

Il est possible que les jeunes lecteurs soient heureux de retrouver un texte et des images qui leur rappellent les bons moments passés avec leur ami magicien Claude Lafortune. C'est ce que je leur souhaite.

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TRAVELLERS IN THE PERILOUS REALM

Canadian fairy tales, retold by Eva Martin. Illus. Laszlo Gal. Douglas and McIntyre, 1984. 128 pp. \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-030-8.

Canadian fairy tales, retold by Eva Martin and illustrated by Laszlo Gal, is a fine collection drawn from the storehouse of European folklore. The stories, brought to Eastern Canada and passed on from generation to generation by French, English, Scottish and Irish settlers, have been recorded during the past seventy years by such pioneer Canadian folklorists as Marius Barbeau, Cyrus Macmillan, and Mary Fraser and, more recently, by enthusiastic amateurs or curious linguists armed with tape-recorders and Canada Council grants. Of the twelve tales, eight are French-Canadian; of these, four recount the exploits of tricky Ti-Jean, a brother-under-the-skin of Jack the Giant Killer. "The fairy child" is a Celtic tale popular in Nova Scotia while "The three golden hairs" derives ultimately from *Grimm's fairy tales*. Two *märchen*, "Little golden sun and little golden star" and "Beauty and the beast" were first published by the University of Sudbury's Centre Franco-Ontarien de folklore in the *Les vieux m'ont conté* series.¹

Though used originally as entertainment for adults in lumber camps, on fishing boats, in farm kitchens and community halls, the stories will be classified as children's literature because of the "error of false sentiment" which, according to J.R.R. Tolkien, relegated fairy tales to the nursery.² Motifs familiar from Grimm, Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy are prodigally present — magic apples, invisible coats, seven league boots, beautiful princesses and unpromising younger sons, talking animals and prophetic fairy godmothers, deceitful sisters and wicked witches, mysterious gardens and forbidden rooms, transformations and impossible tasks. Distanced in time and place, events occur "once upon a time in a kingdom far away" or "a long time ago deep in the forest far to the north." Only in "Beauty and the beast" (a reversal of the familiar Madame de Beaumont version since it is the heroine who must be changed back from beast to princess by the hero's devotion) do references to baseball and football evoke a North American present.

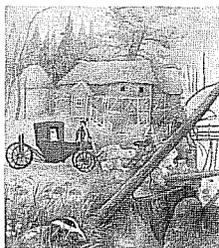
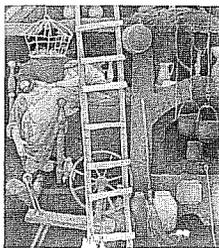
Recalling that the transmission of an old English ballad, "Edward, Edward", to the Appalachian region of the United States effected the change of the "red roan steed" to "the old gray horse that ploughed the field", I was puzzled by the lack of localisation in a collection titled *Canadian* fairy tales. A comparison of Martin's versions with their sources shows that she has deliberately chosen to strip away not only localisations but dialogue, colloquialisms, and descriptive details that suggest the subjectivity of an oral story teller.³ As a result, the materials have the timelessness of the supernatural. In this secondary world of the imagination, a lazy dümmlingkind, Ti-Jean, can imprison a unicorn "with its eyes as large as fists glowing in the dark", a prince who has been cut into a thousand pieces by sharp knives and razors can be reassembled by means of a princess's special ointment, and a horse with "feet as long as tomorrow" can leap over the lakes and mountains, carrying the hero to a magical garden.

No effort is made to soften the violent, the horrible, and the macabre aspects of the originals. In "The healing spring" the corpse of Jack's mother, set upright like a stone by the roadside, is shot three times by a farmer. In "St. Nicholas and the children" a wicked butcher specialises in pickling children "as a delicacy for the giant to eat." Fathers beat their sons day and night and sons beat their horses. But the violence is countered by good humour and comic reversals, as when the deceitful Princess of Tombozo is afflicted with the Foot-Long-Nose. And always there is the consolation of a happy ending, with the good rewarded and the evil punished.

The Hungarian-Canadian artist Laszlo Gal has provided evocative full-page illustrations in muted colours. Like Arthur Rackham, Walter Crane, and Edmund Dulac,⁴ Gal is particularly at home in the fairy tale world where the mysterious and magical impinge on the natural. The cross-hatching effect produced by combining watercolour and tempera creates an old world atmosphere which is sustained by thatched cottages, interiors furnished with spinning wheels, twig brooms, pottery jars and iron cauldrons, and the solid stone buildings of French or German towns (fig. 1). The "Beauty and the beast" illustration shows a marvellous Italian garden with ornamental fountain, statuary, columns, urns, and exotic orange flowers. "Goldenhair" is represented by medieval knights with plate armour, spears, and banners.

Avoiding scenes of horror and violence, Gal wins the audience's sympathetic involvement by showing his heroes and heroines in moments of achievement. Jack, blinded by his villainous brother and dumped into a graveyard "amidst the rough stones and prowling beasts", plunges his hand into the healing spring. Little Golden Sun on his white horse reaches out for the purple-plumed Bird of Truth. Ti-Jean sets out for the castle in his toad-drawn coach with the white cat who, transformed into the most beautiful of princesses, will win for him the crown (fig. 2). An appeal is made to all the senses as the artist depicts wind blown grasses, strings of plump sausages, the pointy-eared changeling with his flute, the blue-green waterfall in the wilderness where the old witch tracks

Jean-Pierre, and on the dust jacket and title page of each story, a dreamy-eyed boy playing a violin.



By excluding native folklore and failing to provide any local context, Eva Martin has produced a book that is not obviously Canadian. But it will appeal to readers of any age who are drawn to the Perilous Realm of faerie and will indirectly make us aware of “the hidden submerged culture lying in the shadow of the official civilization about which historians write.”⁵ My eight-year-old grandson spent several hours on Boxing Day with his nose in *Canadian fairy tales*. When asked how he liked the book, he replied enthusiastically, “It’s terrific!”

NOTES

¹In *Les vieux m’mont conté* (Montreal and Paris, 1973-) two versions are printed for each tale, one for the benefit of linguists, “qui fera une étude du juron ou du ‘patois’”, the other for readers “qui veulent jouir du comportement des multiples heros et de leurs auventures” (vol. I, p. 16).

²“On fairy-stories” in *Tree and leaf* (London, 1964), p. 34.

³Compare, for example, Martin’s version of “The fairy child” with that which Mary Fraser collected from Neil MacLellan of Broad Cove, Nova Scotia, who related it in Gaelic. Published in *Folklore of Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1975 [1931]), it is also available in Edith Fowke’s *Folklore of Canada* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 123-125. A more colloquial version of “The three golden hairs” is “Three gold hairs from the giant’s back” in Carole Spray, *Will o’ the wisp: folk tales and legends of New Brunswick* (Fredericton, 1979), pp. 37-42. Spray heard the story from Wilmot MacDonald of Glenwood who said it was a favourite in the lumber camps along the Portage River.

⁴Fairy tale illustrations by these and other artists are reproduced in Iona and Peter Opie, *The classic fairy tales* (London, New York and Toronto: 1974)

⁵Richard Dorson, quoted by Edith Fowke, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

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