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## Reviews

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#### REVIEWS

# Politique du conte. Special Issue of Féeries: Études sur le conte merveilleux XVIIe–XIXe siècle 3 (2006). 415 pp.

This special issue consists of thirteen essays that deal with various political aspects of the French literary fairy tale and that cover the period from about 1690 to 1789 or so. Anne Defrance's introductory article, "La Politique du conte aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: Pour une lecture oblique" (The Politics of the Fairy Tale in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Toward an Oblique Reading), lays out the parameters for the rest of the essays. Essentially, Defrance argues that Charles Perrault serves as a good starting point for understanding the relationship between politics and the fairy tale. Perrault was constrained by rules of decorum and social codes that prevented free speech so that he had to make it seem that his fairy tales were nothing but delightful bagatelles (trivialities). In actuality, Perrault, who was somewhat disgruntled and perturbed by Louis XIV and his court—as were many of the other fairy-tale writers in the 1790s—incorporated into his tales subtle political and moral critiques of the Sun King and the classical literary standards of Nicolas Boileau and his followers. To make her point, Defrance does an excellent close reading of Perrault's verse tale "La Marquise de Salusses ou la Patience de Griseldis, nouvelle" (1691). She indicates that there are many veiled references to Louis XIV and the dangers of absolutism. In the end, however, Perrault compromises his critical position by vindicating the king in this tale and not taking a clearer stand for the radicalism of the fairy tale as genre. Though "Griseldis" is not a fairy tale, it served as a model that Perrault used in his fairy tales, in which his political critique of the absolute monarchy is much more apparent. According to Defrance, most of the writers of fairy tales from Perrault up to the French Revolution developed political themes in their works with metaphorical references to politics, and she traces schematically the different phases of the fairy tale (the marvelous, libertine,

oriental, and philosophical) and focuses on the symbolical representation of politics.

All the essays that follow Defrance's article treat themes and problems that she raises, but they do this in more detail and from different perspectives. Among the more interesting essays are those by Éric Méchoulan, Marie-Agnès Thirard, Jean-Paul Sermain, and Huguette Krief. In Méchoulan's "Le pouvoir féerique" (Fairy Power) he sheds light on how Louis XIV's court itself was more like a fairy tale and provided the sociopolitical background for the motifs and topoi in the fairy tales. Thirard's article, "De l'allée du roi aux sentiers du bon sauvage: Un parcours dans les contes de Madame d'Aulnoy" (From the King's Alley to the Paths of the Noble Savage: A Trajectory in Madame d'Aulnoy's Tales), concentrates on the subversive aspects of d'Aulnoy's tales; Thirard argues that they do not reinforce the social codes and political power of absolutism. On the contrary, she maintains that there is a utopian impulse in Madame d'Aulnoy's tales that projects an "insula feminarum," in which women would hold political power. Sermain deals with a later period of the fairy tale in his essay, "Le fantasme de l'absolutisme dans le conte de fees au XVIIIe siècle (Fénelon, Galland, Crébillon, Diderot, Beckford)" (The Fantasy of Absolutism in the Eighteenth-Century Fairy Tale). In it he analyzes the manner in which the fairy tales involve the reader in questioning authority and the nature of absolutism. Krief's essay, "Le conte politique et l' Isegoria à l'aurore de la Révolution Française" (The Political Tale and Isegoria at the Beginning of the French Revolution), demonstrates that despite the skeptical attitude toward the fairy tale and other types of tales by the people who overthrew the monarchy, there were a number of narratives that were published during the period 1789-1793 that sought to enlighten the people and project models of the "new revolutionary man."

In general all the essays in this volume make important contributions to our understanding of the role that politics played in the French literary fairy tale in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their scholarship is sound, and the readings of the tales are convincing. However, there are some serious gaps in the conception of this special issue of *Féeries*. First of all, since there is no theoretical introduction that elaborates notions of politics and political approaches, there is no common notion of what politics means or what a political approach to fairy tales entails. Each author assumes that the reader understands what politics is or that the representation of politics in the tales is what determines whether a tale is political. Second, with the exception of Thirard's essay, there is very little discussion of gender and how a feminist approach to the tales might be political. The fact that it was *not* Perrault who was central to the development of the fairy-tale genre in the 1790s is ignored, and the political role that women writers played is downplayed. Third, the development and the cultivation of a new literary genre in France that owed a great debt to the oral tradition, even in the salons, was in itself

a political act of expropriation, an act that was closely connected to the development of a civilizing process. Civil discourse and the cultivation of new genres were political acts, and they are touched on only superficially by the academicians in this issue. Finally, many of the general ideas and the political critiques of the tales, with some exceptions, have been widely discussed in Germany, Italy, the United States, and the United Kingdom for the last thirty-five years. I am thinking of the work of Friedmar Apel, Volker Klotz, Hartwig Suhrbier, Winifried Menninghaus, Teresa DiScanno, Michele Rak, Marina Warner, Stephen Benson, Mererid Puw Davies, Lewis Seifert, Philip Lewis, Patricia Hannon, Holly Tucker, Anne Duggan, and others who have approached the French literary fairy tale from distinct political viewpoints. It might benefit French scholars to take a look beyond the borders of France to understand its own culture. But my suggestion might involve questioning what Pierre Bourdieu has called the homo academicus in France, and that is a political issue that pertains to the politics of scholarship and may not be apropos in this review about fairy tales. All in all, despite my critique of this issue of Féeries, there is a good deal to be learned from the close readings of the tales that are the focal points of most of the essays.

> Jack Zipes University of Minnesota

Logica della fiaba: Fate, orchi, gioco, corte, fortuna, viaggio, capriccio, metamorfosi, corpo. By Michele Rak. Milan: Mondadori, 2005. 317 pp.

Over the last few decades Giambattista Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti* (The Tale of Tales, 1634–1636) has begun to attract the scholarly attention it so richly deserves. Both in and outside of Italy there have appeared critical editions, translations, articles, and conferences dedicated to the work that more than any other initiated the genre of the literary fairy tale in Europe. What is still lacking, however, is a substantial corpus of critical monographs on *Lo cunto*, of which there are just a handful.

Logica della fiaba, Michele Rak's ambitious study of *Lo cunto*, is thus most welcome, and its insights on Basile's place in the history of the fairy tale, in Baroque culture, and in the development of literary genres address fundamental aspects of the text that are all too rarely considered on the same page. Rak is indeed a scholar made to order for such a necessarily wide-ranging consideration of *Lo cunto*. Throughout his academic career (he currently teaches at the University of Siena) he has repeatedly visited early modern Italian and Neapolitan literature and culture, the fairy tale, and intersections between popular and elite culture, all of which converge in this and his other work on Basile, which includes the by-now classic bilingual edition/translation of *Lo cunto* (1986).

Rak's main thesis develops in two directions. First, *Lo cunto* codifies a new narrative model—the literary, or authored, fairy tale—that throughout the following

centuries will reach extraordinary levels of popularity. Although neither Lo cunto nor its author enjoys a high degree of name recognition with a general public, Basile is, in a sense, perhaps the best-known Italian author of all times, since his fairy-tale prototype—a particular sequence of characters, actions, places, and narrative treatment of time and space that reconfigures itself in similar ways tale after tale—has made its way into the collective European imaginary as few other narrative forms have. Rak's insistence on the novelty of this "serial" model in terms of content and form, and both within and outside the genre of the fairy tale (thus transporting his considerations to the wider arena of literary history) is crucial: Lo cunto is "the first European work in which a narrative model of a generative type is elaborated . . . a genre that destructures the humanistic and elitarian vision of literature, signals the presence and eruption of other traditions into literature and, above all, the possibility of effecting, with these new materials, a self-assured and uncontrollable mixage" (15). These materials range from orally transmitted folktales, to myths and legends, to classical literature (The Golden Ass, the Metamorphoses), early fairy-tale collections (the Arabian Nights), the Petrarchan lyric, the Boccacian novella, popular pamphlets and chapbooks, travel accounts, and theater, among others.

The second part of the thesis focuses on how the narrative materials and techniques used to elaborate this new model are part and parcel of a Baroque esthetic that itself privileges "the techniques of assembling components of works from diverse traditions" (xiii) and the intertextual and intercultural dialogues that ensue. *Lo cunto*, notwithstanding its subject matter and intended audience and function—as courtly entertainment, according to Rak—"communicates in comical, parodic, and theatrical form subjects ranging from ethics to social, political and ideological critique, and by doing so is a vehicle for various myths of modernity" (10). Indeed, the seriality of the fairy-tale narratives recalls other Baroque epistemes: *Lo cunto* is a "stupefying Baroque architecture," "a machine of marvels that introduces into literature the infinite replicability of the image of oneself (in the mirror), also present in the idea of the replicability of the experiment in the fields of natural philosophy and the 'new science" (268).

Logica della fiaba is divided into four main parts, with numerous (sixteen) chapters and even more abundant (excessively so, in my opinion) chapter sections. Part I, "Logic: The Form of the Fairy Tale," defines the new genre of the literary fairy tale in terms of its epistemological underpinnings ("an exploration of the world of difference using figures of ogres and fairies" [67]) as well as the essential structural and thematic components that comprise its "script." Part 2, "Labyrinth: Status, Journey, Trial, Utensils, Time, Place, Numbers, Action," treats more specific elements of the fairy tale, concentrating on the motif of the journey, fairy-tale metamorphosis and magic, and the "chronotypes" and topographies of Lo cunto. Again, Rak's most stringent observations link these topoi to

other aspects of Baroque culture. Journeys and transformations are seen, for example, as a mirror of the obsession with status and the general crisis of social identities in this period; the "organized dischronotype" of the tales in the context of Baroque meditations on time; and the magic that punctuates the tales as a symptom of the Baroque fascination with automatons, stage machinery, and the creation of "false perspectives and optical illusions" (155), as well as a metaphor for the wondrous powers of language.

Part 3, "The Family of the King," explores Basile's descriptions of "the spectral world of class society, its emblematic locus of the court, and the rules necessary to live in it" (167). The generally negative representations of royal courts in *Lo cunto* reflect, according to Rak, the image of an ethically corrupt, dystopic world-upside-down that bears close resemblance to the corresponding institutions of the time, places of "absolute violence" where "the maximum observance of manners coincides with the maximum ethical deviation" (220). The last section, "Body and Tale," centers on the symbolics of physicality in *Lo cunto*.

The merits of Rak's book thus derive not only from his consideration of Lo cunto's towering place in the history of the literary fairy tale, but also from his intuitions about its role in the history of narrative overall, at a juncture of early modernity in which a remarkable experimentation with traditional forms and genres led to widespread innovation and invention (resulting in the "birth" of the literary fairy tale, but also of the commedia dell'arte, the opera, and the modern novel). So, for instance, when Rak comments that the fairy tale is "a model of fiction in line with the experiments with novels" of the same period, he points the way to what is without a doubt a most fertile terrain: the investigation of cross-contamination between oral and literary forms, between different authors of fairy tales over time, and, especially in the seventeenth century, between the fairy tale and other emerging genres. Rak focuses less concretely on the longer-range view of Lo cunto in literary history and the system of genres: its stability and recursiveness ("the history of analogous characters and plots in literary tradition"), sources, textual history, fortune, and readers. Indeed, as he himself recognizes, intertextuality and reception are the two most promising directions for future research on Basile. But although Rak does not directly treat the question of influence over time, with his comments on the "seriality" of this new genre he suggests, as has other recent scholarship (by Stephen Benson, for example), an intriguing thread running from the folktalederived cunto to narrative paradigms of our own age, yet again affirming the extraordinary modernity of Basile's enterprise.

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Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation. By Amy M. Davis. Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey, 2006. Distributed by Indiana University Press in the United States. 274 pp.

The title of this book is somewhat misleading. It seems to indicate that Amy Davis will provide some kind of *feminist* reading of how women are portrayed in Walt Disney Studios animated films. On the contrary, her study, based on a PhD dissertation at the University of Ulster, is a polite and sober rationalization of the sexism in the Disney Studios' use of women in its organization and for the manner in which the studio, now a major corporation, has consistently produced films that disregard the actual living conditions of women and that reinforce the patronizing manner in which females have been treated in Western societies. Indeed, Davis's positivist study of the diverse ways that females have always been put into their "Disney prescribed" places, whether in film or in the corporation, rationalizes the Disney ideology and aesthetic to such an extent that the book's real title should be *How Good Girls and Wicked Witches Can Come to Terms with Poor Misunderstood Walt and His Boys*.

The book is organized into six chapters that cover the film as cultural mirror; a brief history of animation; the early life of Walt Disney and the Disney Studio, 1901-1937; Disney films, 1937-1967, the "Classic Years"; Disney films, 1967–1988, the "Middle Era"; Disney films, 1989–2005, the "Eisner Era." There are also four helpful appendixes: a list of Disney's full-length animated feature films; synopses of selected Disney films; a bibliography; and a filmography. Davis's major thesis is "to correct the perception of how women are represented in Disney's animated features, and secondly, to begin a dialogue—based on this analysis—about how these representations function within American society and popular culture. Because this analysis of Disney's animated feature films contradicts to some degree many popular conceptions of Disney films as a group, the findings it presents in its analysis will hopefully counteract the impressions that these films are so thoroughly sexist by offering a more balanced look at depictions of femininity in Disney films" (235). The difficulty, however, is that Davis's "findings," based mainly on descriptive and positivist analysis, only reconfirm that the images of women in almost all the films that she discusses tend to present stereotypical women.

Davis sets up standard binary categories of morality, physical beauty, and behavior to describe certain types of women and their actions, and she uses quantitative measures to discuss the values placed on the appearances of women and how they are depicted in the Disney films. Her early chapters that deal with animation and the history of the Disney Studios rely heavily on Steven Watt's *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* and most of the conventional biographies and studies of Walt Disney's life and work. Thus her work is repetitive of commonly known facts. She does not cite or discuss the more crit-

ical and theoretical works of animation such as Alan Cholodenko's *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation*, Donald Crafton's *Before Mickey: The Animated Film, 1898–1928*, Shamus Culhane's *Animation: From Script to Screen*. There is very little theoretical discussion of the problematic aspect of film adaptation and how technology is used to maximize a male gaze. The important period of 1923–1924 and the production of fairy-tale films are given short shrift. Nor does she analyze the very important fairy-tale and fable adaptations of *Silly Symphonies* in the early 1930s to grasp the evolution of gender portrayal in the Disney films: how Disney and his artists adapted fairy tales in regard to their sources, and why and how the films encompassed the gender roles into a general political ideology that tended to gloss over social contradictions and to celebrate elitist ruling groups and male power in almost all the animated features from the original Walt Disney productions through the Eisner period.

The depiction of women in Disney animated films cannot simply be discussed in relation to other Hollywood films, social changes, or simply as an isolated aspect of Disney's work, as Davis does. She seems to accept the film industry as neutral, and there is little critique of how Disney's films were and are still part of a complex culture industry. Yet, as we know, Disney's films represent an ideology that Walt Disney and his coworkers labored to develop with great depth and care, and the themes of the Disney films involve power politics and identity politics that are rarely addressed with any perspicacity in Davis's book, even though her research does include some relevant books on Hollywood and feminism. But Disney's exploitation of utopian concepts and the aspirations of the American public, as analyzed in Louis Marin's important book *Utopics*, are never considered, and she does not grasp the connection between the ideology of Disney's animated films to his theme parks. Instead, she downplays Disney's conservative bent, his anti-Communism, his patronizing attitudes toward women, and his micromanagerial tactics, and she minimizes the effect that the studio's interest in technology and profit taking had on the portrayal of gender in the animated films.

It is all well and good that Davis wants to show that Disney was no more sexist than his times and that we need to be more discriminating in our critique of his sexism. But in taking the "balanced" position on Disney that she has taken, Davis seems to be unaware that she is taking a political position that minimizes feminist critique and disregards many of the very sophisticated essays written about the Disney corporation's representation of women. In fact, there have been numerous articles on gender in the Disney films, such as Roberta Trites's "Disney's Sub/version of *The Little Mermaid*" (*Journal of Popular Television and Film*, 1990–1991), and this article, among others, is not discussed or even mentioned in Davis's bibliography.

Had Davis entered into a dialogue and critique with those authors who have written extensively about sexism, gender manipulation, political conservatism,

formulaic aesthetics, and censorship, instead of dismissing their critiques in a seemingly well-tempered and moderate tone, she might have added to our understanding of the Disney Studios' reification of women in animated films. As it is, her study is filled with well-intentioned facts and synopses that contradict her major thesis.

Jack Zipes University of Minnesota

**Bodies: Sex, Violence, Disease, and Death in Contemporary Legend.** By Gillian Bennett. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005. xv + 313 pp., index.

Gillian Bennett begins her remarkable book with the following identification: "I am a folklorist by profession and inclination" (ix), and throughout her work she conveys her extraordinary commitment to the scholarly place and humanist import of contemporary legends. In both the introduction and the conclusion, she emphatically declares that folklore and contemporary legends are not "trivial stories." In the six chapters that comprise *Bodies*, Bennett's careful readings of contemporary legends reveal the prominence, astonishing adaptability, and staying power that legends—particularly those that feature sex and death, whether violent or through disease—have had across both time and cultures, These chapters address such varied topics as "bosom serpents," poisoned garments, AIDS transmission, the murder of the prodigal son, organ theft, and anti-Semitic and blood libel legends to name just a few.

Beginning with a focus on legends that concern animals breaching the bodily boundaries of the human, those that get inside us, and on the many tales and rumors about clothing or food that kills the user/consumer is a smart choice, for it highlights the strength of Bennett's scholarship, and she frequently refers back to these particular legends in subsequent chapters. Without positing a singular origin for them, she traces and reviews various manifestations in different cultures throughout history. By linking contemporary legends back to earlier ones with similar characteristics and structures, Bennett impressively demonstrates the frequency with which certain stories (re)appear, albeit with specific modifications.

The range of materials in each chapter includes rumors, recorded legends, literary retellings, and journalistic accounts. In her notable work on "Poison and Honey," for example, Bennett connects legends about poisoned dresses in circulation in the United States in the 1930s and '40s with Greek myths, tales from the Mughal Empire, and the poetry of John Keats and Algernon Charles Swinburne among others. What links them, Bennett argues, is not unbroken transmission but their concern with "skin to skin contact" and the different ways that they connect sex, gifts, and death. Her examination of these and other texts nicely draws out the gendered implications such equations often involve, but she pulls back from other kinds of analysis. What does it mean, we might ask,

in the United States when racial or class differences explicitly become a feature of the poisoned dress legend? What additional cultural work does such telling engage?

The materials that Bennett brings together in individual chapters and the juxtaposition among them will invariably provoke new associations. While reading her work on legends of AIDS aggressors, those who use their infected bodies or needles to transmit the disease to others, I wondered how early stories of AIDS originating from monkey bites to humans relate to the bosom serpent stories insofar as both involve the invasion of the human by something animal. In a sense those stories link to recent fears about mad cow disease and bird flu. But Bennett is particularly concerned not to use contemporary legends to diagnose societal anxieties. She concludes this chapter by arguing that legends about random attacks on the healthy by those with infected needles are not precautionary in the ways that earlier stories featuring sexual transmission were. Rather, the needle legends tell us, "There is no such thing as 'risky behavior' because it's life itself that's risky" (136), which nonetheless sounds like an anxiety.

At times, the review of similar tales at other historical moments supersedes an analysis of those from the contemporary period. The killing of prodigal son legends, manifestations of which she describes from seventeenth-century texts to mid-twentieth-century ones, do not seem to have survived to the present day. Given their links to times of war and unrest, Bennett rightly challenges us to consider that such tales may indeed circulate in war-torn Iraq, the West Bank, or Bosnia, areas where the need to survive outweighs the impulse to record. Similarly, the juxtaposition of the long tradition of blood libel legends with accounts of ritual abuse of children from the 1990s displays her erudition, creativity, and real-world approach to understanding contemporary legends, but Bennett's analysis shies away from offering an account of why these particular stories, which in their past forms cast the perpetrators as racial or class others, should have been mobilized in the 1990s in connection with collective fears about the safety of children.

An index is a small thing to fault, but at barely 2 full pages for a 309-page book, this one is indeed small and exclusively organized around body parts and bodily functions. The strict organization of the index both suggests a certain integrity—*Bodies* is, after all, about just that, but of course not just that (hence the subtitle)—and limits its usefulness.

Unlike Gillian Bennett, I am not a folklorist, but I do work in what might be broadly defined as "cultural studies." One of the many ideas that I take away from Bennett's compelling book is her commitment to placing contemporary phenomena like legends into a longer history of specific legend types. Hers is a wide-angle lens that helps us to understand the diachronic aspects of currently circulating legends that can be obscured by the tight-angle snapshots that

sometimes characterize contemporary cultural criticism's take on similar material. That said, at times Bennett's analysis of the specifically *contemporary* significance of her material is diluted by her guiding presupposition—articulated in her conclusion—that "the stories speak for themselves, though in different voices at different times" and that "describing their spread is enough to reveal their nature" (307). I cannot comment on the veracity of Bennett's assertion that folklorists "rarely support popular world views," "[t]hat their first impulse seems to be to disbelieve," or that "they rush to disallow/delegitimate popular conceptions" (305), but I hope she is not suggesting that interpretation, as opposed to strict presentation of contemporary legend, inherently falls into such traps. Such differences aside, Gillian Bennett's *Bodies* is an impressively researched and highly readable work, as fascinating and rigorous on its own terms as it is thought provoking and suggestive for future projects and studies that others might take up.

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**Why Fairy Tales Stick: The Evolution and Relevance of a Genre.** By Jack Zipes. New York: Routledge, 2006. 332 pp., bibliography, index, illustrations.

In an ambitious and interesting outing, Jack Zipes moves beyond his previous work theorizing the fairy-tale genre as "classical tales . . . consciously and subconsciously reproduced largely in print by a cultural industry that favors patriarchal and reactionary notions of gender, ethnicity, behavior, and social class" (2). In the opening chapter, Zipes asks whether there may be internal and external elements of fairy tales that account for both how and why the genre spread and persists, and how and why certain tales loom large as popular favorites.

Toward this end, Zipes postulates human reception and reproduction of fairy tales as a behavior governed by evolutionary forces. He casts the genre of fairy tales as a kind of species and individual tales as viruslike entities. He employs a theoretical construct called memetics originated by sociobiologist Richard Dawkins, who regards discrete cultural objects (such as the plots of individual fairy tales) as ideological viruses spreading through populations according to rules of contagion and varying according to rules of evolution. Further, Zipes follows the work of Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber on relevance theory in evaluating the importance of communications as related to the biological operations of information processing, a view rooted in cognitive psychology and sociobiology. These schools of thought view the brain's inherent properties of reception and re-creation of communication as the elements external to fairy tales that Zipes postulates may affect the spread and popularity of the genre and/or individual tales. In applying these ideas, Zipes examines both the fairy-tale genre as a whole and exemplary tales from the canon for evidence that

their development and transmission comport, with well-developed ideas drawn from a broad array of scholars and scientists in fields as diverse as linguistics and cultural evolution.

The extraordinary quality of Zipes's scholarship and his understanding of the genre of literary fairy tales make as powerful a case for these theoretical tools as can be made. He examines the transmission, development, importance, and moral strains of the fairy tale in several chapters that are a tour-de-force examination of a centuries-spanning set of instantiations of fairy tales realized in many media. His enthusiasm for the usefulness of this line of inquiry and his diligence in following it leave no question unanswered, no implication unconsidered. The excellence of Zipes's work, however, cannot disguise the basic flaw in memetics and its related theories.

Memetics and other sociobiological and cognitive psychological theories work at a level of abstraction far removed from the actual biological occurrences that map to cultural acts such as reading or hearing, telling, or remembering a fairy tale. At that distance, distortions appear, such as the notion that women are genetically programmed as a result of evolutionary pressures to choose strong, wealthy, powerful husbands, a notion Zipes employs. This assumption conflates the action of presumed biological imperatives governing sexual pairings, which may produce progeny, with the selection of a partner for the socioeconomic institution of marriage, which may or may not include sexual relations and may or may not produce progeny fathered by the husband. Further, the formation of the cultural institution of marriage is far too recent to have become encoded through evolutionary pressures into the human genome. Although popular science often pronounces some hormone or physical attribute as "the secret" to sexual attraction, responsible scientists are far more circumspect in their extrapolation of biological data to predictions of behavioral tendencies. One of the only links between sexual attraction and biology to have borne up under repeated studies and close analysis shows that the larger the difference in genetic immunity to disease, the stronger the sexual attraction between the man and woman, which perhaps supports the conjecture that progeny of this pairing will have an increased chance to survive disease. It hardly supports the notion that women innately seek wealthy and powerful husbands who will protect them and their children, although even a cursory analysis of social, legal, and economic forces explains the benefits of such a partner in marriage.

In the last three chapters, Zipes comes into his own as he doffs the scientist's lab coat (and with it the overly abstracted distance of memetics and its kin) and grapples more directly with the difficult bodies of a few problematic tales. His insight and compassion shine as he considers the dilemma of wives and children on the wrong side of power in families dominated by wicked or neglectful husbands or parents. His final appeal to those who study and participate

in the ongoing creation of fairy tales asks that "those who foster the tale-telling tradition" take seriously its strong effect on children's lives, inviting us to transform the tradition by "question[ing] and undo[ing] dominant traditional story-telling . . . [so as not to] place our children at risk" (243). The strength of his exhortations illuminates, perhaps, Zipes's eagerness to find a theoretical tool for the analysis and implementation of change and relevance in fairy tales.

Memetics is only one approximation of this tool, and an early attempt to forge one, at that. The convergence of the growing database of knowledge about biological origins of behavior and thought with analysis of behavior and thought gallops along on several tracks. Neuroscience studies that use brain imaging to document cognition of proverbs, for example, are slowly filling in a picture of how the brain interacts with discrete, culturally determined utterances. This approach, more pointillist than impressionist, maintains a close connection between biological occurrences and implementation of cultural artifacts. Over time, as databases of such information deepen and broaden, cultural scholars will certainly frame overarching theories about cultural material such as the fairy-tale genre. Zipes's book represents a fascinating early look at how such theory making may proceed. The real treasures in this book, however, are Zipes's energetic expertise and his unabashedly personal concern for the part fairy tales play in the unfolding triumphs and tragedies of human life in our time.

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**Catalogue of Portuguese Folktales.** By Isabel Cardigos with the collaboration of Paulo Correia and J. J. Dias Marques. FFC 291. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2006. 406 pp.

With this catalog, Portugal claims its rightful place in international folktale scholarship. The material indexed consists of seven thousand texts taken from major and minor books and periodicals as well as several private (unpublished) collections. In addition to modern texts, literary versions, mostly from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, are included. The numbering system is based on the recent revision, by Hans-Jörg Uther, of the tale type index, now *The Types of International Folktales* (FFC 284–286, 2004, abbreviated ATU), where Portuguese tales are listed as "Cardigos (forthcoming)." At the cost of a delay in its publication, Cardigos's catalog could be cited in *The Types of International Folktales* and still was able to benefit from Uther's revised tale type descriptions.

Regional folktale catalogs vary in the amount of details they convey about the variants (texts) they list. This one, fortunately, is relatively specific. For complex tales, the summaries have been broken into sections and details, which are coded. Then comes the list of variants, with codes to indicate which motifs appear in each. Variants that consist of more than one tale type are noted. When a single type exists in two forms, each variant is labeled "A" or "B."

National folktale catalogs have three functions. Most obviously, such a catalog is an inventory of the country's oral tradition, showing how large and various—and thus how important—it is. Second, the listing for each tale type directs a researcher to the variants, so it is a simple matter to discover what stability and variation the tale type exhibits. The researcher may have a local purpose (the Portuguese tradition of such-and-such a tale); or, third, may want to add Portuguese evidence to a broader study (the European or worldwide tradition of the tale type or of some of its motifs). In the last case, the international acceptance of the Aarne-Thompson numbering system facilitates international folktale scholarship.

Portuguese folktales are most similar to Spanish ones, and this catalog has made good use of the many existing Spanish and Spanish American Aarne-Thompson-based catalogs. A list identifies non-ATU tale types (approximately fifty) taken from such catalogs, created especially for Portuguese material (more than one hundred types), or retained from the old Aarne-Thompson catalog. Most of the tales with "Cardigos" numbers, indicating that they are (apparently) uniquely Portuguese, could be considered subtypes of widely known tale types; nevertheless, adding these numbers creates an opportunity to add more information about the particulars of the variants. The fact that the vast majority of Portuguese tales are easily fitted into ATU types shows that ATU has escaped the northern European ethnocentrism of the earlier international tale type indexes.

A number of the tale types here (as also in ATU) never became popular in Germany or France or elsewhere in northern Europe. Some of these are primarily Hispanic (Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American)—for example, type 516D, The Serpent Maiden (cf. type 533\*, The Serpent Helper, which seems to be Portuguese only). A couple of local (Portuguese and Hispanic) subtypes of type 480, The Kind and the Unkind Girls, can, thanks to existing scholarship, be fitted into the wider tradition of that tale type. The Hispanic type 650D includes the tar baby motif, which is otherwise African and African American and is very rare in Europe. Other tale types are popular throughout the Mediterranean region and the Middle East—for example, type 310B, The Maiden in the Tower Escapes by Magic Flight; type 894, The Stone of Pity (cf. types 710A and 438); and the cumulative tale type 2023, Little Cockroach (Little Ant Marries). In type 311B\*, The Singing Bag, a kidnapped girl hidden in a sack identifies herself by singing.

For a long time, most folktale scholars prized oral tradition over historical sources, and folktale catalogs considered literary sources outside of their scope. Now this attitude has changed, and in this catalog a special effort has been made to include older Portuguese literature. A fifteenth-century collection of fables,

Fabulário Português, contains, for example, variants of type 207\*D, Pig Is Sorry for the Donkey, Who Is Sore and Tired, and type 222, The Battle between the Lion and the Cricket. In the case of type 155, The Ungrateful Serpent Returned to Captivity, the old literary fable consists of only the first part of the story and ends unhappily, while most of the modern versions include some additional events and end, usually, with a happy ending. A work by the sixteenth-century dramatist G. Vicente has as one of its episodes type 1479\*, The Old Maid on the Roof. A collection of moralistic tales by G. F. Trancoso (also sixteenth century) includes, for example, type 873, The King Discovers His Unknown Son; type 887, Griselda; and type 1454\*, The Greedy Fiancée, as well as types classified as magic tales, types 505, The Grateful Dead, and type 516C, Amicus and Amelius, and type 707, The Three Golden Children.

The prolonged development of the international scope of The Types of the Folktale (FFC 74, 1928; FFC 184, 1961) has made the Catalogue of Portuguese Folktales possible. Compare the up-to-date version, The Types of International Folktales, with Antti Aarne's original modest list (Verzeichnis der Märchentypen, FFC 3, 1910), which consisted mainly of Finnish folktales from an archive, supplemented with references to the collections of the Grimms' and of Grundtvig. Much of the progress has occurred recently, within the past twenty years. Sixty years ago, in annotating his collection of Spanish tales, Cuentos populares españoles (3 vols. Madrid, 1946–1947), Aurelio M. Espinosa provided AT type numbers but pointedly chose to override them when they did not reflect Hispanic tradition. Unlike national catalogs (or, for that matter, ATU), each of Espinosa's notes is formed as an essay. Variants are sorted into groups that represent subtypes of the more general type; Hispanic variants (including Portuguese ones) are described in some detail and are situated in international tradition with reference to older, literary sources. These notes are still of value to readers and scholars interested in that aspect of Portuguese folktales.

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**Stepmother.** By Robert Coover. San Francisco: McSweeney's Books, 2004. 90 pp., illustrations.

In the first section of this fairy-tale metafiction for adults, Stepmother is attempting with whatever faulty magic she recalls to free her red-haired daughter from the dungeon of the royal palace, where—raped, naked, and bloody—the girl awaits execution for some unnamed impropriety she has allegedly committed. Stepmother is the first-person narrator of this section, which begins with her exhortation to the shackled girl, "Look at it this way, love, I tell her, no more slops to empty," and ends with the girl escaping on the back of her mother, who has temporarily transformed into a female unicorn. As narrators and focal-

izers shift, the rest of the story is hardly this hopeful, but it does continue throughout to provide powerful insights into the narrative topoi of fairy tales as landscapes of socialization and opportunities for transgression. Robert Coover's irreverence is matched only by his up-close knowledge of the norms that regulate social power and narrative reception.

As philosophy, *Stepmother* is an exuberantly ethical romp in the face of death and of the institutionalized fictions of transcendence on which we rely to unthink mortality. As narrative, it tells and comments on the cyclical nature of the punishment of Stepmother's "beautiful wild daughters" in a world where her tricks and those of the Jack-like Old Soldier defy the authoritative powers of the Reaper, the Holy Mother/Ogress, the King. And Coover's recent essay "Tale, Myth, Writer," in Brothers & Beasts: An Anthology of Men Writing on Fairy Tales (2007), provides one interpretive key to these dynamics. As metanarrative, Stepmother invites us to look at the fairy-tale genre in estranging ways that transform it, but arguably do not renew it. Coover invokes a very large number of folktale and fairy-tale plots, actors, and motifs in hypertextual associative patterns that open a window into social pathologies and/or lead to naughty laughter. Fairytale aficionados will recognize something of "Iron Henry" and "Hans My Hedgehog," "Cinderella" and "All Kinds of Fur," "Snow White" and "The Juniper Tree," "The Maiden without Hands" and "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers," "The Kind and the Unkind Girls" and "Six Go through the Whole World"—at times paired to reflect on one another and all mingling in disorderly but not meaningless ways. If the novella as a whole is a wonderful vindication of the fairy-tale's stepmother-witch stereotype, Coover also provides a devastating investigation of "princehood"—the essence of which is associated with the "exercise of royal privilege" on the "near-naked maidens" that princes often encounter in the woods—and of the fairy-tale heroine who continues to put her hopes into selfmutilating narratives where she must be rescued. Magic rings, seven-league boots, Aladdin's lamp, wands and spells are made good use of because Stepmother, her daughters, Old Soldier, and everyone else refuse to give up and are "not without resources," but Stepmother—unlike Holy Mother—makes it clear that "magic can alter only the sight of the beholder, not the reality of the thing or person seen."

From *Pricksongs & Descants* (1969) on, Coover's forays into the fairy tale have seriously challenged readers to rethink the social life of familiar stories in philosophical, ideological, and gendered terms. In a recent interview with Gabe Hudson, Coover declared that

fairy tales, religious stories, national and family legends, games and sports, TV cartoons and movies, now video and computer games—it's a metaphoric toy box we all share. Sometimes all this story stuff feels

like the very essence of our mother tongue, embedded there before we've even learned it, so much a part of us that we forget it didn't come with the language, but that someone made it up and put it there. The best way to expose that and free ourselves up is to get inside it and play with it and make it do new things.

With *Stepmother*, Coover gets into fairy tales and plays with them to denaturalize their hold on our imaginations. At the same time, he asks in a sustained way to what extent "new things" are possible. The world of the fairy tale in *Stepmother* is the dark Reaper's Woods: stories have saved Old Soldier's life, but all characters, including the Reaper, and especially the "wild daughters," want "something more than this."

Whether Stepmother's magic can finally save the day or not, Coover's storytelling does not fail his readers. I read the book in one sitting the first time, and that's what made me want to go back and play again. Some may find the representation of sexual violence in the novella disturbing, but, far from titillating, those scenes work as a call to wake up from the complacency with which violence is sexualized in our culture. This book is hilarious, devastating, tender, and brilliant. It is also beautifully produced by McSweeney with high-end paper, sewn-in signatures, and striking illustrations by Michale Kupperman that partner well with Coover's techniques of montage, zoom, and parody. I definitely recommend *Stepmother* as a successful metafiction and also as a promising text for graduate courses on fairy-tale fiction or narrative and gender.

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*Fiabe sgarrupate.* By Marcello D'Orta. Venezia: Marsilio, 2005. 186 pp.

An Italian writer from the Naples area, Marcello D'Orta is well known in Italy, especially for his *Io Speriamo che me la cavo* (1991), a compilation of fifthgrade essays from one of the most degraded suburbs of Naples. This popular book, later turned into a movie by the Italian director Lina Wertmüller (1992), denounces the harsh living conditions of the student writers both through their stories and through the sarcastic comments of the editor.

By rewriting such classic fairy tales as "Cinderella" or "Red Riding Hood" in *Fiabe sgarrupate*, not only does D'Orta give them a humorous "Neapolitan" flavor, but he also locates them in his own specific sociopolitical and linguistic context (e.g., the poor, dialect-speaking suburbs of Naples) and carries on a dialogue with other fairy-tale translations and adaptations.

A conscious effort to adapt the classic fairy tales to a new context is evident in the way D'Orta's text is structured: his fairy tales are grouped in different sections according to the source D'Orta borrows from (Charles Perrault, the Broth-

ers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, etc.). As for "Vardiello," a story borrowed from Giambattista Basile's *Lo Cunto de li Cunti*, D'Orta pays homage to the local storytelling tradition by "updating" both language and characters to fit them into a contemporary picture of Naples. His adaptations, however, involve various strategies: some tales contain more or less explicit references to current events and characters as well as to pop culture, whereas in others the author's backstage remarks function as a way out of the story and into Italy's current events or customs. In both cases, the stories showcase the author's outlook on the southern Italian lifestyle. For example, on a cold New Year's Eve in Denmark, the protagonist of "The Little Match Girl" finds herself thinking of Naples, where she has never been:

She knew about New Year's Eve, when the whole city uses fireworks, and the hospital Cardarelli is filled with the injured and the deceased. She knew about the big family dinner and all the delicacies they would put on the table: spaghetti with mussels, . . . calamari, shrimps and especially the *capitone!* Ah, how she loved the *capitone!* . . . And then, soon after midnight, the *inferno* would start with all sorts of fireworks . . . Ah, in Naples they really sold matches on New Year's Eve! But hers was only a daydream. [*Capitone* is a large eel traditionally eaten in Naples on both Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.]

Both the festivities and their painful consequences are presented ironically.

Also working to adapt the tales to contemporary and localized culture are the characters' bold and to-the-point comments on the plot or other characters, usually made in some southern Italian dialect, which has the effect of transforming these fairy-tale heroes and heroines into local *scugnizzi*, or rogues. In "Cinderella" the prince turns out to be very practical when he decides to cover the stairs of his palace with pitch so that the girl's shoe will be stuck in it; as he explains in the Neapolitan slang, "E no! mo' nun me faie cchiù fesso!" ["You're not gonna treat me like a fool anymore!"].

Notwithstanding D'Orta's intention to actively engage with the fairy-tale tradition, the book turns out to be a missed opportunity. As the author explains in the introduction, he has injected a "shot of cheerfulness" into the classic fairy tales, especially the often violent and macabre versions by Charles Perrault, so as to generate the reader's laughter. For this reason, D'Orta's versions don't offer any explicit moral lesson; on the contrary, they are "fiabe sgarrupate": "they do not intend to establish the principles of what is good and what is bad, they don't indicate the right path, they don't preach; they are just a joke; they sometimes end up turning the original upside down and questioning its truth-value."

By reducing fairy tales to a joke, D'Orta ultimately reduces their meaningmaking potential as well as the traditional role of storytelling in making sense of the world. Even when the stories contain an explicit moral lesson, as in the fables presented in the last section of the book (here D'Orta borrows from Aesop, Phaedrus, and La Fontaine), they do so only to create a mock moral that questions the genre without offering any valuable interpretation of it.

In the local dialect, "sgarrupato" refers to a house or a street that is in very bad condition and that is not likely to be repaired anytime soon. Like the characters in these stories, and like the fifth-grade students in *Io Speriamo che me la Cavo*, their author points to problems but seems to have given up, with a resigned smile, on taking any social role that would impact the sociopolitical and cultural situation he lives in. As a result, D'Orta's stories resign their function as social commentary even while they create a narrative space for it through the author's ironical remarks.

Perhaps it is the disenchanted quality of D'Orta's laughter that reduces his fairy tales to being no more than jokes. By adopting a defeatist sense of humor usually associated with Neapolitans, he ultimately perpetuates a well-known sociopolitical stereotype according to which Neapolitans, and southern Italians in general, would be extremely fatalistic about and acquiescent to the system they live in, and the only thing they are able to do is to laugh about it.

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**The Little Mermaid.** By Mike Kenny. Dir. Eric Johnson. Perf. Herman Tesoro Jr. and Mary Wells. Honolulu Theatre for Youth. Tenney Theatre, Honolulu. 15 Sept. 2007.

Mike Kenny's stage adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, first performed in 2005 by York Theatre Royal and Polka Theatre in London, adapts Andersen's 1837 fairy tale of the same name, but nods at the legacy created by Walt Disney Pictures' 1989 animated film with the naming of the characters. The play imagines how children living in Copenhagen, Denmark, at the time of the publication of Andersen's fairy tale would have told the little mermaid's story. In September 2007 the Honolulu Theatre for Youth in Honolulu, Hawai'i, performed Kenny's *The Little Mermaid* under the wonderful direction of Eric Johnson.

The play tells the story of Flotsam and Jetsam, two children who enact Andersen's story while playing on a pier. The characters share their names with the eel-minions created by Disney for Ursula the sea-witch. But the actual definitions of these names (wreckage and discarded cargo floating in the sea) are reflected by the sea debris that Flotsam and Jetsam use as props to tell their story. For the Honolulu production, the Tenney Theatre itself was dressed in debris for the performance—netting and life preservers adorning the walls, which enfolds the audience into the play space of the "child" actors. In the Honolulu Theatre for Youth's production, performed by adults Mary Wells (Flotsam) and Herman

Tesoro Jr. (Jetsam), the play creates an enchanting scene that emulates the very best qualities and experiences of storytelling: using one's imagination and living in the story being told at the moment of telling.

Kenny's The Little Mermaid retells Andersen's story with a few subtle, and one not-so-subtle, changes. In Andersen's story a young mermaid fascinated by the human world and the human concept of an immortal soul sets out to obtain a soul for herself. Her method of doing so is to win the love of a human prince who will share his soul with her upon marriage. Her transformation into a human so that she can act on this plan comes with a high price: she must give up her voice to the sea-witch, who cuts out her tongue. While Andersen's human prince certainly cares for the little mermaid, he does not marry her. Upon the prince's marriage to a princess of a neighboring land, the little mermaid is left with the dilemma of killing the prince to save herself or dying. The little mermaid chooses death, throwing herself into the sea. In Andersen's incongruous and overly moralistic ending, the little mermaid is saved, in a sense, and turned into one of the daughters of the air because of her sacrifice and good deeds. In Kenny's retelling, the little mermaid desires love, not a soul, and is left as foam on the sea. In a move that many adults suspicious of Andersen's ending will applaud, Kenny rejects Andersen's moral and ends his play as Flotsam and Jetsam deal with their grief over the loss of the fictional mermaid.

Andersen's rich descriptions of the land- and seascapes are delightfully portrayed through the imagination of Flotsam and Jetsam (and the audience). Under Johnson's direction, small cylindrical floats become fish; nets become long, flowing hair; a jacket stands in for the prince; a shell necklace denotes the little mermaid; and a broken rowboat and oars become the sea-witch. Single props stand in for multiple objects in this play, highlighting the creativity and remarkable vision central to children's play—the floats used for the fish are also stand-ins for boats that rock on the great swells during a storm, and the waves are the same net-and-wire trap used as the grandmother's hat.

Flotsam and Jetsam share the storytelling, taking in turn the roles of the narrator, grandmother, sea-witch, sisters, prince, and the little mermaid. The switching of roles is performed seamlessly by Wells and Tesoro, who inflect the secondary characters (those of Andersen's story) with the trepidation and awe of their primary characters (Flotsam and Jetsam). Much of the charm of this retelling is its frame. Jetsam, the boy who apparently has a crush on his female playmate, tries to engineer the story when he is narrator to receive kisses from Flotsam, and Flotsam and Jetsam break character to comment on the mermaid's plight. In a moment of empathy, Jetsam steps out of the sea-witch role to tell Flotsam that "I don't like this next bit" because it's too "scary," and that he doesn't want to play the witch. He also breaks character to tell the little mermaid "no, don't do it" when she makes the deal with the sea-witch, and that he has "a bad

feeling about this" when the mermaid gives up her voice. The character of the child maintains his hold on the reality in the play while firmly living inside the story he is telling. Flotsam, enamored with the role of the mermaid, encourages and alternately bullies Jetsam to keep playing. At the end, when the little mermaid dies, Flotsam and Jetsam, in exaggerated cries that please the young children in the audience, grieve over the loss of the mermaid. They recover after a moment and walk off the stage to end the play.

Kenny's adaptation of Andersen's story removes the Christian quest for a soul to focus instead on the love for the prince, the soul becoming a secondary prize. While it is a decision that reflects the young audience of the play for whom the concept of a soul may be too abstract, the move to change the mermaid's desire places this adaptation in the tradition of other adaptations of "The Little Mermaid" that establish the mermaid as a modern heroine who is a martyr for romantic love. Andersen's ending can be shocking for those who know only Disney's version of the story, but none of the children in the audience seemed distressed at the time. While the exaggerated cries performed by Wells and Tesoro may have helped the young audience negotiate the possible shock of the un-Disney-like ending, the comedy of the scene undercuts the tragedy of the mermaid's death. But in under an hour, Kenny's play does what Disney's movie cannot—situate "The Little Mermaid" story within a tradition of storytelling and demonstrate the mark of a truly wonderful tale, one where the story comes alive and enchants the storyteller and audience.

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