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ENGL 362

### **Five Fairy Tales from the RBSC Library**

While discussing the various texts we read in class and browsing through the RBSC library catalogue, I was often struck with the notion that many of these stories were ones that I wish I had personally been able to own or read while growing up. I imagine that my childhood self would have loved to indulge herself in many of the fantastical tales we have since been introduced to.

The first title I was immediately drawn to in the RBSC catalogue was Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes*. Like many other children, I had an affinity for colourful Greek myths and their respective gods and goddesses, who were divine and powerful yet often imperfect, raucous, and petty. *The Heroes*, aptly named, focuses more on the human warriors such as Perseus and Theseus, who battled monsters and overcame various trials and challenges. However, my interest in this particular book mostly stemmed from the inclusion of Perseus's battle against the Gorgon, Medusa. Depictions of the "monstrous" female figure have consistently garnered my interest, and the tragedy of Medusa was no exception. One rendition of her origins describes Medusa as a beautiful maiden who was raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple, and then cursed by an enraged Athena so that her hair became serpents and her eyes turned mortals to stone. Though her fate is cruel, many including Perseus describe her punishment as justified, and I often felt sympathetic towards the mistreated Medusa. In many ways, she can be interpreted as a wounded woman, betrayed and vindictive towards those who harmed her. This dichotomy creates an interesting and compelling narrative for a monstrous figure, and as a result Medusa became one of my favourite characters. It is also worth noting that the book's watercolour illustrations by W.

Russell Flint are beautifully done; as a hobbyist painter myself, watercolours as a medium is one of my personal favourites.

*The Bear's Kingdom* by Eva C. Rogers was the second book to catch my attention, first for the title, then for the familiar narrative and detailed illustrations. With a narrative structure reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a young girl named Doris ventures away from home and into the forest, where she stops to pick honeysuckles. Unbeknownst to her, she has wandered into a garden belonging to the king of the Bear Kingdom. Doris is put on trial for attempted robbery and is sentenced to fulfill three challenges or be turned into a bear. The text, despite its new characters and premises, felt familiar in many ways; perhaps because it follows many patterns and themes found in other fairy tales. I found that familiarity to be comforting however, rather than repetitive, and especially enjoyed the choice of having an all-bear kingdom, as opposed to a kingdom of assorted animals, such as in *Wonderland*. Having grown up on the Lower Mainland, I am especially familiar with the notion of finding bears in one's backyard, and felt like that was a fantastical twist on my childhood home and its surrounding neighbourhoods. I can only imagine that a younger self would have enjoyed reading such a fairy tale and then imagined that something similar lay just beyond the boundaries of the house.

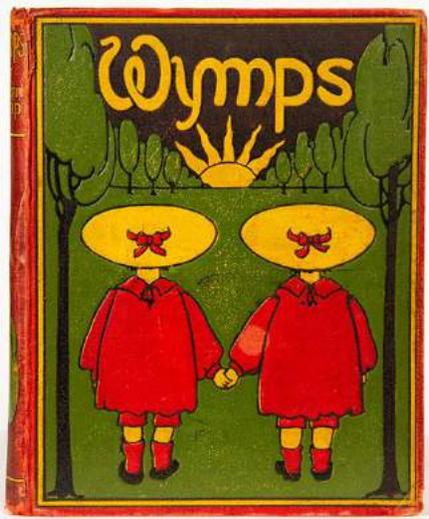
*The Pink Fairy Book* is a collection of short stories edited and compiled by Andrew Lang, and belongs to a much larger series of other "coloured" fairy books. Each book contains tales from a wide variety of authors from differing backgrounds; the RBSC library has available *The Pink Fairy Book*, *The Yellow Fairy Book*, and *The Grey Fairy Book*, each with different themes and authors as well. Personally, I like the idea of having a bookshelf of small, colour-coded titles, each a collection in itself of even smaller stories, but of the three I was most interested in

*The Pink Fairy Book* for its stories from outside London and Europe. *The Pink Fairy Book* contained short fairy tales of Japanese, Scandinavian, and Sicilian origins, making for a broad span of different cultural contexts. A few of the Japanese stories also reminded me of Chinese fairy tales that my mom would read to me when I was little, as cats and dragons, are also both very popular figures in Chinese storytelling. I also found it particularly fascinating to notice how flexible the art style was, depending on which country the story originated from, such as the portrayal of a Japanese woman included in the images below.

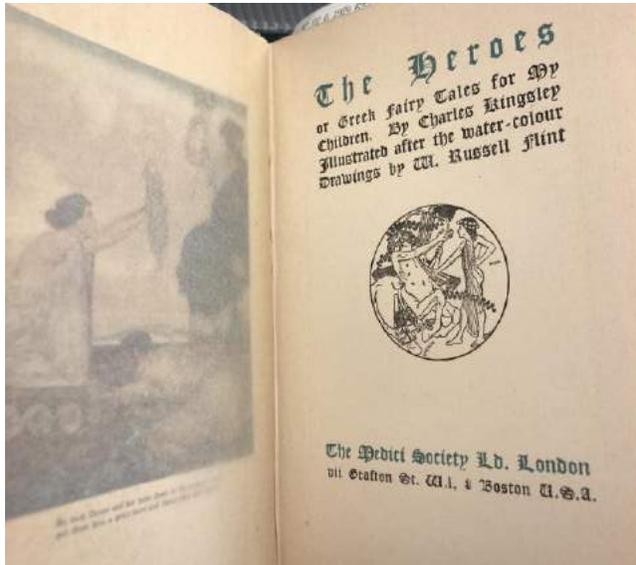
Ernest Nister's *Peeps into Fairyland* is a stunningly unique fairy tale book for its panorama-style full-page pop-up illustrations. Carefully crafted, both written and illustrated by Nister, *Peeps into Fairyland* comes with six different stand-up illustrations. Each image is made with multiple layers, adding physical depth to the foreground and background and creating unique three-dimensional scenes. The stories also include some very well-known titles such as "Jack and the Beanstalk", and a copy of *Peeps into Fairyland* may even have been on display at the MET Museum in New York at one time. I did not get a chance to look at the RBSC's copy of this book before the library closed, but have every intention to stop by and take a look next semester.

I particularly enjoy writing that includes a good use of irony, or occasionally hints at the presence of the reader in a metaphysical sense. Evelyn Sharp's *Wymps and Other Fairy Tales* is written with a witty sense of humour that I found stood out from other fairy tales I had read; I couldn't help myself from smiling and occasionally laughing out loud as the characters quipped back and forth with each other. In its titular story, a small fairy-like man known as a Wymp decides to curse a prince for not inviting the Wymps to his betrothal. However, the characters are shown as having a humorous sense of self-awareness, as the Queen comments (before the

Wymp's arrival) that she is quite certain they had not forgotten anyone "this time", implying they had already experienced something similar before. This is further corroborated by the Prince who, upon being cursed by the Wymp, gloomily states that he is tired of being given bad gifts by sprite-like beings, as he had had enough of those at his christening after they had forgotten to invite the fairies, an echo of many similar sentiments found in Nesbit's fairy tales as well. I found such dialogue and such stories to be very endearing, and also especially liked the Prince's fiancée, who climbs up a sunbeam to ask that the Wymps lift their curse and had a tendency to laugh at her own jokes, which I'm sure many people will find relatable.



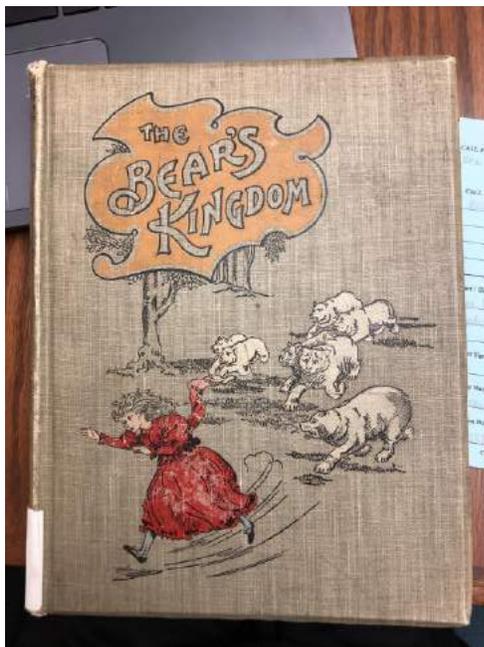
*Wymps and Other Fairy Tales*  
by Evelyn Sharp; illustrations by Mabel Dearmer  
London, Ballantyne, Hanson & Co. (1897)  
PZ6 1897 .S537  
<http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=9850411>



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*The Heroes: Or, Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*  
 by Charles Kingsley; watercolour drawings by W. Russell Flint  
 London, Medici Society (1924)  
 PZ6 1924 K563

<http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=184797>



*The Bear's Kingdom: A Fairy Tale*  
 by Eva C. Rogers; illustrated by J. R. Sinclair  
 London, Sunday School Union (1897)  
 PZ6 1897 .R644

<http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=877375>

THE  
PINK FAIRY BOOK

EDITED BY  
ANDREW LANG



WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. J. FORD

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.  
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON  
NEW YORK AND BOMBAY  
1897

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THE CAT'S ELOPEMENT 3

kind that everybody loved her, and she would have led a happy life, had it not been for a serpent who had fallen in love with her, and was constantly annoying her by his presence. Her servants had orders to drive him away as often as he appeared; but as they were careless, and the serpent very sly, it sometimes happened that he was able to slip past them, and to frighten the princess by



appearing before her. One day she was seated in her room, playing on her favourite musical instrument, when she felt something gliding up her sash, and saw her enemy making his way to kiss her cheek. She shrieked and threw herself backwards, and Gon, who had been curled up on a stool at her feet, understood her terror, and with one bound seized the snake by his neck. He

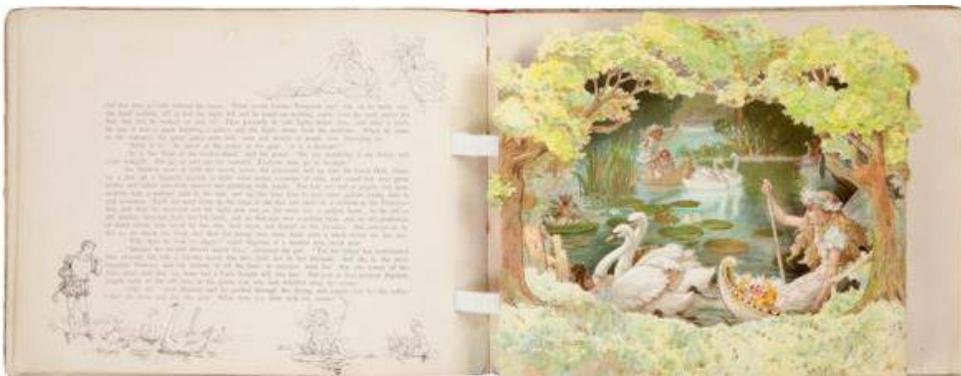
*The Pink Fairy Book*

Edited by Andrew Lang, with illustrations by H. J. Ford

London, Longmans, Green & Co. (1897)

PZ6 1897 .L353

<http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=13779>



*Peeps into Fairyland: A Panorama Picture Book of Fairy Stories*

Written and illustrated by Ernest Nister

London, Ernest Nister (1896)

PZ6 1896 .P446

<http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=341282>