

Reviews

***Wonder Tales in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt*, edited by Alexandra Cheira.
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Edited by Alexandra Cheira, *Wonder Tales in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt* is composed of seven essays penned by different distinguished Byatt scholars focusing on Byatt's wonder tales covering both the single and the embedded ones. Cheira elucidates that the choice of the term "wonder tale" to "fairy tale" is based on Marina Warner's assertion that the fairy entities are absent in this type of tales, instead there is the presence of wondrous elements (xv). The introduction of the book delineates that Byatt's wonder tales within her fiction as an exclusive critical study has been a highly neglected research area despite several excellent monographs covering her entire fiction in that *Wonder Tales in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt* solely focuses on her wonder tales. Moreover, as Cheira asserts the book also scrutinizes Byatt's claim that wonder tales are "modern literary stories" and that they consciously play with "postmodern creation and recreation of old forms" ("Fairy Stories" in Cheira, xvii). Furthermore, revealing Byatt's fascination with fairytales since her childhood mostly by the forefathers of the fairy tale tradition such as Hans Christian Andersen, Brothers Grimm and Lewis Carroll, Cheira also highlights the foremothers of this genre maintaining that they have not been adequately analyzed, either although Byatt's tales likewise reflect their literary conventions. Likening the nineteenth century women fairy tale writers to "the traditional princesses in distress" since they have been in oblivion by the literary scholars and readers, Cheira also refers to writers such as Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, Marie-Cathérine d'Aulnoy and Christina Rossetti (viii). Her contention is that Byatt's narrative correspondingly participates in the female tradition of the literary wonder tale following their thematic and stylistic conventions since they allowed her foremothers to dissent and rebel against patriarchal traditions and taboos. Hence, Byatt balances both male and female authors that Cheira designates as her "literary foreparents" (viii). The subtitle in the introduction "'Stories about Storytelling': Discussing Wonder Tales in A. S. Byatt's Fiction" outlines the previous critical studies on Byatt introducing

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numerous books justifying the difference this collection presents. It may be regarded as tiresome for those readers who are not Byatt scholars per se and would like to concentrate on her wonder tales, yet it is a highly meticulous research which I believe would pave the way for Byatt scholars. The introduction also pinpoints that the first and last chapters are recommended to be read together with the introduction since as a whole they form an umbrella over thematic tropes and stylistic devices along with gender and genre produced in Byatt's wonder tales.

Following the editor's recommendation, I'd also like to continue with the first and seventh chapters after the introduction. Chapter One "Wonderful Creatures and Liminality in A. S. Byatt's Short Fiction" by Carmen Lara-Rallo investigates two types of supernatural creatures in Byatt's short stories focusing on liminality. The tales for female metamorphosis are "A Lamia in the Cévennes" and "A Stone Woman" and the other stories for terrifying monsters are "Dragons' Breath" and "The Thing in the Forest." Honing on these four wonder tales Lara-Rallo contends that liminality from ontological point of view reveals in-between conditions and the change in the character after encountering with dragons exposing phenomenological liminality. Byatt's translation of Marie-Catherine D'Aulnoy's story "The Great Green Worm" is also covered for the purposes of exposing Byatt's continuity within the framework of liminality. The Seventh and last Chapter, to complement the thematic tropes and stylistic devices as mentioned in the introduction is "'Telling Stories about Stories': Embedded Stories, Wonder Tales, and Women Storytellers in A. S. Byatt's Novels" by Margarida Esteves Pereira. Stemming from her argument that "Byatt's fiction is permeated by 'stories within stories,' which may take the form of legend, myth, fairy tale, children's story, poem" (103), Pereira scrutinizes intertextual wonder tales and common tropes in *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*, *The Children's Book*, *Possession: A Romance*, *Babel Tower* and *The Whistling Woman* focusing on the female characters in terms of the tradition of female fairy tale and children's writers as storytellers providing added meaning, extending continuity with the old forms. Thereby she also discloses how stories within stories provide believable women characters representing autonomy.

The recommendation accomplished, going back to the Second Chapter titled "'Beyond the Single Gesture': Loss and Reconnection in 'A Stone Woman,'" María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro approaches A. S. Byatt's fifth-short story collection *Little Black Book of Short Stories* (2003) as narratives of traumatic experience. As such in "The Thing in the Forest," The Thing Martínez-Alfaro argues "crawls through the collection" (19) representing different aspects of fear, pain and traumatic loss, including death. Based on trauma theories and following the thread that arts is a survival mechanism against trauma she underpins that wonder tales containing the elements of the supernatural, the magical and the unreal facilitate the anxieties about loss and death connecting human bodies with nonhuman. Gillian M. E. Alban in "Transformation Through Celebration in A. S. Byatt's Wondrously Illuminated

Tales” scrutinizes Byatt’s five short stories in Chapter Three. Alban includes “Gode’s Story” in *Possession* and the same tale narrated slightly differently in *The Djinn in the Nightingale’s Eye*, “A Stone Woman” in *Little Black Book*, “Medusa’s Ankles” in *The Matisse Stories* “Body Art” from *Little Black Book* and “Art Work” in *The Matisse Stories*. These stories are narrated realistically, in magical realist or fairy tale form, focusing on layers of meaning these five stories keep and tracing the Medusa theme exposing Byatt’s ekphrastic talent drawing on creative women. Alban comments that these stories exemplify Byatt’s imaginative skill by narrating a rich account of transformation and myth. Chapter Four “‘All Old Stories (...) Will Bear Telling and Telling Again in Different Ways’: Literary and Mythological Motifs in ‘The Threshold’” is written by Alexandra Cheira evaluating the story from the nature of the narrative, a postmodern metafictional stance. Cheira argues that although Byatt uses omniscient narrators in her stories, she still enables her female protagonists to have their own narrations in the embedded tales. In Chapter Five “A Matter of Stories: Transcorporeal Entanglements in ‘The Djinn in the Nightingale’s Eye’” Barbara Franchi discusses Byatt’s novella “The Djinn in the Nightingale’s Eye” from the point of more-than-human and posthuman perspectives depending on the fact that it is also a romance between Gillian and the djinn of different species. Franchi reads the novella focusing on the relation between human and more-than-human analyzing Byatt’s metatextuality through new materialism and posthumanist feminism in that by the power of storytelling she engages with global crises of the contemporary world. Celia M. Wallhead deliberates “‘Tom Underground,’ a Story within a Story: Its Role in *The Children’s Book* and Its Coherence” in Chapter Six. Since Byatt’s protagonist Olive writes a personal story for each of her seven children, Wallhead highlights the significance of a personalized story and the intertextual references to wonder stories also drawing on Byatt’s discussion that “stories warn us and prepare children for life” but that they should be “entertaining” (99).

Consequently, all these individual chapters *Wonder Tales in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt* encompasses contribute highly to Byatt scholarship specifically focusing on wonder tales. Although some essays focus on the same wonder tale yet they introduce different perspectives thus, numerous tales of Byatt are included revealing highly thought-provoking conceptions and critical approaches. Moreover, pursuing Byatt’s affiliation with her fairy tale forefathers and foremothers illustrate fresh perspectives revealing continuity in older narratives that circulate in new forms. Thereby, *Wonder Tales in the Fiction of A. S. Byatt* is a well-researched significant contribution to Byatt scholarship and I believe while it would enrich studies on Byatt it would also inspire similar studies on different authors.