

The Turnip Princess

*Foreword by Erika Eichenseer
Translated by Maria Tatar*

Fairy Tales are that simple. All you need is a rusty nail, and something that is hidden away, spellbound, and beautiful, can be transformed, disenchanted, and reanimated. In real life no one hands us a nail that can lift away all our cares.

The fairy tales collected by Franz Xaver von Schönwerth (1810-1886) seemed to have vanished into thin air. These tales from the Upper Palatinate, die eastern part of Bavaria, were hidden away for a long time.

In 2009, after searching for many years, I made die exhilarating discovery that there were about five hundred fairy tales among the Schönwerth papers stored almost like buried treasure in the municipal archive of die city of Regensburg. The enthusiastic nineteenth-century folklorist and collector of tales – had recognized that his era was witnessing a rapid decline in storytelling traditions.

For that reason, he and his friends made the rounds, asking for stories from plainspoken men and women within the confines of their native territory. At first there was some reluctance to tell tales, but that was followed by, eagerness to share. This is oral history in the truest sense of the term.

The social standing of the tellers and the collectors varied widely. In the archival materials there are some linguistically sophisticated texts with romantic flourishes but also some terse and fragmentary drafts, and they all have proven valuable. The tales are particularly colorful and lively when told in the regional dialect.

This book will fill a gap in German-speaking countries and in the global fairy tales landscape, appealing to readers young and old. And it is also directed at scholars who will be able to evaluate, analyze, and honor this particular selection of tales from the archive of a collector and researcher who was something of a pioneer. The door has been unlocked, and now it can swing wide open.

"No one in Germany has gathered tales so thoughtfully and thoroughly and with such finesse." This observation about Schönwerth made in 1858 by Jacob Grimm can be seen as a tribute, an acknowledgment, and a commitment to pay attention to an important message about nature and how it is animated by marvelous creatures as well as about how the magical and the natural blend into each other.

Let me close with one additional thought. . Storytelling is an ancient art that rarely receives the respect it deserves. Is it even possible to find someone these days with the time to give something precious to listeners, who understands stories at a profound level and can tell them without a book or a page in hand?-

"A world without fairy tales and myths would be as drab as life without music."

Georg Trakl.

Erika Eichenseer

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