

## ROMANIAN FAIRY TALES

**Fairy tales.** Flavia Cosma. Trans. Don D. Wilson. Illus. Kate Kennedy. Canadian Stage & Arts Publications Ltd. 1990. 48 pp. ISBN 0-919952-48-8.

In one of the three stories in *Fairy tales*, Flavia Cosma describes a world ruled by two separate powers, Queen Day and Queen Night. "The Legend of the sunflower" reflects an essentially Manichean notion of the universe prevalent in Romanian thought. A common saying among devout Romanians, for example, is "God is great, but the Devil is clever too."

Queen Night's daughter, Princess Moon, demands the nightingale as a gift. The bird, however, has been given to Prince Sun, the son of Queen Night's enemy, Queen Day, by Princess Flower. Queen Night steals the bird (she transforms herself into a black cat). Moon also desires Day who is therefore kidnapped. The plot then follows Queen Day's efforts "to save the day," as it were.

Despite interrupted romance and royal rage, "The legend of the sunflower" is not very interesting because Cosma provides little dramatic detail and relies upon narrative whim to carry the plot along. The transformation of Princess Flower into the sunflower seems tacked on after the inconclusive confrontation between Day and Night, itself remarkable because it demonstrates the duality in Romanian thinking.

"The Four brothers" is more appealing because here Cosma uses convincing detail and structures the conflicts in a more compelling way than she does in "Sunflower." This is a tale of young men "so poor that nobody was poorer than they were." Johnny, the youngest brother, lags behind on their way "looking for some luck" and meets the Badger of the Earth who grants him several wishes. Johnny shares the wishes with his brothers who acquire great wealth, having promised to feed whatever poor wayfarer knocks on their door. They don't, even when the suppliant is their own brother, fallen on hard times.

"A tale of love" depicts the deep devotion between a palm tree and an ivy plant. A weak and overdrawn story, lacking real tension and verging on the sentimental, the prose here and throughout the collection, as translated by Don D. Wilson, is often banal and formulaic, depending upon adverbs for emotional emphasis:

Time passed. The palm grew taller and taller and handsomer.

Then, unexpectedly, misfortune struck. In the afternoon the sky darkened suddenly in the distance. A black cloud swiftly approached, covering the soft light of day with menace....and the birds took off shrilly.

The unattractive, full colour paintings by Kate Kennedy suffer because of the production values. Heavy, glossy and glaring paper is more suitable for photographs than book illustration. Held by glue, the first two pages of my

copy also fell out when I opened the book.

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## STORYING AND LEARNING

**Stories in the Classroom.** Bob Barton and David Booth. Pembroke Publishers, 1990. 200 pp., \$14.95 paper. ISBN 0-921-217-439.

To story or not to: that is the question answered by Barton and Booth in *Stories in the classroom*. In their reply they persist in using the noun "story" as a verb and urge teachers to transform their classrooms into "storying tribes" where children and teachers will bond together without "elitism" into "storying communities." In spite of the use of contemporary educational jargon and slogans, this is a serious book where the power of story in children's lives is discussed in detail.

To Barton and Booth, narratives are, for the young, "a kind of shorthand for dealing with complex situations such as wickedness or deceit" (42) and afford them the opportunity to mentally venture afar and grapple with awesome challenges. Through stories children also learn literary forms and language by coming "to know the anatomy of story, its forms, genres, motifs, patterns, universals, words, and images" (16).

Like Egan in *Teaching as storytelling* (1987), Barton and Booth propose that narratives become the heart of the school curriculum, arguing that the structure of stories lies at the root of the mind and that story's possibilities for learning activities are endless: "They can be burrowed into, built onto, they can provide the stimuli for talk, extend reading and a host of interpretive activities" (23).

The authors give advice on choosing stories and provide examples from folktales, picture books, story poems and novels; they also advise how to help children respond to stories through "talk, drama, painting, dance, writing, modeling, spontaneous laughter, letters to authors" and so on (93). But they wisely add a note of caution: a simple response is often the most effective one in helping children to explore stories for their own sake – children like to talk about stories and benefit from it.

The authors write with a genuine enthusiasm for their subject; their knowledge and love of the world of children's literature is inspirational and their experience of working with teachers and children for over thirty years comes through. In addition, their approach to story is innovative, acknowledging as it does that: "stories come in all shapes and sizes – novels, tales, legends, pic-