ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

JUVENILE FICTION

Terrible Tales: As Presented by Felicitatus Miserius
Jennifer Gordon
iUniverse
978-1-4401-4209-3
Four Stars (out of Five)

Classic characters from five traditional stories are revamped in this collection of fractured fairy tales, written in the voice of the fictional Sir Jasper Gowlings. In the foreword and "Backword" that frame the tales, Gowlings describes his encounter with an ancient creature, Feliciatus Miserius, who has recorded these "true" versions of our familiar tales to "set right the dangerous and erroneous impressions left by later, distorted versions of the truth."

Each of the stories retains enough of the traditional version to be easily recognizable, but the familiar main characters are cast in a wholly unfavorable light. Cinderella is a spoiled brat whose mother dies of despair over her daughter's behavior. Greedy Little Red Riding Hood and her granny love to stuff themselves full of food while hungry peasants and animals watch. The three pigs are amateur bombers who end up doing themselves in with their explosive habit, and Rapunzel, Hansel, and Gretel are transformed into similarly distasteful characters. Fans of dark comedy in the style of Roald Dahl and Lemony Snicket will delight in these wicked alter egos.

While remaining faithful to the basic structure of each tale, Jennifer Gordon puts her own creative stamp on the material with unforgettable images like the "mountainous pile of plump, steaming pork sausages" served on a silver platter, which are the remains of two of the three pigs, or the peculiar baby girl with "just the odd green sprout here and there on her little, bald baby head" who eventually grows into young Rapunzel with a head full of lettuce leaves for hair. The narrator notes, correctly, that "Rapunzel is just another word for lettuce." Each of the stories is accompanied by a well-executed black and white illustration featuring the main characters fully engaged in their respective vices.

The main characters in these tales have no redeeming values, and while there is humor in their wickedness, their stories are more appropriate for older readers than an early elementary school audience. This book would make a good additional purchase for collections where fractured fairy tales are in high demand, and it would make a nice gift book for sophisticated fans of the genre.