

Hey Red, where you goin'?

The fantastical and dark worlds of fairy tales beckon from Hasselt

REBECCA BENOOT

Once upon a time, an unsuspecting *Antwerpenaar* went to Hasselt to indulge in some shopping and sightseeing. Little did she know that when she got off the train she would encounter a magical and inconspicuous place called the Literair Museum Hasselt. Shocked and amazed by this unexpected delight, she entered into the realms of this enchanting house where fairy tales temporarily come to life.

Yes, boys and girls, that *Antwerpenaar* was me. I was beckoned inside a 19th-century neo-classic house by the irresistible title *Zeg Roodkapje, waar ga je heen?* (*Say, Little Red Riding Hood, Where Are You Going?*).

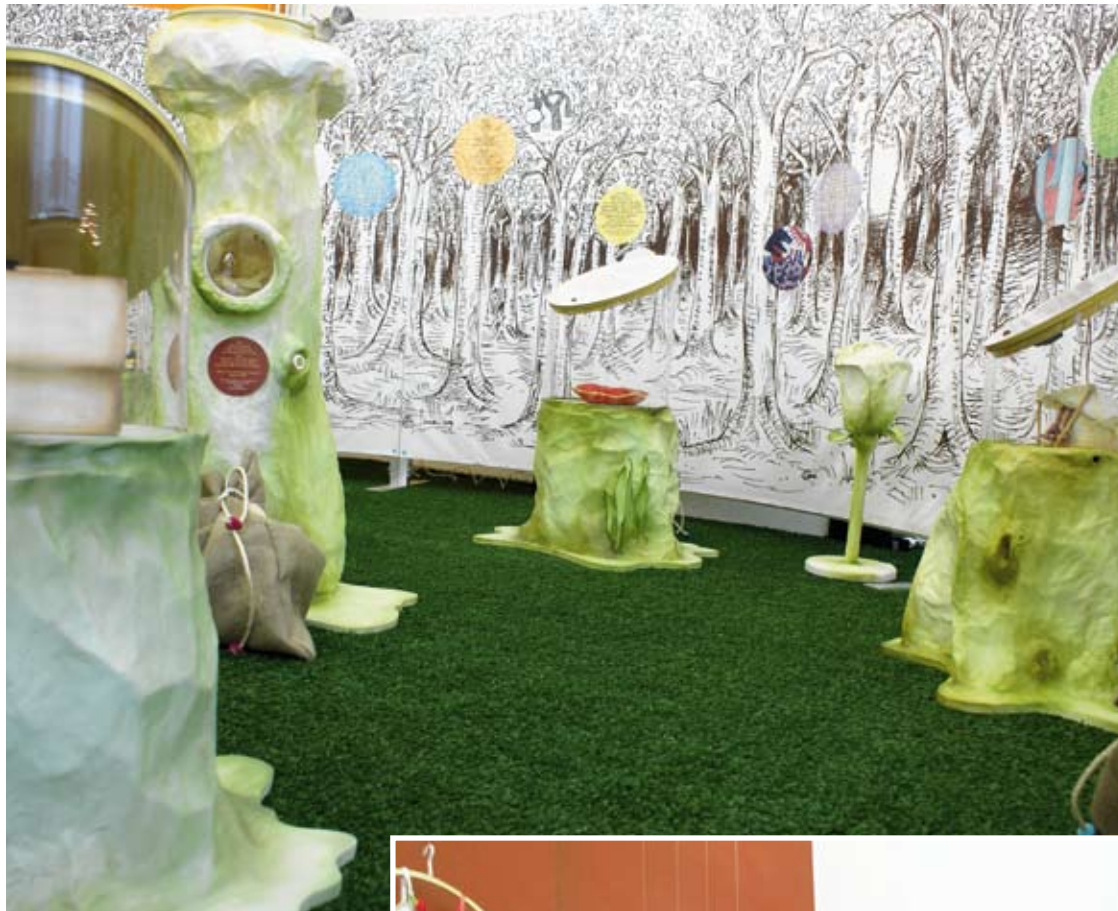
Since the 1990s, fairy tales have been making quite a comeback in Flemish literature. Authors like Peter Verhelst, Bart Moeyaert, Toon Tellegen, Anne Provoost and many more have been using these timeless classics either as a basis for their own stories or revamping them aided by a wide variety of talented illustrators. In this colourful and fun exhibition for both adults and kids, these contemporary adaptations take centre stage.

You walk in to find a modern-day enchanted forest, which isn't only beautiful but also interactive. Countless objects from frogs to sparkling toadstools were created in papier-mache by Gent artist Micheline Vanderveken, who has done a spectacular job.

You can sit down in the big bad wolf's chair, listen to what Snow White's mirror has to say or follow the trail that the seven dwarfs have left, it's up to you. If you can rip yourself away for a bit of reading, Dr Vanessa Joosen, a researcher at the University of Antwerp, has equipped this display with explanations about the nature of fairy tales. These texts are accompanied by original drawings by Flemish illustrators Sabien Clement and Golden Owl winner Carll Cneut, among others.

Besides this great little show, the Hasselt Literary Museum has a permanent exhibition called *Giftige appels op gouden bordjes, eten en drinken in sprookjes* (*Poison Apples on Golden Platters: Food and Drink in Fairy Tales*). This also dream-like collection was brought to life by, again, Vanderveken, a papier-mache artist who is responsible for turning this small and little-known museum into a true work of art.

Fairy tales are packed with references to food, like poison apples and gingerbread houses, all of which are illustrated quite vividly. Familiar tales by



Wander through settings of contemporary Flemish fairy tales at the Literary Museum

The Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen and other penners of fairy tales are here, together with information on the meaning behind these seemingly innocent bedtime stories. Don't forget to explore the lower floor of the house, which is stuffed with Vanderveken's creations that are slightly reminiscent of the Land van Laaf in the Netherlands' amusement park De Efteling. Be sure to look up at the ceiling and the lavishly decorated table that resides there.

An ingenious display of small, wooden cabinets enclose a short biography and the works of several Limburg children's books authors and illustrators. Discover how each earned their cabinet, along with a delightful diorama of one of their most cherished memories or experiences.

Even the basement has been turned into a unique adventure. Get a flashlight at the front desk and explore the literally dark and gloomy world of coal mining. In this intricately recreated shaft, books, objects and photographs tell you the story of that famous Limburg coal. Beware, small kids might not take to this very well, but older ones will relish this grim experience where things just might go bump in the night.

The last permanent feature in the museum is *Van Schrijver tot Lezer, hoe een boek gemaakt wordt* (*From Writer to Reader: How A Book is Made*). The entire second floor is dedicated to



explaining to kids and adult book enthusiasts alike how books are put together. Starting with a few ideas or notes that the author is toying with, to the publisher, the illustrator, over to the printing and finally selling of the books. Brightly decorated panels take you through these various steps along with several draft versions of children's books that illustrate the process for youngsters. (It's an eye-opener for grown-ups, too.)

Located between the train station

and the city centre, the Literary Museum, at a mere €2.50 entry, is well worth the visit. The setting both inside and out will leave you feeling like you might just live happily ever after. ♦

Zeg Roodkapje

Until 20 February 2010
Hasselt Literary Museum
Bampslaan 35

→ www.literairmuseum.be

CULTURE NEWS

De Smaak van de Keyser, the popular Flemish drama series that showed on TV één late last year, has won the prize for best script in the prestigious Seoul International Drama Awards. Scriptwriter Marc Didden and co-director Frank Van Passel will travel to Korea next month to accept the award personally. The award follows on the heels of a number of other international prizes for the show about three generations of Hasselt women in a family of jenever distillers.

Viewers of quality Flemish TV programming were dismayed last winter when it was announced that television producer *Woestijnvis*, responsible for popular shows like *De slimste mens ter wereld*, *Man bijt hond* and the 2006 drama series *De parelvisser* (*The Pearl Fishers*) fell out with TV station VRT, resulting in the breaking of a contract that went back more than 10 years. But several new *Woestijnvis* programmes have show up on the autumn schedule of TV één, including the drama series *Los zand* (*Loose Sand*), partially set in Namibia and starring über-popular Flemish actors Matthias Schoenaerts and Koen De Bouw, and *De jaren stillekes* (*The Quiet Years*), in which long-time TV personality Steven Van Herreweghe looks at blasts from the past with special guests.

It was a surreal experience for this reporter to open *De Morgen* newspaper during the morning commute to the statement: Don't be surprised to see someone in the train reading a book on an eReader in the coming weeks" only to look across at a woman with one of the electronic books open in her lap. She must have bought it on holiday in the US, where the new *Kindle eReaders* are so popular, they will soon be available across Europe. Although eReaders, book-sized electronic devices to which you can download books off the internet, are already sold in Flanders, they were difficult to find and no more popular than in other markets, where they were seen as too clunky and hard on the eyes. Kindle, developed by Amazon.com subsidiary Lab126, are slimmer and lighter, and they use new "e-ink" technology that makes them easier to read. Kindle should be available here by the end of the month. Both Sony and Apple are also said to be copying the technology.

The Flanders Today ingenious award of the week goes to the Museum of Fine Arts in Brussels for its **August Fairy Tales in the Museum** programme, which gathers kids together in front of different paintings and tells them the "fairy tale" behind the picture. Children learn about the historical facts behind the image and are encouraged not to think of museums as boring and stuffy. This could very well educate a few parents, too.

→ www.fine-arts-museum.be