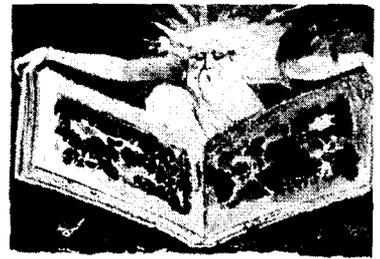


The Development of Canadian Fantasy Literature for Children



Judith Saltman

Résumé: Judith Saltman définit le “merveilleux” et le “fantastique” comme “étant empreints du sens de l’altérité”, résume ensuite leur évolution, de la tradition orale aux jeux littéraires du merveilleux animal et du voyage dans le temps, de la science-fiction, et, enfin, dresse un bilan de la production canadienne dans ce domaine et présente différents auteurs qui ont pratiqué ces genres.

Summary: This paper defines “fantasy” as being “marked by a sense of otherness,” and then traces the evolution of fantasy from the oral tradition into the divergent practices of animal fantasy, time-slip travel, science fiction, and related permutations. Judith Saltman gives an overview of Canadian fantasy to date.

How is fantasy defined? Fantasy is marked by a sense of otherness. It is touched by the magical, by a reality different from that of daily life. According to J.R.R. Tolkien in his essay “On Fairy-Stories,” fantasy involves the creation of a “Secondary World,” a world with “the inner consistency of reality,” which commands belief and possesses an essential “quality of strangeness and wonder.” This total world — or secondary reality — is created by imagination, by what Tolkien calls the elvish craft of enchantment:

Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose.¹

Fantasy may create a total world. It may involve time travel or flight to distant planets. It may explore the thresholds between worlds in the passage between congruent universes or the intrusion of the supernatural into the everyday world. It may reinterpret myth and legend or anthropomorphize animal society. But it always speaks with the universal voice of imagination, dream, and archetype, and its magic is imbued with meaning within a basic code of laws.

Fantasy is an expansive and fluid genre, including many categories. These can be seen clearly in the history of fantasy writing for children. Fantasy is, first of all, rooted in the oral tradition. In the nineteenth century, the works of the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen generated a renewed enthusiasm for the folktale and the fairy tale. The first fantasies written for children — including John Ruskin’s seminal *King of the Golden River* (1851) — owe their style and content to the fairy tale. The great Victorian fantasists, such as Charles Kingsley in *The Water-Babies* (1863), Lewis Carroll in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and George MacDonald in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), shared a seemingly limitless imaginative energy in their varied ap-

proaches to fantasy. They created extraordinarily diverse stories marked by sophisticated wit and parody, high morality and subtle didacticism, enchantment, and the revelation of universal truths.

At the turn of the century, *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) by Kenneth Grahame provided a new form of animal fantasy, which combined elements of the traditional beast fable with social satire. This same form is evident in such present-day works as Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (1972).

Stories of real or toy animals interacting with people as in A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), Hugh Lofting's *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* (1920), and E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) are more closely related to the light domestic fantasy that became the major form of children's fantasy from the turn of the century to the mid-twentieth century. The primarily comic tradition of domestic or light fantasy is marked by elaborate inventiveness, wit, and playful adventure. Beginning with Frank Baum (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 1900) and E. Nesbit (*Five Children and It*, 1902), domestic fantasy found adherents in J.M. Barrie (*Peter Pan*, produced as a play in 1904 and retold as a story and published in 1911 under the title *Peter and Wendy*), P.L. Travers (*Mary Poppins*, 1934), Astrid Lindgren (*Pippi Longstocking*, first published in English in 1950), Mary Norton (*The Borrowers*, 1952), and the controversial but popular modern cautionary tale, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) by Roald Dahl.

The fantasy of time travel also evolved early in this century, from the early "time slip" works of E. Nesbit to Alison Uttley's evocative *A Traveller in Time* (1939). Recent fantasists such as William Mayne, Philippa Pearce, L.M. Boston, Penelope Lively, and Ruth Park explore the shifting dimensions of time.

Influenced by J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-56), a new form of fantasy developed after the Second World War. This epic or high fantasy uses material from myth, legend, romance, and hero tale. Since the 1960s, writers such as Alan Garner in Britain, and Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper and Ursula Le Guin in the United States, have created memorable works in this category.

Science fiction written specifically for children (sometimes called science-fiction fantasy) is a latecomer to children's fantasy. The dividing line between fantasy and science fiction is blurred, but children's writers of the second half of the twentieth century have created speculative fiction that involves elements of science and technology or that is set in the future or on another planet. These writers are generally considered science-fiction writers. Madeleine L'Engle (*A Wrinkle in Time*, 1962), John Christopher (the White Mountains trilogy, 1967-68), and Peter Dickinson (the Changes trilogy, 1968-70) are practitioners in this field.

In Canada, the fantasy genre had particular difficulties in development. The imaginative core of early Canadian children's literature, from the 1850s to the mid-twentieth century, has been rooted in a geographical awareness, in the impact of the land. The dangers, challenges, and awesome beauty of the Canadian wilderness and its wildlife provided a dramatic backdrop and rich

source of colourful incident for what became the standard genres of Canadian children's literature: the Robinsonnade survival saga, the historical romance of exploration and the furtrade, the traditional outdoor adventure story, the wild-animal biography, and the retellings of aboriginal legends.

It was difficult for fantasy to take root in this literary landscape. Except for indigenous native legends, there is no substantial tradition in Canada of the magical and fabulous, no imaginative storehouse of themes and motifs drawn from folklore and mythology, no national epic romances such as the Arthurian legend. First Nations myth and legend belong to the native peoples; the power of these tales is difficult to translate into fantasy. This has hindered the growth of local fantasists, although there were notable exceptions in the early years, including Catherine Anthony Clark, whose magical stories, such as the 1950 *Golden Pine Cone*, incorporate elements of the awesome British Columbia landscape and Indian spiritualism. But Clark could not create a convincing new world based on native folklore, such as that found in the aboriginal *The Ice is Coming* trilogy (1977-1981) by Australian Patricia Wrightson. A more classical fantasist is Ruth Nichols. In the late 1960s, her traditional *A Walk Out of the World* integrated Canadian settings with the quest structure and the symbolic conflict between good and evil found in the epic high fantasies of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

The 1970s and 1980s were a turning point for the writing and publishing of Canadian children's books. There was a vigorous exploration of new genres and themes; this included an invigoration of fantasy from picture books to fiction. Many picture book authors wrote in the fantasy vein.

In the classic animal-fantasy picture-book genre, Tim Wynne-Jones and Maryann Kovalski offered memorable works. Wynne-Jones's *Zoom* books, beginning with *Zoom at Sea*, are quest fantasies, rooted in reality by the restrained firmness of Ken Nutt's down-to-earth, matter-of-fact pencil drawings in which both the ordinary and supernatural images are rendered with meticulous detail. The story of a cat's quest for the sea and the miracle of an expanding ocean inside a hidden room is told as sparely and smoothly as a folk tale.

The gentle humour in the *Zoom* books is similar to that in Kovalski's *Brenda and Edward*, a tender tale of animal friendship. The anthropomorphized dog protagonists love and lose each other, only to be reunited in their old age. The sketchy, pastel-toned images in gouache, coloured pencil, and pen and ink add to the story's blend of sentiment and humour.

The king of the pre-school fantasy genre is Robert Munsch, whose exaggerated, comic satires and child-power fantasies are the flip side of the serious view of the emotional life of children. Munsch's tall tales, such as *Mortimer*, show brave and plucky kids having absurd adventures and thwarting authority figures. The colloquial, fast-paced tales are theatrical in their rich sound patterns and repetition. Along with Michael Martchenko's exuberant, cartoon style water-colour and pencil sketches, the text and art have very little Canadian sensibility; they belong to the universal world of the urban North American every child.

Although the picture-book fantasies were increasing, true fantasy was not a strength in Canadian writing for children, with few practitioners until the late 1970s and 1980s, when a handful of fantasists attempted an exploration of the genre. None, however, successfully integrated Canadian landscape or native myth with themes of classic fantasy as Ruth Nichols and Catherine Anthony Clark had in the early years.

Perhaps the best known Canadian fantasy of this period is not one of high epic fantasy, but Mordecai Richler's *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, a light, comic fantasy with an energetically raw, comic-book appeal. Set in England, the narrative recounts the adventures of a young boy who dreams he is tossed into the dungeons of Slimer's Isle, a children's prison, for insulting an adult. A sly variation of the Victorian children's cautionary tale, the story is slapstick and exaggerated, possessing some of the bite that enlivens Richler's adult novels.

Although Canadian fantasy of the classic struggle between good and evil, set in fully realized other worlds, has rarely been successful, the time-travel or time-slip category set in Canada has shown much promise. The overpowering and alienating Canadian landscape and the lack of a magical folk tradition and localized heritage with ancient roots that did not belong to the First Nations oral tradition was detrimental to the development of epic fantasy, but beneficial to the growth of the time-travel genre. Perhaps this is because the only true elements of fantasy and magic in the time-travel genre are movement across time and the talisman or plot device that precipitates the travel through time and space. And, considering Canadian children's writers' predilection for historical fiction, it is natural that they would be comfortable with a genre in which the time travel leads into historical fiction and dramatizes the daily life and customs of a particular period. The evocative power of the Canadian landscape and the innate drama of historical sites are factors in many time-travel works. Setting often plays a crucial role. The child protagonists' sensitivity to the residual layers of time in a particular place may provide the emotional connection that links two eras and motivates the action.

Like many other time-travellers before her, Rose Larkin, in Janet Lunn's *The Root Cellar*, is lonely, disturbed, and confused by changes in her life and her emotional turmoil precipitates travel into another era, in which she becomes distanced from, and finally resolves, her inner conflict. The twelve-year-old American orphan cannot adjust to her new life with unknown Canadian relatives in a decrepit old Ontario farmhouse. Her estrangement leads her to wander through the old house's root cellar into an era as metaphorically divided as her own heart — the time of the American Civil War. She leaves her self-absorption on a path to maturity, beginning with a perilous journey through the grim horrors in the aftermath of war, and finally accepts her home in Ontario, her loyalties reconciled.

Another type of fantasy developed in Canadian children's writing in the late 1970s and 1980s — supernatural or psychological fantasy: a loose amalgam of magic realism and the supernatural, of ghost stories and psychological tales of

extrasensory perception and the occult. The most powerful work from the cluster of titles in this category is also the most realistic. Cora Taylor's *Julie* speaks with a voice of surface realism, depicting an ordinary world populated by real human beings living in a grounded prairie environment. The sense of "otherness" in *Julie* lies in the psychic gift of the child protagonist, whose growing extrasensory perception brings her alienation and grief. Taylor's prose is condensed and imagistic as the narrative follows Julie's growth in psychic powers from preschooler to ten-year-old.

The drama of an unusual child's perceptions and emotions — the trials of an outsider in society — is also a theme of Monica Hughes's *Isis* trilogy, the strongest work of science fiction for children written in Canada. Successful Canadian science fiction written for children is as rare as epic fantasy, despite the fact that such elemental Canadian themes as the struggle for survival and the adaptation to new, hostile environments are familiar motifs of speculative literature.

Monica Hughes is our only writer of international calibre in this area. Her writing has echoes of the Canadian immigrant and pioneer experience as she writes of space settlers, disoriented and adapting to a new and hostile planet, and of the experience of being a lonely outsider, a stranger to a land that is too primal and vast to admit a human presence. Beginning with *The Keeper of the Isis Light*, Hughes's trilogy follows the history of a community on an interstellar lighthouse planet in the twenty-first-and-second century over four generations from its promising beginnings to near-destruction. Teen-aged Olwen lives in isolation on the beautiful, alien planet of Isis with Guardian, her robot protector. Physically altered by Guardian, she is spurned by the new settlers from Earth for her different, reptilian appearance. The existential dilemma of the outsider and such moral issues as prejudice and hatred are extended in the sequels. In a direct, economical style, Hughes explores thought-provoking concepts in her prolific publications. She dramatizes the meeting of cultures and makes vividly concrete the invaluable, living heritage of a society's myth, ritual, and history.

In modest, but increasing numbers, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Canadian authors and illustrators began exploring the genre of the literary fairy tale, which adapts the structural shape of the folktale with its patterned language and moral conflict while adding elements of psychological realism or playing with the very concept of the folktale. Michael Bedard has tried his hand at several original literary fairy tales, such as *The Lightning Bolt* with its Germanic dark forest and battle of wits. He has also retold the masterful literary fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen in *The Nightingale* and other tales. In all these works, Bedard's illustrator has been Regolo Ricci. In his rewriting of *The Nightingale*, Bedard evolves his interpretation of Andersen's lively diction, strong spoken language, and fluctuating tone of social satire and bitter-sweet lyricism. He definitely changes the text, removing passages of light absurdity, making this a more pensive, sombre story. The well-researched imagery of the elegant, ornate paintings provides a window into another time and place, while Ricci's adept-

ness at comic caricature prevents the pictures from being overly decorative.

In 1842 Robert Browning stamped his poetic interpretation on the German semi-factual legend, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," and ever since, the tale has been an odd amalgam — part historical fact, part folktale, and part literary fairy tale. Michèle Lemieux's version is somewhat bald in her retelling, but her sturdy oil paintings provide a view into medieval social history and community life, as did her earlier paintings for *A Gift from Saint Francis* and *Peter and the Wolf*. Her flattened perspective, architectural detail and domestic imagery of life in the miniature, toy-like towns are drawn from medieval manuscripts and early Renaissance genre paintings. But the scenes of mad-cap chaos created by the rats are full of movement and decidedly non-formalistic — more cinematically Marx brothers in origin than any medieval Book of Hours.

In this same period, Canadian fantasists experimented with fantasy, bringing it closer to the realm of the psychological and archetypal and blending elements of fantasy with other genres, such as historical fiction. Two historical novels exploring the immigrant's pain of adjustment to an unwelcoming new land, Janet Lunn's *Shadow in Hawthorne Bay* and Paul Yee's *Tales from Gold Mountain*, are given a particular resonance through the interjection of fantasy elements.

Janet Lunn, in *Shadow in Hawthorn Bay*, recreates the Upper Canada sturdy pioneer society of the early 1800s in detailed, nuance-filled observations of that practical, hard-working, often brutal existence. Scottish immigrant Mary brings with her strong beliefs in ghosts, fairy lore, and her vivid second-sight. As she finds a place for herself in this new world and battles with the spectre of her drowned Heathcliffian cousin, Mary's story slides between myth and social history. She will be a vessel through which ancient Celtic beliefs from the old country will become rooted in the new world. Lunn's writing is rich in characterization, strong in dialogue, and compelling in plot, but her greatest strength is the creation of a simultaneously dual vision of reality and fantasy.

Paul Yee does something very similar in *Tales from Gold Mountain: Stories of the Chinese in the New World*, his collection of short stories of immigrant experience. Like Lunn's use of ballad, myth, and faerie-lore, Yee blends historical fact and folklore motifs. With narrative energy and his considerable strengths in historical research, Yee recreates the daily hardships and emotional lives of the nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants to the Pacific Coast. The Chinese presence in the building of British Columbia, from the gold rush to the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, is described from the inside, with the emphasis on the stoic courage, fortitude, and spiritual strength that enabled the Chinese people to overcome adversity. The atmosphere of British Columbian frontier society is aptly conveyed in the hard-working characters and harsh settings that range from salmon canneries, gold fields, gambling halls, farms, and the rock faces of the CPR rail line. As in Janet Lunn's writing, an overwhelming sense of place and social detail recreates the milieu of a particular time and morés of a cultural group. Again, as in Lunn's romantic approach,

elements of surrealism and folklore are incorporated by Yee to build layers of resonating themes and to construct unusual plots predicated upon the structure and motifs of classic literary fairy tales. There are ghost stories, tales of high romance, comic farces, as well as sagas of quiet heroism and survival. The stylized illustrations by Simon Ng are darkly sombre or spryly satirical portraits, recalling in their dignity and power monumental mural painting.

The new fantasists of the last decade have also continued in the traditional time-travel genre and have attempted to sculpt a different shape from the matter of high, epic fantasy. Time-travel fantasy — stories in which the protagonists travel into the past from the present — is a mode that has attracted quite a number of Canadian writers. The usually adolescent protagonists are most often propelled into the past through their inner pain and find perspective and solace there. Most recent writers have been concerned with the social aspects of the past rather than with major events. An exception was Janet Lunn's stellar work from the early 1980s, now almost a classic — *The Root Cellar*, drawing as it does on the tragedy of the American civil war and the drama of the time. Quieter stories that take the protagonist back into social history demand a stronger fictional component, a reason or psychological need for the character to be in the past. Such works of the last decade as *A Handful of Time* by Kit Pearson and *Who is Frances Rain?* by Margaret Buffie demonstrate the blending of fantasy and social history with family history which becomes the motivator bringing the young person into the past. Shy Patricia, in *A Handful of Time*, is estranged from her mother. During her summer visit to the family cottage, she travels back in time through the talisman of an old pocket watch to become a witness to her mother's hardships as a young teenager. The fantasy is gentle and insightful, written with quiet restraint and compassion. These family-history fantasies of travelling into the childhood of parent or grandparent have a deep psychological power as the protagonist reaches an awareness of family secrets, and a revelation of how one generation is alive in another.

Margaret Buffie's *Who is Frances Rain?* follows this mode as the young teenager, unsettled by family transformations, discovers a missing piece of her family history. Travelling back in time as an observer, through the magic of a pair of old spectacles, Lizzie witnesses the family pain of three generations past, the suffering of her grandmother and great grandmother. Again, the act of seeing one's family through the perspective of time acts as a cleansing of vision and heart.

Pearson and Buffie's fantasies rend open the social fabric of the past to reveal the injustices and cruelties experienced by women. Julie Lawson and Kevin Major do something parallel in time-slip fantasies that cast light upon our inheritance of racism and prejudice from the past. In Lawson's *White Jade Tiger*, Jasmine, grieving at the loss of her mother and angry with her father, enters the world of British Columbia in the nineteenth century with its cruel bigotry and intolerance of the Chinese immigrants. Her experiences are both an adventure and a restoration of family identity.

Major's *Blood Red Ochre* is a darker book. It is an exploration of a Canadian historical tragedy — the disappearance from Newfoundland of the Beothuk tribe in the nineteenth century. Major builds a time-travel fantasy by layering two narrative voices which come together only at the novel's climax: a contemporary Newfoundland teenage boy; his alter-ego, a young Beothuk brave, trying to help his family survive; and another voice, that of a teenage girl who links the two young men and is based on the last surviving Beothuk. The slippery narrative layers incrementally build suspense and foreboding into the plot, which climaxes as they are brought together, in tragedy, loss, and despair. The strongest element is the horrific survival saga, conveyed by the young brave in beautiful, rhythmic language — first-person and present tense. This voice contrasts ironically with the contemporary David's colloquial expression of his everyday needs.

Major's awareness of his characters' collision in time, the uncertainty of history slippery with guilt and blood, are strong elements in the dark fantasies of Michael Bedard. *A Darker Magic* and its sequel, *Painted Devil*, belong to the genre of psychological fantasy with roots in stories of extra-sensory perception, horror, and the psychic literature of another, supernatural reality breaking into our known world through the activation of myth, history, or ritual. Alan Garner and Margaret Mahy are masters of this genre internationally. In Canada, Michael Bedard and Welwyn Wilton Katz are the only two fantasists to explore this territory seriously.

Bedard's dense, multilayered style and his ability to swing from humorous family realism to suspenseful foreboding are rare in Canadian fantasy writing, or, for that matter, in any genre. His evocative metaphors and energetic prose carry the reader over repetitive moments and cracks in the atmosphere. Bedard's novels of evil and mystery, despite their tangled plots, belong to the realm of philosophy and psychology. His world is as Manichean as Leon Garfield's or Susan Cooper's — one of ever-recurring battle between the light and the dark, God and the Devil. In both novels, the demonic theatre of magic and puppetry are stages for the Devil. The light to do battle against this dark is found in the hearts of ordinary teenagers and eccentric, elderly women and men.

Bedard's third novel, *Redwork*, uses the same combination — engaging, wholly realized teenage characters make contact with an elderly, eccentric outsider — a First World War veteran who is also an alchemist. Less sinister but just as atmospheric as the other novels, this is a human, not a supernatural, story, where evil is not the Devil outside, but the devil within — the darkness in the soul that leads to violence, and, ultimately, the horror of war. The book is time-travel fantasy in the sense that the teenage protagonist moves into dreams of the old man's experiences of trench warfare. The faith here is in a different kind of magic, not the eery black magic of Mephisto but the archetypal, ancient belief in alchemical transformation, a rebirth of the spiritual self out of death.

The psychic power of other dimensions is also attractive as the matter of

fantasy to Welwyn Wilton Katz. Her stories are also atmospheric and page turning, but they do not resonate as subtly as Bedard's. They are, rather, loud and symphonic, magnificent as clever conceits, but often overbearing or murky in tone. The ongoing battle of good and evil is writ large in such epic dramas as *Come Like Shadows*, rooted in witchcraft and Shakespeare, and *The Third Magic*, predicated on the Arthurian romance. Her touch in other, environmental works is lighter, more graceful, as in *Whalesinger*. At her best, the prolific Katz writes with originality and energy. In *Whalesinger*, the teenage girl has a remarkable, extrasensory bond of feeling and communication with the gray whale mother. Although layers of history, past and present murders, ecological concerns, and a love relationship between two emotionally wounded adolescents all weave together with reasonable success, the compelling images and moments of imaginative strength are those of Marty swimming with the whale. The audacity of Katz's imagination leads her to play with the Arthurian legend in *The Third Magic*, in which she creates a complex mythology of her own in the terrifying secondary reality of the world of Nwm. The use of Arthurian fantasy devices and talismans add an ancient underpinning to this attempt at high, epic fantasy.

Canada has seen few fantasists who have written epic fantasies in the classic sense. Ruth Nichols is now joined by Katz, O.R. Melling, and Sean Stewart who combine strands of myth and legend from the classic, secondary-reality motherload of British Arthurian and Celtic lore. As Katz immerses herself in Arthur, O.R. Melling, in her time-travel fantasies, plumbs the faerie lore of Ireland. All Melling's stories set in a richly realized, mythological past, come alive through the recreation of legend — ranging from the warrior Cuculann's tales of *The Druid's Tune*; the standing stones and Tuatha DeDanaan of *The Singing Stone*; and the faerie lore of *The Hunter's Moon*. Melling's skill improves with each book as the clutter of research and folklore allusion boils down in the cauldron of story to a fine broth. In *The Hunter's Moon*, an original note is sounded as the two worlds — the magical realm of Faerie (dangerous, seductive, and immortal) and the ordinary Ireland — exist side by side. In all her books, the rents and tears in the cloth between worlds easily open for Melling's adventurous and romantic young women. It is exciting to see them find their identities in relation to myth and dream. Katz and Melling chart the dreams of the unconscious; they touch on the epic and violent struggles of myth and the continuity of legend. They are both mappers of the dream.

Aside from tongue-in-cheek picture books, revisionist fantasy is usually written for an older audience. In *Nobody's Son*, Sean Stewart has created a fascinating cross-over, a young-adult fantasy with adult sensibility and complexity. His bleak world of secondary reality and fairy tale convention is evocative and sombre, ridden with quests, spells, ghosts, and generational betrayal. Fashioned with great care and artistry, Stewart's feudal-style world surpasses the attempts at high fantasy from previous Canadian writers for young

people. The unique writing style with its mix of rough, Middle English-modelled speech, courtly mannerisms, lyrical soliloquies, anachronistic colloquialisms, and sharp humour achieves an ironic tone, not in any sense a parody, but part homage to Tolkienesque epic fantasy and part deconstructionist in wit.

Like Stephen Sondheim's shadowy musical *Into the Woods* and Jon Scieszka's satirical picture book, *The Frog Prince, Continued*, which also play with fairy-tale endings, Stewart addresses the nature of heroism and explores what follows the "happily ever after" ending. In Stewart's world of dark, haunted souls and dangerous magic, the hero Shielder's Mark is a commoner, scarred by his father's abandonment, who seeks greatness and his identity by breaking the spell of the Ghostwood and wedding the princess. He does all this in the first chapter. The happily ever after they face together is a dangerous, shifting world of court politics, brutal magic, and painful human relationships.

Stewart balances irony and high fantasy as his self-reflective protagonist observes the disparity between his confusing, brutal life and the epic tales of heroism and romance. This interplay of irony, psychological realism, and fantasy is also found in Kevin Major's *Eating Between the Lines*. Major's refreshing, tongue-in-cheek voice here parodies the severe teenage angst marking his earlier young adult fiction, as he blends his protagonist's sharp, ironic viewpoint on contemporary teenage life with outrageous fantasy misadventures. In an episodic series of literary time-slips or "book-travelling," Jackson merges with characters in the novels and plays he is reading, projecting himself into *The Odyssey*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Quirky and profound, the reading-as-life experiences give solace and solutions to love sickness, parental problems and censorship attempts. This work is a lively, witty, and often poignant reflection on reading, literature, and the imaginative life as transformative of individuals and the social order.

These recent fantasists demonstrate an ability to work with ambitious and complex subjects. As in much of Canadian realism and historical fiction, the protagonists are older than in the past — sophisticated teenagers exploring personal and cultural identity against the backdrop of history or myth. The great, swirling epic fantasies may be, at times, too foggy with mysticism, but the best of Bedard, Katz, Stewart, and Melling gives us clear maps of the internal quests and dreams that stand for the imagination. The time travellers — Pearson, Buffie, Lawson, and Major — also work at charting maps of family and social history, rooted in place, in Canada.

Whether as universal metaphors or as specific images drawn from Canadian cultural heritage, Canadian fantasies mirror human life. The stories speak convincingly of spiritual quest and inner journey; of peril, loss, and recovery; and of the heroic apprenticeship of the young into the fullness of human life.

NOTES

- 1 J.R. Tolkien, "On fairy-stories," in *Tree and Leaf*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965, pp. 52-53.

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