



Fairy Tale Favourites

Article Author:

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Fiona Waters makes her selection.

Fiona Waters shares with us her love of fairy tales - both old favourites and new publications

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As a child I lived in a world entirely encompassed by fairy stories. The Famous Five and Secret Seven held no appeal. Even the, as I now perceive, imaginative and exciting Arthur Ransome adventures left me cold - where were the elphin, ough and fay I had been introduced to by Walter de la Mare in **Come Hither**? I devoured all the Andrew Lang 'Fairy Books' and was inconsolable when even he ran out of colours. How excellent to see these are still available in affordable facsimile from Dover Publications Inc. 'Complete and unabridged, every word, every one of the illustrations,' as their own cover blurb proudly declares. For the serious aficionado, this is a rich vein of titles not to be missed - the twelve colour 'Fairy Books', together with a very comprehensive range of other classic collections including **Perrault's Fairy Tales**, with illustrations by Gustave Dore which still scare me mightily, **East O' the Sun and West O' The Moon**, **The Celtic Fairy Tales** of Joseph Jacobs and **Household Stories by the Brothers Grimm** with head- and tailpieces from the incomparable Walter Crane, and many more. The books are distributed by Constable in the UK.

I read all the Oxford 'Myths and Legends' series which looked dreary even in those long gone days when children's books didn't have much in the way of colour illustration, but contained such magic and wonderment that my imagination soared. But the seminal discovery was the illustrations of Arthur Rackham. Forever will I look at trees and see his weird and fantastical faces, at toadstools and see his red-capped elvish treasure seekers, at stars and see the sparkling pin points of light in his illustrations to **A Midsummer Night's Dream** or **Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens**. I cannot conceive the world of fairy tales without Arthur Rackham. Even the appearance of his crabbed gnomes and gossamer fairies on biscuit tins, wrapping paper and carrier bags in the sixties did not diminish his stature or his magic - and magic isn't a powerful enough word! Given his **Book of Pictures** to keep me quiet as a child of six, my destiny was set.

I hope many, many others have been so moulded and will continue to be. Several of his titles are still in print - **Cinderella** (0 434 958611, £9.95), **Fairy Tales from Many Lands** (0 434 95854 9, £9.95) and **Grimms Fairy Tales** (0 434 95862 X, £9.95) for example, all published by Heinemann.

While not strictly for children, **Arthur Rackham: A Life with Illustration** by James Hamilton (Pavilion, 185145 5310, £25.00) is so crammed with Rackham's pictures, both the warmly familiar and the undiscovered from private collections, that beauty and mystery leap off the page. The quality of the reproduction and the excellent design of this book produces an experience not often to be had merely from turning pages. It's outstanding, and James Hamilton writes with great authority but also tenderness, revealing a fascinating insight into this unique and special artist.

But back to those far off days before Turtles.

'Once upon a time. ..' was the password to delight, to 'cloud capped towers and gorgeous palaces'. No matter how often the words were used, the effect was instantaneous - pure unadulterated magic and unadulterated is the word. Fairies were in control here, not stuffy adults. I wonder how it is for children today. The wealth of glorious books available burst with (literally) fabulous illustrations and dramatic, imaginative texts, handsome bindings, paper so thick and shiny, books which *smell* wonderful. I hope they are not blasé for I am bowled over!

Do they still believe in fairies? I hope that especially. Frederick Warne obviously believe in fairies and that children do too, as they've just re-issued eight of Cicely M Barker's 'Flower Fairy' books - **Flower Fairies of the Spring** (0 7232 3753 0), **Summer** 0 7232 3754 9 , **Autumn** 0 7232 3755 7 , **Winter** (0 7232 3756 5), **Wayside** (0 7232 3757 3), **Garden** (0 7232 3758 1), **Trees** (0 7232 3760 3) and **A Flower Fairy Alphabet** (0 7232 3759 X), priced at £3.99 each.

It's all too easy for cynical adults to scoff at the rather sweet verses, but in fact therein lie many pieces of sensible country lore and very accurate observation. But best of all, of course, is the meticulous details of her flower paintings together with the superb interpretation of the individual fairies, each one so accurately reflecting the colour, shape, and, yes, characteristics of the particular flower. The Flower Fairies suffered the same fate as Arthur Rackham in the last decade and even the quality of reproduction in the books became lamentable, but new printing techniques have swept away all the blurred edges and darkened Muddy colours to reveal these very special little books in all their delicate and fresh splendour.

Together with these particular favourites of mine, all the staples are still to be had, and should be there to form the basis of the fairy library.

Ardizzone's Hans Andersen Fourteen Classic Tales (Deutsch, 0 233 984313, £7.95; 0 233 98372 4, £4.50 pbk) includes all the obvious favourites, together with some less familiar, translated by the ubiquitous Stephen Corrin. Apparently Edward Ardizzone had always wished to illustrate his favourite Andersen stories. How splendid that his wish was fulfilled! The drawings are gentle, subtle and haunting with a most memorable dog 'with eyes as big as the Round Tower' in 'The Tinder Box'.

Brian Alderson's collection **The Brothers Grimm: Popular Folk Tales** (Gollancz, 0 575 04030 0, £5.95 pbk, to be re-issued at the end of November '90), is an excellent re-telling, specifically written remembering the oral tradition. Michael Foreman's illustrations perfectly capture the strange beauty and mystery of the stories.

One Thousand and One Arabian Nights, translated by Geraldine McCaughrean (Oxford, 0 19 274530 1, £9.95), reads like a novel. The thread of Queen Shahrazad's own story runs powerfully through the narrative and creates a mounting tension which is as integral a part of the book as her fabulous stories. Stephen Lavis' illustrations loom large out of the page, full of menace, mystery and secret shadows.

If restricted to just one sumptuous volume, then don't miss **The Faber Book of Favourite Fairy Tales**, edited by Sara and Stephen Corrin and illustrated by Kate Greenaway medal winner, Juan Wijngaard (Faber, 0 571 14854 9, £9.95). Perrault, Andersen, Grimm, Joseph Jacobs - all are here in one handsome volume. The translation of the tales is lively and fresh, the colour plates shining jewels. A stunning book.

And for the modern touch don't miss Terry Jones' **Fairy Tales**, illustrated by Michael Foreman (Pavilion, 0 907516 03 3, £7.95; Puffin, 014 03.1642 6, £4.99 pbk). He has taken all the traditional ingredients of a good fairy tale - good versus evil, constancy reaping just rewards, mysterious visitors, riddles, dragons, elves and witches - and added his own anarchic, zany humour to make a highly idiosyncratic and hugely successful collection of stories that children just adore.

Picture book versions of traditional fairy tales provide a rich source for the technically experienced, vividly imaginative illustrator, a dreary excuse for the rest: **Hansel and Gretel** revealed for the truly macabre tale it is by Anthony Browne (Julia MacRae, 0 86203 042 0, £6.95); **Goldilocks and The Three Bears** with *very* cross bears retold and illustrated by James Marshall (Collins, 0 00 191382 4, £5.95; 0 00 663750 7, £2.50 pbk); a newly discovered Grimm, **Dear Mili**,

wondrously illustrated by the greatest illustrator alive today, Maurice Sendak (Viking Kestrel, 0 670 80168 2, £9.95); a hilarious look at that frog prince in **The Princess and the Frog** by Amanda Vesey (Methuen, 0 416 50300 4, £5.95); **The Enchanter's Daughter** illustrated, it seems, with real gold by the incomparable Errol le Cain (Cape, 0 224 02399 3, £5.95).

And lest we forget how times have changed, what about all those wonderful princesses who have swept away the feeble-damsel-in-a-tower bit forever with a tidal-wave of subtle, funny and pungent tales like **The Wrestling Princess** by Judy Corbalis (Deutsch, 0 233 97852 6, £5.95; Knight, 0 340 40860 X, £2.50 pbk), **Clever Gretchen and Other Forgotten Folk Tales** retold by Alison Lurie (Heinemann, 0 434 94899 3, £7.95; Mammoth, 0 7497 0569 8, £2.50 pbk, to be published in January '91), **The Woman in the Moon** by James Riordan (Hutchinson, 0 09 174078 9, £4.95 pbk) or **The Tough Princess** by Martin Waddell (Walker, 0 7445 0540 2, £5.99; 0 7445 1226 3, £2.99 pbk).

'O stop, stop,' cried the Mole in ecstasies, 'This is too much!' Yes, perhaps it is, but how wonderful to have such a vast library to choose from or does it merely confuse, and, worse, does excellence sink under the cascade of mediocrity? Caveat Emptor!

And so to those titles published within the last few months.

The crop of single story picture books is heavy, the quality sadly very variable. **Thumbelina**, retold by James Riordan, illustrated by Wayne Anderson (Hutchinson, 0 09 174329 X, £6.95), is a haunting book which marks the welcome return of the illustrator of **Rat's Magic** which was published in the mid-seventies. These plates are full of tenderness laced with the surreal; the landscapes stretch into infinity, the colours hazy but powerful, and the animal characters all have a delicacy of paw, whisker or feather, while Thumbelina herself looks like a Dickensian waif. James Riordan's retellings of tales are always a delight; totally lacking in false solemnity yet plangent, his language and imagery are colourful, his turn of phrase economical but telling. 'She sang so beautifully that the mole fell in love with her at once. But this he kept to himself.' Dry and unsentimental, but memorable.

Tom Thumb, retold and illustrated by Richard Jesse Watson (Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 13012 3, £8.50), is another variation on the I-wish-I-had-a-child-however-tiny story. And Richard Jesse Watson is hugely successful in his illustration of Tom's life amongst the numerous 'giants', where even tomatoes can bowl him over, a thistle head makes an excellent viewpoint and a cup and saucer make a convenient and comfortable bath. A huge cow, a fish and a mouse exactly pinpoint Tom's dilemma. The re-telling is robust, the story fairly speeds along, and the ending, big is not always best, very satisfactory.

Lisbeth Zwerger is not a new name to find on the cover of a fairy tale picture book as she has illustrated countless classic tales - **The Gift of the Magi**, **The Selfish Giant** and **The Nutcracker**, together with many Andersen and Grimm tales, **The Nightingale** being especially lovely. Her ink and wash drawings are delicate and sensitive yet the image is powerful, distinct and memorable. Three of these tales now appear in miniature: **Hansel and Gretel** (0 907234 92 5), **The Swineherd** (185618 008 5) and **Thumbelina** (0 907234 917), published by Ragged Bears at £3.50 each. I find this scale more pleasing and more suited to her style, and the size very compact and equally comfortable in small or large hands. Lisbeth Zwerger is the 1990 winner of the Hans Christian Andersen Medal for lifetime achievement and contribution to children's literature.

The interpretation of the Beast in **Beauty and the Beast**, retold and illustrated by Jan Brett (Simon & Schuster, 0 67165329 6, £6.95; 0 7500 0430 4, £3.99 pbk), is really quite gentle compared to some I've seen. He's a rather distinguished wild boar with a very handsome snout and tusks and gentle eyes. Jan Brett's work is always elegant with a tapestry-like quality, and here her text is based on the 1910 re-telling by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.

Tattercoats, retold by Margaret Greaves and illustrated by Margaret Chamberlain (Frances Lincoln, 0 7112 0640 6, £6.95), is a gorgeous romp! Tattercoats lived in a gloomy, cobwebbed castle with her gloomy, cobwebbed grandfather and the boy who looked after the geese as her only friend. But she had a kind face, along came the handsome prince and together they blew away the cobwebs. This book sparkles with colour, joy and a light touch that is so refreshing and

exuberant. The geese are especially noteworthy, full of character and joie de vivre! The simple text is slightly tongue in cheek and thus the marriage between words and illustrations is perfect.

And now, as they say, for something rather different. Tomie de Paola has a very distinctive style of illustration which is wonderfully and instantly recognisable, and yet in his latest book there's even another dimension. **The Badger and the Magic Fan**, with text by Tony Johnston (Hutchinson, 0 09 174577 2, £6.99), is the re-telling of a Japanese folk tale, a variation on the classic Pinocchio. The goblin children, the tengu, are a wonderful visual creation, full of mischief and nonsense, and the sense of another land, with a totally different culture, very strong.

Graham Oakley is probably best known for his hilarious 'Church Mice' books, crammed with marvellous detail and gentle humour, but he's also written and illustrated **Henry's Quest**, a post-apocalyptic adventure where the hero seeks a magical substance called petrol, and the surreal, brilliant **Magical Changes**. His latest creation is **Once Upon a Time: A Prince's Fantastic Journey** (Macmillan, 0 333 51532 3, £6.95). The prince in question is Prince Alfred and he's unbelievably dense. Without his trusty squire known to the Lord Chamberlain as 'You grubby little tyke', henceforth called Tyke by everyone else, the fantastic journey would have had a rather different outcome. Alfred's father the King has promised to retire if his son performs three tasks - to prove he's clever, to find a suitable wife and to prove he's brave. Tyke feels, with justification as is revealed, that the first of these could be a problem. Turning off a big flyover, ignoring the signs 'No Entry' and 'Keep Left', which Prince Alfred said did not apply to Royalty, they soon found themselves in a rather strange land. Prince Alfred is blissfully unaware of where they *really are*, but sharp-eyed Tyke has read the signposts - Camelot, Storyland, El Dorado, Utopia, Arcadia - and so knows just *exactly* who the strange egg-shaped person on the wall is, why they should polish the pedlar's lamp and what to do with the glass slipper, and that's only the beginning. Graham Oakley's inventiveness seems to have no limit. The story itself is utterly hilarious, very dry and one of those marvellous turnabouts where the reader, together with the down-trodden Tyke, is in complete control and can scoff at the woeful inadequacies and blundering ineptitude of the pretty useless Prince Alfred.

But, it's the illustrations that make this a book to return to over and over again and still find small, fantastical details that you missed previously: a frog wearing a crown, sitting under a leaf; a distraught-looking lady with a crook, poke bonnet, but no sheep; the family photograph in the Three Bears' house; and many, many more that you'll need to look for yourselves!

Oscar Wilde's fairy tales have been enormously popular with children ever since they were first published in 1888. Great sensitivity and a lyrical romanticism combined with his lethal wit make compelling reading, and **The Selfish Giant**, **The Happy Prince** and **The Nightingale and the Rose** have even adapted well to television and cinema. Now there's the superlative new illustrated edition available which captures all the elusive nuances of Wilde's imagination and adds a haunting subtlety and gentleness while losing none of the power and drama of the writing. **Stories for Children** by Oscar Wilde, illustrated by P J Lynch (Simon & Schuster, 0 7500 0302 2, £10.00) marks another major stepping stone in the career of the young artist P J Lynch. He gained early success by winning the Mother Goose Award in 1987 for **A Bag of Moonshine** (Collins, 0 00 184403 2, £8.95 hbk; 0 00 184449 0, £4.95 pbk) and has added an extra dimension to a new edition of W B Yeats' **Fairy Tales of Ireland** (Collins, 0 00 184437 7, £8.95) with his sparkling pen and ink drawings. The marvellous illustration on the cover of this issue of **BfK** is from the Oscar Wilde.

Michael Foreman has won many awards for his illustrations, both in his own picture books and in collaboration with contemporary writers - notably Terry Jones, Edna O'Brien and Madhur Jaffrey. His latest book described on the jacket as 'a tapestry of delight' is a highly personal selection of fairy tales from all around the world. **Michael Foreman's World of Fairy Tales** (Pavilion, 185145 466 7, £12.99) has a spectacular title page map of the world, rich in vivid colours and bearing the dedication 'For the children of the world'. The stories do come from all of the world - Australia, the Arctic, Cornwall, Ireland, Russia, New Zealand, Arabia, France, Japan, China, Mexico...

The titles are magical: 'How the Raven Brought Light to the World', 'The Fool of the World and the Flying Ship', and 'The Four Dragons' from China. This is no mere token poly-ethnic collection - Michael Foreman has imbued all of the pictures with the characteristics of each distinctive culture, but brings his own interpretation to what he saw as he

travelled thousands of miles, often in the company of the actual storyteller. The attendant contrasts are striking.

One of the books I've most enjoyed reading while researching this article is **Tales from the Threepenny Bit** by Wendy Eyton (Collins, 0 00 184994 8, £5.95). I hope Wendy Eyton will take it as the best possible compliment if I describe this as a wonderfully old-fashioned book! *This* is how fairy stories were in those special days I've recalled. There is magic with fairies and witches, dreams with the cold bejewelled North Wind, there are princesses, a special scarecrow and a magic dog, old and new legends, and the story of the original Bakewell pudding (it was the boggart's fault) - splendid for reading aloud.

Once upon a time, then, brought marvellously up-to-date. And I think they did all live happily ever. Me, too, while I inhabited these pages...

Fiona Waters has been involved in children's books for more than 20 years as a bookseller, publisher, author and reviewer. Since 1987 has been Editorial Director of School Book Fairs.

'He who would enter into the Kingdom of Faery should have the heart of a little child, if he is to be happy and at home in that enchanted realm.'

Andrew Lang, introduction to **The Blue Fairy Book** (1889)

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