

Suzanne Lebeau admits that *Les petits pouvoirs* was not easy to write. And one cannot but recognize that there is a true and intense passion in her play, a passion that the author has mastered through her impeccable style and the rigorous theatrical apparatus.

The challenge is now for theatre critics and historians to take this play, which was written for children, and to propose a comparative analysis between it and other plays whose central theme or concern is power and its abuses: a Greek tragedy, a French classic, a play of the absurd. *Les petits pouvoirs* will certainly stand strong in such an analysis.

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A VERY SOPHISTICATED STORY

The willow maiden, Meghan Collins. Illus. Laszlo Gal. Groundhog books, Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. 40 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 088899-039-1.

A charming and very sophisticated tale entitled *The willow maiden* is the result of an international collaboration between American children's author Meghan Collins and Canadian illustrator Laszlo Gal. The reader's eye is immediately attracted by Mr. Gal's magnificent illustrative style. A striking combination of blues and greens ranging from indigo to pale turquoises and emeralds portrays the enchanted woodland setting (fig. 1).

The direct, uncluttered, though extremely rich narrative style used by Meghan Collins will be appreciated by even the most discriminating ear. The author succeeds admirably in creating a pleasing balance between realistic, natural dialogues which feature extremely correct English and beautifully written prose. This extremely readable text immediately involves the listener in the tale. From the first passages the reader/listener becomes interested in the fate of Denis, a lone woodsman who seeks shelter from the rain in the whispering woods...a place from which many a lone traveler has never reappeared...Within four pages occurs the main encounter between the principal characters. Denis, the young local farmer meets Lisane, the willow princess. The reader's curiosity about Lisane and the willow people is avid as is Denis'.

Structurally, the story is very typical of any classical fairy tale. The period of sleep followed by an awakening to the enchanted scene where illusion and reality are one, the “love at first sight” encounter between the perfect hero and the perfect heroine, the potentially fatal physical struggle won by the perfect hero against another potential suitor, the happy marriage and the “happily ever after” denouement are all present. Yet, this story is rather more than a typical fairy tale.



What sets *The willow maiden* apart from other such stories is the willow princess herself.

Denis' love story brings out a number of sophisticated themes such as generosity, greed, understanding and responsibility essentially because, as the life's breath of her willow tree, Lisane has responsibilities that marriage does not absolve. Denis must make a sacrifice and allow Lisane to return to live as her willow tree in spring or her tree will die. Denis has much difficulty coming to this conclusion and considers cutting down Lisane's tree in order to keep her near him all year round. Such a brutal, concrete solution seems to fit in with the role of the invincible hero who rescues the “damsel in distress” but here, quite assuredly, one is not dealing with a typical damsel. In a very few choice words Lisane explains to Denis the role freedom to the commitment they have for each other: “Dearest, you must learn to let me go free when I need to,” she said. “I will always come back to you”. All in all a refreshing change from the typical plot not just from a feminist point of view but because the characters are thinking beings who try to come to terms with difficulties rather than drastically eliminating them. The possibilities for follow-up discussions in a school or home setting are countless.

The willow maiden is a lovely addition to any young person's library. The magnificent illustrations and the sophistication of the story line make this volume pleasing to young and old but the ideal age range is about ages six to ten.

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