

The Enchanted North: Canadian Fantasy Authors

Many Canadian authors have become prominent writers of fantasy. Five of these writers are profiled here.

Eileen Kernaghan

Eileen Kernaghan is an author who incorporates mythology, history, and archaeology into her fictional fantasy stories. She has written for both adults and young adults. Her best-known work is the Grey Isles trilogy, a fantasy series set in ancient Celtic times. The first book *Journey to Aprilioth* is set in 1970 B.C. A young man is forced to flee his homeland and finds himself journeying across Europe in search of a much older civilization, fighting with barbarians and bandits along the way. The second book, *Songs from the Drowned Lands: A Novel of High Fantasy* was the winner of the 1984 Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Award (also called the Aurora). This book is set before the first and tells four stories of the demise of a pre-historic culture. The third book is called *The Sarsen Witch*.

In reference to these works, Kernaghan wrote: "My major theme in the 'Grey Isles' trilogy is a traditional one in fantasy: the eternal struggle between order and chaos; the message, one of guarded and long-term optimism: civilizations rise as well as fall. Essentially, I just enjoy telling a good story. But people whose opinions I respect tell me that my books are about making choices, accepting responsibility, seeking values in something larger than oneself."

Kernaghan later turned to writing YA fantasy novels. She published three books that each dealt with different historical and mythological settings. *Dance of the Snow Dragon* takes place in 18th century Bhutan and is inspired by Tibetan Buddhist traditions. A young yak herder goes on a mystic journey through the Himalayas. The next book, *The Snow Queen*, is based on traditions of Finnish shamanism as well as the ancient Finnish myth cycle, the *Kalevala*, and the Hans Christian Anderson story, *The Snow Queen: In Seven Stories*. In it a Danish girl named Gerda heads north to rescue her friend who has been imprisoned by the Snow Queen. The most recent novel is *The Alchemist's Daughter*, a book inspired by the practices of Renaissance magic. A teenage girl in the court of Queen Elizabeth I goes on a journey to find a substance that will help her father achieve the goal of transforming lead into gold. She meets a woman who practices her own kind of spiritual magic and they fight together against enemies of the queen.

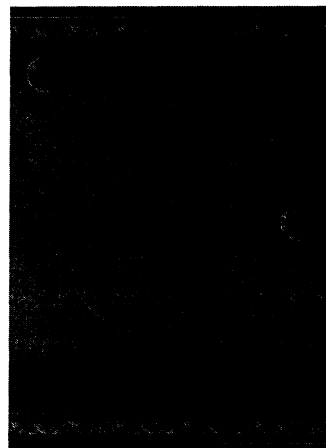
Guy Gavriel Kay

He has become one of the best-known authors of fantasy fiction in Canada and the world. Guy Gavriel Kay worked as literary assistant to J.R.R. Tolkien's son Christopher in the 1970s and was a great admirer of Tolkien's writing. His own "Fionavar Tapestry" trilogy was a story that fits into the tradition of fantasy of which Tolkien is the most prominent figure. The three novels narrate the adventures of five modern day Canadian university students who travel into another world and find themselves in a clash with evil forces. Critics noted that although elements of the trilogy seemed derivative, the writing was of such high quality, that readers couldn't help but love it. H. J. Kirchoff in *The Globe and Mail* noted in a

review of the first book *The Wandering Fire*, "Kay's 'alternative' world of Fionavar was a fully realized gem from the beginning of the trilogy, a rich mixture of peoples and societies, myths and magics, good and evil and politics and war . . . both attractive and compelling."

Kay's next book *Tigana* was hailed for its deep psychological insight and its depiction of very believable characters. Inspired by the culture of Renaissance Italy, it follows the adventures of a group of wanderers who carry the memory of a great civilization, one that has been erased from the memory of nearly everyone by a tyrannical sorcerer. The next novel *A Song for Arbonne* is set in a world similar to France at the time of the troubadours. It is a tale of forbidden love, bitter rivalries, and power struggles. Kay's novel *The Lions of Al-Rassan* was set in a land that resembles Medieval Spain. Unlike some fantasy novels, these books do not treat good and evil in a rigid black and white manner. The characters and situations reveal many shades of grey.

More recently, Kay has created a series called the *The Sarantine Mosaic* based on the ancient city of Byzantium. An artisan journeys toward the mighty city, but must pass through many trials along the way. *The Last Light of the Sun* shows what life in the era of the Viking era might have been like if people interacted with magic on a daily basis. Guy Gavriel Kay's work has been translated into 19 languages.



Tanya Huff

Originally from Halifax, Tanya Huff is a writer whose novels mix elements from the detective, horror and fantasy genres. Her series about Toronto private detective Vicki Nelson chronicles cases involving mummies, zombies and werewolves, while Vicki's romantic interest is Henry Fitzroy, a vampire. Together they battle the supernatural horrors that have been unleashed on Toronto.

Huff has written several fantasy adventure novels that combine magic and political intrigue. In a novel called *Sing the Four Quarters*, a young woman named Annice is training to become a bard in a world where singing can conjure the elemental spirits. *Fifth Quarter* is a novel set in the same world, but this time a pair of assassins must share the same body. Huff has written collections of short fiction such as *What Ho! Magic* and *Relative Magic*. She has also established Bakka, a Toronto bookstore specializing in science fiction and fantasy literature.

Charles de Lint

Charles de Lint has published more than fifty books and has become famous for creating a sub-genre of fantasy that is often called "urban fantasy." Throughout his long and prolific writing career, he has spun stories where the mundane aspects of everyday life are blended with magical elements. A typical story of his may contain both pick-up trucks and pixies. Many of his tales are set in a fictional city called Newford, Ontario, a modern community built on top of the ruins of a nineteenth century city that was destroyed in an earthquake. Three of de Lint's short story collections *The Ivory and the Horn*, *Moonlight and Vines* and *Tapping the Dream Tree* feature a variety of artists, children and impoverished characters exploring the strange happenings in Newford. They often meet up with fairies, angels, or werewolves. The novel *Someplace to be Flying* is also set in Newford. Incorporating aspects of North American aboriginal mythology, this story follows a photographer who is looking for strange flying creatures. He ends up meeting mythic archetypal figures like the Trickster and the Storyteller. Other aboriginal traditions appear in *Forests of the Heart*, where spirits of Ireland clash with spirits of the new world.

Canadian settings are featured in books like *Moonheart* and *Yarrow*. In a review of *Moonheart* for *The Globe and Mail*, Douglas Hill writes, "De

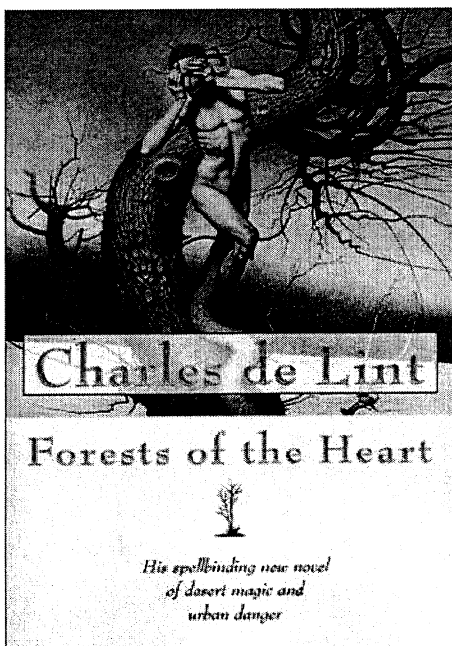
Lint sustains his balance between ordinary reality and legend with skill." An old Ottawa mansion is the scene for supernatural events that draw the protagonists into a battle of good versus evil. This same mansion appears in the sequel *Spiritwalk*. A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* calls *Spiritwalk* a "powerful story of sacrifice, revenge and the responsibility of power." *Yarrow* is about a vampire that feeds on

people's dreams and the victim is a Canadian writer whose dreams are the inspiration for her stories.

In describing his work de Lint has said, "Writing is, like all forms of creative endeavour, a form of communication, so I believe that it's the writer's job to make his work as accessible as possible to his or her readership - but not to the detriment of the work itself. In a world that's growing increasingly cold-hearted and mechanical, I like to do what I can

to remind my readers of the wonders that are still present and the need to preserve those wonders and mysteries, doing so through the exaggerated technique of fantasies set in the contemporary world."

He has won a many awards including Canadian SF/Fantasy Award (the Casper), the Homer Award for best fantasy novel, and the World Fantasy Award. His work was chosen by the ALA as part of their list of best books for young adults and by the New York Public Library for their Best Books for the Teen-Age list.



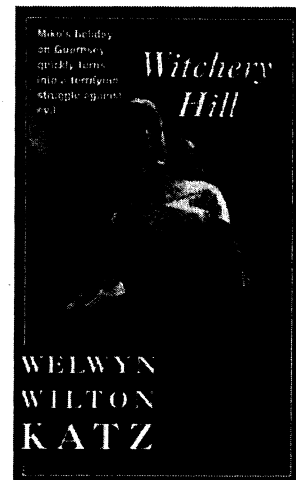
Welwyn Wilton Katz

Welwyn Katz writes stories inspired by mythology. Her books feature teen protagonists who deal with problems like family conflict or anxiety, but mythic themes help tell the story. After a short career as a teacher, Katz was transformed by her reading of Tolkien. She devoted much time to writing a large fantasy novel that was rejected by many publishers. It was then that she took a different direction and started to write about younger characters. Her novel *The Prophecy of Tau Ridoo* had children transported to a strange world ruled by a tyrant. Her next book *Witchery Hill* attracted some critical praise. A reviewer from *Publishers Weekly* called it "a knockout, with each character deftly delineated and a socko finish." Katz was inspired to write the novel after a visit to Guernsey, an English Channel Island, where there was supposedly a tradition of witchcraft. In the novel, a boy with divorced parents visits the island with his journalist father. He meets a girl who suspects her stepmother is a witch. The young heroes must take on evil forces as they try to resolve conflicts in their own families. The stone circles of England are the setting for *Sun God*, *Moon Witch*, another novel that pits young characters against magical evils.

A Canadian setting is used for *False Face*, a novel about a girl named Laney who finds an ancient aboriginal mask and is given conflicting advice about it from her parents. An ethical/cultural dilemma blends with family drama as strange powers begin to affect Laney. *The Third Magic* is a reformulation of the Arthurian legend. This complex book has a girl being taken into a world called Nwm. There she becomes a pawn in a plot to take the throne of Camelot. *Come*

Like Shadows is a book that integrates Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with a contemporary setting. Young Kinny O'Neill, while working at the Stratford festival discovers a mirror that has trapped the souls of the original eleventh-century witches. In *Out of the Dark* a boy who has lost his mother moves to Newfoundland, where he begins to carve a wooden Viking ship, using the Norse myths to help him find his way toward healing. Katz wrote a prose version of *Beowulf* that uses modern language to tell the ancient story from the point of view of Wiglaf, Beowulf's heir. The book is beautifully illustrated by Laszlo Gal.

In describing her work, Katz has said, "It's always a challenge to write about things that people don't experience, and then try to make them think that they have experienced these things because they've just read about them."



Alison Baird

Alison Baird currently resides in Oakville Ontario. She has written numerous fantasy novels and a few short stories. Her short fiction has appeared in *On Spec*, the anthology *What If: Amazing Stories* and in the anthology *Tales From the Wonder Zone*:

Stardust. Like many fantasy authors, Baird loved classical myths as a child, especially Nathaniel Hawthorne's retelling of the Greek myths *A Wonder Book*. The works of E. Nesbit, J.R.R. Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis were also major influences. Canadian settings are common in her fantasy novels for young adults.

Her first book *Dragon's Egg* takes place in modern day Toronto. A smart girl named Ai Lien is being teased by bullies at her new school. She finds a friend when a dragon's egg hatches and an invisible companion emerges. In her novel *The Hidden World*, Baird tells the story of a girl who moves to Avalon Peninsula in Newfoundland, and soon finds herself transported to King Arthur's Avalon. There she meets fairies and other mythical creatures, and embarks on a heroic adventure. *The Wolves of Woden* also takes place on the same magical peninsula. This time a teenager is swept into an other-worldly battle involving Celts, Vikings, an evil witch, and even the god Woden. They are going on a quest for the legendary Spear of Lugh, the artefact that will save the world. A reviewer for the *Hamilton Spectator* felt that the book had "wonderful, fully believable characters in both worlds."

Recently Baird has been at work on two trilogies. The *Willowmere* trilogy tells the story of Claire, a girl who meets a practicing Wiccan at a mysterious old estate. As she is drawn into the world of witchcraft, she searches for the truth about her mother's disappearance. She discovers her own mysterious connection to a past life, and as accompanied by a friendly spirit in her struggle against

a dark coven. In *The Dragon Throne* trilogy, the planet Mera is home to the descendents of a lost culture of magic-users who want to find a girl who can use the powerful Star Stone to defeat an evil tyrant. A young student named Ailia discovers that the old myths are true and she journeys to another world to find the Star Stone.

The *Contemporary Authors* database was the main source of information for this article.

