quelquefois préférable de fermer les livres et d'envoyer tout le petit monde jouer dehors.

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NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES

Royal family fables. Allan Shute. Illus. Barbara Hartmann. Tree Frog Press, 1988. 160 pp., $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88967-062-5.

Royal family fables is a collection of nine children's stories by eight Canadian authors and, although it does not say so on the beautiful royal blue cover, the book is edited by Tree Frog's publisher, Allan Shute. It is illustrated with some fifty line drawings by Edmonton artist, Barbara Hartmann. *Royal family fables* is meant for ages 8 to 12, but it is probable that a younger child would enjoy Tololwa Marti Mollel's piece, "The king and the tortoise."

This is not the kind of book a young reader would choose on her own, largely because the pages are overfull with print, and some of the stories are too long to be absorbing. Nor is it the kind of book my friends would choose for their kids, largely because they would tend to choose tales which avoided themes of royalty, property and traditional family, or they would choose the classic fairy tales instead. *Royal family fables* may be caught in a catch 22; the tales are not as good as the classics, where unsavoury values and questionable stereotypes are used cleverly to bring a fairy world struggle of injustice to a happy close (usually marriage and unexpected wealth); but neither are they good enough to be excused the world view they construct in the troubled eighties, where sexism, racism and class are taken seriously because they do influence young minds. That said, however, the stories have merit because they succeed in creating alternate, unified worlds into which readers can escape. Although the writers are not particularly well-known, all of the stories are well-written and well-edited.

Even though parents may be irritated by the prince-and-princess mentality of these contemporary fairy tales, most of the heroes are children or young adults with whom young readers will readily identify. The cleverest story is "The golden arrow" by Gregory Sass in which the hero, Nicole, accompanies the Youngest Princess on a successful quest (i.e. marriage to the young prince), the result of which is that Nicole makes it through a scary day at a new nursery school although she misses her daddy. The best story is Anita van Keimpema's "The princess in the wind", a fable in which the stereotypes are not as strong as the writing.

The term "fables" makes us think twice about moral texture. We usually consider fables to be animal stories, told to point a moral in a two-page tale such as "The king and the tortoise". True, the genre has expanded beyond the beast fable to include both people and inanimate objects, but even the expanded fable has remained brief, pointed, and focused on a particular human dilemma with a single resolution. The stories in this collection, although they rely on folklore sources and even rewrite classical tales ("The golden arrow" is a witty and less reverent reworking of "The Frog Princess"), may be morally too complex. To counter this, the reader's contemporary consciousness must be brought into play. This is how Budge Wilson gets around the moralizing in "Dancing in the streets" and, less successfully, in "The queen who wouldn't listen." In both stories the queen [read: mothers] has a hard time listening to the prince or princess [read: children]. "Dancing in the streets" reminds one of *Oliver Button is a sissy*, but it is not as much about ordinary boys who love to dance as it is about boys who must escape mothering (this is what kingship means to the prince) by finally winning the mother's approval. Our hero becomes a real man in the end, "an imposing king, mounted upon his chestnut filly, erect, handsome, dressed in a scarlet cloak over a jet black leotard."

More conventional is the fairy world of Emerald-Rose, a young and perfect martyr who suffers death at the hands of her evil brother ("The peppermint branches" by L.C. Mitchell). A flute tells the truth about her demise to the loving king-father. Glenda Leznoff's hero, Prince Frederick, learns about true charity from a peasant girl in "The Prince who couldn't love." In Harry P. McKeever's "The peasant girl and the prince," the obedient Malina is saved from the marriage arranged by her father (in the course of doing his usual business) so that she can marry Prince Ahmed, have his four children and rule their subjects as "one large family, in harmony and in happiness." Malina has little voice in the tale, but she is the source of the father's transformation. Class and money are, of course, the booty; beauty and servility the weapons used to win them. These three tales are an example, too, of the way stereotypes about girls and women (suffering, virtuous, virginal, devoted wives and mothers, unable to speak in their own voices) are used to propel otherwise clever narratives, because all of us children want a perfect family.

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THE SPARROW AND THE SEA

Gurgle, bubble, splash. Richard Thompson. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Annick, 1989. 23 pp., $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-029-4, **The sparrow's song**.