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REVIEWS

The Type and Motif Index of Finnish Belief Legends and Memorates. By Marjatta Jauhiainen. Revised and enlarged edition of Lauri Simonsuuri's *Typen- und Motivverszeichnis der finnischen mythischen Sagen* (FF Communications No. 182). FF Communications No. 267. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia/Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1998. 362 pp.

This is a revision, expansion, and translation into English of Lauri Simonsuuri's *Typen- und Motivverzeichnis der finnischen mythischen Sagen* (FFC 182), which appeared in 1961. Its source material is the belief legend and memorate card file of the Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives as of 1997. Finland's archive is one of the monuments of folklore studies: collected from 1830 onward, by amateur and professional collectors, it is "a multidimensional, geographically comprehensive sample of the folklore of a particular people over a long period of time, a sample whose collection history is well documented and which, moreover, has been organized using archival technology" (17). By 1988 it held 3.5 million manuscript texts, from 27,000 persons, and 14,500 hours of audiotapes of interviews with 9,500 informants. Substantial numbers of photographs and videotapes have also been added. Marjatta Jauhiainen, the creator of this magnificent new index, is also a field collector herself: she has contributed over three hundred hours of recordings of narrative folklore and remarks that "Contact with living folklore traditions also belongs to the basic training of the type index compiler . . ." (25). Jauhiainen's trenchant introduction surveys the history of belief legend collection and study in Finland, and places her at the center of an ongoing debate about how to construct such indexes, and whether or not one should even try in an era when the historic-geographic, or "Finnish method"—the original purpose of type indexes—is quiescent, and after a formative period for a generation of folklorists in whom the

performance school of folkloristics has injected a debilitating doubt as to the adequacy of archival “texts.” Fortunately for folklore scholarship Marjatta Jauhiainen has moved the theory and practice of type and motif indexing ahead: far from being the mere “pigeon-holing” of disparate “items,” the usual critique of narrative indexes, this index reaches toward a much broader idea of what it should be good for. With a nice line in geographical metaphor Jauhiainen envisions type and motif indexes as ideally providing maps of tradition, bridges between different communities of scholars, overviews of “a broader mental landscape [. . .] in which emotions, values, and world views can be dealt with and expressed using belief legends” (14).

The index is organized into fifteen main categories on the basis of *dramatis personae*, or active agents in the narratives; these can be supranormal beings (“actants”), powers, or phenomena. The divisions reflect the designations and distinctions made by the narrators themselves, inasmuch as this is possible with terms whose meaning “is not always completely transparent to the narrators themselves” (14 n. 4). This sensitivity to emic usage is reassuring in this index as a sign that the compiler fully recognizes that “predefined categories never completely correspond to the living tradition” (24). Granted the inevitable slippage of meaning from one mind to another, it is still worth making the classificatory step. The divisions are as follow: A (omens, destiny); B (numen-type hauntings); C (death, the dead); D (sorcerers, witches); E (the Devil); F (taboo violations); G (place spirits inhabiting cultural, man-made environments); H (supernormal beings increasing human wealth); K (forest spirits); L (water spirits); M (trolls, underground folk); N (giants); P (treasure); Q (disease demons); R (supernormal animals). With each type or motif an unobstrusive line shows the number of versions contained in the source card file, and the regions in which they were recorded. It is indeed a geography of belief.

It is also a history of change in belief narratives. One of the benefits of this massive sampling of folk culture over a long span of time is that change in the relative proportions of legend themes can be convincingly demonstrated. Jauhiainen gives a chart showing belief legend themes in the period 1850 to 1950 as an aggregation which is compared with two surveys in 1958 and 1961. It shows that the frequency of legends of place spirits, trolls, underground folk, and treasure was cut by roughly half; narratives of sorcerers, witches, and the Devil declined somewhat; but narratives of death, the Dead, omens, and destiny rose markedly. World War II is postulated as a cause. Poltergeists are the commonest phenomenon, with 1,600 versions in the 110,000 card file. In the mid 1990s encounters with angels were increasing.

The key to the success of this new index in setting the user on a “trail of [. . .] meanings” is the extensive use of cross references. The difficulty of basing a typology on actants, that “[m]ultiple agents perform a single function,” as Wayland Hand observed, is considerably mitigated by cross referencing. The index is also multigeneric. Unlike previous type indexes, such as Reidar Th. Christiansen’s *The Migratory Legends* (FFC 175), Jauhiainen does not limit herself to just one narrative genre: within her field of associations are the belief legend, the memorate, and the motifs which are parts of their natural constitutive environment. As she suggests, “the line between these opposing genres which inhabit the supranormal world (legend: factual; folktale: fabricated) is probably a line drawn on water” (26), and without including motifs “the mesh in the sieve would be so wide that a sizeable portion of the legend material would slip through” (27). Other forms, including humorous anecdotes, didactic fictions, folk medicine, calendar traditions, ballads, proverbs, and riddles associated with belief legends and memorates are also alluded to through the cross reference system. Thus a reader is guided toward a more nuanced understanding of any particular legend theme by being shown the range of its associations in this very large archival corpus.

This is a very well thought-out index, prefaced by a wide-ranging introduction, and supplemented by a nineteen-page subject directory (an index to the index). It will be of great interest and service to all researchers of traditional belief narrative. Its appearance is heartening to those folklore archivists and other researchers who believe in the fundamental need for classification. Type and motif indexing is not a subordinate kind of folklore research; it is an essential part of knowing what a tradition is, and as Carl Lindahl has observed, it is a necessary curb on the analyst’s subjectivity (52). As Marjatta Jauhiainen puts it, indexing and archiving should even predict future research directions.

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*Indice delle fiabe popolari italiane di magia. Volumes I and I**.* By Renato Aprile. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2000. xv + 408 pp.; 409–894 pp.

Renato Aprile’s award-winning work fills the need for an index of Italian tales of magic that is not confined to one region and includes up-to-date references. As Aprile notes in his introduction, the absence of such a research tool may account for the frequency with which scholars cite Italo Calvino’s *Fiabe italiane* (*Italian Folktales*) even though he is drawing—and in his own literary style—on primary sources which are not as readily available or known. It is true that the *Fiabe Regionali Italiane* series published by

Mondadori made regional tales readily available to Italian readers and that each of those paperback volumes provided a scholarly introductory essay on a specific regional tradition; but Aprile's volume is primarily an index, rather than an anthology, and it accounts for all nineteen regions. Further, by adopting Aarne-Thompson classification, Aprile's work promises to be useful to scholars who may not be fluent in the Italian language but will nevertheless benefit, when pursuing comparative research, from information about regional distribution and variants of a specific tale type in Italy.

The first volume of this index includes an introduction, a preface (*Avvertenza*), maps, tables, and information on Italian tales from AT300 through AT327. The second volume documents AT328 to AT451 and includes a bibliography of sources as well as an index of variants organized by source. Over one hundred pages are dedicated to AT425 in the second volume. For each tale type in either volume, there is a map showing which regions are represented, a plot description or sequence of episodes that make up the type, a list of variants classified by region, references and basic plot variations, scholarly notes (*Osservazioni*), and a distributional table. Every one of the tale-type descriptions, as Aprile explains in his introduction, is articulated according to a plot trajectory for which I am providing a quick, and I fear inadequate, translation here: "initial condition," "pre-cognition," "envy," "cognition," "via crucis" and/or "passio," and "resolution" (commonly achieved via recognition and marriage). This pattern, which stresses the meaning and consequences of knowledge as acquired by the tale's protagonist, makes for a certain interpretive rigidity, but allows for a uniform overview of all the tale types in question. The tables and maps provide important information in an effectively visual manner.

Aprile's introduction deserves scholarly attention, particularly when he discusses tales of magic with female protagonists. He immediately points out that such tales are dominant in Italy and then, by focusing on AT425, especially in its "Cupid and Psyche" variant, he stresses the archaic and chthonic elements of these tales. His observations on the importance of water, centripetal movements, and underground depths contribute to a larger contrast between the Italian and more generally Mediterranean tale and the Middle and Northern European tale, more open to centrifugal forces and heights. Aprile also connects the female protagonists of Southern Italian tales with Demeter, Persephone, Isis, and Hecates. While not all mythic connections are convincing, I found his analysis of AT310 particularly successful: he contrasts the German name Rapunzel with the Italian Prezzemolina, which derives from *prezzemolo*, parsley, and the earlier Latin *selinus*, a reminder of Selinunte the famous temple dedicated to Hecates-Lamia, "la dea che sorge dal profondo e, relegata in una torre come la vec-

chia della fiaba, è ricordata come divoratrice di bambini” (“the goddess who emerges from the depths of the earth and, relegated to a tower like the old woman in the fairy tale, is remembered as an ogress”).

In contrast, Aprile’s observations on tales of magic with male protagonists are brief and I did not find them as suggestive. Regardless, at the end of his introduction he concludes that he has at least begun to delineate the features of Italian ecotypes and thus opened up the possibility for better-informed monographs. Aprile also refers to anthroposophic research and, repeatedly, to his interest in understanding the tale of magic in relation to myth, but then mentions that he does not want to force interpretation or adopt a grid that would be too rigid.

While I found Aprile’s observations on individual tales of magic with female protagonists suggestive and often helpful to contrast the early Italian imaginary with that of more internationally well-known traditions, scholars, especially those of us who are interested in questions of gender and genre, will have to test these ideas and further historicize and contextualize them. But Aprile’s work is primarily an index, and as such it is a major accomplishment, as recognized by its being awarded the Premio Paolo Toschi: this significant research tool surveys as thoroughly as he could, Aprile states, volumes of Italian tales of magic published in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries *and* it includes tales recorded for the *Discoteca di Stato* or National Archive of Recordings during the 1968–75 period.

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The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm. Selected and edited by Jack Zipes. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001. 991 pp.

In many respects, Jack Zipes’s most recent anthology of fairy tales and critical texts has as its primary objective to trace the history and development of the literary fairy tale in Western Europe, a genre that first took root in sixteenth-century Italy, then came to flourish in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, only to prosper in Germany by the beginning of the nineteenth century. This “chronology” of the genre’s history is reflected in the organization of tales, which in each section moves from Italian tales by Straparola and Basile, to French tales by authors like d’Aulnoy and Perrault, and finally to German versions mostly by the Grimms. Rather than organize the tales according to the Aarne-Thompson system of classification, Zipes groups the tales based on affinities that highlight relations of direct, indirect, or mutual influences between tales coming from different national tra-

ditions. Zipes hesitates characterizing the development of the genre in terms of diachrony, and complicates this linear evolution by pointing out in the short introductions to each group of tales, in his essays, and in the choice of critical essays the various “synchronic” influences on each national tradition, such as the sociopolitical context and ideological objectives of the particular writer, the influence of contemporary oral versions of the tales, and literary trends of the period.

As the organization of tales would suggest, Zipes is interested, as he clearly states in his introduction, in the notion of the genre’s *hybridity*. Far from drawing from some sort of pure, unadulterated, and wholly indigenous oral folk tradition, authors of literary fairy tales, including the Grimms, grafted together local and foreign, oral and literary traditions. In effect, Zipes’s notion of hybridity complements his idea of “cross-cultural contamination” which he develops in his essay on the subject. What Zipes suggests here is that *both* oral and literary fairy tales are always already “contaminated” or hybrid. For instance, as W. G. Waters maintains in his essay, several of Straparola’s stories were influenced by oral versions of the *Arabian Nights*, for at the time there were no written versions of the tales in Europe. This suggests that in commercial cities like Venice, where merchants from across the Mediterranean world would come to trade, oral stories were also being exchanged, and then integrated into local traditions. Tales from the East also blended into the European tradition through Spain in the Middle Ages. Zipes’s notion of crosscultural contamination takes into account affinities between Oriental and European tales, as well as affinities between different national traditions within Europe, whether written or oral. Harry Velten’s essay is particularly interesting with respect to Perrault’s impact on the German tale tradition as he charts which tales by Perrault were the only source for particular German literary tales, and which ones influenced more generally German popular tradition.

At no historical moment can we separate out the oral tradition from the written, which have always mutually influenced each other. This is particularly clear in the history of the French *Bibliothèque Bleue* and the German *Die Blaue Bibliothek*, both of which allowed for the wide diffusion of literary fairy tales, consequently influencing oral traditions in France and Germany. The mixing of oral and literary traditions often plays out in the very conventions of the literary fairy tale. Although Boccaccio himself did not write fairy tales, Zipes points out the importance of his *Decameron* in establishing the model of a frame narrative where characters “orally” relate tales to each other, a model that influenced writers from Straparola and Basile to d’Aulnoy. As Zipes has noted elsewhere, French fairy-tale writers of the late seventeenth century recounted their tales within the context of

the salon, and it is likely that tales published by writers like d'Aulnoy, Murat, and Perrault were first communicated orally before they were published. Even eighteenth-century French fairy-tale writers, who often satirized the genre, "highlighted the exchange of literary fairy tales and dialogue" (863). While many writers inscribed the oral storyteller within the written tales, the Grimms tried to efface the "literariness" of their "transcriptions" of oral tales. In his essay on the Brothers Grimm, Siegfried Neumann looks at how Wilhelm in particular developed a *literary* aesthetic standard for the tales to be included in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which consequently made the collection more marketable. Neumann provides examples from different editions of "The Frog King" to demonstrate the ways in which Wilhelm polished and embellished the tales, transforming them into literary texts.

We can extend Zipes's notion of "contamination" and "hybridity" to the question of class as well. Zipes argues that, although peasants were excluded from being producers of the literary tale, "their material, tone, style, and beliefs were also incorporated into the new genre, and their experiences were recorded, albeit from the perspective of the literate scribe or writer" (847). For Benedetto Croce, as well as for other critics mentioned in his essay, Basile's *Pentamerone* cleverly and often for the purposes of social satire blends popular and learned traditions. This is reflected in Basile's use of language and tropes, as well as in the frame narrative, in which the storytellers are all lower-class women (with the exception of Zoza), who recount their tales at the court of prince Tadeo. In the case of the Grimms, who claimed to reproduce tales from the "folk," their informants in reality issued primarily from the ranks of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy, a fact noted in essays by Zipes and Neumann. However, even considering the predominantly aristocratic nature of the French tales, tales written and recounted by members of the upper class were also shaped by popular culture.

Zipes's choice of tales and essays emphasizes the cross-cultural, cross-genre, and cross-class influences in the constitution of the genre of the literary fairy tale, whose pool of characters, topoi, motifs, and tropes nevertheless became conventionalized and institutionalized over the course of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, stabilizing in the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. The essays, the introduction to each group of tales, and the tales themselves take the reader through what Zipes calls a "pan-European" tradition, that nevertheless takes specific forms in specific places and periods. For each (contaminated, hybrid) national tradition constitutes itself through (1) literary appropriation, i.e., Straparola borrows from Boccaccio, Basile from Straparola, d'Aulnoy from Basile and seventeenth-century French novelists, etc.; (2) appropriation from local (always already con-

taminated) oral traditions; and (3) adaptation to a specific sociohistorical situation and to the ideology of the writer.

Essays by Lewis Seifert and Patricia Hannon examine the ways in which seventeenth-century French writers adapted tales to their specific ideological positions within the sociocultural field. For instance, Seifert situates tales by French writers like Perrault, d'Aulnoy, and Lhéritier in relation to the culture wars at the end of the century. Tales are regarded as vehicles in the production of a counterideology that revalorized *mondain* culture and women's participation in literary and cultural production at a time when both had come under attack. Hannon examines the ambivalent representations of women in Perrault's tales particularly with respect to misalliances (a phenomenon that greatly troubled Perrault's contemporaries), changing notions of nobility, and objects that limit women's sphere of action. Taking into account the specific sociohistorical context of tales also provides some explanation for the wide popularity of the Grimms' collection since its publication, which, according to Zipes, brought together "representative tales in a style and ideology that suited middle-class taste throughout Europe and North America" (868).

As a matter of fact, Zipes suggests that the wonder tale or literary fairy tale that emerged in the sixteenth century at a time of great social change, when the possibilities for social mobility opened up, can be characterized at least in part by the utopian quest for a better life. Whether we consider Straparola's Swindled Swindler, who in the end becomes a wealthy man, Perrault's son of a miller, who becomes the Marquis de Carabas, d'Aulnoy's Aimée, who recovers her lost noble identity, or the Grimms' Simpleton, who inherits a kingdom, so many tales constitutive of the literary fairy-tale tradition have to do with improving one's status or, as in the case of the French *conteuses*, recovering a lost one. *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition* is an excellent anthology that debunks myths of pure oral or national traditions through a complicated outline of the genre's evolution that moves between a multiplicity of influences or "contaminations" on the one hand, and recurring themes, characters, and motifs that establish the genre as such, on the other. Moreover, the many references to the various traditions from which fairy-tale writers drew opens up new directions in fairy-tale scholarship.

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Feen-Mährchen: Zur Unterhaltung für Freunde und Freundinnen der Feenwelt. Textkritischer Neudruck der anonymen Ausgabe, Braunschweig 1801. Edited and with a commentary by Ulrich Marzolph. Preface by Jeannine

Blackwell. *Völkskundliche Quellen: 3, Märchen und Schwank*. Hildesheim: Olms, 2000. xiii + 331 pp.

One of the most exciting aspects of fairy-tale research in recent years has been the growing availability of fairy-tale texts that over time have been forgotten, neglected, denied admission to the canon, or not widely known to readers outside their national literatures. This work has involved publishing, sometimes in translation, a wide range of texts in new editions and anthologies. Examples include Jack Zipes's translations of *Fairy Tales and Fables from Weimar Days* (1989), Daniel Shealy's edition of *Fairy Tales and Fantasy Stories* (1992) by Louisa May Alcott, Shawn Jarvis's edition of Gisela and Bettine von Arnim's *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns* (1986), and Jarvis and Jeannine Blackwell's translations of fairy tales by German women in *The Queen's Mirror* (2001). Ulrich Marzolph has made a significant contribution to this recovery work by making available a new edition of the early-nineteenth-century volume *Feen-Mährchen*.

Published anonymously in 1801, *Feen-Mährchen* is a collection of sixteen tales that was popularly received in its own time, but which today is extremely rare—even in German libraries—and therefore largely inaccessible to most scholars. The Brothers Grimm were well acquainted with the *Feen-Mährchen* and even cited the collection in the preface to the first edition of their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812. In a brief summary of German fairy-tale collections up to that time, the Grimms noted that *Feen-Mährchen* was the richest of these collections, although they considered the tone of the tales to be “verkehrt.” In other words, as Marzolph points out in his afterword, the Grimms considered the style and content of these stories to be inconsistent with their own view of the ideal fairy tale. Indeed, despite the inclusion of several tales that can best be described as legends, the *Feen-Mährchen* owe a good deal overall to the French conte de fées and document an important chapter in the German reception of the French fairy-tale tradition. Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's stories clearly provide the model for at least three of the tales here, and “La belle et la bête” by Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont is the source of yet another. The influence of the *Arabian Nights* via Antoine Galland's French translation of 1704 is also evident.

Despite these literary influences, the anonymous author of *Feen-Mährchen* prefaces the collection with the claim that the tales published here are recollected from childhood, when they were first heard from the lips of a beloved elderly aunt. As Marzolph observes, this tension between the written and oral traditions characterizes the collection as a whole and underlines its importance as a fairy-tale collection that took shape in a time of social and cultural change. The unusual mix of folk motifs and courtly

culture, the pretense of orality despite the distinct echo of aristocratic French tales, and the clash of superstition with Enlightenment rationality all point to the nature of the *Feen-Mährchen* as a transitional document, one which the Grimms might have valued as a rich and interesting resource, but dismissed as an improperly executed collection of German folktales. For modern readers and scholars, it is precisely this tension and the transitional nature of the tales—their ironic moments and their subtle play with morality in particular—that make them so fascinating and raise important questions about their popular reception in the early nineteenth century.

Marzolph's edition does an excellent job in raising these issues and providing an indispensable tool for pursuing further research. The volume opens with a preface by Jeannine Blackwell that explores questions raised by the anonymous author's preface, in particular the author's identity and gender. While that question is not definitively answered—and may never be—Blackwell offers an excellent summary of the suspects and of the literary culture that the author's preface evokes. The editorial apparatus provided by Marzolph is practical and illuminating. While his afterword documents the popular and scholarly reception of the *Feen-Mährchen* and places the collection in its literary and sociohistorical contexts, his commentaries for the individual tales provide important information about tale types, motifs, generic aspects, and unique features of the tales. Marzolph has judiciously edited the original text so that we have before us a reliable edition. The few corrections of obvious typographical errors that were made to the text are listed in the back matter, along with a useful glossary. The volume also reprints handwritten marginal annotations that the Grimms had made about these tales in their personal copy of *Feen-Mährchen*.

Simply providing a reprint of *Feen-Mährchen* would have been in its own right an important contribution to fairy-tale studies. However, by publishing a well-equipped volume such as this—with an editorial voice placing the collection in context, articulating its rich texture, and offering perspectives and information critical to a proper understanding of its importance—Marzolph has paved the way for other fairy-tale scholars to undertake significant new research.

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From Court to Forest: Giambattista Basile's Lo cunto de li cunti and the Birth of the Literary Fairy Tale. By Nancy L. Canepa. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1999. 333 pp.

Nancy Canepa has provided English-language scholars with an excellent and multidimensional study of Giambattista Basile's wonderful seven-

teenth-century collection of tales, *Lo cunto de li cunti overo Lo trattenemiento de peccerille* (*The Tale of Tales, or Entertainment for the Little Ones*) also known as *Il Pentamerone*. Published posthumously in 1634–36 and written in the Neapolitan dialect, this vastly influential but no longer much read work opens up with a frame tale the narrative resolution of which calls for the telling of forty-nine more tales by ten female narrators over a period of five days. *Lo cunto* includes Basile's versions of well-known European tales of magic, including "Cinderella," "Snow White," "Puss in Boots," and "The Three Citrons"; and, as Canepa foregrounds, the volume "marks the passage from the fairy tale [. . .] as an oral, popular genre to the artful and sophisticated 'authored' fairy tale" (11).

While *From Court to Forest* is far more than an introduction to Basile's collection, it is also that, and as such it fills a large lacuna when it comes to materials available in the English language. Canepa provides solid information on the structure and themes of the collection, on the author's life and intellectual concerns, on the institutional limitations and frustrations of the artist as courtier in the Kingdom of Naples at the time, and on the literary traditions from which Basile constructs his own narrative fireworks. In doing so, Canepa herself adeptly utilizes and synthesizes an illustrious tradition of Italian criticism of Basile's work, a tradition that includes Benedetto Croce's erudition, Michele Rak's impeccable scholarship, Italo Calvino's stylistic analysis of metaphors, and Paolo Valesio's critical acumen. From this angle, then, Canepa's book—which is also informed by Jack Zipes's historicizing perspective and Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas as understood within contemporary American literary criticism—is also another fine example of how important it is to recognize, on the one hand, that the history of folk and fairy tales develops both in relation to localized knowledge and international dynamics, and, on the other hand, that the study of these tales today really benefits from perspectives that span across oceans, languages, and critical traditions.

Of the forty-nine-plus-one tales in *Lo cunto*, Canepa's detailed reading draws examples from as many as forty-seven tales. This comprehensive approach does not, however, yield a large number of independent close readings; rather the discussion of individual tales bolsters a narrative analysis of the collection which in turn is meant to support a larger interpretation of how Basile's work "engages with 'reality'—the reality of literary and popular traditions and of its own sociocultural context" (25). For instance, Canepa presents the first tale within the frame tale, "Lo cunto dell'uero" ("The Tale of the Ogre"), as a tale of initiation by underscoring, on the one hand, Antuono's transformation from "simpleton" to "canonical fool" in the tale itself and, on the other hand, Basile's own initiation into active trans-

former of popular traditions (95–98). Both processes of initiation, with clearly different levels of awareness, it is suggested, are enabled by the manipulation of language or the magic of words to intervene critically in specific structures of power. Then, later in the book, Canepa convincingly turns to this tale again in support of her argument that Basile’s sympathetic figuration of “significant others” (characters like the ugly but “sage” ogre and the fool who is rewarded in spite of his persistent ignorance of cultural norms) “effects, metatextually, a revaluation of the popular culture with which [such figures] are intimately linked, as well as a general critique of court society and the canonical literary tradition” (177).

However, even as Canepa’s organization effectively subordinates the individual tale to her interpretive project, she does still provide her readers with ample access to the wealth of invention, fun, magic, and artistry of Basile’s tales. She does so by drawing on many of his lesser-known stories and, most importantly, by quoting abundantly. A. S. Byatt has recently called for a renewed attention to the multivalent possibilities of quotations in critical discourse: Canepa’s study would go to support that, I think. Basile’s text illustrates Canepa’s arguments; it opens up new opportunities for readers who may not know his work extensively; it performs its foremost purpose of entertainment as the collection’s subtitle intimates; and because Canepa makes it available in English *and* in the original Neapolitan language (a choice I loudly applaud), the quoted text more fully represents Basile’s linguistic and ideological excesses, transgressions, and artistry.

From Court to Forest is organized in the tradition of the monograph. The first three chapters provide background, respectively to the place of *Lo cunto* in the history of the fairy tale, the “life and times” of Giambattista Basile, and the linguistic and literary traditions for which Basile’s collection marks a defining transformation. The following four chapters each focus on themes or figures—initiation; kings and courtiers; enterprising heroes and heroines; ogres, fools, and forests—of central importance to Canepa’s meta-narrative and ideological argument. By the way, this argument is more complex and historically grounded than I have been able to indicate since it involves not only Neapolitan cultural traditions and literary norms of the time, but also courtly dynamics of power in the Kingdom of Naples and Basile’s own life and tribulations. Chapter eight, following a critical tradition best exemplified by Calvino, zooms in on Basile’s metaphoric language as his signature piece both within the larger genre of the marvelous and the poetics of the Baroque. A brief epilogue makes explicit the connection between Canepa’s representation of Basile’s “engagement with ‘reality’ “ and the Bakhtinian concept of the “carnavalesque.” Canepa’s language is generally clear and free of jargon.

Overall, in reading this book, I felt I was walking into a magic forest with Canepa as my helper pointing out individual trees, clusters, pathways so as to encourage an appreciation of the forest, its values and its figuration in contrast to those of the court we kept nevertheless as our frame of reference. The journey ends successfully if or when as readers we see the forest as a “carnavalesque” space of critical engagement with social and literary norms rather than an escape. In these terms, Canepa’s references to Jack Zipes’s approach to the fairy tale as genre and to postmodernism as akin in some ways to the Baroque are quite apt. Furthermore, when we see the forest in Canepa’s terms, the figure on the cover of the book assumes new significance. This illustration, Carmelo Lettere’s *Sourpuss*, features the cat from “Cagluso,” Basile’s version of “Puss in Boots.” In supporting Basile’s ideological and ethical shift from court to forest, Canepa argues, extending Zipes’s earlier reading, that the “virtuous” courtier is the “real-life counterpart” of the talented cat who served her master ever so loyally and is rewarded only with his ingratitude. The wrong values are clearly in power at the court, and, though the cat behaves splendidly and complains eloquently, the artist-courtier has no chance in the courtly world of the tale. In Lettere’s image, however, where the cat holds a puppet hand (a sign for artifice) and is ornately dressed, the courtier’s artistry and perspective—talented, playful, but also somewhat sour—take centerstage. Here, then, is a book true to its cover, along with a charmingly witty and *ingegnosa* collaboration between wife and husband, if I read Nancy Canepa’s acknowledgements correctly.

During Canepa’s guided tour, I was not convinced by every argument equally, of course. Just how “the conventions of the fairy tale itself are overturned” (255) in Basile’s collection is not clear to me, especially if his collection is historically foundational to the genre of the literary fairy tale in Europe. I would have wanted more examples from the oral traditions and from later canonized texts. And while the chapter on “The Key to Success: Enterprising Heroes and Heroines” effectively juxtaposes male and female subjectivity in some tales at least (particularly interesting are the examples of “La Sapia” [“The Wise One”] and “Betta Smauto” [“The Splendid Shrine”]), I would have welcomed a stronger focus on gender and sexuality throughout the book. After all, the exposed genitals of an old and poor woman are the scene of the forest, “la scena voscareccia” or “woody scene,” out of which laughter, adventure, and storytelling emerge in Basile’s collection, and the cat in “Cagluso” is female. I do not believe that the gender and sexual politics of Basile’s work have been adequately addressed so far, even when it comes to Italian criticism. And I wonder if something is not lost when considering *bosco* and *foresta* as absolutely synonymous and equally

translatable into “forest.” But there is so much to learn from and enjoy in Canepa’s *From Court to Forest* that perhaps it is better to say that I look forward to future interventions on her part to move us along less worn pathways or new figurations within Basile’s magic world.

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Twice Upon a Time, Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale. By Elizabeth Wanning Harries. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. xiv + 216.

In this readable book, Harries argues that the history of the fairy tale has focused exclusively on one particular type of fairy tale and has excluded equally valid forms of stories which do not conform to the model of the short, simple, and putatively oral tale popularized by Charles Perrault at the end of the seventeenth century and the Brothers Grimm at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These latter are, in Harries’s very useful term, “compact tales,” which have entered the canon and have determined, both in folklore/fairy-tale research and in fairy-tale collections, the definitive format of the genre. There is, however, an equally valid tradition of more sophisticated tales for which Harries suggests the term “complex tales” to stress that these stories have a history which stretches as far back, if not farther, than that of the compact tales. In her book, Harries sets out to examine this muted history of the complex fairy tale; she identifies the mechanisms by which these stories were marginalized and shows the commonalities between the strategies employed by the seventeenth-century *conteuses* who had first popularized the complex *contes de fées* and contemporary revisions of fairy tales. Harries argues that there is a long tradition of women writers who use the fairy-tale form to “reorder the world” (163) and to establish a new language which allows them to write “outside the law” (quotation from Rich, 163), questioning and subverting social patterns and normative expectations.

The book has two halves, separated by an “interlude” which summarizes the argument of the first half—a rereading of the history of the fairy tale—and introduces the aims of the second: a discussion of contemporary revisions of fairy tales drawing on the work of a wide range of writers and one artist which cites them as a continuation of the muted strand of fairy-tale history. Chapters one to three engage with the knotty issues of canon formation, the nature of orality, and the “invention” of the fairy tale in Britain in the nineteenth century. Harries shows how the study of the fairy tale provides a good example of the mechanics of canon formation, where gendered cultural standards and the construction of the fairy tale as an artless and seemingly naive narrative form combined to exclude the sophisti-

cated tales written by women. In addition, the *conteuses* did not claim allegiance to the unlettered peasant teller of stories, constructed by Perrault and, later, the Brothers Grimm, but to a literary tradition of tale telling. Judged against conventions of the simple “oral” tale as “folk art,” which was being constructed as the dominant model, the consciously literary style, complex structure, ironic self-referentiality, length, and historic specificity of their elaborate *contes* generated derogatory criticism and rejection, which has endured. Harries’s perceptive comparative reading of versions of the same tales by Perrault and Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy or Catherine Bernard revalues their elaborate style not as an “inferior imitation” (Grimm 23), but in their own terms, as a knowingly mocking and psychological exploration of a common tale and a coded comment on the practices and values of women’s writing. In the same way that she shows how Romantic perceptions of the folk and folk art contributed to a dramatic narrowing of the fairy-tale canon, in chapter two Harries engages with the notion of orality as a central and constituting feature of the *Märchen*. Taking issue with the belief that fairy tales are documents of and give access to an oral, preliterate tradition, she argues that the orality of the compact tale is a carefully constructed simulation which excludes other forms of oral culture, such as the conversation of the aristocratic salon. Rather than the nostalgic evocation of “authentic” folk art, the *contes* are evidence of a living oral counter-culture, performed in the setting of competitive conversational salon culture. But these tales draw very consciously on literary models, partly on the structures and established devices of the seventeenth-century novel, but also on the literary tradition of fairy tales as established by Straparola and Giambattista Basile, whose tales are told within the frame of a simulated conversational setting. Such a framing of stories establishes an interweaving of narrative voices and discourses where the frame tale and the embedded stories inflect each other and establish additional meanings which are lost when these stories are published on their own, as has been publishing practice almost from the beginning. In her third chapter, Harries shows how the complex tales of the *conteuses* were domesticated in British reception to fit the model of the compact tale. Using the perceived absence of a living native tradition of tales in England, this chapter also further investigates how conceptions of orality and the fairy tale have been formed, and demonstrates how the fairy tale was *invented* as an oral form in the construction of an “English” tradition from imported, naturalized tales which then consolidate the compact tale as the dominant model of the fairy tale. However, like the “return of the repressed,” complex fairy tales are a recurrent feature of fairy-tale writing which continues to challenge the generic dogma of the compact tale with their complex, multilayered and framed narratives.

Framing is one of the strategies Harries identifies as central to the complex tale. In the second half of the book, her aim is to show the continuities in the history of the complex fairy-tale tradition by examining two new framing strategies deployed by contemporary revisionist fairy-tale writing. The first is reframing, which most obviously links the work of authors such as Joseph Cornell, Anne Sexton, and Emma Donoghue with the *conteuses* in their framing and reframing of entire stories. Both the Russian-doll model of embedded fairy stories and the continuing frame story on which tales are strung “like beads on a narrative chain” (107) are evident in the work of contemporary writers and continue to inform and inflect meanings as Harries’s interesting discussion of A. S. Byatt’s complex novel *Possession* shows. Her three examples of more explicit fairy-tale revisions are the work by artist Joseph Cornell in whose *Shadow Boxes* fairy-tale objects and images are framed and in the tension between the verbal and the visual, the fairy-tale narratives are shaped and stopped short. Anne Sexton’s witch’s prologue provides a contemporary frame, which ironizes the tales and inserts them into a “modern matrix” (129) of contemporary American consumer culture and pop-art images. Emma Donoghue imaginatively links narrative voices in interlocking receding frames where a marginal character of one story becomes the central figure and narrator in the following tale. In this way, stories comment on each other and establish a continuous narrative chain which only “ends” when the last tale directly addresses the reader and passes the storytelling “baton” on to her to tell her own story.

Transliteration is the second new framing strategy, which Harries discusses with reference to the work of East German author Christa Wolf, US poet of Greek origin Olga Broumas, and British writers Carolyn Kay Steedman and Angela Carter. Transliteration isolates and reinterprets specific images from well-known tales, reframing the tales by “zooming” in on an often marginal image and giving it and the tale new meaning through its new context. This fragmentation of tales and motifs is used by Christa Wolf to question traditional meanings of fairy tales and establish them as models of resistance rather than an overwhelming, coherent myth. Carolyn Steedman uses fairy-tale patterns to describe her mother’s yearning and—impossible to fulfill—desires (fostered by traditional tales’ endings) and her own experience in contrast to conventional motifs and images. Broumas uses transliteration most consciously as an attempt to formulate a new language to express experiences, which cannot be said in existing formats. Her revisions of fairy tales pick up on and further develop Sexton’s new perspectives to formulate a passionate celebration of lesbian sexuality. In Angela Carter’s work, fragmentation and transliteration are expressed through the weaving together of shards of stories from different traditions

to make new meanings, which criticize the sharp divisions between beast and human and call into question the primacy of the word. It is these discussions of contemporary work which left me not quite satisfied.

Harries covers such a wide field that individual analysis by necessity remains quite short and the perceptive insights that she provides left me wishing that she had had the space for a more detailed study in which she also could have established the commonalities between the strategies of the early and contemporary women writers of fairy tales more sharply. But this is a minor concern: this is a highly readable work which engages with important questions in feminist literary criticism and fairy-tale research and offers a valuable and well-argued rereading of the history of the fairy tale.

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Traditional Storytelling Today: An International Sourcebook. Edited by Margaret Read MacDonald. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1999. xv + 627 pp.

This book is a mammoth undertaking, and like all mammoths, it is large and clumsy but admirable. Margaret Read MacDonald is a renowned storyteller, critic, editor of anthologies, and librarian; she has undoubtedly made major contributions to the renaissance of storytelling in the United States. The present volume is an endeavor to depict the present state of traditional storytelling throughout the world, and MacDonald has gathered together one hundred articles, long and short, written by expert critics, scholars, and practitioners of storytelling that cover an unusually wide array of topics and are always informative, even when they are weak in substance.

The major portion of the book (ninety-one essays) is divided according to geographical region: Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Australia and the Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, Native America, North America, and South America. The final nine articles deal ostensibly with theory but they are more historical analytical accounts than anything else and explore such topics as: children's telling of ghost stories (Sylvia Grider), organizational storytelling (Richard Raspa), the role of traditional stories in language teaching and learning (Martha Bean), the storytelling revival (Joseph Sobol), pre-adolescent girls' storytelling (Elizabeth Tucker), an analysis of five interviews with story listeners to determine how they perceive the listening experience (Brian Sturm), urban legends (Jan Harold Brunvand), a case analysis of an etic/emic storytelling event (Wendy Welch), and the nature of women's storytelling (Linda Dégh). Most of these fine essays focus on issues and developments in the United States and the West. The length of the articles throughout the volume varies from two to eleven pages, and

they are all introduced by a brief description of the contents and conclude with a helpful bibliography of suggested reading.

Given the comprehensive scope of the book, it is difficult to comment on all the essays, especially since I am unfamiliar with many of the storytelling traditions in the numerous countries represented in this volume. Therefore, I should like to examine a few articles about storytelling in countries with which I am familiar and with a couple of regions that are unfamiliar to give a general sample of the quality of the essays.

There are two articles on storytelling in Germany, Sabine Wienker-Piepho's "Märchen 2000: Taking Care of the Fairy Tale in Germany," and Siegfried Neumann's "Traditional Storytelling Today in the Ast of Northern Germany," which complement each other. Wienker-Piepho's essay is exemplary, and I wish most of the articles in *Traditional Storytelling Today* had been conceived and developed like hers. She begins by discussing the post-war situation and the notion of *pflegen* or taking care of the fairy tale as an important cultural tradition. Then she discusses the split between the academic and popular reception of the tales in Germany. Her major focus is on the historical development of the influential association, the Europäische Märchengesellschaft (The European Fairy Tale Society), and the other groups that are linked to it and how the renewal of storytelling in Germany compares with other movements in the West. Throughout her article she is informative and critical of the commercial and pseudoscientific uses of storytelling, and she celebrates the multiplicity of approaches to the tales. Neumann's piece is much more specific and just as enlightening as Wienker-Piepho's essay. A distinguished folklorist from the former East Germany, he explores in detail how story traditions in Mecklenburg and West Pomerania have been conserved through a mix of oral storytelling and the mass media.

In contrast to the two articles on Germany, Veronika Görög-Karady's essay on "New Storytellers in France" is disappointing. She makes one interesting point—that contemporary storytelling in France does not derive directly from traditional oral culture—but her three-page article is so skimpy and so general that it is impossible to grasp how rich and multifarious the revival of storytelling in France has been. Nor do three titles in her bibliography help the reader. The articles on contemporary storytelling in the UK and Ireland are also disappointing, and there is a huge gap: there is no article on the important rebirth of storytelling in England, nothing on the British Society for Storytelling. Patricia Lysaght's article, "Traditional Storytelling in Ireland in the Twentieth Century" very rarely mentions post-1945 developments, and thus we learn nothing of the rich contemporary storytelling traditions in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In contrast, the two

pieces on Scotland, Barbara McDermitt's "Storytelling Traditions in Scotland" and Donald Braid's "Our Stories Are Not Just for Entertainment': Lives and Stories Among the Travelling People of Scotland," are superb accounts of the different types of storytelling that have developed in Scotland and how and why they are flourishing today.

Turning to Japan, a country which I have visited and whose tales I have studied, I was somewhat dismayed that Westerners wrote the entries, that the article on "Religious Tales and Storytelling in Japan" (Richard Anderson) does not even touch on twentieth-century developments, and that Cathy Spagnoli's piece, "Still Telling in Japan: Traditional Folk-tellers," was a superficial report of an excursion she made to learn about traditional storytellers. Articles written by indigenous scholars and storytellers such as Chwumu Azuonye's "The Dogon Creation Story" (West Africa) or Ode Oggede's "The Storytelling Event Among the Igede of Nigeria," two traditions about which I know nothing, were on specific tales and traditions, and while insightful, they did not provide a general picture of currents and developments in these countries. A more productive approach is taken by Ku'ualoha Meyer-Ho'omanawanui, a native Hawaiian author, composer, and scholar, whose superb critical article, "The Revival of the Hawaiian Language in Contemporary Storytelling," reveals how strong ties to the indigenous language of Hawai'i are important for the resurgence of storytelling and the continuity of profound traditional rituals and customs.

Traditional Storytelling Today is a potpourri of essays, sometimes fascinating and highly informative and sometimes boring and not disclosing much about storytelling in a particular nation or region. If MacDonald had been more systematic in setting up a format for her contributors, her book would have been a much stronger resource book. As it is, *Traditional Storytelling Today* is a huge sea of varied articles, and one must fish and hope for luck to hook the information one seeks.

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On Histories and Stories: Selected Essays. By A. S. Byatt. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001. 196 pp.

A. S. Byatt's collection of essays reflects a writer's timely stance as *writer* on contemporary literary criticism. The essays also examine writing in relationship to what Byatt calls tales and stories—narratives that owe some debt to traditional oral tales. Byatt calls for a return to an appreciation of writing, of stories and storytelling, and for a fluid approach to modern novels (2–3).

Byatt's primary concern in the first four essays in the collection—

"Fathers," "Forefathers," "Ancestors," and "True Stories and the Facts in Fiction"—is the relationship between history and fiction. Byatt discusses a large number of historical novels in these essays, questioning the theoretical stance that one cannot know the past (10–11). She argues that some novels (such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*) claim a history previously unknown, while some present accurately ideas that were important during the time in which the novel is set, no matter whether the characters existed or are fictional (24–25). Using her own novel *Possession* as an example, she says, "writing Victorian words in Victorian contexts in a Victorian order, and in Victorian relations of one word to the next" can help one represent that period (46–47). She would like to see historical novels taken more seriously than she thinks they have been (9).

In "Forefathers," Byatt examines the forms British writers have used in their novels about invented pasts, discussing two forms in particular: the maggot and ventriloquism. The former, based on John Fowles's novel of that name, examines the change from a metaphorical larval stage to a winged one; for ventriloquism she gives the example of Browning's dramatic monologues and her own novel *Possession*. Of Browning's monologues she says later: "It is always said of Browning's various resurrected pasts in his dramatic monologues that they are about the nineteenth century, and of course this is true—but it is not always added that they are also truly about the time when the New Testament was written, or about Renaissance Christianity and Art, though they are, and are illuminating about those matters" (94).

The effect of scientific ideas such as Darwinism and Lyell's geology is the focus of the essay "Ancestors." Byatt shows the effect that concepts of natural law, questions about the place of chance and order in the universe, and the crisis of faith had on novels written both in the Victorian period and more recently. John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* serves as her example of a novel written with understanding of the effect of Darwinism on the time. She continues her discussion of the question of understanding a time period in "True Stories and the Facts in Fiction," where she makes the above quoted comment about Browning's monologues. "True Stories and the Facts in Fiction" also includes her comments on contemporary writers' awareness of the difficulty they face: "The moments in the prose of *The Golden Notebook* that most excited me [. . .] were little self-correction sequences of sentences about how to say things, how to get things right" (97). In addition, Byatt critiques some contemporary critics' treatment of texts; for example, she dislikes Mary Jacobus's discussion of Wordsworth in *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference*, which she calls "a kind of rewriting, or writing between the lines which fiction does with more tact, less whimsy and infinitely more power" (100). One should, I believe, take her point seriously.

Probably of most interest to readers of *Marvels & Tales* are the last three essays in *On Histories and Stories*: “Old Tales, New Forms,” “Ice, Snow, Glass,” and “The Greatest Story Ever Told.” In the first of these essays Byatt demonstrates a fine understanding of oral narrative tradition; she quotes Roberto Calasso on story forms and metamorphosis and notes Italo Calvino’s network metaphor when he speaks of his fables. Later she calls stories’ relationships “story webs” (148), and in the last of the three essays she remarks, “Great stories, and great story-collections, are shape-shifters” (166).

In “Ice, Snow, Glass” Byatt concentrates on the uses she and a few other writers have made of *The Snow Queen*, *Snow White*, and *The Glass Coffin*; she shows, for example, how her use of the images of cold and ice in *Possessions*, seemingly deathlike in their signification of solitude and distance, are possible indications of a way to preserve life for women and artists. The images may thus signify life in death.

The final essay, “The Greatest Story Ever Told,” continues Byatt’s discussion of the relationship between stories and tales and death, using the example of the *Thousand and One Nights*. In that series of tales, of course, storytelling literally avoids death, as, she notes, cartoons and soap operas do: they are “worlds in which death and endings are put off indefinitely—and age too, in the case of Charlie Brown” (170). Byatt contrasts the tales—the “story webs”—with novels, which she says are modeled on the linear Judeo-Christian narrative: “It [the Judeo-Christian narrative] moves forward from creation through history, to redemption in the Christian case, at one point in time, and looks forward to the promised end, when time and death will cease to be” (170). The continuation of life, she implies, comes from tales.

On Histories and Stories is an important book, not only because of its challenge to contemporary criticism’s emphasis on writing as social documents and writers as cultural products unable to see beyond their own time. It is also important because of Byatt’s insights on writing and storytelling as well as her vision of their relationship to each other and to life. These finely-written essays, reflective of an impressive breadth of knowledge and reading, are an example of the fluid approach Byatt calls for in the examination of contemporary writing. They most certainly deserve our attention.

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A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales. Edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000. 166 pp.

A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales adds another collection to what is emerging as a fairy-tale genre of its own, specifically the “retold

tale,” a tale that departs markedly though still recognizably from its more widely known cognate. Such retold tales range from the sophisticated literary retellings of Angela Carter and the poetic versions of Anne Sexton to children’s books like Babette Cole’s *Princess Smartypants* and the highly parodic *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories* of James Garner. Edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, *A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales* is a collection of thirteen retold tales for young readers.

Datlow and Windling open the book with a brief introduction intended to provide some historical context to the collection while also encouraging young readers to see fairy tales as a more complex genre than “these sweet and simple versions that most of us know today” (vii). They suggest going “back to the older versions” (vii) to find the scarier, more interesting stories lacking in happy endings, and they give as examples Red Riding Hood’s being gobbled up by the wolf, Rapunzel’s lover being blinded by the witch, and the Little Mermaid dying when the prince opts to marry a human. Regardless of the fact that these incidents still exist in the classic fairy-tale versions of these stories (e.g., *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*) or, as the case may be, in the literary tale of Hans Christen Anderson’s *The Little Mermaid*, Datlow and Windling’s vague and imprecise introduction does little to repair what they perceive as the problem with how fairy tales are understood today. They do, however, provide interested readers with references to other collections and to websites where they might find more information about fairy tales.

The stories themselves seem typical of stories written for young readers. As retold tales, however, they tend, with a few exceptions, to suffer from the relative obscurity of the tales from which they choose to depart. That is, retold tales depend—for their effect, for their pedagogical value, for their humor, etc.—upon the tension that exists between the transformed version of the story and the reader’s cultural familiarity with the original. Thus, if the reader is not already familiar with the tale being retold, the retelling loses all of its transformative power and is simply another story.

Each story in *A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales* is followed by a short author biography in which most authors describe their own fascination with fairy tales as well as their decisions for choosing the tales they use as the basis for their own retellings. In some cases, the authors even make explicit their intentions in retelling the chosen tale (see, for instance, Jane Yolen’s explanation of her story “Cinder Elephant,” though here Yolen’s explanation is unnecessary as the tale’s retold meaning seems quite obvious given the cultural familiarity that most readers have with “Cinderella”). It’s possible that *A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales* would benefit from reprinting versions of the original tales along with the author biogra-

phies, though even then the disjuncture created between the two might not carry enough cultural relevance to convey the intended meanings.

With the brilliance of Angela Carter's retellings and Anne Sexton's transformed tales and James Garner's humorous parodies, even young readers interested in retold fairy tales would be best served by these new "classics" than by the stories in *A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales*.

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Beasts. By Joyce Carol Oates. New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2002. 138 pp.

"I had not been forbidden to go upstairs, exactly," the young, female narrator of Joyce Carol Oates's novella, *Beasts*, tells us. "But of course I ventured upstairs." We are two thirds of the way through this tiny book, and if we didn't already know, we are in the land of fairy tales. What unfolds from here is horrible, but we've been prepared. Neither we, nor any of the characters, will be spared; no one gets out unscathed. And Gillian, of course, will survive.

In *Beasts*, the plot is as transparent as it is dark, and its message as inscrutable as its language pristine. These are all, in my view, extraordinary qualities. *Beasts* tells the twisted story of Gillian Brauer, a student at Catamount College in southwestern Massachusetts where a spate of arsons have recently occurred. There is the air of distrust, of unstable, oversexed students. Easily unnerved, our quiet Gillian writes poetry and is anachronistically interested in form; she writes sonnets other students find bloodless. These are among the subtle, finely-wrought clues that we are in fairy-tale land.

Enrolled in the exclusive writing seminars of Andre Harrow, Gillian is drawn into a world that is way beyond harrowing. This poetry class will be her undoing, and it will also do him in, and his sculptor-wife, Dorcas. Her name, spelled backwards, is nearly Sacred. Fast-moving and packed with codes, the novella maintains the muted love-threat feel of beast tales, with their special sort of erotic violence, or violent eroticism. The novel contains an anthem that strikes a disturbing chord. It accompanies Dorcas's unsightly wooden sculptures of nude girls: WE ARE BEASTS AND THIS IS OUR CONSOLATION. This string of words might be read synoptically to describe the contents of Oates's novella, with its peculiar arrhythmic sound and its wavering meaning. It does not reveal, although it announces.

And who are these beasts?

One is Andre, as he has his students call him, a real lady killer. At first he seems fairly harmless, though rather unpleasant. He is not even attrac-

tive, we are told: “his spade-shaped beard was sometimes unkempt, his graying-brown hair was often greasy and fell about his face in quills. His teeth were uneven and, like his restless fingers [not an alluring image], nicotine-stained.” It is his wife, Dorcas-Sacred who contains the real power between them. It is Dorcas whom Gillian followed on a path of needles through the woods before the affair. Dorcas is the seductive one, the beautiful one.

But the girls are beasts too, are they not? Young Gillian is the sort of girl in a novel who seems sweet but is secretly not, or who seems weak but is strong—the kind who can get away with, well, murder. We know she is not innocent, though she begins the book in a childlike state. Unlike the other girls, she does not smoke, and weighing only ninety pounds, she is full of wonder at the other students’ erotic powers. We are spared no horrors that await her in her crossing-over to the adult world. As soon as Andre the Beast kisses her, she has turned. It is too late to reverse the path she is on, and it is no surprise when, sated with wine and cassoulet at the Harrows’ home, she disrobes and is defiled. That we are not spared any detail is just right; what sort of tale would Bluebeard be without that smear of blood? And the wife is there too. Beasts.

Of course, in not too much time Gillian finds a key to a secret chamber in the bearded lover’s home. Of course, she convinces herself that her husband-and-wife captors—here, metaphorical captors, bound to the rules of obsessive desire—have wanted her to take a look. But what she finds inside the locked file cabinet is unspeakably bad: that expected series of girls, indeed, all lovers. Yet they are not dead, though their souls appear departed. Drugged, dazed, drooling, even, all underage. Worse: on the seedy pages of porn magazines or captured in near-paralyzed condition on Polaroid.

So in 128 pages unfolds a tale of sex and violence. The plot is simple: a poet-husband and sculptor-wife seduce young, unstable girl-students in their chamber, ply them with food and with wine. But, unlike criticism I recently read in a mainstream publication, the plot of *Beasts* is absolutely not disappointingly “one dimensional”—or at least, if it is one dimensional, it is not unpleasantly so. Rather, the novella’s pared-down form, its inexplicable exaggeration, its creepy slogan—WE ARE BEASTS AND THIS IS OUR CONSOLATION—appear wholly intentional, wholly realized. This is not a fragment of a world.

Though I do not know the current standing of Max Lüthi’s work among fairy-tale scholars (I review this work from the vantage of a novelist), his writings on the one-dimensionality of fairy tales here seems apt. Personally, I am drawn to Lüthi’s work, to his writings on style and transparency in fairy tales. “The folktale siphons off three-dimensionality” from its figures,

its images, its plots, he writes. In this way, one-dimensionality can be seen as a gorgeous abstraction, revealing the translucency of tales, their bright danger. In short, Oates seems to me in *Beasts* a master of the abstract art of fairy tales as described by Lüthi in *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*. Her novella emerges from that suffering, otherworldly place, free of certain hesitations and full of violations, within a rigid form that, despite its fixity, evolves with fluidity. It is familiar but displaced. It is art. (The dominant cultural ideology in literary criticism often faults a work for a perceived lack of “dimension,” but that is an unfortunate turn which fails to take into account the complexity of many fairy-tale works.)

Here, everything gets put in its place, in an unsettling finale. Deeply patterned, logical and yet untamed, the book begins and ends with Gillian’s hot, animal acting; and though she does not utter the words from another familiar story, she may as well: I’ll burn your house down. (The entire novel has the lilting gleam of a children’s nursery rhyme sung in a young girl’s off-key tone.) But why, but why? Because WE ARE BEASTS, I suppose.

Indeed, *Beasts* remains intricately evasive—perhaps even coy—as to our heroine’s exact motive, in the end. And we are left with the unsettling suspicion that she has been ruined, changed into wood. Oates is in full command of this path of needles, this path of beasts. I greatly admire her incantatory style in this novella, this intensely wrought use of the fairy-tale form.

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