

to the ghostly Susannah, an historical love triangle, the threat posed by Susannah's mentally-deranged father, Thea's budding romance with the psychic gardener next door, and a surprising climax with a plot twist.

The point of view shifts frequently from first person to third, and from Thea to the ghostly Susannah. These shifts build tension and reflect Thea's confusion over her own identity. They are also, occasionally, confusing.

At the climax of the story, a shocking crime leads to the revelation that one character has taken on the identity of another, and as the mystery is solved the ghosts are laid to rest. It requires an agile reader to keep up with the twists and turns of the plot. Thea's experiences are sometimes so subtly presented and so full of unanswered questions that the scenes become bewildering. However, a second reading of the book reveals that it has been masterfully plotted, with themes and scenes cleverly interwoven and perfectly timed. For example, Thea, who is a painter, frequently describes people in terms of colour. Her cat often appears when a ghostly encounter is imminent. References to gardening come back again and again. These details are carefully planned and are sustained throughout the story, giving it a sense of unity.

Readers will love Thea and will revel in her encounters with the supernatural. Fans of Buffie's previous books will not be disappointed in this one.

Joanne Stanbridge is the children's librarian at Westmount Public Library in Montreal. She has an MA in Creative Writing (Concordia), and her middle-grade novel was recently accepted for publication.

GALLOWAY'S GRIM TALES

Truly Grim Tales. Priscilla Galloway. Lester Publishing, 1995. 132 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 1-895555-67-1.

Because they are endlessly fascinating and endlessly interpretable, the fairy tale "mill" never quits. Currently, two popular manifestations of the tales are James Gardner's *Politically Correct Bedtime Tales* and Jon Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales*. In the first instance, Gardner, in his adult book, is correct to the ridiculous, while in the latter children's book, Scieszka manipulates the tales textually and visually so that neither content, forms nor feelings are spared from his absurd imagination. His retellings include "The Princess and the Bowling Ball" and "Little Red Running Shorts." Also feminist retellings — from Angela Carter's serious work *The Bloody Chamber* to Babette Cole's frivolous and funny *Prince Cinders* — give us the tales in new shapes and in contexts. Priscilla Galloway's *Truly Grim Tales* contributes to this enterprise. Her tales, like Robin MacKinley's *Beauty*, are geared to the young adult reader.

I was immediately struck by *Truly Grim Tales*' cover's similarity to *The Stinky Cheese Man* (cover designed by Patrice Sheridan). The earthy tones, the



caricatures (in this instance an oversized wolf's mouth "hoods" *Little Red Riding Hood*), and the collage style are all reminiscent of Lane Smith's illustrations. Expecting the witty and clever language associated with Scieszka, I was surprised to read in the first few pages archaic language and convoluted syntax. The first sentence of the book begins, "My mother I never knew." Other examples include: "Early memory brings dinner served at night" and "... a child grows, begotten of my body." "It was not easy for me to get the information about her that I craved, but I had learned to dissemble well." I imagine Galloway inverts the sentence structure, uses the passive voice and eighteenth-century language to emulate the ambiance of, say, Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. Galloway's inconsistency, however, makes the passages contrived and stilted. At its worst, Galloway's grammar is wrong and her syntax dreadful. For

example, "I can come on no suggestion of present-day fact behind the stories."

In this first story, "The Name," Galloway conjoins several tales into one story — a technique she uses throughout the book. This story begins in an atmosphere which faintly resembles "Beauty and the Beast" and evolves into the tale of "Rumpelstiltskin." Galloway writes from Rumpelstiltskin's point of view, ending the story with his dilemma in the readers' hands. She credits her readers with the intelligence and imagination to decide. Puzzling through several tales in one story and wondering how they will develop is fun. But in order to fully enjoy the variations, these stories are dependent, I believe, like many current retellings, on prior knowledge of the tales. I would be interested to know how young readers who do not know Grimm's tales read these stories.

Collapsing tales into one story can be a strength, but the ordering of sentences and plot events in many of these stories is problematic. In "The Good Mother" Galloway writes: "One day one clam was open a little, hiding under a huge mat of green-brown seaweed. It snapped shut on the edge of Ruby's cape. Luckily Mum had scissors in her bag. Both of them together couldn't pull the crimson velvet loose." An edit would have eliminated the sentence about the scissors, which is awkward and unnecessary. The story is a mish-mash of conflicting settings and times. We're at the ocean one minute, and without notice, are post "Chem Wars" the next. Information is added seemingly willy-nilly, so that for several pages of this story, each paragraph begins with a thought unrelated to the ones which preceded it. In the midst of this confusion moments such as: "'Good child,' the voice almost purred" help to keep the reader connected to the fairy tale. Vivid observations such as: "Her feet slipped inside the loose rubber boots.

She could feel her socks bunching” also keep the reader “inside” the story.

A “Bed of Peas” is my favourite story. Not grim at all, it is, rather, a love story set in an exotic locale, with the mysterious “Hassan the slave.” It moves beautifully into the story of “Rapunzel,” and its ending shows restraint and respect for the reader. This story succeeds partly because it resists the awkward syntax of “The Name,” and begins with the intriguing question: “What are the special properties of sand?”

Hoping that Galloway demands the editing her stories deserve, I look forward to more work from her.

Cornelia Hoogland is a poet whose publications include *The Wire-thin Bride* (Turnstone, 1990), and *Marrying the Animals* (Brick, 1995). She is a professor of English in the Education Faculty at the University of Western Ontario.

KNIGHT OF THE ENDLESS NAPPIES

Knights of the Endless Day. Robert Priest. Illus. Vic Vaccaro. Viking/Penguin Canada, 1993. 166 pp. \$16.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-84862-X.

The title’s a dead give-away: language twists as much as plot does in Robert Priest’s revamped quest/fairy tale. The best plot turns turn upon language; I love the witty and unexpected homophone that ensures the repugnant Cornelius Hoophus RubFubbis Fubson McDango El Fub dePhubson gets his “pun”-ishment. That Priest’s language is often playful isn’t surprising since he’s a poet/songwriter; neither is the plot’s energetic movement, given its dramatic origins (the book is a novelization of Priest’s 1992 YPT production). Sometimes richness of language stands second to plot and playful absurdity; Priest’s words can be music-laden and I miss such fullness when it’s lacking. This reservation, however, is outweighed by more general delight.

At a time when scathingly parodic “politically correct” fairy tales top bestseller lists, Priest offers a politically *aware* fairy tale whose charm is similar to that which sustains Munsch’s *Paper Bag Princess*. Overturning nearly every convention of the heroic quest (one knight is sent to retrieve a giant clove of garlic), yet maintaining the subversive fairy tale pattern of the commoner who proves himself “aristocratic,” Priest raises questions of heroism, gender roles, pacificism and environmentalism. But he is never cloying or pedantic. Wearing a modified suit of armour,

