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Jack D. Zipes , *Jane Yolen (Contributor)* , *Tanith Lee (Contributor)* , *Angela Carter (Contributor)* , *Meghan B. Collins (Contributor)*

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This anthology of feminist fairy tales and critical essays acts as an example of how the literature of fantasy and imagination can be harnessed to create a new view of the world. It demonstrates how recent writers have changed the aesthetic constructs and social content of fairy tales to reflect cultural change since the 1960s in area of gender roles, socialization and education. It includes selected works from such writers as Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood and Jay Williams, and critical essays from Marcia Lieberman and Sandra Gilbert.

Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England Details

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From Reader Review Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England for online ebook

Chris says

A feminist look at fairy tales including short stories. This book is split into three sections - tales for younger readers, tales for older readers, and criticism. The works have appeared in various sources elsewhere.

Included in this collection are feminist working of Beauty and the Beast, a discussion about "Snow White", an examination of the illustrations for "Little Red Riding Hood", a prince's quest to marry a spoiled princess, as well as a princess saving a prince.

The stories and poems are wonderful, though I have to wonder, why do feminist fairy tales end in marriage, even if it marriage to a partner who proves his worth? Is it because of social conditioning or because we long for a partnership of equals?

Amanda says

I haven't enjoyed a book of short stories as much in years. Tales where girls and women find their way through the very familiar fairy-tale world through their own smarts and determination. There are talking dogs, witches (good and bad), quests, true love and other varieties of love not-so-true. The thread that runs through them is that each story features a girl who, eventually, is her own heroine. Buy it and read it to your little girls so they can grow up smart and strong and have their own adventures without waiting for that Prince.

Jennifer says

One's overall opinion on this book will likely depend on how much of the book you actually read. This was a great book if you only read the "Feminist Fairy Tales for Young (And Old) Readers" and "Feminist Fairy Tales for Old (And Young) Readers" sections and not the introduction or literary criticism. I found the essays to be dry and/or reading far too much into traditional folklore. (For example, a 1934 illustration of a father carrying a young Red Riding Hood on his shoulder at the end of the tale is captioned with the commentary that it is a sexist image in that implies Red Riding Hood needs to cling to her father because she is not capable of standing on her own two feet. What I saw was a father expressing affection for and relief at the safe return of his offspring!) If you are a fan of the fairy tale anthologies by Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow, you will probably like the poetry and stories in this book (and some of the tales may already be in those collections.)

Juushika says

In three sections (following a lengthy introduction), editor Zipes compiles three revised, purportedly feminist takes on traditional fairy tales: *Feminist Fairy Tales for Young (and Old) Readers and for Old (and Young) Readers*, 17 modern fairy tales from authors like Tanith Lee, Jane Yolen, and Anne Sexton among others, and four pieces of feminist literary criticism on fairy tales. That a work purports to be feminist, however, does not necessarily make it so. Or, rather, a work can claim to be feminist, can aim to be feminist, and still fall short of the mark—as is the case here. First, it's Zipes that drags down the anthology. In his overlong introduction and concluding critical essay, he's given to cumbersome academic dialog and bold leaps of reasoning, a tendency towards form (in place of content) which makes for inscrutable, unsubstantiated arguments. Those arguments are promising, but they beg clearer, more thorough address. The anthology's second weakness is the stories themselves. There are some gems—most provided by the authors mentioned above, and Carter's "The Donkey Prince" and Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg" also appear on my list of favorites. But there are many stories which fail to push their feminist premises far enough, leaving them open to worrying commentary.

"In none of these tales is marriage a necessity or a goal for young women, rather it is a possibility which may or may not enter their plans. [...] In addition, the lives and careers of the young women are not telologically [sic] shaped by marriage (17)," writes Zipes in his introduction, yet in a surprising number of *Prince's* stories marriage *is* presumed—and in more, female energy is focused on male figures, roles, and relationships. The stories that don't fulfill heteronormative goals of romance, marriage, and childbirth often focus on that failure, mourning the sense of loss that accompanies it. For a purportedly feminist anthology, *Prince* has a surprisingly strong focus on men (even in the title!), and heteronormative standards are nearly inviolate. Perhaps I aim too high (and take too modern an approach) when I wish that *Prince* didn't constrain its feminism to heteronormative obligate male/female relationships; the fact that it does not, however, makes it limited in scope and depth. And then there's de Larrabeiti's story "Malagan and the Lady of Rascas," in which a husband has his wife made grotesque to force her to remain faithful, and when she does for many years remain faithful—and good, patient, and forgiving—he learns to be a decent human being. A story where men make decisions, women survive ill treatment without complaint or agency, and men reap the rewards of the experience is not feminist—certainly not feminist enough to fit a collection that totes the word so boldly on its cover.

Prince is not all bad—many stories are second rate (not just because of their feminist content, but because they are too far divorced from their source material to be effective retellings), Zipes is a constant irritation, but the other essays are thoughtful (if dated and brief) and there are some intriguing stories in the collection. But the volume aims to be more than this, and it's a lofty goal; that it fails to reach that goal makes it a disappointment. There are better feminist takes on fairy tales out there, even if they don't come in such proud packaging. I don't recommend this one.

Veronica says

Come for the fairy tales -- Margaret Atwood! Jane Yolen! Joanna Russ! -- and fell free to to leave before the literary criticism at the end.

Shout out to my mom for providing me with Petronella and only the later colors of Andrew Lang's Fairy Books.

If been reading this for a while, but didn't want to count it as done until I got through the arduously second wave essays at the end. And I'm glad I did -- I know it's only because they happened that I think the way I do, and they still aren't obvious I a lot of folks I interact with, but I'd still be more likely to keep the book if I tore the last third out and just kept the stories. That's the problem with getting books from the dumpster

behind the library after librarians have picked through the remains of a retiring Women's Studies professor's collection.

martha says

Pretty charming collection of fairy tales with a feminist twist, bookended by a critical theory introduction and academic essays on the subject. The stories are in two sections, really basic fairy tales for younger readers, with simple twists like a questing princess instead of a prince, and more adult, complex ones -- which I wish I'd realized, since I was a little disappointed at first thinking there were only the simple stories. This was published in the 80s, so the criticism feels a tad dated, but it was still fun.

Katie Kasben says

I LOVE THIS BOOK! I love every story, and the essays at the back have informed my whole life. I performed from this book in college, and now I'm using it with my class. SO thankful this book was written.

Zanna says

There were parts of this that I enjoyed a lot. I really like Angela Carter's story 'The Donkey Prince', which disrupts the racism, the classism and the sexism of traditional fairytales all in one go. The Merseyside Fairy Story Collective's version of Snow White is also satisfyingly proletarian and justice-focused. Tanith Lee's story 'Prince Amilec' and Meghan B Collins' 'The Green Woman' rehabilitate the figure of the witch, which always gets an extra star out of me.

Jane Yolen's version of Cinderella, 'The Moon Ribbon' is perhaps the most sophisticated piece, offering a story in which matrilineal magic is infused into an artefact with the help of which her own learning and effort enable the young girl to escape her tormentors. Most of the other stories get no further than creating a heroine who is strong and spirited from the start (and generally royal and red haired!) the antidote to the passive objectified (and blonde) white damsel who traditionally figures. This is a start, of course, but it does not offer any shift from concepts of gender built on whiteness, nor does it show a pathway out of trauma or oppression. Yolen's protagonist is weak, afraid, and lacks self-knowledge. She needs her mother's and sister's help and advice to be able to rescue herself. This presents socialisation and trauma as serious obstacles to liberation that can be worked through only with help. I love the use of ancestors and dream/visions in this story rather than a fairy bearing magical help: of all the tales I find it most *helpful*, which is what Zipes expects the feminist fairy tale to be according to his introduction.

The scholarly pieces at the end were very variable. Those pointing out the sexism of fairytales were super boring for me, since I already know feminisms quite well and it doesn't take a scholarly dissertation level of analysis to point out the obvious issues with the average *Blue Fairy Book* tale. The lack of focus on material context for the stories and tellers here is a real weakness. Anyone interested in this topic should go to *From The Beast To The Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* for an approach grounded in history and materiality and a fantastically fun read – this stuff is neither. The extract from *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* is much more interesting, suggesting that the voice of the vain queen's magic mirror is 'the king' or the voice of patriarchal approval. Actually, I

think this is a simplistic way to think about women's concern with appearance. And I still can't entirely get my head around what they're saying about art and women's creativity here. Oh well, at least it's food for thought. My issue generally with Zipes' approach is that I don't agree that a fresh psychoanalysis of fairytales is what's needed so much as a reconnection with lived experience, something I think Helen Oyeyemi does effectively in her appropriation of ideas from Bluebeard in Mr. Fox, interrogating historical and contemporary tropes of gender(ed) violence in literature.

Zipes' own essay on illustrations of Red Riding Hood is quite good, because it gives a version of the traditional tale before Perrault and the Grimms ruined it, and some nice pictures. Warner does the former in her book too, with a better takedown and less labouring of the point about rape, which becomes unnecessarily skin-crawly here (do we need to tell you, guys, that sometimes by talking to women about rape you're bringing a subject to a tired audience?) His introduction to the book is, as far as I'm concerned, decidedly skippable, particularly towards the end. More or less beached in a second wave white & cis (and heterosexual) concept of gender, its focus on psychoanalysis renders its cultural criticism toothlessly ahistorical and immaterial.

Leah says

If I were to recommend *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary Feminist Fairy Tales in North America and England* that recommendation would be primarily for its small collection of contemporary fairy tales, only two of which I'd read before. The analyses and criticisms, while interesting and potentially educational for newbies, read somewhat like old news. This *was* first published in 1986 so the outdated vibe is understandable, though I would be curious what a revised edition might offer this century's readers. Plus, the criticisms in *Don't Bet on the Prince* lacked any mention of historical context which, having recently completed *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* by Marina Warner, left the former's arguments feeling less informed and even more antiquated.

My favorite story from Part I: *Feminist Fairy Tales for Young (and Old) Readers* was "**The Moon Ribbon**" by **Jane Yolen (1976)**. My favorite story from Part II: *Feminist Fairy Tales for Old (and Young) Readers* was a tie between "**The Green Woman**" by **Meghan B. Collins (1982)** and "**Wolfland**" by **Tanith Lee (1983)**.

4 stars

Margaret says

Don't Bet on the Prince is a collection of short stories, poems, and critical works looking at fairy tales from a feminist perspective. It's broken up into 3 sections--tales for young readers, old readers, and lit criticism.

The tales for young readers explore strong princesses, or the strong women prince's choose. My favorites from this section were "Prince Amilec" by Tanith Lee, about a prince who falls instantly in love with a head-strong princess and seeks a witch's help in wooing her; and "The Moon Ribbon" by Jane Yolen, a Cinderella retelling about an abused child who seeks the wisdom of her deceased mother for help, with a ribbon made from her mother's hair.

The tales for old readers are more varied in approach, and my favorites were "The Green Woman" by Meghan Collins and "Wolfland" by Tanith Lee. In "The Green Woman," when the town's healer is visited by

a local wealthy woman, she must make a difficult choice in helping her or else she might be burned as a witch. This is my favorite of the entire collection. In "Wolfland," a spoiled teen girl makes her way to her grandmother's estate, and is beset by wolves once there.

Of the criticism, the only piece that made me think is "A Second Gaze at Little Red Riding Hood's Trials and Tribulations" by Jack Zipes. It explores the origins of LRRH, and how the retellings of Perrault and Grimm re-situated the tale as one of rape, and how the illustrations of the tale continue that tradition. A very disturbing analysis, and I'll never look at LRRH illustrations the same.

While this is a good collection, it is a bit dated. Current feminist fairy tales move far beyond some of these more simple retellings, though they're still fun stories. I would also recommend *The Girl Who Married the Moon: Tales from Native North America* for those looking for feminist fairy tales for young readers, and any of the anthologies edited by Terri Windling and Ellen Datlow for adult feminist fairy tales.

Hazel says

Thanks to whoever recommended this. (Was it you, Chris?) I just got it from the library. I skipped all the academic discourse in the preface and introductory essay, and got straight to the stories. Loving it so far.

There are excellently crafted tales by the like of Angela Carter, Joanna Russ, Judith Viorst, Margaret Atwood and Jane Yolen. I love *The Green Woman* by Meghan B Collins, and Anne Sexton's poem *Briar Rose* makes me shudder. The first section will do for younger readers, and I could read most of it to my 6-year-old niece.

I hope the politically sensitive aren't put off by the title. Although they are bookended by academic essays (which I ignored), these stories are notable not for any agenda, but as intriguing, exquisitely thought-provoking narratives.

Here is Sara Henderson Hay's *Rapunzel*

Oh God, let me forget the things he said.
Let me not lie another night awake
Repeating all the promises he made,
Freezing and burning for his faithless sake;
Seeing his face, feeling his hand once more
Loosen my braided hair until it fell
Shining and free; remembering how he swore
A single strand might lift a man from Hell...

I knew that other girls, in Aprils past,
Had leaned, like me, from some old tower's room
And watched him clamber up, hand over fist...
I knew that I was not the first to twist
Her heartstrings to a rope for him to climb.
I might have known I would not be the last.

Highly recommended.

Lynn says

I made my daughters listen to this book, which I loved. It is a collection of fairy feminist fairy tales.

I think it should be required reading for all little girls - probably boys too. Actually, a lot of adults women I know could probably benefit too. You really need this book to counteract all the bs in the traditional fairy tales, to say nothing of other types of books, magazines, advertising, etc. that set up very unrealistic expectations to put it mildly. It is great that it seems to be still in print.

Erika Gill says

great stories. I especially liked Bluebeard's egg.

Arielle Walker says

Some of these stories are a bit... meh, but the good ones more than make up for it and the essays are fascinating.

Sarah says

This is a great combination of new stories and poignant criticism of the old stories.
