then (and would never have thought of re-reading) and interpret them anew. This combination with the Horror theme leads to great stories. Other material that includes such material would be the Sandman-series (Neil Gaiman in general, American Gods for example but most anything of his). There are more comics like that but none so famous as those mentioned. Also - I'm Swiss - I have Donald Duck comics where the Ring of the Nibelung (der Ring des Nibelungen) and the Divine Comedy (la Divina commedia) were re-imagined with the Disney family.

2.52. They remind me of the stories my parents and grandparents would tell me when I was a child. As for other comics there are the offshoots of Hellboy such as B.P.R.D. but as I have mainly read things such as Batman (which depending on the story has some folklore aspects) and other Dc and Marvel hero books that might not be counted as folklore. Now there are things like telltale's "the wolf among us" that are highly involved in the western folklore and do it well.

2.53. It does appeal to me. I enjoy fairy tales and folk lore outside of comics, so I also enjoy them being combined together in a comic book. The Sandman series includes a great deal of folklore.

2.54. Yes, it appeals to me. In my opinion, comic books are most interesting when it is a fantastical story with real life metaphors and the Hellboy comics provide on both of those topics. Right now, the names of other comics with folkloric material are escaping me but I know there are a few out there. The one that comes to mind is Usagi Yojimbo. Stan Sakai uses a lot of Japanese folklore that clearly influenced his stories

2.55. Incredibly, it gives a sense of mysticism that is lacking from other works. Many of Vertigo's other comics draw on similar inspirations. Comics like Sandman, Swamp Thing, Lucifer, Shade, Scalped, and The Invisibles are all drawing on folkloric traditions

2.56. Yes. I think what originally piqued my interest with Fables was Bigby-- the big bad wolf turned human/werewolf and sheriff, trying to not be the "bad guy" anymore. The other characters hadn't really appealed to me originally but that changed when I started reading the comics and discovered that the characters' personalities have been greatly expanded on and are multi-dimensional. They have flaws and merits that you can relate to. I can't think of any other comics I've read that have folkloric material.

2.57. The fairytale element in Fables appeals to me for several reasons. I first decided to read Fables because I knew the characters within it already, therefore it provided easy to understand reading material with interesting art. I kept reading Fables because those familiar characters were written in new and interesting ways that expanded the fairytale canon beyond Disney's versions of the story. As to the second half of your question, Spiderman is the first comic that comes to mind not in plot but structure. There are many versions of Spiderman that are allowed to exist in multiple universes. They don't die, they continue to exist, and their stories continue to have merit (much like multiple versions of the same fairy tale). MouseGuard is another comic that comes to mind if for its anthropomorphic mice and commitment to The Hero's Tale. Wicked and Divine is another. It takes significant deities and cultural elements and manipulates them to be relevant in a new way thus contributing to the life of these myths and legends rather than letting them stagnate and die off. Comics like these make these myths, legends, and fairytales relevant to a new age and creates folk groups surrounding them of common interest.

2.58. Yes, it provides a depth of lore that I find compelling. Witches by Scott Snyder

2.59. Yes, I'm not too big into fairy tales but the way that Hellboy mixes it into the real world and makes it all quite dark (prime example being the tooth fairies). The only real folklore I can think of in comics is things dealing with Thor, Loki, and Asgard in the marvel comics and the lore of Wonder Woman with the different gods and goddesses.

2.60. Hellboy stands out as the main novel that explored fairy tale folklore and dark horror themes.

2.61. It does appeal to me, and while other comics have attempted to replicate the amount of folklore found in Hellboy and Fables, I have yet to find one which truly duplicates it. It presents so much history of our own world that may have been passed or glossed over that it is truly tough to ignore.

2.62. Yes. I really enjoy being introduced to a character or creature from folklore and reading up on the source material. Other comics that incorporate folklore are rare.

2.63. Yes, it appeals greatly to me. I love reading about the folklore of any culture, though I especially enjoy north American folklore, such as Pecos Bill, Paul Bunyan, and the like. The comic Gunnerkrieg Court definitely has folkloric material.

2.64. Yes, it appeals to me greatly. I love the fantastic stories that they tell and paired with Hellboy they become even more interesting. Other folklore comics I can think of are Neil Gaiman's Sandman comics and Michael Dougherty's Trick 'r Treat: Days of the Dead and Krampus: Shadow of Saint Nicholas

2.65. Yes, they scratch a deep and meaningful itch for me. I read a lot of independently published stuff that can have folklore as a basis for the story. A lot of Dark Horse comics has at least a touch of folklore in them.

2.66. Yes, it does, because it is written in such a smart way that engages the reader like no other.

2.67. I've always enjoyed reading folklore and fairytales. I'm not sure exactly why. Maybe because its often placed in a medieval setting with fantastical elements in it being used to send a moral message. It's even more interesting when the message it sent in a twisted or dark sort of way, as its more exciting and sometimes more powerful and influential. Superhero comics such as Thor and Blade use Norse mythology and vampire lore. The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen merges monsters and heroes from various literature into a team.

2.68. Yes. A lot of lore I had not heard of outside of the comics. Constantine's Hellblazer comics introduced me to some occult stuff but I'm not sure that's the same category as folklore

2.69. Yes. I love the material in Fables, and the spin taken on each fable.

2.70. It does appeal to me. Neil Gaiman's Sandman series consisted of many mythologies but didn't capture my interest as Hellboy did.

2.71. Yeah, it appeals to me a lot. I've always loved folklore stories, especially like them when somehow presented in modern settings. Other series: Injection, Saucer Country/Saucer State (if you count modern UFO folklore), Promethea

2.72. Yes. I've always been a fan of folklore and mythology as both an important part of history and anthropology, and also just as interesting stories. Plenty of comics pull on mythology and folklore; Thor, Wonder Woman, Crimson; web comics like Skin Deep, Lore Olympus, and All Haven Academy, and manga like Shiki, Faerie's Landing, and Mushishi, to name a few.

2.73. The Hellboy's stories appeal because I find mystery and the ambiguity in them appealing and I feel the varying religious ideas are handled nicely. The only other comic that I can think that comes close to this is DC's Sandman comics by Neil Gaiman.

2.74. It didn't much before I read Hellboy, but now that I have it certainly does. I think Hellboy puts folk tales into a modern perspective and makes it fun and even more interesting.