Ludovic, Daniel Sernine. Collection ***Conquêtes.*** Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1983. 274 pp. broché. ISBN 2-89051-091-3.

Ludovic is all that its cover promises, "un livre envoûtant, plein d'action, de mystère, et de magie," and more. Even though this book is intended for fifteen-year-olds, the epic adventures of Ludovic and his companions are so skillfully interwoven with mystery, colorful frescoes of medieval life, moonlit sceneries, magic paraphernalia, and an incredibly rich parade of creatures of myths and legends, that even an adult can easily become engrossed in its multi-level universe. Going hand in hand with this richness is the author's talent for making it all come alive. Enchanted by the images that his words conjure up, the reader is lured into his fantasy and surrenders to the spell.

The book is packed with enough noble quests, confrontations with villainous characters, desperate acts of bravery and great feats of magic, to keep young readers on the edge of their seats almost all the way to the end of the book — the only part that I found a little disappointing. But this is, after all, what epic adventures are about. The uniqueness of this book lies first in the author's ability to instill it with a teeming life of its own, as already mentioned, and second, in its subtle but sustained didactic intent.

A case in point is the author's fascination with words and his obvious delight at juxtaposing them in ways that will both kindle all sorts of images and feelings in the readers and expose them to an extremely rich and varied lexicon. Those who want to know the exact meaning of every word should keep a good dictionary at their side since adjectives like *céladon* or *cunéiforme,* and nouns like *cavée, échauguette* or *akène* are not to be found in pocket editions. This book is guaranteed to introduce the average fifteen-year-old to literally hundreds of new words. They range from nomenclature of medieval weaponry and architecture to such evocative combinations as "des couinements aigres," "l'appel rauque de bêtes sans nom," "un petit vitrail bombé, émeraude, saphir et carmin."

The "teaching" goes beyond words. The readers are introduced to the ceremony of knighting, the rituals of the druids, techniques of medieval warfare, principles of government and especially to all the legendary peoples of the forest: sylphs, dryads, goblins, elves and gnomes, each richly described in terms of their physical and mental characteristics and of their relationship to nature. Through the exploration of these myths and symbols, the reader is led to a certain degree of understanding of, and an almost symbiotic relationship with, the rhythms of nature, the tug-of-war between the forces of renewal and destruction, good and evil, light and darkness, life and death.

Equally unobtrusively, the author teaches his young readers about death, moral values, inter-personal relationships, respect for differences, acceptance

of one another's frailties, caring. In the course of the book, the prince Fabrice grows from an impetuous young boy to a young man who has retained his fiery courage but has learned to temper it with wisdom, concern for others, and a great deal of savvy. The heroes, in their various confrontations with foes and villains, engage in a generous amount of slaughtering, yet it is made clear that it is only because they have to, for self defense, and even Fabrice, the most spirited of the three, reflects on how sad it is to have to take a life. "Il avait tué. Des gnomes, des hussards, toujours pour se défendre. Mais c'étaient quand même des vies, des vies d'être pensants, qu'il avait prises" (p. 194). Fabrice is also forced to deal with his friend's impending death, worrying about what lays beyond, and experiencing the visceral fear of that great unknown, fathoming his own helplessness: "Un grand frisson secoua Fabrice, une détresse sans nom l'agrippa — Un homme mourait devant lui, — et Fabrice était parfaitement impuissant, tout futur roi qu'il fût" (p. 93). In his encounter with the "sylvains," Fabrice discovers how we tend to distrust the unknown, endowing it with ominous powers and evil intents, how these prejudices are based on hearsay rather than fact, and how other "people" may have just as distorted and prejudiced a view of us as we of them. Getting annoyed, or even angry, with one's friends, and then regretting one's harsh words, questioning their motives at times, are all presented as normal parts of relationships. Fréald, all grown-up and king that he is, still feels like a boy when his father gives him advice and, worse still, is obviously right. And even the bravest hero, at times, experiences paralyzing fear and feels like a helpless child (e.g., Fabrice when he has to mountain climb). Ludovic helps him by revealing that he too is scared to death, and once they have acknowledged each other's frailty, they are able to give each other the support they need to overcome the obstacle. They are not too "tough" either to cry and to give each other love and comfort. "Le garçon, lui, pleurait à chaudes larmes, laissant sans vergogne sa tension se relâcher. Il serrait son ami comme un noyé s'agrippe à une planche, et Ludovic l'étreignait aussi fort" (p. 214-215).

Despite all these great qualities, *Ludovic* has also its flaws. For instance, although we do find women in positions of power (Lauriane, the queen of the dryads and her chieftain, Eriane), or who are quite capable (Alia, daughter of count Lysius, who can defend her father's castle when he is not around, and the leper woman who drives off the attackers by showing her ravaged face), their main roles remain essentially traditional ones: the damsel in distress that men have to risk their lives to rescue (Ligélia, the fiancée of King Fréald who has been abducted by Drogomir) and the enchantress (Lauriane, who by breathing life back into Ludovic has also bound him to her forever.) The relationship between men and women and the way love is portrayed are also shallow and disappointing. For one thing, Ludovic's companions, those with whom he shares adventures, hardships, victories, moments of fear or of joy, in other words, all the things that matter, are all men. Friendship between men and

women being totally out of the picture, there remains love. But love is essentially presented as bondage, a bondage that takes men away from their manly responsibilities and exiles them in a land in which they remain strangers. Dyald, the former king of Uthaxe has deserted his throne for the love of a dryad under whose spell he had fallen. He is not exactly "unhappy" and he is certainly not mistreated, but he literally appears like "a lost soul" and we are told that he cannot leave the forest of the dryads for any length of time.

Ludovic likewise, at the end of the book, "surrenders" willingly to his love for Lauriane. But the author gives us a lot of insidiously negative messages about that love. For instance, after Lauriane has breathed life back into him, his friend Thoriÿn, the good wizard who has Ludovic's best interest at heart, is obviously worried about the consequences. When he is finally ready to explain to Ludovic that her saving him his also put him under her spell, he takes "une profonde respiration comme pour se préparer à quelque chose de *pénible*" (p. 250, underlining mine). To be quite fair, however, Thoriÿn adds that she had no other choice, that was the only way she could save him. By this point, Ludovic is so much under her spell that he is no longer worried and thinks that "si Lauriane l'aimait elle aussi, ce serait un sortilège d'éternité agréable à *endurer*" (p. 256, underlining mine). Even when Lorelan adds that he will be as bound to the Ghaste Forêt, her domain, as to Lauriane herself and that he won't be able to leave it without his life seeping away from his body, Ludovic's only urge is to return to the forest of which he has started to become a part. Or maybe, now that he has had his fill of adventures, he is ready to settle down to marital bliss!

Before that, however, Ludovic had had some misgivings about the increasing hold he felt the dryad was getting over him, almost against his will: "Il était la *proie* d'un autre *mal* qui maintenant, se faisait sentir avec plus d'acuité. C'est Lauriane qui le *tourmentait* ainsi" (p. 244, underlinings mine). He perceives his attraction to Lauriane as a potential threat to his life, something that may consume him and destroy him. "Il se sentait attiré vers elle comme phalène vers la flamme et, tel le papillon, il craignait de se brüler à ce feu, un simple mortel *consumé* par un être magique" (p. 255). The resoluton of these fears is never dealt with by the author and the next time we see Ludovic, he seems "happily" married to Lauriane. We are left to conclude that the charm she has cast upon him is so powerful that even his fears have been dispelled and that love is a silver-lined bondage in which men lose themselves.

Once united with his queen, however, Ludovic begins to yearn secretly for his native land, "la nostalgie d'un monde qui ne recelait pas autant de merveilles, mais qui était le sien, sa terre d'origine" (p. 263.) Here again magic is called upon to dispense with, rather than deal with, another troublesome problem: Ludovic's belonging to several worlds at once, the tug he feels from each of them, the critical distance he experiences towards himself and his life, as if he were watching himself live these adventures (except when he is caught up

in the heat of action), the knowledge of his being "different." Throughout the book, Ludovic occasionally ponders over the "reality" of one world over another. He wrestles with the haunting memory of also belonging somewhere else while feeling powerfully engaged in the present world, with the disturbing sense of split and irreconcilable levels of consciousness. A large part of the appeal of this book lies precisely in the disquieting overlap of these worlds, disquieting and spell-binding because, even though we know this is a book of fantasy and magic, it evokes in us obscure and deep psychological echoes. What is reality? Where does it stop and where does fantasy begin? Where do those faint echoes of other "worlds" come from? What causes the feeling of relative estrangement, of vague and nameless yearning that is part of the human experience? Those are questions that philosophers and poets of all times have tried to explore and it is to the credit of the author to have used them as the canvas upon which the adventures are woven. What is disappointing is that, in the end, the author uses magic — the gift of a magic music box that can take Ludovic back at will to his "real world" home — to avoid dealing with the emotional reality that he had so skillfully evoked through this book of magic and fantasy: the feeling of being pulled towards different realms of being, knowing that whatever choice is made or whatever realm seems to win, the others will always linger somewhat in our subconscious and there will always be a faint memory and a nostalgia for what used to be — or might have been.

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LA B.D. DU CHÔMEUR

Octave, la dolce vita, Yvon Brochu et Patrice Dubray. Sillery, Ovale, 1983. Non paginé 8,95$ relié. ISBN 2-89186-025-X.

L'actualité, la nécessité d'une vision critique sur la société, les essais de repérage de la place et de la fonction du chômeur dans l'espace idéologico-politique peuvent constituer les points essentiels d'un traité sociologique. . . ou d'une bande dessinée. Mais alors que le traité sociologique fait partie de l'ordre des discours "légitimes," sérieux, la bande dessinée est plus frondeuse et son discours, en ce sens, est resté plus ou moins flottant. Pourtant, l'apport de la B.D. à la remise en question d'une situation particulière par le moyen de l'humour et de l'ironie n'est pas négligeable, et si l'on rit, ce rire est parfois jaune.

Octave, la dolce vita d'Yvon Brochu et Patrice Dubray est un album de bandes dessinées humoristiques de type classique relatant les aventures d'un chô-