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.

Marlene Kadar *is a Canada Research Fellow and Assistant Professor at the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies, York University.*

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**.

Ian Wallace. Illus. author. Penguin, 1986. 32 pp., $12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-81453-9.

Those who choose their books by their covers will be quickly drawn to these two superbly illustrated stories. The audience for *Gurgle, bubble, splash*, according to my seven-year-old consultant, is the three-to-six year old set, while *The sparrow's song* appeals to five-to-eight year olds. Very different in conception, the two books nonetheless share the distinction of containing illustrations that are more captivating than the text.

In the case of the first, Thompson's slightly awkward and wordy diction detracts somewhat from the Robert Munsch-like charm of the story of preschool-age Jesse's entrancement with the ocean. After Jesse has to leave the seashore at the end of her vacation, she receives a large, mysterious parcel that turns out to be the ocean coming to visit her. The comedy of their flooding friendship is captured in Eugenie's Fernandes' delightful illustrations, while Jesse manifests the power desired by King Canute when she successfully commands the sea to return to the beach. My daughter – who likes clear gender distinctions in her storybooks – shared my mild discomfort with the masculine spelling of the name of the androgynous-looking female protagonist. As the character derives from the real-life young female Jesse who is the author's own child, I will refrain from further comment.

In *The sparrow's song*, text and illustrations interact magically. While this book contains no more words that *Gurgle, bubble, splash*, it invites more sophisticated reading as the pictures develop dimensions of the story not stated explicitly in the text. The plotline is simple: Katie rescues a young sparrow orphaned by the slingshot of her repentant brother, and together the two children raise the bird to maturity and release it in the fall. The early twentieth-century Niagara Falls setting is barely mentioned in the words but forms the essence of the pictures, one of which shows an attic room full of local references: a photo of a honeymoon couple, a painting of the legendary Maid of the Mist, a life-belt from the tourist boat of that name, and a Union Jack hanging from a rafter. Even more engaging are the illustrations of the children's games: as they raise their sparrow near Niagara's "mythic gorge" they identify totally with their bird, painting their faces and tying branches to their arms to mimic wings as they teach it to fly, or attaching feathers to their heads to costume themselves like the insects they catch to feed it. Decoding these pictures with my daughter proved the most involving phase of preparing this review, and I predict that the book will be even more attractive to a child who has visited Niagara Falls and experienced their spell.

Carole Gerson *teaches Canadian Literature in the English Department at Simon Fraser University and prepared this review in consultation with Rebekah Gerson, who attends L'Ecole Bilingue in Vancouver.*