North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies

1-1-2016

Victorian Fairy Tales, edited by Michael Newton, Oxford UP, 2016, 444 pp.

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Book Review

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*V*ictorian Fairy Tales is the latest anthology devoted to fairy tales written during the nineteenth century. As part of the Oxford World Classics series, this edition could become a foundational one. To compare *Victorian Fairy Tales* with previous editions can be a fruitful endeavor, for it demonstrates the wide-variety of writers of fairy tales during the Victorian period and the difficulty of selecting a representative example for such an edition.

Jonathan Cott's *Beyond the Looking Glass: Extraordinary Works of Fairy Tale and Fantasy: Novels, Stories and Poetry from the Victorian Era* (Overlook Press, 1973) was the first major anthology to focus on the Victorians. The anthology has an Introduction by Leslie Fiedler, who pays particular attention to the Cottingley Fairy photographs as "proof" of the popularity and importance of the fairy tale to the Victorians; in addition, the volume has an essay "Notes of Fairy Faith and the Idea of Childhood," by Cott, who categorizes fairy faith according to a variety of theories—Mythological, Pygmy, Druid, and Naturalistic—which demonstrates the popular structural approach to fairy tales taken during the 1970s. Of the eight authors represented, George MacDonald has two tales—"The Golden Key" and "The Day Boy and the Night Girl."

A second important anthology is Jack Zipes's *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves* (Methuen, 1987), which has become, to a degree, *the* canonical anthology of fairy tales of the nineteenth century. Zipes's Introduction follows his theory of subversion that he articulated in the now-classics *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (UP of Kentucky, 1979; rev. ed., 2002) and *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (Wildman, 1983; 2nd ed. Routledge 2006; 2nd revised ed. Routledge 2012). Zipes includes 22 authors, with MacDonald represented by "The Day Boy and the Night Girl."

A year after Zipes's anthology, Michael Patrick Hearn, for the

Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library, published *The Victorian Fairy Tale Book*, which contained 17 authors, including MacDonald's "The Golden Key." In his Introduction, Hearn argues that MacDonald represents the pinnacle of Victorian fairytale writers *and* the moment where fairy tales began to lose their popularity towards the end of the century. Finally, one should probably mention a companion anthology that purposely leaves out the major male fairytale writers of the nineteenth century, that being Nina Auerbach and U. C. Knoepflmacher's *Forbidden Journeys: Fairy Tales and Fantasies by Victorian Women Writers* (U of Chicago P, 1992). The editors argue that female fairytale writers were more subversive than their male counterparts, yet their subversion was often tempered by their role as women writers.

All but Cott's anthology remain in print.

The most recent anthology, the one that is the focus of this review, is *Victorian Fairy Tales*, edited by Michael Newton. The volume includes 14 authors, with MacDonald represented by "The Golden Key." The Prologue to the anthology includes foundational tales by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm ("Rumpel-Stilts-kin") and Hans Christian Andersen ("The Princess and the Peas"). In addition, Newton includes Appendix material: Ruskin's "What is a Fairy Tale?"; Ewing's "'Preface' to Old-Fashioned Fairy Tales"; MacDonald's "The Fantastic Imagination"; and Housman's "'Introduction' to *Gammer Grethel's Fairy Tales*." One wonders why Newton did not include Charles Dickens's "Frauds on the Fairies" (1853), which cemented the fairy tale in popular culture for the Victorians and articulated the central debate over fairy tales—to teach moral lessons or open the way to the imaginative spirit of the child and adult readers. Dickens's essay was in response to his once-illustrator George Cruikshank, who gained fame, particularly from John Ruskin, for his illustrations to the first English translation of the Grimms' fairy tales. Cruikshank went on to rewrite classic fairy tales as didactic temperance manifestoes, which gained Dickens's ire and subsequently led to a falling out between the two men.

The tales in *Victorian Fairy Tales* include the following tales. I connect the authors and their works selected to the previous anthologies:
Robert Southey, "The Story of the Three Bears"
John Ruskin, "The King of the Golden River"
Cott: "King . . ."
Zipes: "King . . ."
Hearn: "King . . ."

William Makepeace Thackeray," "The Rose and the Ring"
>   Hearn: "Rose . . ."

George MacDonald, "The Golden Key"
>   Cott: "Key" and "The Day Boy and the Night Girl"
>   Zipes: "The Day Boy and the Night Girl"
>   Hearn: "The Golden Key"

Dinah Mulock Craik, "The Little Lame Prince and his Travelling Cloak"
>   Hearn: "Little Lame Prince . . ."

Mary De Morgan, "The Wanderings of Arasmon"
>   Cott: "Through the Fire" and ". . . Arasmon"
>   Zipes: "A Toy Princess"
>   Hearn: "The Necklace of Princess Fiorimonde"

Juliana Horatia Ewing, "The First Wife's Wedding-Ring"
>   Zipes: "The Ogre Courting"
>   Auerbach and Knoepflmacher: "Amelia and the Dwarfs" and
>   "Christmas Crackers"

Oscar Wilde, "The Selfish Giant"
>   Zipes: "The Happy Prince"
>   Hearn: "The Selfish Giant"

Andrew Lang, "Prince Prigio"
>   Zipes: "The Princess Nobody"

Ford Maddox Ford, "The Queen Who Flew"
>   Hearn: "The Brown Owl"

Laurence Housman, "The Story of the Herons"
>   Zipes: "The Rooted Lover"
>   Hearn: "Rocking-Horse Land"

Kenneth Grahame, "The Reluctant Dragon"
>   Zipes: ". . . Dragon"
>   Hearn: ". . . Dragon"

E. Nesbit, "Melisande"
>   Zipes: "The Last of the Dragons"
>   Hearn: "The Deliverers of Their Country"
>   Auerbach and Knoepflmacher: "Melisande" and "Fortunatus Rex &
>   Co."

Rudyard Kipling, "Dymchurch Flit"
>   Zipes: "The Potted Princess"

Cott, Zipes, Hearn, and Auerbach and Knoepflmacher include the following
authors who do not appear in *Victorian Fairy Tales*: **Cott's edition**: Tom

Hood, Mrs. Clifford, Maggie Browne, Mark Lemon, and Christina Rossetti. **Zipes's edition**: Catherine Sinclair, George Cruikshank, Alfred Crowquill, Lewis Carroll, Charles Dickens, Anne Isabella Ritchie, Jean Ingelow, Edward H. Knatchbull-Hugessen, Harriet Louisa Childe-Pemberton, Mary Louisa Molesworth, Lucy Lane Clifford, Evelyn Sharp; **Hearn's edition**: Robert Browning, Charles Dickens, Henry Morley, William Allingham, Christina Rossetti, William Butler Yeats, J. M. Barrie; **Auerbach and Knoepflmacher's edition**: Anne Thackeray Ritchie, Maria Louisa Molesworth, Christina Rossetti, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Jean Ingelow.

As this comparison illustrates, an editor must by necessity eliminate key writers for space considerations.

In the Introduction Newton provides a general overview of the importance of fairy tales, arguing that fairytale writers "experimented with the form to explore political and social concerns, as well as questions of identity, love, and the moral life" (ix). Newton alludes to two critiques of fairy tales: 1) that "the literary fairy tale [is] sentimental, escapist, and kitsch," and 2) that fairy tales have been "neglected, spurned, on the point of being lost" (ix). These concerns have been addressed many times, and it is clear that fairy tales continue to capture the imagination of readers and the critical interest from scholars. Fairy tales have their own critical industry, with new studies being published frequently, often leading to further debate, with Ruth B. Bottigheimer's *Fairy Tales: A New History* (Excelsior, 2009) creating quite a critical upheaval in fairytale studies. In addition, fairy tales continue to be taken seriously by writers, artists, and filmmakers, and four most recent literary publication demonstrate how the fairy tale has been adapted in myriad ways—the graphic novel *Snow White* (2016) by Matt Phelan; *The Singing Bones* (2016) by Shaun Tan, where Tan reimagines the Grimms' fairy tale as sculptures; Michael Cunningham's *A Wild Swan* (2016) and Jean Thompson's *The Witch and Other Tales Retold* (2015), which both retell fairy tales in more contemporary settings. Newton concludes this section by stating that fairy tales "were simply part of the shared vocabulary of Victorian culture. If we wish to understand the Victorians, we should read their dreams" (xi). This overview is simultaneously critically situated in fairytale theory, yet dedicated to overstatement about the literary form as if the Introduction needs to convince readers of the importance of fairy tales—and, following, the importance of *Victorian Fairy Tales*.

The rest of the Introduction is divided as follows: *Sources, Inspiration, Origins*

Newton does a nice job distilling the consensus on fairytale history and says of the Victorians that "the fairy tale was a recognizable niche product, one that took its place in the book market or in periodicals alongside many other kinds of fiction for children and adults" (xiii). He contends that the allure of fairy tales centered on the Victorian's desire for folklore to become "the root of a literary art" (xiv), which also allowed England and Scotland, for example, to highlight its cultural past. In addition, Newton argues, less persuasively, that evolutionary theory led writers to embrace "the idea of recapitulation (the belief that the life of the individual re-enacts the story of the race)" (xiv). Newton evokes Edward Clodd's *Tom Tit Tot: An Essay on Savage Philosophy in Folk Tale* (1898) as his defense, demonstrating how Andrew Lang and Rudyard Kipling, in particular, participated in this "atavistic mode of mental and imaginative perception" (xv).

The Stories: Fairyland and the Real World

In this section Newton argues that while fairy tales are often seen as "the simplest of all narrative forms," they are, in fact, "one of the most experimental of all nineteenth-century genres" (xviii). Victorian fairytale writers often "disobeyed aesthetic strictures that demanded a strict realism and adherence to fact in the literary work" (xviii), and this disobedience can be seen in a three-fold way: 1) Victorian fairy tales play with techniques in storytelling; 2) they use illustrations that could "radically mix techniques" (xix) to provide for original insights, and 3) their artfulness is inspired by performance, particularly the theater and the Christmas pantomime. Newton then provides an overview of the larger issues that Victorian fairy tales address, including the following:

- "An attempt to find the sacred in a world disenchanted" (xx)
- A questioning of "modern industrial society and the pursuit of money and social success" (xxi)
- A political intent, engaged in subversion, "the making of a mirror-space where protests against Victorian culture and morality could be voiced
- "Concerns with gender and sexuality, and with desire and love, certainly pervade these tales" (xxxvi)

Newton concludes the Introduction by claiming that Victorian fairy tales demand us to read them with a "serious delight. They introduce us to an already familiar strangeness, and through the resources of art grant a pace to make believe" (xxviii).

Victorian Fairy Tales encapsulates this "serious delight." Newton's Introduction navigates the complexity of fairy tales generally and Victorian fairy tales specifically. The broad canvas of the Introduction requires a nimbleness from the reader—there is a lot to digest in the Introduction, and Newton expects the reader to make intuitive connections from one major idea to another. His Introduction is probably best suited for a critic, not a student or lay reader. A teacher necessarily must translate Newton's idea to students other than graduate students. Yet the edition is crafted in a way to be a useful teaching tool, particularly with the inclusion of "A Chronology of the Literary Fairy Tale," which is quite detailed at over seven pages spanning the years 1705-1914. The Appendix material provides important fairy-tale statements from the writers represented in the anthology; though, as mentioned earlier, the absence of Dickens's "Frauds on the Fairies" seems a key omission. The Explanatory Notes are very detailed and useful, and for each author Newton provides a brief biographical sketch that contextualizes the authors in important ways. The Prologue section with the reprint of Grimms' "Rumpel-Stilts-kin" and Andersen's "The Princess and the Peas" is a useful framework for the study of Victorian fairy tales. One might quibble with the choice of the tales selected, and with the absence of a tale from Perrault, but that is the nature of having to narrow down selections for a manageable and affordable anthology. Newton chooses to reprint the 1823 version of "Rumpel-Stilts-kin," which has a much more positive ending—the closest canonical version of the tale has the little man stomping his foot into the floor and tearing himself apart. A nice touch would have been to include that other ending, the one most readers have encountered. The choice of Andersen's tale, which is one of his most famous, is safe, but one wonders if other tales capture more effectively the social and political tensions inherent in Andersen's tales. Curiously, too, is the version that Newton includes, which has three peas put under the mattress; the most famous and widely read version has just a single pea. Newton should explain his editorial reasons for choosing these lesser-known versions of the Grimms and Andersen, which would connect nicely to the notion that fairy tales are in a constant state of revision. But this is a minor quibble. When I teach my Classic and Contemporary Fairy Tales class next year at St. Norbert College, I will seriously consider adopting *Victorian Fairy Tales*.

The journal you are holding in your hands or reading on the digital commons—*North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*—as the title clearly articulates, is focused on George MacDonald, so I should on

some level address how MacDonald is represented in *Victorian Fairy Tales* in relationship to past anthologies. First point: MacDonald continues to be seen as a key fairytale writer of the nineteenth century. In his introduction to MacDonald in the notes, Newton writes that MacDonald "has strong claims to being Victorian Britain's greatest writer of literary fairy tales" (417). It is curious, though, that every anthology has published two MacDonald tales, either "The Golden Key" or "Day Boy and the Night Girl" (also known as "The History of Photogen and Nycteris: A Day and Night Märhchen"). While it is hard to argue with either of these choices, an editor could choose other MacDonald tales that are of equal merit. "The Golden Key" is certainly representative of MacDonald's spiritual and religious views, but it is one that lacks the wit and humor—and self-reflexive nature—captured by other tales. "The Day Boy and the Night Girl" reflects, as Zipes claims, MacDonald's interest in masculine and feminine conditioning, yet one might argue that it lacks the aesthetic unity of other tales, especially "Little Daylight," the interpolated tale in *At the Back of the North Wind*. In his notes Newton writes that "The Light Princess" is "MacDonald's other short masterpiece" (418). Since Newton gives us a convincing account of the connection between the fairy tale and the Christmas pantomime, he might want to have considered "The Light Princess" for a few reasons: 1) it is a Christmas story so to speak, told to Adela Cathcart during the Christmas season so she can spiritually heal; 2) it is witty and a parody of other classic tales, the perfect complement to the theater pantomime; and 3) its play on *gravity* is both serious and playful, a fairy tale that engages both the child and adult reader in an unique way that captures of the subversive spirit of Lewis Carroll and the Alice books.

  Victorian Fairy Tales does not break new ground, but it is an excellent collection of tales that aptly captures the variety and quality of the "serious delight" of fairy tales during Victorian times.