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Editorial: The Dark Side

Even if we can't picture ourselves as co-warriors with the angels, most of us would like to think that, given the choice, we could resist the lure of the dark, that we could tell the difference between what is and what ought to be, and that we'd know a devil to see one. (He'd be the one with the horns.) The writers we feature in this issue may not agree.

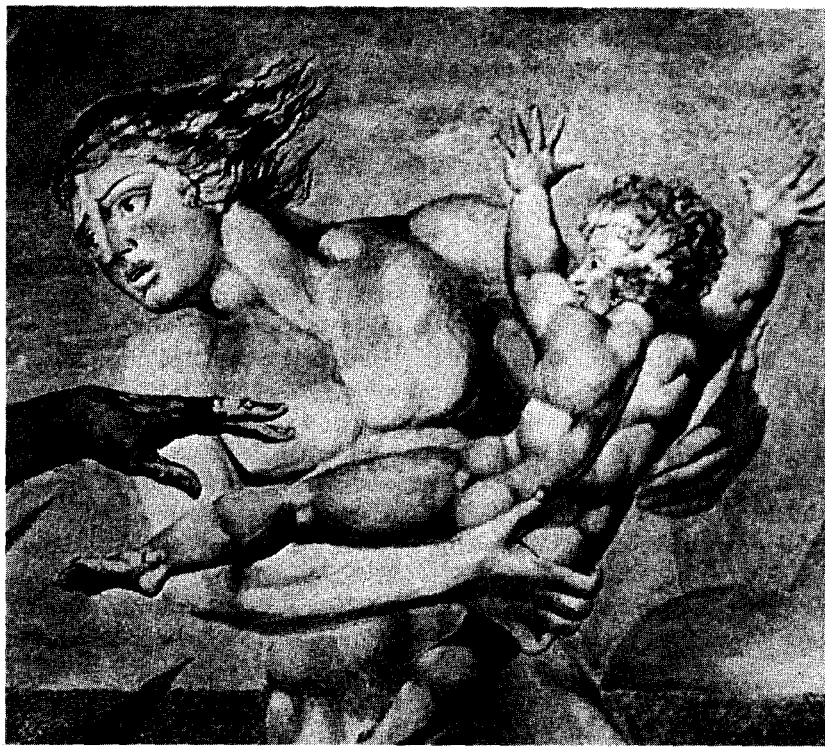
The dark is not so easily known or understood, they claim. Indeed, the idea of the devil or of a menacing darkness stirs their imaginations to dramatic expressions of the problem of evil. And what is that problem? Its character has changed over the course of centuries of Western thought, but it is usually registered in two questions, moral and metaphysical: Why does it exist in the first place? Why do we seem incapable of surmounting it? The answers remain elusive.

This issue of *CCL* is devoted to writers who are willing to ask those questions in children's literature, willing to explore the problems of unmerited suffering and oppression, to investigate the illusion of loveliness that disguises the dark. The philosophy of life in Michael Bedard's, Dennis Foon's and Carol Matas's art defies any cursory formulation, but the writers' guiding ideas of good and evil, the dark and the light, can be recognized clearly. And though none offers a solution to the problem of evil, the writers we feature here do portray, either explicitly or implicitly, ways in which we should confront it. But it is not the task of these writers to delineate the cuter, rather safer side of the "bad" world: schoolyard bullies, snotty cliques, or telephone hogs. Theirs is children's literature, to be sure, but these are not demure writers. Foon has dramatized plays about sexual abuse, racism and alcoholism. Bedard has written novels about the mysterious grip one person can have on another. Matas has written about the Holocaust and witch-burnings. Not a pencil-case thief in sight.

While these writers differ markedly in subject and approach, they possess at least one arresting commonality. In her article on *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil*, Joanne Findon argues that "the greatest wrong," in Bedard's eyes is "to seek to control another person." That same belief belongs to Matas, as she tells us in her lively conversation with Perry Nodelman: "Someone once said evil is the desire to control other human beings. I think that's a pretty good definition and have adopted it as my own. From Hitler down to the class bully this definition seems to apply." Finally, as Sarah Gibson-Bray points out, many of Foon's works are concerned with the "politics of domination," which the

dramatist abhors. All of these writers are concerned, then, with the snuffing out of individuality, creativity, will and choice by a malevolent force. None seems to suggest that we can ever completely vanquish evil or eliminate the dark, because, like the dissonant notes which seem to swell the harmony of a composer's masterpiece or the shadows that seem to set off the light of a painting, the dark gives meaning to the light. As Matas puts it, "like form and shadow, they co-exist" in all of us. It is partly because of their daring and their convictions that none of these writers sits comfortably on a shelf with a group of "like" writers. Foon, for instance, stands alone. He has practically invented his own genre, "child advocacy theatre." Matas takes on aspects of history in her fiction that less brave writers would rather not touch. And because Bedard has altogether defied categorization, but has been most consistently called a fantasist, we thought we'd give you Judy Saltman's breathtaking survey of the development of fantasy writing in Canada, so you can see where a well-read expert might put Bedard's elusive works. Finally, we hope these articles and interviews help you see that that figure with the horns you thought you could spot easily looks different in the works of these three Canadian writers. So different you may not recognize him.

Marie C. Davis



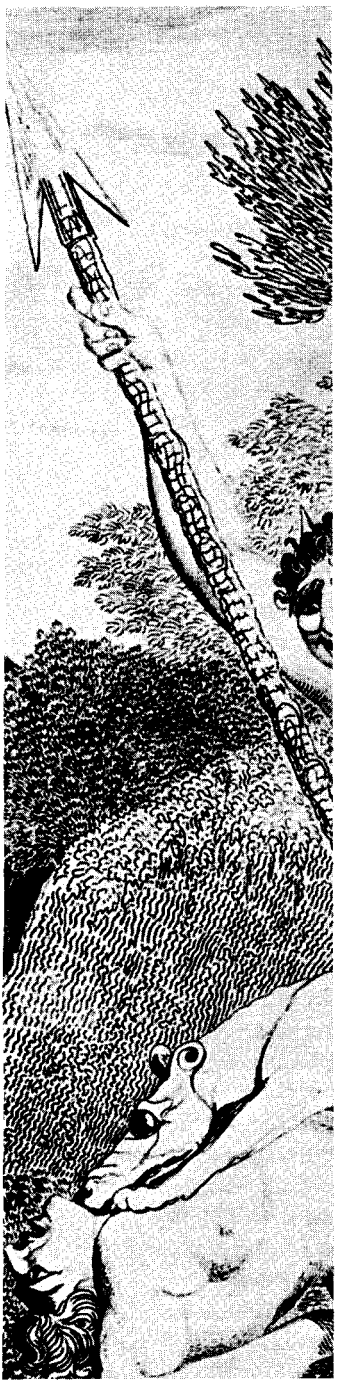
Présentation: Le fantastique, le merveilleux et la question du Mal

Rien de plus simple et de plus difficile que de parler de littérature fantastique: d'une part, chacun a sa petite idée du fantastique ou, du moins, une oeuvre en tête, que ce soit *le Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, *la Vénus d'Ille* ou *le Horla*: d'autre part, dès qu'on veut l'analyser ou en discuter plus sérieusement, le problème de la définition se pose de façon aiguë. Car ni les ouvrages classiques comme *l'Introduction à la littérature fantastique* de Todorov, ni les bibliographies consacrées à ce genre, si genre il y a, n'ont abouti à une définition rigoureuse, satisfaisante pour l'esprit et correspondant vraiment à l'ensemble des ouvrages classés sous cette catégorie qui recoupe le merveilleux, la science-fiction, la "fantaisie" des littératures anglophones, voire la production à la limite du macabre et du démoniaque. En effet, le fantastique présuppose très souvent la présence de l'inexplicable, de l'au-delà, voire du Mal.

C'est un aspect que nos lecteurs découvriront dans l'oeuvre du romancier Michael Bedard, qui s'impose de plus en plus comme l'un des chefs de file de la nouvelle littérature pour la jeunesse du Canada anglais. À la lumière de la pénétrante analyse de Joanne Findon et de l'entrevue accordée à Marie Davis, l'on sera à même d'apprécier un auteur fort cultivé, à la fois nourri de la grande tradition du romantisme et sensible aux questions les plus actuelles, dont les romans, unissant l'apport des mystiques comme Jakob Böhme et des poètes romantiques anglais, posent le problème du Mal en des termes complexes et troublants, qui dépassent le manichéisme du combat entre les forces maléfiques et celles du Bien. Un survol de la production ressortissant du fantastique par Judith Saltman et une présentation du dramaturge Dennis Foon par Sarah Gibson-Bray complètent ce numéro thématique consacré à la fantaisie et au Mal.

En terminant, nous pouvons affirmer que les numéros à venir auront un contenu francophone plus substantiel: à signaler, d'abord, un article important de Danielle Thaler sur la définition de la littérature de jeunesse, une étude de Suzanne Pouliot sur "les petits débrouillards", et bien d'autres contributions, notamment sur l'oeuvre de Daniel Sernine, les contes inuit de Maurice Métayer, la sexualité des adolescentes, *etc.*, sans compter, enfin, des comptes rendus détaillés d'oeuvres récentes, qui constitueront en soi des embryons de véritables études, et une série de présentations d'auteurs québécois et canadiens-français. C'est donc dire que la direction de la *CCL/LCJ* entend consolider et accentuer son visage français!

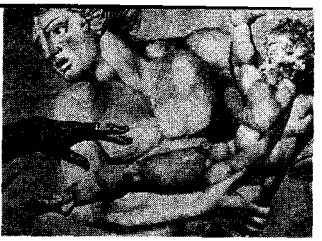
Daniel Chouinard



Contents / Sommaire

FILM REVIEWS / CRITIQUES DE FILMS

Illustrations by William Blake appear as follows: page 34, "The Good and Evil Angels struggling for posession of a child," 1795. Colour print, finished with pen and watercolour. Tate Gallery (see also detail on pages 4, 8, 22 and 57); page 2, "Head of a damned soul in Dante's Inferno," 1788-90. Line-engraving, after Henry Fuseli. British Museum; page 69, *Book of Urizen*, plate 5 from "A Small Book of Designs," 1794. Relief-etching. British Museum. Illustrations from *The Complaint and The Consolation: or Night Thoughts*, by Edward Young, 1797, appear as follows: page 6, "Till death, that mighty hunter"; page 7, "The thunder, if in that";page 21, 39 and 68, detail from "Its favours here are trials." Line engravings. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Darkness in the Novels of Michael Bedard

Joanne Findon

Résumé: Joanne Findon étudie la manière dont Michael Bedard présente les forces du mal dans ses oeuvres, particulièrement dans son roman *A Darker Magic* et sa suite, *Painted Devil*. Fondant son analyse sur l'examen des sources de l'auteur, de sa technique narrative et de ses intentions énoncées dans les entrevues qu'il a accordées, elle situe la manifestation la plus radicale du mal dans le "désir d'étouffer la volonté et l'individualité de l'autre". A l'opposé et en contrepartie, l'amitié constitue "la lumière du monde".

Summary: This articles explores the way in which Bedard treats forces of darkness and evil in his novels, particularly in *A Darker Magic* and its sequel *Painted Devil*. Building her arguments out of textual analysis, personal interviews with Bedard, and a study of the works which have influenced him, Findon locates Bedard's "darkest dark" in the desire to extinguish the will and the individuality of another person. Against this, human friendship constitutes the "light of the world."

In the last few years Michael Bedard has emerged as an important new writer of fiction for children. His novels are challenging, muti-layered works which deal with a number of difficult themes in a sophisticated manner. His first novel, *A Darker Magic*, the Governor General's Award-winning *Redwork*, and his most recent book, *Painted Devil*, all serve up plenty of suspense and drama to the young reader. Yet they are also complex, poetic narratives which resonate in the mind long after the last page is turned, and which offer access to a world of deeper meaning.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Bedard's work is his richly textured representation of evil. In fact, Bedard prefers to speak of "darkness" — a term which expands his symbolic range considerably and allows him to deploy a series of double-edged images throughout his novels. Darkness in Bedard's work is as much related to dreams and the imagination — and thus to ambiguity — as it is to moral evil. For Bedard the world of shadows is a continuum of lesser and greater degrees of darkness, from the vague menace of the woods or a child's "dreadful wish" that her mother's pregnancy had never been, to the threats and intimidation of bullies or the manipulation of the weak by the strong. The "darkest dark" in Bedard's continuum is the desire to extinquish the will and individuality of another person.

Unlike the evil in many other modern fantasy novels, the darkness in Bedard's books is never vanquished once and for all. Instead it creeps back, assuming new and more alluring forms in different times and places. Moreover, his characters are acutely aware that the darkness *will* return, and that their own success in banishing it is at best provisional. Partly as a result of this strategy, Bedard's work lacks the didacticism often found in other popular fantasies for young

people, such as the Narnia Chronicles of C.S. Lewis. Bedard seems uninterested in creating new worlds for his characters to inhabit, or in deploying them as allegorical figures. Instead, he situates them in our own world, with all of its positive and negative possibilities.

In fact, although Bedard has been characterized as a writer of fantasy, he is uneasy with this label. Many fans of *A Darker Magic*, often categorized as "dark fantasy," were disappointed with his next book *Redwork*, which is much more concerned with intergenerational relationships than with the supernatural. Bedard is careful to point out that his work has been influenced as much by poets such as Blake, Coleridge and Emily Dickinson as by fantasy writers. And the fantasists he does list among his influences are George MacDonald and Alan Garner, writers whose works are poetic and often highly ambiguous.[1] Bedard does not see his work as part of the modern "fantasy tradition" — at least as this has been defined by Lewis, Tolkien, Le Guin, and others — and balks at the restrictions that such a label places on a writer. While allowing that elements of fantasy are present in all of his works, Bedard seems happiest writing in the space that defies definition, where poetic images have free play. All of his novels explore the fragility of the boundaries between dream and reality, death and life, dark and light, past and present, and what Bedard calls "rigidity" and "tenderness,"[2] and refuse to draw the borders between these clearly for the reader.

This study will consider in detail the representation of darkness in Bedard's first novel, *A Darker Magic*, and in its complex sequel *Painted Devil*. In the process, it will seek to illuminate Bedard's distinct vision of life as a creative interplay between light and dark, fraught with both joy and pain — a view that owes much to the works of both William Blake and Emily Dickinson. The meaning in Bedard's work arises from an interplay of images which are allusive and multivalent rather than explicit. In the novels examined here, he employs a complex web of double-edged images to suggest the many shades of darkness in the world.

Bedard claims that he strives to make his prose "mean in the way a poem means."[3] He sees his work as deeply influenced by Emily Dickinson's poetry, with its attention to extremes and to what lies hidden beneath the surfaces of things. His use of double-edged images recalls Dickinson's preoccupation with the "duality of experience,"[4] in which contrary states of mind seem inextricably bound to each other.[5] The recurrent theme of another reality hidden behind a veneer or mask of what is "normal" is also clearly reminiscent of Dickinson's verse. Bedard signals these connections through the use of epigrams in his books; *A Darker Magic* opens with Dickinson's poem "Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn," while "On my volcano grows the grass" begins *Painted Devil*.[6] Both of these brief poems capture the sense of the hidden about to be revealed, of something unusual and unnerving about to occur.

At the same time, William Blake also presides over much of Bedard's work. This is most apparent in *Redwork*, where the main character's mother is writing a thesis on the development of Blake's ideas between the *Songs of Innocence* and

Songs of Experience. She spends most of the novel in a "Blake haze," but at one point looks up from her book to say

"... it seems to me that *The Book of Thel* occupies a profoundly important place in the development of Blake's thought. You see, Blake believed that the only way of attaining the realm of higher innocence was to pass through the world of experience, to endure what on the surface looked like death in order to gain a higher life. The great tragedy of Thel is that out of fear she is unable to bring herself to act, to go down into the grave of experience, knowing, as Blake says, "'tis given thee to enter / And to return; fear nothing.' As a result, Thel becomes the symbol for all who fail out of fear to bring the life within them, whatever form that life may take, to fruition, and instead flee back like Thel to the unborn world." (*R* 164-65)[7]

This passage certainly articulates the philosophical underpinning of *Redwork*, but the theme of a descent into the "death" of experience is also crucial to *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil*. While Blake is not mentioned explicitly in either book, each one explores the dangerous passages through darkness that human beings must undertake.

In *A Darker Magic*, darkness is centred in an external force embodied in the magician Professor Mephisto and his modern human incarnation, Scott Renshaw. *Painted Devil* is concerned with a subsequent manifestation of this same malevolent force; but also embedded in this narrative is a multi-layered exploration of the more mundane shadows that lurk in all human hearts. In this respect, *Painted Devil* is reminiscent of *Redwork*, with its complex examination of the fragile bridges between fear and trust, and its concern with the *ordinary* wrongs that people do to one another. In *Painted Devil* Bedard examines the full range of "greys" between darkness and light, all the possibilities of hurt and misunderstanding that lie between the extinquishing of self on the one hand, and the creative interaction of individuals on the other.

In *A Darker Magic*, Emily Endicott's summer tasks of coping with three uproarious younger siblings are overshadowed when her teacher, Miss Potts, finds an old handbill for a magic show that she attended when she was a child fifty years before. The magician, one Professor Mephisto, made a powerful impression on Miss Potts at the time, and when she realizes that this year August 8th falls on a Saturday just as it did in 1936, she fears a return of the evil force. Emily's father and his historical society are renovating the old Caledon Depot, where the original magic show was held, and it becomes increasingly clear to Emily and Miss Potts that it is this railway depot that harbours the darkness. Complicating matters is a strange new boy named Scott Renshaw, who exerts a mysterious hold on another student, Craig Chandler.

The point of view alternates between Emily, Miss Potts, and Craig, each one providing a different perspective on the workings of the darkness that Scott embodies, until the rivetting climax unites all three characters in the magic show. Miss Potts's memory of the original show forms a separate narrative interspersed throughout the story. These alternating viewpoints allow Bedard to weave together a series of distinct yet related perspectives on the nature of the dark force that threatens the characters.

The novel begins with Emily struggling to recall a dream. Much of the first chapter is lighthearted and tongue-in-cheek, sketching Emily's rambunctious family with warmth and humour. But the chapter ends with a chilling image from Emily's dream, a memory of herself "perched on the brink of an icy abyss" where she hears the warning voice of her teacher Miss Potts (*DM* 7). This remembered dream fragment is the first of many hints of menace in the novel. The passage not only establishes the crucial link between Emily and Miss Potts, but also points to the significant role that dreams will play in the story. Indeed, the fragility of the boundary between waking and dreaming is one of the dominant motifs in the novel. Dreams can be wonderful, even illuminating; they can also be nightmares so frightening that the dreamer becomes paralyzed both in the dream world and in waking life. Emily, Miss Potts and Craig are all troubled by dark dreams in which either Scott Renshaw or his alter-ego the Magician appear or speak, warning or tormenting them and seeking to influence their behaviour. Craig gives us the first glimpse of the dangerous world of illusion that Scott represents. On his first visit to Scott's apartment, Craig catches sight of his own reflection in a mirror:

> And then an incredible thing happened. It was as if the image rippled suddenly, like a piece of painted scenery in a play. And when it settled again he found himself staring at a totally different room. It was barren and devastated. Hunks of plaster dangled from the wall, leaving the lathing gaping through like bone. The walls were covered in crayon scrawl.
>
> He swung around. Scott was standing in the doorway, buttoning his shirt, and staring at him. The room was as it had been before. (*DM* 19-20)

This is a powerful image of the illusion that lies at the heart of darkness in this book. The devastation Craig glimpses in the mirror symbolizes the spiritual devastation that Scott seeks to inflict on his victims. It unmasks the threat of death that hides beneath the magic and wonder that both Scott and his alter-ego the Magician use to lure and control the unwary.

Indeed, Professor Mephisto openly questions the boundary between reality and illusion. In one of the interleaved descriptions of the magic show, he asks the children, "Reality and illusion ... which is which? Could it be, dear children, that life and death themselves are no more than illusions?" (*DM* 164) Of course, he wants his victims to believe that such distinctions are trivial. Yet failing to discern the difference results in entrapment and death.

This power to create illusion is the source of Miss Potts' dread of Professor Mephisto. When she recounts to Emily the events of the Children's Show, she pinpoints the cause of her fear:

> ... now and then it seemed to me that something flared briefly in those hooded eyes. I can only call it a hunger. And for an instant the magic would fail, the smile falter, and in its place I sensed the unbridled fury of a wild beast about to spring. And then it would be gone, and again there would be only the wonder. (*DM* 55)

This cloak of wonder masking a fury underneath is reminiscent of Dickinson's image of the grassy hill beneath which seethes the molten rock of a volcano. While such an image of hidden power can carry either positive or negative force, Bedard here deploys it to highlight the manipulative qualities of darkness. It is

precisely his ability to generate wonder that gives the Magician such power. He is a tremendously alluring figure, and as the embodiment of evil he is unlike the ugly monsters of many fairy tales. His appearance is strange, but not repellent. He is, instead, more akin to the fallen angel Lucifer, the beautiful Prince of Lies.

Bedard has said that in creating Professor Mephisto, he studied material about cult leader Jim Jones and the type of rhetoric he used to bind his followers to him.[8] Within the context of Bedard's depiction of evil in the novel, this is not surprising. The greatest wrong, in Bedard's view, is to seek to control another person. The Magician's "hunger" is for the type of enslavement which overpowers the self and creates from individuals one homogeneous mass of mindless followers.[9] The connections between this and many modern religious cults is clear.

It is certainly the verbal magic that draws children into the Magician's spell. In describing Professor Mephisto's voice, Miss Potts tells Emily

> We sat there spellbound as it flowed and eddied about the room, transforming all it touched.... There was the overwhelming feeling of having long been lost and finally found one's way home.... He gathered us to him as a mother hen gathers her brood beneath her wing, and we were one. (*DM* 54)

Such power is dangerous indeed, for it is darkness masquerading as light, and Miss Potts escapes being caught in the Professor's net only because she senses the beast underneath. The other children who are less perceptive pay with their lives. The feeling of oneness which is so alluring is actually a loss of individual will. Significantly, the image of the mother hen sheltering her chicks is one used by Jesus in Matthew 23:37 when he says,

> 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.'

The fact that the Magician's voice conjures up this image used in a very different context by Christ — the antithesis of Lucifer himself — is a chilling reminder of how effectively darkness can be masked beneath robes of light. It also suggests Professor Mephisto's connection with Satan, a link that becomes explicit in *Painted Devil.*

Aside from this confusion between dark and light, Miss Potts's account of the Children's Show also introduces other double-edged images: the roses, with their beauty and their thorns; the recurring, mysterious sound of applause or the beating of birds' wings which is sometimes harmless, sometimes menacing; and the children in the audience, whose charming innocence makes them vulnerable to becoming lifeless dolls in the Magician's hands. Bedard weaves these images throughout the narrative to suggest the ways in which darkness and light are inseparably connected.

Emily's fears are centred on the abandoned depot where her father is working on the renovations for the railway museum. Miss Potts suggests that the depot is a place "where darkness once passed, setting its stamp indelibly upon that spot, casting its long shadow down through time" (105). This introduces another recurrent motif in Bedard's novels: that of old places and objects as both

repositories of memory and vehicles of the dark. The depot is a harbour for the Magician's power, a place where time has stood still and the magic show of the past can be revived. Once again, there are two sides to the coin: through its annihilation of the boundaries between past and present, an old building can bring comfort and draw forth memory; but in doing so it can also provide a channel through which the darkness of the past can flow into the present.

The only way to defeat the power of Professor Mephisto or his alter-ego Scott Renshaw is to resist his spell and refuse to obey his orders. This is not easy, and even Emily almost succumbs to his powers of delusion. In the climactic scene, as the Children's Show is reenacted once again in the railway depot, Emily finds herself sitting on the floor with Craig Chandler. When Craig rises from the crowd as a volunteer for the deadly trick "The Decollation of John the Baptist," Emily cries out and interrupts the show. The Magician turns his attention on her, causing her memory of the present to fade and assuming the form and voice of her mother. Under the control of this deadly illusion, Emily is almost lost:

When is the dark just the dark ... and when does it become something weighty and menacing, something to be feared?

> Emily ... felt herself being lifted effortlessly up onto the bed. That perfume her mother was wearing. Very strong. What was it? Roses, yes, roses.
> 'I feel funny. Cold,' she said.
> "It's the fever, love.' (*DM* 167)

Although Emily senses that the reassuring words of this "mother" are artificial, she is powerless to act; the mother's eyes, "Cold, piercing eyes, pinning her to the bed like a butterfly to a board" (167) hold her down. It is only the intervention of Miss Potts that shatters the Magician's spell.

But Professor Mephisto has only lost the battle, not the war. Both Emily and Miss Potts know this:

> 'He will be back, won't he?'
> 'Yes,' said Miss Potts 'I believe he will be back..... All we can do is wait, and watch, and trust that when the night draws near again, there will be someone left who remembers the last time, and is ready for him.'
> 'Someone like me,' said Emily.... (*DM* 175-76)

Craig's last frightening visit to Scott's empty apartment, when the illusion of the inhabited room and Scott's mocking voice begin to take shape again (177-83), only serves to underline the tenuousness of the victory of light over dark.

Significantly, it is the alliance of Emily and Miss Potts, forged across the often insuperable barriers of age, attitude and the teacher/pupil relationship, which enables them to thwart the Magician. The kind of friendship that Emily and Miss Potts share is what constitutes, for Bedard, the "light" in the world. It is these tenuous, risky, easily shattered connections between individuals which "bring people to bloom"[10] and which enable them to push against the darkness around them.

Painted Devil takes place 28 years after *A Darker Magic*, when August 8th is due to fall once again on a Saturday. A now-grown Emily Endicott returns to Caledon to try to stop the Magician's return. The main character in this story is her niece Alice, who is the same age Emily was when the adventure with Miss Potts marked her life forever. Now Alice and Emily must work together to turn back the powerful force of evil that threatens them both.

Despite their beauty, the roses with their cruel thorns and their suffocating scent warn of the danger and decay that this beauty can conceal.

Painted Devil explores darkness and light in even more complex and intricate ways. Here, darkness is not simply the evil, external force of Professor Mephisto, now embodied in a Devil puppet. It is also painted in various shades of grey in everything from Alice's guilt over her resentment of her mother's pregnancy to the difficulty and danger of that pregnancy; from her little sister Lela's fascination with a fairy tale witch to the eccentric librarian's unhealthy obsession with one old set of puppets; from the eerie unease of the empty crib already set up in Alice's old room to the menacing black birds in the wallpaper. And hovering over the whole book is the image of the womb as a place of darkness and unknown potential, a place of dangerous possibilities like the dim woods of fairy tales or the dusty shadows of the old library. Where does imagination end and real threat begin? Where does human frailty give way to actual wickedness? When is the dark just the dark — the absence of the sun's light — and when does it become something weighty and menacing, something to be feared? In journeying through *Painted Devil*, the reader negotiates a forest of symbols that suggest much yet provide few definitive answers to such questions.

The novel begins with Alice watching her younger sister playing with her dolls in the back yard. As she watches Lela, she recalls the day she came home to find her pregnant mother lying white and bleeding in the living room. Alice's father rushed her to the hospital, where tests revealed that the pregnancy would be a difficult one. For Alice, that day marked a point when "a sudden fragility ... entered into their lives" (*PD* 5). Here, Bedard suggests the tenuousness of the boundary between life and death, a theme that will emerge again and again in the novel. At the same time, as Alice's thoughts return to Lela feeding her dolls, the fragility of another boundary — that between reality and illusion — is also emphasized. Since Alice has moved into Lela's room to make way for the coming baby, she has found it increasingly difficult to believe in the lifelessness of dolls. Lela's dolls constitute an important subtext in the story, and recall the doll-like passivity of the children at the magic show in *A Darker Magic*. This point is driven home in Alice's frightening dream of herself as a doll who can neither speak nor act on her own (159), a scene which powerfully reinforces the double-edged imagery of dolls as both charming childhood playthings and

symbols of mindless passivity.

The first chapter closes with Alice's contemplation of the woods that separate her home from the old library where she works:

> The damp smell of leaf mold and growing things rolling off them would normally have intoxicated her, but now she found it strangely unsettling. It seemed as though they lay under enchantment, like the magic woods in one of Lela's fairy tales. (*PD* 8)

In both natural and imaginative terms, the woods embody both life and death simultaneously. They can be magical and full of wonder, like the idyllic, sun-dappled forest in the library's mural which depicts a woman reading to a group of children (80). On the other hand, they can be places of confusion and peril, where Lela can get lost in the middle of the day (102-06). And as the liminal space which connects Alice's house and the library, the woods foreshadow the dangerous passages — both physical and psychological — that Alice and Emily must make in the course of the story.

The rest of the novel weaves together a whole series of other double-edged images, many of them linking this book with *A Darker Magic*. One of the most important of these is the roses. Haunted by what happened in the depot all those years ago, Emily is particularly susceptible to all that roses represent. She sees and smells roses everywhere, from the housing project that now stands on the site of the old depot, to the stained glass dome in the library where the dark leading seems to "sprout thorns" and the "random shards of color to cluster into lush, elaborate blooms" (67). Despite their beauty, the roses with their cruel thorns and their suffocating scent warn of the danger and decay that this beauty can conceal.[11]

Fairy tales form an important subtext in *Painted Devil*. Lela is obsessed with fairy tales, even the frightening ones. Her favourite book is one inherited from Aunt Emily, an illustrated book called *A Wonder Book of Tales for Boys and Girls*. The most powerful picture — and the one which presides over the whole novel — depicts the witch peering out of her window at Hansel and Gretel. For Alice, this drawing touches "the nerve of terror at the very heart of the story" (24). This picture captures the tension between fear and wonder which is the essence of fairy tales, and which infuses the whole of *Painted Devil*.

As in *A Darker Magic*, old buildings and objects play an important role. In *Painted Devil* there are two such places: the upper bedroom that Alice shares with Lela, and the library, which has become the repository for the items saved from the old Caledon Railway Depot's museum. This collection includes a handbill for the 1936 Children's Show and the knife used in the "Decollation of John the Baptist." The library has inherited along with these objects something of the external, malevolent force resident in the depot. It is not so much the past itself which makes the library menacing, but the darker imprints of that past which find the building a suitable vehicle. Alice senses this when she stays after closing time with the peculiar new librarian, Mr. Dwyer.

> Here, truly, was a place out of time. The two of them suddenly seemed pitifully small and insignificant standing there. Beneath a flimsy shroud of dust, something stirred. As she stood within its spell, Alice had the sudden unsettling feeling that anything might happen here. (*PD* 29)

At this stage in the story, the library is very much like the womb of Alice's mother: not yet a place of life or death, but a place that harbours both possibilities. Eventually, the library takes on aspects of the witch's house and all of the danger that it represents.

Alice and Lela's bedroom is also a place of shadows. Here, the twilight of the imagination reigns. This is the one room in the house that has not been redecorated, and as such is another "place out of time" as well as an intimate space where fairy tales are told and dolls seem to listen to them. There is a sense of magic and wonder here; yet the darker elements in the room, such as the strange birds on the old wallpaper, suggest deeper shadows and call to mind the mother's dangerous pregnancy. Like the library, this room is also womb-like, a place of unknown potentialities.

Fairy tales, the secret lives of dolls, and the dangers of the womb form the backdrop for the book's central drama of the puppet show. It is in the puppets, and especially in the antique Punch-and-Judy set that Mr. Dwyer finds in the library, that the real darkness of the book takes shape. But here again, Bedard's representation of the dark is many-layered. Once Alice has agreed to help Mr. Dwyer resurrect the Saturday morning puppet shows in the library, the script of a Punch-and-Judy show begins to appear at intervals between chapters. In the first scene Punch offers to mind the baby while Judy prepares dinner, but bangs the baby's head on the floor and throws him out the window when he cries. In the second scene, several chapters later, Punch kills Judy when she rages at him for murdering the baby. Both of these scenes are shockingly violent to the modern reader, despite Punch's amusing banter and his apparent innocence of all wrong intention. Juxtaposed as they are with chapters in which the dangerous pregnancy of Alice's mother features prominently, Punch's domestic violence is doubly disturbing.

The collision of dark and light in *Painted Devil* is manifested, in part, in a collision of rigidity and tenderness.

As the novel progresses, however, the reader's initial impression of Punch is modified in light of the greater evil he must encounter at the climax of the play: the Devil himself. Alice begins to sense a deep malevolence in the antique Devil puppet. The themes of imagination and illusion collide with the theme of the nature of evil as the puppet comes to life in Mr. Dwyer's unsuspecting hands:

> He slid his hand inside the limp black cloth. A tremor ran through the puppet, as if it had been suddenly roused from sleep. It slowly raised its head and looked at Alice. She felt it fix her with its wicked red eyes, and a chill ran through her. It bobbed its head in silent greeting, and the leering smile seemed to widen a little, as though the lifeless wood in fact were flesh. The image of the witch in the *Wonder Book* flashed through her mind. (*PD* 53)

Punch's misdemeanours pale before the death and despair that the Devil represents. Mr. Dwyer's comment that the puppet set came from a New England dealer named Renshaw alerts readers familiar with *A Darker Magic* that this puppet is indeed another vehicle for the power of Professor Mephisto.

The Devil puppet and his role in the Punch-and-Judy show — particularly in light of the two different versions of the play which figure here — are crucial to Bedard's depiction of darkness. Within the context of the play itself, Punch's valuation as "good" or "evil" depends on how rigid a standard of "moral virtue" is applied. If one views Punch's actions as totally reprehensible, then the written version which ends with him being carried off by the Devil shows him getting his just reward. In such an interpretation, the Devil (while not "good" in himself) is an agent of divine justice. However, the traditional, oral versions of the play end differently, with Punch triumphing over the Devil and driving him away or even killing him. This ending betrays the roots of the Punch shows among the working poor of nineteenth-century cities; for them, Punch was the "champion of the oppressed" (52). Outrageous and childlike, Punch was the trickster figure who, "in flouting authority ... was a symbol of their own struggle for liberty" (101).

One of the important binary pairs in Bedard's thought — along with life-death, and dark-light — is rigidity-tenderness.[12] What Bedard means by "rigidity" is a fixed way of operating and of viewing the world, a "black and white" approach which fails to allow for ambiguity. It implies a resistance to compromise, a defensiveness against the world outside oneself, and fixed ideas of right and wrong. In fact, Bedard's concept of rigidity has much in common with Blake's idea of repressive Reason as embodied in the demiurge Urizen.[13] "Tenderness," on the other hand, is an openness to the imagination, to change, and to sympathetic exchanges with others; it is the quality most evident in children. This tenderness is fragile, like a candle-flame easily blown out, and it must be guarded and nurtured. It brings with it both the ability to see clearly (as Lela sees immediately that the Devil puppet is "bad") and a dangerous vulnerability (as Lela is vulnerable to being lured into the woods by the Magician's illusions).

The collision of dark and light in *Painted Devil* is manifested, in part, in a collision of rigidity and tenderness. Mr. Dwyer has come under the sway of Professor Mephisto and his dark force through the Devil puppet. This particular puppet is old, "much older than the rest of the set" (53); it seems to Alice to be "possessed of some dark, almost elemental life that had survived the centuries, smiling its unwavering wicked smile while people grew old and withered around it" (153). Like the written text of the play that accompanies it, the puppet is rigid and fixed. As Mr. Dwyer is seduced by its power, he becomes obsessed with using this *written* version of the play, which has the Devil carrying Punch off at the end. Alice, on the other hand, is very uncomfortable with this ending; the more she rehearses her role as Punch, the more she comes to understand that Punch is "not really wicked" but "simply impetuous. Like a child, he did not think things through.... He did not deserve damnation" (128).

These conflicting views have tangible results. As Mr. Dwyer allows himself to be possessed by the devilish force, he becomes even more solitary than usual, living "like an addict" with "a haunted look about him, a sheen of madness in the sunken eyes" which take on "the glassy vacancy of one of Lela's dolls" (184). Ultimately, Mr. Dwyer allows the puppet's power to possess him completely,

and goes so far as to powder and paint his face in its likeness (203). In contrast, Alice chooses to believe Aunt Emily's bizarre tale about Miss Potts and the Children's Show, and forms an alliance with her, determining to help her destroy the Devil puppet. Through their willingness to trust each other (again, despite the barriers of age, attitude and experience), they are empowered to act creatively and aggressively against the dark force that threatens them.

This type of alliance with another individual lies at the heart of all Bedard's books. Indeed, in both *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil* Emily survives *only* because of the intervention of another. Such an alliance signifies for Bedard the state in which life can be lived most fully. But even this openness to others and to the realm of the imagination — this admitting of "tenderness" — is double-edged, as Alice realizes after she decides to believe Emily's story:

> Something had opened [a] crack, had let the darkness whistle in, as the wind had whistled through the car window while Aunt Emily told her incredible tale. Could such things possibly be? No, the voice of reason screamed inside her. But another part of her — the part that sank beneath the spell of the *Wonder Book* as readily as Lela, that looked in the window of the little cottage and saw the withered face of the witch take shape among the shadows, the part that had lain in bed that night and wished the dreadful wish that the baby were never born — that part heard the light fall of footsteps behind her now and turned yet again to stare nervously down the empty street. (*PD* 133)

An openness to the imagination brings with it both wonder and terror, and both a heightened awareness of and vulnerability to the illusion and fear that the darkness brings. Moreover, the imagination can be twisted by malevolent forces. As Emily admits, imagination is the Magician's most powerful weapon: "He creeps into your imagination and twists it all in knots. He makes you see things that aren't there" (194).

This ability of the darkness to possess and delude is highlighted forcefully in the climactic scene when Emily and Alice venture to the library at midnight to destroy the Devil puppet. Once inside, Emily's sense of the dark force is so overwhelming that she cannot bear to bring Alice inside with her. Proceeding alone, she hears again the Magician's seductive voice. She steps from one world into another, just as she did that long-ago night at the depot. Fighting the Magician's spell, she struggles to bring the knife down on the head of the Devil puppet. But the illusions of the malevolent force distract her, and she thinks she sees blood glistening on the puppet's painted lips:

> She reached out an incredulous finger to touch them. It came away red. A chill, reaming darkness spiraled up inside her.
>
> *Look at me. I said, look at me, girl.*
>
> The voice was no longer soothing, but cold, bloodless.... She could do nothing but obey. (*PD* 198-99)

This delusion is followed by a vision of her father, now long dead, superimposed on Mr. Dwyer. Both illusions are calculated to shatter Emily's will and bring it under the Magician's control. Only through Alice's intervention is the spell broken and the Devil puppet destroyed.

The novel ends with both the birth of the baby and the successful performance

of the Punch-and-Judy show — this time with a new Devil puppet and the traditional ending of Punch's victory over the Devil. For the moment, life triumphs over death and the hidden secrets of the womb emerge into the light. The conjunction of these two events draws the web of double-edged images together in an ending that is powerful and emotionally resonant.

Both *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil* suggest the inadequacy of rigid codes of "good" and "evil." Bedard's richly-textured representation of darkness in these novels suggests that human beings are not made for rigidity or closure, for clear choices and "happily-ever-afters." Humans are made for struggle, but through an openness fuelled by the imagination, creative alliance and exchange is possible. In this respect, Bedard's work recalls Blake's radical critique of traditional moral categories, his view of the imagination as life-giving energy, and his concept of good and evil as contrary but ultimately interdependent forces.[14] However, Bedard is quick to point out that his depiction of darkness should not be confused with Jungian concepts of the Shadow as something to be embraced as a guide into the subconscious.[15] In his view, the dark side of the self is something to be challenged rather than embraced.

Like Blake, Bedard sees the struggle with darkness as an essential experience, especially crucial in the passage between childhood and adulthood.

Like Blake, Bedard sees the struggle with darkness as an essential experience, especially crucial in the passage between childhood and adulthood. When confronted with the terror of adult life, the innocent child wants to turn and flee, to block out the wonder and ambiguity that accompanies that terror. But by confronting the shadows the child can pass through them into a state of "higher innocence," where imagination holds the contrary forces of light and dark in a creative tension.[16] Only by enduring this elemental struggle can one emerge into wholeness.

Bedard's most overt articulation of the double-edged nature of life comes at the end of *Painted Devil* when Emily, watching the puppet show, falls under its benign spell and reflects: "Fear and wonder, joy and pain. How closely bound they were. Without the one the other could not be. It was a truth at times too hard to bear. One laid the wonder by to still the fear" (222). Emily's thought here recalls both Blake's contraries and Dickinson's "duality of experience." She recognizes that the danger lies in refusing to see the shadows and the ambiguity all around us. Such denial results in misunderstanding and harsh judgments, and can lead to entrapment and death. The trick is to hold on to the wonder while confronting the fear.

Not every young reader will grasp the deeper meanings embedded in Bedard's narratives. Yet the complex interplay of images in these two books suggests fresh ways of approaching familiar problems, and especially those connected with the many shades of darkness in the world. *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil* are challenging novels, but in awakening the imagination they may at least point out a path through the forest.

NOTES

1 Bedard mentions especially MacDonald's novels *Phantastes* and *Lilith*, as well as his fairy tale *The Golden Key*. Among Alan Garner's works, Bedard lists *The Owl Service*, *Red Shift*, *Elidor*, and *The Stone Book* as those which he particularly admires.

2 These terms will be discussed in greater detail below.

3 Michael Bedard, personal interview, 15 Feb., 1994.

4 The phrase is Albert Gelpi's in *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet*, 104.

5 Examples of poems which speak of this duality are "A Tooth upon Our Peace," "Must be a Woe," "I lived on Dread," and "If all the griefs I am to have," poems 459, 571, 770, and 1726 in Thomas H. Johnson's *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*.

6 The full text of the first poem reads:

> Presentiment — is that long shadow — on the lawn —
> Indicative that suns go down —
> The notice to the startled grass
> That Darkness — is about to pass —

The second reads:

> On my volcano grows the grass
> A meditative spot —
> An acre for a Bird to choose
> Would be the General thought —
>
> How red the Fire rocks below —
> How insecure the sod —
> Did I disclose
> Would populate with awe my solitude.

7 Bedard's three novels will be cited throughout as follows: *A Darker Magic* (*DM*); *Redwork* (*R*); *Painted Devil* (*PD*).

8 Unpublished lecture given at the first "Storymakers" conference at George Brown College, July 1989.

9 In this respect Bedard's Magician is somewhat reminiscent of Blake's Urizen, whose desire for uniformity and stringent moral codes leads to tyranny. In *The Four Zoas* Urizen describes his ideal Utopia:

> Compell the poor to live upon a Crust of bread, by soft mild arts....
> Say he smiles if you hear him sigh. If pale, say he is ruddy.
> Preach temperance: say he is overgorg'd & drowns his wit
> In strong drink, tho' you know that bread & water are all
> He can afford. Flatter his wife, pity his children, till we can
> Reduce all to our will, as spaniels are taught with art. (viia, 117, 125-29)

See Frye's discussion of Urizen and tyranny in *Fearful Symmetry*, 219-23.

10 This is Bedard's phrase.

11 The rose has a long history as an ambivalent symbol; it is sufficient to note here that Bedard may be influenced by Blake's use of the rose, particularly in the brief but suggestive poem "The Sick Rose."

12 Michael Bedard, personal interview, 27 July, 1994.

13 As Paley puts it in *Energy and the Imagination* (67), Blake's Urizen is "the repressive Reason Blake sees behind all orthodoxies which promulgate 'One King, one God, one Law' (*Urizen* E 71)." Urizen is also a symbol of old age, associated with death and deserts, and the enemy of love and the imagination; See Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 209-10. Blake's satire *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Keynes, 148-60) also rails against the orthodox Christian notions of Good and Evil.

14 In Blake's poem *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* the narrator, Blake's "devil" persona, declares: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (Keynes, 149). Blake eventually modified his earlier vision of Reason and Energy as opposing forces when he realized that the two were intimately bound together in the human soul, and that life was a constant internal struggle between the two. For a lucid account of Blake's thought on these issues see Frye's

discussion in *Fearful Symmetry*, 55-84.

15 The idea of the Shadow as guide within the context of modern fantasy literature is elaborated by Ursula Le Guin in her essay "The Child and the Shadow," reprinted in *The Language of the Night*, 54-67.

16 Michael Bedard, personal interview, 15 Feb., 1994. Bedard elaborates on this in an unpublished lecture entitled "Fear and Wonder."

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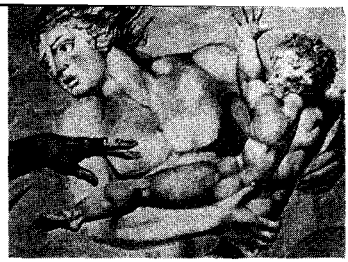


An Interview with Michael Bedard

Marie C. Davis

Résumé: Lauréat du Prix du gouverneur général pour son roman *Redwork* en 1992, Michael Bedard discute de l'importance de l'influence de Blake, Böhme, Brontë, Dickinson et Flaubert sur son oeuvre. Son affinité avec les poètes romantiques est évidente: il tend à recourir à des métaphores organiques pour décrire le processus créateur et, tout comme Blake, parle non pas "du bien et du mal" mais de l'opposition entre l'imagination et la restriction, la lumière et l'obscurité, la fleur qui s'épanouit et l'entonnoir qui engloutit.

Summary: Michael Bedard, winner of the Governor General's Award for *Redwork* (1992), and one of Canada's most gifted writers for young people, discusses in this interview the influences of Blake, Boehme, Brontë, Dickinson, and Flaubert on his craft and vision. Bedard's kinship with the Romantic poets is clear: he tends to use organic metaphors to describe the creative process, and, like Blake, he speaks not of "good and evil," but of imagination versus restriction, light versus darkness, the unfolding flower versus the restrictive funnel. Bedard also discusses details of his craft — his use of landscape and architectural space and broader issues such as his generic slipperiness (he mixes realism with fantasy, mystery, and horror).

Reading Bedard, one soon becomes familiar with the words "frightening" and "alluring." His characters are drawn to the dark, slipping toward it in dreams and in daylight. Some are enslaved by it; but most come back into the light. All are changed by the experience. But for Bedard the dark is not equivalent to the traditional moral category of evil. It is frightening and it is alluring, double-edged, but it is not outside oneself and it can never be completely vanquished. Indeed, Bedard quarrels with the polarities of good and evil, asserting that human regeneration can be achieved only through the workings of the imagination, which sees the interdependence of the dark and the light, not through some

final conquering of "evil."

Bedard's faith in the imagination informs many of his best portraits: Arthur Magnus of *Redwork*, the protagonist of *Emily*, and Emily Endicott in *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil*. All are artists whose seeing into the dark proves redemptive; they are not fragmented, torn or destroyed by the experience. Indeed, if postmodern fiction highlights fragmentation and discontinuity, then Bedard's emphasis on continuity and completion makes him a bit of a literary stray. He finds kinship amongst visionaries, Romantics, and mystics of former times and asserts the primacy of striving for connectedness between people.

It is not only Bedard's vision that catches one by surprise, but also his fine craftsmanship. Typically, he holds several plots in motion at once, handles time slips effortlessly, and interweaves the central plot with long stretches of dream, stories within stories, or Punch and Judy skits. The result can be magical satisfying echoes and challenging parallels, a prose that is often rhythmic, visceral, and characters who seem real. And yet for all of his interest in dream and time slips, Bedard's vision is clearly oriented in time and space. He is not about to abandon this world we know — where the sun sets in his fiction and who lives two doors down. His novels open not with terrors and mysteries, but with the banalities of everyday life: catching cockroaches in jam jars, holding dirty tea parties in sandboxes, and blubbering motor sounds as toy trucks are smashed into walls. But this doesn't mean that Bedard is predominantly a realist. The generic slipperiness of his work is well-known: "realism," "fantasy," "mystery," "psychological thriller," "mystical prose-poetry" — they've all been used to describe his work. And they all fit in some ways. His work is elusive, almost protean. The more one reflects upon it, the more it seems to grow into multiplicity. We can read Bedard as a philosopher spinning fables about the dangers of passivity, an elegist of lower middle-class simplicities and early adolescence, a dramatist staging a battle between light and dark, a poet of tenderness, solitude and silence, a contemplative witness to the allure of the dark. And it is this contemplativeness which produces the true Bedard note: plangent and deep, reflective and awestruck, sympathetic and uncensorious; patient before the vastness of time, the petty cruelties of life, and the protracted confrontations between dark and light that feed moral choice.

Bedard himself is soft-spoken, thoughtful, precise, and quiet about his accomplishments. Of his literary mentors, William Blake, Emily Dickinson, and George MacDonald, Bedard is less elusive than Dickinson and as utterly sincere as Blake and MacDonald in his defense of the Imagination. A self-confessed creature of ritual, Bedard quotes Talking Heads with approval when describing his ideal writing space: "Heaven is a place/Where nothing ever happens." But being the eldest of five children, and having four children of his own (aged four to 21), that sort of heaven, Bedard laughingly admits, has never really been attained. Yet his fiction is the better for it; for me, Bedard's casual, laconic way of presenting the restive atmosphere of improvisation, pettiness, and affection

of a crowded lower middle-class home is just as skilful as his portrayal of Professor Mephisto's frightening allure. It's an unpretentious but loving place of broken nightlights, scraggy dolls, dirty diapers, bicycles with rusty chains, and dark, cool garages. And it's the modest world from which Bedard comes.

When I first asked him about the evolution of his writing, he pointed to two high school English teachers as early influences. These were the people who, as supportive readers and critics of his work, gave him the feedback and encouragement he needed as a young writer. He continued:

BEDARD: I started writing when I was about seventeen and I pretty much knew that's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. The jobs I've taken since then have all been to further the cause of my becoming a writer — a sort of apprenticeship to my craft. After I did a degree in English and Philosophy at U of T (1971), I worked for seven years at one of the University libraries as a technician. Working there allowed me to become very familiar with other writers while I was practising my craft. Then I worked in a small print shop, where I was a pressman for a few years. I was also interested in producing books, and that's where my first two books came from — collections of original fairy tales for children.

DAVIS: Have you had any training in visual art or drama?

BEDARD: No, nothing formal. I did the layout and design on the fairy tale collections. I enjoy drawing. I did a couple of dramatic productions in high school. But that's about it.

DAVIS: I ask about this because your novels are very visual — in terms of both colour and imagery, but also in terms of spatial organization. I have a keen sense of where there's elbowroom and where there isn't; what lies on my left and what on my right. *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil* would make good screen plays.

BEDARD: The visual is very important to me. I know when I'm working on a piece I can only write as far as I can see. When I stop being able to see the scene, I must stop writing. I'm not a writer who can somehow prompt the scene by the act of writing the words.

DAVIS: Does the idea for a scene come first or the image?

BEDARD: The image comes first, then I go chase it. Once I am chasing it, I'm very interested in how I flesh it out — then the diction, the flow of the language, and the texture of the words become very important to me. But none of those things in itself will save the piece if I can't see it.

In the case of all of these novels — well, not all of them, but certainly with *Redwork* — I knew the places I moved people around in. I knew that movie theatre; I had worked in a theatre like that. I knew the house, because I had lived in a house just like that. I knew the park. In fact, I switched the house I had lived in to the site of that park. It's very important to me to be able to clearly move around the physical setting of the piece. I then set the fiction in motion within that space.

DAVIS: In a lot of your work, it's almost as if the plot is already in the landscape too.

BEDARD: I think that's true to a certain extent. It's a very circumscribed world

that I work with, and within it there are three or four key places that rebound off each other. I like to set up triangles: in *Redwork* you have the movie theatre, you have the house, you have the park. Different things happen within each of these places but they all relate to the main characters, and to one another.

DAVIS: So your natural scope is a little like Jane Austen's — you know, "3 or 4 families in a Country village is the very thing to work on." With you, it's three or four locations.

BEDARD: Jane Austen operates within a relatively limited sphere when you think of the big chunks of life other writers would take. She is more interested in what happens within the characters than in the setting itself. That's true for me as well.

DAVIS: Although your settings are far more like autonomous characters: the depot has its own character, the ravine has its own character. So does the library. And there's a striking sort of inevitability about the way in which the plot moves through that landscape of characters.

BEDARD: Yes, I recognize that too. I'm working on a new novel now and it suddenly struck me that I am using a building to ground the piece. It stands at the very centre of the work. As I write, I will start moving things around in relation to the building, but I keep coming back to it, as though to a touchstone.

DAVIS: English Romantic writers come to mind when I think of your work— ones whose settings are so striking. I think of the Brontës' use of houses and moors, for instance, and of George MacDonald and the way he uses the architecture of the house in *The Princess and the Goblin.* It seems to me you share a similar perception of space as something psychological.

BEDARD: I like MacDonald very much. And I've just finished working on a book on the Brontës, which will be coming out in the Spring [of 1997]. It's a picture book. I've looked at one day in the life of the Brontë children.

DAVIS: When they're making Gondol?

BEDARD: Yes. When they were just beginning to create the imaginary world called Glass Town, just starting to write those little books. What I was attempting to do was to show the birth of creativity among a small group of children in what seem to be — at least on the surface — adverse circumstances. I tried to see the whole shape of their lives on one day during their childhood. It's what I like to do, take a little spot of time and open it up.

DAVIS: You did that in *Emily.* And you do give readers a sense of Dickinson as a person; well, as much as any one can give.

BEDARD: She's elusive. The embodiment of mystery. But, she teaches you very deep lessons. On the surface she lived a very limited life in a very limited world. But she opened that out in incredible ways. She saw into the small things of life with a passion and a depth that someone in a larger world might not have seen comparably. Very small events become very important to her. She sees eternity folded in with time.

DAVIS: A lot of the writers you admire seem to have that vision of time. George MacDonald was mystical as well; like Dickinson, he sees eternity in time and he

sees dream and reality as being one and the same thing. Would you say that is a very strong component of your vision too?

BEDARD: Yes, I would say that's true. I've long been a student of Blake and of a man who was his mentor too, Jacob Boehme. Boehme was a visionary writer (born 1575; died 1624), a shoemaker by trade, who wrote a number of profound and demanding books. He has a short saying that he often wrote when he signed his name in friends' autograph books:

> Der ist befreit
> Von allem Streit,
> Wem Zeit ist wie die Ewigkeit
> Und Ewigkeit wie Ziet.

It translates as "That one is free from all strife, for whom time is as eternity and eternity as time." You see this very much in Blake who will say that eternity is in love with the production of time and who will say if the doors of perception were cleansed, we would see everything as it is — infinite.

DAVIS: The earthly, literal world is as nothing, then; it's only a speck in time or it contains the constituents of eternity? I'm not sure I understand.

BEDARD: I'm not sure I'm capable of doing justice to this vision, but I would say that the vision is that eternity is in time; it doesn't exist apart from time. The eternal is manifested in the things that we see and touch. It's not something that is set apart from or opposed to the things one sees and one touches. The outer world is in some way a signature or figure of an inner invisible realm. The inner pushes into the outer and manifests itself there. The difficulty is, of course, in putting yourself into the state to perceive that .

DAVIS: So, it is a false opposition — the earthly and the heavenly?

BEDARD: Utterly.

DAVIS: How does the idea of eternity folded in with time relate to the specifics of your novels? How does it relate to Magnus's alchemical experiments, the reappearance of Professor Mephisto to three generations of women, Magnus and Cass's mystical links, or even Alison's thesis?

BEDARD: I cannot pretend to answer this question. I don't want to give the mistaken impression that for me the movement in writing is from intellect to imagination. It is rather the other way around. Writing is dreaming, and writing a novel is like dreaming a long dream. Ultimately, as Ursula Le Guin correctly states, "Dreams must explain themselves."

But apart from the specifics, I think it is true to say that the work of imaginative fiction takes place in a realm where eternity and time walk hand in hand. The world of the novels may look in one sense like the external world, but it is not. The scene is set in Imagination, and in that country eternity is in time and time in eternity, fear and wonder walk hand in hand. The rules that apply in the daylight world are down.

I began my work by writing poetry and fairy tales. I think perhaps that is still what I'm doing. The form has changed, but the intent is the same. Baudelaire

says that the aim of poetry is to introduce "l'infini dans le fini." This, I believe is the aim of all art, to glimpse eternity clothed in the things of time, shining through the things of time. This is what moves us in a piece of poetry, a fine sculpture, a beautiful dance; we see the harmony of inward and outward, the finite and the infinite, eternity and time.

DAVIS: Aside from Blake and Dickinson, are there other people who have influenced you — either in a technical way or in terms of your own vision?

BEDARD: One writer I particularly admire and return to is Flaubert. I also like Truman Capote, especially some of his earlier work, and Willa Cather. (She is really good in something like *A Lost Lady* [1923] or *My Mortal Enemy* [1926], the shorter transition pieces between the earlier prairie novels, which I also like, and the later stuff, which I can't read.) And I really admire the Brontës. Among writers for children, I think Paula Fox is the best stylist writing in the US right now. When it comes to fantasy I like the British writers. I have a soft spot in my heart for British fantasists like Susan Cooper and Alan Garner. Garner is a very significant writer. He does things with children's writing that challenge the genre. And I love his lean, economical style.

DAVIS: There is some of that leanness in your own prose. Like Garner, you can evoke this strong sense of background feeling behind the text. An enormous pressure behind the slight words.

BEDARD: Well, there are a lot of silences in Garner's work. You have the feeling that what is unsaid is as important if not more important than what is said. There are certain key points in his work, often at the conclusion, where he will draw back and he won't give you what you expect, and that is important for me too. It is very important to leave silences, because in fiction speech and silence interdepend.

DAVIS: Like the relationship between white space and type?

BEDARD: Yes. I think you should feel the silences between the words and between the lines. Those are the reader's entrance into the book.

DAVIS: You want the reader to enter into a book and create with you?

BEDARD: The reader is really a co-creator. It is not up to me to detail everything to such an extent that I put the reader's imagination out. It's rather up to me to sketch things and to touch on detail to the extent that I bring the piece alive, but beyond that the reader comes in and fleshes it out. I don't like describing, for instance, the physical aspects of characters in a book. There are some people I do it to, but I never describe what Cass looks like in *Redwork*. I think the reader should do that. It always makes me feel awkward when I read a book, even a Nancy Drew novel, where you will get a sentence like, "Nancy, a bright-eyed brunette teenager." That sort of stuff makes me cringe.

DAVIS: And yet when I think of children who are not described physically in a book, I think of C.S. Lewis. His children are, to me, too bodiless and faceless; it's almost as though they have been de-sexed, neutered. Your "undescribed" are different — there seems to be enough weight to your characters that I don't notice that you haven't described them.

BEDARD: That's as it should be. You need enough of their speech and their thoughts to really get inside them and open them out.
DAVIS: So, how do you leave room for the reader to co-create and also flesh out the characters enough that they seem to have presence?
BEDARD: I think it is important that you feel intimately with characters, and that is something that you do from the inside out rather than from the outside in. I'm more interested in getting you as close to the centre of the character as I can — so close that you are seeing with the character. So, it's often a matter of controlling the perspective.
DAVIS: Is that why you tend to write the novels mainly through the eyes of the child protagonists instead of exclusively through an omniscient narrator? It suggests a kind of respect for your young characters.
BEDARD: You have to have a profound respect for your characters. Blake says that everything that lives is holy because in each living thing there is a centre opening — it's the same centre, but it opens differently. In something as small as a piece of fiction, I try to enter into each of these characters' lives and open their centres. While they may appear on the surface to be pretty insignificant, once you start seeing with them, you begin to see a whole distinct vital universe opening up. What I like to do in a book is set different universes in motion and see what happens when they intersect.
DAVIS: When you set those different worlds in motion do you deliberately parallel them or do they just happen to parallel in your hands?
BEDARD: I don't think I deliberately parallel. But it certainly is the case that when you are working on a piece you are looking for harmony, fullness, completion. You have to feel that the end of the book bends back on itself, touches the beginning. There has to be that sense that things have come full circle. Linear progression is not enough. When I set a theme going in the earlier part of the book and I repeat that theme later in the book, it will be different because I have touched it once already. The second time you touch the theme, it has more implications and overtones than it had before. It reverberates — that's what I like to see happening in a book. When I see a piece start to resonate, it's beginning to live and I know I am on the right track.
DAVIS: So, is writing like orchestrating?
BEDARD: I have said many times that for me writing a book is less like building a house than it is like having a child. I don't have the sense when I'm working on a piece that I am like a carpenter who has an external design and that I'm measuring pieces, fitting things and trying to shape something out there. However the piece starts — and for me I usually start with a strong visual image — once it starts, it's like something stopping in the flow of time. Then things start to circle around it and set up a vortex. That first start is like a seed that is germinating. It's my business as a writer to give it the guarded space in which to grow so that it will unfold according to its own inner dictates. That means, for instance, I don't talk about a piece while I'm writing it because it's like opening

a womb — you don't do it. This means that you can't bring the lessons that you learn from writing one book to the next book, because the next book will have its own dictates as to how it unfolds.

DAVIS: You use metaphors drawn from nature to describe your art — not just having a baby, but being a vortex or being a seed that's germinating or a centre that's unfolding. Yet in the eighteenth century, writers like Dryden often used architectural metaphors to describe the creative aspect of their work. And architectural metaphors seem very popular today when children's writers describe their work.

BEDARD: I'm in complete sympathy with William Blake's rebellion against his period. I think that the period he was rebelling against is quite like the period that we are living in right now. If you're writing at the rate of someone like R.L. Stine, who writes two novels a month (if you can believe that!), then the metaphor of architecture probably applies. He's writing in a particular genre; he knows the conventions, and he's interested in getting out a large body of work. He builds them. I prefer books that escape the shallows and set out on the high seas.

DAVIS: Are there writers whose craft you admire or whose work seems to resonate and "live," as you put it?

BEDARD: I admire Flaubert's consummate skill as a craftsman. I know of no other writer who can touch a particular theme and bring it to life by one or two quick strokes. He does this time and again in *Madame Bovary*. Let me see if I can think of an example. In the beginning of the book when he is first describing Emma Bovary before she is married, there is an episode where her future husband has come to visit her. He talks and they share a liqueur together. She only pours the tiniest drop into her glass and then she reaches in with her tongue and licks out the very bottom. He will do something like that and completely open the character. A little touch like that! It's as if he will take a mental picture and will give it one, two, three beats. At each touch he will make the picture more particular by giving you detail. So by the end of the three beats, the thing is absolutely alive. Now, I don't know any other writer who does this as well as Flaubert. That's why I admire him so much. He is a consummate craftsman. I also love his rhythm. He will set up a rhythm and have it going for pages. And you will feel the flow of his sentences. When he was writing, he would drum out the rhythms of his sentences with his fingers on the table; and when he got near the end of *Madame Bovary* he said he had not written the last 20 pages yet, but he knew them because he could feel the flow of the sentences. That's what I like about him. He was very much a poet who found himself working in prose but he tried to make prose sing in a way that it had not sung before.

DAVIS: Do you have habits like that — drumming out sentences?

BEDARD: Well, I write by hand because it keeps me closer to the rhythm of the work. I think that writing is basically a very primitive craft and the closer you keep it to its primitive roots the better. This is important to me. I need to feel the pull of the pen across the page.

DAVIS: You admire the work of a realist, a mystic, a fantasist — where does

your work fit in here? In what genre would you place it?
BEDARD: I don't think in those terms. The book comes in its own form; I follow it there. I know all three of the novels have elements of fantasy in them. I can't see myself ever writing a novel that would be straight realistic. I don't know if that puts me in a genre or not, but I try not to think about the piece fitting into a particular type of writing.
DAVIS: One of the things I've noticed is that the three novels all began in realism, depicting an essentially middle class world.
BEDARD: Yes, it's a lower middle-class world.
DAVIS: I've always loved your detailed descriptions of these domestic homes which are never blissful. There is always someone screaming — as in *A Darker Magic* when Albert bellows and crashes about.
BEDARD: That's what it was like in my family! I'm the oldest of five children. I think people who come from larger families may feel a certain echo of their own experience.
DAVIS: That's true for me, too, I think, though, that these portrayals of the domestic scene come across as realistic because there's no melodrama or sentimentality. Tim Wynne-Jones's work is like that as well. He shows a similar kind of love for family life and a similar kind of respect for children. His characters are not as noisy and obnoxious as yours, but you both depict domestic disorder in a tender way. I think of Emily Endicott who puts her room downstairs to get away from her siblings, but when she wakes up in the morning her mother is washing Albert's soiled diapers right near her and she has to drag herself upstairs and take care of Albert. And she does it without complaint.
BEDARD: It's a close bond between her and Albert. I really like the relationship that obtains between an older and younger sibling. I think that can be a very tender and tendering relationship.
DAVIS: Did you have that in your family?
BEDARD: Yes, I was often called on to watch the younger kids because there is a seventeen-year gap between me and the youngest. For someone like Emily, who is on the borderline between being a child and an adult, having the influence of a younger child is beneficial. The younger sibling offers a reminder of where you came from and is helpful in developing where you are going to go.
DAVIS: It's strange how easily that very realistic portrayal of sibling relationships and the domestic world gradually bleeds into a fantasy world where a mystery plot begins. It happens almost seamlessly. I know that at Western where I teach children's lit., the course divides itself by genre, and I never know where to put your work. Do you see the notion of genre itself as something useful for cataloguing books but otherwise sort of false?
BEDARD: Yes I do. I think that the task of the writer is to break down as many barriers that would enclose the writing as he possibly can. I think that there must be an element of insurrection in the act of writing itself. I'm uncomfortable with the writing being tame enough to fit comfortably in one particular genre.

DAVIS: So the slips between genres can have thematic or philosophical import? Like the links MacDonald or Phillipa Pearce make between dream and reality by blurring realism and fantasy?
BEDARD: Well, I think it's important to the way we live out our lives. It's important not to clearly follow these distinctions.
DAVIS: Why though?
BEDARD: Because then you are open to the essential mystery, the awe that underlies the whole of our lives. To the small child the world is utterly new and the things we take as solid and dead and unmoving are suffused with life. It is very much the business of the writer to keep that vision percolating.
DAVIS: Doesn't the blurring of genres complicate the issue of where the "real" world is and who lives there?
BEDARD: Well, I know that in *A Darker Magic*, Emily's mother was always talking about "the real world," and I'm not quite sure what that means. Let's look at something like *Redwork*. What is the real world in a world like that? Is it somehow the world that is outside and apart from all of these various lives that are being lived? Is it a common denominator that they all sort of touch upon? Or is the real world something that opens from the centre of each one of them. Mr. Magnus's world — is that an unreal world? His world is very much his apartment and his memories, and his search for the stone: that's a real world; that's an utterly real world. A lot of people have this sense that the real world is the world that we passively accept rather than the one we actively create. But reality lies in the creation of worlds, rather than the passive acceptance of them.
DAVIS: So, the tendency for people to think that ugly reality — smoke stacks and child abuse — is reality, and anything that is beautiful or mysterious is not reflects their sense of their agency?
BEDARD: Yes, it's the natural consequence of believing that reality is something that exists outside of you and which you must somehow passively accept and come to terms with. That belief makes one feel very powerless about their reality. When you feel powerless and helpless, reality will be the ugly things, the dark things, the inevitability of one's own deterioration or demise — these function as your reality, and the only thing you can do to avoid them is to entertain yourself. Turn away from them one way or another.
DAVIS: Is this, then, where evil or the dark side of life comes from?
BEDARD: I find that I don't think in terms of good and evil because it is very easy to use those terms to one's own purposes. I immediately think of someone like Blake when I think of the notion of good and evil. When he was writing *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, he would say that what most people consider good was "reasonable" and what most people consider evil was passionate and fiery. He was right; that is what his particular period thought about those two terms. He took it as his business to reverse those things to show that there was good in evil and evil in good. So, following him, I find that I don't use those terms and I'm more comfortable talking about light and darkness, life and death.

Imagination is life; it is not something on the other side of life and light. It is life. I would say that life is imagination versus death and darkness. I hope I have not given the feeling in my work that imagination is something dark.

DAVIS: No, but isn't the imagination really the conduit into both sides — the light and the dark?

BEDARD: I would say that the imagination will lead one into life and light.

DAVIS: But like Blake, you show that you can't just stay in light and life because you can't know it unless you are lead into death, darkness, secrets.

The fool and the wise man
don't see the same tree.
What you see is a function
of what you are.

BEDARD: Exactly, you encounter the two all the time. Light doesn't come from light but from dark. You live in a world of joy and pain and flip between them. The two frame one another and define each other. The characters in the light have been sensitive to the darkness. They have seen it. And it's their openness to the imagination that makes them vulnerable to the dark, too.

DAVIS: So, do people contain both the powers of light and darkness within themselves?

BEDARD: Absolutely.

DAVIS: Is one better than the other?

BEDARD: Yes, absolutely. I would say that while our lives are composed of a vast "yes" and a vast "no," the "yes" is the side one must come down on. You have to make a choice. As Boehme says "We are each our own makers and shapers." You can't just sit back and say "yes, there are elements of light and darkness in our lives." Within and without there are elements of openness, freedom, expansion, as well as elements of contraction and cutting down and one cannot just observe them objectively apart from the fray. No, we are intimately involved in these things, because they not only occur in the world outside our selves but also inside ourselves. So we must choose between the light and the dark. I think you can serve the light for twenty minutes and then serve the dark for two hours, but then you know you should be serving the light. It is a battle that never ends.

DAVIS: The forces in this battle — the light and the dark — how are they manifested every day?

BEDARD: We are all composed of imagination and selfhood and/or imagination and reason. The polarity is between that which opens in oneself, which naturally expands and makes connections between things, and that which tends to close down in oneself — that puts one outside oneself. If you stand outside yourself (by using reason), then you are a stranger to yourself because your imagination that wants to open is not opening, and you can't bear to see it opening in the things around you, so you begin to cut them down. The operative term for me is whether something opens and unfolds.

To Dante, heaven is a flower and hell is a funnel. The flower is organic: it

opens and unfolds its life from its centre. It does this without contention with other things. Hell is a funnel: it sucks everything into itself; it consumes. These images speak to me.

DAVIS: So, is the force of darkness in your novels a force that constricts and suffocates?

BEDARD: The force of darkness in *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil* is basically a surrendering of one's own self; it's a mass giving over of oneself unto the power of another.

DAVIS: I notice that the image that you use for that is the *doll* in both *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil* — that image of an ecstatic plastic or ceramic thing that only stares out.

BEDARD: Passivity is the dark. We are called to action. We are called to unfold ourselves creatively. Once we become passive to our world, the dark rises. If you stand apart from your world passively, any kind of activity you view around you becomes a threat, so you wish to cut that down too. We are all very good critics but we are not very good creators.

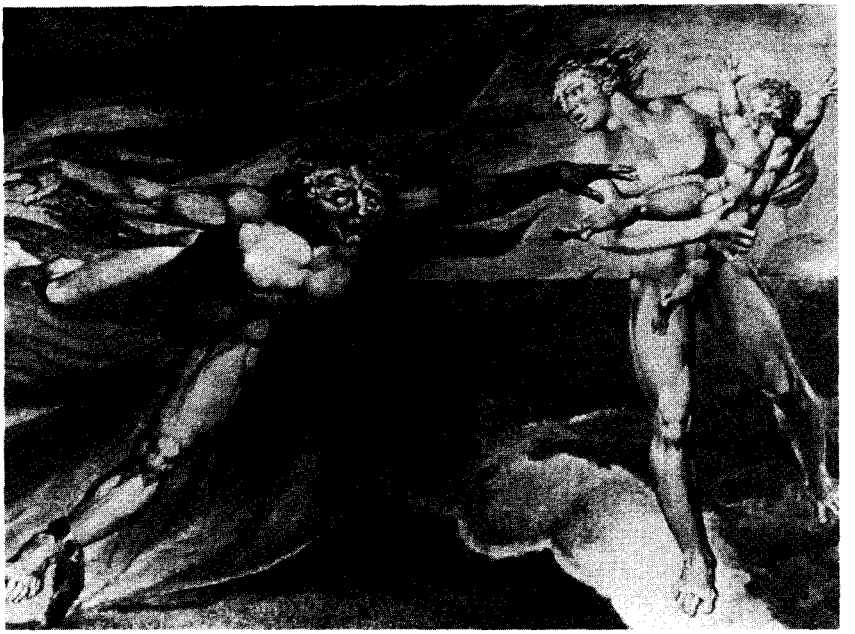
DAVIS: Do you remember the painting that Blake did of Los and Orc where the one figure is chained and enfolded in fire and the other walks on water, holding the child? [See illustration on page 34.]

BEDARD: Yes, "The Good and Evil Angel." I think that painting is very true: these two beings are inhabiting the same world but they are in two different worlds at the same time. If you look at the evil figure in that picture you will see that he is blind. He cannot see the world the good angel can. Blake, like Boehme, very much believes that heaven and hell are everywhere present, and that we enter one or the other with the turning of our wills. The fool and the wise man don't see the same tree. What you see is a function of what you are.

DAVIS: In the painting, "The Good and Evil Angel," the figure on the side of the light is holding a child, innocence. Does that resonate with you in your own work? Do you represent childhood as a state of innocence — the absence of experience — or do you think that children contain within themselves something that adults don't have? I'm thinking of *The Catcher in the Rye* or of Wordsworth's poetry where adults have lost their innocence. They trailed their clouds of glory so long ago that they live inland and they don't know where the sea is.

BEDARD: Yes, that resonates for me very strongly. I do think that childhood, for all of the difficulties that young children can encounter, is a period of innocence. The child's vision is one of wonder and awe. The child is fully imaginative. As the child becomes more accommodated to the world and more self-conscious — around ten, eleven, twelve — some of their initial lights begin to go out. Suddenly it is not enough just to be themselves; it is very important how they are perceived. So these original openings that the child had are curbed and curtailed.

It is quite possible to go through the rest of one's life forgetting this original spontaneous unfolding that went on in one at an early age, and to become rigid,



to dwell outside oneself. It is important to keep coming back to that tender thing in you. One can do it by being in the presence of children or by being engaged in any number of other creative occupations. I think the creator is almost of necessity child-like. There is a certain tenderness in the creative person and a certain discomfiture with what many people accept as being grown-up.

I recently completed a piece on two women sculptors who lived in Toronto in the earlier part of this century. They were very at ease in their own world, but they felt ill at ease in the social world. They didn't pay much attention to their clothes. They didn't view themselves in that type of external way. I've met a number of intense people in my life who were very passionate about whatever they did and they didn't seem to own a mirror. They would dress oddly and wouldn't take care of themselves in the way someone comfortable in the world might. The truly creative person lives in an absence of mirrors.

DAVIS: It is true that Emily Dickinson got along very well with children and so many of Blake's visions came to him when he was a child.

BEDARD: And the figure of the child recurs. He addresses his work to children of a future age.

DAVIS: How do you see Cass, Maddy and Emily, then, in this respect? They are not sentimentalized, idealized children.

BEDARD: When I speak of the child, I'm speaking of someone probably before the age of five. But some of my characters keep the child alive in them. Take Alice, for instance. She has a relationship with Lela which I think is important; it keeps

that tender thing alive in her. And her aunt Emily has a relationship with her. So, who Alice is is not a function of who she is but who she encounters. In a certain sense these three figures — Lela, Alice, Emily — are all parts of one another. When we meet Lela and Emily, Alice's character is broadened or enlarged. I don't think that the flow of darkness could have been stopped by Emily on her own in *Painted Devil* or by Miss Potts alone in *A Darker Magic*. It had to be in the conjunction of certain characters that the darkness was stopped. It's the fragile connections between people that harbour the light and the strength to resist the darkness.

DAVIS: Do you deliberately make the conjunction of characters intergenerational?

BEDARD: I'm attracted to the notion of alliance across time, openness to others who at first don't seem like oneself. I also sometimes have a sense of looking at a single character through a whole span of life.

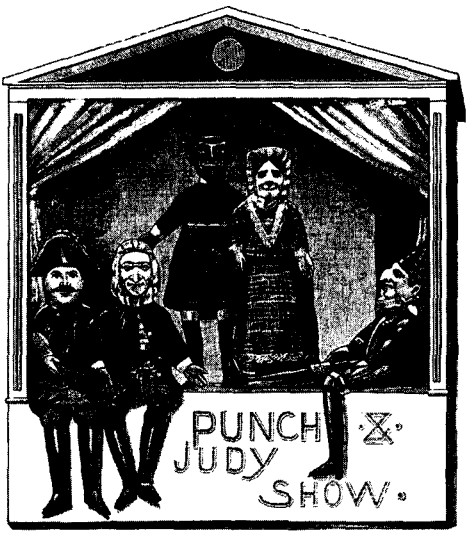
DAVIS: George MacDonald also has a tendency to link youth and age. Usually the older person has some kind of special power that the younger doesn't. The younger is being tutored to some extent. There seems to be a greater equality between the young and the old in your books. Mr. Magnus cannot come to openness without the children. Irma Potts needs Emily. And in fact goes out in search of her.

BEDARD: Yes, that's true. The younger characters usually choose to align themselves with the older ones, but not at first. At the very centre of each of these books there is a moment when the young character is called upon to make a choice. I see that most clearly in *Redwork* where Cass is described as looking down at the sorry state of the house he is living in. The kids in the park across the street are eyeballing the place with hostility, and there's a very definite moment when he decides to go down and cut the grass, trim the hedge — do something this old man can't do for himself. By that very act, he is aligning himself with the old man. He is bringing himself from a state of observation to a state of action, and from that point on he is aligned with that character. So he is able to act on behalf of and in concert with Mr. Magnus. In the same way, when Alice hears Emily's absurd story about the force of darkness recurring, or when Emily hears from Miss Potts about this force at a puppet show, they react with incredulity. It's only as they come to know and sympathize with this character that they are brought to a state of acting in that world. There's always a transition point between wariness and passivity and alliance and activity. And our choices for creative action are always built on such small, subtle things.

DAVIS: Couldn't characters like Sid Specter and Frankie Grogan be described as "active," though. They have anarchic wills. I see that they function like the funnel, with their reductive consciousnesses. They reduce people to objects, bring people down. But is this not a kind of aggressive activity?

BEDARD: But I wouldn't call that action, if one engages in restraint of some sort or another. That isn't action; it is a furtherance of the disease of passivity.

DAVIS: You don't explore how it is that this "disease of passivity" or desire to restrain comes into the world. Your novels are not sociological. But do you think



that it has something to do with our modern world? Do you think the Sid Specters and Frankie Grogans express general human tendencies or do you think they reflect specific societal tendencies?

BEDARD: If I were to go any place, any time, I think I'd find the same thing.

DAVIS: Is that why you use Punch and Judy to help portray darkness — they seem to transcend local culture or history?

BEDARD: I didn't know that I was going to use Punch and Judy. I knew that I was dealing with a puppet show, one that was haunted. I fished around in fairy tales and I explored several ideas, but none seemed to be right. I had a fascination with Punch and Judy since I read *Riddley Walker* (1981) by Russell Hoban — an incredible post-apocalyptic novel. I decided to start experimenting with Punch and Judy and the more I learned about it the more fascinated I became. The time that it was most popular was in the early Victorian period.

DAVIS: What purpose do you think it served?

BEDARD: The Punch and Judy show was popular with the poor who felt oppressed. The Punch figure is like themselves — sort of the eternal child who lashes out at oppressors in a way that makes people laugh. It's not a blood and gore show. Historically, the audience gradually changed from the working poor to the children of the powerful classes. Punch was invited into the parlours of the rich. A lot of the darker elements in the play vanished when the performances were controlled by the very class that the earliest Punch and Judy shows satirized. At the end of the later performances, Punch got his comeuppance when the devil took him away. It becomes a play about good and evil where the good and the evil are understood in terms of moral law. Well, in the earlier street performances of the Punch and Judy plays, the devil could not take Punch away. The people on the street would not allow that to happen.

DAVIS: So, in your novel, Punch is able to defeat the devil.
BEDARD: That's right. In the play as it is first uncovered by Mr. Dwyer, the devil does take Punch at the end, and so the whole force of the dark is understood one way: the devil will get the victory. He will take Punch. And so after the climax, they decide to revise the play and do an earlier version where the devil doesn't take Punch. So it goes back more to the roots of the Punch and Judy play.
DAVIS: Which you feel is somehow a more liberating version?
BEDARD: Yes. After Punch has killed his wife, thrown the baby out the window, killed the policeman, and killed the doctor, to have the devil come and take him away at the end feels right on one level. But I think that's the wrong level. Punch is a figure of imagination and must be judged in those terms. He's the child who acts spontaneously — and not always in ways one wishes — running up against the forces of constraint and the barriers that society imposes. His rebellion is imaginatively liberating. The audience knows that none of these victims really die. They will all be there 20 minutes later when the next show begins.
DAVIS: So, is he just an exaggeration of the boy who points out that the Emperor is not wearing any clothes?
BEDARD: Punch says what we sometimes wish we could, and so he's important for keeping us honest. And I know that many people react negatively to Punch and Judy plays. They're very much looked down upon now. And I'm sorry about that.
DAVIS: What about the other interesting attraction in your work, and that is to alchemy? Obviously, it's used to characterize Mr. Magnus. But the notion of going to the core, and having to go through the furnace is very Blakean — you have to endure experience and something like death before you reach the stage of higher innocence. Are these things linked in your mind — alchemy and Blake? Or are they separate?
BEDARD: They're very much linked in my mind in all sorts of ways. Alchemy in *Redwork* functions as an emblem of any creative enterprise. Take, for instance, writing. You are dealing with raw material — words — and you are attempting to spiritualize them, purify them. The dream of alchemy is to come up with a stone that could transform base metals to gold or silver. On one level, that was the aim. On another level, it was about the purification of oneself. Any type of artistic activity is two-pronged: you're both engaged in the act itself and, one hopes, in gradual enlightenment of the self. That's how I feel alchemy functions in the novel. Mr. Magnus is not really interested in making gold. He's interested in maintaining contact with a vision, a vision that has a lot to do with who he was as a child. So, it's something he takes up and never quite works out. So he does it again, and each time he gets a little closer perhaps. But it never completely works out. This is what any artist does. Alchemy is art.
DAVIS: Is the Emily figure, like Magnus, an artist figure? Emily Endicott is in both *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil*. There's a bit of her in Alison Parry. Is she Emily Dickinson?

BEDARD: She is a figure who has evolved over the course of my work. When I first met her in *A Darker Magic* she had some elements of myself in her. When I came to write *Painted Devil*, I didn't know she was going to be in the book. It wasn't until I had her in Alice's home, when I was calling her Aunt Elida, I became aware that there was something that had happened to her in her past that would make her sensitive to the puppet show and to the force of darkness. I can still recall the moment when I suddenly realized that this aunt was Emily, that she was grown up, had returned to this town, and this puppet show was the occasion for the recurrence of the force of darkness that had appeared in the earlier book. I had no idea that I was doing this! Emily had kept a journal when she was with Miss Potts. So I made her a poet. Part of her becoming a poet was this experience of darkness she had as a child. I put an Emily Dickinson poem as the epigraph for the first book and so I already had intimations of Emily Dickinson for Emily in the first book. As I looked more deeply into Dickinson as a symbolic figure, I came up with the idea for the Emily book. Emily Dickinson had an encounter with darkness early in her life.

DAVIS: What was the nature of that encounter?

BEDARD: At one point in her life she moved with her family to a house near a graveyard. The funeral processions went by her door on their way to the graveyard. I think the impact upon her is revealed in her continuous preoccupation with death. That proximity to death stayed with her, became part of her emotional make-up. So, I had a character who had had an encounter with death, and she became this Dickinson figure. That's the evolution of the character. It was fascinating for me to take the life of one character beyond the confines of one book — to pick her up, with the space of years intervening, in another book. It spoke to me of the continuing life of the book and of that character.

DAVIS: I was wondering about her, about this outside figure who can talk to children or identifies with them. Typically, she is not judgmental. I think of Irma Potts, Emily Endicott. They tend to live on the margins of society. Is this a necessity for insight? The observer has to be on the outside?

BEDARD: Perhaps the reason these figures seem to be on the outside is because they are further inside. They are champions of the imagination. They are active.

DAVIS: They're also relatively alone with their knowledge. Emily in *A Darker Magic* does not tell her parents or her brother and sister what she is going through. The only person she can talk to is Irma Potts and she never really confides her fears in Irma. Alice handles her knowledge and fears in a similar way. I was wondering if their relative aloneness is important to their developing insight? Do you think it's a precondition for insight? In other words, in order for kids to grow up and gain moral independence, do they need the guidance of an adult or do they need some solitude?

BEDARD: Both of these characters are alone with their experiences. They must come to terms with them on their own. I believe there are things that each of us are alone with. In the case of the fundamental choices in life, one is always alone

with them. One can't look for answers from someone else. At the core of the imaginative character there is silence and solitude. A large part of becoming that type of person lies in coming to terms with the solitude and the silence in oneself and being able to operate from that centre. Emily and Alice are strong and they are not completely isolated. They live within quite dynamic and very alive families.

DAVIS: So, solitude and silence are natural to your characters.

BEDARD: You need solitude to face the dark. Silence can be the condition or spur of reflection. Mystery lives there. It is the seeming nothing that has to be shown as the most important thing to be preserved in one's own life. Though my business is with words, and that's how I make my way, I firmly believe that the artist in our day must be in the service of silence. That is the ground art has to defend.

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The Mirror Game: Reflections of Young Canadians in Dennis Foon's Child Advocacy Drama.

Sarah Gibson-Bray

Dennis Foon

Photo by: David Cooper

Résumé: Dramaturge à la réputation internationale, Dennis Foon est un habile créateur de pièces de théâtre qui reflètent les préoccupations des jeunes Canadiens d'aujourd'hui. En tant que pionnier du "théâtre au service de la jeunesse", son objectif est triple: mobiliser, informer et valoriser son jeune auditoire. Le profil que S. Gibson-Gray nous présente est fondé sur sa recherche doctorale et sur des entrevues accordées par l'auteur entre 1988 et 1996.

Summary: Dennis Foon is world-renowned as a master craftsman of plays which reflect the culture and concerns of contemporary Canadian youth. As one of Canada's leading pioneers in "child advocacy theatre," Foon's threefold dramatic objective is to engage, inform, and empower his young audiences. This profile of Dennis Foon's life and works is based on my doctoral (and my more recent) research on Foon, and on a series of conversations I have had with the playwright between 1988 and 1996.

Dennis Foon is renowned both nationally and internationally as one of Canada's foremost playwrights. In his 21 years working in professional theatre, the playwright has worn many artistic hats, as dramatist, director, administrator, storyteller, social critic, advocate, humorist, reformer, anthropologist, and iconoclast. Foon's most significant contribution to the arts in Canada has been as a pioneer playwright who has helped to forge a new, realistic, issue-oriented, dramatic and theatrical genre christened "child advocacy theatre." Designed to engage, to inform, and to empower his young audiences, Foon's numerous experiments in this new form include *New Canadian Kid* (1981), *Skin* (1984), *Invisible Kids* (1985), *Liars* (1986), *Mirror Game* (1988), *Seesaw* (1993), and *War* (1994). These works have been enthusiastically received by over a million school children, as well as parents, teachers, and critics across Canada and around the world.

Born in 1951 into a "very staid, middle-class"[1] Jewish-American family, Foon

spent his childhood and adolescence in Detroit, Michigan. He attended an inner-city elementary school which afforded its pupils little artistic stimulation. The playwright's first exposure to the arts came synchronistically with his first taste of Canada. As a camper at Camp Temakwa, a private children's summer camp situated picturesquely in Algonquin Park, the nine-year-old Foon made his stage debut as Jack in Oscar Wilde's delightful comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

Apart from idyllic summer escapes from Detroit's stifling heat-waves to the Canadian wilderness, Foon recalls his childhood and adolescence as being "troubled ... and not the happiest."[2] As a teenager attending Cooley High School in central Detroit, the scene of several race-riots in the mid-1960s, he grew up in a polarized environment fraught with racism and bullying. Foon ran the schoolyard gauntlet himself many times:

> Whites hated blacks, simply because they were black ... blacks hated whites, simply because they were white. I used to carry tons of matches and spare change to school with me ... If you were asked for a light, and you didn't have it, it was a complication. So rather than be killed, I gave a couple of dollars away. (June, 1988)

In addition to this overt bigotry, more insidious forms of racism were regularly manifest in the Detroit school system. "You'd see the black kids streamlined into vocational training," Foon recollects. "The white kids were in academic programs. Then the black kids went off to become fertilizer in Vietnam."[3]

Growing up in the United States in the socially and politically unstable 1960s and '70s, Foon witnessed the highly controversial Vietnam War, the ensuing Peace movement, and the American Civil rights movement, three external phenomena which left an indelible impression on him. Foon's home life was also unsettled during this period. His invalid father suffered chronically from "psoriatic arthritis" — a severe skin disease combined with crippling arthritis, and serious hearing loss. His constant care absorbed much of the family's time and energy, and created what the playwright vividly describes as "an emotional black hole." "[As is] often the case in dysfunctional families, like those of alcoholics," Foon recalls of his upbringing, "... the child's needs often aren't met."[4] The dramatist's autobiographical radio play for adults, *Children's Eyes* (1983), graphically depicts his father's afflictions and his own struggle to come to terms with them. Though Foon acknowledges that his Detroit boyhood was "utterly different" from the average young Canadian's experience, many aspects of his youth served to inspire his later writings for Canadian audiences and to enhance the playwright's empathy for his young protagonists. Some aspects of growing up transcend time and place, Foon asserts:

> ... my experiences as a child and teenager were very important to me, and had a lot of effect on my development. When I'm writing a play for kids, I'm drawing upon the emotions of my experiences as a kid and a teenager to help give a piece some kind of emotional fibre, depth, and power. (August, 1988)

In 1969, Foon enrolled in a program of creative writing and religious studies at the University of Michigan's experimental Residential College. With such

renowned literary figures as Joseph Bronsky and March Pearsey as lecturers, and a multitude of aspiring poets and playwrights as colleagues, Foon found college life rich and stimulating. As an undergraduate he made his first foray into playwriting with an experimental trilogy of one-act plays exploring actor/audience interaction. In his third year, he was awarded the prestigious Hopwood Award for fiction. In 1974, with an honours BA under his belt, Foon declined the offer of a John Hawkes Creative Writing Graduate Fellowship from Brown University in New England. Instead, the promising young writer enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts Program in Playwriting at the University of British Columbia, a move which transformed Foon's fond childhood associations with Canada into a permanent and fruitful personal and artistic affiliation.

As part of his MA thesis at UBC Foon wrote four short plays, including "a very bad children's participation-play" (August, 1988) entitled *Hokum, the Giant Spider.* In 1975, Jane Howard Baker, a fellow student with contacts in the Richmond, B.C. school system, offered to market *Hokum* to local elementary schools. Baker's proposal was both timely and fortuitous. With the recent termination of Vancouver's Playhouse Theatre's 22-year-old school-touring program, theatre companies which could present plays to British Columbia school children were suddenly in great demand. Foon hastily conscripted Baker and three friends, christened his new-found troupe with the name of an adjacent plant store, and commenced rehearsals. The Green Thumb Players were born. Despite Foon's misgivings, *Hokum* was a critical success. Little did Foon or his co-founders know that their fledgling enterprise would blossom into one of Canada's most successful theatre companies for young people, still flourishing in 1996.

Foon's development from novice playwright into a dramatist of international renown and the evolution of his Green Thumb Players are inextricably linked. From 1975 to 1988[5] Green Thumb Theatre provided Foon with a well-appointed laboratory for playwriting, direction, and theatre administration, and also with a stimulating, collegial environment which afforded him contact with other theatre practitioners working in Canada and abroad. By 1976, Green Thumb's actor-writers with Foon at the helm had begun to establish themselves as a writer-based theatre production company which employed West Coast playwrights, professional designers, and small ensembles of professional actors to tour plays to public schools. Their first mandate was "to develop and produce new Canadian plays for young people" (June, 1988).

Foon spent his first five years at Green Thumb honing his playwriting craft and searching for his own distinctive dramatic voice. Through his early adaptations of American and Canadian folk tales (*The Last Days of Paul Bunyan* and *Raft Baby*), an Ojibway legend (*The Windigo*), and a Greek myth (*Heracles*), Foon developed facility as a cultural anthropologist, experimented with narrative techniques and staging devices, and devised research methods such as the personal interview, skills which he went on to apply to very different ends in the second phase of his playwriting career.

The 1978-79 theatre season proved to be a pivotal year both for Foon and Green Thumb: the company had carved out its niche as Vancouver's sole professional school-touring company; the first Vancouver International Theatre Festival for Young People dazzled West-Coast Canadians of all ages with a plethora of innovative productions by theatre companies from other provinces and overseas; Foon, who had married Jane Baker in 1975, became a father; and, with the staging of *Hilary's Birthday*, Joe Wiesenfeld's naturalistic children's play about divorce, Green Thumb assisted in the birth of a new "socially relevant"[6] dramatic genre which was to become their in-house speciality.

The following season, Green Thumb produced *Juve*, Campbell Smith's groundbreaking play for and about teenagers, and Irene Watts' elementary school companion-piece, *Tomorrow Will Be Better*. Both innovative productions were artistic fodder for Foon's creative imagination. Distilling interviews with over 300 Vancouver adolescents from every walk of life, Smith created a pithy rock-musical revue performed by a skilled cast of eight amateur teenage actors. *Juve* explicitly documented adolescent attitudes to love, self-esteem, teenage prostitution, homosexuality, abortion, substance abuse, and divorce. With the help of three young professional actors, Watts drew on over 2,000 poems, skits, songs and stories by B.C. school children to create a forty-five-minute theatrical revue about "play, friendship, death, sports, philosophy, and sex."[7]

In the fall of 1980, TRACY approached Foon and Green Thumb to create the first Canadian "Theatre-in-education" project designed to teach small children how to protect themselves against sexual abuse.

Following *Juve*'s immensely successful tour, Foon and fellow Vancouver dramatist Tom Walmsley set up an improvisational theatre project involving street kids and teenage prostitutes from Vancouver's Davie Street. While working closely with these young people Foon discovered that most of them had been sexually abused as children:

> It never occurred to me that the connection [between sexual abuse and street kids] had any possibilities at all ... really the whole issue of abuse and other social problems — I hadn't made that connection in all honesty. (August, 1988)[8]

Inspired by this disturbing new insight, Foon joined the ranks of "TRACY" ["Taking Responsible Action for Children and Youth], a voluntary child advocacy group in Vancouver. In the fall of 1980, TRACY approached Foon and Green Thumb to create the first Canadian "Theatre-in-education" project designed to teach small children how to protect themselves against sexual abuse. Two years of meticulous research, rigorous consultations with a panoply of child experts and educators, and copious collective writing by Foon and actors Fran Gebhard, Brian Torpé, and Wendy Van Riesen, finally bore fruit. In 1982

Feeling Yes, Feeling No was privately piloted at Henry Hudson Public School in Vancouver, and almost unanimously approved. The sexual abuse prevention program was given its premiere public tour in Vancouver in 1983, followed by professional productions by theatre companies in Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Calgary. *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* was also demonstrated in Sweden and England. In 1985 the National Film Board released a filmed version of the program for use by schools and libraries across Canada. The same year, Foon collaborated with psychologist Brenda Knight to produce a book entitled *am I the only one?*. This poignant compilation of stories, poems and drawings created by sexually-abused children is designed to offer further help to sexual abuse victims of all ages.

The playwright is deeply concerned with the self-perpetuating nature of oppression and patterns of recurring violence, as they affect the everyday lives of children and teenagers.

Feeling Yes, Feeling No is a four-part program which includes preparatory sessions designed to create a "safety net for kids"[9] with parents, teachers, social workers and facilitators, and two one-hour actor-led theatrical workshops for six- to twelve-year-olds[10] which integrate imaginary scenarios, music, audience participation, and class discussions. The program's multiple objectives include teaching children self-awareness about their bodies and emotions, as well as learning how to identify and repel potential sexual abusers, how to avoid dangerous situations, and how to seek help should abuse occur. Fourteen years after its inception, *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* is still highly regarded and frequently employed.

Feeling Yes, Feeling No proved to be an extraordinary professional and personal catalyst for Foon. His involvement as one of the co-writers propelled the playwright headlong along a path of theatrical explorations into the many facets of youth victimization. Though his child advocacy plays vary widely in subject matter, modes of theatrical presentation, use of dramatic devices, and characterization, since 1981 virtually all Foon's works depict archetypal conflicts between bullies and their victims. The playwright is deeply concerned with the self-perpetuating nature of oppression and patterns of recurring violence, as they affect the everyday lives of children and teenagers.

Foon's first solo dramatic work in the new realistic style adopted by Green Thumb Theatre in the 1980s was *New Canadian Kid*. Inspired by *Immigrant Children Speak*, a modest elementary school drama club oral-history project which the playwright was invited to workshop, *New Canadian Kid* explores the linguistic and cultural travails of the new Canadian immigrant from a child's-eye-view. Despite its celebrity (*New Canadian Kid* has been produced by over 30 Canadian and international companies, and widely translated), the play is an uncomplicated piece of theatre. However, within its simple framework we find many hints of

Foon's distinctive mature dramatic style: a strong central narrative, a realistic plot and characters drawn from interviews with actual kids, the use of monologues and flashbacks, simple staging, and serious subject matter tempered with an optimistic outlook and a light — often Rabelaisian — comic hand.

Foon's central protagonist in *New Canadian Kid* is a juvenile "Everyimmigrant" called Nick. Through a series of monologues intercut with illustrative flashbacks, the boy recounts to the audience the ups and downs of coming to Canada from a generic foreign land called "Homeland." Nick's nemesis takes the form of Mog, a baseball-bat slinging, name-calling schoolyard bully, who delights in mocking his new classmate's language and customs and excluding Nick from his schoolyard games. Foon rounds out his minimalist cast with Mench, the little girl who eventually befriends Nick and helps him outwit his oppressor, and Nick's mother, who lends an adult perspective on immigration to the piece. What makes *New Canadian Kid* a delight is Foon's ingenious comic inversion of English and "Homelander": while Nick confides to the audience in perfect English, the Canadians speak an absurd form of gibberish with slapstick mimed accompaniments. By putting his audience in Nick's shoes, Foon builds a new empathy for the newcomer to Canada.

Many approving critics referred to *New Canadian Kid* as "a play on racism" (August, 1988). Because his actual dramatic intent had been simply to portray "one of the least problematic forms of racism ... and that's bullying," Foon resolved to write "a piece on the actual issue of racism ... hitting it squarely." Drawing on personal insights gleaned from his Detroit upbringing, Foon maintained that the most serious form of racism was "the institutionalized form ... [because of] the way it works itself out in the education system, the government, and in the immigration policies of the country" (August, 1988). In 1984 and 1985 respectively, Foon crafted two new child advocacy plays,[11] *Skin*, his first work specifically designed for teenagers, and *Invisible Kids*, a piece for elementary school students. With *New Canadian Kid*, these pieces form a trilogy which addresses the full spectrum of bullying, xenophobia, racism, and bigotry affecting today's young Canadians.

The playwright conveys these assaults expressionistically with masks, special lighting, and sound effects.

Foon based *Skin* on material developed in a series of race-relations workshops organized by *Feeling Yes, Feeling No* childhood education advisor, Dr. Judith Mastei. Known simply as "Project One," the improvisational sessions brought together a group of young adult amateur and professional actors from visible minorities in Vancouver to experiment using masks around the theme of the Japanese-Canadian experience. Foon and the actors then canvassed a cross-section of B.C. adolescents from many ethnic backgrounds including native-Canadian, "in an attempt to understand a little about how racism affects youth."[12] Following the 1986 Green Thumb Theatre premiere of *Skin*, Toronto's Young People's Theatre

presented a second version of the play, which Foon had modified using interviews with area Caribbean-Canadian teenagers.

In *Skin*, Foon presents three distinctive, well-rounded teenagers with whom a young Canadian audience can personally identify: Phiroza Mehta, an Indo-Canadian girl, Jennifer Malcolm, a first generation Canadian girl of Jamaican descent, and Tuan Hung Wong, a Vietnamese refugee with landed immigrant status in Canada. Each has a different account of racism to relate. Using ten secondary characters,[13] Foon interweaves the trio's separate narrative monologues and their accompanying flashbacks into a series of twenty short dovetailed scenes, which explore a comprehensive catalogue of racist acts. The playwright conveys these assaults expressionistically with masks, special lighting, and sound effects. Phiroza is buffeted with racial slurs and simply ignored by many of her schoolmates. Unnecessarily fearing rejection from her Caucasian boyfriend Todd, the shy teenager conceals her true nationality thereby denying her very self. Her gradual mastery of these bullies parallels her blossoming self-acceptance. Jennifer is faced with a more insidious form of bigotry, satirically personified by "Mr. Lee-zard," her grotesque reptilian teacher. With the help of her perceptive cousin Delacy, Jennifer outfoxes her teacher's attempts to denigrate her intelligence and to relegate her to the vocational program. At the play's conclusion, Jennifer deflates her oppressor, acknowledges her real intellectual potential, and resets her academic sights on university.

In sharp contrast to his counterparts' ultimately affirmative tales, Tuan's story is sharply tinged with tragedy. Doubly vulnerable due to his skin colour and his lack of English, Tuan copes with the recent drowning death of his brother, while also juggling menial night work, caring for his younger sister, sending money home to his parents in Vietnam, and attending highschool. Though he is skilled at martial arts, he refuses to resort to physical violence in order to protect himself from a shadowy gang of rough young racists. Wise beyond his years, Tuan has witnessed bloody war first hand and has "seen enough death" (24). When his employer's bigotry leads to his firing (by an apologetic but ineffective supervisor), the undaunted, hard-working youth reacts stoically. Foon juxtaposes Tuan's persistent optimism against his Vietnamese friend Lo's embittered approach to making a new life in Canada. A skilled auto mechanic who now requires Canadian experience and a proficiency in English to find work in his trade, Lo refuses to undertake unskilled labour. Ashamed to admit to his family back home his failure to achieve quick success, the youth paints himself into a corner. Despite Tuan's efforts to bolster him, Lo's inflexibility, negativity, and pride eventually lead to his tragic suicide. Though chastened by his friend's death, Tuan's determination to build a better life remains untarnished. Foon frames *Skin* with a choric prologue and epilogue which serve to underline his three protagonists' collective humanity.

In *Invisible Kids* Foon once again employs optimism and pragmatism to tackle racism, in this case on two levels: the personal and the political. In 1984 Nick Barter, Artistic Director of England's Unicorn Theatre, commissioned Foon to create a

companion touring-piece for *New Canadian Kid*, which could be presented to primary school children as a double-bill at London's Arts Theatre in 1985. Following extensive interviews with young children from low-income and middle-class districts of London, Foon crafted a well-made one-act play about racial prejudice and social change from a young girl's perspective. *Invisible Kids* tells the simple story of how Georgie, an eleven-year-old black girl who has lived in England for nine years, is forced to forfeit a school day-trip to France because she lacks a British passport. She has been waiting for over three years for her citizenship application to be approved. Foon juxtaposes Georgie's plight with the timely true story of controversial white South-African athlete Zola Budd's expedient attainment of a British passport (so that she can run in the 1984 Olympics) to emphasize the inherent disparities within the British Immigration system.

In *Invisible Kids* Foon rounds out his young ensemble of characters with energetic Vince and slightly spoiled Samantha (Georgie's black schoolmates), reserved Thiun (newly emigrated from Vietnam), and outspoken Chris (the only white child in the group). Gathered around the playground jungle-gym, the fivesome roughhouse, tell stories (including some about their own run-ins with racists), confide their secret fears and desires, and offer support to one another. Resolved to boycott the class trip (with the exception of self-centred Samantha), the kids collectively hatch and carry out a plan to secure Georgie's passport by petitioning the Prime Minister. At the same time, Vince resolutely petitions his sceptical parents to buy him a special BMX bike. Typically, Foon cleverly uses timely cultural references, naturalistic "kidspeak," and the latest reggae music to underscore the play's naturalistic plot. When a triumphant Vince arrives unexpectedly on his new mount to chauffeur Georgie and petition to the Parliament buildings, the children are given tangible proof that with persistence the seemingly impossible can be achieved. Moved by the "great sense of hope" expressed by many of his young interviewees, Foon set out in *Invisible Kids* to "reinforce that sense of the possibility for change."[14]

Between 1986 and 1993 Foon created a second thematic trilogy of plays for young people which delves into the shadowy world of child abuse, a subject which the playwright first encountered in *Feeling Yes, Feeling No. Liars* (1986), *Mirror Game* (1988), and *Seesaw* (1993) explore a range of destructive physical and psychological abuses visited upon children and teenagers by parents, peers, and themselves.

While researching *Skin* in a British Columbia Native community, Foon was entreated repeatedly to write a play about children of alcoholics. With the support of the Vancouver Centennial Organization and Green Thumb Theatre, Foon and a group of professional actors (including one actress who had experienced parental alcoholism first hand) undertook to research the subject. Working closely with two youth counsellors from the Burnaby Alcohol and Drug Program, the playwright was permitted to join a Youth Drug Information Workshop for teens. Foon distilled the candid personal accounts of these

youngsters together with material garnered from specialists in the field of addiction, to create *Liars*. The one-act play attempts both to inform a teenage audience about the horrors of addiction and to help children of alcoholics gain some control of their lives. Though *Liars* contains graphic depictions of violent behaviour, many critics have praised Foon for his engagingly humorous script and his appealingly recognizable characters.

Foon cleverly represents the alcoholic alter-ego of each adult with life-size mannequins which the inebriated parents wield alternately as shield and weapon.

Foon's two teenage protagonists in *Liars* inhabit opposite corners of their adolescent world. Sixteen-year-old Leonore is a quiet, studious "preppy" from a well-to-do family. Her extroverted classmate Jace is a tough leather-jacketed denizen of the fringes of the "headbanger" crowd, who comes from a blue-collar background. Despite these conspicuous differences, the two youngsters share a subtle kinship; both Lenny and Jace live with an alcoholic parent, and each, in his/her own way is a loner. Foon uses the teenagers' superficial disparities to underline the universality of addiction. Whereas Lenny secretly struggles with caring for her frequently incapacitated and neurotic mother, keeping house for her demanding workaholic father, and maintaining top grades at school, Jace copes with the unpredictability of his unemployed alcoholic father, who is by turns buddy and bully. Foon cleverly represents the alcoholic alter-ego of each adult with life-size mannequins which the inebriated parents wield alternately as shield and weapon.

While Lenny fantasizes about escaping her oppressive home-life and moving to Japan (symbolized by her fascination with the serene beauty of the ancient Japanese tea-ceremony she re-enacts), Jace resorts to drugs and heavy-metal music to carry him away from his sordid reality. Through a series of brief encounters (interspersed with graphic flashbacks of life at home) the teenagers meet, become friends, play games and share confidences, fall in love, and make a pact of mutual support. At the climax of *Liars* both Lenny and Jace confront their parents about the destructiveness of their addictions, and plead with them to seek professional help. Lenny meets with anger, denial, and verbal abuse. Jace is brutally beaten by his father. Foon ends *Liars* on an ambiguous open-ended note; whereas Lenny finds the inner strength to seek counselling for herself, Jace finds a "safe" haven in drug-induced oblivion — thereby mimicking his father's self-destructive dependency — and opts for an uncertain life on the streets. Peers and professional counsellors, Foon implies in *Liars*, can be stronger allies in the battle against parental alcoholism than parents themselves.

In 1987, Foon set out to research the impact of media images on teenagers' sense of self-esteem. With only the title *Mirror Game* clearly in mind, the playwright canvassed a multicultural class of local grade twelve drama students; the subject

From the Green Thumb Theatre for Young People production of *Mirror Game*
Peter Scoular as Bob and Heather Troop as Maggie

Photo by David Cooper

"bored the hell out of them." However, the arrival of a female student to Foon's class with a black eye administered by her boyfriend as punishment for being late prompted "a much ... more intimate kind of discussion about relationships and families" (December, 1991). The episode provided Foon with the impetus to write a play about violence and abuse in teenagers' relationships. Broadening his earlier explorations of the bully/victim and dysfunctional family themes, in *Mirror Game* Foon presents a wide spectrum of abuse which ranges from the merely irritating to the devastating. As in *Liars*, adults' negative patterns of behaviour directly affect their offspring; often history grimly repeats itself. "If there's going to be a bad response [to *Mirror Game*] it's because the gloves are really off and I take a real whack at parents and adults" (June, 1988), Foon reflects.

Mirror Game recreates a catalogue of typical teenage haunts; classrooms, cafeterias, school washrooms, and parental homes are simply evoked through textual references enhanced with minimalistic staging. As in a Shakespearean comedy, Foon divides his *dramatis personae* into two contrasting sub-groups which comprise both a comic and a more serious duo. Bob, the acne-obsessed, lovelorn narrator, and Maggie, his self-effacing, engaging confidante, serve as foils to Luke and Sara, whose external good looks and "cool" demeanours mask

a troubled bully and his mesmerized victim. Whereas Bob and Maggie are caught up in a comic triangle of unrequited young love, Sara and Luke are trapped in a much more dangerous entanglement rife with jealousy and physical abuse. As the play unfolds, Bob's vain attempts to win Sara's affections mirror Sara's successful battle to free herself from Luke's manipulative clutches.

In *Mirror Game*, Foon juxtaposes revealing flashbacks of each teenager's homelife with scenes from the present, in order to reveal gradually what makes his young characters tick. His adult protagonists present themselves as ghostly voice-overs or eerie silhouetted projections on a giant scrim. Bob is simultaneously denigrated by his verbally abusive father and suffocated by his over-protective mother, while Maggie vainly tries to bolster her self-absorbed, self-pitying mother in the absence of her workaholic father. Sara is forced to co-exist with her well-intentioned but brow-beaten mother and her mother's crude wife-battering boyfriend. Since early childhood, Luke has suffered vicious verbal and physical lashings at the hands of his sadistic, bullying father. Parental behaviour, Foon implies, can profoundly affect the next generation. The playwright's depiction of Luke's metamorphosis from child scapegoat to pent-up bully is a frightening illustration of how violence perpetuates itself. Foon's compelling portrayal of Sara's slow awakening to her own self-worth, and her ensuing rejection of Luke's warped affections (spurred on by Maggie and Bob), conversely demonstrate the power of peer support to effect positive change. With self-respect, Foon also implies in *Mirror Game*, comes empowerment.

"If there's going to be a bad response [to *Mirror Game*] it's because the gloves are really off and I take a real whack at parents and adults"

Foon's 1993 play *Seesaw* once again explores the complexities of young people's relationships with their peers and families, in this case from a twelve-year-old perspective. While interviewing dozens of Winnipeg elementary school students, the playwright observed that these children were coping with increasing external hostilities and diminishing parental support. *Seesaw* marries "slice of life" realism with expressionistic puppetry "to show the forces many twelve-year-olds keep in balance in order to survive.[15]

As in *Mirror Game* Foon presents a cast of four well-rounded characters: shy, intelligent Josh who finds self-expression in magic, Charla the new kid at school who is trying to "fit in," Paige, the trend-setting cliquish pre-teen, and Adam, the schoolyard extortionist and covert artist. *Seesaw* traces the dynamic ups and downs (at school and at home) of this young foursome. Peer pressure, mass-media influences, and self-esteem are central issues. Underdogs Charla and Josh ultimately come out on top, by collectively defusing Paige's and Adam's efforts to manipulate and harass them.

The parents in *Seesaw* are satirically characterized (through the magic of collaborator/Canadian puppeteer Ronnie Burkett's artful puppetry) as animals

From the Green Thumb Theatre for Young People production of
Seesaw
Standing: Brian Drummond as Adam; Daniel Dolan, Stage Manager;
Ellie Harvie as Paige
Seated: Laura Myers as Charla; Jacques Lalonde as Josh
Photo by David Cooper

and inanimate objects: Josh's ever-preoccupied workaholic parents sport attaché-case hats complete with Rolodex files and cellular phones; Charla's sincere, hard-working divorced mother is constrained with marionette strings; Paige's "blended family" includes her superficial "fashion-mannequin" mother, her materialistic "sportscar" step-father, and her manipulative little step-brother Misha, who takes the form of a demonic two-foot-high puppet with two faces; and Adam's quarrelsome parents are cat and dog hand-puppets. Through fleeting glimpses of life at home with these parents, in *Seesaw* Foon illuminates the correlation between family dynamics and how kids relate to each other.

In 1994 Foon created two new plays which aptly demonstrate his breadth and versatility as a playwright for the young: *The Short Tree and the Bird That Could*

Not Sing is a delightful fable for little children; *War* is a hard-hitting cautionary tale for teenagers on the brink of adulthood. Both plays are departures from his characteristic child advocacy dramas. Adapted from Foon's 1986 children's book, *The Short Tree and The Bird That Could Not Sing* is a tragi-comic fantasy for primary school children which chronicles the meeting, separation, and joyful reunion of a lonely sapling and a gregarious (if tone-deaf) migratory song-bird. The playwright penned the metaphorical little book after his marriage ended, as a means to reassure his daughter of his constancy. Using programmatic music, puppetry, elaborate lighting, and rainbow-coloured scenery and costumes, in his stage adaptation Foon exploits all the magic of theatre in order to convey a subtle message to children about the nature of love and loss.

"It's scary having a teenage daughter ... this play is a warning to her and to her friends."

Foon also wrote *War* for his daughter, now a teenager, but to a very different dramatic end. "I worry about kids, especially young women," the playwright and father recently reflected. "It's scary having a teenage daughter ... this play is a warning to her and to her friends." *War* is an atypically bleak piece which confronts the issue of societal violence head-on. The play explores "the way that we raise our young men ... and, those young men's minds" (June, 1996). In *War* Foon presents a rogues gallery of unsympathetic teenage protagonists who have each been indoctrinated to become amoral, dangerous young men: Brad, the hockey-team "hit-man" turned arsonist; Andy, the would-be Arnold Schwarzenegger clone and actor; Tommy, the aspiring fighter-pilot and date-rapist; and, Shane, the lethal, now jaded ex-gang-member. Through a series of succinct monologues interspersed with actual conflicts, three of the four jostle for dominant position. When Tommy and Brad challenge Andy (the lowest on the totem) to combat in "the cage," Shane steps in to protect him. In repayment, Andy offers to secure Shane an audition with his agent who casts violent action films. Tommy vicariously wreaks revenge on Andy by raping his ex-girl friend Sheila, whom Brad maliciously claims also to have bedded. One of the most striking dramatic elements in *War* is the punchy raw slang which the characters wield like weapons. Reminiscent of the "Droogspeak" in Burgess's brutal black comedy *A Clockwork Orange*, Foon's invented dialect embodies the brutality and alienation of his subjects.

Parents are virtually non-existent in *War*'s barren world; the young men look to fictional television and film personae as role-models. Brad and Tommy dance to the tune of "The Coach" and "The Commander" respectively, two unseen figures with arbitrary powers who exploit their underlings and ultimately betray them. Female characters are notably absent in *War*. Consequently, the audience is privy to a type of male conversation which women, at least, rarely overhear. "The women are there in the boys' heads," comments Foon, who has deliberately objectified Sheila, the sole young woman in the piece. Sheila's vicious off-stage rape (re-

enacted graphically by Tommy) is at the heart of Foon's play, a stark metaphor for "the politics of domination"[16] which the playwright clearly abhors.

Ironically, the only male character in *War* who elicits our sympathies is the one who has participated most fully in this "power-over" world. Shane is truly a tragic figure. Beaten as children by their mother's boyfriends, Shane and his brother transformed childhood survival tactics into a lucrative teenage profession; the duo served as cold-hearted gang-mercenaries, who would commit any crime for a price. A teenage Faust, Shane sold his soul for money and power. When his brother whom he genuinely loves is murdered, Shane's eyes are forcibly opened to the fragility of life and the illusory nature of power. "The Hurt you put out stays alive ... and one day, any day, finds you again ... just smells you and splatters your life away."[17] Wisdom for Shane comes too late; when his assassins strike at the end of *War*, he offers no struggle.

As a piece of theatre, Foon's *War* defies traditional classification; the play ends without resolution or redemption. Foon is deliberately "not letting the audience off the hook" (June, 1996). Unchastened by his friend Shane's death, in a final monologue Andy cockily rejoices in landing the film part of a "gangbanger." Whether in life or in art, Foon implies, the violence continues.

The seeds for Foon's most recent exploration into youth violence were sown in 1992 as he prepared to write *Seesaw*; several of his ten and eleven-year-old interviewees in Winnipeg recounted to him their involvement in criminal activities. The playwright's personal experiences with juvenile vandalism and break-and-entry at his Vancouver home served as a further creative catalyst. Determined to find out "who these kids were" (June, 1996), Foon spoke with hundreds of children, as well as social workers, youth counsellors, psychologists, teachers, and police and school liaison officers. In a little over a year, Foon had created the production draft for a CBC television feature film for grown-ups, with the resonant oxymoronic title *Little Criminals*. Though *Seesaw* and *Little Criminals* both depict children on the brink of puberty, in every other respect they are galaxies apart: *Seesaw*'s inherent lightness, humour, and hopefulness sharply contrast with *Little Criminals*' heart-wrenching pessimism; *Seesaw* sends a positive message to its young auditors, *Little Criminals* a caustic warning to its adult viewers. When Foon's superbly written screenplay aired for the first time one Sunday evening in January 1996, over 1,800,000 Canadian viewers sat watching with a mixture of horror and compassion. Shortly after, Foon and his CBC associates were lauded on the floor of the Canadian Senate for addressing the issue of youth violence.

Little Criminals is a compelling portrait of the short tragic life of an eleven-year-old criminal. In his diminutive anti-hero Des, Foon has created a complex individual who is at once cockily invincible and pathetically vulnerable. The illegitimate offspring of an underprivileged teenage-mother and her abusive foster-father, Des has grown up in a harsh frenetic world devoid of love, stability, and beauty. He shares his sordid home with a television-addicted grandmother, his drunken ineffectual mother, and a stream of her lowlife suitors. He is haunted by

the mystery of his father's identity. With only himself to depend on, Des has fallen into an underworld of dope-dealers, arsonists, and thieves, and apparently landed on his feet. The mask of cool bravado which he sports as the foul-mouthed ringleader of a ragtag gang of under-age offenders conceals a frightened child crying out for help. *Little Criminals* chronicles Des's tenuous ascent out of this underworld and the series of betrayals which ultimately bring about his downfall. Foon heightens the nightmarish atmosphere of the screenplay with striking visual images of fire, rapacious animals, and death's heads, and with potent textual metaphors for the "dog-eat-dog" jungle in which Des exists.

The dramatic structure of *Little Criminals* is intricate. Foon introduces us to Des through a series of flashbacks (filmed from Des's perspective) which graphically depict the astonishing range of criminal activities he and his gang have undertaken for money and kicks. Des is finally caught ransacking a house with his soulmate Cory (using Cory's three-year-old step-sister as an unwitting accomplice), apprehended by the police (who are frustrated by his young offender immunity), and sent to "Children's House" for psychological assessment. Through juxtaposed snippets of Des's sessions with Rita his psychotherapist, the audience witness the slow unmasking of Des's humane side. Here is a child capable of generosity, love, and compassion, who secretly expresses his inner-self through beautifully rendered drawings on his closet wall. For a fleeting moment, Des's redemption seems possible.

The two-fold peripeteia in *Little Criminals* occurs when Rita inadvertently violates Des's closet-sanctuary, and sadly informs the boy that he must proceed to a foster home since their allotted time together is up. Triply-betrayed by his mother, Rita, and "the system," and determined to avoid the dreaded foster home at all costs, Des sets out on a reckless path of self-destruction with his only friend Cory playing a delinquent Tom Sawyer to his Huck Finn. When Des cold-bloodedly shoots their corrupt seventeen-year-old mentor, the terrified Cory abandons him, choosing to return instead to his flawed but loving family. Eluding the police one final time, Des bids his comatose mother goodbye, sets his house alight, and awaits life's ultimate "escape" in the womb-like haven of his closet.

In *Little Criminals*, Foon presents an apocalyptic vision of the lost child whom society has failed. "People *can* help these kids," Foon reflects, "but people run out of time" (June, 1996). The real tragic flaw is not in the child, Foon implies, but in a system that puts time and money before people.

Foon never seems to lack creative inspiration. He is currently working on a new play for teenagers about youth involvement in Canada's underground neo-Nazi movement, and an episode about pedophiles for an adult Canadian TV series on parole. His play *The Short Tree and The Bird That Could Not Sing* is about to be piloted as an animated television series. Leslee Silverman, Artistic Director of Manitoba's Theatre for Young People, has recently commissioned Foon to write a piece on the effects of parental gambling and "the casino movement" on kids.

Since 1975, Dennis Foon has written more than twenty plays for young people, directed over a dozen works by other Canadian writers, and commissioned and premiered more than 35 new Canadian plays. He is a recipient of the British Theatre Award for Best Production for Young Audiences (*Invisible Kids*, 1986), two Canadian Chalmers Awards for Best Children's Play (*Skin*, 1987 and *The Short Tree and The Bird That Could Not Sing*, 1995), a British Columbia LEO Film Award for Best Screenplay (*Little Criminals*, 1996), and an International Critic's Prize from the Monte Carlo Film Festival (*Little Criminals*, 1996). In 1989 the playwright's "outstanding contribution to the field of the arts for young people" was recognized with the prestigious international Association for Young Audiences Award. As a pioneer dramatist who holds a mirror up to contemporary Canadian youth culture, Foon has truly earned his status as "bedrock in the field of English-Canadian theatre for young people."[18]

NOTES

* I would like to thank Dennis Foon for graciously permitting me to interview him. I am also very grateful to the staff of Blizzard Publishing for their generous provision of Foon's most recently published texts, and to Green Thumb Theatre for Young People for so promptly supplying me with production photographs.

1 Dennis Foon, Interview with Gibson-Bray, August, 1988. All subsequent quotations excerpted from my own interviews with Dennis Foon will simply be denoted in the text by a bracketed date.

2 Dina Sudlow, "Playwright focuses on the realities of young lives." *Victoria Times-Colonist* 2 May 1989.

3 Joe Adcock, "Fanfare — Beneath 'Skin' lies hope for the future." *Seattle Post Intelligencer* 9 May 1986.

4 Sudlow, "Playwright focuses."

5 Foon left the Artistic Directorship of Green Thumb in 1988 in order to put all his energies into writing and direction.

6 Kevin Barker, "Kids' Theatre Grows Up." *CP Air Empress* July/August 1986.

7 Joyce Doolittle, "The West Coast's Hardy Perennial: Green Thumb." *Canadian Theatre Review* 37 (Spring 1983): 59-65.

8 In her book *STREET KIDS: The Tragedy of Canada's Runaways* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.), author Marlene Webber explores in depth the direct connections between child sexual abuse, dysfunctional families, and street kids.

9 *Feeling Yes, Feeling No*, NFB of Canada, 1985, The film: Part One.

10 The program offers two specially tailored versions of Part 4, one for children in Kindergarten to Grade 3, and the other for students from Grades 4 to 7.

11 There are two versions of each play: Vancouver and Toronto versions of *Skin* (the latter has been published), and the original British *Invisible Kids* and a second for Canadian audiences (the latter also is published). Though both versions of *Skin* are equally effective, in my opinion the Canadian *Invisible Kids* lacks the powerful motivation and structural integrity of its British predecessor.

12 "Programme notes to *Skin*," Green Thumb Tour, 1986.

13 As in most of Foon's plays written with a touring-company in mind, *Skin* can be played with as few as four actors.

14 *Invisible Kids*, Toronto version, "Background," 59.

15 Dennis Foon, *Seesaw* (Blizzard Publishing: Winnipeg, 1993), "Playwright's Note," 58.

16 Dennis Foon, *War* (Blizzard Publishing:, Winnipeg, 1995), Preface by Guillermo Verdecchia (Director of Green Thumb Theatre's premiere production of *War*), 16.

17 *War*, 57.
18 Leslee Silverman [Artistic Director, Manitoba Theatre for Young People], Interview with Gibson-Bray, 19 December 1991.

SELECTED PUBLISHED WORKS

am I the only one?. [Children's book, co-authored with Brenda Knight] Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985.
Feeling Yes, Feeling No: A Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Program. [Film with co-screenwriters Moira Simpson and Anne Wheeler. Prod. Jennifer Torrance. Theatrical Dir. Dennis Foon] National Film Board, 1985.
Heracles. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978.
The Last Days of Paul Bunyan. Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1977.
Little Criminals. [Screenplay] Winnipeg: Blizzard Publishing Inc., 1996.
Mirror Game. Winnipeg: Blizzard Publishing Inc., 1992.
New Canadian Kid & Invisible Kids: Two Plays by Dennis Foon. Vancouver: Pulp Press Book Publishers, 1989.
Raft Baby. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978.
Seesaw. Winnipeg: Blizzard Publishing Inc., 1993.
The Short Tree and The Bird That Could Not Sing. [Children's book] Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1986.
Skin & Liars. Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1988.
War. Winnipeg: Blizzard Publishing Inc., 1995.
The Windigo. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978.

Sarah Gibson-Bray *is a specialist in English-Canadian Theatre for Young Audiences. She completed her doctoral dissertation,* The Plays of Dennis Foon — A Playwright for Young Canadians, *at the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama at the University of Toronto in 1992. Sarah lives in Perth, Ontario, with her husband Carl and her two-year-old daughter Emma, where she is currently compiling an index and guide to "child advocacy drama" in Canada. This summer she will be helping to coach two young people's theatre workshops as part of the Perth Theatre Project's Midsummer Theatre Festival.*

Good, Evil, Knowledge, Power: A Conversation between Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman

Perry Nodelman

Photo credit: Peter Tittenberger

Résumé: Dans cette entrevue qu'elle a accordée à son ancien collaborateur et coauteur Perry Nodelman, l'écrivain Carol Matas discute de son oeuvre. Elle précise, entre autres sujets, les raisons pour lesquelles elle compose des récits pour les jeunes, présente sa conception du bien et du mal, et explique son intérêt marqué pour la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, époque tragique où elle situe la plupart de ses romans.

Summary: In this interview conducted originally by fax, Perry Nodelman, who has collaborated with Carol Matas on two young adult fantasies, discusses with Carol the children's fiction she has written on her own. The conversation focuses on a variety of topics: Carol's reason's for choosing to write for children and her convictions about the kind of fiction children deserve to read; her ideas about the nature of good and of evil; and her special interest in writing fiction about children who find themselves involved in the upheaval and tragedy of World War II.

PERRY: Carol, we've had some interesting but random conversations about various aspects of children's literature over the years, in the course of my reading early drafts of your work, and particularly in the process of collaborating on the two children's novels we've written together. But most of these have been in the context of hasty phone calls in the midst of other matters, and we've never actually sat down and had a formal, organized conversation about the subject. Nor are we ever likely to, as we pursue our two different careers and separate lives across town from each other. Hence this discussion-by-fax, devoted specifically to exploring your views about children's literature and, therefore, I hope, uninterrupted by any of the following:

a): questions about what colour Lenora's dress was in the last chapter, and whatever happened to the rip in her hem, which seems to have disappeared in this chapter;

b): disagreements about just how wimpy Coren ought to be;

c): emotional crises triggered by the shenanigans of various of our individual and mutual literary agents and/or editors;

d): emergencies caused by or involving our real-life spouses, children, dogs, parents, students, and parliamentary representatives;

e): anxieties about whether or not it's actually going to be possible for us to meet the deadline we agreed to finish copy-editing by; and, above all,

f): random calls-waiting on our two different other lines, which usually turn out to be fantastic offers from carpet cleaning services.

I'd like to talk to you particularly about the darker aspects of life as depicted in your work — simply because they tend to be darker than a lot of people seem ready to see as appropriate in the context of literature for children. As you and I both know, many people like to believe that children are, or ought to be, innocent — that they aren't capable either of doing much evil themselves or of understanding the evil others do. Many other people aren't sure that children can't understand evil, but would still prefer that they didn't; as many parents and teachers often say to me, "They'll find out soon enough — why bother them with all that awful stuff when they're so young?" Your books do often bother children with all that stuff — and therefore distress the many adults who might prefer that they didn't. So I'll start with the BIG question: considering your obvious interest as a writer in depicting the darker aspect of existence, and considering the boundaries that writing for children seems to put on authentic and complete descriptions of those darker aspects, what led you to choose specifically to become a children's writer?

CAROL: When I read your question, my first reaction was — uh oh, he's asked me the wrong question, because I never "intended" to become a children's writer. I sort of stumbled into it, writing stories at the beginning with children as the central characters, which I assumed people of all ages would read. It wasn't until I wrote my first novel that I specifically focused on children as an audience. And here, I'd like to take back my question over your question, although it puts me in a nasty spot. I have to admit I wrote those books with children in mind and with their minds in mind, specifically. In fact, dare I admit this, I wanted to change them (oh, how politically incorrect, does this have to be public knowledge?) I wanted to make them into young people who would think for themselves. So I challenged them to see how the future might turn out if pollution is allowed to go unchecked (*Zanu*), if a nuclear war should happen (*It's Up to Us*). I wanted them to have the fun adults were having in reading a time travel book (*Me Myself and I*) and I wanted them not ever to completely trust those in charge (*The D.N.A. Dimension*). Of course reviewers immediately accused me of preaching. Funnily enough, that never occurred to the young people reading the books. They liked them as straightforward action/adventure — and sometimes they did make them think, as evidenced by the many letters I received, one from a group in Ontario that literally revolutionized the entire county recycling program after reading *Zanu* and forming an organization called the Zanu group.

As I progressed in my writing I settled into children's writing because I felt that it was an area in which I could make a difference. You know, catch them when they're young and before they've solidified their views, become rigid. I also, and this is of equal importance, wanted to give them a wonderful reading experience. I *loved* to read when I was young for the sheer pleasure of it — and is there anything wrong with trying to deliver a pleasurable experience to children? I hope not.

PERRY: Me either. But I'm interested in the two different goals you suggest here — and the ways in which the two might be seen to be contradictory, perhaps even opposite to each other. You want to entertain children, AND you want to challenge them or even change them. Are you assuming that children find it entertaining to be changed, or at least to have someone or some book try to change them? Or do you see these as two separate things your books are doing, offering entertainment in order to sneak the message across? I guess I'm asking, what do you see as the pleasure your books, or reading in general, offer? And does it have anything to do with the challenge to think, or is that something separate from reading pleasure?

CAROL: Perry, you fiend, that's a hard question.

PERRY: I know. That's why I asked it. *(Imagine fiendish laughter.)*

CAROL: And it's a question that has many different answers, I think. Let me start with a basic response: I can only write if I have a reason to do so. This was apparent when we worked on *Of Two Minds* together. I felt it was about women, and power, and imagination, and how women would deal with power — you refused to consciously think about anything but the story.

PERRY: There *is* something else beside the story in *Of Two Minds?*

CAROL: Of course there is, you dolt. And I need both. Equally, I have to have a reason for writing. and I desperately want to tell a story that is unputdownable! What I hope for is that the reader will have 1), a good read (yes, that is number 1) and 2), *if* they want to, will be also be challenged by the material. If both happen, wonderful. The disaster would be that it was only a book *about* something — a dull, pedantic, unimaginative text.

Which brings me to the pleasure of reading. For me, the greatest pleasure is to read a book that is compelling *and* substantive. Doris Lessing, for instance, is the epitome of this kind of writing. I guess that's what I aim to do. I don't try to sneak a message in — that's not at all how I'd describe it. (In fact I hate that description). I have themes I want to explore, characters I want to explore, ideas I want to challenge. Naturally it comes from my own point of view, that's a given. But I'm not trying to preach a message — quite the opposite. I'm trying to open a question, a dialogue, give my reader food for thought, challenge assumptions. And for me as a reader, as I've said, that *is* part of the pleasure of reading.

I like to read for pure entertainment too. And sometimes, as a pure challenge. So I think there's a place for all kinds of books — young people should be no more confined in their choices than us old guys.

Let me talk about my motivation more specifically. *The Burning Time* describes the witch burnings of Europe in the 1600s, France. So often these days I hear young girls distressed by my kind of feminism, determined to be apolitical. I felt I had to acquaint young women with their history — show them how women's power was systematically taken away, bring up issues of power and sex and how the male establishment, ruled by fear, used sexual repression to demonize women. After all, these mindsets are still operational today — if a women dresses a certain way, she is "asking" for it, if she behaves aggressively she's accused of being a witch etc. We can't understand our present if we don't understand our past.

Interestingly, some reviewers in the U.S. (the book got raves in Canada) were horrified, one reviewer calling it feverish, which I take to be another word for hysterical. And yet I had to leave the worst out — it was far too horrible. Other reviewers, fortunately, saw what I was trying to do and were very appreciative, but more importantly, young women who write me now list it as one of their favourite books (my reward).

PERRY: Well, Carol, I'm not surprised they like it. "Intense" and "exciting" are also other possible words for "feverish," and I think *Burning Time* is an intense and exciting book — and pretty scary, even if you did leave the worst stuff out. That's what *I* like about it — and what I admire about a number of your books. They tell exciting, suspenseful, involving stories — and as you said, that's *all* I like to think about myself when I'm writing fiction (I think it's because I'm always conscious of the other hat I wear as, not only a literary critic, but a specialist specifically in children's literature: I'm afraid that if I start thinking about the meanings of my novels as I write them, I'll end up overloading them with all the complex theoretical stuff I think I know, and as a result they'll just collapse under the weight, and be dead on arrival. Instead, I'd rather trust that if the characters say the right things and the plot takes the right turns, then the meanings or morals, whatever they are, will be there without my having to consciously worry about it.) But that takes me back to my original question, about how the serious concerns in your books relate to the pleasure they offer. I have a sense that you're right in suggesting the two go together, and that *Burning Time* would be much less involving if the issues weren't as serious as they are. But at the same time, I get a little worried when you tell me that you want to show your readers how women's power was systematically taken away, or to bring up issues of power and sex and so on. I worry, because that *does* sound to me like preaching a message. And yet when I read the novel it doesn't feel that way to me. I don't sense preaching going on at all. Not that there aren't moral and intellectual issues in the air — there are lots of those. But I get the sense when I read your books that the characters are being placed in moral or ethical dilemmas that they have hard times solving, if they actually ever do solve them at all — and that you're careful not to make the solutions to those dilemmas clear or obvious. I take this to mean that if you're preaching, you're always preaching

the same message: that when it comes to defining human values there are no easy answers, that there are always at least two sides to every question, that only a fool would leap at one of the sides and be content with a total commitment to it. Is that a fair reading of the books? Is your concern with meanings perhaps a matter of raising questions rather than providing answers?

CAROL: You've said it so well that I'm not sure what I can add — but I won't let that stop me! Your question has forced me to actually consider what it is I do. Of course, thanks to you, I'll probably never write another word, now that I have to examine my writing process.

PERRY: The unexamined life is not worth living. Proceed.

CAROL: I will. Most books put forth a point of view, don't they? The question is, *how* is that point of view expressed — as a simple message, which does end up preaching, or in a context where the character is placed in a situation which challenges the character's assumptions and hopefully the readers assumptions as well? I hope I do the latter — and you're right, I don't like pat answers.

For example, in *Sworn Enemies* I wanted to explore the issues of faith, idealism and religion. Zev and Aaron are both religious, and at the beginning of the book, neither questions their faith. But as the story develops we see that Zev uses his religion to justify anything, even kidnapping. Aaron is forced to question his faith, God, anything he ever believed in. Both boys must convert or die. Zev refuses to convert, Aaron gives in. Does that mean Zev is a better person? Or just a fanatic? In a way, the book itself is a reflection of my attitude, my point of view. Zev is the character who represents the simple message; Aaron is the character who challenges all assumptions, who questions everything, who in the end is the moral one because he goes into the unknown with no fixed rules of right and wrong, only his own conscience to guide.

To complicate matters further, I ask a larger question: how does one live morally in an immoral world? Zev is also a victim — forced to be a kidnapper by the leaders of the Jewish community, who in turn are forced by the Tsar to send a quota of boys every year to the army. The reader must question the choices all these characters make, yet view them in the context of the greater world they live in. A modern parallel, of course, is the war in Vietnam.

Often I place my characters in a situation where their assumptions are challenged, or where they are forced to challenge others. I hope their dilemma will challenge the reader in a similar way. And if my point of view does come through then I hope it's one the reader at least finds interesting — maybe it's something that they hadn't considered before, a new, different way of seeing the world.

PERRY: Let me pick up on that "different way of seeing." What you've said about *Sworn Enemies* suggests some themes or interests — or obsessions? — that seem to me to appear in a number of your books. One is a concern with the ways in which people use or misuse their authority over others — particularly people who claim to represent the will of God. In *Burning Time,* in *Sworn Enemies,* in *Primrose Path,* religious, theoretically good people act badly in ways that

seriously harm others. And meanwhile, theoretically good characters like Aaron or like Lisa herself in *Lisa* find themselves having to do theoretically evil things, things they themselves find morally obnoxious, in order to survive or to defend what they believe to be right. I find this particularly fascinating since it implies a way of seeing good and evil quite different from the simplistic opposition often present in children's books. Could you talk a bit about your way of seeing or understanding good and evil—particularly evil? What is evil? And what draws you to focus on this kind of a problem so often? What leads you to be so interested in the evil potential of good people and the good potential of evil ones?

CAROL: Perry, the questions get tougher and tougher, you evil fellow! No, I don't mean that. Because, in fact, in my definition of evil you wouldn't qualify at all, not being a control freak. Someone, (I wish I could remember who) once said evil is the desire to control other human beings. I think that's a pretty good definition and have adopted it as my own. From Hitler down to the class bully this definition seems to apply.

You see, Zev *likes* having power over Aaron. The priests in *The Burning Time like* to have power, ultimate power over women, the rabbi in *Primrose* is all about power and control. My supposedly "good" characters don't really want to control anyone, but *are* forced by circumstances to sometimes kill, lie, etc. And sometimes, a part of them *wants* to do it, but a bigger part finds it abhorrent. And I guess that my view of "evil" is that there is the potential for good and bad in all of us and that like form and shadow, they co-exist. It is the people who never acknowledge their "dark side" who are in danger of being overtaken by it. Hitler put all his darkness onto others and this is typical — Zev blames everyone for his misfortune, *never* taking responsibility. Aaron does take responsibility for his actions, he also sees his dark side, and, in the end, learns to live with it. That's what I consider courageous, honest, and yes, even "good."

PERRY: This all raises two questions for me, and I can't seem to choose which one to ask — there's a joke about being "of two minds" in here somewhere, but I'm not sure exactly what it is. Anyway, I'm going to ask you both of the questions at once. You may answer in turn, or together, or as you wish.

The first question is about specific episodes in two of your novels that clearly relate to this questions about good people being evil and evil people being good — episodes that often puzzle and even upset students when I've discussed your work with them in the children's literature courses I teach. One episode is the moment in *Lisa* when Lisa shoots and kills in cold blood — and only thinks about the implications of her doing so afterwards. Some students worry that this conveys a message that being a murderer is sometimes okay. The other episode is the scene in *Jesper* in which Jesper discovers that the Nazi in charge of his fate is an old friend from his past, and must deal with conflicting feelings about a friend who is also an enemy — and furthermore, a Nazi who, rather than being a despicable monster like the Nazis we usually see in movies, is someone Jesper always looked up to, an idealist with a strong belief in the positive moral value

of what he believes in. Here, students wonder why you made this all so complicated — wouldn't it confuse children and make them think that maybe fascism isn't so bad after all? I wonder how you would respond to their concerns.

The second question relates to that one, sort of. It's about the idea of evil as control. It occurs to me that Frederik's profound idealism about Nazism suggests his need for a system of ideas to believe in and feel secure about and shape his behaviour — in other words, a sort of religion. Because isn't much of what many religions (and especially the religion of the background both of us share, Judaism) offer believers exactly the feeling of being safely controlled by forces outside oneself, of having rules to follow and superiors to obey? Is this, perhaps, why you seem to be drawn so often to stories involving uses and misuses of religious authority? Do you see your books as being concerned with what it means to have faith or be religious? Is the fact of your own Jewish background of any significance in shaping this aspect of your writing? (Incidentally: I hate it when people ask me personal questions like this. You may refuse to answer if you want.)

CAROL: Perry, your students' comments that Lisa's shooting a German soldier in cold blood is a message that murder is OK makes my blood boil! This is really ignorant thinking.

First of all, Lisa is a character. As I said before she's not there to convey a message, but her action *hopefully* will make people think (not *not* think, like these students!). Secondly, she *does* react, it isn't a cold blooded act — she sweats, her heart pounds, she shakes, she throws up afterwards. Any intelligent reader can see that, in fact, she's *very* upset. Finally, she has to kill the soldier or *all* the fifty people counting on her will certainly be captured, and probably killed. She has no choice. She does the hard thing, the right thing, at that moment: to put her own scruples and feelings above the welfare of those she's caring for would be irresponsible.

Re your question about *Jesper* and why it's all so complicated. Again, the very question frustrates me — after all, that's the whole point of the book. To say it's complicated is to miss the whole point, which is, it *is* complicated. Frederick *does* believe in what he's doing, he *is* an idealist, but surely that doesn't mean fascism is good? Just because someone believes in it? People believe all sorts of things but that doesn't make those things true? And those people are often idealists — and ideologues, like Newt Gingrich, for instance. I think ideologues are *always* the most dangerous types. In Canada Brian Mulroney was a perfect example of that, and so are Preston Manning and Mike Harris.

Which brings me to your last question about control. I think I am more concerned with the political ideologues than I am with religious ideologues, because in this day and age religious ideologues have less power. But in the times I've been writing about, they often had a lot of power — i.e *Sworn Enemies, The Burning Time.* Even so, I hope the parallels will be apparent to the reader — those that believe in a system which has all the answers are in danger of handing over their decision-making power to someone else. And that someone, whoever it is,

should *never* be given absolute power because absolute power corrupts absolutely. This is all too obvious in *The Primrose Path.*

How do my convictions affect those themes? Well, they must, I suppose. I dislike any kind of "orthodoxy" in any religion, for the reasons stated above. They give too much power to one person and not enough to the individual. Very rarely do we see people in those positions of power using it wisely. The Pope's shocking silence about the massacres of Jews in World War II is still a scandal the church has not fully addressed. He very well might have slowed it, even stopped it, had he used the full weight of his office. Why didn't he? Is it an accident that the worst atrocities happened in countries where the Catholic church had encouraged anti-Semitism for hundreds of years? It is no accident that *Primrose Path* is set in an orthodox synagogue rather than a reform synagogue, because, again, Orthodoxy sets out all the rules and regulations and then puts one *man* (never a woman) in charge of it all.

Now that I've managed to insult just about everyone, let me move on to the more personal side of your question about my upbringing. I was not brought up in a religious household, but in a household where it mattered what happened to others, where community large and small was considered our responsibility. What I hate most about the right wing agenda is the emphasis on the individual as removed from his or her community. All decisions are based solely on how things affect the individual. I hate to break this news, but eventually the larger community impinges on all of us — the person who has been made homeless by welfare cuts may have kids that will one day knock on your nice townhouse door and blow you away. Never mind the moral issues of leaving people to suffer like that!

Also I'd like to clarify here — because first I spoke of the importance of the individual thinking for him or herself. Then I spoke of the importance of the community. I don't think these are contradictory ideas — but ideas which have to be balanced. After all, in communism we saw community overwhelming the individuals. In the U.S. right now we see the individual overwhelming community. It is the balance of these which forms a healthy society.

In terms of your *very* personal question about my own beliefs. I am a very spiritual person, but not religious. And I'm not sure how that affects my writing except that it makes me pretty sceptical about all formal religion.

PERRY: I'd like to pursue this whole business of the parallels between the religious ideologues and the political ones a little further, because I find it intriguingly paradoxical — and it also engages the matters of control and of communal obligation rather than individual ones that you've been talking about. Let me lead up to a question by way of some other things I know people have said about your work.

First, another student in one of my classes, this one of German background, expressed deep distress that your characters called those who invaded Denmark in *Lisa* "Germans" and not specifically "Nazis." To her, it suggested that *all* Germans were evil, and encouraged prejudice against Germans in the past and

in the present. I couldn't persuade her that all these particular Nazis in the book were, indeed, not only German, but employees of the German government of the time, representatives of Germany — that it was an historic fact. That mattered less to her than the potential damage she imagined to the reputation of her people. Second: I know that a school board official somewhere in southern Ontario, this one of Jewish background, proposed the banning of *Sworn Enemies* because it suggested that some Jews in the past might have been bad people — thus confirming the prejudices of anti-Semites and damaging the reputation of her people. And third: there was also a similar decision recently to ban you from discussing *The Primrose Path* at a synagogue here in Winnipeg, wasn't there?

What intrigues me about all these responses is what they have in common — that people worry that your work might give comfort to those whom they perceive as their enemies. And yet the enemies are anti-German in one case, anti-Semitic in the others. That not only seems to confirm the presence in your work of the parallel between religious ideologues and political ones — it also suggest how that idea does bother at least some adults, who happily acknowledge the potential for evil for others but not in their own group or community. They want, also, to control things — to preserve one-sided orthodoxies? And they clearly believe that the welfare of their community as a whole is more important than the facts and your individual right to tell about the facts.

Now, finally, my question. Am I misreading all this? Because if I'm not, I wonder how you respond in this case as the individual a community is trying to condemn or to silence (and perhaps particularly, as a Jew being condemned or silenced for the good of the Jewish community)? How does that relate to or impinge upon your idea (which, incidentally, I fervently agree with) that we've currently overbalanced in favour of individual rights over communal responsibilities? Is this a contradiction, or a paradox? Or how exactly do you imagine a balanced way of walking through these particular minefields?

CAROL: Perry, you *are* reading it dead on. And in answer to your question, as an individual the community is trying to silence, I'd say, it's neither a contradiction or a paradox because, as I said earlier, it's a question of balance. Without the individual's voice, speaking what people often don't want to hear, we get fascism. The individual is all important. And yet, if the individual speaks only for his/her self, you get the "me" society that cares for no one and buzz words like "personal responsibility" which no longer mean that, but mean every man for himself.

As for walking through minefields — if you mean me as a writer, I will be responsible to my material and my audience to the best of my ability. And to me, that means being honest, being a mirror to our society, and inevitably some people won't like what they see.

PERRY: Mirrors are like that, right? But I started all this asking you about your interest in depicting the darker aspects of life — and we've talked quite a bit about responses to various of your novels which confirm the fact that some people — most of them adults — don't like what *you* see and know of the world

and want to show to children. I suspect this response is at its most intense in terms of the novels you've written about various aspects of the Holocaust and its aftermath. There's *Lisa, Jesper, Daniel's Story* — and now two new books, *After the War* and *The Garden*, about a girl who survives her horrific experience in a concentration camp and moves on to Israel, not always without facing new horrors. That's a lot of novels centring around the same moment in history — and to me, it suggests a fascination, a commitment, even an obsession. (I promise you that all of those, even the obsession, strike me as being good things, not bad ones — for surely the best writing comes out of a commitment to the things that matter most intensely to writers?) I wonder if you could say a little about your interest in this particular time in history. What led you to write about the Jewish experience in World War II in the first place? And why do you keep coming back to it so often?
CAROL: I have always been obsessed by the Holocaust, you're right. I admit it. And I guess it's because of what we've covered already — the issue of evil. After all, the Holocaust *is* evil, and to study it is to study the very worst in human nature.

But I came to write about it by a different path. My husband Per began to tell me stories of what his own father and grandfather had experienced during World War II in Denmark. The stories were so exciting I began thinking about writing a novel for young people which told the story of a boy in the resistance. At that point, I was given a book on the rescue of the Jews in Denmark and was amazed to discover a story I'd never heard before. I figured, as a fairly well-educated Jew, if I hadn't heard it, probably most children hadn't heard it either. So I felt I *had* to write it. I must admit it was as much for the drama of the story, as for the theme I wanted to explore. Also, it was an uplifting story, a story which said this didn't have to happen the way it did, look at what happened in Denmark.

That's how I came to write *Lisa*. So you see, I kind of fell into World War II. I never said, "I'm going to write a series of World War II books!" *Jesper* was, of course, the book I originally thought of, about a boy in the resistance. So it was quite natural for me to write that after I finished *Lisa*.

Now, *Daniel's Story* was something quite different. I was asked to write that by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as a complementary piece to their children's exhibit. (Not a novelization, as some reviewers mistakenly stated.) And with their backing, I felt comfortable delving into that material.

But I must say, it was the most painful and difficult book I've ever had to research. In a way, although obsessed by the evil of the Holocaust, it was also a topic I actively avoided because I got depressed just thinking about it. This book forced me to look at the worst, most evil thoughts and deeds, and I could not flinch. And it wasn't only the litany of horrors that was hard to stomach — the detailed descriptions of atrocity after atrocity. Some images, like the German soldiers throwing babies out of hospital windows while their colleagues on the streets below played the game of seeing how many they could catch on their bayonets, will never leave me. (By the way, although I included that scene I left out the part about the bayonets, because the image is *too* horrible for anyone,

including children.) But always I was plagued by the *lack* of good, what could have been, why didn't the US bomb the train tracks which took the victims to the death camps. They could have but had "more important" targets. Why did townsfolk watch as Jews were marched by them, pretending to see nothing? Why was the Pope silent? Isn't the absence of good also a form of evil?

My two new books, *After the War* and *The Garden*, deal with the illegal immigration to Israel after the war, and the subsequent fight for a Jewish state. In *After the War*, the characters are survivors of the atrocity, the death camp. What kind of people were they when it was all over? What had happened to their own humanity? What were they willing to endure to find a place that could be called home? How had their encounter with evil affected them, moulded them? These are the questions of *After the War*. *The Garden* deals with survivors who want only peace, quiet, who are still afraid, now confronted with annihilation by the Arab nation surrounding them. They must fight but at least now they *can* fight, they are no longer victims. And yet, having to kill as they were once killed is a terrible moral dilemma, so the questions raised here are all to do with idealism and what one must do to survive. Apparently, when Golda Meir and Anwar Sadat made peace, Golda said that she could forgive him for all the Jewish lives he had taken but could never forgive him for turning the children into killers. That is the issue I'm trying to work through in *The Garden.*

As you know, I'm now proposing at least two new books set in World War II. Again, I suppose this time offers an incredible wealth of dramatic stories as well as an opportunity to explore issues and to put my characters in life and death situations where moral dilemmas have to be faced.

PERRY: "Moral dilemmas that have to be faced," you say. And earlier, you spoke about how *Daniel's Story* forced you to look at difficult things and that you couldn't flinch — and within the novel, Daniel himself often reiterates how important it is for him to take his pictures of the horror that surrounds him, to look and not flinch, to be a witness. As I remember my reading of *Daniel's Story* and think about what you've been telling me in this conversation, I'm fascinated by the ways in which you so often bring questions of evil and knowledge together — how important it is for you yourself to know evil, to witness it, how important it is for characters to do so, how important it is for your young readers to do so. In fact, as I think back on it, this question of knowing evil seems to be the thread that connects all the different things we've talked about in this conversation. Is that a fair assessment?

CAROL: Perry, I agree with your assessment. I guess I believe that old cliché, knowledge is power. Children without knowledge are powerless. This has become very clear to me in my writing of *The Primrose Path.* And one of the main reasons I wanted to write it. Perhaps if children have thought about these issues, have thought about how charismatic leaders work, how they slowly try to suck you in using trust and friendship as their weapons, perhaps they will be able to avoid such situations. But a child who is "innocent" which, to me, means ignorant, has *no* choice.

Similarly with *Daniel's Story*: perhaps reading about the devastation will put them on their guard, and if someone talks to them about becoming a skinhead they will *know* what that means. Educators and parents who are afraid of letting their children read this material because it might upset them should think about how upset their children would be once they were made a victim of a child abuser or once they were complicit in far worse things than the act of reading a book.

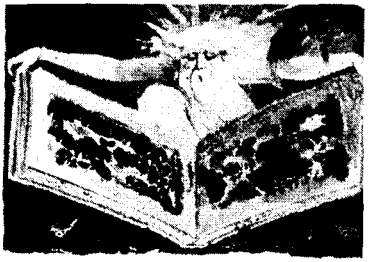
Sworn Enemies talks about moral choice, the difference between self interest and larger moral issues. Surely these are things worth considering.

I spoke earlier about evil being the need to control. While in New York recently I saw Terence McNally's play, *Master Class*. In it, the lead character based on Maria Callas spoke of how one *must* dominate a stage, be in control of the audience, and I suddenly realized that even with a concept like control there is *no such thing* as a clear answer. And maybe this is the best way to end this discussion — to agree that the world is a complex place and that what I'm trying to do is present this world, in all its complexities, to my readers. And hope they are both challenged *and* entertained.

PERRY: As one of your readers, I am both. And I know lots of children and other adults that are too. Thanks for talking to me about this. Now, what about that ripped hem of Lenora's.

Carol Matas *has published sixteen books for young people. She has been nominated for the Governor General's Award for both* Daniel's Story *and* The Burning Time. *Her latest book is* After the War *(Scholastic Canada).*

Perry Nodelman *has written two children's novels,* The Same Place but Different *and* A Completely Different Place *(both Groundwood), and also, a picture book,* Alice Falls Apart *(Bain and Cox). He is currently working on a new YA novel, a satiric look at life in high school. When not writing children's fiction, he teaches children's literature in the University of Winnipeg English department. Together, Matas and Nodelman have collaborated on two YA fantasies,* Of Two Minds *(Bain and Cox) and its sequel* More Minds, *and are working on a third "Minds" book.*



The Development of Canadian Fantasy Literature for Children

Judith Saltman

Résumé: Judith Saltman définit le "merveilleux" et le "fantastique" comme "étant empreints du sens de l'altérité", résume ensuite leur évolution, de la tradition orale aux jeux littéraires du merveilleux animal et du voyage dans le temps, de la science-fiction, et, enfin, dresse un bilan de la production canadienne dans ce domaine et présente différents auteurs qui ont pratiqué ces genres.

Summary: This paper defines "fantasy" as being "marked by a sense of otherness," and then traces the evolution of fantasy from the oral tradition into the divergent practices of animal fantasy, time-slip travel, science fiction, and related permutations. Judith Saltman gives an overview of Canadian fantasy to date.

How is fantasy defined? Fantasy is marked by a sense of otherness. It is touched by the magical, by a reality different from that of daily life. According to J.R.R. Tolkien in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," fantasy involves the creation of a "Secondary World," a world with "the inner consistency of reality," which commands belief and possesses an essential "quality of strangeness and wonder." This total world — or secondary reality — is created by imagination, by what Tolkien calls the elvish craft of enchantment:

> Enchantment produces a Secondary World into which both designer and spectator can enter, to the satisfaction of their senses while they are inside; but in its purity it is artistic in desire and purpose.[1]

Fantasy may create a total world. It may involve time travel or flight to distant planets. It may explore the thresholds between worlds in the passage between congruent universes or the intrusion of the supernatural into the everyday world. It may reinterpret myth and legend or anthropomorphize animal society. But it always speaks with the universal voice of imagination, dream, and archetype, and its magic is imbued with meaning within a basic code of laws.

Fantasy is an expansive and fluid genre, including many categories. These can be seen clearly in the history of fantasy writing for children. Fantasy is, first of all, rooted in the oral tradition. In the nineteenth century, the works of the Grimm brothers and Hans Christian Andersen generated a renewed enthusiasm for the folktale and the fairy tale. The first fantasies written for children — including John Ruskin's seminal *King of the Golden River* (1851) — owe their style and content to the fairy tale. The great Victorian fantasists, such as Charles Kingsley in *The Water-Babies* (1863), Lewis Carroll in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), and George MacDonald in *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), shared a seemingly limitless imaginative energy in their varied ap-

proaches to fantasy. They created extraordinarily diverse stories marked by sophisticated wit and parody, high morality and subtle didacticism, enchantment, and the revelation of universal truths.

At the turn of the century, *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) by Kenneth Grahame provided a new form of animal fantasy, which combined elements of the traditional beast fable with social satire. This same form is evident in such present-day works as Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (1972).

Stories of real or toy animals interacting with people as in A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), Hugh Lofting's *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* (1920), and E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952) are more closely related to the light domestic fantasy that became the major form of children's fantasy from the turn of the century to the mid-twentieth century. The primarily comic tradition of domestic or light fantasy is marked by elaborate inventiveness, wit, and playful adventure. Beginning with Frank Baum (*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, 1900) and E. Nesbit (*Five Children and It*, 1902), domestic fantasy found adherents in J.M. Barrie (*Peter Pan*, produced as a play in 1904 and retold as a story and published in 1911 under the title *Peter and Wendy*), P.L. Travers (*Mary Poppins*, 1934), Astrid Lindgren (*Pippi Longstocking*, first published in English in 1950), Mary Norton (*The Borrowers*, 1952), and the controversial but popular modern cautionary tale, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) by Roald Dahl.

The fantasy of time travel also evolved early in this century, from the early "time slip" works of E. Nesbit to Alison Uttley's evocative *A Traveller in Time* (1939). Recent fantasists such as William Mayne, Philippa Pearce, L.M. Boston, Penelope Lively, and Ruth Park explore the shifting dimensions of time.

Influenced by J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-56), a new form of fantasy developed after the Second World War. This epic or high fantasy uses material from myth, legend, romance, and hero tale. Since the 1960s, writers such as Alan Garner in Britain, and Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper and Ursula Le Guin in the United States, have created memorable works in this category.

Science fiction written specifically for children (sometimes called science-fiction fantasy) is a latecomer to children's fantasy. The dividing line between fantasy and science fiction is blurred, but children's writers of the second half of the twentieth century have created speculative fiction that involves elements of science and technology or that is set in the future or on another planet. These writers are generally considered science-fiction writers. Madeleine L'Engle (*A Wrinkle in Time*, 1962), John Christopher (the White Mountains trilogy, 1967-68), and Peter Dickinson (the Changes trilogy, 1968-70) are practitioners in this field.

In Canada, the fantasy genre had particular difficulties in development. The imaginative core of early Canadian children's literature, from the 1850s to the mid-twentieth century, has been rooted in a geographical awareness, in the impact of the land. The dangers, challenges, and awesome beauty of the Canadian wilderness and its wildlife provided a dramatic backdrop and rich

source of colourful incident for what became the standard genres of Canadian children's literature: the Robinsonnade survival saga, the historical romance of exploration and the furtrade, the traditional outdoor adventure story, the wild-animal biography, and the retellings of aboriginal legends.

It was difficult for fantasy to take root in this literary landscape. Except for indigenous native legends, there is no substantial tradition in Canada of the magical and fabulous, no imaginative storehouse of themes and motifs drawn from folklore and mythology, no national epic romances such as the Arthurian legend. First Nations myth and legend belong to the native peoples; the power of these tales is difficult to translate into fantasy. This has hindered the growth of local fantasists, although there were notable exceptions in the early years, including Catherine Anthony Clark, whose magical stories, such as the 1950 *Golden Pine Cone*, incorporate elements of the awesome British Columbia landscape and Indian spiritualism. But Clark could not create a convincing new world based on native folklore, such as that found in the aboriginal *The Ice is Coming* trilogy (1977-1981) by Australian Patricia Wrightson. A more classical fantasist is Ruth Nichols. In the late 1960s, her traditional *A Walk Out of the World* integrated Canadian settings with the quest structure and the symbolic conflict between good and evil found in the epic high fantasies of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

The 1970s and 1980s were a turning point for the writing and publishing of Canadian children's books. There was a vigorous exploration of new genres and themes; this included an invigoration of fantasy from picture books to fiction. Many picture book authors wrote in the fantasy vein.

In the classic animal-fantasy picture-book genre, Tim Wynne-Jones and Maryann Kovalski offered memorable works. Wynne-Jones's Zoom books, beginning with *Zoom at Sea*, are quest fantasies, rooted in reality by the restrained firmness of Ken Nutt's down-to-earth, matter-of-fact pencil drawings in which both the ordinary and supernatural images are rendered with meticulous detail. The story of a cat's quest for the sea and the miracle of an expanding ocean inside a hidden room is told as sparely and smoothly as a folk tale.

The gentle humour in the Zoom books is similar to that in Kovalski's *Brenda and Edward*, a tender tale of animal friendship. The anthropomorphized dog protagonists love and lose each other, only to be reunited in their old age. The sketchy, pastel-toned images in gouache, coloured pencil, and pen and ink add to the story's blend of sentiment and humour.

The king of the pre-school fantasy genre is Robert Munsch, whose exaggerated, comic satires and child-power fantasies are the flip side of the serious view of the emotional life of children. Munsch's tall tales, such as *Mortimer*, show brave and plucky kids having absurd adventures and thwarting authority figures. The colloquial, fast-paced tales are theatrical in their rich sound patterns and repetition. Along with Michael Martchenko's exuberant, cartoon style watercolour and pencil sketches, the text and art have very little Canadian sensibility; they belong to the universal world of the urban North American every child.

Although the picture-book fantasies were increasing, true fantasy was not a strength in Canadian writing for children, with few practitioners until the late 1970s and 1980s, when a handful of fantasists attempted an exploration of the genre. None, however, successfully integrated Canadian landscape or native myth with themes of classic fantasy as Ruth Nichols and Catherine Anthony Clark had in the early years.

Perhaps the best known Canadian fantasy of this period is not one of high epic fantasy, but Mordecai Richler's *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, a light, comic fantasy with an energetically raw, comic-book appeal. Set in England, the narrative recounts the adventures of a young boy who dreams he is tossed into the dungeons of Slimer's Isle, a children's prison, for insulting an adult. A sly variation of the Victorian children's cautionary tale, the story is slapstick and exaggerated, possessing some of the bite that enlivens Richler's adult novels.

Although Canadian fantasy of the classic struggle between good and evil, set in fully realized other worlds, has rarely been successful, the time-travel or time-slip category set in Canada has shown much promise. The overpowering and alienating Canadian landscape and the lack of a magical folk tradition and localized heritage with ancient roots that did not belong to the First Nations oral tradition was detrimental to the development of epic fantasy, but beneficial to the growth of the time-travel genre. Perhaps this is because the only true elements of fantasy and magic in the time-travel genre are movement across time and the talisman or plot device that precipitates the travel through time and space. And, considering Canadian children's writers' predilection for historical fiction, it is natural that they would be comfortable with a genre in which the time travel leads into historical fiction and dramatizes the daily life and customs of a particular period. The evocative power of the Canadian landscape and the innate drama of historical sites are factors in many time-travel works. Setting often plays a crucial role. The child protagonists' sensitivity to the residual layers of time in a particular place may provide the emotional connection that links two eras and motivates the action.

Like many other time-travellers before her, Rose Larkin, in Janet Lunn's *The Root Cellar*, is lonely, disturbed, and confused by changes in her life and her emotional turmoil precipitates travel into another era, in which she becomes distanced from, and finally resolves, her inner conflict. The twelve-year-old American orphan cannot adjust to her new life with unknown Canadian relatives in a decrepit old Ontario farmhouse. Her estrangement leads her to wander through the old house's root cellar into an era as metaphorically divided as her own heart — the time of the American Civil War. She leaves her self-absorption on a path to maturity, beginning with a perilous journey through the grim horrors in the aftermath of war, and finally accepts her home in Ontario, her loyalties reconciled.

Another type of fantasy developed in Canadian children's writing in the late 1970s and 1980s — supernatural or psychological fantasy: a loose amalgam of magic realism and the supernatural, of ghost stories and psychological tales of

extrasensory perception and the occult. The most powerful work from the cluster of titles in this category is also the most realistic. Cora Taylor's *Julie* speaks with a voice of surface realism, depicting an ordinary world populated by real human beings living in a grounded prairie environment. The sense of "otherness" in Julie lies in the psychic gift of the child protagonist, whose growing extrasensory perception brings her alienation and grief. Taylor's prose is condensed and imagistic as the narrative follows Julie's growth in psychic powers from preschooler to ten-year-old.

The drama of an unusual child's perceptions and emotions — the trials of an outsider in society — is also a theme of Monica Hughes's Isis trilogy, the strongest work of science fiction for children written in Canada. Successful Canadian science fiction written for children is as rare as epic fantasy, despite the fact that such elemental Canadian themes as the struggle for survival and the adaptation to new, hostile environments are familiar motifs of speculative literature.

Monica Hughes is our only writer of international calibre in this area. Her writing has echoes of the Canadian immigrant and pioneer experience as she writes of space settlers, disoriented and adapting to a new and hostile planet, and of the experience of being a lonely outsider, a stranger to a land that is too primal and vast to admit a human presence. Beginning with *The Keeper of the Isis Light*, Hughes's trilogy follows the history of a community on an interstellar light-house planet in the twenty-first-and-second century over four generations from its promising beginnings to near-destruction. Teen-aged Olwen lives in isolation on the beautiful, alien planet of Isis with Guardian, her robot protector. Physically altered by Guardian, she is spurned by the new settlers from Earth for her different, reptilian appearance. The existential dilemma of the outsider and such moral issues as prejudice and hatred are extended in the sequels. In a direct, economical style, Hughes explores thought-provoking concepts in her prolific publications. She dramatizes the meeting of cultures and makes vividly concrete the invaluable, living heritage of a society's myth, ritual, and history.

In modest, but increasing numbers, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, Canadian authors and illustrators began exploring the genre of the literary fairy tale, which adapts the structural shape of the folktale with its patterned language and moral conflict while adding elements of psychological realism or playing with the very concept of the folktale. Michael Bedard has tried his hand at several original literary fairy tales, such as *The Lightning Bolt* with its Germanic dark forest and battle of wits. He has also retold the masterful literary fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen in *The Nightingale* and other tales. In all these works, Bedard's illustrator has been Regolo Ricci. In his rewriting of *The Nightingale*, Bedard evolves his interpretation of Andersen's lively diction, strong spoken language, and fluctuating tone of social satire and bitter-sweet lyricism. He definitely changes the text, removing passages of light absurdity, making this a more pensive, sombre story. The well-researched imagery of the elegant, ornate paintings provides a window into another time and place, while Ricci's adept-

ness at comic caricature prevents the pictures from being overly decorative.

In 1842 Robert Browning stamped his poetic interpretation on the German semi-factual legend, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," and ever since, the tale has been an odd amalgam — part historical fact, part folktale, and part literary fairy tale. Michèle Lemieux's version is somewhat bald in her retelling, but her sturdy oil paintings provide a view into medieval social history and community life, as did her earlier paintings for *A Gift from Saint Francis* and *Peter and the Wolf.* Her flattened perspective, architectural detail and domestic imagery of life in the miniature, toy-like towns are drawn from medieval manuscripts and early Renaissance genre paintings. But the scenes of mad-cap chaos created by the rats are full of movement and decidedly non-formalistic — more cinematically Marx brothers in origin than any medieval Book of Hours.

In this same period, Canadian fantasists experimented with fantasy, bringing it closer to the realm of the psychological and archetypal and blending elements of fantasy with other genres, such as historical fiction. Two historical novels exploring the immigrant's pain of adjustment to an unwelcoming new land, Janet Lunn's *Shadow in Hawthorne Bay* and Paul Yee's *Tales from Gold Mountain*, are given a particular resonance through the interjection of fantasy elements.

Janet Lunn, in *Shadow in Hawthorn Bay*, recreates the Upper Canada sturdy pioneer society of the early 1800s in detailed, nuance-filled observations of that practical, hard-working, often brutal existence. Scottish immigrant Mary brings with her strong beliefs in ghosts, fairy lore, and her vivid second-sight. As she finds a place for herself in this new world and battles with the spectre of her drowned Heathcliffian cousin, Mary's story slides between myth and social history. She will be a vessel through which ancient Celtic beliefs from the old country will become rooted in the new world. Lunn's writing is rich in characterization, strong in dialogue, and compelling in plot, but her greatest strength is the creation of a simultaneously dual vision of reality and fantasy.

Paul Yee does something very similar in *Tales from Gold Mountain: Stories of the Chinese in the New World*, his collection of short stories of immigrant experience. Like Lunn's use of ballad, myth, and faerie-lore, Yee blends historical fact and folklore motifs. With narrative energy and his considerable strengths in historical research, Yee recreates the daily hardships and emotional lives of the nineteenth-century Chinese immigrants to the Pacific Coast. The Chinese presence in the building of British Columbia, from the gold rush to the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, is described from the inside, with the emphasis on the stoic courage, fortitude, and spiritual strength that enabled the Chinese people to overcome adversity. The atmosphere of British Columbian frontier society is aptly conveyed in the hard-working characters and harsh settings that range from salmon canneries, gold fields, gambling halls, farms, and the rock faces of the CPR rail line. As in Janet Lunn's writing, an overwhelming sense of place and social detail recreates the milieu of a particular time and morés of a cultural group. Again, as in Lunn's romantic approach,

elements of surrealism and folklore are incorporated by Yee to build layers of resonating themes and to construct unusual plots predicated upon the structure and motifs of classic literary fairy tales. There are ghost stories, tales of high romance, comic farces, as well as sagas of quiet heroism and survival. The stylized illustrations by Simon Ng are darkly sombre or spryly satirical portraits, recalling in their dignity and power monumental mural painting.

The new fantasists of the last decade have also continued in the traditional time-travel genre and have attempted to sculpt a different shape from the matter of high, epic fantasy. Time-travel fantasy — stories in which the protagonists travel into the past from the present — is a mode that has attracted quite a number of Canadian writers. The usually adolescent protagonists are most often propelled into the past through their inner pain and find perspective and solace there. Most recent writers have been concerned with the social aspects of the past rather than with major events. An exception was Janet Lunn's stellar work from the early 1980s, now almost a classic — *The Root Cellar*, drawing as it does on the tragedy of the American civil war and the drama of the time. Quieter stories that take the protagonist back into social history demand a stronger fictional component, a reason or psychological need for the character to be in the past. Such works of the last decade as *A Handful of Time* by Kit Pearson and *Who is Frances Rain?* by Margaret Buffie demonstrate the blending of fantasy and social history with family history which becomes the motivator bringing the young person into the past. Shy Patricia, in *A Handful of Time*, is estranged from her mother. During her summer visit to the family cottage, she travels back in time through the talisman of an old pocket watch to become a witness to her mother's hardships as a young teenager. The fantasy is gentle and insightful, written with quiet restraint and compassion. These family-history fantasies of travelling into the childhood of parent or grandparent have a deep psychological power as the protagonist reaches an awareness of family secrets, and a revelation of how one generation is alive in another.

Margaret Buffie's *Who is Frances Rain?* follows this mode as the young teenager, unsettled by family transformations, discovers a missing piece of her family history. Travelling back in time as an observer, through the magic of a pair of old spectacles, Lizzie witnesses the family pain of three generations past, the suffering of her grandmother and great grandmother. Again, the act of seeing one's family through the perspective of time acts as a cleansing of vision and heart.

Pearson and Buffie's fantasies rend open the social fabric of the past to reveal the injustices and cruelties experienced by women. Julie Lawson and Kevin Major do something parallel in time-slip fantasies that cast light upon our inheritance of racism and prejudice from the past. In Lawson's *White Jade Tiger*, Jasmine, grieving at the loss of her mother and angry with her father, enters the world of British Columbia in the nineteenth century with its cruel bigotry and intolerance of the Chinese immigrants. Her experiences are both an adventure and a restoration of family identity.

Major's *Blood Red Ochre* is a darker book. It is an exploration of a Canadian historical tragedy — the disappearance from Newfoundland of the Beothuk tribe in the nineteenth century. Major builds a time-travel fantasy by layering two narrative voices which come together only at the novel's climax: a contemporary Newfoundland teenage boy; his alter-ego, a young Beothuk brave, trying to help his family survive; and another voice, that of a teenage girl who links the two young men and is based on the last surviving Beothuk. The slippery narrative layers incrementally build suspense and foreboding into the plot, which climaxes as they are brought together, in tragedy, loss, and despair. The strongest element is the horrific survival saga, conveyed by the young brave in beautiful, rhythmic language — first-person and present tense. This voice contrasts ironically with the contemporary David's colloquial expression of his everyday needs.

Major's awareness of his characters' collision in time, the uncertainty of history slippery with guilt and blood, are strong elements in the dark fantasies of Michael Bedard. *A Darker Magic* and its sequel, *Painted Devil*, belong to the genre of psychological fantasy with roots in stories of extra-sensory perception, horror, and the psychic literature of another, supernatural reality breaking into our known world through the activation of myth, history, or ritual. Alan Garner and Margaret Mahy are masters of this genre internationally. In Canada, Michael Bedard and Welwyn Wilton Katz are the only two fantasists to explore this territory seriously.

Bedard's dense, multilayered style and his ability to swing from humorous family realism to suspenseful foreboding are rare in Canadian fantasy writing, or, for that matter, in any genre. His evocative metaphors and energetic prose carry the reader over repetitive moments and cracks in the atmosphere. Bedard's novels of evil and mystery, despite their tangled plots, belong to the realm of philosophy and psychology. His world is as Manichean as Leon Garfield's or Susan Cooper's — one of ever-recurring battle between the light and the dark, God and the Devil. In both novels, the demonic theatre of magic and puppetry are stages for the Devil. The light to do battle against this dark is found in the hearts of ordinary teenagers and eccentric, elderly women and men.

Bedard's third novel, *Redwork*, uses the same combination — engaging, wholly realized teenage characters make contact with an elderly, eccentric outsider — a First World War veteran who is also an alchemist. Less sinister but just as atmospheric as the other novels, this is a human, not a supernatural, story, where evil is not the Devil outside, but the devil within — the darkness in the soul that leads to violence, and, ultimately, the horror of war. The book is time-travel fantasy in the sense that the teenage protagonist moves into dreams of the old man's experiences of trench warfare. The faith here is in a different kind of magic, not the eery black magic of Mephisto but the archetypal, ancient belief in alchemical transformation, a rebirth of the spiritual self out of death.

The psychic power of other dimensions is also attractive as the matter of

fantasy to Welwyn Wilton Katz. Her stories are also atmospheric and page turning, but they do not resonate as subtly as Bedard's. They are, rather, loud and symphonic, magnificent as clever conceits, but often overbearing or murky in tone. The ongoing battle of good and evil is writ large in such epic dramas as *Come Like Shadows*, rooted in witchcraft and Shakespeare, and *The Third Magic*, predicated on the Arthurian romance. Her touch in other, environmental works is lighter, more graceful, as in *Whalesinger*. At her best, the prolific Katz writes with originality and energy. In *Whalesinger*, the teenage girl has a remarkable, extrasensory bond of feeling and communication with the gray whale mother. Although layers of history, past and present murders, ecological concerns, and a love relationship between two emotionally wounded adolescents all weave together with reasonable success, the compelling images and moments of imaginative strength are those of Marty swimming with the whale. The audacity of Katz's imagination leads her to play with the Arthurian legend in *The Third Magic*, in which she creates a complex mythology of her own in the terrifying secondary reality of the world of Nwm. The use of Arthurian fantasy devices and talismans add an ancient underpinning to this attempt at high, epic fantasy.

Canada has seen few fantasists who have written epic fantasies in the classic sense. Ruth Nichols is now joined by Katz, O.R. Melling, and Sean Stewart who combine strands of myth and legend from the classic, secondary-reality motherload of British Arthurian and Celtic lore. As Katz immerses herself in Arthur, O.R. Melling, in her time-travel fantasies, plumbs the faerie lore of Ireland. All Melling's stories set in a richly realized, mythological past, come alive through the recreation of legend — ranging from the warrior Cuculann's tales of *The Druid's Tune*; the standing stones and Tuatha DeDanaan of *The Singing Stone*; and the faerie lore of *The Hunter's Moon*. Melling's skill improves with each book as the clutter of research and folklore allusion boils down in the cauldron of story to a fine broth. In *The Hunter's Moon*, an original note is sounded as the two worlds — the magical realm of Faerie (dangerous, seductive, and immortal) and the ordinary Ireland — exist side by side. In all her books, the rents and tears in the cloth between worlds easily open for Melling's adventurous and romantic young women. It is exciting to see them find their identities in relation to myth and dream. Katz and Melling chart the dreams of the unconscious; they touch on the epic and violent struggles of myth and the continuity of legend. They are both mappers of the dream.

Aside from tongue-in-cheek picture books, revisionist fantasy is usually written for an older audience. In *Nobody's Son*, Sean Stewart has created a fascinating cross-over, a young-adult fantasy with adult sensibility and complexity. His bleak world of secondary reality and fairy tale convention is evocative and sombre, ridden with quests, spells, ghosts, and generational betrayal. Fashioned with great care and artistry, Stewart's feudal-style world surpasses the attempts at high fantasy from previous Canadian writers for young

people. The unique writing style with its mix of rough, Middle English-modelled speech, courtly mannerisms, lyrical soliloquies, anachronistic colloquialisms, and sharp humour achieves an ironic tone, not in any sense a parody, but part homage to Tolkienesque epic fantasy and part deconstructionist in wit.

Like Stephen Sondheim's shadowy musical *Into the Woods* and Jon Scieszka's satirical picture book, *The Frog Prince, Continued*, which also play with fairy-tale endings, Stewart addresses the nature of heroism and explores what follows the "happily ever after" ending. In Stewart's world of dark, haunted souls and dangerous magic, the hero Shielder's Mark is a commoner, scarred by his father's abandonment, who seeks greatness and his identity by breaking the spell of the Ghostwood and wedding the princess. He does all this in the first chapter. The happily ever after they face together is a dangerous, shifting world of court politics, brutal magic, and painful human relationships.

Stewart balances irony and high fantasy as his self-reflective protagonist observes the disparity between his confusing, brutal life and the epic tales of heroism and romance. This interplay of irony, psychological realism, and fantasy is also found in Kevin Major's *Eating Between the Lines*. Major's refreshing, tongue-in-cheek voice here parodies the severe teenage angst marking his earlier young adult fiction, as he blends his protagonist's sharp, ironic viewpoint on contemporary teenage life with outrageous fantasy misadventures. In an episodic series of literary time-slips or "book-travelling," Jackson merges with characters in the novels and plays he is reading, projecting himself into *The Odyssey*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Quirky and profound, the reading-as-life experiences give solace and solutions to love sickness, parental problems and censorship attempts. This work is a lively, witty, and often poignant reflection on reading, literature, and the imaginative life as transformative of individuals and the social order.

These recent fantasists demonstrate an ability to work with ambitious and complex subjects. As in much of Canadian realism and historical fiction, the protagonists are older than in the past — sophisticated teenagers exploring personal and cultural identity against the backdrop of history or myth. The great, swirling epic fantasies may be, at times, too foggy with mysticism, but the best of Bedard, Katz, Stewart, and Melling gives us clear maps of the internal quests and dreams that stand for the imagination. The time travellers — Pearson, Buffie, Lawson, and Major — also work at charting maps of family and social history, rooted in place, in Canada.

Whether as universal metaphors or as specific images drawn from Canadian cultural heritage, Canadian fantasies mirror human life. The stories speak convincingly of spiritual quest and inner journey; of peril, loss, and recovery; and of the heroic apprenticeship of the young into the fullness of human life.

NOTES

1 J.R. Tolkien, "On fairy-stories," in *Tree and Leaf*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965, pp. 52-53.

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WELWYN WILTON KATZ
Out of the Dark

Review Articles and Reviews / Critiques et comptes rendus

THE SEARCH FOR A SHARED HOME

Out of the Dark. Welwyn Wilton Katz. Groundwood, 1995. 185 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-241-6.

In *Out of the Dark*, Welwyn Wilton Katz successfully continues to explore the main concerns of her fiction for young adults: the search for emotional wholeness of teens with problems, the pervasive influence of history and myth on the present, and the interpenetration of fantasy and reality as the way by which the "real-world" present and historical-mythic past interact. Through this interpenetration she also wrestles, again, with the question of who rightfully belongs to a place.

Thirteen-year-old Ben Elliott and his nine-year-old brother Keith have moved to Ship Cove, Newfoundland, with their author father Lorne, who had grown up there. Their mother, Frances, has been killed in a parking lot shooting in Florida, and Lorne has taken the boys "home." The problem is that Ship Cove is not home to Ben, and he resents the move as an imposition. The one thing that saves the situation for him is that across the bay from their house is L'Anse aux Meadows, the restored site of one of the Viking landfalls. Lorne and Frances had met one summer while working on her father's archeological dig at the site, and Ben has inherited his mother's love of things Viking. He knows *The Vinland Sagas* thoroughly, and since being little has "played Viking" by imagining himself to be Tor, a young shipbuilder who accompanies Karsefnie and Gudrid to settle Vinland.

In *Whalesinger* (1990), Katz develops the historical/tourist site marking Sir Francis Drake's harbour at Point Reyes, California, by having the past episode penetrate into the present story. Similarly, in *Out of the Dark* Katz details the restored Viking settlement and Ben's imaginary recreation of its inhabitants in order to have the Viking clash with native people (Skraelings) increasingly mirror, and eventually come to shape, Ben's encounter with kids of Ship Cove. The question Katz explores is whether the outside can plant a "home" in inhospitable territory. For Ben the territory is not only Newfoundland, but also the uncharted emotional ground he finds himself on after his mother is murdered. The title, *Out of the Dark*, comes from the story Frances tells Ben about the aftermath of the Norse Apocalypse, Ragnarok, where when everything is dead, "only then, out of the dark, will life begin again." The climax of the story occurs when Ben/Tor has to make a choice of whether to throw the Viking axe away or to bury it in the head of Ross Colbourne/Skraeling. In the actual saga it is the native chief who throws the iron axe into the lake, in a gesture of rejection of all

things European. The Vikings finally abandon Vinland, knowing they cannot win the land, and that they could never share it with the Skraelings. By adapting the saga to have Ben/Tor holding the axe, Katz enables the abandoning of it to be a gesture of acceptance, goodwill, and trust rather than rejection. It also allows the Skraelings/Ship Cove kids the opportunity to express the same. It enables the ground — the "home" — to be shared:

> Tor had gone away from here, but he, Ben, would stay. And this time, he would make Vinland work.

The search for a shared ground between Native and European was also central to Katz's *False Face* (1987) in which a mixed-race boy, Tom, and a white girl, Laney, tentatively enter a new, unstereotyped human territory while dealing with the havoc caused by Iroquois medicine masks of power which are irresponsibly possessed by Laney's mother. Upon the book's nomination for Trillium and Governor General's awards, Katz was charged with cultural appropriation by members of the Iroquois nation. Eight years later, by having Ben know he would "make Vinland work," Katz responds to those who accused her of treading where she has no business. The land is a shared home, and we must make it work. Katz's fiction is an impressive contribution to that task.

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THE ATLANTIC'S FUTURE

Out of Darkness. Ishmael Baksh. Jesperson, 1995. 144 pp. $12.95 paper. ISBN 0-921692-71-4.

Out of Darkness is a dystopian novel for young adults. The chaos and despair from which the characters eventually escape in this future society stem from the present social crisis in Newfoundland. Current world and Atlantic problems such as lack of employment, lack of morals, and economic stagnation have culminated in a society where young people face such realities as fierce competition for scholarships in a world where education is the only hope; social and racial intimidation by gangs; alcoholism; violence in the home; ecological disaster; date rape; poverty; and paranoia. All our fears have come true.

This is not, however, a cyberpunk or violent novel. It is a political and social commentary. The future is non-democratic. Governed by The Party, Newfoundlanders have no freedom of thought or of movement beyond designated living areas for workers, play areas such as Rec-zones, and the dreaded Out-zones where "the unemployed were collected along with the descendants of the Second Resettlement and the thousands who had returned jobless from other provinces" (9). The threat of the violent anarchy in the Out-zones is as close as we get to Gibson's *Bladerunner*. The hero lives in worker's housing in St. John's.

This, then, is a future totalitarian state with "Enforcers" in the schools, mass education by holograms and computers in the classroom, videophones in the homes, and Public Affairs propaganda on television. The police force are the Enforcers: "a zealous lot because the Agency got a cut of all the fines the courts collected and a fee every time someone was imprisoned" (115-116). Videophones are easily tapped by the Enforcers, and the Public Affairs program is a must to watch because "the laws and the regulations were always changing, always growing, and, to stay out of trouble, people had to know what the latest rules were" (43).

If these conditions resemble those of our current lives, that is because the novel predicts dangerous outcomes for present situations. Ironically, this causes a major flaw in the novel: the distinction between our present and that of the novel is not clear. The reader questions the credibility of the fictional world of the future circa 2050 when the schools, homes, and cities are so similar to those of 1995. The students still use lockers, see police in the school corridors, work part-time at the corner store, live in over-stressed two-working parent families, face bullying, and experience social and racial discrimination. There are malls to hang out in. The classrooms are overcrowded, the teachers are fearful and overworked, and the curriculum is "all science and mathematics and computers and technology" (11). Novels in the school are old, but there is still a library. Furthermore, "the university had shut down its graduate programs because so many PhDs roamed the streets with nothing to do" (17). As heart-wrenching as it is, it is all too familiar.

Our credulity is further stretched by the improbability of the situation: on the one hand, The Party requires considerable force to control people and to compel them to live miserable, inhuman lives, yet, on the other hand, when the central family of the story escapes to the uninhabited areas of Newfoundland, we are told that "the province can't do much with the tiny fleet of helicopters they've got, or the two or three boats they have patrolling the sea" (134). One also wonders what advantage it is to The Party to deceive and keep people in misery when the entire economic situation is so bad, yet "The Party lies to the people. It's not the way they say it is. The fish have come back. The forests have regenerated. The place is bursting with life" (135). The premise of the novel and its dystopian outlook would suggest that powerful, greedy Party members would return to plundering and raping such resources, yet they ignore them, leaving such areas to be (unknown to them) reinhabited by escapees.

There are, then, serious flaws in the novel, but the fundamental question asked by the author is one of major concern, especially for young adult readers. What can one person do when faced by a monolithic political system and a broken social structure? Ishmael Baksh tells young people that one thing we should not do is sit by and accept the demands of destructive and self-serving politicians, for, if we do, we slip deeper into despair and decay. The central character, Gerry, is compassionate and humane, he faces the bullies with courage and he helps those, like Ravindra, who, he believes, are weaker than himself. Gerry's father tries to criticize the system publicly and is ostracized, but is saved by the quiet

heroism of Tendulkar, the father of Ravindra, who is secretly organizing an underground escape system for those "who get into difficulties through no fault of their own" (134). The courage of such people makes them heroic and their moral values are to be admired.

Though the novel does not create a convincing fictional world of the future, it makes us face our concerns about current affairs. It would stimulate discussion of social and political issues.

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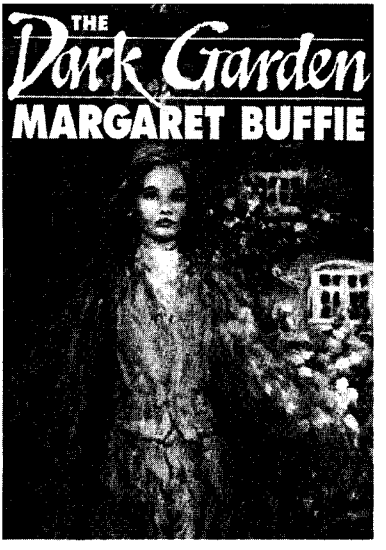
A GHOSTLY LOVE TRIANGLE

The Dark Garden. Margaret Buffie. Kids Can Press, 1995. 240 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-288-4.

When sixteen-year-old Thea arrives home from the hospital with amnesia, she is more than a little confused. Not only does she remember her house as it looked two generations earlier, she sees people who don't exist. She quickly becomes involved in the web of passion and violence which connects these apparitions.



In a spooky page-turner complete with an overgrown garden, a haunted churchyard, a kindly vicar and a next-door psychic, Margaret Buffie has once again written a book teenagers will love. Thea is an appealing protagonist, caught between resentment against her parents — who make her do all the housework while they focus on their careers — and a desire to take responsibility. The awfulness of her home-life makes Thea's obsession with the past even more understandable. Adolescents will sympathize with her moody defiance right up to the last page.

The story moves along briskly, with plenty of scary scenes and fascinating encounters. At times there seem to be more plot threads than can be comfortably handled in one novel. We follow Thea's recovery from amnesia, her adjustment to her difficult family, her connection

to the ghostly Susannah, an historical love triangle, the threat posed by Susannah's mentally-deranged father, Thea's budding romance with the psychic gardener next door, and a surprising climax with a plot twist.

The point of view shifts frequently from first person to third, and from Thea to the ghostly Susannah. These shifts build tension and reflect Thea's confusion over her own identity. They are also, occasionally, confusing.

At the climax of the story, a shocking crime leads to the revelation that one character has taken on the identity of another, and as the mystery is solved the ghosts are laid to rest. It requires an agile reader to keep up with the twists and turns of the plot. Thea's experiences are sometimes so subtly presented and so full of unanswered questions that the scenes become bewildering. However, a second reading of the book reveals that it has been masterfully plotted, with themes and scenes cleverly interwoven and perfectly timed. For example, Thea, who is a painter, frequently describes people in terms of colour. Her cat often appears when a ghostly encounter is imminent. References to gardening come back again and again. These details are carefully planned and are sustained throughout the story, giving it a sense of unity.

Readers will love Thea and will revel in her encounters with the supernatural. Fans of Buffie's previous books will not be disappointed in this one.

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GALLOWAY'S GRIM TALES

Truly Grim Tales. Priscilla Galloway. Lester Publishing, 1995. 132 pp. $12.95 paper. ISBN 1-895555-67-1.

Because they are endlessly fascinating and endlessly interpretable, the fairy tale "mill" never quits. Currently, two popular manifestations of the tales are James Gardner's *Politically Correct Bedtime Tales* and Jon Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales*. In the first instance, Gardner, in his adult book, is correct to the ridiculous, while in the latter children's book, Scieszka manipulates the tales textually and visually so that neither content, forms nor feelings are spared from his absurd imagination. His retellings include "The Princess and the Bowling Ball" and "Little Red Running Shorts." Also feminist retellings — from Angela Carter's serious work *The Bloody Chamber* to Babette Cole's frivolous and funny *Prince Cinders* — give us the tales in new shapes and in contexts. Priscilla Galloway's *Truly Grim Tales* contributes to this enterprise. Her tales, like Robin MacKinley's *Beauty*, are geared to the young adult reader.

I was immediately struck by *Truly Grim Tales*' cover's similarity to *The Stinky Cheese Man* (cover designed by Patrice Sheridan). The earthy tones, the

caricatures (in this instance an oversized wolf's mouth "hoods" *Little Red Riding Hood*), and the collage style are all reminiscent of Lane Smith's illustrations. Expecting the witty and clever language associated with Scieszka, I was surprised to read in the first few pages archaic language and convoluted syntax. The first sentence of the book begins, "My mother I never knew." Other examples include: "Early memory brings dinner served at night" and "... a child grows, begotten of my body." "It was not easy for me to get the information about her that I craved, but I had learned to dissemble well." I imagine Galloway inverts the sentence structure, uses the passive voice and eighteenth-century language to emulate the ambiance of, say, Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*. Galloway's inconsistency, however, makes the passages contrived and stilted. At its worst, Galloway's grammar is wrong and her syntax dreadful. For example, "I can come on no suggestion of present-day fact behind the stories."

In this first story, "The Name," Galloway conjoins several tales into one story — a technique she uses throughout the book. This story begins in an atmosphere which faintly resembles "Beauty and the Beast" and evolves into the tale of "Rumpelstiltskin." Galloway writes from Rumpelstiltskin's point of view, ending the story with his dilemma in the readers' hands. She credits her readers with the intelligence and imagination to decide. Puzzling through several tales in one story and wondering how they will develop is fun. But in order to fully enjoy the variations, these stories are dependent, I believe, like many current retellings, on prior knowledge of the tales. I would be interested to know how young readers who do not know Grimm's tales read these stories.

Collapsing tales into one story can be a strength, but the ordering of sentences and plot events in many of these stories is problematic. In "The Good Mother" Galloway writes: "One day one clam was open a little, hiding under a huge mat of green-brown seaweed. It snapped shut on the edge of Ruby's cape. Luckily Mum had scissors in her bag. Both of them together couldn't pull the crimson velvet loose." An edit would have eliminated the sentence about the scissors, which is awkward and unnecessary. The story is a mish-mash of conflicting settings and times. We're at the ocean one minute, and without notice, are post "Chem Wars" the next. Information is added seemingly willy-nilly, so that for several pages of this story, each paragraph begins with a thought unrelated to the ones which preceded it. In the midst of this confusion moments such as: "'Good child,' the voice almost purred" help to keep the reader connected to the fairy tale. Vivid observations such as: "Her feet slipped inside the loose rubber boots.

She could feel her socks bunching" also keep the reader "inside" the story.

A "Bed of Peas" is my favourite story. Not grim at all, it is, rather, a love story set in an exotic locale, with the mysterious "Hassan the slave." It moves beautifully into the story of "Rapunzel," and its ending shows restraint and respect for the reader. This story succeeds partly because it resists the awkward syntax of "The Name," and begins with the intriguing question: "What are the special properties of sand?"

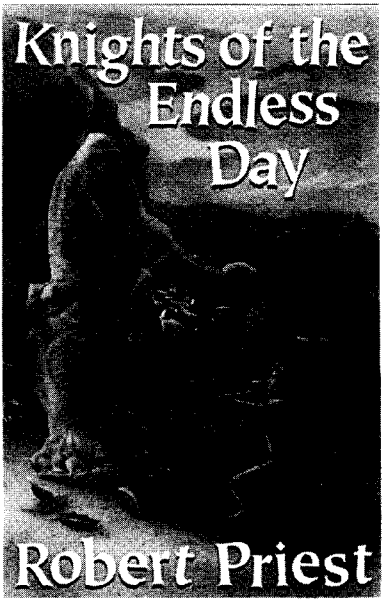
Hoping that Galloway demands the editing her stories deserve, I look forward to more work from her.

Cornelia Hoogland *is a poet whose publications include* The Wire-thin Bride *(Turnstone, 1990), and* Marrying the Animals *(Brick, 1995). She is a professor of English in the Education Faculty at the University of Western Ontario.*

KNIGHT OF THE ENDLESS NAPPIES

Knights of the Endless Day. Robert Priest. Illus. Vic Vaccaro. Viking/Penguin Canada, 1993. 166 pp. $16.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-84862-X.

The title's a dead give-away: language twists as much as plot does in Robert Priest's revamped quest/fairy tale. The best plot turns turn upon language; I love the witty and unexpected homophone that ensures the repugnant Cornelius Hoophus RubFubbis Fubson McDango El Fub dePhubson gets his "pun"-ishment. That Priest's language is often playful isn't surprising since he's a poet/songwriter; neither is the plot's energetic movement, given its dramatic origins (the book is a novelization of Priest's 1992 YPT production). Sometimes richness of language stands second to plot and playful absurdity; Priest's words can be music-laden and I miss such fullness when it's lacking. This reservation, however, is outweighed by more general delight.



At a time when scathingly parodic "politically correct" fairy tales top bestseller lists, Priest offers a politically *aware* fairy tale whose charm is similar to that which sustains Munsch's *Paper Bag Princess*. Overturning nearly every convention of the heroic quest (one knight is sent to retrieve a giant clove of garlic), yet maintaining the subversive fairy tale pattern of the commoner who proves himself "aristocratic," Priest raises questions of heroism, gender roles, pacificism and environmentalism. But he is never cloying or pedantic. Wearing a modified suit of armour,

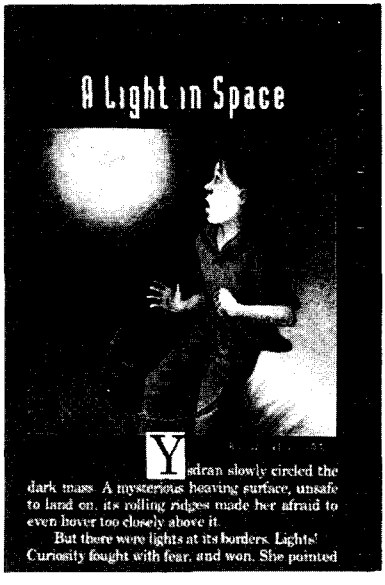
whose breastplate lacks only a "baby on board" sign, and carrying a spear slung with a diaper bag, Ogo learns there's glory in changing diapers. Sound improbable, unpalatable? In Priest's capable hands this story is both funny and moving.

Marnie Parsons *teaches at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario. Her reading of twentieth-century poetry in light of nonsense,* Touch Monkeys: Nonsense Strategies for Reading Twentieth-century Poetry, *was published by University of Toronto Press. She also writes on Louis Zukofsky, and frequently reviews children's books.*

HEAVY SUBJECTS IN ZERO GRAVITY

A Light in Space. Wendy Orr. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick Press, 1994. 188 pp. $14.95, $4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-368-4,1-55037-975-5.

Wendy Orr is an experienced author of juvenile fiction and she has tackled some tough themes in *A Light in Space*: the value of freedom; the importance of love, friendship and loyalty; the attraction of power; the capacity for evil in ordinary people. Whew! Sounds like a heavy, possibly depressing tale. But *A Light in Space* is neither of these things. While giving serious consideration to serious subjects, Orr manages to make her tale quite weightless. This is suitable for a story that alternates between twelve-year-old Andrew on earth and a treacherous journey in a mini-spaceship with a bad-tempered alien named Ysdran and her long-suffering Companion, Caneesh.



Andrew's problems and the dual settings of the story are made possible by the telepathic communication that links the two main characters. No need for translators or the clumsiness of "codes" as Ysdran refers to languages, "We're simply exchanging thought waves. It's not nearly as complicated" (47). That last point, however, is the heart of the issue. While different languages may make communication difficult, skipping that hurdle altogether certainly doesn't mean that understanding between vastly different beings is less complicated. Andrew thinks of his "cute and cartoony" (51) alien friend as a potential pet, a step up from Max, his dachshund, and much more exotic. Ysdran, on the other hand, has her own sinister plans, as she trains Andrew for his eventual role as her personal assistant and headslave.

Orr's style is breezy and relaxed. Her pre-teen characters have believable voices; moms and

dads are not type-cast as the enemy, nor are they super-parents. The earthling characters are just people with the coping mechanisms of the well-intentioned but often stumbling humans that they are. The bantering style of dialogue carries over to the spaceship where the relationship between Ysdran and Caneesh gives dimension to these alien beings.

The use of telepathy for much of the dialogue in the book presents Orr with a unique opportunity and challenge. Lacking the possibility of facial expression and tone, and the suitability of many words traditionally used to convey speech, she develops some striking metaphors. "Ysdran's confusion was like butterfly wings against his brain" (76). "'I can teach you lots of tricks,' [Ysdran] purred, and her mind rubbed his like a furry cat" (50). "... [A] warm wiggle passed from her to Caneesh and back again" (172). *A Light in Space* may have a nondescript title, but the story is captivating. And the ending? Well, individual readers will have to judge its plausibility.

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THE "GRANDFATHER PARADOX" IN FOUR YA TIME WARP NOVELS

Within a Painted Past. Hazel Hutchins. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick Press, 1994. 160 pp., $4.95 paper; $14.95 library binding. ISBN 1-55037-989-5; 1-55037-369-2. **Time Ghost**. Welwyn Wilton Katz. A Groundwood Book, Douglas & McIntyre, 1994. 172 pp., $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-216-5. **The Summer of the Hand**. Ishbel L. Moore. Roussan Publishers Inc., 1994. 135 pp., $6.95 paper. ISBN 2-921212-37-4. **Garth and the Mermaid**. Barbara Smucker. Penguin Books, 1994. 135 pp., $5.99 paper. ISBN 0-14-036168-5.

I think that at that time none of us quite believed in the Time Machine.
H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (1895)

The question of *belief* is central to the success of time travel (or, as they are variously called, time slip or time warp) novels. As with other forms of fantasy or science fiction, the reader must believe in what Tolkien called the "secondary" or created world, in this case the world of the past and/or future; but she must also be convinced that "travel" (or slippage) between the primary world, usually the world of the reader's present, and the secondary world is possible. As Paul J. Nahin points out in his fascinating and idiosyncratic book, *Time Machines: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics, and Science Fiction* (1993), any convincing time-travel novel must address what is known among time-travel aficionados as the "grandfather paradox." This classic change-the-past paradox "poses the question of what happens if an assassin goes back in time and murders his grandfather before his (the murderer's) own father is born? If his father is never born, then neither is the assassin and so how can he go back to murder his grandfather...!?"

Another way of putting this dilemma is this: how can an individual travel to the past without altering the conditions which have made her and her travel there possible? One of the most haunting explorations of this paradox can be found in Ray Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" (in *The Golden Apples of the Sun*). The story takes place in a world in which time-travel has become a form of tourism and in which big-game hunters travel to the past to bag now extinct animals, in this case a Tyrannosaurus rex. Time Safari, Inc. ensures the historical continuity of species and life-forms by identifying animals which would have died no more than two minutes after their arranged encounter with the big game hunter. It also insists that its clients remain on "the Path, laid by Time Safari for your use. It floats six inches above the earth. Doesn't touch so much as one grass blade, flower, or tree. It's an anti-gravity metal. Its purpose is to keep you from touching this world of the past in any way. Stay on the Path. Don't go off it. I repeat. *Don't go off*" (103). Naturally, the protagonist panics, runs off the path, returns to a 2055 which is utterly changed, and discovers — to his horror — a crushed butterfly embedded in the mud on his boot. Such are the consequences of playing with time.

Despite the centrality of the "grandfather paradox" to the persuasiveness of time-travel novels, only one of the four young-adult novels under review here acknowledges and addresses this central paradox. Not surprisingly, it is the most satisfying and intellectually coherent of the four. Welwyn Wilton Katz's *Time Ghost* is also the only one of the four in which the protagonists live in our future and travel *back* to our present, their past. *Time Ghost* describes a future in which overcrowding, pollution, and the destruction of natural environments have made it impossible for people to go outside, except in one of those "last bits of natural Earth" (11), the North Pole. Even the North Pole, however, is threatened by the Greysuits, corporate businessmen determined to drill for oil in the Arctic Ocean. The novel's main protagonist, eleven-year-old Sara, is an agoraphobe (the result of a life lived completely inside) who loves horses, though she has never seen a live one, and resents the environmental activism of her grandmother, former Supreme Court justice Gwyneth Green. Gwyneth, a member of Grassroots (a Greenpeace-like organization), takes Sara and three other children with her to the North Pole where she hopes to interrupt the Greysuits' oil-exploration ventures. It is at the North Pole that Sara commits the action which propels her into the past.

The novel is constructed around a series of parallels: Sara, who turns twelve during the trip to the North Pole, travels back in time to the summer in which Gwyneth turned twelve; just as Sara's moment in history represents a possible turning point for the environment (will the Greysuits be allowed to drill for oil?), so was her grandmother's twelfth birthday a turning point (she learns that her father has sold her beloved lakeside country home to a lumber mill). The notion of parallels — parallels which paradoxically *touch* or meet — is central to the narrative but also to the novel's theory of time travel. Sara's best friend's brother, Joshua, postulates that because "all the time zones in the world meet at the North Pole" (12), it is possible that "either there *is* no real time up there at all, or it's all times at once" (13). When Sara finds herself abruptly propelled

back to her grandmother's twelfth year, and into her grandmother's twelve-year-old body, she and her best friend Dani (who, unlike Sara, is bodiless in the past) must confront time-travel's grandfather (in this case, grandmother) paradox:

> Dani thought for a long moment. 'So maybe the only way you can really go back in time is if you *can't* do something while you're in the past that would change the whole course of history. But bodies are always doing something. So for us to come into the past, either we can't have a body at all — like me, or — '
>
> 'Or — like me — we have to be inside someone who actually lived in the past,' Sara finished for her. (80-81)

Significantly, the two girls are able to come to this conclusion in part because they are already familiar with the generic demands of the time travel story. Their conclusions are prompted by their dissatisfaction with Ray Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder," here unnamed: "'I saw a televid once,' [Dani] said slowly, 'where a man went back in time and stepped on a butterfly.... A whole bunch of things happened because of the butterfly dying, one thing causing the next, and each new thing getting bigger and more important, until finally the whole path of history changed, and the man's future no longer existed'. 'So where did he come from then?'" (80). Katz seems to be suggesting here that, perhaps from its origins in H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, the twentieth-century time travel story is about *consequences*; this makes it an almost perfect genre through which to explore environmental issues.

The other three novels under review here are less concerned with consequences than with making history come alive for their readers; in fact, one has a sense that these are essentially historical novels using the conventions of time travel as a way of seducing readers who might normally gravitate toward fantasy and science fiction. Barbara Smucker's *Garth and the Mermaid* is an excellent and persuasive account of daily life in late-medieval England. The novel is particularly strong in its evocation of what contemporary readers might feel as the claustrophobia of medieval life, the near impossibility of venturing outside of one's inherited occupation or rank and village. Although the time travel motif frames the novel, it hardly touches the central narrative and is certainly not essential to it. The main protagonist finds himself in medieval England — a subject he has been studying as part of a school project — when he is hit by a car; he finds himself back in late twentieth-century Guelph when the central tower of a great medieval cathedral crumbles and falls upon him. Although his experience of the hardships of medieval life reconciles him to the dourness of his soon-to-be step-father, the relationship between the two has never been fleshed out enough for the reader to have much interest in its resolution. At heart, *Garth and the Mermaid* is a fine historical novel wearing the borrowed, and quite unnecessary, feathers of the time-warp novel.

Although each of the remaining two novels has certain strengths, neither satisfactorily resolves, or even acknowledges, the grandfather paradox. Ishbel L. Moore's *The Summer of the Hand* has a slight edginess which lends it a kind of raw authenticity. Its central character, twelve-year-old Shona Drummond, is, with her immediate family, preparing to immigrate from Moodiesburn, Scotland

to Winnipeg, Canada in 1967. Together with her cousin Davey, she travels back in time to the Scotland of 1567 where they witness the horrific murder of two young people, Lady Rose Boyd and her brother Hamish, victims of the intrigue and political machinations surrounding the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots. This double time frame enables the contemporary young-adult reader to explore two pasts, 1967 and 1567. Moore's evocation of the trepidation created in a family on the brink of economically-motivated immigration is convincing, and she also does a nice job of delineating the tension between the pubescent Shona (in love with her first cousin) and her anxious mother. However, this novel is perhaps the least satisfactory in its treatment of time travel, primarily because its protagonists actually *change* a major historical event (with no discernible consequences). *The Summer of the Hand* crosses a number of genres — problem novel, ghost story, historical novel, time travel novel — and this affects its overall coherence.

I was prepared to love Hazel Hutchins' *Within a Painted Past*; it recreates a part of the country which is not much represented in Canadian children's literature (Alberta's Canmore and Banff), and the novel's vehicle for time travel is hugely evocative. Twelve-year-old Allison, visiting her aunt who runs a going-out-of-business tourist store in Banff, finds herself in the Canmore of 1898 after contemplating a painting in her room: "Small and self-contained, it showed a mountain cabin lost in the swirls of a winter snowstorm, and every morning the snow had floated out of the picture frame" (7); "The snow was so wonderfully real against her face, and there was more — the smell of it, and that special silence that settles on the world with the falling of it. It was then, softly at first, from the depth of that silence, that she heard a sound. Someone was crying. Small and woeful, the sound reached out to touch her; reached out, yet with such hopelessness that, almost against her will, Allison took a single step forward" (15). This device suggests the creative but also dangerous power of art to recreate other times and cultures, to draw us into its world. I was prepared to love this novel, and in the end I liked it. Its main weakness is a conclusion which is little prepared for in the body of the narrative and which, as with *The Summer of the Hand*, ignores the centrality of the grandfather paradox to the time travel genre.

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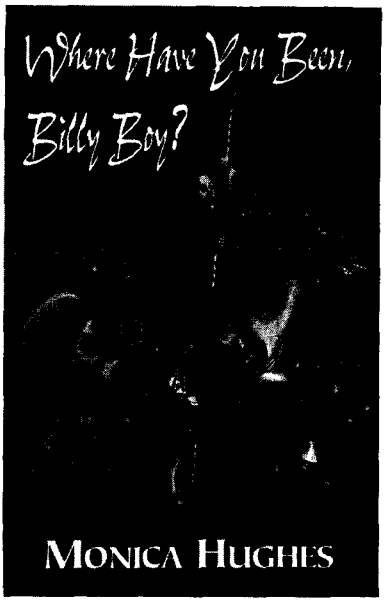
TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME WITH MONICA HUGHES

Where Have You Been, Billy Boy? Monica Hughes. HarperCollins, 1995. 136 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-224389-X.

In her latest novel Monica Hughes (to paraphrase *Star Trek*) "boldly goes where [she] has not gone before," and in so doing has produced a novel that will win her new fans as well as praise from educators. Instead of using the techniques of

science-fiction to construct a possible future as in so many of her best-known novels, she here compares past and present through a plot which depends upon fantasy. Her characters, however, are as realistic, problem-prone, daring and as easy to identify with as in her best previous works.



As the title suggests, eleven-year-old Billy is both the youngest and least socialized of her major characters: as we meet him in 1908, he is a parentless, shoeless street urchin who steals food, sleeps outdoors wherever he can find a hiding place, and is planning to steal the savings of a sick old man as soon as he gets the chance. (His situation echoes that in Hughes' earliest novel, *Gold-Fever Trail* [1974]. Billy's father was away prospecting for gold in the Klondike when his mother died; in both works, the children prefer striking out on their own to orphanages.)

Hughes transports Billy 85 years into the future (our present) via a ride on a high-speed carousel. Billy had seen old Johannes, the carousel operator, speed it up until both it and he simply disappeared, but then reappeared in the morning. Billy, of course, awaits his chance to do the same; Billy faints during the ride, and awakes to find himself (in an allusion to *The Wizard of Oz*?) on a farm overlooking "the corn country of Kansas." It is only here that Hughes introduces her more typical characters — fourteen-year-old Susan, her schoolmate George, her sixteen-year-old brother Jim — who are daring, cooperative and inventive enough to find the way to send Billy back to his own time.

Of particular interest to educators is Hughes' semi-comic but realistic descriptions of the mutual cultural shocks all the youngsters experience: Billy's '90s friends (and their families) are horrified as he (following practices of his day) "spits" on the floor, blows his nose into an embroidered dinner napkin, and the like; he is mystified by television, freezers, aeroplanes, and such. The moderns, of course, cannot understand why Billy is frantic to return to his own time where nothing awaits him but homeless misery, but he has come to realize that his love and concern for the sick Johannes he left behind is more important than our brave new world. His friends use '90s technology to return him to his own time (by rebuilding the carousel with a powerful new high speed engine). The novel ends with Billy's descendants visiting the teenagers who sent him back to his own time and who are responsible for restoring the carousel to its original condition.

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MYTH AND MAGIC IN MALL AND MOTEL

Ran Van : A Worthy Opponent. Diana Wieler. Douglas & McIntyre, Toronto/ Vancouver, 1995. 185 pp., $7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-219-X.

The middle member in a trilogy should hold its own: this one does. Its packaging looks familiarly disposable and raises certain expectations of the quick read. However, Diana Wieler is not enslaved by message-obsessed critical pedagogy: the reader has room to manoeuvre. In seeking recourse to timeless tales, she modifies and subverts them in order to reveal contemporary situations, characters, and problems. Familiar conventions are reworked for a new breed of reader.

Ran Van conforms to time-honoured patterns: he is orphaned through the murder/suicide of his parents and must look back beyond anger through traces, hints and guesses to what "they must have been like." The past intersects with the present: through faded photos and fragments of speech, Rhan reconstructs what he needs. While the absence of parents is a useful heuristic device, there remain certain limitations on the morbidity of the dead when they are known in the bones of a still-very-much-alive aunt and grandmother in the local motel. The wise old woman whose magic power is sometimes eclipsed is nonetheless the "fixed point in the turning world" of the questing young knight. And a thinly-disguised Beatrice called Kate functions in the story as both girlfriend and ideal. The book is aimed unabashedly at young males. The women — Gran, Zoe, Kate — are forceful enough characters, yet their main function in the novel is to further the journey of the unlikely, bespectacled hero. One need only check out the mall to see who's playing.

The parallelism in the novel's characterization and structure invites the reader to play intertextual games with other novels, TV shows, or films. For example, on Gemini Planet, the video universe which plays in point and counterpoint with Rhan's everyday world, the forces for good and evil are identical twins and, as always, penetrating beneath appearance to reality is complex and tricky. And Ashtar and Rumpelstiltskin — myth and fairy tale — are essential for communication when the Iceman finally cometh and observes from the depths of his isolation: "Well, you know, the gods are always setting up tests. And you don't screw with destiny." Ran Van counters, "You always have a choice" ... "We're not just bits of light ... It's got to be more than that." This romance sticks to the conventions of its own genre, challenging the bleak determinism of much popular literature written for the young adult market. Rhan's life need not proceed inexorably to murder and suicide: he has a choice. And, of course, as the publishers make certain we know, the whole tale is not yet told.

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LE RETOUR DE NOTDOG

Faut-il croire à la magie? Sylvie Desrosiers. Illus. Daniel Sylvestre. Montréal, La courte échelle, 1993. 96 pp. 7,95$ broché. ISBN 2-89021-201-7.

Les jeunes lecteurs retrouveront avec délice le chien Notdog et les trois "inséparables" — Agnès, "la petite rousse qui porte des broches", Jocelyne, "la jolie brune aux cheveux bouclés" et John, "l'Anglais blond aux lunettes rondes" (13-14) — dans ce nouveau livre de la série Notdog, publiée dans la collection "Roman Jeunesse". Dans *Faut-il croire à la magie?* les trois détectives privés de l'agence Notdog élucident un nouveau mystère aidé du fameux chien-détective Notdog.

Si le jeune lecteur ne saisit pas d'emblée l'allusion intertextuelle du titre du premier chapitre, "Où vas-tu, petit chaperon jaune?", la vignette en noir et blanc qui suit immédiatement le titre montre "le chien le plus laid du village", habillé en "Petit Chaperon rouge-jaune", en train de courir à travers la forêt portant un panier. "Ce n'est pas vers sa grand-mère qu'il s'en va, car en vrai chien, Notdog ne reconnaîtrait même pas sa propre mère", explique le narrateur avec humour (9). Ainsi s'ouvre cette histoire cocasse où, du début à la fin, le mystère se mêle au comique. Où Notdog va-t-il si tard la nuit? Pourquoi ce chien fidèle ose-t-il défier sa maîtresse Jocelyne? Quel est ce parfum mystérieux qu'il suit irrésistiblement à travers la forêt?

D'autres mystères, plus inquiétants, ne tardent pas à venir s'ajouter à celui de la fugue nocturne de Notdog, dans une atmosphère carnavalesque (c'est le Festival du blé d'Inde dans le village). Un drôle de client sollicite l'aide des inséparables. Il s'agit du motard local, Bob Les Oreilles Bigras, qui prétend que sa moto lui a été volée par un homme "invisible". Peu après, en mangeant des hotdogs avec Notdog (le narrateur précise que le chien mange un hotdog "tout nu" car il n'aime pas les condiments), Agnès et Jocelyne apprennent, chez Steve La Patate, qu'on a volé à celui-ci sa Mustang 1979. L'homme invisible ne tarde pas à frapper une troisième fois, volant à Maurice Turbine, le mécanicien du garage Joe Auto, "Moteur pour les intimes", son pick-up (33). Mais Agnès, toujours la sceptique, la rationnelle, déclare: "Avant que je croie à l'homme invisible, il va mouiller des petites cuillères!" (31). A peine a-t-elle achevé sa phrase qu'une petite cuillère passe devant elle, suspendue en l'air. Dans le chapitre précédent, intitulé précisément "Il va pleuvoir, les fourchettes volent bas!", John a fait la connaissance de Rajiv, un Indien qui fait voler des ustensiles au moyen de la télékinésie, et maintenant il présente son nouvel ami aux deux autres membres de l'agence Notdog.

A son insu, John chauffe quand il suggère que ces vols sans voleurs, auxquels Agnès cherche une explication logique, sont peut-être le fait de quelqu'un qui

a, comme Rajiv, "un pouvoir de télévision" (34). Pauvre John! Non seulement son costume de blé d'Inde le rend ridicule, mais on est toujours en train de corriger ses fautes de français. Et quand il parle trop bas pour être entendu d'un autre personnage, le narrateur anonyme prend la relève: "Il a dit cela si bas que Rajiv ne peut pas le corriger et lui dire 'coudre, John, pas *coudrer*'" (48).

Le texte est parsemé d'indices, mais ce n'est que tout à fait à la fin, comme dans tout roman policier digne de ce nom, que le mystère s'éclaircit. C'est le trousseau de clés que Notdog rapporte en cadeau à sa maîtresse, pour l'amadouer après sa fugue, qui met les détectives sur la bonne piste. Mais Notdog refuse catégoriquement de bouger tant qu'il a la laisse au cou, car "qui a déjà vu un grand détective au bout d'une lanière de cuir niaiseuse" (57)? Le narrateur semble se plaire à adopter le point de vue de Notdog! De "super mauvaise humeur" tout à l'heure (29), au bout d'une laisse sur laquelle il lui arrive de manifester son mépris en faisant pipi, Notdog est maintenant de "très bonne humeur", car il mène le jeu et Notdog "adore mener" (60).

L'Indien Rajiv, qui préférerait être un détective qu'une attraction de festival, est en fait le complice malgré lui de son oncle dans cette affaire. Rajiv, qui s'appelle en réalité Jean-Pierre et qui est Montréalais, non pas Indien, est, selon son oncle Claude, "le plus grand voleur de clés du monde" (65). (Cela explique le sens de la petite vignette au début du chapitre VII, intitulé "A beau mentir celui qui vient d'où, exactement?", où le personnage au long nez ne peut être que Pinocchio-Rajiv-Jean-Pierre). Liés dans la roulotte des voleurs, les inséparables ne semblent avoir d'autre espoir que Notdog. En fait, c'est un couteau volant envoyé par Rajiv qui les sauve. "Rajiv choisit sa destinée". C'était le titre du chapitre précédent, dans lequel Rajiv avait dénoncé les inséparables à son oncle, laissant croire au lecteur que c'était la destinée de voleur que le garçon avait choisie.

Le récit réserve encore une surprise cependant, puisque dans le chapitre "Avez-vous déjà vu un chien rougir?" le lecteur apprend le sens des mystérieuses fugues de Notdog. C'est chez la tireuse de cartes qui avait lu le sort de Rajiv très tôt dans le récit — et qui porte ironiquement le nom de Mme Descartes, un nom qui conviendrait certes mieux à la rationnelle Agnès — que les inséparables retrouvent Notdog, auprès de Réglisse, la chienne de Mme Descartes, et entouré de ses six "enfants", dont deux sont Notdog tout craché. Sans doute "faut-il croire à la magie", car Rajiv-Jean-Pierre est adopté par les inséparables et adopte à son tour un des "fils" de Notdog dans le dernier chapitre intitulé: "Tu seras un chien, mon fils".

Les dessins de Daniel Sylvestre, illustrateur de la série Zunik, complètent d'une façon très heureuse le texte de cette aventure drolatique et fantaisiste qui enchantera tous les jeunes amateurs de romans policiers.

Sandra L. Beckett *est professeur à l'Université Brock, où elle enseigne la littérature de jeunesse et la littérature française du vingtième siècle. Elle est vice-présidente de la Société internationale de recherche en littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse. Ses publications portent sur la littérature française contemporaine.*

D'Est en Ouest. Pierre Mathieu. Saint-Boniface (Manitoba), Éditions des Plaines, 1992. 75 pp. 8.95$ broché. ISBN 2-921353-02-4.

Auteur de nombreux ouvrages pour enfants tels que *Le Bouclier magique* (1990) et *Le Zoo enchanté* (1992), Pierre Mathieu nous présente cette fois-ci un beau recueil de douze récits folkloriques. Il en inclut un de toutes les provinces du Canada, et, de plus, y ajoute une légende amérindienne et un conte inuit. Comme l'indique le titre, le lecteur commence à l'Est, à Terre-Neuve, et continue progressivement vers l'Ouest en s'arrêtant dans chaque province pour découvrir une légende ou un conte qui proviennent de la région. Les légendes nous apprennent, par exemple, l'origine du cap Diamant à Québec ou celle des îles de la baie Georgienne. Les contes, comme "Les poules aux oeufs de pierre", nous amusent par leurs éléments fantastiques et leurs aventures rocambolesques. La couleur locale canadienne ajoute à "l'authenticité" des récits

À titre d'exemple, dans "Le dieu qui parle", l'auteur décrit la naissance de quelques particularités du paysage manitobain. D'après la légende, les premiers habitants de la région vivent près d'un étang. Un jour, ces simples gens voient dans l'eau le visage éblouissant d'une déesse aux cheveux dorés. Un sourire de ce visage transforme en blé d'or l'herbe verte qui entoure l'étang. Puisque ces primitifs n'ont pas de langage, ils ne peuvent pas remercier leur bienfaitrice, ce qui trouble tant un jeune dieu qu'il se met à pleurer. Ses larmes tombent dans l'étang qui continue à croître jusqu'à ce qu'il forme une immense mer intérieure, le présent lac Manitoba. Le créateur du lac ouvre la bouche et des sons mélodieux en sortent. Cette musique a un effet magique sur les habitants; leur langue se délient et ils commencent à parler! Le sage de la tribu demande au dieu son nom. Celui-ci répond: "Mon nom est Manitoba, le dieu qui parle." Le sage proclame alors:

> En souvenir de toi, ce pays se nommera Manitoba; et, pour souligner la bonté de la déesse aux cheveux d'or qui nous a visités, dorénavant, nous cultiverons le blé doré pour nourrir le monde entier. (40)

En tant que lecteur adulte, j'aurais aimé en savoir davantage sur les sources de ces récits. S'agit-il des légendes traditionnelles des peuples autochtones? Si oui, de quelles tribus? Très probablement, les enfants ne se soucieront pas de tels détails, mais liront les histoires pour leur intérêt même. Les belles illustrations de Michel LeBlanc, qui captent bien l'atmosphère et l'essence des histoires, contribueront au plaisir des lecteurs. Je dirais que ce recueil est destiné aux élèves du deuxième cycle de l'école élémentaire.

Glen Campbell *est professeur titulaire de français à l'Université de Calgary.*

LA FÊTE EST À L'EAU!

La fête est à l'eau. Jean-Pierre Guillet. Illus. Gilles Tibo. Contes écologiques. Editions Michel Quintin, 1993. 31 pp. 12,95$ relié. ISBN 2-89435-020-1.

Le présent conte écologique, *La fête est à l'eau*, réussira à charmer le jeune lecteur sensible à la protection de l'environnement.

Sous les traits d'une princesse, l'héroïne du conte entraîne le lecteur dans l'univers d'un site enchanteur. Près d'un lac entouré de roseaux, de plantes aquatiques et d'arbres, la princesse Clémentine s'amuse théâtralement avec les animaux qui s'y prêtent à cet endroit: grenouilles, raton-laveur, hérisson ... L'auteur, Jean-Pierre Guillet, s'allie avec l'illustrateur Gilles Tibo pour marquer à leur manière le bonheur de la princesse. Une première illustration du lac et son emplacement est remarquablement bien exploitée.

Grâce à son imagination, Clémentine se permet de vivre de multiples aventures avec les animaux. Ces aventures ne sont pas révélées au lecteur. Ce dernier aurait sans doute aimé les connaître mais l'auteur a un but précis en présentant un second personnage qui viendra modifier les habitudes de Clémentine. Ce personnage est le père de Clémentine. Il décide un jour, sous les conseils d'un jardinier, de transformer la rive du lac pour y aménager une statue. Ce nouvel aménagement comporte des changements écologiques et provoque un malaise entre Clémentine et son père. Clémentine cherche par différents moyens de modifier le projet pour protéger et conserver le site et les animaux. L'auteur mise sur l'importance de la nature et soutient Clémentine qui assume par son rôle, la responsabilité d'apporter des informations à son père et en même temps au lecteur: "L'engrais s'écoule dans le lac ... C'est peut-être ça qui fait pousser les algues". (p.12)

Mais Clémentine ne réussit pas à convaincre son père, le roi. Les travaux s'effectuent au désespoir de la petite fille qui voit les animaux relégués dans des cages près du château. En poursuivant la lecture du conte, le lecteur assistera avec intérêt à une série de situations drôles. Pendant la réception donnée en l'honneur de la nouvelle statue, le roi reçoit de nombreux invités. Clémentine qui s'ennuie veut libérer tous les animaux. Cependant elle ne prévoit pas les conséquences de son geste. L'auteur et l'illustrateur ne manquent pas d'imagination pour décrire ou représenter le désordre créé par la libération des animaux. Pour le lecteur, cette partie du conte est source de plaisir. Par une énumération de faits cocasses, le lecteur s'enrichit d'informations qui agrémentent le contexte. Le texte est bien écrit. Il possède un vocabulaire riche et coloré: "Le martin-pêcheur plonge dans les assiettes des convives pour chiper du poisson...La taupe creuse un tunnel dans la rembourrure d'un fauteuil..." (pp.19-20)

Toutefois, certains mots ou expressions ne permettent pas à tous les lecteurs de saisir le contexte: amphibiens — dégouline — entrave — gobe — démantibule ... Près d'une dizaine de mots occasionnent l'enrichissement du vocabulaire du lecteur. À titre de suggestion, un lexique de mots aurait avantagé le jeune lecteur dans sa compréhension du texte. C'est aussi une mesure importante pour le motiver à poursuivre sa lecture et l'aider à saisir le message.

Ce conte a la possibilité d'être un outil précieux pour les intervenants du milieu scolaire. A caractère informatif, *La fête à l'eau* apporte plusieurs notions écologiques qui expliquent l'interaction du monde animal avec le monde végétal. Ces différentes notions peuvent servir à compléter un tableau écologique. Ce tableau permettrait au lecteur de recueillir des informations dans le texte pour mieux situer les événements du conte. Au niveau primaire, cette activité peut s'avérer intéressante en groupant les élèves pour cette recherche.

"LA FÊTE EST A L'EAU"	
Description du site	*Description du nouveau site*
- Petit lac	- Grande terrasse
- Roseaux et broussailles	- Nouvelles fleurs
- Présence d'animaux	- Absences d'animaux
- Arbres et arbustes	- Statue représentant le roi
Etc.	*Etc.*

Pour les lecteurs plus avancés, la recherche peut se compléter en identifiant les conséquences de nouvel emplacement: le roi ne peut plus aller à la pêche— les algues poussent dans le lac — les animaux ne possèdent plus leur habitat — etc.

L'objectif de Jean-Pierre Guillet est de faire comprendre au lecteur comment il est essentiel de préserver la nature pour éviter un désastre écologique. Il réussit à émettre son message sur une petite échelle. Comme Clémentine qui vit son drame dans la cour du château, le lecteur peut lui aussi réagir et jouer un rôle protecteur dans son propre milieu.

C'est avec la merveilleuse complicité des images de Gilles Tibo, illustrateur renommé pour ses albums "Simon" que le conte, *La fête est à l'eau*, se révèle intéressant à lire. Et si la détermination de Clémentine avait touché les jeunes lecteurs, il faudrait créer un personnage susceptible de réveiller les adultes qui ont parfois des idées bizarres pour entraver la nature. La nature pourrait bien un jour faire leur procès ...

Lucie Paré *est enseignante à l'école primaire.*

Les Voix truquées. Sonia Sarfati. Illus. Caroline Merola. Montréal, La courte échelle, 1993. 93 pp. 7,95$ broché. ISBN 2-89021-187-8

Soazig Taillefer-Lefrançois et Simon sont les héros de cette histoire un peu simplette qui se veut des allures d'intrigue policière. Engagés tous les deux comme doublures françaises d'un film américain dont les principaux acteurs sont les enfants d'une colonie de vacances, les deux enfants (il est assez difficile d'imaginer leur âge faute d'indications textuelles, une dizaine d'années sans doute) vont se heurter à toutes sortes d'embûches pour empêcher leur patron David de remplir son contrat de doublage dans les délais voulus. C'est non sans mal qu'ils parviennent à convaincre les adultes qui leur veulent du bien de la réalité d'un complot. Finalement, en tendant un piège entièrement cousu de fil blanc, ils prendront le coupable, d'ailleurs le seul personnage "noir"

de toute cette affaire. ... il faudrait vraiment avoir à faire à un jeune lecteur inattentif pour ne pas découvrir très vite son identité.

Bien que les noms d'Agatha Christie, d'Hercule Poirot et de Sherlock Holmes soient mentionnés à plusieurs reprises au cours de l'histoire, *Les Voix truquées* n'a rien d'un roman policier et je doute fort que les lecteurs soient tenus en haleine par une intrigue fort mince et dont la solution leur est téléphonée dès le commencement du livre.

On regrette surtout le manque de substance des deux personnages principaux. Non content de n'avoir pas la moindre idée de leur apparence physique ni de leur âge, le lecteur n'a que très peu d'éléments pour se faire une idée de leur personnalité ou de leur psychologie. On aimerait en savoir plus sur eux, ou en tout cas pouvoir en imaginer plus à leur sujet. C'est par essence ce qui manque à ce petit roman: la capacité de pouvoir jouer du pouvoir de l'imagination, l'art d'impliquer le jeune lecteur dans l'intrigue et de s'identifier aux héros.

À un autre niveau, on trouve dans cette histoire un plaidoyer discret mais réel et sincère pour la cause des enfants souvent manipulés par les adultes. Il est certain qu'en utilisant de vrais enfants comme doublures de rôles d'enfants, et non des adultes imitant des voix enfantines, les acteurs professionnels, si souvent à la recherche désespérée d'un travail, quel qu'il soit, perdent des chances de se trouver un gagne-pain. Après tout, être doublure, c'est un boulot, peu prestigieux certes, mais remunérateur tout de même. L'auteur semble prendre position en faveur des enfants et les défendre.

Les illustrations en noir et blanc de Caroline Merola reprennent images pour mots le texte de Sonia Sarfati sans rien ajouter ni retrancher à l'histoire. Un petit livre vite lu, ... vite oublié, qui pourra, on l'espère, occuper les jeunes le temps d'une après-midi de pluie.

Claire L. Malarte-Feldman *a écrit de nombreux articles sur la littérature pour la jeunesse.*

UN APPEL À LA TOLÉRANCE

Sans signature. William Bell, trad. Paule Daveluy. Saint Laurent, Éditions Pierre Tisseyre, 1993. 258 pp. 8,95$ broché. ISBN 2-89051-508-7.

Dans ce récit des plus émouvants, William Bell campe à merveille le personnage principal, un jeune adolescent "Mèche", et en tissant la trame de l'histoire, l'auteur a dépeint de façon très adroite les préoccupations viscérales des jeunes à l'heure actuelle.

Une fois les caractéristiques générales du personnage posées, le lecteur est graduellement initié à la culture adolescente par les images dont le texte est truffé. On retrouve des détails sur les préférences vestimentaires,

le langage particulier et les habitudes de chacun. Tout le récit est émaillé de "flash-back", souvenirs qui reviennent à l'esprit et auxquels on donne libre cours sans jamais les refouler. L'auteur recrée la fulgurance de ces images engrangées en mémoire en comparant la remise en conscience à un mécanisme de technologie moderne, mentionnant le rayon laser. Cet appel à la technologie de pointe place encore mieux l'histoire dans l'actualité et ce, de façon originale. À ce niveau, le contraste avec les problèmes de l'adolescent qui sont des problèmes de l'humanité de toujours, se trouvent par là même accentués. Le tout se tient admirablement bien aux délices des lecteurs.

En suivant le fil du récit, on se trouve au sein de conflits et de résolutions de conflits. Les thèmes principaux qui soutiennent le récit se rapportent aux problèmes d'alphabétisation, d'alcoolisme, de préférence sexuelle, d'ordre sportif et de réussite scolaire. Il est également question de familles séparées, d'amitié et d'affection entre races différentes et d'une critique du système scolaire.

On est d'abord témoin d'une fugue de l'adolescent causée par la nostalgie produite par l'absence du père, appuyée tout au long du récit, d'une part, par le leitmotiv du copeau de cèdre, symbole d'une certaine virilité par l'odeur et les aspérités, mais aussi d'espoir. D'autre part, l'auteur crée un certain suspense qui cause également une certaine aliénation au jeune, en rappelant toutes les cartes de ce père absent, venues d'un peu partout, sur lesquelles il n'y avait qu'un tampon avec son nom, jamais écrit à la main.

On est ensuite plongé dans un conflit des générations et on patauge entre des niveaux socioculturels différents. L'auteur dénonce par là la rigidité, le manque de chaleur humaine que certains justifient par le biais des convenances sociales traditionnelles. On est surpris par l'amour parental qui va jusqu'à l'altruisme et en même temps on s'embrouille dans l'opposition des goûts. On ressent finalement la force d'une amitié rudement mise à l'épreuve mais qui reprend le dessus.

En gros, il s'agit de l'histoire d'un adolescent qui passe par une crise d'identité, qui affirme de plus en plus son caractère et finit par assumer ses responsabilités comme un adulte grâce à la bienveillance de son entourage. En prenant quelques décisions moins heureuses, il mérite d'être réprimandé, et, finalement, par un acte un peu fougueux, il montre qu'il a mûri. Ses essais de se prendre en charge aboutissent.

Dans le texte, l'utilisation de caractères gras pour les passages sous le titre *Reprise* qui est répété, produit un effet des plus heureux. La langue et les images propres à la culture adolescente dont le texte est truffé, étoffent le tout de moments poétiques ça et là. Le message de William Bell est un appel à la tolérance et ceci aux niveaux interpersonnel et interculturel.

La coloration canadienne du récit nous pousse à recommander d'en faire une publication mondiale, vu l'habileté avec laquelle l'auteur s'y est pris.

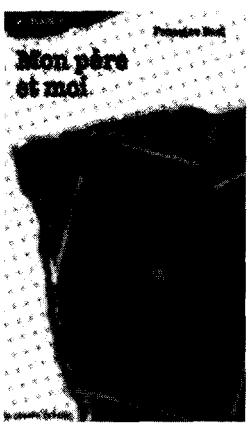
La traduction enfin est remarquable. Certaines tournures familières viennent tout à fait à propos, certains canadianismes sont de bon aloi bien qu'ils requièrent un dictionnaire de français canadien, certains anglicismes, bien que gênants,

peuvent néanmoins rendre compte de la langue en usage au Canada, une langue en développement.

Marie Myers *enseigne à la faculté d'éducation de l'Université Queen's à Kingston et s'intéresse de près à la littérature de jeunesse du Québec et de la France.*

MON PÈRE ET MOI OU "PEUT-ÊTRE QUE CE QU'ON IMAGINE EST TRÈS PRÈS DE LA RÉALITÉ"

Mon père et moi, Francine Ruel, Montréal, Les éditions de la courte échelle, 1993. 157 pp. 7,95$ broché. ISBN 2-89021-192-4.



Mon père et moi est un roman-jeunesse d'un grand charme. C'est l'histoire d'une jeune fille de 14 ans, Colline Kimmel dont les parents sont divorcés. Colline, qui habite avec sa mère, souffre de l'absence de son père. Le père est un photographe professionnel qui semble trop occupé pour voir Colline souvent. C'est ainsi que son père n'est pas venu assister à la pièce de théâtre dans laquelle Colline jouait pour la première fois. Colline en est profondément déçue: elle s'enferme dans sa chambre, elle pleure, elle est en colère, et puis elle se met à rêver. Tout ceci constitue le prologue; son rêve, une histoire imaginée, constitue les onze chapitres du roman. Le rêve de Colline est l'histoire d'un séjour chez son père, séjour pendant lequel Colline apprend à se servir d'un appareil photographique, à prendre de bonnes photos, à les développer; c'est aussi l'histoire de la tentative de Colline de se rapprocher de son père. Au bout de ces onze chapitres de rêve éveillé, dans l'épilogue, nous revenons à la réalité de la situation du prologue, mais la Colline de l'épilogue n'est pas la même que celle du prologue; elle a su imaginer un futur différent du passé qu'elle connaît, et c'est à partir de la possibilité de ce futur entrevu qu'elle agit dans le présent. Sa vision, nouvellement acquise à travers le rêve, permet à Colline de transcender peur et tristesse, d'agir au lieu de subir, et de produire des miracles au lieu de réagir aux circonstances. Ainsi, dans l'épilogue, Colline, dans une tentative à la fois vulnérable et courageuse d'établir des liens avec son père, lui dit: " J'ai besoin de toi. Je n'ai pas peur, mais je veux que mon père me tienne la main".

Si, comme le titre l'indique, *Mon père et moi* est avant tout l'histoire d'une quête de l'autre, c'est aussi celle d'une jeune fille, émotive, intense et lucide, qui, à peine sortie de l'enfance, cherche à se connaître: "[...] c'est que je me cherche tellement que c'est la seule façon que j'ai trouvée pour savoir qui je suis vraiment. Je me dis qu'à force de me regarder, je vais peut-être finir par savoir qui je suis". *Mon père et moi*, c'est non seulement l'histoire de l'apprentissage de la photographie mais avant tout celle de l'initiation à une vision qui pénètre

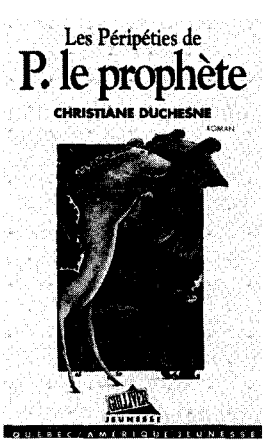
au-delà des apparences, d'une vision nouvelle et surprenante.

Le récit est, sans aucun doute, d'une grande richesse et la structure unifiante du roman en assure la cohérence. Le prologue et l'épilogue, intitulés, servent de cadre à onze chapitres numérotés et intitulés. Alors que le prologue et l'épilogue fonctionnent en focalisation zéro à la troisième personne (avec des relais en focalisation interne), les onze chapitres sont à la première personne: Colline en tant que narrateur intradiégétique raconte son "rêve", dans lequel elle est l'actrice principale. Une telle technique narrative appelle la participation affective du lecteur qui vit l'histoire imaginée de l'intérieur, tout en lui gardant, par la position initiale en focalisation zéro, une certaine distance critique. Toutefois, la puissance de la fiction est telle que bien qu'on nous explique dans le prologue que l'histoire qui suit est imaginée, cette mise à nu du procédé ne nous empêche guère d'être par moments complètement pris par l'histoire, et d'oublier qu'il s'agit d'un rêve. Donc, si le roman établit une séparation claire entre le monde de la réalité fictive (prologue et épilogue) et celui du rêve fictif (chapitres 1-11), il opère aussi résolument une transgression de cette frontière. Le rêve reprend des éléments de la réalité tout en les transformant, et la réalité puise dans le rêve. Cette fusion du rêve et du réel est tout particulièrement évidente dans l'épilogue; c'est que l'épilogue relie avec brio les fils de l'intrigue, constitue une explication et un accomplissement. L'épilogue manifeste en la complétant le sens de toute la construction. Colline commence à y entreprendre "[...] ce qu'elle n'avait osé faire qu'en rêve". Le rapprochement, la tendresse et l'intimité tant désirés avec son père, sont en train de se produire miraculeusement. Et nous sommes amenés à nous demander avec Colline: "Mais qui sait après tout, peut-être que ce qu'on imagine est très près de la réalité".

Irène Oore *est professeure au Département de français à l'Université Dalhousie à Halifax. Elle se spécialise en littérature canadienne-française.*

DE LA DRÔLERIE IRRÉSISTIBLE À LA DÉCOUVERTE D'UN CONTEUR

Les Péripéties de P. le prophète. Christiane Duchesne. Montréal, Québec/Amérique, 1994 (collection Gulliver jeunesse). 154 pp. 7,95$ broché. ISBN 2-89037-677-X.



Pendant douze chapitres, Christiane Duchesne nous entraîne dans les aventures loufoques, absurdes et débridées de P. le prophète. Ce roman, dédié à Chalvin, a d'abord été créé pour les Coups de théâtre, puis pour la radio de Radio-Canada et diffusé sur les ondes de Radio-Canada. On retrouve parmi les personnages, l'irrésistible général Jonas qui commande une intrépide et bruyante cavalerie dont la principale mission est de ramener P. le prophète

pour qu'il puisse retrouver la bonne en chef de Pokov, Marie-Ursula dont ce dernier est amoureux.

Les Péripéties de P. le prophète ne sont pas sans rappeler par le ton et les réparties à la fois le père Ubu, *Alice au pays des merveilles* et *Le Petit Prince*. L'univers décrit est tout autant sonore que visuel, olfactif que symbolique. Les personnages interagissent avec tendresse et rudesse, s'implorent, s'engueulent et s'amourachent. On finit par entendre ces lourdes gouttes qui tombent des voûtes et ces mulots qui galopent à gauche et à droite. On sent les chevaux qui piaffent et qui pataugent dans les marais et l'on voit les centaines de palétuviers aux grandes racines arquées au-dessus de l'eau. Ce roman est un véritable festin pour l'imagination, car à la suite de la cavalerie, nous traversons des contrées inconnues, bigarrées, peuplées d'êtres bizarres et fantastiques. Nous entendons la voix satanique de la reine des mers qui traverse les noirceurs et déroute Marie-Ursula.

Les réparties de Jonas, de Marie-Ursula et de Prokov amusent, tant leur naïveté surprend et déconcerte. Ils agissent comme des enfants bien qu'ils aient des corps d'adultes et qu'ils occupent des fonctions politiques prestigieuses. C'est dans cet écart perçu et montré que surgit l'hilarité, l'inattendu, le surprenant, l'inédit. En fait, Christiane Duchesne nous entraîne à un rythme époustouflant, d'une scène sublime à une scène sordide, de lieux décorés avec splendeur et richesse en des lieux couverts d'êtres visqueux et dégoûtants. C'est ce mélange si joyeusement dosé de formules alchimiques, de réparties débridées et de sensations désagréables qui fait incontestablement le succès de cette pièce de théâtre, devenue roman-radio, puis roman, et dont certaines scènes nous hantent longuement tant elles vibrent d'odeurs suspectes et de personnages étranges.

Pour ceux et celles qui en douteraient, Christiane Duchesne a une feuille de route impressionnante. En guise de rappel, mentionnons que l'auteure a été récipiendaire à deux reprises du Prix du gouverneur général dans la catégorie jeunesse. D'abord, pour *La Vraie Histoire du chien de Clara Vic* (1990), puis deux ans plus tard, pour *Victor* (1992). Elle s'est vu décerner à deux reprises également le Prix Christie dont le tout dernier pour *La 42e Soeur de Bébert*. De plus, l'auteure a obtenu le Prix Alvine Bélisle en 1990 également pour *La Vraie histoire du chien de Clara Vic*.

Destins. Marc Laberge. Illus. Frédéric Eibner. Montréal, Québec/Amérique, 1994. 108 pp. ISBN 2-89037-672-9.

Laberge est un conteur qui dessine des souris qui libèrent les hommes. Il conte des histoires tragiques, émouvantes, troublantes. Il raconte des histoires qu'on lui a racontées quand il était petit. Il en crée également devant nous qui le lisons. Il fait surgir des mots qui crient, des mots qui disent la mort et la vie. Comme il raconte par écrit des histoires entendues, il rend son récit plus crédible en introduisant de nombreuses traces d'oralité, en précisant bien que c'est ainsi qu'on racontait jadis les choses. C'est ainsi qu'on peut lire au détour des phrases et des réparties: "Ca a l'air de rien" (p. 22), "une cenne noire" (p. 28), "toé" (p. 29),

"brailler" (p. 31), et j'en passe. Voilà pour la partie "contage".

Pour la partie destins, le lectorat a droit à des fatalités hors du commun. Des histoires personnelles rarement entendues qui ont eu lieu, il y a peu, sur le territoire québécois, dans la vie d'une mère éplorée, au fond des bois ou un samedi entre un fils et son père. Ces histoires racontées par une voix narrative qui a participé d'assez près aux événements décrits comme l'atteste l'énoncé suivant: "Si j'ai pu vous raconter cette histoire, c'est que Zaphat, c'était mon oncle!)" (p. 38), accroissent l'authenticité du propos et créent un effet dramatique inattendu. Les événements sont localisés (une plage, une fonderie, Saint-Maturin) et situés dans le temps (dans les années trente), question d'ancrer ces destins (un enfant, des fermiers), de chair et de sang.

L'originalité de ce livre réside plus dans la découverte d'un conteur que dans les contes qui nous sont ici offerts. Ces récits plairont sans doute aux préados et aux jeunes ados masculins qui cherchent tant à savoir si nous les adultes avons vraiment été jeunes et enfants, et si nous avons finalement cheminé dans des sentiers cognitifs et affectifs semblables aux leurs. Ce livre de contes les rassurera un peu sur notre passé rural et ouvrier, et peut-être même sur les adultes qui les entourent. Par contre, les personnages féminins sont si peu présents comme si l'histoire s'était faite sans elles ou encore à leur insu, que le lectorat féminin n'y trouvera guère son compte. Peut-être l'auteur est-il déjà en train de fomenter d'autres destins ... au féminin. Ceux qui enseignent aux jeunes trouveront également pour leur creuse dent littéraire un objet de connivence scolaire, un nouveau lieu de partage de destins, écrit au quotidien.

Suzanne Pouliot *enseigne à la faculté d'éducation de l'Université de Sherbrooke et a écrit trois ouvrages et de nombreux articles sur la littérature de jeunesse.*

TRANSCENDING TIME IN *VINCENT AND ME*

Vincent and Me. Super Ecran/ La Societé Radio-Canada, 1991. 91 minutes, colour. Written and directed by Michael Rubbo.

Summer art school in Montreal leads to adventure in Europe when a young art student (Jo) naively sketches the portrait of con-man, Bruno Winkler, in a style similar to one of Vincent van Gogh's portraits. Winkler spots the resemblance immediately and commissions another drawing from the girl. This he passes off as an early, newly-discovered van Gogh. In an effort to recover her drawing, Jo travels to Amsterdam where she uncovers Winkler's further involvement in art theft and forgery.

Although at one level *Vincent and Me* is a simple Walt Disney-style *whodunit*, with all that entails, including heart-warming morals such as, "be true to yourself" and stock characters such as the suavely evil spy and the zany, yet adorable grandmother, at a deeper level, it is an exploration of time. Transitions from Vincent in nineteenth-century Arles to intrigue in twentieth-century Montreal record the intersection of temporal and eternal, contrast the living man with his historical persona, and suggest that time is not neatly divided into before and after, but that past, present and future co-exist.

At the centre of this tale of greed and ambition is the image of the pure artist. Unnoticed and unrewarded, Vincent paints, filling canvasses which will change perception and fuel forgery rings a century later. Art transcends time.

On the narrative level, present and past meet in the life of Josephine. It is the strength of her mystical identification with van Gogh that launches and finally resolves the events of the plot. When it seems impossible that Jo will ever be able to prove the drawing is hers, a departure from the film's realism into fantasy enables her to travel backwards in time to meet her mentor face to face, solve her problem, and revise history's view of the artist. He is released from despair and madness and transformed into a breathing, laughing man. A human life is more than the sum of its parts and imagination bridges the centuries.

Fragments of Vincent also survive in the consciousness of the living. In the documentary footage which frames the film, one-hundred-year old Mme. Calment describes what she remembers of van Gogh from her encounters with him in her father's store. Documentary and fantasy collide with humorous results when Jo challenges Mme. Calment's view of the artist.

In *Vincent and Me* narrative structure, fantasy and documentary combine to suggest that time is circular and simultaneous rather than linear and sequential. Art, memory, and the transcendent powers of the imagination unite past, present, and future.

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MISSING GOLD IN MUPPET TREASURE ISLAND

Muppet Treasure Island. By Jerry Juhl, Jim Hart, and Kirk Thatcher. Dir. Brian Henson. Produced by Henson and Martin G. Baker. Jim Henson Productions / Walt Disney, 1996.

We all enjoy playing these characters in classical literature. And, of course, it's a very good story.
(Kermit the Frog on the set of *Muppet Treasure Island)*

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and successful movie versions in 1934, 1950, 1972, and 1990 have thrilled generations with Jim Hawkins' life-and-death pirate adventure. Unfortunately, *Muppet Treasure Island* alternately abandons and sanitizes Stevenson's classic. Having lost the novel's treasure map (namely, strong characters and highspirited adventure), the film runs aground on the shoals of cheap gags and superficial morality. One of the film's singing pirates would "like to get [his] hands on whoever wrote this script;" so too might Stevenson.

Shot in Britain, the film's sets and scenery — the inn, the *Hispaniola*, the island — are spectacular. The opening song, combining human pirates with singing Muppet skulls, and the battle scenes, are fun. But musical theatre clichés and half-baked humour undermine the story's suspense and drama. Anachronisms, aimed mainly at adults, prove tiresome: Blind Pew is "visually challenged;" Billy Bones has a Henry Kissinger book on diplomacy. The film answers the novel's literal embarrassment of riches with rats on water skis and the Swedish chef. Stuck as ship's figureheads, the Muppets' grumpy old men conclude: "It could be worse — we could be stuck in the audience."

It didn't have to be this way. Scottish comic Billy Connolly's Billy Bones is perfect — his drunken violence and paranoia immediately expose the story's complex brew of good and evil. Tim Curry's Long John Silver is charmingly diabolical, even if stilted song business makes him wooden (in more than his bad leg). Curry becomes mawkish, though, when faced with Kevin Bishop's saccharine Jim. Too innocent, too uncomplicated, too constantly smiling, too soprano, it is not surprising that Blind Pew mistakes Jim for a "pretty little girl."

This antiseptic Jim kills nobody. In fact, after Billy Bones' demise, nobody seems to die in the Disney universe. In one of the film's frequent attempts at self-reflexive humour (adult "in jokes" at worst, limp distractions at best), Rizzo the Rat explains why: "[T]his is supposed to be a kids' movie!" While Stevenson only had to come up with pirates who don't curse, the 1996 filmmakers feel compelled to posit violence that doesn't hurt: Gonzo is stretched on the rack, but he likes it, now that he's "taller." In its closure, the film is bowdlerized by the film industry's archaic logic of compensating moral values. While in the novel, Jim and readers feel both complicity and relief when Silver escapes the gallows to wander free, in the film, Silver must pay for his evil deeds by losing his treasure and by being condemned to spend the rest of his days exiled on an island listening to a rock statue's bad jokes.

by his rich, halfwit son (Fozzie Bear); Silver's parrot Polly by a lobster of the same name; and mad Ben Gunn by Benjamina (Miss Piggy) who gets her treasure by sleeping around with Flint, Silver, and Captain Smollett (Kermit the Frog) when she's not busy being Treasure Island's resident love goddess, Boom Sha-Ka-La-Ka-La. While the novel intentionally ignores women, the film seems to hate them: Muppet Piggy and Jim's human innkeeper-guardian (Jennifer Saunders) are both porkers, comic only in their obesity, vulgarity, and ability to beat up Muppets and men. The love interest between Piggy and Kermit seems simply out of place: "We saved the pig and the frog," observes one grumpy old Muppet. "Well, it was too late to save the movie," concludes the other.

Peter Cumming, *children's author and playwright, is a PhD candidate at the University of Western Ontario. He has been a teaching assistant in Children's Literature and in American Film.*

BOOKS REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE / LIVRES RECENSÉS DANS CE NUMÉRO

ANNOUNCEMENTS / ANNONCES

The 8th Annual Canadian Jewish Book Awards were presented on June 5, 1996. The awards are co-sponsored by The Jewish Book Awards Committee at the Bathurst Jewish Centre, the Koffler Centre of the Arts, the Holocaust Remembrance Committee of the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem. The Rachel Bessin Memorial Award for Writing for Young People was presented to Walter Buchignani for *Tell No One Who You Are* (Tundra Books). Gary Clement received the Louis Lockshin Memorial Award for Children's Literature for *Just Stay Put* (Groundwood Books), Eric Koch received the Yad Vashem Prize for Holocaust Writing for *Hilmar and Odette* (McClelland & Stewart) and Eva Brewster received the 1996 Biography-Memoir Prize for *Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness* (NeWest Press).

Winners of the 7th annual Mr. Christie Awards for the best Canadian children's books have been announced. In the seven years and under category the winners were Pierrette Dubé and Yayo for *Au lit, princesse Émilie* (Edition Raton Laveur) and Nan Gregory and Ron Lightburn for *How Smudge*

Came (Red Deer College Press). In the eight to eleven years category winners were Christiane Duchesne for *La Bergère de chevaux* (Québec/Amérique jeunesse) and Mordecai Richler and Norman Eyolfson for *Jacob Two-Two's First Spy Case* (McClelland & Stewart). The twelve years and over category was won by Jean Lemieux for *Le trésor de Brion* (Québec/Amérique jeunesse) and Joan Clark for *The Dream Carvers* (Penguin Books).

The Canadian Authors Association has presented the 1996 Vicky Metcalf Short Story Award to Bernice Friesen for "The Seasons are Horses," the title story from the collection *The Seasons are Horses* (Thistledown Press), edited by Susan Musgrave who received the Vicky Metcalf Editor's Award.

The Children's Books History Society (British Branch of the Friends of the Osborne and Lillian H. Smith Collections) in liaison with the Library Association has presented the Harvey Darton Award (1994-95) "for a distinguished contribution to the history of English children's literature" to Marina Warner for *From the Beast to the Blonde* (London: Chatto & Windus).

The Canadian Children's Book Centre has announced that the following books have been short-listed for the 1996 Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People: *A Time to Choose*, Martha Attema (Orca Books, 1995); *Rebellion: A Story of Upper Canada*, Marianne Brandis (Porcupine's Quill, 1996); *Trapped by Coal*, Constance Horne (Vancouver Educational P, 1994); *Amy's Promise*, Bernice Thurman Hunter (Scholastic Canada, 1995); *The Secret Wish of Nannerl Mozart*, Barbara K. Nickel (Second Story P, 1996); *The Secret of Sentinel Rock*, Judith Silverthorne (Coteau Books, 1996); *A Place Not Home*, Eva Wiseman (Stoddart, 1996).

A *CCL* Index has been completed and it is expected that it will be on the Web in the future. It will be updated on an ongoing basis by the University of Guelph library. *CCL*'s Web address is http://www.uoguelph.ca/englit/ccl/.

Rea Wilmshurst: A Scholar with a Passion

We are very sorry to announce the death of Rea Wilmshurst, in March, 1996, in Toronto. Professionally, Rea worked on major editorial projects at the University of Toronto, but in her own time, she was a private scholar with a passion for the works of Lucy Maud Montgomery. She compiled a massive bibliography of Montgomery's published poems and short stories (some 500 of each), and this work was published in *Lucy Maud Montgomery: A Preliminary Bibliography*, by Russell, Russell, and Wilmshurst, by the University of Waterloo Library in 1986. Actual copies of these stories already existed, and are held in Archives in Prince Edward Island and at the University of Guelph, but there was no record of the time and place of their original publication. Rea tracked them down in the original magazines held at the Library of Congress and other archives. In the process, she located some stories and poems by Montgomery that did not exist in Montgomery's own scrapbooks and financial record books. From 1988 onward, Rea published some eight volumes of Montgomery's short stories. Rea was most recently cited in the last issue of *CCL* (#81), in the article by Susan Drain entitled "Telling and Retelling: L.M. Montgomery's Storied Lives and Living Stories." Rea was extremely well-read, with an excellent memory, and another project she had worked on for years was that of compiling a list of all the literary allusions in Montgomery's books. Rea's many other enthusiasms included professional ballet, and she will be sadly missed by practitioners in that field as much as in Montgomery scholarship.