

## **Reading YA: 7 Fairy Tale Books You Need To Read Now**

Fairy tale literature, once mostly stock standard retellings of The Brothers Grimm and Charles Perrault, is moving on. Old fairy tales are still being retold (*Book of a Thousand Days*), but new ones are constantly being written, too (*Once Upon a Marigold*). Of course, that leaves dedicated fairy tale readers like me in a bit of bind--there's so much to read that sometimes the best books get lost in the bookshelf shuffle. Here's a list of some of the great fairy tale lit you may have missed. Some titles listed are younger than a YA audience, but fun reads all the same. (Have something to add to the list? Email me, or leave a note in the comments!)

### **1. BOOK OF A THOUSAND DAYS, Shannon Hale**

Hale (*River Secrets*) delivers another winning fantasy, this time inventively fleshing out the obscure Grimm tale, *Maid Maleen*, through the expressive and earthy voice of Dashti, maid to Lady Saren. A plucky and resourceful orphan, Dashti comes from a nomad tribe in a place resembling the Asian Steppes, and is brought to the Lady's house in the midst of a crisis. Lady Saren, having refused to marry the powerful but loathsome Lord her father has chosen, faces seven years' imprisonment in an unlit tower. Initially, Dashti believes her worth is tied to her ability to care for her "tower-addled" lady until she can join Khan Tegus, to whom she is secretly betrothed. When the gentle Tegus comes to the tower, Dashti must step in for her traumatized lady, speaking to him as Saren through the one tiny metal door. Hale exploits the diary form to convey Dashti's perspective; despite her self-effacing declaration that "I draw this from memory so it won't be right," the entries reflect her genuinely spirited inner life. The tension between her unstinting loyalty and patience and burgeoning realization of her own strength and feelings for Tegus feels especially authentic. Readers will be riveted as Dashti and Saren escape and flee to the Khan's realm where, through a series of deceptions, contrivances and a riotously triumphant climax, the tale spins out to a thoroughly satisfying ending.--PW

### **2. BEAUTY: A RETELLING OF THE STORY OF BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, Robin McKinley**

Beauty has never liked her nickname. She is thin and awkward; it is her two sisters who are the beautiful ones. But what she lacks in looks, she can perhaps make up for in courage. When her father comes home with the tale of an enchanted castle in the forest and the terrible promise he had to make to the Beast who lives there, Beauty knows she must go to the castle, a prisoner of her own free will. Her father protests that he will not let her go, but she answers,

"Cannot a Beast be tamed?" Robin McKinley's beloved telling illuminates the unusual love story of a most unlikely couple: Beauty and the Beast.--B&N

### 3. FAIREST, Gail Carson Levine

Levine's enchanting, intelligent fairy tale, set in a kingdom devoted to singing, lends itself well to full-cast production; this one features 32 voices. Composer Todd Hobin has set Levine's lyrics to music; Naughton does a terrific job as maid Aza, the narrator, a demanding role that requires near-operatic talents. Homely Aza, abandoned at birth, not only sings like a lark, she can throw her voice and mimic others, a skill she calls illusing. In a chance meeting, the treacherous new queen, whose abrasive voice has a Valley Girl-esque quality, discovers Aza's talent and blackmails the girl into secretly providing her voice for all of the queen's public singing.

Additional background music augments the many perilous predicaments Aza finds herself in, as well as providing a backdrop to the fairy-tale romance that develops between her and Prince Ijori. --PW

### 4. THE STINKY CHEESEMAN, AND OTHER FAIRLY STUPID TALES, Jon Scieszka, Lane Smith

Scieszka and Smith, the daring duo responsible for revealing The True Story of the Three Little Pigs (Viking, 1989), return here with nine new exposes, all narrated by the ubiquitous Jack (of Beanstalk fame). Unlike the detailed retelling of the pigs' tale, most of these stories are shortened, one-joke versions that often trade their traditional morals for hilarity. "The Stinky Cheese Man" is an odoriferous cousin to the gingerbread boy; when he runs away, nobody wants to run after him. "The Other Frog Prince" wheedles a kiss only to reveal that he is just a tricky frog (as the princess wipes the frog slime off her lips); the Little Red Hen wanders frantically in and out of the book squawking about her wheat, her bread, her story, until she is finally (and permanently) squelched by Jack's giant. The broad satire extends even to book design, with a blurb that proclaims "NEW! IMPROVED! FUNNY! GOOD! BUY! NOW!" and a skewed table of contents crashing down on Chicken Licken and company several pages after they proclaim that the sky is falling. The illustrations are similar in style and mood to those in the earlier book, with the addition of more abstraction plus collage in some areas. The typeface, text size, and placement varies to become a vital part of the illustrations for some of the tales. Clearly, it is necessary to be familiar with the original folktales to understand the humor of these versions.

Those in the know will laugh out loud. --Susan L. Rogers, Chestnut Hill Academy, PA for School Library Journal

## 5. TITHE, Holly Black

Kaye is 16 when she finally learns why she's such a strange young woman: she's a changeling pixie under a spell. A move home to the New Jersey shore brings her back in touch with her childhood friends, the solitary fey, who want to end their servitude to the higher-born faeries by foiling the sacrifice of human blood known as the Tithe. Kaye offers to masquerade as a human for the Tithe and is swept into a complicated net of politics and treason between two rival courts of faeries. Grim scenes from Kaye's life in the human world pile up at the beginning of the story in what initially seems a gratuitous manner (her mother is almost stabbed by her current boyfriend, Kaye steals for thrills, a new acquaintance tries to rape her), but the details all have explanations later on in the equally grim world of the faeries. The plot moves quickly, and the secondary characters are appealing, if not always entirely believable. Occasional awkward changes in point of view won't discourage readers who enjoy dark, edgy fantasy. However, the excessive use of obscenities adds little to character development. The greatest strength of the story lies in the settings, particularly the descriptions of the debased Unseelie Court. -Beth Wright, Fletcher Free Library, Burlington, VT for School Library Journal

## 6. ONCE UPON A MARIGOLD, Jean Ferris

In a gratifying fantasy that contains elements of classic fairy tales, Ferris (*Love Among the Walnuts*) breathes new life into archetypal characters by adding unexpected and often humorous dimensions to their personalities. The protagonist, Christian, has been raised in the forest by a troll named Edric. As he nears manhood, Christian decides it is time to see the world-or at least the section across the river, where the lovely Princess Marigold resides. Having spent many hours gazing at Marigold through a telescope and corresponding with her by "p-mail" (letters sent by carrier pigeon), he has already felt the sting of Cupid's arrow by the time he lands a job in court. Marigold readily returns his affections, but unfortunately, she is about to become betrothed to Sir Magnus. Meanwhile, Marigold's evil mother, Queen Olympia, is plotting to murder both Marigold and her kindly, doting father, King Swithbert. Readers swept into the lighthearted spirit of this novel will likely not be bothered by the predictability of outcomes. As in fairy tales of old, jabs are made at social values and norms, and concepts of nobility and ignobility are painted in very broad strokes. Nonetheless, heroes and heroines emerge as convincing, well-rounded characters embodying flaws as well as virtues. Their foibles-Edric's tendency to mix up adages, Christian's stubborn streak and Marigold's penchant for "awful" jokes-make the good guys all the more endearing.--PW

## 7. HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE, Dianna Wynne Jones

Sophie Hatter reads a great deal and soon realizes that as the eldest of three daughters she is doomed to an uninteresting future. She resigns herself to making a living as a hatter and helping her younger sisters prepare to make their fortunes. But adventure seeks her out in the shop where she sits alone, dreaming over her hats. The wicked Witch of the Waste, angered by "competition" in the area, turns her into a old woman, so she seeks refuge inside the strange moving castle of the wizard Howl. Howl, advertised by his apprentice as an eater of souls, lives a mad, frantic life trying to escape the curse the witch has placed on him, find the perfect girl of his dreams and end the contract he and his fire demon have entered. Sophie, against her best instincts and at first unaware of her own powers, falls in love. So goes this intricate, humorous and puzzling tale of fantasy and adventure which should both challenge and involve readers. Jones has created an engaging set of characters and found a new use for many of the appurtenances of fairy talesseven league boots and invisible cloaks, among others. At times, the action becomes so complex that readers may have to go back to see what actually happened, and at the end so many loose ends have to be tied up at once that it's dizzying. Yet Jones' inventiveness never fails, and her conclusion is infinitely satisfying. Sara Miller, White Plains Public Library, N.Y. for School Library Journal