

Of the Swedish re-enactments, she observed that “serving” on the side of the Confederacy was a more popular endeavor for female re-enactors and allowed space through martial masculinity of the Lost Cause.

Combined, these essays pose innumerable opportunities for new directions within an increasingly multidisciplinary and expansive field. The editors show the value of expanding scholarship of Swedish migration to America beyond 1930. A significant number of emigrants arrived in America during the 1950s and 1960s with vastly different motivations and cultural ties than the settlers and migrants who came before them. This anthology aims to move away from classic studies of migration and ethnicity. Further study could include conceptual or spatial borders that divide racially disparate communities, which would deepen our understanding of Swedish-American interactions with the “other.” Blanck and Hjorthén point out that nearly 20 percent of Swedish migrants to America returned home, which poses the question of why. Did they intend to stay, but economic depression, cultural difference, or a general lack of opportunity changed their outcome? Altogether, *Swedish-American Borderlands* provides a groundbreaking next step in the study of borders, both geographic and metaphoric. Contemporary sociological and cultural studies of food pathways, secularism, music, globalization, environmentalism, and race relations might provide the topic of a complementary volume focused on American-Swedish borderlands for scholars who wish to expand this volume’s framework.

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■ Ivan Z. Sørensen. *Blixens humor*. Sorø, Denmark: U Press, 2021. Pp. 150.

One of the things I enjoy most about books by Ivan Z. Sørensen is that I always learn something, even though he is writing about a topic (Karen Blixen) that I imagine I know very well. Blixen’s sense of humor is certainly distinctive and can function as an antidote to the dark angst that is something of an occupational hazard when dealing with Scandinavian literature. One of Blixen’s earliest critics, Robert Langbaum, noted this quality in her tales and chose to title his monograph on her *The Gayety of Vision* (1964). A book about Blixen’s humor is long overdue, and it seems likely that the topic is not yet exhausted.

As is well known, Blixen wrote her tales both in English and in Danish, and the Danish texts are the clear focus of this book. Obviously, humor, especially puns, are closely connected to language, and so jokes that work in one language might not work in another. Thus, I had never noticed before that there was a fart joke embedded in the introduction

of the prostitute Lise in “Samtale om Natten i København” (Converse at Night in Copenhagen) that does not exist at all in the English version (p. 8). Indeed, it is amusing to consider how very naughty many of Blixen’s jokes are. In return, I can offer a joke (not nearly as naughty) from the English version of “Roads Round Pisa” that does not translate: “In Denmark everybody has thick ankles and wrists, and the higher up you go, the thicker they are” (Dinesen, *Seven Gothic Tales*, Vintage, 1991, 181). Perhaps it is just as well that this jab at her countrymen (they’re a bit thick) does not translate into Danish.

The purpose of Sørensen’s book is not to provide an inventory of Blixen’s jokes, though he certainly offers up quite a few. Rather, along with Harald Høffding, Sørensen considers the nature of humor, both “stor” (great) and “lille” (small), then with a nod to Kierkegaard, looks at how that relates to irony. A fair amount has been written on Kierkegaard and Blixen, but Sørensen’s views in this context are well worth considering. On the way, Sørensen provides one of the best comparisons between Hans Christian Andersen and Blixen that I have seen. In addition, someone has finally been able to explain to me the Spinoza reference in “Heloise,” which I puzzled over unsuccessfully for my own book, *Understanding Isak Dinesen* (2002). Høffding, whose work Karen Blixen knew, sees Spinoza as an inspiration for viewing life from the perspective of eternity, thus transcending both tragedy and comedy (p. 71).

About halfway through his book, Sørensen strays from the main topic of humor, but that does not make the book any less interesting. Sørensen’s chapter on Blixen and Brandes is the most thorough treatment of that relationship yet. Sørensen then turns his attention to Blixen and Shakespeare and, among other things, performs a detailed reading of the tale “Alkmene” from *The Winter’s Tale*. A bold statement is made: “Det er påfaldende at i næsten alle analyser af ‘Alkmene’ er Perdita-henvisningen enten overset, forbigået eller ubetydeliggjort!” (p. 104) [It is striking that in almost all the analyses of ‘Alkmene,’ the Perdita references are either overlooked, passed by, or made unimportant!]. This statement is a bit of an exaggeration, but that is perhaps because Sørensen has missed a few analyses of the tale, including my own. In the final chapter, Sørensen takes up where Lynn Wilkinson left off in her article on Hannah Arendt and Isak Dinesen (“Hannah Arendt on Isak Dinesen: Between Storytelling and Theory,” *Comparative Literature*, 2004) and provides us with even more food for thought.

In an Afterword, Sørensen tells the story of how Judith Thurman received an assignment to write her acclaimed biography of Isak Dinesen. This includes a letter from Michael Denny to Sørensen describing what happened. This is a delight to Dinesen buffs like me.

Ivan Sørensen knows Blixen's tales like the back of his hand, and he is extremely well-versed in the cultural figures to whom she responded. In addition to the solving of various interpretive puzzles, these comparisons are where the real value of this book lie.

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■ *Myth and History in Celtic and Scandinavian Traditions*. Ed. Emily Lyle. The Early Medieval North Atlantic Series. Amsterdam, the Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2021. Pp. 302.

This volume begins with an introduction by Emily Lyle, in which she explores the relationship between the two concepts of “myth” and “history” and then goes on to present a comparison of the fight of Lug and Balor in the medieval Irish text *Cath Maige Tuired*, the combat between Thor and the giant Geirrod as described in the Snorra-Edda, and a broad range of other comparative material. This comparison leads her to propose a “cosmological approach” that aims to study the archaic mythical elements that, she emphasizes, underlie the medieval Christian literature while remaining aware of the literary and Christian character of the sources as they have come down to us.

Following this introduction, the volume is organized into two parts under the headings “Celtic Tradition” and “Scandinavian Tradition.” The first part, “Celtic Tradition,” deals exclusively with medieval texts from Ireland and is given additional unity by the recurrent focus of its contributions on *Cath Maige Tuired*. *Cath Maige Tuired*, or “The (Second) Battle of Mag Tuired,” is one of two main sources for an idea that has become widely held in studies of “Celtic” mythology: that the Fomoiri of medieval Irish literature represent demonic beings of darkness that stand in contrast to the Túatha Dé Danann as the old gods of light. In his study of the textual evidence for “The Nature of the Fomoiri: The Dark Other in the Medieval Irish Imagination,” John Carey shows that this assumed contrast is considerably less marked than it has been widely held, and that the relationship between Fomoiri and Túatha Dé Danann is a complex and ambiguous one. From a different perspective, this questioning of a fundamental opposition between Fomoiri and Túatha Dé Danann is continued in the contribution by Elizabeth A. Gray, which studies the relationship between “Tuatha Dé and Fomoiri in *Cath Maige Tuired*.” Gray shows the complexity of this relationship as characterized not only by hostility, but also by close kinship ties, attempts at establishing alliances, and a political striving to restore peace. Ina Tuomala then takes up