

Anti-Tales: The Uses of Disenchantment
Edited by David Calvin and
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Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011
(ISBN: 978-1-4438-2869-7). 297pp.

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Anti-Tales: The Uses of Disenchantment is a collection of 22 essays from the eponymous symposium that took place at the University of Glasgow on 12-13 August, 2010. It explores various definitions of the anti-tale's history, structure and function, and the ways in which it impacts our understanding of traditional fairy tales. The product of interdisciplinary study, it approaches the anti-tale from a number of angles including film studies, philosophy, art history, psychology, geography, literature, postcolonial studies, creative writing, fashion, sculpture and painting.

Anti-tales have been present in the genre of fairy tales since its beginning. Though there is no exact definition, anti-tales serve to oppose, re-imagine, subvert, invert, deconstruct or satirise elements of fairy tales and to present an alternative narrative interpretation, outcome or morality (p.9). This spirit of revolt makes the anti-tale difficult to categorize since anti-tales change form according to the elements they challenge. Previous studies on the anti-tale by Wolfgang Mieder, John Pizer, Jack Zipes and Cristina Bacchilega concentrated on certain elements of the anti-tale insofar as they related to wider research on fairy tales, or other recognized fields. Anti-tales had not been subject to academic scrutiny in and of themselves. The overarching aim of *Anti-Tales* is to turn the tables

and make anti-tales a central and autonomous field. As a result *Anti-Tales* has the potential to lead to further work on subversive tales.

Co-editors David Calvin and Catriona McAra approach the anti-tale not as the negation of the fairy tale but rather as the opening of new readings, deconstructions and creations (p.10). The collection defines and situates the anti-tale in relation to the fairy tale and explores the function of anti-tales by placing them in a wider context of postcolonial studies, feminism, surrealism, black humour and the politics of the underrepresented. Anti-tales are studied both as interpretations of older tales and as critical tools that may be useful to the arts and academia alike.

Anti-Tales is divided into seven thematic parts that guide the reader through the uncharted terrain of anti-tales. The first section, 'History and Definitions', begins by discussing what we think to be true about fairy and anti-tales, and then reveals alternate possibilities; Laura Martin's article on the Brothers Grimm argues that what appears to be a beginning is, in fact, a continuation. She discusses how the Grimm Brothers built their collections on a tradition of divergent stories, most of which they chose to exclude from their pivotal work. *Anti-Tales* thus makes the surprising assertion that there may be no anti-tale to discuss if one cannot even chart the history of the fairy tale itself. Both the anti-tale and the fairy tale are interpretations of anonymous works, many of which are now lost. Perhaps the first fairy tales were, in fact, anti-tales. The rest of the section argues for certain universal characteristics of the anti-tale by exploring Latin and Russian representatives of the genre.

The second section, 'Twisted Film and Animation', engages with the anti-tale through a cinematic lens. Topics include the work of surrealist Czech director Jan Svankmajer. The notion of self-

reproduction, a potent theme in anti-tales, is investigated via a Quay Brothers animation, *Street of Crocodiles*. Buchan's essay on the Quay Brothers is representative of the collection's interdisciplinary approach. Buchan begins by discussing Walter Benjamin's essay 'Old Forgotten Children's Books' and his analogy between waste products and fairy tales. For Benjamin both fairy tales and waste products turn the mind away from functionality and purpose towards the self and the unprofitability of imagination. Buchan then analyses Bruno Schulz's novel *Street of Crocodiles* in the light of Benjamin's theories on waste products. He concludes that the Quay Brothers take Benjamin's philosophy and Schulz's imagery one step further by employing puppet animation as artistic medium. The Quay Brothers protagonists are puppets made from waste products, which brings a new dimension to the notion of self-reproduction. The human or anthropomorphic characters of fairy tales become metaphysical machines that form a new anti-tale cosmos.

Anti-Tales' third and fourth sections focus on 'Surrealism' and 'Sensorial Anti-Tales'. Papers in this section include Dorothea Tanning on Freudian anti-tales and artist Paula Rego's re-readings of 'Bluebeard' through painting. 'Sensorial Anti-Tales' examines the prints of Francisco Goya and the Japanese retellings of 'Little Red Riding Hood' through Tomoko Konoike's art. Though the time periods and subject matters discussed in these essays are vastly different, the two sections are connected by a focus on visual arts. 'Black Humour' charts the work of Roald Dahl, American satirist James Thurber and the work of writer Rikki Ducornet. In this section there is an overriding quest for absurd, grotesque and gory elements that spring to anti-tales.

The last three sections of the collection may provide inspiration for scholars wanting to further anti-tale research. Each article puts emphasis on the subversive act itself and discusses how anti-tales can be used as tools to create new perspectives. The idea of the anti-tale as tool is applied to psychotherapy, phenomenology, feminism and Orientalism. Calvin and Cooker discuss how ‘villains’ can begin telling their side of the story, Robinson points out the postcolonial tendencies of anti-tales, and Wilson concentrates on how anti-tales have helped feminism grow.

One notable feature of *Anti-Tales* is its format. The academic articles are accompanied by paintings, sketches, fashion photography and creative writing. This use of multiple mediums encourages the reader to approach the anti-tale from different perspectives. The format emphasises the interplay between theory and practice.

Anti-Tales is an introduction to the field of anti-tales. It shows a commendable breadth of scholarship and subject matter. Each essay in the collection offers a unique view and raises interesting questions. Diverse beginnings and interpretations of the anti-tale in literature and the arts are suggested, though not fully explored, initiating discussions that can be expanded in further study. Thus, *Anti-Tales* is best taken as a reader on the emerging field of subversive tales. It offers valuable grounding to anyone that is interested in the magical and its reversals, the history of telling tales, surrealism, and more.