

Whereas Baranoir's tests take place in the other world and involve trickery, Cathal's take place in this world and lead to fairminded rule. After using this comparison to illustrate the reductiveness of archetypal criticism, Gose returns to it in his reading of "The Cotter's Son and the Half Slim Champion." By confronting infidelity and impotence, Arthur liberates himself from them, thus reassuring the audience that the lack of maternal blessing does not endanger life and that reliance on a wife, rather than on overachievement, is the best way of facing the personal void.

In his last chapter, through the example of "The Speckled Bull" Gose seeks to unravel the paradox that the complete determinism of the wonder tale leaves its heroes free. Unfortunately, Gose's structural explanation of the concept of *crux* intervenes. Even so, he claims suggestively that violence and corruption need not govern the individual if he treats them as innocent aspects of himself. It is a compelling idea that fate is no more than the denied unintegrated aspects of a self. Still, the case that the wonder tale is a relevant and optimistic literary form needs a more steady and careful argument than it receives in this study.

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IT'S HOW IT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED

The singing stone, O.R. Melling. Viking Kestrel, 1986. 224 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-80817-2.

O.R. Melling's *The singing stone*, a sequel to her first children's fantasy, *The druids's tune*, is a remarkable accomplishment, a truly readable, highly entertaining story which, in its quiet way, redefines the literary tradition that it embraces. Inevitably it will be compared to the fantasies of C.S. Lewis, for it too chronicles the adventures of a modern protagonist in a mysterious, mystic land of magic and enchantment. And there are also the inevitable traces of Tolkienian fantasy (trusted companions, wise old scions and treasures with mysterious powers). But the writer that Melling probably most resembles is Canadian fantasist Ruth Nichol, for both are vitally concerned with stories that deal not with the adventures of heroes, but with the emergence of women as viable, effective heroines. And both are interested in providing fantasy worlds that can tell us much about prob-

lems that plague modern man.

Melling's meticulously researched story chronicles the adventures of Kay Warrick, a troubled, lonely young girl who is transported from her modern city-dwelling existence to a thousand years before Christ, the time when the Tuatha De Danaan ruled in Ireland. In this world, she is provided with both a companion, an equally rootless girl names Aherne, and a quest: to recover the four ancient treasures of the Tuatha De Danaan, the last of which is the singing stone, the link between this world and the next, between the finite and infinite. However traditional such a tale may appear at first glance, it would be a mistake to dismiss Melling's story as another Tolkienian imitation, for it is much more. First of all, as mentioned previously, the protagonists are largely women, not men. It is even a goddess who ultimately rules the next world. And these women are not simply heroes disguised in women's garb; there is something inherently feminine in the quest itself and the message Melling's tale ultimately provides. Perhaps this is why there is so little violence in the story, a fact, I might add, that does not in any sense dampen the suspense or overall impact of the tale. Significantly, Kay's powers are intellectual, not physical. She is a sage, a seer, and her victories are won over men's minds. Her quest's final realization is that the most effective way of winning a war is often not to fight it, and the most effective way of dealing with the chaos of modern existence is simply to confront it. As Kay says, "If you face the hard parts with hope and courage and refuse to give up, then you'll know who you are and that you've done the right thing. It's all we can do really. And it's enough, I think."

There are some problems with the book, to be sure. As in the case of most stories involving time trips to the past, the language the characters use is not always consistent. The romance element, both in the modern and past worlds, also seems a bit forced, as is Kay's ultimate realization of her heritage. But these are minor problems, at best, for overall, Melling's tale is a stunning example of fantasy literature at its best.

Recently there has been a trend toward redefining certain traditions of children's literature by making them more aware of the feminine consciousness. Jack Zipes' collection of contemporary feminist fairy tales, *Don't bet on the Prince*, for example, re-examines the fairy tale tradition. *The singing stone* may well serve the same function, heralding a new type of tale, a new kind of heroine. More importantly, it may be finding, even in the most violent of times, an argument against violence, against swords. And as Melling says, "If this isn't how it happened, it's how it should have happened."

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