snow myth with anything but derision.

The Gift of Winter is funny and clever, but either the authors have tried too hard to cater to all possible tastes, or they have neglected to consider what audience they would write for. A "something for everyone" recipe turns out to be a little too much for anyone.

The weaknesses of these three books are not weaknesses of their respective genres. Whether children accept or reject them, they will do so for the same reasons that they would accept or reject any stories. The authors have taken steps in a good direction; if they take further and stronger steps the children will gladly follow them into myth, folk-lore, and fairy-tale.

Pamela Steele has worked as a librarian for many years, in academic and special libraries, and in adult and children's departments of Public Libraries in England and Canada.

Dubious Magic

MARY H. PRITCHARD

Joanie's Magic Boots, Brenda Bellingham. Tree Frog Press, 1979. 125 pp. $3.95 paper; $8.95 cloth.

Brenda Bellingham's first novel for children, *Joanie's Magic Boots*, might have been an exploration of the imaginative relationship between fairy tale and reality or a magical story about the power of a symbolic material object to transform imaginatively the shape of the real world. Instead, it is a tale about a troubled child's struggle to set her world to rights when magic has failed her, and as such the novel is a resounding success.

The youngest reader in the six-to-ten age range for which the novel is recommended could hardly fail to understand Joanie Taylor's need for a little magic in her life. Ten-year-old Joanie lives with her working mother whose singular inability to fulfil the emotional needs of her child must, in

charity, be attributed to the trauma of divorce and its attendant financial difficulties. The two have been abandoned by Joanie's alcoholic father, a "no good bum," for whom she has no apparent feelings; necessity has also separated them from their only other relatives, Joanie's grandparents. It is small wonder, then, that Joanie is obsessed by a Russian fairy tale about a princess who, having been stolen and enslaved by gypsies, meets a kind old lady who gives her a pair of magic purple boots that grant her dearest wish – to be reunited with her family. Nor is it surprising when Joanie succumbs to a coincidence of temptation and opportunity and shoplifts a similar pair of boots.

The resultant abrupt descend into reality provides a splendid opportunity for a realistic solution to Joanie's problems which are now compounded by the shame of being branded a thief, the loss of her mother's trust, the alienation of her only friend, and the necessity of paying for the boots. What is required is a practical, everyday solution that must be hammered out in terms of cold, hard cash that is earned by daily work, the only surety of good faith that Joanie can offer an unforgiving world. Fortunately, necessity is kind as well as cruel and presents Joanie with two new adult friends: Bill, the policeman, who eventually becomes her new father, and Mrs. White, a kind old lady who gives her a job. Joanie also wins back her friend, and together they devise a method for catching a villainous thief whose crime has been attributed to Joanie.

As a realistic story, the novel works very well. Joanie makes a mistake, suffers for it, and sets things right. Her efforts, combined with her basic honesty and generosity, bring about growth for herself and unforeseen events in the adult world around her. It is unfortunate, then, that the value of her accomplishment is undermined by the conclusion that the stolen boots, long since established as very ordinary and a bitter reminder of the folly of confusing the fairytale world with the real world, are magic after all.

By reversing the movement of the story, the conclusion introduces serious questions about the moral implications of the novel as a whole and about the relationship between the fairytale world and Joanie's reality. First, there is a danger, particularly for the younger reader, in the idea that theft may be worthwhile if a stolen object really can magically solve one's problems. This danger is intensified when Bill, who possesses the combined moral authority of adult, parent, and policeman, agrees that the boots "must have some magic about them."

Further, in Bellingham's version of the Russian fairy tale that Joanie reads, the princess is not only restored to those who love her, but also "[wears] fine clothes and [has] lots of money and good things to eat." Fairy tales are seldom this specific about material riches, because those riches are symbolic and represent intangible values – in this case, the security of family life. The equation of that symbolized security with actual food,

clothing, and money is Joanie's crucial mistake, so having the fairy tale itself define the riches in Joanie's terms confuses the central issue of the novel.

Again, in the fairy tale, the boots that are given to the princess, like most magical objects in fairy tales, are a gift. Such things must be gifts because they bring that rare kind of good fortune that comes arbitrarily, inexplicably, and gratuitously into our lives, fulfilling our most extravagant wishes. Such fortune belongs to the lucky; it cannot be earned, stolen, or bought, however much we may desire it. It is somewhat misleading, then, to suggest that Joanie's boots, whether stolen or bought, are the source of such a boon. Moreover, Joanie's good fortune is of a different order, for her wishes are fulfilled only when they have been progressively modified until they conform with real possibility: that is, ironically, when they have been divested of the material values of the fairytale world in favour of the intangible values of the real world.

Although these objections seem to suggest that Bellingham, like Joanie, has failed to distinguish between the symbolic world and its material counterpart, she has actually come within a hair's breadth of a totally successful union of them. Through a process of displacement, the symbolic elements of the fairytale world are transmuted into elements of the real world when Joanie stops looking for external solutions to her problems and starts taking responsibility for herself. An astute editor could easily have helped Bellingham to make the minor adjustments that would have clarified this development.

Perhaps, however, the editor did not understand the novel. Perhaps he wrote the cover blurb, complete with its grammatical error, its implication that the boots are, indeed, magic, and its attribution of Joanie's problem to a "vivid imagination" rather than to the failure of imagination that prevents her from seeing the truth. Brenda Bellingham deserves better than this, and so does Joanie: as represented by model Sherry Murray in the slick colour photograph on the cover, she looks far too wise to be taken in by an all-too-real pair of blue (not even purple) winter boots in a window full of summer saddle shoes, hiking boots and sneakers, even the window does reflect another world. The realism of the photograph is consistent with the overall no-nonsense effect of the sturdy paper binding and clean printing job. With no other illustrations, however, the novel presents a rather austere face to the younger reader.

These reservations notwithstanding, this is an impressive first novel, well-deserving of the support it received from the Canada Council and Alberta Culture and worthy of a substantial readership (with guidance) in a world where realistic children's fiction is often far less imaginative in treating social problems. Whether Tree Frog Press is equally deserving is less certain.

Mary Pritchard teaches English literature, including children's literature, for the University Ontario and King's College, one of its affiliates.