Hans Christian Andersen's The Snow Queen. Ken Setterington. Illus. Nelly and Ernst Hofer. Tundra, 2000. $19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-497-5. *The Snow Queen*. Eileen Kernaghan. Thistledown, 2000. $14.95 paper. ISBN 1-894345-14-2.

Hans Christian Andersen's story "The Snow Queen," in which faith and love triumph over the harsh cold world of scientific reason, has been retold by two writers: Ken Setterington, Toronto story-teller and children's librarian, and Eileen Kernaghan, West Coast writer and author of *Dance of the Snow Dragon* (1995). The results are very different: while Setterington's book is a conservative updating of Andersen's tale, Kernaghan's is an imaginative recasting of the story in terms of the quest for female independence.

Among Setterington's changes are the reduction of the Christian elements found in the original version, including the hymn repeated at the beginning and end of Andersen's tale, and the softening of Andersen's acerbic criticism of scientific methodology. Andersen's Kay, imprisoned in the Snow Queen's palace until he is able to form the word "eternity" out of pieces of ice, is engaged in "the ice game of reason. . . . [T]he patterns were very remarkable and of the highest importance . . . but he could never make the word he wanted." On the other hand, Setterington's Kay "was busy with the ice fragments from the frozen lake, trying to put a word together . . . like a child playing with building blocks." These changes are, however, somewhat problematic because they weaken the central dialectic of the story without offering any substitute. Science and religion aside, there are moments when Setterington's changes are difficult to understand. Why, for instance, subsume Andersen's expressive phrase "the most lovely landscapes looked like a plate of boiled spinach" in the blandly abstract alternative "the mirror could make anything that was good or beautiful look horrid" (5)? Nelly and Ernst Hofer's silhouette illustrations using a delicate technique of paper cutting are wonderfully intricate and offer perhaps the best reason for purchasing this volume.

Kernaghan converts the dialectic between reason and faith into an explicit gender issue: from the moment that the Snow Queen's ice splinter enters his heart, Kay is in the grip of the rational side of his nature and, in contrast to Andersen's story, he does not change after he is rescued by Gerda. Nor does Gerda simply represent innocent faith and love: instead, Kernaghan perceives the issues latent in Andersen's story and concentrates upon Gerda's search for identity, reinforcing the interest of this quest by duplicating it in the character of the Robber Maiden, who makes only a brief appearance in Andersen's tale. Ritva, as she is called in Kernaghan's story, is herself on a quest for independence from her domineering mother (a Saami shaman) and from her dissolute father and his band of robbers. The two protagonists — Gerda, a polite product of a conventional nineteenth-century Christian upbringing, and Ritva, an aggressive, rough-spoken girl from a northern shamanistic culture — join in an uneasy alliance to find Kay after Gerda has fallen into the hands of the robbers and Ritva decides to protect her.

The central relationship in the story is now that between Gerda and Ritva, whose contrasting characters and cultures are vividly realized by Kernaghan. At the heart of the story are their dangerous journey to the Snow Queen's realm, the people who help them (including Andersen's two wise old women), and their success in passing the tests set for them by the treacherous Snow Queen. In the course of their

adventures, the girls move from ill-concealed fear and enmity to respect, affection, and admiration for each other's different gifts and cultures.

Kernaghan's perceptiveness about the key issues in Andersen's story is equalled by the effectiveness of her writing. When the girls reach the Snow Queen's palace, for instance, descriptions of the landscape increase the suspense: "The moon hung like a great pewter dish in a cobalt sky. Trackless snowfields, stained with violet shadows, stretched away to the dark line of the horizon, where they vanished into a silvery mist. . . ." (116). Although the meaning of the original tale may be largely inaccessible to modern children, this version is turned into a gripping adventure story for young adolescents that builds upon the mystery and complexity of Andersen's story. Finally, however, the two stories have opposite meanings: whereas Andersen's Kay and Gerda go back to the innocent paradise of their rose garden, Kernaghan's heroines head off into adult life with the courage born of increased self-awareness. Andersen's story records a stalemate in the dialectic of faith and reason: to idealize childish innocence is to isolate oneself from the larger world. Instead, Kernaghan's characters make the dangerous passage from innocence to experience.

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Rough Guides to Faeryland

The Secret Life of Fairies. Penelope Larkspur. Illus. Leslie Elizabeth Watts. Kids Can, 1999. 27 pp. $14.95, $16.95 with faux gold fairy pendant. ISBN 1-55074-547-6, 1-55074-555-7. ***How To See Fairies***. Charles Van Sandwyk. Illus. Charles Van Sandwyk. Raincoast, 1999. Unpag. $29.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55129-275-4.

Fairy populations are dwindling because of habitat encroachment but "At the beginning of the second millennium fairies are still very much with us," and the illustrations in these books are, as ever, much more important than the text. Anyone who enjoyed Cicely Mary Barker's delightful *Flower Fairy* books as a child probably still remembers the delicately drawn fairy pictures decades after forgetting the poems, if indeed he or she bothered to read the poems in the first place.

The Secret Life of Fairies is beautifully illustrated in soft greens and pale earthy colours. The delicately drawn fairies are robust and unsentimental, sometimes quite wicked looking and always smug. These are the fairies of Shakespeare not Walt Disney, fairies to respect and keep at a safe distance. The text is a humorous attempt at imaginative cultural anthropology. The reader is told in detail, perhaps in a little more detail than is strictly necessary, where fairies live, what they wear, how they entertain themselves, and all about their diet. It seems that fairies wear a batwing cloak when it rains. Political correctness has obviously not reached fairyland; this is surely the equivalent of our wearing a fur coat. The reader is offered some useful advice on where to find fairies and how not to offend them. The book concludes with a delightful fairy tale. Two or three more fairy tales and less fairy information would have made the book one that a child would read again and again.