

Yolen, Jane. *Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie and Folklore in the Literature of Childhood*. 2nd edition. Little Rock: August House, 2000. 128p. paper \$11.95.

It was with great delight and the feeling of sitting down with a trusted old friend that I read this second edition. The original essays, to which I have turned to again and again in the past nineteen years, were as fresh and as relevant as they were on my first reading. The only change I noticed was a reference to Xena and Hercules.

There is a magic in Yolen's writing style, allowing the reader to become a listener to her story about story. In her opening essay, "How Basic is Shazam" she talks of the importance of introducing mythology to children:

These four functions of myth and folklore should establish the listening to and learning of the old tales as being among the most basic elements of education: creating a landscape of allusion, enabling us to understand our own and other cultures from the inside out, providing an adaptable tool of therapy, and stating in symbolic or metaphoric terms the abstract truths of our common human experience.

In those first essays, Yolen explains the ability stories have to empower and to transform lives, how they provide a sense of good and evil, and link us not only to our past but to our future. She explores the roles of teller and listener, the spirit of "once upon a time," and the need for children to receive not only the gift of words, but also the capacity to wonder. She talks about the need for "tough magic" - the understanding that to receive, one has to give, and the importance of children hearing stories and reading books that confront the evils, fantasy, and real, and stand up to them.

When one came to the end of the first edition, there was a feeling of completeness, but Yolen has added Part Four, called Touchtones, which contains six new essays. Here she, among other things, writes about story when censorship and morality come calling. "Story in Ten Fits" tells, with great humor, what story is not, and thus explains what

story is. In "Touchstones" Yolen chooses five children's books which she considers the touchstones of fantasy writing. "Fabling to the Near Night" uses seven books to explore prejudices or "cultural baggage" with a plea that we be aware of both the "hidden and open messages" in every story.

Yolen tackles three popular folktales in "Killing the Other" and points out the need to read below the surface and to examine the layers of story to find the true richness. With "An Experiential Act" she uses time-travel books and her writing of *The Devil's Arithmetic* to show how the past can be interwoven with the present and the future—a living and continuous process of which they are a part.

In the final essay, she reflects on how, and maybe why, we live our lives through metaphor, and this reader truly felt that she had touched magic and had the power to pass it on. A selective bibliography of books and articles that have been "very special, helpful stimulating companions and resources" follow the essays.

Touch Magic is all of the above and more; it is a book that can, and should, be read again and again. Jane Yolen writes "A book remains for the life of its paper and print and thus its imprint persists on the lives of its hundreds, even thousands of readers." For children everywhere, my hope is that this imprint will persist on the lives of millions.

MERLA HARRIS, storyteller

1 Tatar, Maria, ed. *The Classic Fairy Tales: Texts, Criticism*. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.

2 Luthi, Max. *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976.

3 Wilson, William A. "Sibeliu, the Kalevala and Karelianism." In *The Sibelius Companion*. Edited by Glenda Dawn Goss. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996, 43-60.

4 Wilson, 48.

5 *Libraries Unlimited: Books & Resources for Librarians & Media Specialists*.