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Snotty Saves the Day by Tod Davies, and: *Lily the Silent* by
Tod Davies (review)

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project, which she might well have expressed in a grotesquely exaggerated parody in her fiction—Zero and his harem of “primitive” women nursing pigs in *The Passion of New Eve* (1977) come to mind—is expressed here in the elliptical form of a picture postcard to her close friend.

The last card Clapp writes about is not from Carter but an invitation (beautifully reproduced in the endpapers of the book) created by an old friend of hers, Corinna Sargood, for Carter’s memorial, which took place at a cinema in south London about five weeks after her death. The ceremony was based on the radio program *Desert Island Discs*, for which Carter had been asked to choose eight pieces of music, a book, and a luxury item to take. (The program was never made because of Carter’s declining health.) Clapp’s restrained description of the memorial, filled with warmth and subtle humor, affectingly captures Carter as a person so much loved and valued by those close to her. The final paragraph is especially moving for those of us who admire Carter’s work and spirit. At the end of the memorial, her husband and son went up on the stage to reveal Carter’s choice of luxury, as painted by Sargood; it was a zebra, that exotic herbivore, almost too wonderfully made to be real. This startling choice introduces another complication into Carter’s fairy-tale menagerie, offering an intriguing contrast to the figure of the wolf, that “carnivore incarnate,” that Carter demythologizes in her Little Red Riding Hood stories and that has become her signature animal and a kind of a totem among the readers of her fairy tales, as is indicated by the mail-carrying wolf depicted on the front cover of Clapp’s memoir.

Although slim, this book is infused with touching moments and insightful observations. It will stimulate many readers to turn again to Carter’s writings and, like a good hors d’oeuvre, leave them eager for something more substantial. Her long-awaited full-length biography is currently being prepared by Edmund Gordon, to be published by Chatto & Windus in 2016. Clapp’s lapidary memoir may mark the beginning of the demythologizing of Angela Carter. The book she had chosen to take to a desert island, by the way, was *Larousse Gastronomique*.

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Snotty Saves the Day. By Tod Davies. Ashland, OR: Exterminating Angel Press, 2011. 208 pp.

Lily the Silent. By Tod Davies. Ashland, OR: Exterminating Angel Press, 2012. 224 pp.

There are six ugly little brick houses that 12-year-old Snotty can see whenever he looks out the window of his gloomy room. Six dirty houses that form the most familiar sight of his childhood in this poor and crime-ridden neighborhood. Six houses, but seven gardens—how can that be? That puzzling seventh garden proves to truly defy all logic when Snotty, running from the

police, escapes into the garden only to find himself falling and falling, all the way down the rabbit hole and into a different world. It is this mysterious land, populated by such fantastic creatures as talking teddy bears, living garden gnomes, and a small white horse with a strange scar on its forehead, that serves as the setting for Snotty's adventures and journey of self-discovery. But as Snotty struggles to understand what truly is, rather than what only appears to be, and as he begins to peel away the layers of self-deception for his true self to emerge, he also finds himself at the center of a violent battle: in this land, the Strong and Big have declared war on the Weak and Small, and Snotty will have to choose a side.

Snotty's tale, or *The Legendus Snottianicus*, as it is known in its untranslated form, is not only the story of a young boy's adventures, however; it is also the foundation myth of the land of Arcadia and a text that has been extensively studied by Arcadian scholars. As the founder of Exterminating Angel Press explains in a note that precedes Snotty's story, the book came into her possession complete with a foreword and extensive notes by Professor Devindra Vale, one of Arcadia's most respected scientists. Her footnotes, which often refer to other academics' works and highlight scholarly debates relevant for a more profound understanding of *The Legendus Snottianicus*, offer an additional layer of meaning to the reader: while Snotty's tale provides insight into Arcadia's beginnings, Professor Vale's notes illuminate Arcadia's current state of affairs and frequently ponder the causes for the civil war this land now finds itself in. As the reader quickly learns through the commentary Professor Vale provides, the opposing ideologies that lie at the root of the war Snotty is fighting also present the core of the modern-day Arcadians' struggle.

Snotty Saves the Day is an unconventional text for children, or, as it proclaims, for "adults of all ages," both in its innovative form and spellbinding content. Author Tod Davies skillfully interweaves the plot of Snotty's tale with the metacommentary inherent in the text's footnotes, and she presents the reader with a book that looks as much like a scholarly work as it does a fairy tale. Ultimately advocating the importance of academic study and intellectualism, Davies's novel also posits that it is in children's stories, fairy tales, and folktales that the most fundamental human truths can be found. In the bratty, selfish, and arrogant Snotty, the tale has an unlikely protagonist whose choices nonetheless remain relatable and whose journey of self-discovery further illuminates the war of ideas that serves as the novel's core. By subverting Snotty's internalized ideas of the female as subservient to the male, the text moreover critiques traditional gender roles and offers a startling and creative conclusion to the child character's quest for his true identity. Davies's fast-paced and mesmerizing tale, which propels

its reader from one breathtaking adventure to the next, is a novel of ideas for children and adults that invites its readers to reflect on contemporary politics not just in Arcadia but in our world as well.

Lily the Silent, the second book in the History of Arcadia series, continues to ponder the philosophical questions that *Snotty Saves the Day* raises: Who are we? Why are we here? And how shall we live? Picking up only a few years after Snotty's tale left off, *Lily the Silent* tells the story of Arcadia's first queen, although it focuses not on Lily's eventual reluctant ascension to the throne and her reign but rather on her adventures as a young, teenaged woman. As her peaceful and idyllic homeland of Arcadia is colonized by the much stronger and more powerful Megalopolis, 15-year-old Lily is presented with a society much different from the community of her childhood: whereas Arcadians live in small towns surrounded by nature, share their resources, and tell stories at their many feasts, the people of Megalopolis reside in a loud big city, strive to gain money and power, and obsess over celebrity gossip. Uprooted from her village and faced with the ruthlessness and superficiality of Megalopolis, Lily wishes nothing more than to return home and to restore the Arcadian way of life. Before she can make her way back home, however, Lily has to undertake a journey to fulfill her destiny that takes her from enslavement in a children's mine all the way to the moon (two moons, to be precise) and to the deepest bottom of the sea. In her adventures she is joined by characters the reader will recognize from *Snotty Saves the Day*, although they now reappear in different disguises and incarnations.

But at its core *Lily the Silent* is the love story of two teenagers. Lily, the future queen of Arcadia, and Conor Barr, the handsome prince of Megalopolis, fall in love at first sight, and both know that it is the other person who makes them truly whole. In Davies's novel, however, love does not conquer all, and Lily and Conor do not live happily ever after, nor do they ever get married. Although Conor rescues Lily from slavery in the children's mine, he remains too absorbed in the egotistical ideology of Megalopolis to help her on her quest to save Arcadia, and Lily knows that her fate is not to remain with Conor but to return home. For Lily, in fact, there is no happily-ever-after because her two deepest desires, to restore Arcadia and to live with Conor, prove to be irreconcilable, and the text thus breaks with the common motif of marriage as the end goal of the fairy-tale protagonist's journey.

More overtly didactic than *Snotty Saves the Day*, this second installment in the History of Arcadia series is explicit in its critique of a superficial celebrity culture that values appearance, money, and power above all else, and it is because of his entanglement in this culture that Conor's love for Lily is doomed. The text is also distinctly feminist, and the prevalence of strong female

characters is striking: the story is narrated by Lily's daughter, Sophia the Wise, and features an almost exclusively female cast with Lily, her friend Kim, Conor's mother Livia, Arcadia's freedom fighter Maud, and Maud's old friend Death as the central characters. Male characters, including even the handsome Conor, play supporting roles in the text and are generally portrayed as weaker and more passive than their female counterparts.

Much like *Snotty Saves the Day*, *Lily the Silent* is also a political allegory that asks its reader to reflect on gender roles, popular culture, and dominant ideologies. The texts also point to the importance of storytelling, although here it is not Professor Vale's notes but Sophia the Wise who, in narrating her mother's story, comments on the implications of this tale of the past for contemporary Arcadia. The reader thus learns more about Arcadia's current problems, which closely mirror not only those Snotty and Lily have faced but also our own inequitable society's and which are likely to feature prominently in the series' next installment about Arcadia's Lizard Princess Sophia. The stories, as Tod Davies's History of Arcadia novels ultimately suggest, serve as a civilization's backbone, and it is therefore in stories too that we can discover the potential for fundamental change and a better society.

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Brave. Directed by Mark Andrews, Brenda Chapman, and Steve Purcell. Performed by Kelly Macdonald, Billy Connolly, and Emma Thompson. Walt Disney Pictures, 2012. DVD.

The newest film from Pixar Animation Studios, *Brave*, is a fairy tale about a Scottish princess who does not want to get married and tries to change her fate. Her parents, Elinor (Emma Thompson) and Fergus (Billy Connolly), invite the leaders of three other clans to bring their sons to compete for Merida's hand in the Highland Games. Merida (Kelly Macdonald) competes as the eldest child of her father, winning the archery contest and her own hand. However, winning only delays the decision and her mother insists that she still marry. Merida buys a spell from a witch (Julie Walters) to change her mother, but the spell has unintended consequences, and Elinor becomes a bear. Merida and Elinor seek out the witch, and in their search start to repair their damaged relationship. The more Elinor acts like a bear, however, the less control she has as a human, and when she eats, that control slips and Elinor is more bear than queen. The witch is gone, but she has left Merida a message explaining how to undo the spell: "Fate be changed, look inside. Mend the bond, torn by pride." Merida interprets this as needing to mend her mother's tapestry that she tore in anger, so the women return to the castle.