

Underworlds, Otherworlds: A Storytelling Bibliography for Fall and Winter selected and annotated by Fiona Hartley-Kroeger, CCB Volunteer.

Seasonal tales often culminate in the coming of spring, the return to warmth and light, the sun and the seed. But before the season of rebirth comes the descent into darkness: the cold, the frost, the uncanny touch of the underworld. It's a reminder that life and death are intertwined; that alongside our own waking world lie other worlds of dreams and spirits, worlds of the imagination; that in our own familiar geography of the natural world lies also the geography of the supernatural. Settle into the coming of the frost, gorge yourself on pomegranate seeds, and let these tales transport you to underworlds and otherworlds.

Belting, Natalia M. *Moon Was Tired of Walking on Air*; illus. by Will Hillenbrand. Houghton Mifflin, 1992. 48p. Gr. 3-6.

There are worlds above the earth,

Worlds below.

The blue sky

And the white sky above it,

The yellow-green sky above the white

Are worlds: demons and spirits, animals

Dwell there...

[...]

The bottom-most world

Is crossed by the path the sun follows

From its setting at night

To its rising.

(from “Worlds Above, Worlds Below: A Myth of the Toba Indians,” p. 34.) Ancestors inhabit the landscape, spirits are reincarnated in the living, and Earth itself is created as an underworld in this wonderful book of South American tales.

Craft, M. Charlotte. *Cupid and Psyche*. Illus. by K.Y. Craft.

In this tale from classical mythology, Cupid (the son of Venus, goddess of love) marries the mortal Psyche. Psyche's life is happy, if odd: she lives in a beautiful palace with invisible servants and an invisible husband. Her sisters' jealousy prompts her to sneak a glimpse at Cupid while he is sleeping: is he a god or is he a monster? Cupid flees upon learning of this betrayal of trust. To win back her husband, Psyche must undertake a series of tasks, culminating in a perilous journey to the Underworld ruled by Pluto and Proserpine. Can Love overcome Death?

Grimm, Jakob Ludwig Karl. *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*; ad. and illus. by Jane Rey. Dutton, 1996. 32p. 6-9 yrs.

Down a hidden staircase, through a garden of silver, a garden of gold, and a garden of diamonds, and across the lake to a magical underground palace: every night, twelve princesses dance until dawn. Rey's colorful, gilded illustrations bring the tale to life. Each princess is rendered as a distinct individual (one of them wears glasses!); the clever soldier who discovers their secret has curly hair and an eyepatch. The characters, visual details, and lush landscapes will delight and enchant you.

Hamilton, Virginia. *The Dark Way: Stories from the Spirit World*. Illus. by Lambet Davis.

The incomparable Virginia Hamilton retells twenty-five haunting tales from around the world. Here you will find Medusa, Baba Yaga, Father Frost, the Pretender, girls swallowed by the earth, wicked stepmothers, the *Flying Dutchman*, and more. Don't miss the author's note: "Between thought and unthinking is this course of the shapeshifter, shrouded in gloom. Whether it be monster, gorgon, trickster, ghost, imp, fairy, elf, devil, phantom, or witch—all of these twitch, they change, nightmarining, slumbering there. In the Dark Way" (xi).

Helgadóttir, Guðrún. *Flumbra: An Icelandic Folktale*; tr. from the Icelandic by Christopher Sanders; illus. by Brian Pilkington. Carolrhoda, 1986. 27p. K-3.

The volcanic geography of Iceland underpins the story of Flumbra, a giantess whose love for a faraway ugly giant and for her giant children (Altogether-Beautiful, Completely-Beautiful, Even-More-Beautiful, A-Little-Bit-Beautiful, Almost-As-Beautiful, A-Wee-Shade-Beautiful, Every-Bit-As-Beautiful, and Absolutely-Beautiful) literally transforms the landscape.

Hutton, Warwick. *Persephone*; ad. and illus. by Warwick Hutton. McElderry, 1994.

Hutton retells the familiar myth of Persephone's abduction by Hades, king of the Underworld, with simple, effective prose and deceptively understated illustrations. The bleakness of Hades'

underground kingdom stands in stark contrast to the almost too-bright world above; Demeter's world of golden grain turns to parched golden desolation as she mourns for her daughter. The tale ends with a vertical diptych emphasizing the seasonal nature of the myth: Persephone sits beside Hades beneath a snowy world above.

Hutton, Warwick, ad. *Theseus and the Minotaur*; ad. and illus. by Warwick Hutton. McElderry, 1989. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

Theseus, son of the king of Athens, journeys to Crete in order to kill the fearsome Minotaur. Half-man, half-bull, the monster rages beneath the Cretan palace in an inescapable underground labyrinth. With the help of the king's daughter, Ariadne, Theseus slays the Minotaur and finds his way out of the labyrinth—but his heroic success is undercut by tragedy on the journey home. As in *Persephone*, Hutton's shadowy watercolors and use of white space define the visual landscape of Classical mythology, highlighting the rocky shores, blue seas, and fabulous palaces of the ancient Mediterranean.

Mabinogion. *Tales from the Mabinogion*; tr. by Gwyn Thomas and Kevin Crossley-Holland; illus. by Margaret Jones. Overlook Press, 1985. 82p. 5-8.

This book of retold tales from the great Welsh mythological cycle opens with an otherworldly encounter. Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, swaps places for a year with Arawn, King of the Other World. Pwyll lives in Arawn's palace, hunts with his marvelous red-eared hounds, and fights a duel for control of another Other World kingdom. Arawn governs Pwyll's kingdom with generosity and justice. When the time comes to swap back, the two swear eternal friendship—and neither is unchanged by his experience in another world.

Manning-Sanders, Ruth. *Stories from the English and Scottish Ballads*; illus. by Trevor Ridley. Dutton, 1968.

The English and Scottish ballads are full of otherworldly incidents and adventures. From elves, imps, witches, and unquiet ghosts to the beautiful, dangerous Fairy Queen, these supernatural figures will hold you in thrall. Among other tales, Childe Rowland rescues his sister from the Dark Tower of the Elfin King, fair Janet rescues her true love Tam Lin from being sacrificed by the fairy folk, and the bard Thomas the Rhymer follows the Queen of Fairy to a wondrous land.

Meyer, Marianna, ad. *Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp*; illus. by Gerald McDermott. Macmillan, 1985. 81p. 4-6.

A villainous sorcerer enlists Aladdin's help to recover an oil lamp from an underground garden. Down into a fabulous underground palace Aladdin goes, past rooms filled with treasure and into a sunken garden filled with trees decked with precious jewels. But the lamp is the greatest treasure of all—and the underground journey is only the beginning of Aladdin's adventures. Meyer's retelling is detailed, vivid, and punctuated with McDermott's glowing illustrations.

Mikolaycak, Charles, ad. *Orpheus*; ad. and illus. by Charles Mikolaycak. Harcourt, 1992. 32p. Gr. 7 and up.

Mikolaycak intersperses his richly illustrated retelling of "Orpheus and Eurydice" with lyrics from Claudio Monteverdi's opera, *L'Orfeo* (1607). Mikolaycak's illustrations are gorgeous, his Underworld a place of barren stone, gloomy caverns, and tormented souls where Orpheus plays his lyre for stone-faced gods crowned with stars.

Moore, Christopher, ad. *Ishtar and Tammuz: A Babylonian Myth of the Seasons*; illus. by Christina Balit. Kingfisher, 1996. 26p. 5-8 yrs.

In this Babylonian seasonal myth, the goddess of life, Ishtar, kills her son Tammuz out of jealousy—but soon must retrieve him from the underworld to save the earth and its people. The underworld—a strange, rich place full of jewels, salamanders, and snakes—is closely guarded, and Ishtar surrenders the symbols of her power one by one in order to gain access to her sister's palace and rescue her son. The conflict between the sisters over who gets to keep Tammuz is a fascinating (and ancient) take on the powers of earth, sky, and underworld, with the balance of life and death at stake.

Riordan, James, ad. *The Twelve Labors of Hercules*; illus. by Christina Balit. Millbrook, 1997. 62p. Gr. 4-6.

Readers might be more familiar with the mythological books of another Riordan, but this retelling of Hercules' labors hews closely to the details of the Classical myths. For the twelfth and final labor, Hercules must descend to the Underworld and bring back Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guards the gates of Hell.

Yeats, W.B. *Fairy Tales of Ireland*; ad. by Neil Philip and illus. by P.J. Lynch. Delacorte, 1990. 160p.

As a young man, the Irish Modernist poet W.B. Yeats gathered fairy tales from firesides and folk tale collections, publishing them in two volumes in 1888 (and adding the occasional original

composition of his own). This selection, chosen by Neil Philip and illustrated by P. J. Lynch, includes the most delightful of Yeats's collected stories. The opening poem, Yeats's "The Stolen Child," acts as an invocation, inviting the reader to "Come away, O human child!" Many of the stories are specific to real-world locations: in Yeats's Ireland, the natural and supernatural lie side by side and are often inseparable.

Yeh, Chun-Chan, ad. *Bawshou Rescues the Sun: A Han Folktale*, adapted by Chun-Chan Yeh and Allan Baillie; illus. by Michael Powell. Scholastic, 1992. 32p. 4-7 years.

A boy travels across the waking world and then the spirit world to the underground cavern of devils who have kidnapped the sun. Magical objects made from personal, everyday materials—special shoes made from a mother's hair, a magical cloak made from the sheepskins of a hundred families—help Bawshou (and his father before him) make the journey between worlds to free the sun.