

**Review: *The Little Book of Hidden People:*  
*Twenty Stories of Elves from Icelandic Folklore*  
by Alda Sigmundsdóttir (Little Books Publishing, 2015, 116 pp.)**

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Reading Sigmundsdóttir's little book brought back so many wonderful memories of all the stories I would hear around the fire Friday nights after dinner with teachers and professors (mostly of language) with whom I had worked all week, subbed for, and commiserated with. Elves play an important role in the history of the Scandinavian cultures, and they represent lessons, metaphors, touchstones, and reminders. With a rich past, the Icelanders have embraced the elf stories and other tales—of the sea, of dragons, of Viking times, of pirates, of sports games, and of Olympic sports from the past and from the remote past.

Just like the German fairy tales (which are mentioned in the book), the Icelandic elf stories often contain very sad and sometimes disgusting details not exactly suitable for children. The merging of the magical elves—and sometimes their magical livestock—with criminals and outcasts is explained, as are some of the possible origins of the elf stories. As with all my reviews, I try to not give away too much information so that you will get something out of the reading for yourselves, dear readers.

I remember many of the stories, and in different versions. It is important to remember that these stories are part of an oral tradition—details vary as the stories change shape and some of the religious and political ideals of the day bend those shapes. The various Scandinavians, such as the Swedish, had other versions of these or similar stories. The Poles in our teacher groups could shock us as well as anyone else when the after-dinner brandy flowed and the more adult fairy tales full of gore and intrigue poured forth. The Poles would win the prize on storytelling. There were many silly hours spent with bad translations and questions about clarification constantly interrupting the stories (there were many, many speakers of Polish at our parties!)

Two years (interrupted) of teaching methods courses for English as a second language and subbing and sharing and learning were a wonderful experience for me as I traversed even some remote areas of Iceland—some mentioned in the book! Thank goodness the natives could put up with my old Danish as I did not learn Icelandic as fast as I should have! Both English and Danish are required, generally, in the schools.

The book is delightful and is as much history as it is literature. I recommend you read it and take some examples for use with especially older students to look at the didactic use of storytelling. Great stuff here!