

ANDREW LANG

“Ever since I could read, and long before I ever dreamed that fairytales might be a matter of curious discussion, those tales have been my delight. I heard them told by other children as a child, I even rescued one or two versions which seem to have died out of oral tradition in Lowland Scots; I confess that I still have a child-like love of a fairy-story for its own sake; and I have done my best to circulate Fairy Books among children.”

Andrew Lang was the J.K. Rowling of his time. Like modern children waiting for each new Harry Potter book, English and Scottish children looked forward to a new colored fairy book every few years.

Although Lang lived in Scotland, where there are many lonely villages and elderly villagers, he did not collect folktales directly from “the people.” Still, he is an important folklorist. He is famous for his collecting fairytales from *other* collectors and putting them together in a series of “fairy books” first published in 1889.

At that time English fairytale collections were rare. Lang fought against people who didn’t like the fairytales. Adult critics thought the stories were not serious enough for grown-up readers, and teachers thought the traditional tales were too brutal and scary for kids.

Folklorists of his day also had strong opinions about folktales. The Folklorist Society was formed when Lang was writing his books. They even argued with him! For example, many folklorists believed fairytales originated in India long, long ago. Their research about folktales was focused on trying to prove that theory. Lang disagreed and wrote his opinion in an introduction to *Cinderella*:

“If India be the center, why have we so few Indian examples? Why in lands near India is the tale so corrupted for the type, which we have chosen. How do we know that the tale was not carried to India? ”

Like many fairytale writers, Lang thought the purpose of fairytales was to amuse children and to teach them a moral lesson. (He lived during the Victorian era, which was a time when teaching manners was very important.) As a result, he usually chose tales where bad behavior was punished and good behavior was rewarded.

Because he mainly chose tales that showed his beliefs, the females in his stories were usually gentle and well-behaved. And since his books were

so popular, those female heroes became the most famous. Many girls in older fairytales were wilder and braver. They just weren't made famous.

ANDREW LANG'S FAIRY BOOKS

- 3.1 *Blue Fairy Book* (1889)
- 3.2 *Red Fairy Book* (1890)
- 3.3 *Green Fairy Book* (1892)
- 3.4 *Yellow Fairy Book* (1894)
- 3.5 *Pink Fairy Book* (1897)
- 3.6 *Grey Fairy Book* (1900)
- 3.7 *Violet Fairy Book* (1901)
- 3.8 *Crimson Fairy Book* (1903)
- 3.9 *Brown Fairy Book* (1904)
- 3.10 *Orange Fairy Book* (1906)
- 3.11 *Olive Fairy Book* (1907)
- 3.12 *Lilac Fairy Book* (1910)

ANDREW LANG'S Introduction to the *Green Fairy Book*

To The Friendly Reader:

This is the third, and probably the last, of the Fairy Books of many colors. First there was the *Blue Fairy Book*; then, children, you asked for more, and we made up the *Red Fairy Book*; and, when you wanted more still, the *Green Fairy Book* was put together. The stories in all the books are borrowed from many countries; some are French, some German, some Russian, some Italian, some Scottish, some English, one Chinese. However much these nations differ about trifles, they all agree in liking fairy tales. The reason, no doubt, is that men were much like children in their minds long ago, long, long ago, and so before they took to writing newspapers, and sermons, and novels, and long poems, they told each other stories, such as you read in the fairy books. They believed that witches could turn people into beasts, that beasts could speak, that magic rings could make their owners invisible, and all the other wonders in the stories.

Then, as the world became grown-up, the fairytales which were not written down would have been quite forgotten but that the old grannies remembered them, and told them to the little grandchildren: and when they, in their turn, became grannies, they remembered them, and told them also. In this way these tales are older than reading and writing, far older than printing. The oldest fairy tales ever written down were written down in Egypt, about Joseph's time, nearly three thousand five hundred years ago.

Other fairy stories Homer knew, in Greece, nearly three thousand years ago, and he made them all up into a poem, *The Odyssey*, which I hope you will read some day. Here you will find the witch who turns men into swine, and the man who bores out the big foolish giant's eye, and the cap of darkness, and the shoes of swiftness, that were worn later by Jack the Giant-Killer. These fairytales are the oldest stories in the world, and as they were first made by men who were childlike for their own amusement, so they amuse children still, and also grown-up people who have not forgotten how they once were children.

Some of the stories were made, no doubt, not only to amuse, but to teach goodness. You see, in the tales, how the boy who is kind to beasts, and polite, and generous, and brave, always comes best through his trials, and no doubt these tales were meant to make their hearers kind, unselfish, courteous, and courageous. This is the moral of them. But, after all, we think more as we read them of the diversion than of the lesson. There are grown-up people now who say that the stories are not good for children, because they are not true, because there are no witches, nor talking beasts, and because people are killed in them, especially wicked giants. But probably you who read the tales know very well how much is true and how much is only make-believe, and I never yet heard of a child who killed a very tall man merely because Jack killed the giants, or who was unkind to his stepmother, if he had one, because, in fairytales, the stepmother is often disagreeable. If there are frightful monsters in fairytales, they do not frighten you now, because that kind of monster is no longer going about the world, whatever he may have done long, long ago. He has been turned into stone, and you may see his remains in museums. Therefore, I am not afraid that you will be afraid of the magicians and dragons; besides, you see that a really brave boy or girl was always their master, even in the height of their power.

If we have a book for you next year, it shall not be a fairybook. What it is to be is a secret, but we hope that it will not be dull. So good-bye, and when you have read a fairy book, lend it to other children who have none, or tell them the stories in your own way, which is a very pleasant mode of passing the time.

CHARLES PERRAULT

Mother Goose is not a goose at all. Mother Goose isn't even a mother. Mother Goose is actually a man! Charles Perrault is the writer of *Tales of Olden Times, or Mother Goose Tales* (1697). People sometimes call him the creator of the modern fairy tale, because his versions of some fairytales are so popular.

His most popular tale is "Cinderella," although older variants exist. Perrault's Cinderella does not pick lentils out of the fireplace. There is no tree or ghost of her mother. The step-sisters do not cut off their toes and heels. Instead Perrault adds a magical pumpkin coach and rat coachmen. He adds a fairy godmother and a glass slipper. In the end, Perrault's kind Cinderella forgives her selfish sisters. It's no wonder that Walt Disney based his movie on this version. The Disney movie influenced the way most people now know the tale.

Perrault thought folktales should have a moral ending. He wanted to warn children against doing bad or thoughtless things. He wanted to children to read his stories and learn a lesson about how to behave. For example, Perrault's Little Red Riding Hood gets eaten by the wolf, and that is the end of the story. No huntsman comes to save her. He ends the story with a moral: "Children, especially attractive, well-bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf."

Like the *Harry Potter* books, Perrault's stories were very popular. They became some of the most translated works of French literature. They have remained popular for centuries. He wrote that his stories would be "modern fables," and thought that one day his stories would be as important as myths and legends. He was right.

THE BROTHERS GRIMM

"Our first aim in collecting these stories has been exactness and truth. We have added nothing of our own, have embellished no incident or feature of the story, but have given its substance just as we ourselves received it." (from preface to *Household Tales*, by the Brothers Grimm)

Do you want a nice story with a happy ending? Do not turn to the real tales from the Brothers Grimm. They did not collect tales for little children. They were two patriotic brothers who gathered German folktales. They wanted other scholars to read their work

When children read their tales and loved them, the brothers started to change details. In later books, the stories became sweeter, less violent, and more moral. They took out the things they thought would be bad for children to hear. Once the stories got translated to other languages, the stories were very different from the originals.

Some folklorists accuse the brother of rewriting tales in their own words. They believed the Grimms should have reported exactly what the original storytellers said, because that's what they claimed. They said their stories came from the mouths of peasants, when really they changed some details.

Still, many of the today's most popular fairy tales come from the Grimms: *The Frog King*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *The Bremen Town Musicians*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Rapunzel*. They also collected tales similar to those recorded by Charles Perrault, especially *Aschenputtel* (*Cinderella*) and *Briar Rose* (*Sleeping Beauty*).