

Magic as Power and (Self-)Knowledge

Jack Zipes, ed. 2017. *The Sorcerer's Apprentice: An Anthology of Magical Tales*. Illustrated by Natalie Frank. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 480 pp. ISBN 978-0-691-17265-1

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In the minds of most people, the words “sorcerer’s apprentice” are most likely to conjure up the image of Mickey Mouse donning a pointy blue hat and trying desperately to control a legion of animate brooms. While the animated sequence starring the affable rodent from the Walt Disney Animation Studio’s *Fantasia* (1940) may be their most recognisable and popular incarnation, tales featuring the conflict between an elderly sorcerer and the novice he typically exploits – classified in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther Tale Type Index as ATU 325. “The Magician and His Pupil”, and ATU 325*. “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” (previously “Apprentice and Ghost”) – have for centuries enjoyed sustained popularity, and been transmitted across cultures, languages, and media.

Edited by the prominent fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes, the anthology *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* brings together more than fifty international and intercultural variants of the above-mentioned tale types, penned/recorded by a plethora of writers/collectors, and originating in different time periods (ranging from the beginning of the 1st to the end of the 20th century) and countries. It should be noted that Zipes uses the syntagm “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” tales as an umbrella term for both ATU 325 and 325*, which are given new names that better reflect their thematic preoccupations: “The Sorcerer’s Rebellious Apprentice” and “The Sorcerer’s Humiliated Apprentice”, respectively.

The protagonist of the conservative “Humiliated Apprentice” stories is typically ineffectual, as his attempts to wield magic always lead to catastrophic results, thus confirming the sorcerer’s authority and sway over him. In contrast, the radical “Rebellious Apprentice” tales feature protagonists who utilise their magical (especially transformative) skills to break free from enslavement, and, having defeated their tyrannical masters, become emancipated. The two types of tales express opposing views on authority, childism (prejudice and/or discrimination against children), and power relations, with the former fostering “authoritarianism and enslavement”, and the latter “empowerment and self-awareness” (xiv). Zipes identifies another distinct group of tales within the “Rebellious Apprentice” tradition, which he terms the Krabat tales (after the main protagonist). Emerging in Sorbia (Lusatia), the Krabat tales follow the exploits of an impoverished young man who learns enough magic to defeat an evil sorcerer.

The tireless Zipes, who recently published *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm: The Complete First Edition* (editor and translator, 2014), *Grimm Legacies* (2015), and *Fairy-Tale Films Beyond Disney: International Perspectives* (co-editor with Pauline Greenhill and Kendra Magnus-Johnston, 2016), ascribes his lasting fascination with the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” tales – particularly the “Rebellious Apprentice” strand – to the fact that they gave him “some signs of hope when it seemed that we were living in hopeless times”, by providing “examples of opposition and resistance to wicked sorcerers of all kinds, who exploit magic for their own gain, and of the ways magic can enlighten readers about oppressive conditions under which they live” (xi). The appeal of the tales further lies

in their positive representation of magic – portrayed as a means of self-emancipation and empowerment, as well as acquiring (self-)knowledge – the depiction of what Zipes terms “the ‘slave’s perspective’, a voice and view from below” (xiii), and subversion of authority and existing power relations (and, by extension, the status quo in general). Finally, the fact that they address a number of present-day concerns, such as childism, (child)abuse and exploitation, and misuse of power, lends the stories a contemporary relevance, making the anthology as a whole all the more timely and welcome.

The stories included in the anthology are organised into three thematic parts: “The Humiliated Apprentice Tales” (13 tales), “The Rebellious Apprentice Tales” (35 tales), and the “Krabat Tales” (eight tales). Individual thematic parts are organised chronologically, with the first two parts further divided into three sub-sections: “Early Tales”, “Nineteenth-Century Tales”, and “Twentieth-Century Tales”. The stories are complemented by twenty black-and-white illustrations by American artist Natalie Frank, who previously selected and illustrated thirty-six lesser-known fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm (*Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, 2015, edited by Karen Marta and with an introduction by Jack Zipes). The tales are preceded by a preface, notes and acknowledgements, and an introduction by the editor, and followed by the biographies of authors, collectors, editors and translators, a filmography and bibliography, a chronological list of tales, and an index.

Zipes’ lengthy critical introduction, entitled “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice, Harry Potter, and Why Magic Matters”, discusses the tale type in focus, its sub-types, their meaning and popular (cinematic, literary) retellings, and the role of magic as a tool of resistance against authority. The text opens with a brief analysis of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* books. Baffled by the dazzling success of what he considers to be little more than “a conventional series of fantasy novels” (1), Zipes eventually concludes that *Harry Potter* owes much of its popularity to its folklore sources, most notably the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” tales, and their omnipresence as “memetic stories in cultural memories” (6).

Explorations of the origins, historical and cross-cultural transformations, and meaning of the main sub-types of the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” are followed by a discussion on G.W.F. Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, and Theodor Adorno’s negative dialectics. Building on Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s theories presented in her study *Childism: Confronting Prejudice against Children* (2013), the following section examines contemporary relationships between teachers, parents, and other “sorcerers” on the one hand, and children (“apprentices”) on the other.

The next section provides an overview of cinematic versions of the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” tales, ranging from European adaptations of the Krabat tales, such as Celino Bleiweiss’s *Die schwarze Mühle* [The Black Mill] 1975, to Hollywood blockbusters such as Jon Turteltaub’s action-packed *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* (2010), featuring the incomparable Nicolas Cage in the role of the sorcerer-mentor. The final section in the introduction turns to literary works inspired by the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” tales, published in anglophone countries since the 1940s. Particularly interesting in this section are Zipes’ observations about a clear division between books aimed at children, which typically have a strong didactic strain and follow the “Humiliated Apprentice” plot, and those intended for (young) adults, which are typically written in the “Rebellious Apprentice” vein. As Zipes demonstrates, the decisive factor in integrating the “Humiliated Apprentice” into

children’s literature was its animated Disney version (and the proliferation of picturebooks it inspired), which “‘infantilize[d]’ the tale type” (16) by turning it into a cautionary tale about the importance of obeying authority.

While by no means exhaustive (nor purporting to be), the richly varied anthology – yet another testament to Zipes’ abilities as researcher, editor, writer, and translator (the majority of translations from German, Italian, and French are his) – is sure to generate interest in this tale type, and become a springboard for future scholarly outings into this stimulating and fairly unexplored field. Zipes’ prose is characteristically fluent, comprehensible, and oftentimes even conversational (“Hmm, this might make for a Harry Potter novel!”, 63), which makes it accessible to a wide readership. This thought-provoking and visually appealing book is likely to acquire most devotees among folklorists, fairy-tale scholars, students (the variety and organisation of the materials make it especially suited for classroom use), and story-lovers at large, who are sure to enjoy these tales that “make us aware that magic matters, no matter what its substance may be, no matter what form it takes” (7).

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Confronting Cultures

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė & V. Geetha. 2017. *Another History of the Children’s Picture Book: From Soviet Lithuania to India*. Chennai, India: Tara Books in association with the Lithuanian Culture Institute. 176 pp. ISBN 978-93-83145-45-4

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Unusual combinations such as this will surely provoke many confused looks, since it seems difficult at first to connect terms such as “Soviet Lithuania”, “India” and “children’s picture books”. However, Giedrė Jankevičiūtė and V. Geetha present us with an overview of Soviet children’s picture books and their influence on two different cultures through this exceptional book full of wonderful illustrations. “Taken together, Indian and Lithuanian experiences help us rethink the global culture of the picture book: they focus on developments that are not often recounted in standard picture book histories, or even in scholarly literature” (5).

This compelling book emerged from an exhibition of children’s books from Soviet Lithuania hosted by the publisher, Tara Books, in Chennai. The book is divided into two parts: the first one, entitled “Children’s Picture Books from the Soviet Union: The View from India”, puts the Indian experience with Soviet picture books in the spotlight. The second part focuses on the influence of illustrations in children’s picture books in Soviet Lithuania. Each part is divided into several shorter chapters which concentrate on different aspects of children’s picture books, and their influence on Indian and Lithuanian culture of that period.

The first part begins with a chapter called “The Enduring Appeal of Soviet Children’s Books”. Serving as an introduction, it explains that Soviet picture books were a window into Soviet children’s way of life. Indian children gained the impression that Soviet children had a perfect life – with plenty of opportunities and different clubs offered by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. What they did not see was the Communist propaganda hidden