

Book Review

Johnny Breadless: A Pacifist Fairy Tale. By Paul Vaillant-Couturier. Translated and adapted by Jack Zipes. Minneapolis: Little Mole & Honey Bear Press, 2019. 104 pp. Illus. £26.50 (hbk). ISBN 978-1-73322-320-1

Paul Vaillant-Couturier (1892–1937) went to fight, willingly, in World War I, and returned, after being injured many times, a communist and pacifist. Having witnessed the horrors and futility of war, he sought to encourage peace and equality through his political and journalistic work, and through his writings. Among these is the fairy tale 'Jean-sans-Pain', published in 1921, translated here as 'Johnny Breadless'. This short tale follows the painfully poor Johnny, whose father will not be returning from the War and whose mother is mortally sick from factory work. On the outskirts of his village Johnny encounters Rabbit, who, with the assistance of a bevy of partridges, flies him to a factory, a dinner party for the ruling classes, and to the front line. Rabbit explains to Johnny the various injustices in society, and how these and their ruling-class orchestrators are complicit in maintaining poverty and inequality, and are responsible for the War and the deaths it causes.

This charmingly produced book comprises a short Preface by Jack Zipes, his English translation, the original French text of 1921, and a longer Afterword. The English translation is accompanied by Jean Lurc,at's illustrations from the 1933 French edition, while the French text is reproduced with its original illustrations by Paul Picart le Doux. The French tale here is reproduced as it appeared in 1921, with the same page numbers; note, therefore, that the Preface and English text are numbered pages 5–43, while the pages of the French text begin again and run 1–54. The Afterword begins at page 99 (with no other pages between this and the French text).

Zipes has done brilliantly to bring this fairy tale to English-speaking audiences today, in a way that will appeal to the young and not so young. His translation underscores his fondness for the tale and its message, and it is generally clear and readable. However, there are occasionally some odd turns of phrase that often had me comparing the French and English texts side by side. On page 12 of the English text, for example, the partridges are described as having 'paws', which is strikingly unusual, and has no equivalent phrase in the French. Later, 'everything became white as if someone had spilled flour on the moon' (30, English text), whereas in the French it is 'sur le monde' ('on the Earth', 38, French text; my translation), which makes more sense in the context. The most unusual difference occurs on page 34 (English text), when Rabbit tells Johnny that there will be a ceasefire 'Because the soldiers have had enough and want to talk', yet in the French we read 'Parce que c'est la nuit de Noël' ('Because it is Christmas Eve', 41, French text; my translation), referring to the famous Christmas ceasefire of 1914.

However, in the Afterword, we find out that Zipes's translation is based on the updated 1933 edition, rather than the original 1921 text that is reproduced in French here. This may account for a number of the discrepancies between the two texts, especially as, in his later edition, Vaillant-Couturier removed a number of religious motifs and enhanced the tale's didacticism and revolutionary messaging (102). As such, my only criticism of this book—and it is a rather small one—is that it would have benefitted from the contents of the Afterword being put into a longer Preface or Foreword ahead of the tale, to give the reader a better understanding of the two texts and their contexts. Nonetheless, this is not to detract from the achievements of this slim volume, which is recommended *for* all ages, and *in* all ages.