

Romano, Lilia E. *Italian Fairy Tales*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1999. 16.95 hc. 134 pp.

Italian Fairy Tales, called a Wonder Book, was originally published before 1920, and it represents a sampling of Italian Folklore. This "original" collection of eleven stories filled with fairy magic, goblins, beautiful maidens, brave youths, giants, and exquisite Italian names ("Gennareillo," "Giovannion," "Luciella," "Filandoro," and "Cecella") is as refreshing as the perfume of orange groves and myrtle trees that figuratively waft through its pages. Maria Tatar remarked that fairy tales "circulate in multiple versions, reconfigured by each telling to form kaleidoscopic variations with distinctly different effects" (ix).¹ As I read these stories, I found sparkling twists and gentle turns of familiar threads with "distinctly different effects."

The first story, "The Quest of the Bird with the Golden Tail," begins with a prince being turned into a pig because his mother, a queen, laughed at a lame child. He learned in a dream that his only hope would be to be loved by a beautiful girl who would marry him. Of course, this is familiar, but there is more. He finds the girl, and with a twist on Psyche and Eros, the groom turns into a beautiful young man at night when he is with her, and then appears as a pig to others during the day. The queen is exceedingly curious about her pig-son's appeal to his beautiful bride, and finally intrudes on his privacy. This results in his turning into a bird (with a golden tail), and it begins the searching quest for him by his beautiful bride who must wear medieval-like iron shoes (another familiar motif). She is given three nuts, a chestnut, walnut, and peanut, from three kind ogresses she meets on her journey, and she is told to "Open when you are in need." The story becomes more complicated but ultimately has a happy ending. Though it is "original", it is reconfigured from other tales.

The text is profusely illustrated with pen and ink drawings and reproductions of paintings. The illustrations, by Howard Davie, are reminiscent of H.J. Ford, FP Jacomb Hood, and Lancelot Speed, whose works appear in Andrew Lang's *Fairy Book Series*. The pictures provide an education in material lore: furniture, clothing, architecture, foods, and even a parade celebration are pictured with revealing detail. The second story, "Malconseil," is illustrated with a gestural line drawing of Fantina, a water-temptress, that has so much energy one can almost feel the wet chill.

"The Legend of the White Chamois," about a mountain animal called the Slarorog, takes the reader to the Italian Alps: "up to the sky in a mass of abrupt peaks and deep precipices. . . slopes where only the hardy rhododendron and chilly edelweiss grow. . ." (Romano, 30). There, on Monte Ricco, spirits of the mountain guard a treasure cove, and there the heroic youth risks everything. "Little Goat-Face" includes spinning flax, "Luciella" has a Cinderella theme and includes another Psyche and Eros-like scene: "The lantern threw out a drop a burning oil which fell on the youth man's shoulder, and, awakening with a start. . . "Oh why have you done this?" He cried. . .and at that moment everything vanished from sight." (58). "Viola," the sixth story, has an ogre, a garden, three sisters (the older two surpassed in beauty by the youngest), a prince, and a thimble. It is a good story and ends, like many of the stories, with a verse:

They lived in bliss till a hundred years old,
And so my story is said and told. (70)

"The Child of the Myrtle Tree" is a story of a mother who had seven sons. They pined for a daughter and sister. Soon, the family bargained with an old woman for a little girl, and the tale continues. The boys become prisoners of an ogre, and the little girl is born out a myrtle tree. It is a delightful story enriched by helpful animals. "Filadoro," the next story, has another very familiar element: "There was no staircase in the house, and Filadoro had to put down her hair for her mother to get up and down" (92). "The Fairy Kittens" and "The Three Pomegranates" have princes, beautiful maiden, and excellent descriptive passages. The last story "Little Good-for-Nothing" tells the story of Rosella, and has reminders of *Rumpelstiltskin* because of secret and mysterious naming.

The stories are captivating and engaging. For one not familiar with European folk tales, the stories would be enjoyable and entertaining. For a reader familiar with Western lore and tales, the stories provide creative new twists and reconfigurations of familiar themes. These are stories of romance, mischief, and adventure suitable for all ages.

Part of the enjoyment in these tales comes from the descriptive, impressionistic prose: "an almost invisible path to a beautiful spot where the poplars, the oaks, the chestnut trees, and the beeches joined overhead their marvelous foliage" (72), or "thousands and thousands

of skeins of the softest silk and finest thread beautifully tied together with lovely pale pink ribbons" (127). Often, according to Max Luthi², descriptive prose is kept to a minimum in fairy tales. He stated: "This absence of all desire to describe unessential details gives the European fairy tale its clarity and precision." (50). But in these Italian gems, the author's descriptive imagination was in full force. The tales are beautiful, and they are written to be read silently or aloud and enjoyed.

JACQUELINE THURSBY

Livo, Norma J. and George Livo. *The Enchanted Wood and Other Tales from Finland*. Englewood, Co.: Libraries Unlimited, 1999. 188pp. \$27.50

Some Finlanders will tell you that hidden deep in the waters and forests of their rugged country are trolls or *peikkos*, human-like creatures who live in clans or families. The *peikkos* also inhabit the craggy mountains and rolling hills. Some are noisy and have tails (*Hiisi*), some are giants (*jattilainen*), some are dwarfs (*kaapio*), and still others (*keiju* fairies) are beautiful females who can entice beautiful but unsuspecting men. Woven into a collection of nineteen folktales, these characters assume tasks and mischiefs that make it difficult (and maybe unnecessary) for some believers to separate myth from reality.

To help charm and engage the rest of us with this ancient and complex culture, the Livos have put together a carefully researched and accessible text that documents and preserves the folk literature and culture of Finland. From the Finnish National Anthem in the beginning of the book, to *Part IV* which includes a helpful reference section, a bibliography, and an index, the book is informative, lucid, and engaging. Part I describes the folklife of the Finns, and is contextualized by the creation myth from the Finnish national epic, *Kalevala*. The land and climate are described, and the complex early history is carefully explained. The text systematically explains the adverse climatic conditions and how the Finns have occasionally used those conditions to their advantage. The Introduction in Part I invites the reader into a mysterious world. "Come with us to the north woods," it says, "and meet the people with *Sisu*" (5) (*Sisu* represents guts, tenacity, and/or perseverance.)