A de Grummond Primer

Highlights of the Children's Literature Collection

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Fables, short pithy stories meant to instruct readers in worldly wisdom, existed as exemplary literature for adults and children centuries before the genre became the world’s first dedicated literature for children. Fairy tales, longer and more detailed stories, are usually meant to entertain and use magic to help heroes or heroines marry royalty, leave poverty behind, enjoy wealth and privilege, and live happily ever after. When fairy tales were first published in the 1550s, they were aimed at adult readers. Only in the 1700s did published fairy tales begin to be prepared specifically for child readers.

Fables in the modern world have a simple structure. Designed to exemplify a truth about human behavior (such as jealousy or acquisitiveness) or history (such as the habitual emergence of strong arbitrary political leaders), fables are closely related to proverbs. Their minimalist plots have a beginning, such as “There was once a dog in a manger,” and proceed quickly to a conclusion, such as “Even though the dog couldn’t eat the hay himself, he wouldn’t let the cows near it” (the beginning and ending of one of Aesop’s fables, “The Dog in the Manger,” which illustrates selfishness). Largely dispensing with plot development, fables use animal characters to enact what is presented as natural facts of human behavior.
As “exemplary stories,” fables were prominent for over two thousand years. Those associated with Aesop, widely regarded as the genre’s founder, are believed to date from the sixth or early fifth century BCE. No single fable can be directly attached to Aesop as author, yet his name is associated with an enormous body of literature, such as “The Fox and the Grapes.” In this tale, a fox lusts after luscious grapes hanging just out of reach, but when he fails to reach them, he dismisses them as worthless. Fables were collected or composed by many in the ancient world, subsequently published in Latin and disseminated throughout Europe in the early and high middle ages.

A collection of equally lasting significance was the Indian *Panchatantra*. Translated from Sanskrit first into Persian, and in the seventh century CE from Persian into Arabic, the *Panchatantra* served as a source for re-workings that spread through the Muslim and Christian communities of Asia and Africa, eventually reaching Muslim Spain and from there across Europe as a whole. Tales in the *Panchatantra* and in *Kalila and Dimna*, a derivative Arabic collection, were organized into groups of related stories that were told within a framing tale about telling stories to achieve a goal, such as educating a prince or postponing an execution. Although individual fables remained both brief and simple, the overall frame tale within which they were presented was intriguing and sophisticated. Of all the *Panchatantra* stories, the best known perhaps concerns a frog who accepts a crocodile’s invitation to carry him across a snake-infested river, with predictable results: the crocodile eats him during the crossing.

In the ancient world, fables were considered literature for adults, although the *Panchatantra* presented its fables as a painless form of educating a previously ineducable young prince. The early Indian collection prefigured the genre’s entry into children’s literature, where it remains, now intended largely for the very young. The de Grummond Collection’s earliest set of fables is a 1530 edition of Aesop in Greek and Latin, while a contemporary collection of animal fables, *Feathers and Tails* (1992), draws from both Aesop and the *Panchatantra*.

Fairy tales emerged as popular stories in 1550s Venice, where they began to compete with, and eventually to displace, medieval romances among humble readers. Those had often ended with everlasting happiness.
achieved only after death or with renunciation of earthly bliss. In stark contrast, fairy tales offered happy endings here on earth. Giovan Francesco Straparola (c. 1485–c. 1557) crafted this newly secular happy ending in several tales in his Le Piacevoli Notti (1551, 1553; The Pleasant Nights). More significantly, he added poor girls and boys as possible heroes and heroines to the traditional roster of royal characters. In establishing the fairy tale genre, Straparola created the original plot for “Puss in Boots” in his “Costantino Fortunato.” When his mother dies, Costantino, the youngest of three poor brothers, inherits only a cat. She, however, has magic powers (Straparola describes her as fatata) and soon gains the king’s friendship and then the king’s daughter for Costantino. By further cleverness she installs Costantino in a castle, where he lives happily ever after with his wife and children. Straparola also composed the first “Donkeyskin” (his “Tebaldo”), in which a princess flees her royal father’s incestuous desire for her and finds eventual happiness as queen in a foreign land.¹ The de Grummond Collection holds the first complete translation of Straparola’s tales into English, first published in London in 1894 and translated by W. G. Waters, titled The Facetious Tales of Straparola (1898).

Giambattista Basile of Naples (c. 1585–1632), a peripatetic courtier, injected a host of now-classic fairy tale motifs into his Lo Cunto de li cunti (1634–1636, The Tale of the Tales), enriching the genre with insertions from Ovid’s retellings of Greek myths, The Metamorphoses, which was still a familiar school text in Basile’s boyhood. This high classic material’s presence amid the often low humor of his tales probably drew laughter from early listeners.

Straparola’s and Basile’s books with their fairy tales circulated in Paris in the 1690s, where Charles Perrault (1628–1703) reworked Straparola’s “Costantino Fortunato” and “Tebaldo” respectively into “Le Chat botté” (“Puss in Boots”) and “Peau d’Asne” (“Donkeyskin”). In addition, Perrault reworked Basile’s “Sun, Moon, and Talia,” “The Cat Cinderella,” and “Three Fairies” into his “Belle au bois dormant” (“Beauty in the Sleeping Woods”), “Cendrillon” (“Cinderella”), and “Les Fées” (“The Fairies, or Diamonds and Toads”). He also borrowed elements from Basile’s “L’Orsa” (“The She-Bear”) for his “Donkeyskin” in his 1697 Histoires, ou Contes du temps passé (Stories, or Tales of Past Time).
Perrault’s tales were translated into English in 1729 and were subsequently edited into publications specifically for children, but they did not sell well, until they were adopted piecemeal by John Newbery nearly four decades later, and more successfully by his successors in children’s book publishing at the end of the eighteenth century. The de Grummond Collection has rich and varied holdings of Perrault’s tales, including a 1796 chapbook version of his “Sleeping Beauty” and an extensive collection of beautifully illustrated editions published by McLoughlin Brothers in New York between 1870 and 1920.

Hard on the heels of Perrault’s publication of brief fairy tales in 1697, women like Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier (1664–1734), Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy (1651–1705), and Henriette-Julie de Murat (1670–1715) published collections that also included their reworkings of tales from Straparola’s collection, but in longer and more detailed versions. Mme d’Aulnoy’s work remained widely read in printings edited (in English) specifically for different female readerships: aristocratic, merchant, and artisan—entering the world of children’s books in the 1750s. Contrary to general belief, it was the elaborate style of Mme d’Aulnoy’s lengthy and complicated fairy-land fictions that carried the day in the 1700s in English-speaking lands, rather than the now-iconic Perrault tales. The de Grummond Collection holds the first English edition of d’Aulnoy’s Tales of the Fairies, printed by John Nicholson in London in 1707. In the 1750s, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711–1780) rewrote “Beauty and the Beast” for girl readers and presented it along with Bible stories and other fairy tales in a book translated into one European language after another, becoming one of the most far-reaching and influential early children’s books.

In the Enlightenment-dominated world of early eighteenth-century English children’s books, fairy tales were slow to take hold, but the London children’s book publisher John Newbery (1713–1767) introduced them in the last years of his life. In the nineteenth century, fairy tales joined English-language children’s literature from other countries. These included fairy and folk tales by Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859) Grimm, Ludwig Bechstein (1801–1860), Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875), and the international collections translated and edited by Andrew Lang (1844–1912) (and his wife) and Joseph Jacobs (1854–1916).
The de Grummond Collection holds many of these important fairy tale collections, including one of the very first English editions of Andersen, translated by Caroline Peachey and published in 1846, as well as a first edition of Jacobs's *English Fairy Tales* from 1890.

“Fairy stories,” highly developed in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century England, differ from “fairy tales.” Beautifully illustrated with often tiny gauzy figures among garden or woodland flowers, fairy stories detail the lives and actions of “the little folk” in books for children. Some of the stories in Lang’s *Red Fairy Book* (1890) qualify as fairy stories.

Another fairy-tale-related genre emerged in the later twentieth century when a wave of rewritten traditional fairy tales for young adult readers began to appear. They remain an important component of twenty-first-century children’s literature. Jane Yolen’s young adult (YA) novel *Briar Rose* (1992), for example, retells the Sleeping Beauty story in the context of
the Holocaust, while Malinda Lo’s *Ash* (2009), a fantasy novel, retells the Cinderella story.

Folk tales differ fundamentally from fairy tales, and those differences are recognized by the way in which the Aarne-Thompson-Uther *Types of International Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* is organized: “tales of magic” are numbered from 300 to 745; folk tales are scattered through separate listings for religious tales, realistic tales, animal tales, tales of the stupid ogre, anecdotes, jokes, and formula tales. Folk tales often end unhappily, with poor boys and girls, men and women, returning to poverty at the end. In contrast, happy-ever-after endings and an association with achieving happiness by means of a wedding remain closely associated with fairy tales. Nonetheless, terminologies often confuse the issue, with some authors (inaccurately) calling all the tales in the Grimm collection “fairy tales,” while others call all of those tales, including fairy tales, “folktales.”

Scholars are still arguing about whether fairy tales originated with and were spread by illiterate country people or were first composed by skilled writers like Straparola, Basile, and their literary descendants. New in the last thirty years are book-history-based studies that utilize the (newly discovered) presence of fairy tales in nineteenth-century elementary school textbooks, as well as in cheap pamphlets, colorful posters, and widespread newspapers as evidence to demonstrate print pathways for large-scale distribution of identical tellings of a core body of fairy and folk tales. Studies of private and public reading practices in the nineteenth century add to the sense that printed fairy tales played a huge role in acquainting nineteenth-century city and country dwellers with traditional fairy tales.

Notes

1. “Donkeyskin,” widely believed to be a more ancient form of “Cinderella,” is classified as such in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther *Tale Type Index*.

2. Ingrid Tomkowiak initiated the exploration of school books as sources of fairy and folk tale knowledge for children. Ruth B. Bottigheimer and Caroline Sumpter have written about other avenues of fairy tale distribution. Fairy tale posters are ubiquitous in library and rare book holdings, especially in Germany.

3. Rudolph Schenda described and analyzed public and private readings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that acquainted city and country dwellers alike with fairy tales.
Contributors

Ann Mulloy Ashmore is an associate professor of library services at Delta State University. Her interest in the lives of the Reys began in 2000 as a collection specialist at de Grummond. She has published articles about the Reys in both scholarly journals and popular periodicals. Most recently she collaborated on Monkey Business: The Adventures of Curious George's Creators, a 2017 documentary film about H. A. and Margret Rey.

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Lorinda Cohoon is an associate professor in the Department of English at the University of Memphis, where she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in children’s literature. Her research focuses on children’s periodicals. She completed her PhD at the University of Southern Mississippi, where she made use of the rich resources of the de Grummond Collection on an almost daily basis.

Speaker and author Carol Edmonston is the niece of Syd Hoff. Since Hoff’s passing in 2004, it has been her mission to preserve his rich and diverse legacy by creating the website www.SydHoff.org, and establishing the Syd Hoff Research Fellowship Endowment at the University of Southern Mississippi.
Paige Gray approaches the study of children's and young adult literature as a means to explore questions of voice, agency, and creative expression. Her book Cub Reporters: American Children’s Literature and Journalism in the Golden Age (2019) considers the cultural and historical intersections between books for young people and newspapers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She teaches at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta.

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Megan Norcia is an associate professor at SUNY College at Brockport whose research and teaching interests focus on empire and nineteenth-century children’s literary and material culture. She has written about imperial geography in X Marks the Spot: Women Writers Map the Empire for British Children, 1790–1895 (2010) and imperialism in children’s games in The Imperial Agenda of Children’s Board Games (2019). She is happiest when up to her elbows in archives.


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As executive director, Deborah Pope has focused the work and mission of the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation on increasing diversity in children’s literature and enriching the quality of public education. In partnership with the de Grummond Children’s Literature Collection, she has extended recognition of the Ezra Jack Keats Book Award as an imprimatur of quality children’s books for a diverse audience, nationally and internationally.

Ellen Hunter Ruffin, associate professor, has been the curator of the de Grummond Children’s Literature Collection since 2006. She has chaired the Arbuthnot Lecture Committee and served on the Newbery Medal Committee, the Children’s Literature Legacy Award Committee (previously the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award), the Phoenix Picture Book Award Committee, and the Schneider Family Book Award Committee of the American Library Association.
Anita Silvey is the former editor of *Horn Book Magazine* and publisher of children’s books at Houghton Mifflin. She has published six critical volumes about children’s books, including *Children’s Books and Their Creators*, *100 Best Books for Children*, *Everything I Need to Know I Learned from a Children’s Book*, and the *Children’s Book-a-Day Almanac*. She teaches history of children’s book publishing at Simmons University.

Danielle Bishop Stoulig is currently a children’s librarian in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is a former assistant curator at the de Grummond Collection, where she was a member of the staff for eighteen years. She always said that the best part of her job at de Grummond was being able to hold in her hands the original manuscripts and artwork from children’s books. Now, being able to place the published version of these books into the hands of young readers on a daily basis makes her feel pretty special.

Roger Sutton has been editor in chief, The Horn Book, Inc., since 1996. He has an MA from the Graduate Library School, University of Chicago, and worked in public libraries through the 1980s. With Martha V. Parravano, he is the author of *A Family of Readers*, published in 2010 by Candlewick Press.

Deborah D. Taylor joined the Enoch Pratt Free Library in 1974 and recently retired from there as coordinator of school and student services. She has served on numerous book and library services committees, including the Sibert Award Committee for Outstanding Informational Books, the Printz Award Committee, and the Newbery Award Committee. She also chaired the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee. In 2015 she received the 2015 Coretta Scott King–Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement from the American Library Association.

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