



ROUGH TEXT

By Dave Carnie

1 / *The Turnip Princess and Other Newly Discovered Fairy Tales*

By Franz Xaver von Schönwerth
Penguin Classics

The first thing Mark had to do when he entered our freshman writing class was assure us that he was the teacher. Mark was sort of a cross between John Denver and Brad Pitt: very handsome, very young. He was wearing an outfit I would never see him deviate from: button-down shirt, faded 501s, and tan desert boots.

After providing his credentials, he gave his first assignment then and there: stream of consciousness writing. “Just write whatever comes to mind,” he said. “Don’t try to edit or filter your thoughts.”

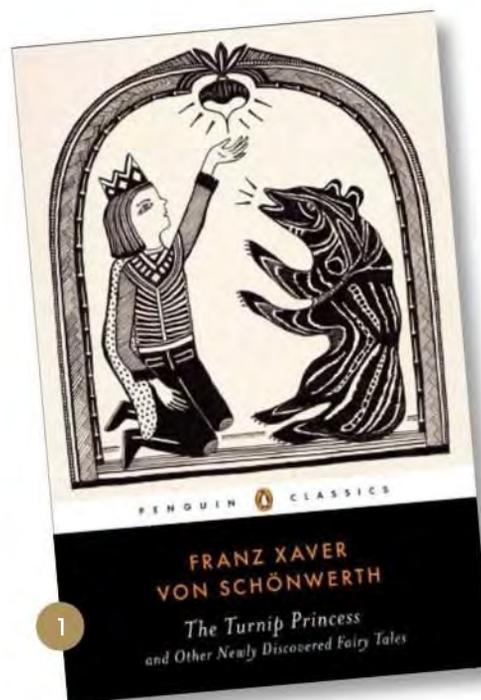
I had already been introduced to Joyce, Burroughs, the whole modern canon, so I was like, “Fuck yeah.” I didn’t even finish listening to his definition of stream of consciousness and started writing feverishly. My classmates, on the other hand, were very confused by the open-ended assignment. They wanted rules, guidelines, what’s the subject, how long does it have to be?

“It’s up to you,” was Mark’s answer to every question.

This guy rules, I thought.

At the time, I had to pee, so I was very conscious of streams of piss. I have no idea what I wrote, it was probably horrible, but I remember being very pleased with myself that I had turned in a college paper about piss. (Like most college students, I was an idiot and an insufferable ass.)

The next class meeting, Mark announced that he had read all of our stream of consciousness stories. Most didn’t get it, he said, there were a few that were okay, but there was one in particular that he felt was exemplary of the form. He warned



the class before he read my piss story that some people might be offended. I could tell he took great pleasure in reading my trashy story to a group of conservative young students in a conservative university classroom. From that point on, Mark was a mentor and a friend throughout my time in college.

I wrote to him a few years ago to touch base, see what he was up to, and to thank him for his influence and guidance. For sake of conversation, I asked him what he’d been reading lately. He was, after all, the one who had turned me on to Samuel Beckett. “Classics,” he said.

I thought he meant classics like *Moby-Dick*, but, no, he meant classics as in classical literature from ancient Greece: Homer, Euripides, Sophocles, etc. He explained that he had become

disillusioned with modern literature. Everything has already been done and it's all in the works of these early Greek writers. Every plot, every character, every modern device originated with these writers, and everything since is merely an echo of their work.

Shortly thereafter I, too, fell for a similarly archaic genre of literature for similar reasons: fairy tales and mythology. Like classical literature, the simplicity of the form of a fairy tale seems to belie the possibility of ancient wisdoms and secret truths. When I read of the symbols and archetypes in myths and folk tales, I can't help but feel a connection with a universal mind, a collective unconscious, that reaches deep into the mists of time. I don't have children, but I think what I feel when I read fairy tales is akin to that magical experience that parents have when they see the world through the eyes of their child.

"The fairy tale," wrote the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, "which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales."

And so in 2012, near the beginning of my interest in these stories, there was a discovery of 500 new fairy tales that had been locked away for over 150 years in an archive in Regensburg, Germany. The tales are part of a collection gathered by a local historian, Franz Xaver von Schönwerth (1810–1886), in the Bavarian region of Oberpfalz, around the same time the Grimm brothers were collecting their fairy tales. To me, this discovery was as exciting as any archaeological find.

Many of the stories echo tales that have appeared in other collections, but new or old, von Schönwerth's offerings have a very different quality to them. Von Schönwerth was a historian and, unlike the Grimm brothers, he made no attempt to alter or add any sort of literary flair to the tales. He recorded them faithfully, straight from the mouths of the local Bavarian peasant population.

"Nowhere in the whole of Germany is anyone collecting [folklore] so accurately, thoroughly, and with such a sensitive ear," said Jacob Grimm in 1885 about von Schönwerth's work.

And so these tales are a little coarser and darker than what one has come to expect from a fairy tale: a man has his buttocks ground off on a millstone, seven sons condemn their mother to death by making her dance in red-hot iron shoes, men piss on trees, women pull down their skirts to moon people, Cinderella is actually a Cinderfella, and no one is guaranteed to live happily ever after.

The book contains over 70 stories, most of which are only a couple pages long, which makes it a great shitter book—perfect for when you're creating your own fairy tale and giving birth to an army of Dookie Goblins.

2 / *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me*

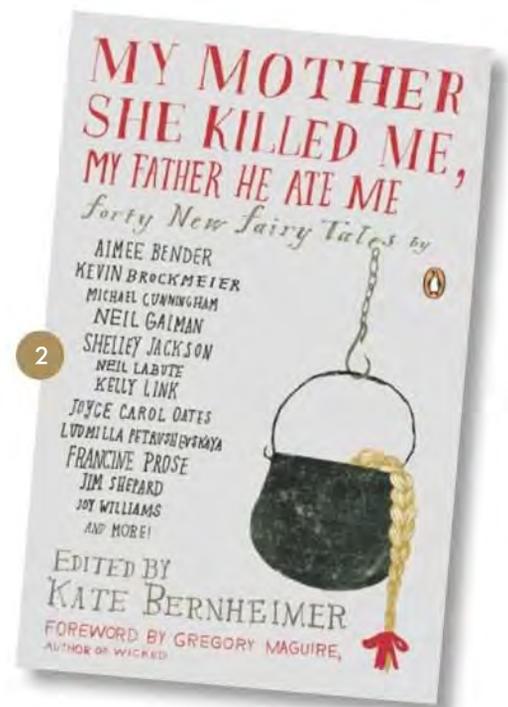
Edited by Kate Bernheimer
Penguin Books

Great title, right? It comes from the Brothers Grimm story "The Juniper Tree," which is reimagined in this volume by Alissa Nutting in her story "The Brother and the Bird." Editor Kate Bernheimer brought together a group of writers, some of whom

are contemporary heavyweights, to celebrate classic and not-so-classic fairy tales and folklore from around the world. While any collection comprised of 40 authors is going to have its flat spots, I was surprised at how delightful the vast majority of the offerings within this volume are.

One of my favorites was the story by Joy Williams, "Baba laga and the Pelican Child." In this retelling of a classic Russian folktale, Baba laga, her pelican child, and their cat and dog live in a shifty chicken-footed hut. "Baba laga did not care for visitors, so when anyone approached, the chicken legs would move in a circle, turning the house so that the visitor could not find the door." I also don't care for visitors and I've been searching for a contractor who will outfit my hut with chicken legs that spin around so no one can find my door. Especially the Jehovah's Witnesses that have been canvassing my neighborhood of late. Jesus fucking Christ, talk about fairy tales—oh wait, the Jehovahs don't believe in the Jesus part of that fairy tale, do they? No, they don't. From jw.org: "We follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ and honor him as our Savior and as the Son of God.... However, we have learned from the Bible that Jesus is not Almighty God." Fair enough.

I find it hard to keep track of all the Christian/Jewish/Muslim variations on the Abraham fairy tale, but that's the great thing about fairy tales: By definition, they're public domain, not really belonging to anybody, open to interpretation, and thus they're different in every retelling. There is no better example of that than the stories in this book, many of which bear no resemblance on the surface to the tales that inspired them. Not sure if you'll enjoy eternal life for reading any of these fairy tales, but in one of them a woman has sex with her cat, and that's pretty cool. ☺





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OF ASSIAH ALCÁZAR.



ASSIAH ALCÁZAR is a man of few words, quite literally. Thankfully for us, his images speak for themselves. Born in Málaga in southern Spain, and currently based in Madrid, Alcázar began shooting professionally three years ago and now works with a number of noteworthy publications, including *P* and *Hangover* magazine. When he's not shooting photos, he's working in advertising, fashion, or film...or at least that is what he told us. He could be a superhero for all we care. All we know is that we love his work. 













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BY JEFF KAMEN