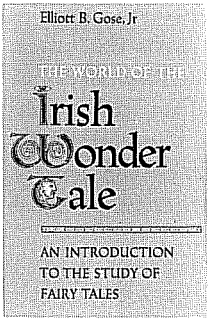
Dave Jenkinson *teaches children's and adolescent literature courses in the Faculty of Education, the University of Manitoba.*

FAIRY TALES FROM IRELAND



The world of the Irish wonder tale: An introduction to the study of fairy tales, Elliott B. Gose, Jr. University of Toronto Press, 1985. 228 pp. $30.00, $12.95, cloth, paper. ISBN 08020-5646-6, -8020-6585-6.

Professor Gose approaches his subject by emphasizing the deep psychological meaning of simple narratives. His study is disorganized because of his sporadic concern with anthropology, comparative religion and folklore and because of his unsustained relation of the wonder tale to myth and archetypal criticism, but his insistence that psychic integration motivates the wonder tale is compelling. Still, readers of this journal might find some of his assumptions questionable. He distinguishes absolutely between the psychology of children and adults, holding that the Irish tales belong to a tradition significant to grown-ups alone. His paraphrases and analyses testify that he puts adult psychic integration above all else. Although he describes the tales' audience as poverty-stricken and non-literate, he discounts social criticism: it seems that, in their creation of psychic freedom, the tales are undetermined by social circumstance. Circular logic, unexamined assumptions, and a disjointed reliance on interdisciplinary ideas detract from the psychological focus.

To prove that fantasy provides answers to real problems, Gose presents "The King of Erin and the Queen of the Lonesome Island." It concerns a king whose unfaithful wife undermines his rule. Unaware of her infidelity, he fathers on a queen of the otherworld a son who brings back from that realm a wife who displaces the adulterous queen. The son renews his father's rule because he is both moral and instinctual: he also fathers a child in the otherworld who helps solve problems there. That Gose's psychological concerns tend to be moralistic is clear when paraphrasing "The Fisherman's Son and the Gruagach of Tricks," This tale describes a son who, after being taken away by a shapechanging mentor, returns home to make his father's life comfortable but is so fixed on shape-changing that

he takes unnecessary risks and is excessively cruel: he is more keen on metamorphosis than identity (31). Although this tale has more narrative integrity than the first one, Gose prefers the former because it privileges virtue over power. He supports his view of the fisherman's son by a reading of "The Fisherman of Kinsale and the Hag of the Sea." The hero in this tale uses transformation to kill the hag with whom his father makes a bad bargain but the transformation originates from kindness to animals. Moreover, he uses power moderately and abandons his father-in-law's wealth. In his treatment of "The Thirteenth Son of the King of Erin," Gose analyzes its hero, Sean Ruadh, to show that wonder tales have structures deriving from primitive myth, yet, besides detailing the tale's connection to initiation rites, Gose stresses that Sean's purging of society gives the tale a social function. Gose more consistently discusses "The Blue Scarf of Strength." This tale indicates the relation of violence and sex in the wonder tale. The hero's disobedience to his mother and his blinding by his step-father suggest to Gose immature sexual independence and fear of castration. But Jack's surrender of wealth and power betokens a new and healthy attitude to women and matrimony.

Gose makes his next major point, that the breaking of taboos is central to the wonder tale, in his reading of "The Daughter of the King of Greece." The wonder tale, he says, achieves reinvigorating unity by confronting taboos because it operates on the boundaries between this world and the otherworld and, in fact, dissolves them. Another tale exemplifying this way of reintegrating neglected aspects of the psyche is "Sgiathan Dearg and the Daughter of the King of the Western World." Yet that the tale's figures are psychic concepts rather than human figures is not well argued. On this weak reading, Gose bases a seemingly irrelevant correlation between the undifferentiated world of the wonder tale and the pre-verbal world of children (121). He also argues that myths and wonder tales share archetypes and that the figures in both represent unconscious impulses needing integration. As a result, violence in the tales is not taken at face value; it simply derives from the breaking of taboos and the crossing of thresholds. Gose presents "Baranoir, Son of a King in Erin, and the Daughter of King Under the Wave" as an integration tale. Baranoir's refusal to marry a sister shows that he denies a part of himself and that relating to women is problematic for him. Insisting that the tale is irrelevant to children but essential to adults contemplating marriage, Gose stresses that it deals with the psychic events by which Baranoir balances desire and morality (151). In "Haggary Nag," a tale with the same folklore classification as the previous one, Gose sees Cathal's refusal to kill as representing a fear of death and ignorance about his anima. His adventures make him depend on female figures who teach him to kill. This recognition of the unconscious female side of his nature allows him to give up aggression.

Whereas Baranoir's tests take place in the other wold and involve trickery, Cathal's take place in this world and lead to fairminded rule. After using this comparison to illustrate the reductiveness of archetypal criticism, Gose returns to it in his reading of "The Cotter's Son and the Half Slim Champion." By confronting infidelity and impotence, Arthur liberates himself from them, thus reassuring the audience that the lack of maternal blessing does not endanger life and that reliance on a wife, rather than on overachievement, is the best way of facing the personal void.

In his last chapter, through the example of "The Speckled Bull" Gose seeks to unravel the paradox that the complete determinism of the wonder tale leaves its heroes free. Unfortunately, Gose's structural explanation of the concept of crux intervenes. Even so, he claims suggestively that violence and corruption need not govern the individual if he treats them as innocent aspects of himself. It is a compelling idea that fate is no more than the denied unintegrated aspects of a self. Still, the case that the wonder tale is a relevant and optimistic literary form needs a more steady and careful argument than it receives in this study.

Robert James Merrett *is a Professor in the Department of English at the University of Alberta.*

IT'S HOW IT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED

The singing stone, O.R. Melling. Viking Kestrel, 1986. 224 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-80817-2.

O.R. Melling's *The singing stone,* a sequel to her first children's fantasy, *The druids's tune*, is a remarkable accomplishment, a truly readable, highly entertaining story which, in its quiet way, redefines the literary tradition that it embraces. Inevitably it will be compared to the fantasies of C.S. Lewis, for it too chronicles the adventures of a modern protagonist in a mysterious, mystic land of magic and enchantment. And there are also the inevitable traces of Tolkienian fantasy (trusted companions, wise old scions and treasures with mysterious powers). But the writer that Melling probably most resembles is Canadian fantasist Ruth Nichol, for both are vitally concerned with stories that deal not with the adventures of heroes, but with the emergence of women as viable, effective heroines. And both are interested in providing fantasy worlds that can tell us much about prob-