

## 19 *Bringing the Story Home*

A JOURNEY WITH *BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*

---

### *Beasts and Scholars*

I've been thinking and writing about "Beauty and the Beast" for thirty years. In revisiting the story for yet another conference presentation I wondered if I still had anything left to say. Then I spent five misty days in Ireland watching 221 border collies compete in the World Sheepdog Trials and came across a book about legendary Jim Cropper (the Dog Man). Looking at the wolf-eyed beast on the back cover (fig. 19.1), you could well ask, Is this a herder or a hunter?<sup>1</sup> Anyone familiar with border collies knows that their work depends somewhat precariously on both instincts—it is the combination that makes them effective. Staring-and-stalking ability is imperative for a herder, but one grip of those powerful canine fangs on a sheep crosses the line into hunting and destroys the dog's chances for herding success (or even survival, since biters are often put down). There is an analogy to those of us who herd stories.

Because storytelling of some kind is endemic to human communities, we tend to regard stories as a domesticated breed of expression. In border collie mode, scholars make long outruns to gather, lift, and drive stories through various theoretical gates; separate those designated for shedding; and pen them—to the applause of an academic audience. In the day when small flocks followed certain paths for generations, stories and scholars—like sheep and herding dogs—knew what to expect from each other. Now we must acknowledge what was perhaps always true, that