

will be broken.

Similarly, the simple line in *Gilgamesh* that Enkidu and Shamshat, the beautiful singer and emissary from Uruk, "explored the ways of love together," will be appreciated by the adult reading this story to the child. A grace in the narrative which extends beyond the language may be attributed to a perfect balance of story elements as they are put together so seamlessly.

While the illustrator of *Cathal*, Jillian Hulme Gilliland, restricts herself to black, green and white, and represents the characters in a frieze silhouette in which they troop across the stage of the book and our imagination, Ludmila Zemaan, (artist/author of *Gilgamesh*) keeps to earth tones (sepias, olives and terra cotta browns) which remind us of the myth's roots in Babylonian myth/legend. One story begins "before now," in a shadowy age earmarked by the traditional green of Irish legend: the other opens up in a patch of warm sunshine of another world and earlier civilization, "long ago."

Although both books are excellent, my daughter preferred the more immediately accessible *Gilgamesh* with its cleanness of narrative, and my son was drawn into the cumulative pattern of action in *Cathal*. My daughter loved the coloured illustrations in *Gilgamesh* for their warmth and immediacy and the dramatic impact of such scenes as Gilgamesh facing Enkidu on the city wall. But my son was drawn to the scary giant, black, threatening and hairy (semi-comic?) shadow of giant that he is in *Cathal*. In fact, personality may determine which book your child will prefer.

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#### A SCOTTISH FOLKTALE RE-PAINTED

**The Nightwood.** Robin Muller. Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1991. 32 pp., cloth. ISBN 0-385-25305-2.

Based on one of the oldest of the Scottish folktales, *The Nightwood* tells the tale of Tamlynne (or Tam Lin). There are many versions still in existence of this story, but this one features Elaine, daughter of the Earl of March, who becomes fascinated by the nearby enchanted forest called the Nightwood. Forbidden to attend her father's formal dance, she finds herself drawn to the faery ball.

As is common to all versions, Elaine plucks a single red rose that blooms amongst the decay of the Nightwood. This flower, belonging to the Elfin Queen, summons the young knight Tamlynne. The ageless youth reveals that he has been the captive of the queen for seven years and that soon his soul will be sacrificed so that the faeries can keep their bargain with Hell. Only through the love of a mortal can he be saved. During the fight for his soul, Elaine clasps Tamlynne to her while he metamorphoses into many strange and frightening beasts until, finally, he becomes a red-hot brand. When Elaine, never daunted,

plunges the rod into a pool of water, Tamlynne becomes mortal. In the end, their love proves stronger than the dark power of the Elfin Queen and they are both saved.

Folktales should have the power to help us understand the rights and wrongs of our human existence—to provide us with a moral framework with which our children can work. Like all folktales, this one speaks of truths through archetypes—the forbidden forest, the red rose, the changeling beast, and the evil attraction of the faery spirit. But Muller has taken the folktale and fleshed it out to yield even more drama. The story literally pulsates with suspense and foreboding, but, as with every good folktale, all is right with the world in the end. Muller's version would work extremely well in oral storytelling—there is enough romance and excitement to appeal to people of all ages.



In the full-page illustrations that depict the faery dance, there is always one of the knights/faeries looking directly at the reader—I found that eerie and deliciously disconcerting. The paintings are extremely detailed and busy, not suited to group viewing when the story is being read aloud. The illustrations are full of wonderful nasty little creatures—perhaps some that parents would not want very young children to dwell on. While Muller's version of the tale would read aloud well, the illustrations are perhaps better suited to individual perusal by older children.

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#### EXPERIENCE BECOMES A BRIDGE TO BEARS

**Bears.** Ian Stirling. Photos. Aubrey Lang. Key Porter Books, 1992. (Natural History Series). 64 pp., \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55013-296-2.

Ian Stirling's informal, engaging style and familiar comparisons draw the reader into the world of scientific research in *Bears*, helping us to understand such things as the bear's fossil history and terms such as "carnivore lethargy" (not hibernation).

Stirling spent twenty years studying polar bears and he catalogued his experience in the thorough 220-page adult reference, *Polar bears*. In *Bears*,