

A Grimmer Grimm's Tale: A Review of *The Book Of Lost Things*, by John Connelly (New York: Atria Books, 2006, 339 pp.)



to the fantasy genre.

I initially considered buying John Connelly's [*The Book of Lost Things*](#) in an audio version, as I thought my children might enjoy it. They might, but after reading it, I give it a PG-13 rating, given its sometimes graphic description of evil and violence, the homosexuality of one of the supporting characters, and a reference to pedophilia. There may be allusions to classic fairy tales, but these are not children's versions but twisted revisions, more disturbing than the originals. With that caution, I can recommend the book as a worthy edition

In essence, Connelly's book is about a boy's coming of age during a moment of family tragedy. The main protagonist, 12 year old David, loses his mother to a debilitating illness against the English backdrop of World War II. His father moves with his son outside of London, where he meets Rose, who he eventually marries and with whom he fathers a child. Unsettled by his mother's death, David resents the competition for his father's time and affection presented by Rose and his infant stepbrother. He sullenly retreats to his room, one lined with books. One night the books begin to speak to him, urging him to the garden where, on one fateful evening, he disappears through a crack in the garden wall and into a world full of horrific peril. Or does he?

Throughout the book, we are never quite sure whether the adventures had by David are merely the working out of the trauma of his mother's death in his imagination or a real struggle in some parallel universe, a sort of twisted Narnia. David enters the garden because he heard his mother's voice calling him. He continues to hear it throughout the adventure. Along the way, he confronts evil, personified in many ways, from The Crooked Man, presumably representing Satan, a "trickster" who steals the innocence of children by having them betray their own families, to the Loups, ghoulish wolf-men created when girls (a la Little Red Riding Hood) entered the woods and mated with wolves) to Trolls and more. Even Snow White and the Dwarfs show up in the story, though White is an obese and dictatorial matron and the Dwarfs are Communists going on about how they need to rise up against oppression. (They provide the lightest note in an otherwise non-humorous and serious tale.)

However, the first person that David meets is a Christ-figure, The Woodsman, who protects David from the murderous Loups and becomes David's guide on his journey to find the King of the land, weakened though he be, and for answers regarding his mother. David meets with repeated peril along the way, and faces the constant temptations of The Crooked man to deceive his family by naming his

brother to him. He learns to recognize evil and reject it, as well as to embrace love and his family, in a tale that, while dark, does not leave us in darkness.

This is, however, in the end not really a story for children. It is too dark and too mature in its content. However, both adults and teenagers will enjoy the story and, perhaps be encouraged in virtuous conduct -- loyalty, courage, and love --- especially for family, and in discerning the charms of evil -- the nursing of grudges, bitterness, and even hatred, especially against family. But my hope is that instead of looking to the Book of Lost Things, a book which serves as a metaphor for the lost and incorrectly presumed innocence of childhood, readers might be prompted to look into the Book of Found Things -- the Bible -- and find faith, hope, and love there in the person of Jesus. That, after all, is a tale not just imaginative, but real.