

## OF FOOLISH FROGS AND DIM-WITTED MONARCHS

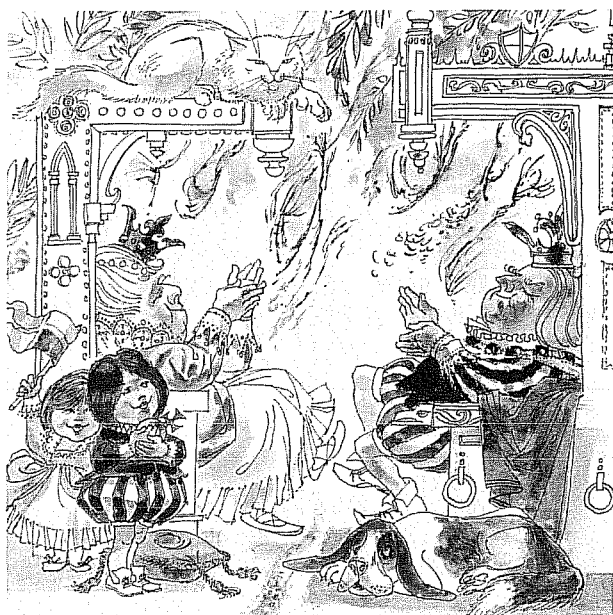
**Frogs.** Andrea Wayne-von Königsłow. Illus. Michael Martchenko. HarperCollins Publishers, 1993. Unpag., \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-223895-0. **A Royal Ball.** Margaret Springer. Illus. Tom O'Sullivan. McClelland & Stewart, 1992. Unpag., \$12.99 cloth. ISBN 1-878093-64-9.

No literature lends itself to satirical renderings or comic variations of a theme more readily than the classic folk or fairy tale. The humorist finds an inexhaustible wealth of character and incident from which to draw. Alter the angle of vision, tell the tale from another perspective, reverse the expected ending, apply liberal doses of anachronism, disregard the moral and spiritual values of the original narrative, sabotage the beauty of the tale by use of sarcasm or irony and, in the end, one has produced a funny story.

*Frogs* is yet another reworking of "The Frog Prince." Andrea Wayne-von Königsłow chooses to ignore the serious heart of the tale, the theme of promise, moral responsibility and redemption, and is also careful to avoid cultural stereotypes. In her version, Lucy, a modern-day child, is not responsible for keeping faith or for saving the humanity of the prince, nor is she in any way required to marry.



Lucy and her sister Lenore love frogs, build castles for them, feed them flies and ultimately set them free. Their mother—there is no father—doesn't "mind crawly things in the house." Fortunately, the humour of *Frogs* survives its sociological subtext. Yes, kissing frogs produces a great many princes who



appear singularly stupid. The comedy arises from their obnoxious behaviour and their amphibian mannerisms.

Michael Martchenko's full-page, one-dimensional pictures capture the tone of this slight tale, which is sprightly in the telling and surprising in the end.

As much as skewed fairy-tales, stories of royal shenanigans and dim-witted monarchs also occasion a smile. Unlike *Frogs*, which carefully avoids mention of marriage, *A Royal Ball* is in fact built upon, allowing for variations, an engagement party.

Two kingdoms, one possessed of seven potential brides for the seven potential grooms of the other, are historical enemies. To ensure safety and stability, however, marriage and heirs are necessary. Of course, neither princesses nor princes do the expected thing: Clarissa hang glides, for example, and Prince Mac loves to bake pies. How the royals meet their true match and overcome ancient hostility comprises the comic plot.

Tom O'Sullivan's drawings for *A Royal Ball* are reminiscent of Ronald Searle's eccentric lines and satiric eye. Much more complex and interesting to view than Martchenko's work, they also do justice to the story. Springer's writing sometimes depends too much upon odd names for its humour—Zygoma, Radinka, a dog named Flann—but her style is brisk and economical.

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