

“In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing.
About the dark times.”

-Bertolt Brecht

Nothing unites people the way stories do. In every society, in every time period, in every circumstance with a group of people in one place, they will inevitably begin to tell stories. Modern, exciting stories about aliens and robots; ancient, mysterious stories with witches and dragons; day to day tales about relatable family struggles and friendship: they all exist because of the incessant, unassailable need of human beings to create.

I’ve always had a fondness for communal stories—the stories so old or common that it’s impossible to find any one “original” version, and every person you ask is certain their version is the right one. Listening to a folk tale is the media equivalent of a home cooked meal: even if the technical skill would be better at an expensive restaurant, no restaurant will ever have the personality of someone’s chicken parmesan, “just like Mom used to make”.

The purest form of that kind of story is, of course, folk and fairy tales. Just the other day, for a project, one of my classes had to, as a group, summarize the plot of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. This was just the set up to a larger activity, intended to be quick and easy with a story everyone knew, but it quickly devolved into chaos. Half the class shouted that Papa Bear’s porridge was too hot, while the other half insisted it was too sweet; no one could agree if Mama Bear’s chair was too big or too soft; there were three or four different interpretations of how the story ended. The beauty of these stories, to me, is that every one of those interpretations of the story are right. There is no master text of Goldilocks to compare everyone’s versions to—while there was an original version published, decades in

the public eye have mutated it beyond recognition, and most people reading it will dismiss it out of hand. (This is what irritates me about edgy people who go around telling people that “in the original Cinderella, the sisters cut off parts of their feet”, “in the original Rapunzel, the prince is blinded by brambles”—while there are versions where this happens, they both aren’t the “original” and don’t invalidate anyone’s gentler favorites.)

Fairy tales were the first kind of stories I was introduced to, growing up. My mother would read to my sisters and I before bed from a book her mother used to read to her. As long as I can remember, my head has been full of stories like Donkey Skin and Finn the Keen Falcon, the Tinder Box and Snow White and Rose Red. Naturally, once I started to choose my own reading material, it was heavily influenced by those styles and stories. Conveniently for me, the one thing people like to do more than write stories is rewrite stories. One only has to look to the dozens and dozens of Sherlock Holmes or The Wizard of Oz adaptations and reimaginings to realize that inspiration will never run dry with a well loved story, and when stories are as common as, say, Cinderella or Little Red Riding Hood, one could read for centuries without having to reread old works. The first novels I ever read were *The Sister’s Grimm*, in which two sisters go to a town and meet all the classic fairy tale characters. Once I outgrew those, I began reading books that didn’t involve the characters themselves, but had the settings classic to fairytales—unicorns and dragons, magic and the fey.

I had a particular fondness for fairy stories—old fairies, the ones who spoke in riddles and stole children away in the night, and could be fought off with salt or iron, or hidden from by wearing red or inside out clothing. My mother has always believed in this kind of fairy, and they’ve been around me my whole life, as long as folk stories have. When I was little, I lived in England, and I used to go on walks with my mother through the nature preserves. She would point out old tree stumps or mushroom circles, telling me to avoid them, as that’s where the fairies lived. She would never go through the

woods after dark, and was always careful to stay on the paths, as those who disrespected the fey always paid for it.

I think the main appeal of folk and fairy stories, to me, is the feeling of community and family they give me. I open an interpretation of *Sleeping Beauty* set in the 1950's and I feel awash with the history of the story. I can practically see the fingerprints of the thousands of people who touched this story before it became this form; centuries of mothers and children being tucked into bed, decades of people who love a story so much that they just have to add to it.

When I read about the fey, I always, always think of my mother, her stories and our walks and her collection of fairy statues, and even if I have never read that particular book before, I can sink into the familiarity of the characteristics, of the Summer and Winter Court, of Queen Mab and Robin Goodfellow, and feel at home.

While I never set out to start a collection, I have never been one to get rid of a book, even if I've outgrown it. While I will never have the same experience with *Ignis* or *Fablehaven* that I did at twelve, I can still page through them, smiling at the memories of my first readings of them and the familiar elements I grew up with. I have always bought books I liked and wanted to read multiple times, and without realizing it, I just turned around one day to find dozens of these stories, accumulated over the course of many years. Every one of them is precious to me, because I chose them not to round out an existing collection, but because at one point or another in my life they made me happy and excited enough to buy my own copy.

For the same reason I didn't expect to collect these books, I doubt I will ever stop. While my taste in books has diversified and matured somewhat since I was little, I still hold a special place in my heart for the familiar fairytale fantasy elements that were so essential to me, growing up. And, provided

human beings continue to do what they have for millennia, I will never run out of new versions to fall in love with.

Annotated Bibliography

Pierce, Tamora. *Wild Magic*. Scholastic Point, 2004.

The Wild Magic series is a set of four books about a girl named Daine who discovers that she has, rather than the traditional magic, an affinity for animals, through which she can talk to them, heal them, see through their eyes, or even shapeshift into them over the course of the series. I first read these books in 2010 and fell in love immediately. They were some of the first books I bought for myself and didn't share with my sisters, and they remain a favorite to this day.

George, Jessica Day. *Dragonskin Slippers*. Bloomsbury Childrens, 2019.

The Dragonskin Slippers series is set in a classical fairytale world, with dragons and references to feats like spinning straw into gold. The main character, Creel, befriends a dragon and receives a pair of shoes that turn out to be made of dragon skin and allow the owner to control dragons. I don't remember the first time I read these books, as they were a series I shared with both my sisters.

Harrison, Michelle. *The 13 Treasures*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2009.

The 13 Treasures series was some of my first literature experience with the Fey, as separate from "fairies". In it, the main character is tormented by her ability to see the Fey and a main secondary character's arc is trying to regain her little brother, who was taken by the Fey in the past. This series was comparatively dark, with the third book containing a murder mystery with several gruesome murders, but the little details about the Fey—how they can't touch iron, how you can hide from them by wearing red, etc.—were familiar to me from my mother's stories, and made the books a fascinating read. This was another series I shared with my sisters initially, and have had for as long as I remember.

Wrede, Patricia C. *Dealing With Dragons*. Magic Carpet Books, 2002.

The Enchanted Forest series, the first of which is *Dealing With Dragons*, is a classical spin on fairy tale tropes. In it, Cimorene, a headstrong princess, decides to run away from an arranged marriage (on the advice of a talking frog) and work for a dragon as a maid. Many characters in this book, largely people from the castle or knights, plead with Cimorene to conform to classic fairytale structure, which she refuses to do. The book is very aware of the tropes it uses and subverts, and manages to somewhat keep the tone of a fairy tale while making a fresh story. This book series was so popular with my sisters and me, we actually own two copies of it—one old, beaten up version for taking camping or reading outside the house, and one beautiful box set that we keep in pristine condition.

Wilson, Gina, and Patrick Lynch. *Ignis*. Walker, 2002.

Ignis is a picture book about a dragon who can't produce fire, so goes on a journey to learn how. It was one of the first books I ever read, and is beautifully illustrated besides, so it remains near and dear to my heart.

Andersen, Hans Christian, et al. *The Golden Book of Fairy Tales*. Golden Books Pub., 1999.

The Golden Book of Fairy Tales was the main book my mother would read to me and my sisters from. Our copy belonged to my grandmother before my mother, and is very old and well loved.

Chainani, Soman, and Iacopo Bruno. *The School for Good and Evil*. Harper, 2014.

The School for Good and Evil is a story about a very nice girl and a very mean girl who get taken to a school where people are trained for traditional fairy tale roles (ex. witch, princess) in two adjacent buildings for good and evil. Unexpectedly, the nice girl goes to the school for evil and the mean girl goes to the school for good. They try to manage this

situation as it becomes increasingly clear that this placement was no mistake. I read this book first in the town library in middle school, then became so excited by it that I bought my own copy, as well as several of the sequels, though the first is still my favorite.

Lackey, Mercedes. *The Sleeping Beauty*. Luna Books, 2010.

This book was part of a series called The Five Hundred Kingdoms. Each book was unconnected, but took place in the same world—one where a supernatural force called “the Tradition” forced people into fairy tale roles, no matter how poorly they fit. For instance, a person might become a “Cinderella”, but their assigned prince is a toddler when their story takes place. The characters in these books have to fight against these roles by tricking the Tradition into different stories, or into alternate endings. This book is about a character forced into the Sleeping Beauty story. This series and author are a favorite of my parents, and I received my copy of this book from them.

Hines, Jim C. *The Stepsister Scheme*. DAW Books, 2009.

This book is a continuation of the Cinderella story in which Cinderella’s stepsisters kidnap the prince and Cinderella has to rescue him. She is assisted by several other fairy tale protagonists, such as Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, somewhat reimaged. This book was a Christmas gift from my grandmother in 2015.

Levine, Gail Carson. *Ella Enchanted*. Harper Collins, 1998.

Ella Enchanted is the story of a girl who receives a ‘blessing’ from a fairy at her birth, but the blessing is to be completely obedient, a blessing which backfires when Ella grows up and is unable to physically deny any demand (when told to hold her tongue, Ella will literally do so). The story is, more or less, a reimaged Cinderella story. I first watched

this movie as a child, and in middle school, when I was looking for the book version of anything and everything, I bought this book.

Steer, Dugald A. *Dragonology: Tracking and Taming Dragons*. Candlewick Press, 2003.

This book is an interactive mock guide to dragon information, framed as though written in a world where dragons are real. It includes a paper dragon that can be put together into a 3D figure. I received it as a birthday present in 2008.

Buckley, Michael. *The Sisters Grimm: The Fairy Tale Detectives*. Amulet Books, 2005.

This series follows the lives of Sabrina and Daphne Grimm, descendants of the famous brothers, as they move to Ferryport Landing to live with their grandmother after their parent's mysterious disappearance. Once there, they discover famous fairy tale characters such as Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood, and Robin Goodfellow are real and live in the town, trapped by an ancient spell. This was another series I shared with my sisters, and one of the first full length novels I ever finished.

Mull, Brandon. *Fablehaven*. Shadow Mountain, 2006.

In this series, two siblings stay with their grandfather while their parents go on vacation and discover their grandfather is the caretaker of Fablehaven, a refuge for fairy tale creatures, such as fairies or trolls. This was another series I read in middle school in the town library and absolutely fell in love with.

Lo, Malinda. *Ash*. Elliot, 2010.

Ash is another story about the Fey, specifically focusing a lot on the Hunt, an event where the Fey go out at night and bring humans back to the Fey realm. An eerie book, *Ash* is also

a loose adaptation of Cinderella, as she lives with her stepmother after her father's death, and reads fairy tales by the light of the fire embers, leaving her covered in ash. This was a book my mother would read to my sisters and I, and my copy was actually originally hers.

Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 1595.

I picked up a pocket copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Stratford-Upon-Avon in 2011 when visiting with my family. The story features many mainstays in stories of the Fey—the summer court, Queen Titania, King Oberon, and of course, Robin Goodfellow.

Shulman, Polly. *The Grimm Legacy*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2010.

This book is set in modern times and follows a girl working at a library that handles items imbued with the magic of fairy tales, like seven league boots. In all honesty, this particular book I borrowed from a friend in 2014 and forgot to ever return.

Riley, James. *Half Upon a Time*. Aladdin, 2011.

This story follows Jack, of Jack and the Beanstalk, after a modern-day girl named May falls from the sky, apparently being chased by a huntsman. This series incorporates many classic fairy tales, with some self-awareness in the form of May. I bought this book in 2015, mostly because I was craving the familiar elements of a fairy tale in a new context.

Hale, Shannon. *The Storybook of Legends*. Little, Brown and Company, 2013.

This story follows the descendants of classic characters like Snow White or the Evil Queen, going to a specialized school. In this world, the students must sign a book agreeing

to follow their assigned roles in their stories. This was yet another book I first read in the town library, then decided to buy for myself.

Anderson, Hans Christian. *Anderson's Fairy Tales*. Wilco Publishing House, 2006.

This collection of fairy tales covers many classic stories, and was a source of bedtime stories when I was young. I inherited my copy from my parents.

Grimm, Jacob, et al. *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. Collector's Library, 2004.

This was another collection of classic stories that my parents read to me and my sisters growing up, and I am now in possession of their copy of the book.

Annotated Wish List

Due to the nature of this collection being “books I read and enjoyed on the topic throughout my life”, this wish list consists mostly of books I read but do not currently own a physical copy of.

Levine, Gail Carson. *Fairest*. Harper, 2012.

This book follows Aza, a born singer, living in the royal castle and interacting with the royal family. This book contains many fairy tale elements, such as orcs, dwarves, and magic mirrors, with unique twists on them—for instance, the orcs have literally hypnotic singing voices, like selkies, and the dwarves can see more colors than the human eye. I first listened to this story as an audiobook, but never owned my own copy.

Kagawa, Julie. *The Iron King*. Harlequin Teen, 2010.

This series addresses the idea of modern Fey, born of technology. Although traditional Fey cannot touch iron, the Iron Fey are often made of it, and represent a huge threat to the existing Fey realms. These books follow Megan Chase, a half-Fey who can touch iron, as she tries to calm the tides of war between the old and new. I read this series on the Kindle along with my mother, and it incorporated many familiar elements that I enjoyed.

McKinley, Robin. *Spindle's End*. Corgi Children's, 2011.

This is an adaptation of Sleeping Beauty wherein the titular character is hidden in a small town as a child and grows up as a normal girl instead of hidden away, never knowing of

her heritage, and her eventual plan to escape her curse. I read this book on the Kindle, but never owned a physical copy.

Tomlinson, Heather. *Toads and Diamonds*. Henry Holt, 2010.

This book is an extension of the story in which two daughters are separately sent to fetch water. The first, a kind girl, gives water to the old woman at the well, and is blessed with diamonds falling from her lips when she speaks. The second, a rude girl, refuses the woman, and is cursed with toads and snakes falling from her lips. This story talks of how the first girl is attacked for her riches, while the second girl's snakes help stop a plague. It is an interesting inversion of a classic story, one which I read at the town library, but never got my own copy of.

Lang, Andrew. *Yellow Fairy Book*. Racehorse Pub, 2019.

This book has more classic stories, and I have listened to many of them in audiobook form, but would love to own the actual book.

Hale, Shannon, et al. *Rapunzel's Revenge*. Bloomsbury, 2008.

This is a comic in which Rapunzel escapes her tower on her own and teams up to defeat the witch using her hair as a weapon. It inverts many elements of the classic story, and is yet another book I read at the library but did not buy.

Melancon, Isabelle, and Megan Lavey-Heaton. *Namesake*. 2012.

Namesake is a story in which many characters are sent into other worlds to relive familiar stories—for instance, there are many Dorothies who go through Oz and do mostly the same things as the original story. I read a version of this comic online, and would love a print copy.

McGuire, Seanan. *Every Heart a Doorway*. Tom Doherty Associates, 2016.

This book surrounds a boarding home for people who went to other worlds, such as Alice or Dorothy, but came back to Earth and can't adjust. It dissects many classic tropes and stories through its original characters. I read a version of this on the Kindle.

Funke, Cornelia. *Igraine the Brave*. The Chicken House, 2007.

Igraine the Brave is a story about a little girl who wants to be a knight, but is put to the test when her home is put under siege and her mage parents are accidentally turned into pigs. I listened to this story endlessly as an audiobook when I was little.

Funke, Cornelia, and Anthea Bell. *Dragon Rider*. Chicken House/Scholastic Inc, 2004.

Dragon Rider is the story of a dragon, a boy, and a brownie—a classic folk tale creature, similar to a gnome—as they attempt to find a safe home for the dragons. Unsurprisingly, this was another book I read at the library but didn't buy.