

mère apparemment présente, dans un effort de rapprocher du monde enfantin, rendent le tout un peu tiré par les cheveux. Mais, tout bien considéré, ce récit piqué de situations de plus en plus amusantes montre la crainte des enfants devant l'inconnu pour en arriver à une conclusion rassurante de façon très adroite. Si l'on peut exprimer des hésitations quant au contenu linguistique de cet ouvrage, il faut toutefois en reconnaître la valeur sur le plan psychologique et pour le contenu culturel canadien véhiculé. Ce texte est basé sur des observations d'enfants et une réflexion très justes mettant en relief les dimensions exagérées que prennent les peurs d'enfants sans l'intervention d'adultes. L'enfant, par la lecture, apprendra un grand nombre de tournures grâce à l'usage adroit de verbes à l'infinitif ainsi qu'un grand nombre de mots.

De plus, l'illustration de ce livre par Odile Ouellet mérite l'attention du lecteur. La stylisation rappelle les petites statuettes d'enfants de Goebels et confère au tout un charme indéniable. Dénote-t-on une pointe d'humour dans la transposition sur l'image du chauffeur d'autobus en conductrice ou est-ce dû au fait que dans la version anglaise l'on ait "driver" sans plus?

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NEW RENDERINGS OF RUSSIAN STORIES

Peter and the wolf. Michèle Lemieux. Kids Can Press. 1991. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-011-3; **Prince Ivan and the firebird.** Laszlo Gal. McClelland & Stewart, 1991. Unpag., cloth \$17.95. ISBN 0-7710-3300-1.

Michèle Lemieux and Laszlo Gal, experienced and gifted picture book artists both, have recently chosen traditional Russian stories to illustrate, although *Peter and the wolf* is a Johnny-come-lately to the "folklore" scene. Originally written and set to music by Sergei Prokofiev, therefore timeless, Lemieux places her version in eighteenth-century Russia.

Judging from the details of costume and architecture, one can see that she has researched the art of the era which has influenced her own canvases. With a palette restricted to greens, blues, and browns, her paintings, although curiously stiff at times, portray a rural life still close to and surrounded by dark forests and wild animals.

The sprightliness and enchanting sounds of Prokofiev are of course missing, but Lemieux's illustrations deepen the emotional values of the story, compensating for the lack-lustre, perfunctory quality of the writing. As *Peter and the wolf* is a simple story of childhood curiosity, courage and quick wits, the solid colours and luminosity of Lemieux's art contribute to a sense of emotion and of human values triumphant in the face of adversity.

Equally impressed by Russian costume and architecture, Laszlo Gal sets

his illustrated retelling of *Prince Ivan and the firebird* in the time of the Muscovy Boyars. Gal's narrative, however, lacks the muscular directness and energy of less self-consciously literary versions like Aleksandr Afanas'ev's as translated by Norbert Guterman. This stylistic difference is apparent in Gal's opening lines:

A very, very long time ago, when the real world and the world of fantasy intertwined in magical ways, when beasts and people were still able to communicate with each other, when mythical creatures were more plentiful, and when enchanted gardens were not as rare as they are today, very, very far away, beyond the thrice-third land, there lived a tsar whose name was Vladimir Andronovich.

The next paragraph offers an unnecessarily prolonged description of the famous garden and the apple tree bearing golden fruits.

The beginning of Afanas'ev's rendering of *Prince Ivan and the firebird* gets to the point directly, avoids extraneous detail, and assumes belief on the part of the reader or, remembering the oral quality of Russian folk tales, of the listener:

In a certain land in a certain kingdom, there lived a king called Vyslav Andronovich. He had three sons. The first was Prince Dimitri, the second Prince Vasily, and the third Prince Ivan. King Vyslav Andronovich had a garden so rich that there was no finer one in any kingdom. In this garden there grew all kinds of precious trees, with and without fruit; one special apple tree was the king's favourite, for all the apples it bore were golden.

Although Gal is faithful to the incidents of the story for the most part, there are questionable omissions in his version. The incorporation of proverbs and ritualistic formulae is part of the unique charm of Russian folklore which Gal generally avoids. "He rode near and far, high and low, along by-paths and by-ways – for speedily a tale is spun, but with less speed a deed is done – until he came to wide, open field, a green meadow" (Afanas'ev). In Gal's version, this special Slavic quality is absent: "For many days he travelled in the direction from which the Firebird had appeared that night in the garden. Heavy clouds were almost touching the earth when he arrived at a vast meadow."

Unlike *Peter and the Wolf*, *Prince Ivan and the firebird* is a complex amalgam of pagan images and motifs and Orthodox Christian belief as influenced by the Byzantine Church. When the sleeping Ivan is murdered by his brothers, for example, having won firebird, a wonderful horse, and a beautiful princess, he lies "dead" for 30 days before the great wolf, his mentor and servant throughout the story, restores his life. In the Orthodox Church calendar, the thirtieth day after the burial of a believer is crucially important, a feast day. The number 30 is spiritually significant. Gal reduces the time to a meaningless 10 days. Moreover, the wolf requires both the waters of life and death to "resurrect" the prince, but Gal makes do with the water of life.

Perhaps these objections are mere academic quibbles, but a retelling of any symbolic story so specifically connected to a region, a religion, or a people should endeavour to preserve what is culturally unique to the tale or all stories risk sounding like the homogenized narratives so beloved of Disney productions.

The real strength and beauty of this book, of course, lie in Gal's full-page pictures. Here the artist is superior to the writer and the illustrations truer to the Russian spirit. The style of pre-Romanov aristocracy, the details of interior decoration, the characters extravagantly costumed in Boyar robes, the mixture of pagan and Christian, are handsomely depicted in *Prince Ivan and the firebird* by an artist-illustrator with a fine and delicate sense of colour and a remarkable sense of cultural detail. The firebird itself is especially handsome in its pinkish hues.

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OF RAVEN AND RESOLUTIONS

Raven and Snipe. Anne Cameron. Illus. Gaye Hammond. Harbour Publishing, 1991. 30 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55017-037-6; **Raven goes berrypicking.** Anne Cameron. Illus. Gaye Hammond. Harbour Publishing, 1991. 32 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55017-036-8.

Rather than surrounding these children's books with context about legends, I prefer to consider the sense a child approaching them for the first time might make of them. Legends, fairy tales and myths are all stories which externalize human emotions into scripted events. They offer a vivid description of how a specific problem is caused and an example of how others can generate an inventive solution to deal effectively with it. In *Raven and Snipe*, Mrs. Snipe invents a ritual to prevent Raven from greedily consuming all her family's stores of food and in *Raven goes berrypicking* other birds cope bravely with Raven's trickery and gluttony. Such stories tell us how we might behave and define a moral vision of social interaction. Their appeal to children is that they demonstrate a truth about human behaviour without being didactic. Legends are subtle, their ideas insinuating themselves gently because they arrive in the form of images and events, not lessons.

Of the two stories, *Raven and Snipe* is more successful in this regard, for the social problem of the glutton is resolved. It is important to touch emotional danger in books for children, and equally important to pull out of it successfully. Cameron takes the risk, but doesn't quite complete the loop to satisfac-