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Erratum

In issue 88 we mistakenly identified this person as Bonnie Ryan-Fisher.

It is actually Cora Taylor.

Dans le numéro 88, nous avons présenté cette personne sous le nom de Bonnie Ryan-Fisher.

En réalité, il s'agit de Cora Taylor.

This is Bonnie Ryan-Fisher.

Our apologies.

Voici Bonnie Ryan-Fisher.

Avec toutes nos excuses.

Editorial: Consuming Entertainment

My father was always suspicious of children's "entertainment." He thought it would cost him money. And about the television and film variety, he was mostly right. My siblings and I wanted not only to *see* the latest kids' movie, but also to get the tie-in lunchbox, the doll, the cool pencil case. It was in this way that we earned my father's disdain: "You're a consumer," he'd scoff. A consumer.

The metaphor of consumption, thoughtless ingestion, even gorging is common in discussions of children's mass-produced entertainment. At one obvious level, it implies that the entry-point for children's entertainment isn't primarily through their brains. And since we are at a point in our history when most of our culture's stories are told by global media conglomerates with something to sell rather than by parents, teachers, spiritual leaders, or community elders who might have something to *tell*, we should be concerned that the entertainment many children are exposed to constitutes them as consumers rather than creators of culture.

On another level, the metaphor of consumption suggests not the mindless pleasure of being told what to buy and who to be but something more crucial about children's entertainment: its visceral quality. As Jeanette Lynes points out in her interview with Sheree Fitch, one cannot underestimate the addictive pleasure of twisting words round one's tongue and of bouncing to ecstatic rhythms. Further, Anne Alton, in her article on the Calgary International Children's Festival, discusses how the most successful children's performers make their songs and dances interactive, calling on every child to sing and swing their bodies. In this kind of entertainment, the child's body is a stronghold of health and creativity, not the hypnotized agent of Disney Inc. which sings and dances a *Mulan* melody all the way to Wal-Mart and McDonald's.

The aim of this special issue of *CCL* is to look more carefully at how children are constituted in and through popular entertainment and popular discourse. To that end, our articles examine some of the most influential entertainments of recent years, from mainstream, corporate-dominated television programs such as *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, through the more grassroots and publicly-interested theatre and performance of the Calgary Children's Festival, to the powerful and popular storybooks of Sheree Fitch and Paulette Bourgeois. All of our contributors ask us to look again and harder at what makes something popular (Wild on Franklin), what makes something inspiring (Lynes on Fitch); what makes one entertainer a monumental bore and another a modern pied piper (Alton); and at what makes us so sure that children are powerless before the influence of The Power Rangers (Reimer). Our profile of Sylvia McNicoll and interview with Welwyn Wilton Katz add to this Entertainment issue by introducing notions about audience and reception as powerful influences on the imaginations of popular writers. Most of the contributors in this issue would contest the claim that the non-corporate children's entertainment out there teaches us to be good little customers; we may have to pay for that theatre performance or storybook, but we won't be asking for a lunchbox that depicts brave moral choice or the power of very small girls. They don't make 'em, Dad.

Marie C. Davis

Présentation: Divertissement et consommation

Depuis près d'un demi-siècle, les enfants sont devenus l'un des maillons essentiels de la société de consommation: tout film, tout programme de télévision est maintenant assorti d'une myriade de produits dérivés, qu'impose une publicité d'enfer. Avant d'être un lecteur, un spectateur ou un téléspectateur, l'enfant est donc un consommateur, et un consommateur privilégié.

La consommation et la manducation participant du même registre métaphorique, il devient alors facile d'affirmer que l'"ingurgitation" des produits commerciaux n'est guère une activité intellectuelle. D'autant plus que les multinationales du divertissement, admirablement servies par la globalisation des marchés, se sont appropriées une très large part des histoires et des contes transmis par les parents, les enseignants et les autres représentants de la tradition culturelle, ce qui fait que les enfants sont maintenant plus réceptifs aux diktats de la consommation qu'aux valeurs implicites que véhiculent les récits destinés à l'enfance.

D'autre part, la métaphore de la consommation en vient à dépasser le registre commercial du divertissement destiné aux enfants; elle implique aussi une dimension viscérale. Comme le montre l'entrevue accordée à Sheree Fitch, on ne peut sous-estimer le plaisir physique de la manipulation des mots. De même, dans son article sur le Festival de Calgary, Anne Alton montre bien que l'enfant, lorsque son imagination est stimulée de façon intelligente, demeure sensible à la culture et à la créativité. L'enfant n'est pas forcément une espèce de robot programmé en vue de l'achat du dernier produit conçu par les multinationales du divertissement et distribué par les magnats de la vente au détail.

Le présent numéro de *CCL* examine l'enfant comme être sollicité et remodelé pas la culture de masse et les divertissements populaires. Dans cette optique, sont analysés des produits qui ont connu un retentissement prodigieux, comme la série des *Power Rangers*, l'un des exemples les plus récents de la mainmise des intérêts commerciaux sur les jeunes consommateurs. En contrepartie, nos collaborateurs s'interrogent sur les différents facteurs qui peuvent concourir aussi bien au succès de séries valables comme *Franklin la Tortue* qu'à celui, pour reprendre une expression française récente, de nanars comme les "Power Rangers". D'où une réflexion en filigrane sur la mise en marché de la culture populaire dans ses manifestions les plus variées. Si la littérature pour la jeunesse enseigne des valeurs fondamentales, ce n'est certes pas dans les produits dérivés ni les navets télévisuels qu'elles se trouvent mais dans les oeuvres que les enfants ont encore le privilège de lire, de voir ou d'entendre.

Daniel Chouinard

Power and Powerlessness: Reading the Controversy over ***The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers***

• *Mavis Reimer* •

Résumé: *Dans cet essai, Mavis Reimer fait l'analyse du débat de 1994 qui a entraîné l'annulation de la série télévisée des* ***Power Rangers****. Selon elle, celui-ci nous en apprend beaucoup sur notre perception de l'enfance. En effet, selon certaines théories contemporaines, la littérature pour la jeunesse intériorise les relations de pouvoir entre les parents et leurs enfants; or, dans ce cas-ci, les parents se sont perçus comme sans défense. L'auteur nous convie donc à nous interroger sur les représentations culturelles de ce rapport de force.*

Summary: *In this essay, Mavis Reimer analyses the rhetoric of the 1994 debate about the cancellation of* ***The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*** *for what it can tell us about contemporary Canadian assumptions about childhood and "the child." Recent critics and theorists have read children's literature as replicating imperialist structures of power in its representation and production of the adult-child relation. In this debate, however, adults represent themselves as powerless. Reimer invites readers to consider what cultural function this representation might serve.*

> One should never forget that language, by virtue of the infinite generative but also *originative* capacity ... which it derives from its power to produce existence by producing the collectively recognized, and thus realized, representation of existence, is no doubt the principal support of the dream of absolute power.
>
> (Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* 42)

In the introduction to his study of the Victorian notion of the child, James Kincaid contends that "[a] child is not, in itself, anything." Rather, what a child is "changes to fit different situations and different needs." For this reason, it is more useful to think of "the child" as a role or function "necessary to our psychic and cultural life" than as a person narrowly "defined or controlled by age limits" (5). In Kincaid's view, the Victorians instituted "the child" as the function through which the adult can both know and disavow desire — "the child is not simply the Other we desire but the Other we must have in order to know longing, love, lust at all" (7) — but contemporary Anglo-American

societies continue to play out the implications of this institution. When it was published in 1992, Kincaid's argument scandalized British reviewers and politicians, who maintained that Kincaid was, in the words of the *Sunday Times* reviewer, "a passionate champion of paedophilia" (Carey 8). That an academic argument about children's literature of the past century could provoke such heated words suggests that Kincaid has located a charged nexus of ideas that continues to have considerable cultural currency. As he noted in his response to the controversy, "[s]candal is the enemy of cultural hegemony" ("Producing" 215).

The scandal of Kincaid's book was identified specifically as the linkage of children and sexuality, but his work more generally explodes the comfortable assumption that childhood and children are natural categories that allow us access to a reality we have lost. As an adult who teaches children's texts to other adults, I find that moving my students to uncover not only the assumptions about children on which those texts depend but also the assumptions about children on which their readings of those texts depend is my most challenging task. It is clear that all of us have a great deal at stake in looking closely at our manufacture of "the child." Indeed, if Kincaid is right, then what is at stake is nothing less than our definitions of ourselves: "If the child is not distinguished from the adult, we imagine that we are seriously threatened, threatened in such a way as to put at risk our very being, what it means to be an adult in the first place" (7).

To begin our consideration of the idea of childhood in my university classes, I borrow the exercise Perry Nodelman suggests in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* (74) and invite students to collect newspaper clippings, advertisements, magazine articles, or accounts of TV texts that address or discuss children.[1] We then develop a list of attributions made explicitly or implicitly in the texts, using the sentence form of subject, copula verb, and subject complement: "Children are (predicate adjective or noun)"; "A girl is ..."; "Babies are ..."; and so on. We typically find that many of the common assumptions listed in *Pleasures* underlie these pieces, but it also becomes clear that representations to and of "the child" shift from one context to another, that certain representations predominate at a particular time and place, and that contradictory representations can be found side by side, all indications that we are working with the production and reproduction of ideology. Among the questions we ask of these texts is, to which of the representations do we find ourselves acceding? What is the implication of such agreement? How can we use explanatory models of ideology, discourse, and subjectivity to reach an understanding of these implications? The overall objective of the exercise is to encourage students to think theoretically not only about the texts they encounter but also about themselves as readers and as adults who interact with actual children made to bear the burden of meaning assigned to them in the cultural system.

Because such thinking can never be finished, can never be reduced to content to be reproduced in neat lectures year after year, I undertake the exercise with my students. In the fall of 1994, I became aware that my clippings file was full of items about the cancellation of the popular children's show, *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. The analysis that follows is my attempt to read these newspaper texts for their manufacture of childhood and "the child." In undertaking this

reading, I begin from Michel Foucault's assertion that, "in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse" (93). My analysis here is restricted to the discourses circulating in a small group of texts; but my hope is to point to some of the questions that those of us who study and teach Canadian texts for children might ask about the ways in which discourses of childhood and "the child" are used to establish the relations of power characterizing the contemporary Canadian social body. Such mapping is preparatory to identifying the power relations we might resist and contest. Pierre Bourdieu remarks that language can be said to "produce existence" in the sense that "collectively recognized" representations of human existence achieve the status of reality, are realized (42). Because official discourses, dominant discourses, hegemonic discourses depend on repeated and collective recognition, there are also opportunities for us to interrupt such recognition.[2] But to know what we wish to interrupt requires that we attempt to understand the workings of the dominant discourse and the ways in which we are implicated by it. As Adrienne Rich has put it in her poem, "Transcendental Etude," we must "study our lives,/make of our lives a study" even as we live those lives.

In November, 1994, YTV, the Canadian children's specialty channel, withdrew *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* from its schedule after the Ontario Regional Council of the Canadian Broadcast Association's Standards Council ruled that the show was "too violent" for Canadian television. In its review, the Council judged that the popular children's show, about teenagers who regularly save the world from evil after metamorphosing first into ninja fighters and then into a robotic dinosaur, "depicted excessive violence, scenes of violence that were not essential to the plot, and failed to show alternatives to violence as a method of resolving conflict" (Lacey, "Power Rangers" A17). The decision was followed by a flurry of comment and opinion in the Canadian media: open-line talk shows, the cultural pages of major newspapers, and letters to the editor were devoted to the question of the effect of the *Power Rangers* on children.

The focus of the public controversy about the cartoon show was on violent texts. In what sense could texts be considered violent? What were the demonstrable effects of violent texts? The second part of the question went unremarked in the discussions: no one, apparently, thought to ask what was understood by the term "children." Such silence suggests that the conceptual category is regarded as obvious. But the obvious, as Louis Althusser reminds us, is often the site of the most effective working of ideology. What does the *Power Rangers* debate suggest about the dominant constructions of children current in Canadian society? To what ideological uses is the category of "the child" being put? My primary texts for this reading are the items carried in November and December 1994 in the national edition of the Toronto *Globe and Mail*. As a newspaper that markets itself as one of the foremost sources of information for and about Canadian business, the *Globe and Mail* can, I assume, be taken as representing the range of opinion on the subject acceptable to dominant interests in Canadian society.[3]

At first reading, that range of opinion seems to be extensive. Among the items from the paper, there are letters cheering the Standards Council decision (Tavuchis, Fletcher), queries about whether this show should be described as violent ("Magazine"), reports of the effects of violent television images on children (Fletcher, Freedman, Lee, Wilson), protests against state censorship (Coyne, Cummings), articles weighing the conflict of the various goods involved in producing a code such as the one regarding violence in television programming (Doyle, Freedman, Lee), essays on the vulnerability of childhood (Salutin). But, when the newspaper texts are read for the assumptions about children underlying the variety of rhetorical positions, it becomes clear that the range of opinion is, in fact, remarkably narrow.

The most obvious commonality across the commentary is that children are a stable, homogeneous, self-consistent group. Psychologist Jonathan Freedman, for example, notes, "The kids do like it and we should let them watch it" (Freedman A19). Patrick Lee, instructor in child development, disagrees with Freedman's conclusion, but, in deriding what he characterizes as the view of "the child's growth, vitality and self-realization as unmixed virtues," he, like Freedman, uses "children" as a self-consistent category: TV programs that "convey violent messages" are "inappropriate for children" (Lee A25). Andrew Coyne, in a polemic against "this ludricrous fit of nanny-statism," qualifies the assumption that "children ... are no better than laboratory rats, conditioned beyond resistance to mimic whatever they see on television." His qualification, however, is to modify "whatever they see" to "*some* of what they see." "Children" is retained as an acceptable generalization: "It's true that kids like to act out what they see on the tube" (Coyne A18). Anecdotal information traded in letters to the editor leave the impression that the response of the "gangs of 30 or 40 boys" reported by a Scarborough teacher to be "launching flying kicks at each other" at recess (Fletcher A23) means the same thing as the response of the "little girl" in a small town in Northern British Columbia who dresses for Halloween as "pink Power Ranger Kimberley" (Wilson A20).

When "the child" is assumed to be an obvious and stable category, it becomes possible to set "the child" in structural opposition to other categories, categories that are themselves stabilized by such opposition. In the *Globe and Mail* accounts, various categories of adults occupy the position of binary opposite to "the child." Sometimes, this category is identified only as "we," a "we" that is distinguished from censorious people and "many parents" by Freedman. In Lee's analysis, "we" is more generally identified first with all adults and then with society. This "we" must weigh two conflicting rights, "the child's right to special protection and society's commitment to free speech"; "the child" and "society" apparently are categories that do not overlap. In the most extended example of such binary opposition, Rick Salutin spins an elaborate scenario in which what he calls Adultcult is seen as "making war on kids" ("Spread" A13).

Both the assumption of categorical consistency and the principle of structural opposition used in the depictions of children in the *Power Rangers* texts corroborate observations made by Perry Nodelman, in an article published in the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* in 1992, of the way in

which children are constructed as colonized subjects in our culture, as subjected "others," to use the terms Nodelman borrows from Edward Said's study of Orientalism. The purpose of assigning otherness to children, according to Nodelman, is to allow the defining adult to control the field of representation. In this theory, the malleability — or, to use James Kincaid's term, the "emptiness" — of the concept of "the child" is precisely the point: whether "the child" is construed as vulnerable and needing protection, as Lee does, or celebrated for its natural and anarchic potential, as Salutin does, the category functions to allow the adult subject to position itself in relation to attributes it needs or desires in order to consolidate its power. Read in this way, the meaning of the *Power Rangers* debate would seem to be either that adults define children as powerless in order to see themselves as powerful or that adults define children as powerful in order to access what is seen as their power.

The first point of view — that children are powerless — seems to be the most common. The newspaper texts repeatedly refer to children as incapable of controlling their responses to the images they see on television. In reporting the Council's decision, for example, John Doyle notes that, "for kids deprived of their daily fix, there was no opportunity for rebuttal" (Doyle A11). Lee recounts the "abundant first-hand evidence of the way ... *Power Rangers* plays itself out in the behaviour of children" (Lee A25). Liam Lacey reports that the program "draws audiences of about 300,000 each night of the week" in Ontario (Lacey, "Power Rangers" A17). Daily fixes, playing out, drawing: the metaphors of addiction, compulsion, and hypnosis all imply states of psychological passivity or victimhood.[4] Even Freedman, who writes to discount the conviction "that television violence makes children aggressive," reinscribes the image of children as essentially inert material by merely inverting the formula: "Television violence does not make children violent" (Freedman A19).

But the attempt to read the *Power Rangers* debate as a structural "othering" of children by adults seems to break down at this point. While children are represented as powerless, adults do not represent themselves as powerful in these texts. If adult subjects use definitions of children to position themselves in relation to attributes they need or desire, then it would follow, in this case, that adults represent children as powerless in order to access their powerlessness. That might appear, at first consideration, an unlikely conclusion. But, indeed, adults are repeatedly figured as "lookers-on" in the commentaries and letters, watching children "erupting into frenzied kicks and leaps" in the schoolyard (Wilson A20); watching as *Power Rangers* "plays itself out" in children's games (Lee A25); watching children watching television, but unable to break the circuitry between the TV images and children (Mellgren A4).

In fact, active agency is attributed primarily to abstract entities and corporate bodies in the articles. The Canadian Broadcasters' Association "rule[s]" and "censure[s]" (Lacey, "Cable Operators" A12). Its decision "sends a signal" (Lacey, "Power Rangers" A17) and delivers a "deadly kick" (Doyle A11). But even that attribution is apparently overly hasty. According to Coyne, the Broadcasters' Association itself is merely "a front" for a more amorphous agency, which he calls "the evil empire itself," "the Mighty Morphin" Canadian

Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, which "suppresse[s]," "enforces," and "kill[s]" (Coyne A18). Ronald Cohen, the chair of the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, in his turn rejects Coyne's claim and refuses to acknowledge the agency and responsibility of either the CRTC or the Standards Council, arguing that the first merely "proposed a set of guidelines" and the latter merely "administers" and "applies" a code put into place by broadcasters, a code which itself merely "reflected" a yet more general mechanism, "the Canadian *assumption* that the causal relation between on-screen images ... and behaviour existed" (Cohen A25). In short, at each level of this debate, there is a refusal of agency and a reiteration of powerlessness.

The terms of the *Power Rangers* debate invert Foucault's theorization of the operations of power in culture. In a lecture entitled *Power/Knowledge*, he advises that, in analysing such operations, "power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogeneous domination over others" and that individuals should be seen not only as the "inert or consenting target" of power, but "always also [as] the elements of its articulation." "In other words," Foucault concludes, "individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (98). The directive that follows from this is that an analysis of power should trace the process by which mechanisms of power are "invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms" (99). In *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* texts, however, there appears to be an investment in powerlessness rather than in power. The ascription of powerlessness to children in the first instance is involuted and displaced along the chain of power in these texts, with adult individuals and groups at every subsequent juncture representing themselves only as inert targets of power, as points of the application of power. Such representation provides a cover of powerlessness at each level, which works to foreclose an analysis of how the individual or group is also exercising power and constituting its articulation. Powerlessness itself becomes a mask of power in the debate.

In this reiteration of power masquerading as powerlessness, the discourse about the *Power Rangers* is peculiarly recursive, itself re-staging the terms of the story under dispute. In each episode of the first series of the *Power Rangers*, the Rangers, a group of "teenagers with attitude," must fight an alien and amorphous evil represented by Rita Repulsa and the Putty Patrol. Their own skills and energies are invariably ineffectual. In the sequence of escalation that follows, they are increasingly displaced from their embodied individuality, choosing first to metamorphize — "morph," in the vocabulary of the series — into sleek, uniformed, and helmeted ninja fighters, distinguished only by the colours of their Lycra suits. When, again invariably, this strategy fails to save the day, the Rangers "call" on the power of ancient but, at the same time, robotic dinosaurs, each of which represents an externalized and amplified characteristic of its Ranger. Their triumph is assured only when these creatures combine to "morph" into their ultimate corporate weapon, the powerful, giant, invulnerable, efficient, robotic dinosaur, the Megasaurus.

The recursion of the debate to the terms of the *Power Rangers* story suggests that the central conflict enacted in the popular TV text is recognized as

critically important by members of the post-industrial societies that produce and consume it. Winfred Fluck, in an attempt to articulate "the social and cultural functions performed by popular cultural forms," has proposed that "[p]öpular culture gains appeal when the status of the values transmitted and affirmed by it has become a problematic, contested domain" (40). Its function is to stage "tensions and conflicts with existing values and meanings in such a way that the recipient is able to explain and to accommodate them within the social and cultural context in which he or she is living" (40). Using Fluck's terms, what are the "tensions and conflicts" that the *Power Rangers* and the texts about the *Power Rangers* exhibit?

The *Power Rangers* stories might be seen as staging a fundamental anxiety about identity itself. The status of the sovereign and unitary self is called into question by the Rangers' need to "morph" into the corporate Megasaurus to effect solutions to the dangers they face. Marsha Kinder argues that American commercial television in general is creating a postmodern subject:

> the particular conventions of American commercial television, with its blatant emphasis on intertextuality, segmentation, and flow and with its pervasive popularity worldwide, have led subjects to see themselves as highly adaptable transformers or sliding signifiers — that is, to perceive their imaginary signifier as marked by an idealized protean malleability rather than by an idealized unity as in the Lacanian matrix. (37)

Jacques Lacan, to whom Kinder refers here, develops Freud's theory of "the mirror stage" as an account of the way in which identity is constructed. Children's experience of the forms of the external world allows them to create an idea of themselves as an objective whole, an idea which permits their (mis)recognition of themselves in an image. For postmodern subjects, the television acts as mirror and what such subjects see encourages them to create an idea of themselves as infinitely malleable and adaptable rather than as a unified whole. Malleability and adaptability clearly are values affirmed by the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers.

The Rangers' metamorphic ability to shift shape and fuse with each other, however, is contradicted by the racial and gendered differences among the Rangers insisted on in the framing sequences of the show. There is Zack, a black young man; Kimberley, a white young woman; and Trini, an Asian-American young woman. The only racial/gendered group to have more than one representative is the category of white male: Jason is distinguished by his athletic prowess from Billy, the intellectual "nerd." Following Fluck's formulation, we might say that *Power Rangers* stages the tension between the existing values of unity and identity and the new constellations of subjectivity Kinder describes, asking the question in what the self consists, in the particular embodied self or in the transformed corporate self? The popularity of the *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* among audiences of children, then, would indicate children's struggle with these problematics of identity. This is the modality of response I hear in the comment eight-year-old Kaleigh Warden makes on the controversy: "When the children watch it, it can come to life in their heads" ("Thoughts" D4).

A successful text of popular culture, according to Fluck, not only stages contested values, but also gives its audience a way of explaining contradictions in meaning and value. The solution proposed by the *Power Rangers* is, in part, the simple solution of narrative sequence itself, in which, as Theodor Adorno has noted, either-or relationships are turned into first-next relationships (qtd. by Fluck 41). The Rangers first attempt to solve problems with their individual skills and strength and, that failing, next transform into the Megasaurus. But there are bridging scenes between the framing scenes and the fight scenes which also give another, more comprehensive solution. These are the scenes in which the Rangers visit Zordon, who issued them their power badges in the original episode of the show, first to receive instructions and later to receive his congratulations on a successful mission. The ontological status of Zordon is unclear: he exists only as a talking head on a large television screen afflicted with bad horizontal hold controls and poor reception and housed in a control room suspended somewhere in outer space. In specifying this location, the text evokes the traditional image of the patriarchal god of Western culture. The solution proposed by the show, then, seems brutally clear: the most painful contradictions of subject positions can be accommodated by understanding them to be required by Big Daddy.

But the representation of Zordon as a television image/personality also cites the context of the technological revolution in information systems that grounds the globalized economy of the late twentieth century. Indeed, the malleability and adaptability affirmed in the "morphin" subjectivity of the show are widely-held values in the consumer culture of late capitalism, values which ensure that consumers continually will need to buy new props to support their re-creations of themselves. The "corporate" is, in fact, a key concept in the *Power Rangers* and carries multiple meanings: the Rangers literally are collected into one body in each story; the show itself is a fusion of an original American show with footage from Japanese martial arts films (Lacey, "Power Rangers" A17); and the popularity of the show and the merchandising spin-offs have made the Power Rangers "an important part of a huge global industry" for Saban International (Doyle A11).

The linkage of the global economy with the sanction of traditional religion suggests one possible answer to the question of why the debate *about* the *Power Rangers* repeats the terms of the show. Linda McQuaig has argued recently that Canadians have been sold on the need to divest themselves of the liability of social programs and to embrace the global economy, particularly in its incarnation as "the money markets," by the reiteration that we are powerless to do anything else:

> it's not just that we can't change things, *but we can't even think about the possibility of changing things*; to do so is to engage in old-style thinking.... The new way of thinking ... requires an acceptance of powerlessness, resignation to a world without solutions — a world of inaction and helplessness. (12)

The conflicting versions of subjectivity played out by the *Power Rangers*, then, would seem to speak to a widespread tension in Canadian culture, and probably in Anglo-American culture more generally, between the pull to corporate identity

and the pull to expressive individuality. Both of these concepts, of course, can be construed in various ways, most of them referenced by the *Power Rangers*. The fact that such anxiety manifests itself in the debate over a children's text corroborates the observations of Kincaid, Nodelman, and Jacqueline Rose that one of the primary ideological uses to which the category of "the child" is put in Anglo-American culture is as a site on which subjectivity itself is defined.

No participant in the debate about *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* ever locates or names the ultimate source and sanction of power in the way the *Power Rangers* show does; the silence on this question may indicate only that the adult participants have mastered more completely the mask of powerlessness on which power depends. Indeed, silence serves as the originary trope of power in the show: the Rangers are instructed explicitly by Zordon that their powerful secret identity is not safe if they speak about it to outsiders. In this context, the need to restrict children not only from seeing the show, but also from talking about the show, becomes more problematic — and more explicable. In a particularly telling comment, a day-care operator is reported to have "banned her charges ... from even discussing the show," because, she says, she's trying to teach children "to use your words, not your hands," to resolve conflict (Doyle A11). As the contradictory terms of her comment make clear, it is not any words that are wanted, but rather the correct words. Producing echoes, producing the replication of sound, depends on the silence of "the others." Taking on silence and powerlessness in this debate — agreeing to the role of inert target of power, to return to Foucault's terms — paradoxically enables vehicles of power to be utilized and extended by more general mechanisms of power.

I suspect that many of us would allow that it might be true that the adult disputants in the debate take on powerlessness, but would want to reserve a less interested and more transparent response for children. Such a reservation, of course, is predictable, given our habit of seeing children as different in kind from adults, as "others." But the evidence suggests that this is not the case. In January 1995, the *Winnipeg Free Press* published a group of responses to the *Power Rangers* controversy by students from a local grade three class. The responses demonstrate the manufacture of consent Althusser calls one of the primary effects of ideology. Of the ten children who write commentaries, five explicitly produce their own silence, either by reiterating the opinions of adults in authority over them — "my mom saw it [and] she said, You're not allowed to watch it," "[m]y mom and dad said I am not allowed to watch television," "[m]y mom thinks it's a little violent" — or by echoing the Standards Council's words that the show is "too violent" as their own opinion. Four children enter the debate by discussing the issues and producing evidence to support their position. Each of these more sophisticated commentators, however, also replicates the sounds of the debate; they have learned to silence the other in themselves, by alienating themselves as writers from themselves as children, so that their reports are *about* the other — about "the parents" and "their child," about "[t]he younger kids that watch it," about "the children" in whom the show "come[s] to life," about "you guys" who "just love it and get ideas how to hurt people." Only one of the children, eight-year-old Buisi Okwumabua,

seems to have failed to understand how to use his words "properly" in this discourse of power and powerlessness and naively reports his own response of pleasure and of control: "I think Power Rangers ... is cool when the five forces come together. I do not mind the kicking and the punching."

But hearing the voices of ten children in this debate is also startling enough that it reminds me how seldom we permit, much less invite, young people to enter any of our public conversations about culture and morality, about texts and violence. Luce Irigaray, in her reading of the parable of Plato's cave in *Speculum of the Other Woman,* observes that "the silent offer [the possibility of the replica] by taking the place of a reflecting screen" (257). What would happen, she wonders, if "everyone talked, and talked at once" (256): "The reflection of sound would be *spoiled* if different speakers uttered different things at the same time. Sounds would thereby become ill defined, fuzzy, inchoate, indistinct, devoid of figures that can be reflected and reproduced" (257). What would happen if we unmasked the first appearance of powerlessness in this controversy, the attribution of powerlessness to the children viewers? If all of these children talked, and talked at once, would it be less likely that the figure of the stable, self-consistent, and powerless "child" could be produced, appropriated, and reproduced?

Notes

1 Perry Nodelman read and commented on this argument at several stages of its development. As always, our discussions about studying and teaching children's texts were invaluable to me as I thought through the issues and implications involved.

2 Judith Butler is theorizing such interruptions in her ongoing work on performativity. See, in particular, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.* I prepared a first version of this paper in the context of studying with Butler at the Dartmouth School of Criticism and Theory in the summer of 1995.

3 I focus only on the Canadian texts, although it seems likely that these constructions of "the child" might be similar in many post-industrial societies. Wire service news stories at the time of the Canadian controversy referred to a similar debate about the Power Rangers underway in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (Mellgren A4) and the cancellation of the show in New Zealand was cited by the Standards Council in their decision (Doyle A11).

4 The use of metaphors of consumption, ingesting, eating, and addictive behaviour for reading have been common in the representation of children's mass-produced cultural texts since the beginning of the century, according to Nancy Romalov, in a paper delivered to the annual meeting of the Children's Literature Association at Trinity College in Hartford, CT, in June, 1992. Romalov links the use of these metaphors with "anti-democratic discourse."

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"Bring the Child in You out to Play!": Canadian Children's Culture and the 1997 Calgary International Children's Festival"

• *Anne Hiebert Alton* •

Résumé: *Le Festival international du théâtre pour enfants de 1997, qui célébrait son onzième anniversaire, a présenté des spectacles qui ont instruit et diverti des publics très variés. L'auteur examine la nature du divertissement destiné aux enfants en se basant sur une distinction entre quatre types de spectacles présentés lors du Festival: pièces de théâtre, présentations de conteurs, spectacles de musique et de danse, récitals de chansons. Il explore l'incorporation des éléments didactiques au jeu, thème central du Festival. Il examine comment l'idéal de plaire et d'instruire à la fois s'intègre à l'univers du divertissement contemporain destiné à l'enfance.*

Summary: *Celebrating its eleventh year, the 1997 Calgary International Children's Festival provided entertainment and education for audiences of all ages, cultures, and tastes. In this article, Alton examines the nature of children's entertainment within the context of four types of performances — theatre, storytelling, music & dance, and song — from the festival's enormous range. In addition to exploring the extent to which many of the entertainers meshed didactic elements with the festival's overall theme of play, this article considers how concepts of instruction and delight relate to contemporary children's entertainment and culture.*

> CICF Mission Statement: To change the world by surrounding children with excellence, so that they can recognize their own power and demand excellence from the rest of their lives.

In her introduction to the 1997 *Calgary International Children's Festival Programme,* producer and writer JoAnne James invites everyone to "Bring the child in you out to play!"[1] For six days in May, that's just what children, teachers, parents, and other adults in Calgary did, and were entertained, surprised, delighted, and at times even instructed as the shows went on. Entertainment from a myriad of cultures and countries, ranging from traditional and non-traditional theatre, puppetry, marionettes, and storytelling to dance, music, comedy, and mixed-media entertainment, formed the core of the performances, and the festival's theme — "For the child in all of us" — was evident in the appeal that these shows had for their audiences. Equally obvious

was the belief that, regardless of age or cultural heritage, we all have children inside us eager to explore and to have fun, and that when the stage is set correctly boundaries can vanish. The festival's *raison d'être* is rooted in the culture of children and childhood: at its heart is the notion that by revealing the arts of many different cultures to children of all ages, they will learn to recognize and appreciate excellence, and thus enhance their lives. The entertainment at the 1997 festival achieved that goal splendidly.

Since its inception in 1987, the festival has featured performances from thirty-six countries and ten Canadian provinces. This year's festival's 42,000 seats were divided amongst ninety-one performances, spread over eighteen shows from seven countries. In addition to ticketed shows, such free events as a storytelling tent and an arts and crafts corral were available. The most popular of these, however, were the make-up clowns who circulated throughout the festival offering free face-painting — an offer nearly all of the children attending the festival accepted, suggesting their delight in becoming, however temporarily, someone or something else. In keeping with today's marketing trends, the festival souvenir shop sold festival T-shirts and posters, CDs and tapes from many of the performers, and — a particular favourite — toy foam dogs on leashes. Despite this focus on fun, both formal and informal educational elements were a part of much of the festival: in addition to various study guides for teachers, workshops were offered on gumboot dancing and on acting. The latter, run by Imagination in Motion's Paul Rajeckas and Neil Intraub and entitled "The Art of Collaboration," focused on developing communication skills, trust, and cooperation in relation to the performing arts. Finally, "Le Colloque / The Exchange" provided a forum for discussion with several guest companies about their works.

While the festival is particularly aimed at children aged three through twelve, it tries to be accessible for everybody. Indeed, this year's *Programme* recommended various shows for groups including the hearing challenged (five shows), the visually challenged (eight shows), and those with special needs (six shows). For parents with babies, a baby room was available with change tables, a rocking chair for nursing, a sink, playpen, and toys. In terms of location, the entire festival was held in a compact, two-block-square area in downtown Calgary, which could be reached easily by public transport, school bus, or car. The only potential drawback was the price of tickets: although the same for children and adults (children under two were admitted free), prices ranged from $4.99 to $7 per show, depending on whether tickets were purchased in advance and whether they were for day or evening performances. A minimum sample of the festival's performances ideally would be three shows, though five or six performances spread over a few days would provide a more complete experience. This would lead to costs of from $15-$40, which could be too high for many parents, despite the value of obtaining such high quality entertainment at a relatively low price.[2] Sadly, the effects of these costs can be seen in recent attendance trends: while in the past school groups tended to attend one performance in the morning and another in the afternoon, filling in the time between performances with free activities, the inclination now appears to

attend only one performance and then participate in free activities. This problem could be solved by emulating the annual Children's Festival in Poland, which is held on June 1, the International Day of the Child: funded by Civic and Federal grants, that festival is free for all children, so that everyone can attend. Unfortunately, for that to happen in Canada a much higher value would have to be placed on the importance of children's entertainment and, indeed, on the entire culture of childhood than our current government seems willing to grant.

I attended the festival knowing very little about the various genres of children's entertainment, but anticipating with pleasure the theatrical performances. My horizons rapidly expanded as I discovered the enormous range of entertainment available. This made me wonder about how to define children's entertainment. As a starting point, I contemplated some of the definitions of children's literature we discuss in my classes, starting with the most general: works which are regarded by a consensus of adults and children to be children's works. Certainly this applies equally well to children's entertainment, and could be extended into the notion that children's entertainment is simply entertainment for or which has been appropriated by children. In contrast, C.S. Lewis's comment that he wrote for children "because a children's story is the best art-form for something you have to say" (208) could also apply to children's entertainment, and raises the question whether children's entertainment is the best art form for what children's entertainers might have to say. This seems naturally to lead to John Newbery and the phrase "Instruction with Delight." A London bookseller and the first major British publisher of children's books, Newbery was also the author of *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (1744), which had as its motto the phrase "*Delectando momemus*: Instruction with Delight."[3] From 1750 onwards, "instruction with delight" became a maxim for children's literature. Whether this holds true for children's entertainment, and more specifically for the entertainment at the Calgary International Children's Festival, will be the focus of this article: it considers what, if any, message or lesson these entertainers were attempting to convey, whether this didactic element meshes with the overall theme of play at the festival, and how concepts of instruction and delight relate to contemporary children's entertainment and culture.

Four types of entertainment at the festival seemed to address these questions particularly well: theatre, storytelling, music and dance, and song. Within these areas, I chose seven performances on which to focus. Traditional theatre appeared with British Columbia's Tears of Laughter Productions' *The Purim Story*, Welsh Arad Goch Theatre's *Taliesin*, and Québec's Le Théâtre du Gros Mécano's *The Stupendous Adventures of Don Quixote*. Somewhat less traditional was Peru's Teatro Hugo e Innes, who performed incredibly innovative storytelling in the form of mime "puppetry" with their *Short Stories*. Russia's Limpopo and Zimbabwe's Black Umfolosi were wonderfully entertaining with their musical and dance performances, while Canada's Paul Hann provided the highlight of the festival with his *Paul Hann in Concert*. While didactic elements were a part of many shows, the overwhelming focus appeared to be on delight—and, not surprisingly, the louder, noisier, and sillier the delight the better.

Theatre: *The Purim Story, Taliesin,* and *The Stupendous Adventures of Don Quixote*

Theatre is perhaps one of the best-known forms of live entertainment, and it was well-represented at the festival, with six of the eighteen shows being plays. Most theatre has certain conventions, including costumes, sets, story, and generally little audience participation, and the three plays I focus on are no exception. *The Purim Story,* performed by Stuart Nemtin and David Kaetz, considers the inception of the Jewish festival of Purim and is based on the Biblical tale of Queen Esther, who saves her kingdom's Jewish subjects when the Prime Minister of Persia wants to destroy them. The play's colourful sets and costumes appealed to the audience, who also appreciated Nemtin's flexibility in playing several different characters with the aid of vibrant masks. At times, however, the story dragged, and Nemtin and Kaetz seemed to ignore the balcony occupants, directing most of their performance to the main floor audience. In addition, though the show was billed as suitable for ages seven and up, the performers appeared a bit unused to younger audiences: although occasionally they invited participation by asking questions or encouraging clapping in time to the lively music, they often neglected to wait for responses. Moreover, the younger members of the audience did not appear to understand many of the jokes or clever witticisms. For example, Nemtin's efforts to make the King of Persia sound like a parody of Elvis Presley were lost on many of the audience's younger members — clearly this was an unfamiliar reference for many of them. Most disappointing, however, was the play's failure to mesh instruction with delight. The story's main lesson was a moral one: we should never be anti-Semitic or, indeed, prejudiced against anyone. Despite the value of this message, the didacticism seemed too blatant: the lessons were delivered in the form of long speeches and occasionally condescending addresses, during which much of the audience stopped paying attention. This reaction not only demonstrated a resistance to overt instruction, but also emphasized children's reactions when they lose interest. It also suggested one of the cardinal rules of children's entertainment: above all, be entertaining!

Arad Goch, one of Wales's leading theatre companies for young audiences, was more successful. Their production of *Taliesin,* adapted by Gwyn Thomas and Jeremy Turner, won the award for Best Children's Production in the Dublin International Theatre Festival in 1996. With its mix of traditional Welsh music and dancing with theatre, it focused on delight rather than on any particular moral lesson. The story is based on one of Wales' oldest legends, and features the witch Ceridwen and her servant Gwion. When Ceridwen makes a magic spell so that her ugly son will become learned, the spell falls by mistake on Gwion, the village idiot, who becomes first the magical infant Taliesin, and then the wisest wizard and best poet in the land. Along with an entertaining story, the play featured plenty of action, including a marvellous chase scene. However, the real strength of the performance appeared in the quality of the acting, along with the beauty of the dancing and music. The only flaws in the performance were that its sixty minutes seemed interminable, and the audience did not seem strongly captivated by the story. One reason for this was the seating, much of which was on floor mats rather than on chairs, which led to some fidgeting — for both children

and adults — about halfway through the performance. More significant, though, is that while *Taliesin* is clearly a well-known tale in Welsh culture, several of its aspects seemed inaccessible to a Canadian audience unfamiliar with either the legend or Welsh mythology in general. The belief in the strength of old magic and curses, for example, tends not to be something many Canadian children grow up with, and so the significance of these elements is less than it would be for a Welsh audience. Here, however, lies the didacticism of the play: to learn something about another culture through experiencing something different. In this, *Taliesin* was relatively successful, and its didacticism did not interfere at all with its entertaining elements.

The final play, Québec's Le Théâtre du Gros Mécano's *The Stupendous Adventures of Don Quixote*, was produced originally in 1993. Since then, this stage adaptation of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, written by André Lachance and translated by Maurice Roy, has been performed approximately 150 times to over 40,000 Canadian students. Its performance at the festival was superb, and contained all the elements of traditional theatre, beginning with an entertaining and inventive story. Structured as a play within a play, the action began with a company of actors arriving to portray the adventures of Don Quixote as knight-errant who insists on tilting at windmills and following his dreams. The play's sixty-five minutes seemed to speed by, with non-stop action performed by an energetic cast who not only became their characters but also drew the audience into the story. The only slow point was a small vignette around the forty-minute mark when a shepherd sang a short operatic aria; for a few moments, many of the children in the audience became a bit restless. Ironically, one critic selects this scene as one of the play's highlights, which demonstrates not only the contrast in audience expectations, but also the play's versatility in delighting people of different ages (St-Hilaire). This scene does fit nicely with the theme of extravagance which pervades the play, from the use of the word "stupendous" in the title to the performance's innovative double stage sets and its colourful costumes and masks. Best of all were the wonderfully spirited mounts — Don Quixote's horse Rozinante and Sancho Panza's donkey — created with dollies on suspenders.

Don Quixote was suggested as being especially suitable for audiences ages six and up, though the performance I attended appeared to be made up primarily of eight- to twelve-year-olds. They seemed to be exceptionally receptive to both the play's themes and lessons, which included the power of imagination and its ability to help one follow one's dreams and discover the world. The implicit lessons were never to relinquish one's dreams or imagination, no matter how eccentric this may make one appear, and that being eccentric or unique is not necessarily bad: sometimes this gives one the power to change the world for the better. The didactic nature of these lessons was communicated through the story, rather than through overt moralizing, which appears to be a much more effective way of instruction, as well as being closer to Newbery's original design of combining instruction with delight. Clearly the intentions of this play were to entertain the children, making them laugh and feel a sense of wonder, while communicating certain values to them, and it succeeded on all counts. Certainly the audience enjoyed the play, and had no difficulty paying attention throughout the performance. While

theatre tends not to have the same degree of participation that other sorts of entertainment have, when plays are this entertaining, children — and adults — have little trouble enjoying them.

Mime Storytelling

A rather less traditional form of entertainment appeared with Peru's Teatro Hugo e Innes's unconventional and utterly fascinating *Short Stories*. This combined performance of mime, puppetry, and storytelling was one of the most ingenious performances I have ever seen. Performers Hugo Suarez Flores, a native of Peru, and Inex Pasic, of Bosnia-Herzegovina, presented a series of short sketches performed by "puppets" created with their hands, elbows, knees, stomachs, fingers, and toes. As Richard Christiansen observed, their performances have roots in children's games such as linking fingers together for "here's the church, here's the steeple, open the door, and see all the people," or in making shadow figures on the wall. However, Flores's and Pasic's techniques make other hand-games look completely uninspired. Their first sketch featured a miniature soccer player, created by Pasic's hand, who ran, kicked, and headed a miniature soccer ball, looking so realistic that at any moment he could have walked out into the audience. Even more delightful was the fat woman, whose face and head were made by Pasic's stomach. The basis of the sketch was the comedy of watching the character try on a variety of ill-fitting clothes, but the audience found the story far less absorbing than the wonderful absurdity of a person being created by someone's tummy. Giggles filled the theatre every time the character moved, made a face (demonstrating Pasic's admirable control over her stomach muscles), sighed, or tried on yet another unflattering garment. Other sketches included Pasic and Flores working in tandem to create an opera singer, a clown, a person split into two parts (top and bottom halves) which unite at the end, and a baby who metamorphoses into a butterfly. The most popular sketch was of a street musician with a miniature guitar, created by Flores's knee and hands. Like the "Fat Woman" sketch, this story about a day in the life of a street musician was clearly less enthralling to the audience than seeing how he was put together: as part of the story, the musician came apart into his "pieces" and reformed himself.

The performance as a whole was incredibly innovative and engaging. Its style of mime with a musical backdrop made this a more accessible performance than most theatre, which in some cases could suffer from either language or complexity barriers. The set, too, was understated: there were few props, the performers wore black clothing so as not to distract the audience's attention from their creations, and the lighting was dark with spotlights highlighting the stage. One weakness was that the forty-five minute performance was a bit too long: thirty minutes would have been optimum, which was the point at which the audience's attention started to wander. Another minor weakness was that the repetitive nature of this art form seemed not to work as well as it did with other arts at the festival: after six or seven "short stories" everything seemed to blend together. While the performance contained no particular moral lessons, it certainly was enjoyable, and the audience relished the opportunity to giggle, laugh, and have fun while encountering a unique cultural experience.

In this era of animated films, videos, and MTV, one might expect that theatre and mime storytelling would be among the most popular and accessible events for audiences accustomed to passively watching rather than actively participating in entertainment. Nevertheless, most of the children attending the festival delighted in the interactive arts of music, dance, and song with Russia's Limpopo, Zimbabwe's Black Umfolosi, and Canada's Paul Hann. *850 Years of Moscow* was the title for Limpopo's performance, and their show consisted of six exuberant Russians dancing, singing, and loudly playing a variety of instruments. Their music, an inventive assortment of traditional balalaika music, jazz, and the Russian version of heavy metal rock music, was utterly delightful. Moreover, their traditional Russian medleys included Ukrainian and Gypsy music, with Russian dancing punctuated by *kazatskas*, the athletic dance flourish with squat-kicks often associated with Russian and Ukrainian dancing. Though not a show particularly intended for children, neither was it directed specifically at adults: instead, it epitomized the theme of the festival by being open to everyone.

Throughout their performance, the members of Limpopo demonstrated their contagious enthusiasm for music, dancing, and frolic. Indeed, having fun was the theme for the entire show. From the moment they stepped on stage, band members encouraged the audience to participate by clapping hands, stamping feet, answering questions, cheering, and generally making noise. The audience joyfully complied: the smallest children danced to the music and shrieked with delight — one two-year-old spent the entire forty-five minutes of the show vibrating to the music. The older children cheered, clapped, commented on the instruments, and fantasized about being either the drummer or the guitar player. Everyone else gave in to the music's irresistible rhythm and tapped toes, clapped, and whistled in approbation. Heavy in delight, the performance contained little overt instruction. However, at one point Dmitri, the lead balalaika player, identified the instruments, which included a balalaika, a trumpet, drums, a trombone, a Russian accordion with buttons rather than keys, an electric guitar, and the bass balalaika. This last instrument looked like a cross between an overgrown guitar and a very large cello, but was triangular in shape; a rather large individual, Dmitri tossed it around as though it were a fiddle. By the end of the performance, audience members had learned to identify each of the instruments, and could sing the choruses to many of the songs even though, as one of the band members kept commenting, they were unable to understand a word since everything was sung in Russian. Nevertheless, this lack of language did not interfere with the enjoyment of the performance: cultural and age boundaries were crossed with ease as the audience and the performers delighted in and shared the music.

Rather than being crossed, boundaries were discarded during Black Umfolosi's performance. Based in Zimbabwe, Black Umfolosi's troupe of eight dancers, singers, and drum players performed a mix of traditional Zulu dances and "imbube" songs from Southern Africa. Their first act, entitled "Ambhiza Dance,"

was a traditional thanksgiving rain dance from the Kalanga people in Western Zimbabwe. Here, the troupe wore traditional costumes and made music by whistling, beating on drums, and playing other percussive instruments. *Gumboot*, their second show, incorporated a dance founded in the mines of South Africa entitled "ingquzu," which combines sung slogans and complaints about the poor working conditions and low wages with percussive sounds from the slapping and stomping of gumbooted feet. Both dances displayed the music's driving beat and the performers' incredible rhythm and energy.

Instruction and delight blended easily throughout this performance, which was extremely participation oriented. Sounds of clapping and cheering abounded from the audience, demonstrating the enthusiasm many children have when given an excuse to clap, shout, and make noise. After teaching the audience to say a few words in Debeleh and Zulu, one of the troupe members asked for some volunteer dance students, and nearly all the children in the audience clamoured to participate. A crowd converged on stage as many children who had not been chosen as participants joined their friends — illustrating not only the apparently universal fear of being left out, but also the level of enthusiasm created by Black Umfolosi. One fascinating element of children's culture appeared near the end of the show, when troupe members invited the younger members of the audience to bring their parents and teachers up on stage with them, and then return to their seats and watch the adults learn a dance. The kids thoroughly enjoyed seeing their parents and especially their teachers do something unconventional, and they enthusiastically cheered for their teachers and contrasted the techniques of the various performers with comments such as "Look at Mr. Smith, he's really cool!" and "Wow, watch Mrs. Sanderson jump!" They relished seeing adults doing things that usually might be thought silly, which illustrates the particular success of this show: by encouraging participation from both adults and children, Black Umfolosi's wonderful performance broke down the barriers not only between cultures, but between adults and children. Their show demonstrated once again the fine line between children's and adult's entertainment and, by implication, the fine line between childhood and adulthood.

The festival's theme of "For the child in all of us" was seen most strongly with the performance of Canada's Paul Hann, children's entertainer *extraordinaire*. Originally from England and now living in British Columbia, Hann has recorded seven albums for children, including *The Brand New Boogaloo Zoo*, *Snyder the Spider*, *Bernie the Bow-Legged Bloodhound*, and *Marmalade on Toast*. A country folk singer for many years, Hann started in children's entertainment just after his first child was born; his children's television program, *Paul Hann and Friends*, ran for six years on CTV and then YTV. Since then, he has toured in all regions of Canada "from Port Alberni to St. John's to Inuvik" ("Press Kit"). *Paul Hann in Concert* was by far the best performance I saw, and his musical participation concert provided the crown of the festival. On the surface this appeared to be a simple show, with few props or costume changes. Hann mixed traditional favourites such as "This Old Man" and "Turkey in the Straw" with some of his own works, such as "Sing Song Sing Along"; the show started and finished with

the latter, giving the performance a sense of circularity along with a feeling of recognition for younger audience members. Hann's easy-going and entertaining personality appealed to the crowd, and he always seemed to be enjoying himself immensely.

Though he admits that song is a great way of getting kids to learn, Hann's main aim is to entertain through participation; indeed, he believes that kids get enough instruction elsewhere (Interview). His audience responds to his steady stream of patter and jokes throughout his performance — such as when he teases the children that they look like a "bunch of little sausages" — with giggling and wiggling pleasure. Almost all of his songs have a humorous nature, emphasising that music is fun. Certainly his audiences have fun, as they participate in singing along, completing rhymes, mimicking actions, and clapping in rhythm. For example, the kids really enjoyed singing the chorus to Hann's "Singing in the Kitchen," which finishes with the gleefully shouted phrase, "banging on the pots and pans." He also performs fill-in-the-blanks songs, where he sings the first couple of lines and the children complete the verse with a rhyme: "My friend Paul, he's really ... [tall]." At one point the kids were so in sync with him that they anticipated the tune for his song "Eye-nose-cheeky-cheeky-chin," sung to the melody of "Skip to my Lou." His main aim is to get both children and adults participating, because then kids see other people having fun with music. As Hann explains, "It's really important that they [the children] realize that music, singing, dancing is fun and okay to do!" (Interview). Nevertheless, instructive elements appear in the "Study Guide" provided for elementary performances. This guide suggests how to prepare for the concert, highlighting what sorts of things the students might learn, such as clapping in rhythm or completing rhymes. Suggested follow-up projects include writing to Hann after the performance and including drawings about what the children remember about the concert or drawing what Snyder the Spider — who "likes biscuits and cider / Hot cakes and cold cakes, Snyder likes either / He never grows taller, he only grows wider and wider and wider and wider" — looks like. However, the main lesson he hopes teachers will stress is that music is fun for everyone.

Hann is great with kids, and his references to such popular figures as Mr. Dress-Up and Michael Jackson demonstrate his knowledge of their culture. When performing, he tends to aim for groups in the range of ages three to ten, and at times will spontaneously throw in another verse or rhyme to play along with the audience's mood. Moreover, he varies the rhythm, style, and volume of his songs, sometimes talking in whispers or changing his voice to a silly-sounding pitch. When recording, however, he says he considers the story-telling aspect of songs more carefully, because "children listen to records over and over," and he likes the thought of them discovering more layers to the songs as they grow older (Interview). While he does not believe that children are necessarily a more demanding audience than adults, he does believe the two are different: "with adults, they might not be so enthusiastic to start with but if they like you they'll keep listening; with kids, you have their attention and enthusiasm at the beginning, and the challenge is to keep it" (Interview). Certainly Paul

Hann has no problem there: without exception, his audience was reluctant to leave at the close of his forty-five minute show, and undoubtedly will return for more.

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Clearly one of most important aspects of the Calgary International Children's Festival is that everyone can delight in experiencing the arts of other cultures. In most cases, the didactic elements inherent within the performances meshed pleasantly with the festival's overall theme of play. Despite the prevalence of television and other "canned" forms of entertainment such as video games, the kids at the festival were really excited to experience something out of their normal routine, particularly since it was designed specifically for them. Certainly they appeared to be enjoying themselves: high noise levels, giggling, and plenty of talking characterized the mood of the crowds in the corridors between performances. While waiting for shows to begin, audience members chattered, looked around, braided each others' hair, and played games such as "I Spy" or "Stone-Paper-Scissors." After good productions, many kids practised dance steps they had learned, hummed songs they had sung, and enjoyed the exhilaration of the day. In contrast, after one especially ponderous (and didactic) show, the audience was extremely critical, yawning and muttering "boring!" with the intonation only a twelve-year-old can provide. Overall, they seemed to prefer entertainment they could participate in, such as Paul Hann's show or Black Umfolosi's performance, over more passive entertainment such as theatre. This highlights not only their intrinsic creativity, but also their delight in learning something new — as long as they have fun while they're learning.

In this sense, children do appear to be a demanding audience. Children's entertainers must work not only at keeping their audience's attention throughout a performance, but also at being ready to cater for the unexpected, such as a child providing a completely unique response to a question — a not uncommon occurrence. Moreover, children seem to respond more quickly and often more honestly than adults, being swift to appreciate and equally swift to criticize. Maurice Sendak's comments about children and reading are equally applicable to children's entertainment: "'If a kid doesn't like a book, throw it away. Children don't give a damn about awards. Why should they? We should let children choose their own books. What they don't like they will toss aside'" (Lanes 106). In terms of entertainment, what children dislike, they will ignore or dismiss, since they have not yet learned the more adult-like polite — and at times insincere — way of responding. Perhaps this is the lesson that we as adults should be learning from children: to respond honestly and whole-heartedly to the world, and to demand excellence from all who surround us.

JoAnne James states, "It is the children in our lives who are often the real teachers. They are champions of wisdom and laughter and curiosity" ("Introduction"). While there was much to learn at the festival, both in terms of some performances' overt lessons and others' gentle exposure of different cultures,

the real focus appeared to be on delight and participation for everyone — performers and audiences, children and adults alike. In the end, this blurring of boundaries between cultures, including the cultures of childhood and adulthood, leads to a more comprehensive definition of children's entertainment as any entertainment that has been, is, or might be enjoyed by a child. The enjoyment of the diverse performances at the 1997 Calgary International Children's Festival revealed the child inherent within us all.

Notes

1 JoAnne James is the founding producer of the Calgary International Children's Festival, which is now in its eleventh year; *cf.* my interview with her in "Changing the World: A Profile of Writer JoAnne James" (*CCL* 85 [1997]: 31-40).

2 The festival is sponsored by various federal, provincial, and local government grants, corporate and small businesses, community partners and agencies, and Friends of the Festival, and is run by 1300 annual volunteers. Although in the past some schools had field trip funds which might have covered the costs, parents are now responsible for paying for their children's tickets. If parents cannot afford to pay for tickets, teachers can apply for a grant from the festival's outreach fund, which is financed by sponsors and donors and is set aside to cover ticket prices for underprivileged children.

3 This quotation alludes to Horace's phrase: "He who combines the useful and the pleasing wins out by both instructing and delighting the reader" (*The Art of Poetry* 54).

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Profile: "A Purple Sort of Girl": Sheree Fitch's Tales of Emergence

• *Jeanette Lynes* •

Sheree Fitch

Résumé: *Les oeuvres de Sheree Fitch nous parlent de l'affirmation de la féminité. Cette dimension est particulièrement perceptible dans ses oeuvres récentes et, surtout, dans son ouvrage en cours de publication,* ***There's a Mouse in My House****. Ses héroïnes, souvent de très jeunes filles, paraissent, dans l'ensemble, impuissantes devant des forces supérieures, psychologiques ou sociales, qu'elles perçoivent comme incontrôlables. Néanmoins, elles parviennent à s'imposer par la dévouverte de l'imaginaire et la maîtrise du langage. Sheree Fitch établit elle-même une relation entre ses personnages et son expérience en tant que romancière qui a dû lutter pour imposer sa voix. D'où une relation complexe entre l'oeuvre et l'existence, le "sexe" de l'auteur et la création littéraire.*

Summary: *Sheree Fitch's poetry-narratives tell stories of female emergence. This pattern is particularly apparent in* ***Sleeping Dragons All Around, There Were Monkeys in My Kitchen, I am Small, Mabel Murple****, and her new book,* ***There's a Mouse in My House****. Her child-protagonists are typically females who, for the most part, initially feel voiceless and powerless when confronted with forces larger than themselves — '"forces" which may be internal/psychological or external/societal, or both, but which are, in some way, seemingly uncontrollable. Fitch's young heroines contend with these forces by embracing language, imagination, and creativity. A conversation with Sheree this summer revealed parallels between her female protagonists' emergence and her own development as a woman writer discovering her voice. Fitch's work, then, exhibits a rich interplay between biography and art — an interplay subtly expressive of the*

problematics around gender and creativity, and how these problematics figure, in an enabling way, in her writing for children.

Summer sun beads down on Chocolate Lake, Halifax, Nova Scotia, over Sheree Fitch's homey, hip abode. Sheree, sitting across the table from me, wears purple, in good Mabel Murple fashion. Her fingernails are resplendent in tri-coloured ladybug polish. Sheree, full of energy and humour, is well known as a poet, storyteller, and dramatist, and also as an activist in the areas of literacy, children's rights and women's rights. To date, her published books for children include *Toes in My Nose* (1987); *Sleeping Dragons All Around* (1989); *Merry-Go-Day* (1991); *There Were Monkeys in My Kitchen* (1992); *I am Small* (1994); *Mabel Murple* (1995); *If You Could Wear My Sneakers* (1997); *The Hullabalo Bugaboo Day* (1997). She has also published a book of poetry for adults, *In This House Are Many Women* (1992). Her new children's book, *There's a Mouse in My House,* was published by Doubleday in the fall of 1997.

Our afternoon conversation was wide-ranging, covering topics as diverse as dragons, floor polishers, Isaac Watts and sneakers. However, we kept circling back to several key elements central to Sheree's work: the writer's discovery of what she calls a "personal mythology;" gender and children's literature; and the concept of community in children's literature. These elements, only marginally separable for purposes of convenient categorization, inform each other.

Fitch's "personal mythology" is an amalgam of elements, drawn from personal experience, dream, and literary tradition. Although Fitch acknowledges the importance of her literary studies at St. Thomas and Acadia Universities — her "good English profs who made [her] love language" — she places particular emphasis on the everyday: "I think so much of what I've done has been less influenced by, you know, literary mythology, than everyday mythology, which everyone has ... it's like taking the ordinary, and allowing yourself to dream on it enough that it becomes fantastical and mythological to you. But I don't really know how that process works ... you never know how all the influences go in and mix and stir and percolate in your brain." Fitch's "mix and stir" of elements has produced a rich texture, a dynamic imaginative landscape in which the fantastic and the mundane come into play — "monkeys in the kitchen," Keats's dragons in the bedroom — and in which wordplay, tongue-twisters and rhymes reminiscent of the nonsense tradition co-exist with the simplicity of colloquial, childlike voices. Her "personal mythology" is also inevitably grounded in her identity as a female, an important aspect of Fitch's aesthetic, as this piece will presently examine.

The notion of community, in Fitch's writing, is significantly formulated on linguistic grounds. Doing a Masters thesis on children's literature compelled her to examine what the key constituents of that literature are, and for Fitch, "a community of listeners" is of crucial importance if a literature, particularly a literature for children, is to have a viable existence. Recognizing the communal characteristics of orality, of a literature "meant to be spoken out loud," Sheree formulated the term "utterature:" "all literature that is dependent on the human voice and a community of listeners to have its life." This concept feeds readily into the genre of children's poetry, one which, Sheree asserts, "is dependent on rhythm

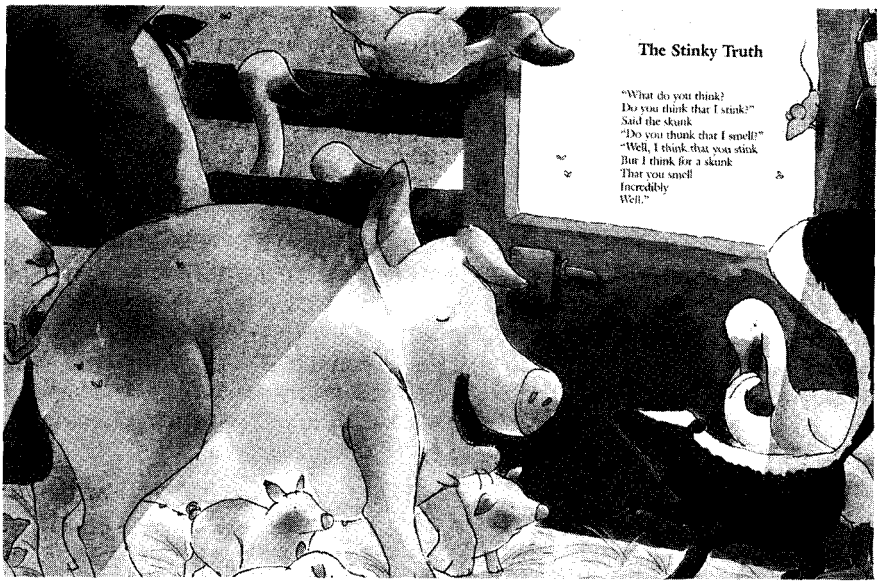

Illustration by Darcia Labrosse, from ***If You Could Wear My Sneakers!***

and the human voice ... a thing that's meant to be shared." "The early 'readers' are not readers at all," she says. "What they really are are listeners of the literature, which means it's utterature." "Uttering" strikes Fitch as an appropriate term for reaching out, for moving towards a community of listeners. "I love the origins of the word 'utter'," she says, "which means to 'outer', to take what's inside and to make it out loud."

Fitch's notion that voiced, poetic language is "participatory," communal and expressive of the child's rite of discovery of his or her body, including language acquisition, reaches back to the nursery rhyme form, and to the essential appeal rhythm and rhyme seem always to have had for children. What she calls the "lip-slipperiness of language," the pleasure we experience from it as a sensory, tactile entity, as "a whole body thing" corroborates a prevailing notion, as Constantine Georgiou puts it, that "poetry is considered a language that is natural to childhood ... it stirs within [children] an innate sense of rhythm and rhyme" (112). In his essay, "Why Nursery Rhymes?" Nicholas Tucker isolates the educational value of rhymes of all sorts, designed, he says, "to help a baby master speech" (258). Tucker, like Fitch, recognizes the educative, communal function of rhyme, remarking that "nursery rhymes do much to link children to their inner selves, and also their own age group and to the central archetypes of their own culture" (Tucker 262). Of children's poetic propensities, Fitch remarks that "all kids have this, like, it's innate." Although space restrictions prohibit an extensive examination, at this time, of Fitch's two poetry collections — *Toes in My Nose* and *If You Could Wear My Sneakers* (a collection written about children's rights for UNICEF) — her poems offer a lavish "lip-slipperiness," and a childlike, joyful remaking of the ordinary

world as extraordinary: for example, the monster that the child believes lives under the bathtub plug, "the blug in the plug in the tub." The communal orality of poetry is continued in Fitch's storybooks, augmented by open-ended forms which, as Fitch presently discusses, engage the reader's participation, again, opening out into community.

Having recognized the innate "poeticness" of children, however, Fitch avoids the sentimentalizing around child-poets that critics sometimes succumb to. She urges us to consider an added dimension: the child's world is not always a poetic one, or even an environment in which creativity is necessarily fostered or valued. Thus, the need to legitimate the child's creative potential is an important value for Fitch. Even child-poets, with all their innate abilities, cannot flourish in a vacuum. Sheree recognizes, in her own childhood experiences, the importance of having her voice "validated." "If there hadn't been certain people," she says, "like that grade two teacher ... or parents who said, 'you'll probably [be a writer] someday' ... everything else in my world, in the world I lived in, did not encourage." The following interview excerpt reveals a pivotal experience for Sheree as a child-poet:

> *JL: Did you always want to be a poet, and did you write poetry as a child?*
>
> **SF:** Ok. When I was seven, my grade two teacher Mrs. Goodwin asked us to write poems, and we all groaned. She said, 'look, you can write about anything, you can even write about your name, just write.' And I wrote. My first poem was 'I'm an itchy Fitch/And I live in a ditch/And I'm not very rich/And I look like a witch/And sometimes I itch.'
>
> *JL: You were seven when you wrote that?*
>
> **SF:** I was seven. And she took that poem, and she wrote it on the board, and she had everybody in the class say, 'I'm an itchy Fitch/And I live in a ditch,' etc. She validated it ... she said, 'Sheree, that is a poem,'

This excerpt reflects, obviously, one of the more enabling moments in Fitch's writing career. However, she also experienced a sense of isolation, probably beginning in high school, when writing "wasn't cool," and later, when she sensed a paucity of female mentors — of (living) women writers in her maritime community.[1] Thus, given the importance, for Fitch, of a "personal mythology," her own emergence as a writer, her own "uttering," is subtly mirrored in her heroines' journeys towards a self-affirmation rooted in language and utterance.[2]

Children's narratives are predominantly stories of emergence. With the exception of *Toes in My Nose* and *Sneakers*, which are collections of discrete poems, Sheree Fitch's books engage this pattern. Even more specifically, *Sleeping Dragons, Monkeys in My Kitchen, I am Small* and *Mabel Murple* are all stories of female emergence. Given Fitch's remark that "I do think I have used myself in almost every book," her development of a "personal mythology" is almost inevitably linked to her growth as writer and woman. Without being overtly didactic, Fitch's female characters subtly fracture stereotypes and expectations around gender. Mabel Murple on her purple motorcycle is (pun intended) no shrinking violet. Fitch also offers her readers a grandma in blue jeans and a female Mountie. When asked about "feminism in children's literature, and how

important gender is in [her] writing, and how conscious she is of it while crafting a book," Sheree responded:

> I really appreciate being asked this, Jeanette. Because people don't always give children's literature its credit and even ask those questions. The funny thing is, you see, in this next book, *There's a Mouse in My House*, the protagonist is a boy. But you know what? Not really, because the mouse is a female. But before I finished this book, Dustin said to me, 'is it going to be a girl or a boy?' I said, 'a girl,' and he said, 'Mom, I think you're really sexist; every book you've written in the last couple of years has all been girls. How about a boy?' And I went... 'oh, my God ...' Like, I hadn't even really seen it. And I said, 'Gosh, Dustin, I guess I do it because I'm a girl' ... And now, in hindsight, when I look back at particular poems ... I know why I was doing it at that particular time in my life, too. But I really think it's essential ... like, *Dragons*, for example. That's about a young girl who's afraid, and she's quiet, quiet, quiet, quiet. What happens, to me, in that book, is not only does she have to face the dragons — that's beside the point — she finds her voice ... she handles the situation ... I can see that now. I didn't see it at the time. And I really believe, knowing where I was in my life, knowing where I'd come from in my life — somebody who had felt voiceless and powerless and fearful — when I look at the time in my life when I wrote that, and what's in that book, it blows me away. Because I think, 'it's there;' I do believe there are as many layers in a children's book as you're willing to go and see.

The *Dragons* protagonist's ability to assert herself, in the end, and banish the dragons, recalls Alice's moment of self-asserting emergence in Carroll's famous story, her "calling the bluff" of the frightening "other": "'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'" (108). Fitch's Dragon girl's assertion is more linguistic in nature, revelling in its own wordly prowess: "'YOU BOLD AND BRUTISH BURSTEN-BELLIED BEASTS .../YOU ... YOU BRASH BUNCH OF BEDRAGGLED DRAGONS .../(...) DRAGONS DREAD/GO BACK TO BED!!'" The imagery of bed, sleeping and night time suggests that the dragons may be essentially a psychological manifestation, an inner fear to be overcome.

Willa Wellowby, the protagonist of *Monkeys in My Kitchen*, reveals female empowerment through words even more explicitly than the dragon girl in Fitch's previous book. Faced with the story's problem-premise — the invasion of monkeys — Willa initially attempts to resolve her situation through the agency of others: "I called the police/I called the RCMP." However, she solves her dilemma of how to rid her kitchen of monkeys, or, more symbolically, her domestic world of chaos, through her own intellect: "I think and think (and think)/Then suddenly I had an idea/The solution to save the day/I shouted one word:/'BANANAS!!!'/And all those monkeys stopped." Comparing *Dragons* with *Monkeys*, Fitch remarks, "The Willa Wellowby one, it's not that different, in a way. It's not fear, it's chaos. She's out of control, and she can't get control.... She uses her head, finally ... and comes up with an idea and she saves the day. And what she does is, she uses words. That one word — 'bananas.' So she has found the one word that makes her able to handle what happens. I really think Monkeys is about the capacity of the imagination. How we control our thoughts, our imagination, how far we let it go, or how it controls us."

Illustration by Kim LaFave, from I Am Small

It is difficult not to draw some parallels between the girl protagonists' (in *Dragons* and *Monkeys*) discovery of their authority-through-language and Fitch's own discovery of her creative, female voice. Fitch remarks, "I could talk about gender and children's literature forever. But I guess I should say it wasn't conscious at the time, but of course at the same time, when I was finding writing, and listening to my voice, and honouring my voice was at the same time when I was coming into my understanding of what it meant to be a woman and a single parent, and my feminist beliefs and philosophies and I was going to university. So it all ... it has to, at some point, be a reflection of all that."

With respect to Fitch's *I Am Small*, it is equally difficult not to make some equation between the "small" person's emergence into a big, sometimes prohibitive, world, and the woman writer's apprenticeship to her craft. As Lissa Paul remarks in "Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows About Children's Literature," "[c]hildren, like women, are lumped together as helpless and dependent; creatures to be kept away from the scene of the action and who otherwise ought not to be seen or heard" (150). We are thus reminded of Fitch's Dragon-girl's initial self-surveillance: "I MUST be quiet ... shhhh!Shh!" The girl's story of emergence as a metaphor for the emerging female artist continues in *I Am Small*; the world, in this story geared towards a younger audience than either *Dragons* or *Monkeys*, is clearly not designed for small people:

> This is small talking.
>
> I cannot reach the light switch
> The glasses in the kitchen cupboard
> The taps that turn on water
> The ice cubes in the freezer
> The towels on the bathroom shelf
> Or the clothes hanging in my closet.

Kim LaFave's illustrations compliment the text quite effectively. "Small's" powerlessness, for instance, is strongly underscored in the illustration for: "I walk through a jungle of legs: / Of shins and knee-caps and thighs and hips. / I am always looking up." In the opening sets of illustrations, "Small" is always depicted, true to her name, as small. In the later illustrations, Lafave devotes many more full-page

illustrations to the protagonist, who has, visually, in fact, become quite big, reflecting her empowerment, growth and emergence. As in *Dragons* and *Monkeys*, a central moment of emergence is closely tied to creativity and language:

> I pick up books with letters I cannot read
> But pretend that I do,
> Then pretend that I talk a language only I understand.
> It sounds like this:
> Melinka melunga preinto jitar — which means,
> 'Can I have a peanut butter sandwich?'
> Sometimes I think of a tune in my head
> Then invent all the words to go along with the song.
>
> And it's beautiful.

The power of the child's imagination to create her own symbolic language is celebrated in Fitch's book; it is a power which leads to "Small's" final self-assertion, her positioning of herself "in the world, in the universe:" "I am small./But I think big." The child's "beautiful" song becomes almost a kind of symbolic code in the way the writer's "personal mythology" might be said to constitute her own unique symbolic language. [3] Interestingly, the fact that "Melinka," etc., translates into desire for food suggests a parallel, larger desire for nourishment, for growth. The repeated word "pretend" in the above quotation is really a trope of invention. Becoming inventive and become "big" are closely allied in the story; creativity is empowering.

The inherent sympathy for "Small's" plight could only come about through Fitch's ability to recreate a child's perspective, and to image a prohibitive world as seen from the position of someone diminutive, disempowered — someone, not insignificantly, female. Quite literally, singing her song, Fitch herself experienced a prohibitive world when "a music teacher told [her] to keep [her] mouth shut because [she] was flat." Much later, as a mother and young writer, Fitch struggled against prejudicial dismissal of her literary work: "I was typing up my poems in a subdivision. And I heard my son outside, and the little boy next door said, 'what's your mom doing?' 'Oh, she's typing.' 'Typing what?' 'My mother thinks your mother thinks she's going to be a writer.'" The sense of endeavouring to create in a sometimes inhospitable world reflects why "that little girl [in *I Am Small*] saying 'and it's beautiful' is so important to [Fitch]." "Children," she says, "should be made to think that what they create is fine. It's beautiful."

Whereas the child protagonists in *Dragons*, *Monkeys* and *Small* must grope tentatively towards full presence, the "purple sort of girl" who narrates *Mabel Murple* possesses, from the outset, an awareness of herself as creator, an exuberant confidence which immediately propels her imagination into action. It is interesting, and probably not a coincidence, that although the character Mabel appeared in *Toes*, she did not take on her own full-blown story until later in Fitch's career. "What if...," the story begins, "There was a purple planet/With purple people on it.... And there was a someone just like me/I mean a purple sort of girl." This narrator is readily identified as creator, and names her creation, really a kind of alter-ego for herself: "I must dream up a proper name .../I've got it!/ MABEL

MURPLE!" From that moment on, Mabel is always in motion, eating, drinking, cooking, skiing, riding her bike. But "even Mabel Murple/Has to close her eyes/I wonder if she dreams./Or perhaps when Mabel Murple dreams/She dreams of/Gertrude Green!" The book ends at a beginning, a new creation; it ends with ellipses, encouraging the reader to invent his or her own world for Gertrude Green.

In this way, the torch of invention is passed from narrator to reader; an invitation is extended to the reader to participate in the creative process. The ending of *Mabel Murple* bears similarities to *Monkeys*, which ends when the monkeys banish, but a new adventure is suggested: "But .../I think I saw an elephant/Just open up my door/And I've got this funny feeling/There are/several/hundred/more." Thus the text opens out into the potential for more adventure. Because no one can see the monkeys except for Willa and the reader (they have disappeared by the time the RCMP officer arrives), they suggest a principle of the imagination, partly frightening, partly celebratory, which, like the dragons, can be decoded and come to terms with through language.

Fitch's *Merry-Go-Day* is an open-ended text, as well, in that after spending a day at the carnival, the child-protagonist fails to win the much-coveted purple parrot. However, the text points outside its own narrative boundaries when the parrot appears in fireworks in the night sky, another kind of symbolic code the child apprehends, whispering, "I'll be back next year.... This is goodnight, but not goodbye." The parrot becomes a trope of desire, suggestive of the notion that desire — for parrots, for adventure, exoticism, or whatever — is within reach, and may, when the time is right, be gained through one's own agency.

That Sheree Fitch's stories are open-ended and invitational takes another step towards forging community. Thus, "a community of listeners" can be realized not only through rhyme and rhythm, but also through a story's narrative structure: specifically, its avoidance of closure. The following segment of our conversation reveals the relationship between community and open-ended textuality:

> *JL: Your stories, to me, don't have a sense of closure. Often, they seem open-ended ... how important is this to you — the notion of leaving the story open?*
>
> **SF:** Boy, nobody's asked me that before, Jeanette. I think that's a really good question. I'm sure there's probably a deep-seated reason for that. I'm not somebody who likes endings. I mean, as a human being I tend not to think of things in terms of beginning, middle and end. I mean, it's ongoing ... I think Ezra Pound said the finishing up of things does not come easily, in one of his letters ... my marriage, my thesis ... I don't like saying good-bye to people, you know, so that partly says something about me as a person, believing there's always something about to happen as opposed to a finite place of stopping. But I think especially in the children's books, what I love is that even though the monkeys are gone, something exciting might happen tomorrow.... It takes a reader to complete my book. I mean, how can a book be a book if it doesn't get read? So, to me, that's a bit of respect for the reader as well. There's another person on the end receiving these words. Let them now write the elephant coming to our school, and kids have done that to me. Let them write *Gertrude Green*, let them, you know, imagine what happens when the dragons come back. I guess no one has ever pointed that out to me before, but now that you're asking, it does have something to do with what life is about, and what I believe story is about.

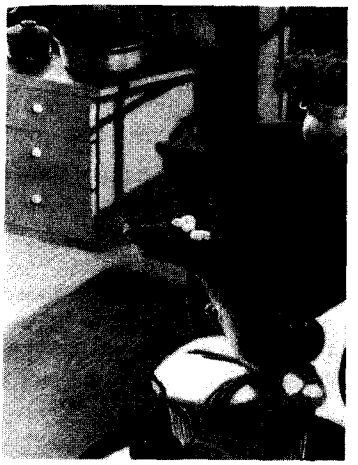

Illustration by Leslie E. Watts, from
There's a Mouse in My House!

JL: There's a kind of generosity to that, too. Your books don't have endings, they have invitations that open the readers' imagination, to imagine more.

SF: That's what you hope. You tell me that, Jeanette, that's the best of all: that what you would like is that your work is a point of departure for someone else's imagination and creativity ... I mean, all I wanted was one little book. And now I meet a mother who says 'we have this sleeping-dragons-all-around game that we play. My husband lies on the floor and then pretends he's a dragon and the kids crawl all over him,' and I'm going, 'oh, my God,' because for me, when a book can kind of insinuate its way into your household culture, then it belongs to your family. It becomes a part of your family culture, or your school culture. So when teachers show me, 'look, we did this thing with monkeys in the classroom,' that's the life you want a book to have. Not necessarily your story, but that it's given rise to them. I mean, that's humbling, it's rewarding, and I don't sneeze at it. I'm very grateful.

We are grateful, too, for the "community of listeners" Sheree Fitch's work has forged, and continues to engage. Sheree's new book, *There's a Mouse in My House*, offers, with a surprising twist, another tale of emergence, another celebration of storytelling, enabling confrontation with chaos and fear, accommodation of difference, and the female's assertion of voice so characteristic of her work to date. I had the good fortune, later that afternoon, to have Sheree recite her new mouse story for me, and I was small again, "a purple sort of girl" rediscovering the rich possibilities of story.

Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges Sheree Fitch's generosity, and the time she took from her hectic schedule to provide an interview on June 24, 1997.

The author also thanks Marie Davis for her assistance with this project, and for the interesting e-mail discussions about children's literature.

1 From an early age, Fitch had identified writing as her vocation. However, "the reality was, there was no such person [as a woman writer] in Moncton, New Brunswick that I ever knew who was a real writer, so it seemed like, 'yeah, that's a nice dream, but there's not really ... but you can't really grow up and do that [be a writer], because how do you do that?' And I did know about Lucy Maud [Montgomery], but ... I still remember thinking, 'but she's long dead.' You know, there was nobody I knew in my small world who was a writer. So it was a long journey and I always wrote, as a kid."

2 It is important to re-emphasize that while I am reading Fitch's stories as narrativized, or metaphorized explorations, of her own quest, as a female, for emergence, authority and voice, she does not write "to formula;" in other words, her narrativization of her own experiences, as a female, were, at the time of composition, incorporated into the text on a sub-conscious level. At the time of composition, Fitch's priority is to "let the poem take [her]." But, she says, "now, in hindsight, when I look back at particular poems, I go, 'Oh, my God,' and I know why I was doing it at that particular time in my life, too." Writing her newest book, *There's a Mouse in My House,* was a similar organic process of discovery for Fitch. "The mouse is a girl," she says, "and what the girl does is tell stories.... And [writing it] when I got to the end of the story, I just cried and cried and cried ... I didn't know."

3 The notion of a child's symbolic/secret language, and Fitch's ability, as a writer, to make such a language resonate with her readers/listeners is suggested by her anecdote of a child who approached her [with respect to *I am Small*] "and said, 'you know, when they talk in that language ... melinka melunga ...' ... he went, 'my sister and I do that all the time.' ... And he started to talk to me in his secret language. 'Cause I think he thought I'd understand."

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Profile: Franklin: Ideal Children's Literary Idol or Flavourless Turtle of Privilege?

• *Leanne Wild* •

Photo credit: The Water Street Studio

Brenda Clark

Résumé: *Ce court article analyse le succès de la série Franklin la Tortue. L'auteur examine la dimension didactique et culturelle de la production ainsi que les caractéristiques essentielles du personnage. Une étude des illustrations de Brenda Clark étaye son analyse.*

Summary: *This profile examines Franklin the turtle's rise to fame. Leanne questions the socializing and didactic value of the Franklin books, as well as the uniqueness and substance of Franklin himself. An interview with illustrator Brenda Clark forms part of the analysis, and the significance of the illustrations, character, story and pedagogy of the Franklin phenomenon are discussed.*

He's a small green guy with a shell, and he's made his way into the spotlight of the Canadian — and now North American — children's literary scene. On a Saturday in mid-April, children gather in a Mississauga Chapters store to meet Franklin the turtle and hear one of his stories read. Franklin's visits — to bookstores, libraries, schools and even restaurants — have become so frequent that Kids Can Press has designated a staff member to co-ordinate the booking of the turtle's official costume.

Franklin's stats are impressive: 16 million books sold worldwide, an animated TV series with The Family Channel and CBS (beginning fall 1998), a myriad of toys, figurines and stickers. Activity books and CD-ROMs geared towards developing math and reading skills, and inspired artistic partnerships such as that with the Touring Players Theatre of Canada, whose Franklin shows, performed largely for schools, have joined the Players' Robert Munsch-based plays as their best-selling shows. And there are only more such diversions to come. At illustrator Brenda Clark's Port Perry home, a continual flow of potential Franklin image-bearers makes its way into her studio (on the day of this interview, the hopefuls range from plush toys to a "Franklin bank"), awaiting her discerning judgement in their bid to win approval as "real" Franklins. Children, parents, educators and marketers of children's books and entertainment seem overwhelmingly in support of the growth of Franklin's fame and success.

If success is measured in terms of marketability and partnerships, the Franklin venture has been successful. But how does this amphibious creation of author Paulette Bourgeois, Kids Can Press and Brenda Clark rate according to the measures of intelligent discourse, social impact and creative uniqueness? Working from a recognition of the substantial potential impact of children's literature as a socializing agent, the widespread reception and influence of the Franklin stories is reason enough to investigate these deeper aspects and perform some analytic probing. Thus we follow the critical narrative into a less nurturing climate, and evaluate the internal story: the less-than-dynamic character of Franklin and his questionable uniqueness.

Franklin is an unassuming, slightly neurotic little turtle who deals with situations no more traumatic than losing soccer games and having his first sleepover. There is not much in plot or character which makes him stand out as extraordinary. In fact, among his young fans, he blends quite comfortably into a circle of (all male) idols which includes Barney the dinosaur and Arthur the aardvark. Just like on TV, the books are set in a cosy family atmosphere and grounded in an established community, and plots revolve around a mildly problematic situation which is solved in a fairly predictable way by the end of the story. Neither plot, character nor setting appear to encourage imaginative and non-linear thinking or challenge the status quo.

Franklin is also a "turtle of privilege": he lives in a materially sufficient home and community with both parents and is physically, mentally and socially more than capable. His "problems" are usually based on a fear of some sort, and even when he has difficulty with a task or skill, it is usually caused by fear or lack of discipline. He has trouble learning to ride his bicycle because he doesn't want to have to practice, and gets stage fright because he has the privilege of the lead role in the school play. These are, perhaps, situations encountered by countless pre-schoolers and primaries, but — in the world of children's literature — they are nothing new. Arthur, Barney, Little Critter and many other characters have also addressed these types of issues. Franklin may be many good things, but he does not seem to be at all revolutionary, or even very original. So why all the excitement? Perhaps this an example of a cultural tendency to celebrate art with some general appeal but rather lacking in depth

and intelligence; more likely this is merely the reality of the mainstream market of literature for children.

The factors contributing to Franklin's success with children, parents, educators and marketing specialists are not difficult to delineate. The illustrations are skilful and appealing, the stories are easily digested and deal with issues and situations encountered daily by the target audience and their adult counterparts, e.g. fear of the dark, tidiness, acquiring new skills, first day of school. Asked why they and their children like the Franklin books, most parents at a Mississauga Chapters Franklin event referred to the kid-relevant storylines: "the books work through issues and situations at their [children's] level of growth, but have happy endings"; "he [child] gets a sense of his own world." Reviewers tend to respond similarly, praising plots involving situations such as fear of the dark, getting lost, first day of school, tardiness and messiness, as relevant to the life and times of many '90s pre-schoolers. "Stories about Franklin the turtle ... are appreciated and loved on each side of the generation gap. Kids recognize Franklin's successes and failures and grown-ups generally approve of the stories' gentle resolutions" (Beaty 34).

Franklin visits a Mississauga, Ontario, bookstore.

Not everyone responds to Franklin with open arms, however. Some reviewers find the issue-based plots contrived: "the moral bits are irritating, especially the attempt at non-sexist revisionism involving a girl named 'Sir Lady Beaver'" (Beaty 34). A children's bookstore staff member had some harsh but insightful criticism for the little green guy. She described the Franklin stories as "washed-out" and "generic," and accused Franklin's creators of "sameness," suggesting that Franklin, Barney, Arthur and others in their realm are "interchangeable." Franklin "teaches good manners and good behaviour, but doesn't teach [children] to be original individuals." She characterises Franklin stories as lacking in creative imagining, originality, intelligent humour and critical thought, and wonders if the socializing effect of such books is to render children "uncritical." The general praise of Franklin's relevance to young children's daily encounters didn't impress this critic. She was more interested in whether or not the books displayed clever wit, a super sense of fun and wacky characters,

and whether or not they could be seen to encourage individual, critical thought.

A three-year-old at the Mississauga Chapters event gave the best response to adult claims of child-relevancy. In response to a parent's unprompted question, "Who do you like better, Franklin or Barney?", the child looked at his father thoughtfully, tilted his head to one side and finally announced, "horse!" He followed this by an impressive demonstration of whinnying and galloping. The "point taken" is not that children don't care about Franklin; nor is it that Franklin stories are removed from the experience of many North American children. It is merely a reality check; a reminder that spontaneity, imagination and originality are instinctive childhood characteristics, and that literature which encourages and demonstrates constructive channelling of those characteristics is worthy of attention. Sarah Ellis voiced this reality in an article in Quill & Quire: "by supporting children in their imaginative natures, we are being deeply subversive because we are fostering change in a way that is likely to be extremely effective" (38).

In such an incredibly censored realm as literature marketed for children, perhaps "subversion" of this sort must be recognized in small ways. Brenda Clark's illustrations are a case in point. Her attention to detail — oft-noted and praised — is not limited to (although it certainly includes) varied types of flowers in a field, or a messy room overflowing with carefully articulated objects. She brings important points to focus through her detail in character interactions and her choices in object detail, demonstrating both artistic skill and insight. Although Franklin and his parents have become quite personified, each of Franklin's friends represents their species in a surprisingly realistic fashion. Beaver *looks* like an authentic beaver; she is also not given any stereotypically ascribed characteristics (long eyelashes, hair ribbons) to validate her girl-ness. Clark also has a tendency to portray the animals eating species-appropriate food: at lunchtime at school, Beaver has a twig and Raccoon is eating an apple. At home, flies, beetles and leaves turn up in Franklin's cookies, pancakes and meals. She commented on this in a recent interview:

> I try and do that as much as possible.... They're still animals! You throw in those bug things just for humour more than anything. You sort of bring [readers] back to realizing [the characters] are not people, even though they're acting like people.

In *Franklin and the Tooth Fairy*, the tooth fairy appears as a fox, then a bear and then a raccoon, when she appears to each of those animals:

> in the illustrations, everybody is dreaming about, or talking about, the tooth fairy and Franklin's friends each have an image of their own tooth fairy. I thought it was important, because we as humans believe that tooth fairies, Santas, etc. look like ourselves, whatever our heritage may be. So why not? She's talking about Franklin being different because he doesn't have teeth when everybody does, so they can also have different tooth fairies.

Clark affirmed the suggestion that her inclusion of bugs, animal-specific tooth fairies and dads in the kitchen is very much intentional, based on an awareness of the deeper issues these reflect.

Illustration by Brenda Clark, from
Franklin and the Tooth Fairy

> I'm aware of all that ... I began my career by illustrating educational books. They have a set of rules you wouldn't believe — standards to go by. For example, if you're showing a group of children, there should be a balanced mix of boys and girls from many different racial backgrounds, and perhaps one or two with obvious disabilities. It's all percentaged out. Also, mothers should not always be seen wearing aprons and fathers can't always be fixing things. Every page is planned out very carefully. That's where I came from when I began the Franklin series.

In fact, considering the amount of censorship placed on children's books, it is not quite surprising that many illustrators stick to the safe spaces of comfortable representation. Franklin now has to pass the tests for Scholastic in the US, which has meant another round of censorship. One main result: no witches allowed at Franklin's Halloween party.

Franklin's international distribution has exacerbated the censorship filters. "At Kids Can Press, the rights and licences department is careful to research the international customs and traditions for the countries that purchase Franklin," including details as seemingly insignificant as the wiener roast in *Franklin Has A Sleepover*. In the UK, wieners are bizarre and sausages are the norm, so Clark had to come up with an artistic compromise: "a chubby short wiener, so it looked like it could be a sausage.... You want to make [the readers] feel that this is their Franklin, that he lives in their countryside, otherwise, they won't feel as drawn to him or the situation."

In terms of character interaction, Clark creates a clear sense of relationship between characters, especially parents. In *Franklin's New Friend*, Moose's parents share a loving glance in the background as they move into their new home. Franklin's parents often share similar glances. While Franklin opens a gift in *Franklin and the Tooth Fairy*, his parents smile at each other as his father passes to Franklin's mother the tea he has just poured for her. Franklin and his parents wash dishes together, and when Franklin makes a mess, his parents help him clean it up. Clark expressed her conviction about illustrating families interacting positively:

"I don't think there's anything wrong with showing a well-adjusted family. There are happy kids, that have good parents, and there's nothing wrong with portraying that. I think it's good to portray a family with healthy attitudes. There are plenty of dysfunctional examples of parents and children in literature and on TV. We show our families as animals, they aren't shown as any nationality or race or anything like that—they could be any nationality and from just about anywhere in the world. They're just dealing with everyday issues, and dealing with them gently."

The Franklin texts are, in fact, quite moralistic. They are not often subtle in their didactic purposes, and although this is sometimes grating to reviewers, child readers and their parents don't seem to protest. Contrived or intentional though it may be, the Franklin stories do contain some applicable pedagogy. Obviously, child readers can learn approaches to dealing with fears. But the didactic qualities of Franklin and Friends go beyond that. Parents observe parenting techniques which are discerning, assertive, gentle, consistent and child-focused; teachers and other educators observe similar interactive approaches to problem-solving in the classroom. Trusting the child with ownership of the problem, and acting as facilitators and guides is the main undercurrent in the responses of Bourgeois' adult characters to the dilemmas of their younger counterparts. This approach not only gives the stories a quiet sense of humour, but also makes them more child-centred and provides helpful parenting strategies. In *Franklin and the Tooth Fairy*, his parents don't stop him or tell him he's being silly when toothless Franklin puts a note and a tiny white rock under his shell in an attempt to trick the tooth fairy into giving him a present. Instead, he finds a note in the morning which reads: "Dear Franklin, Sorry. Turtles don't have teeth. Good try. Your friend, The Tooth Fairy.", and a book at the breakfast table from his parents, "to celebrate [his] growing up."

My concern with this moralistic approach is merely with its historic tradition. Books for children have been known to wield their power as a socializing factor in many ways. Stories of children who reached heaven or hell based on their conformity to behaviour deemed proper are no longer considered to be very relevant, or even appropriate, for current Canadian culture. Neither are most of the values and lessons learned in *Leave It To Beaver*. Current academic thinking scoffs at history's moralistic stories featuring child protagonists who learn that good girls don't get muddy and that children should be seen, not heard. However, this is the model from which Franklin's creators espouse various strategies of applying child psychology. Is Franklin the '90s answer to the Cleaver family? I'm not sure that we are qualified to judge our sensitive '90s morals and values as "better," or any more worthy of moralistic discourse than Puritan values many years ago. The end may be worthwhile, but it may not justify the means, especially if that means is borrowed from an historically notorious model.

However, the experience of one Franklin-positive family is almost enough to convince me that the end does justify the means in this case: a mother explained to me that she and her husband like to read Franklin books with their three-year-old son Zach, because, even though the issues raised may not be huge, they can be extrapolated to the family's situation. She found *Franklin and*

the Tooth Fairy excellent, because, "our child is different, being bi-racial," and the premise of difference in that story was enough for them to discuss with Zach the reality of his own individuality, in an entirely non-threatening manner, because Franklin had been through it too.

Recognizing the obvious element of "sameness" and lack of radical originality inherent in the happenings of Franklin and his children's entertainment co-horts, I also wonder if these characters, their struggles and journeys are readily embraced as "new" or "original" simply because children are born and growing and changing every moment, and people are continually discovering the unoriginal newness of parenting. Again, perhaps the tendency of the process of childhood and parenthood to be incessantly new and unprecedented to each individual, despite eons of practice in the process as a human race is what allows characters such as Franklin to be so joyfully embraced.

The appealing nature of Franklin's character, the child-centredness of his world and his widely applicable (and transferable, as realized in the math and reading skills-centred CD-ROMs) positive didactic value are certainly deserving of recognition. Clark's achievement of "subversion" through detail in her illustrations (as discussed earlier) is also worthy of praise. From this point, it is easy to desire to applaud Bourgeois, Clark and Kids Can in their success and close with a smile. However, some reservations remain salient in my mind. The stories continue to stand as a socializing agent reinforcing many undesirable (to my mind) standards: a main character who is male and the majority of whose friends are male; storylines and setting which mirror the triteness of TV sitcoms; a pedagogical backbone; a type of pseudo-realism which permits neither actual realism nor imaginative exploration; a lack of an awareness of the outrageous, the ridiculous and the spontaneous; a disappointing unwillingness to venture beyond the well-travelled tracks of children's "daily issues." All this in mind, the Franklin craze is neither cause for ecstatic celebration, nor is it cause for extreme alarm. In a very real world of censorship and production, Franklin is quietly endearing himself to kids and their grown-ups.

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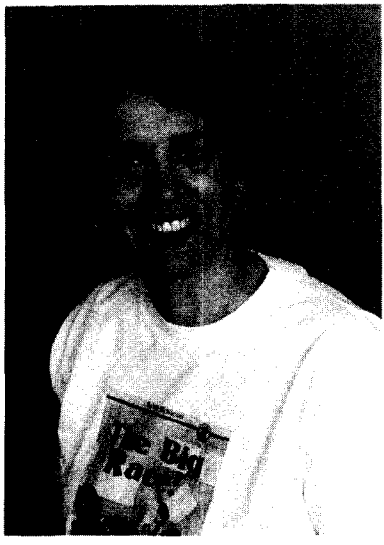
Leanne Wild *graduated from the University of Guelph with an Honours BA in drama in June 1997. She has worked, played and read with children of all ages in diverse capacities and spaces, including camps, schools, community groups and churches in Canada, the USA and Brazil.*

Profile: Sylvia McNicoll

• *Gisela Sherman* •



Sylvia McNicoll

Résumé: *Sylvia McNicoll craint que les parents et les éducateurs n'aient réussi à faire de la lecture une obligation des plus contraignantes. À l'inverse, dans ses séances de lecture et d'animation culturelle, elle cherche à éveiller l'imagination des enfants et à les initier au plaisir de la lecture. Cette volonté de satisfaire les aspirations des jeunes lecteurs d'aujourd'hui est à la source de ses récits, toujours émouvants et pleins d'humour.*

Summary: *Sylvia McNicoll has much fun entertaining children at book talks. She loves to arouse interest in her own books and reading in general. She fears educators and parents have become so adamant about the importance of reading, they've turned it into broccoli. She'd rather show kids the joy and magic of books — turn them back into chocolate treats. She is convinced good books must not only thrill, but connect with a reader's inner identity or they ultimately do not satisfy. Her efforts to connect with modern children, their interests and concerns, have resulted in wonderful novels of humour and poignancy.*

The packed auditorium buzzes with infectious excitement. Three hundred middle school students jostle, chatter and glance around expectantly. Then they grow quiet. A tall dark-haired woman wearing a white karate gi and a blue belt enters the room. She obliges the challenge of some macho types by flipping

them easily over her hip. Superman style, she strips off the gi and reveals her trademark painted blue jeans and the T-shirt with her latest book covers emblazoned on the chest.

For the next hour Sylvia McNicoll sprays whipped cream beards on her audience, gives cucumber facials, demonstrates how to catch tigers with a snare pole, and reads relevant selections from her books. On other visits she'll share her hamster or snails or chocolate cookies, show the Egg People videos her own children filmed. Sometimes she reads from a rejected manuscript, asks for opinions on a work in progress, swings a rubber chicken, anything to raise excitement for her books and reading. She once boasted she would do cartwheels if it would get kids' attention, and then kept that promise with five spectacular vaults across the lawn at Eden Mills's literary festival.

McNicoll explains her enthusiasm for entertaining readers: she likes showing off. She considers the satisfaction of meeting her audience a perk of her writing career. She's also practical. In order to survive financially, Canadian authors must earn some of their income from book talks and workshops.

There is another reason. The visits are part of McNicoll's strategy to make reading desirable and accessible to the next generation. She believes book talks make readers aware that writers are real people. Once kids become interested in authors' personalities, they become curious about their books. Along the way they find they like them, so they begin the habit of reading, or break out of the rut of reading formula series. Circulation statistics of Toronto libraries support this theory. They show that after an author has visited, many more of his/her books are signed out, not just after the reading, but even a year later.

Sylvia McNicoll has always loved reading. But the people in the books she read as a child in Montreal were alien to her. "Realistic" stories were fantasy. It was always summer. Baby sisters wore cute dresses and blonde curls. Even at home, storybook fathers wore suits and ties. Her dad was a blue collar worker. Her family were hard-working immigrants. Every story family owned a dog and a cat. Sylvia could never figure out why storybook dogs said "bow wow." Even her dog didn't speak the same language. The heroine she and her friends read about, Nancy Drew, was a twenty-year-old who did stuff a thirteen-year-old might yearn to do. Their language, too — sleuth, roadster — was of another world. McNicoll says, "We wanted it. We read it. But it wasn't us."

Anyone, even a white, middle- and working-class kid, feels alienated from literature if it doesn't include them. So now she writes realistic stories about real kids. Her characters have overbites and dyslexia, find marijuana in their sister's room, worry about the Gulf War, grades, divorce and anorexia. Their parents cope with the pressures of job, finances and family with varying degrees of success. In *Blueberries and Whipped Cream*, Christina's father arrives at her school, "short and round with his beer belly hanging over his belt ... He was wearing his hard hat ... dirty old work clothes and steel toed boots and carrying — geez how embarrassing — his big black lunch pail." Christina's small room is painted with cheap paint bought on sale — not what she dreams of. Her mother, a factory seamstress, is dying of cancer and her father copes by

drinking too much. But we feel this family's anguish and love and strength. Christina's mother refuses a painkiller so she can stay awake to see Christina dressed for a dance. She can't eat, but she says. "Nurse, just see. I look at my daughter and I am full."

In *Walking a Thin Line,* Lauren's Nanna's bottom stretches her polyester pants with the elastic waist, and she spends her days glued to the TV, but her hugs "felt soft and inviting, like the cookies."

Understated emotional scenes of ordinary people trying their best are one of McNicoll's greatest strengths. They include Christina's race to bring her mother's childhood treat to her, and her realization that it is time for her mother to die, Cliff's dad's letter in *Facing the Enemy,* Neil comforting his sister under the stars in *Project Disaster,* Lauren visiting her anorexic friend in hospital in *Walking a Thin Line,* one of literature's most moving family Christmases in *Bringing Up Beauty,* and, of course, giving up Beauty.

McNicoll went to high school with a girl whose mother died. She always wonderd how "Christina" coped with the burdens of housework, schoolwork, social life and grief, so *Blueberries and Whipped Cream* became her answer. She believes young people need a book like this to see that someone with horrible problems can cope. She's disturbed when teachers tell her they withhold it from a class because someone's parent is dying.

For that novel, McNicoll meticulously researched cancer and coping with grief. The same amount of study goes into all her writing. She says, "A picture may be worth a thousand words, but so is a bit of research." The perennial advice to new writers, "write what you know," bores her. She prefers "know what you write." *Walking a Thin Line*'s funny bits, such as the "Weight Whippers" meeting, were based on her own battles with weight. For the rest, she spoke with doctors, counsellors, patients and their families, then had them read the manuscript for accuracy. For the Stage School Series she's now writing as Geena Dare, she has immersed herself and her family in visits to theatres, ballet recitals, arts schools, biographies and texts. McNicoll believes that research not only enriches her stories, but also her life.

The mother of three teens, McNicoll says she works hard to stay up-to-date with kids' interests and styles, but then laughs and wonders aloud if Charlotte Brontë worried about being dated. Her novels are told from a Canadian perspective, in Canadian settings — especially Burlington and Montreal, with references to Canadian landmarks and authors — Robert Munsch, Paul Kropp, Betty Jane Wylie.

McNicoll remembers being so intense in her teens that she briefly considered suicide when she didn't make the field hockey team, so she tries to be sensitive to the intensity, longings and raging hormones of both her characters and her audience. Her characters are breathing, thinking, modern, kids. They note their parents' weaknesses with acerbic wit. The girls are interested in basketball, auto mechanics and roller blade hockey, as well as mascara, breasts and babysitting. Boys love baseball, cars, Bon Jovi, want a dog, wear an earring. She carries the ideal '90s male perhaps too far, since the tough boys are generally

the bad guys who set tigers loose in the mall, bully, and cheat on exams. Her male protagonists tend to help girls win at baseball or science projects, bake cookies, say sensitive things — and are great kissers with incredible eyes. That said, it's hard not to care about Cliff Hansen in *Facing the Enemy*, who covers his love and worry for his soldier father with shrugs and wisecracks but shows a touching concern for his young sister and for humanity in general.

Facing the Enemy is a beautiful story that deserves more recognition. It was begun during the Gulf War as McNicoll's way of dealing with her own fears. She clipped every war headline and used them somehow in her story. She visited a military base when she and everyone there were upset during the horrible days when no one knew how "Desert Storm" would end. A vehicle technician gave her the story she put in the letter, told her about the scorpions. Using real facts makes her stories three-dimensional. And she likes to save her imagination for the way her characters feel, rather than the setting or events.

She knew that teenagers go through a stage when they don't get along with a parent. It passes. But what if that parent should die first? The guilt would last forever. Cliff is positive that his dad will be killed overseas before he gets a chance to tell him he loves him. He also falls for Farrah, a girl from Iraq, who faces prejudice here, and fears for her family over there.

That prejudice is something McNicoll also knows and strives to address in her work. As the daughter of German immigrants, she suffered the schoolyard insults. She knows what it is to be born in Canada, feel Canadian, but be regarded an enemy within your own country. She worries that we work so hard to promote multiculturalism, but all we need is one war and so much of the hatred comes back.

McNicoll knew in grade four that she loved to write, but she thought it wasn't something a real person did. After graduating from Concordia University in Montreal with a BA in English, she worked in corporate banking for seven years. Staying home to raise her children let her slow down and reflect and begin writing again. In 1986 she took a course with Paul Kropp at Sheridan College. Her first night there she realized that writing for kids was what she rally wanted. During that twelve-week course she completed the first draft of *Blueberries and Whipped Cream*. It was published by Gage in 1988, in Australia in 1989, and optioned for a film in 1990.

McNicoll credits Kropp's novel *Wilted* (now published as *You've Seen Enough*) as the major eye-opener for her. It was the first time she read a book written in first person that was funny, easy to read and poignant. The chapter in which Danny fights with his mom about his glasses reached out to her. It reminded her of the glasses she had to wear as a child — not smart stylish ones, but the cheap ugly ones her parents could afford. That chapter connected with her inner identity, something she feels strongly that good books have. She says the currently popular horror series books may "thrill," but they don't connect and ultimately don't satisfy. If a book connects with children, their interests, and what they are, if they see themselves in literature, they'll like it. *Wilted* showed Sylvia her style could be acceptable. She could write a book.

Since then, she has published sixteen books with that combination of humour, action and poignancy. They range from first chapter book to middle grade and young adult novels. McNicoll explains this variety: "I love writing so much, if the market demanded it, I'd write books for children in the womb."

She finds writing for and reaching teenagers is really satisfying, especially when she speaks to a group diagnosed as tough kids who hate reading. It thrills her to hold their attention, to know that she has reached them. She described one incident that touched her. In a southwestern corn-stalk town an intimidating hulk with an earring blocked her path. He held up his copy of *Facing the Enemy* and uttered one word: "Magnificent." She's moved to know about the girl, daughter of a crack-addict mom, who attended counseling with *Blueberries and Whipped Cream* under her arm, and quoted from it.

Since the value of reading has been discovered, educators and parents frantically push reading as something kids "should do." McNicoll reduces this to the equation "have to = hate to." She (and this author) remembers those days when she rushed through her class-work just to steal time to read a book. Now she fears we have made books the equivalent of broccoli. She'd like to turn them back into chocolate — delicious, desirable. Her tongue-in-cheek solution is that we punish kids for reading too much — make reading sinful, make it chocolate. In that way, she calls Stein and his cohorts good after all. We don't approve of him, so he becomes a forbidden pleasure. Maybe we should make kids write detailed book reports about his work.

McNicoll's seventh published book, *Bringing Up Beauty*, won Ontario's Silver Birch Award for 1996, and Manitoba's Young Readers' Choice Award for 1997. She calls these the "ultimate trophies" because the children themselves pick the winners. These awards have restored her belief that kids do prefer a wider range of reading than is provided by typical series books.

A combination of generosity, passion and practicality is McNicoll. Of her profession she says, "I truly believe you can love something and earn a living at it. But children's writers seem to be expected to write as a charity. We must make a living at it too." Yet one sees her concern for children in the way she talks with them, signs the last book and scrap of paper, gives one more interview, answers questions for a school project even after the girl tells her she didn't buy her books.

Recently she took a course on screen writing. It helped her think more visually and made her more aware of structure, but film work is not for her. She considers herself a writer of books. Asked about the future, McNicoll replies she's very happy to continue what she's doing now. She just wants to write good books and reach her audience. She says, "If the whole world stopped, I'd keep writing."

Novels by Sylvia McNicoll

Blueberries and Whipped Cream. Gage, Jeanpac, 1988.
The Tiger-Catcher's Kid. Nelson Canada, 1989.
Jump Start. Series Canada, Collier MacMillan, 1989.
More than Money. Nelson Canada, 1990.
Project Disaster. Scholastic Canada, 1990.

Facing the Enemy. Nelson Canada, 1992.
Bringing up Beauty. Prentice-Hall, 1994. (Silver Birch Award, Manitoba Young Readers' Choice Award).
The Big Race. Scholastic Canada, 1996.
Walking a Thin Line. Scholastic Canada, 1997.
A Mom and Dad's Guide to Martial Arts. Coles Notes, 1998.
Double Dribble. Scholastic Canada, 1998.
Grave Secrets. Stoddart, 1999.
Smokey and the Gorilla. Scholastic Canada, 1999.
Dan — Clowning Around. Stage School Series (written as Geena Dare). Orchard Publishing, 1998.
Matt — Heartbreak Hero. Stage School Series (written as Geena Dare). Orchard Publishing, 1998.
Lauren — Singing Sensation. Stage School Series (written as Geena Dare). Orchard Publishing, 1998.

***Gisela Sherman** took that same Writing for Children course at Sheridan College with Sylvia, and since then has published three books — **King of the Class** (Scholastic), **There's a Snake in the Toilet** (Simon & Schuster) and **Grave Danger** (Scholastic). She teaches a writing class at McMaster University, is vice-president of CANSCAIP, and is working on the next novel.*

"My Books Are My Children": An Interview with Welwyn Wilton Katz

• *Marianne Micros* •

Résumé: *Dans cette entrevue accordée à Marianne Micros et faite par courrier électronique, Welwyn Wilton Katz, auteur entre autres romans de* ***False Face, Come like Shadows, Out of the Dark****, répond à ses critiques; elle nous fait part des émotions qu'elle cherche à faire passer chez ses personnages, et explique sa conception de la création romanesque.*

Summary: *In this e-mail interview with Marianne Micros, Welwyn Wilton Katz, author of* ***False Face, Come Like Shadows, Out of the Dark****, and other novels, responds to her critics and discusses the techniques and emotions she brings to the characters and stories she creates.*

MM: *As a writer, you have come under some attack recently, so I think you would enjoy hearing how my students responded to the whole "appropriation of voice" and other charges levelled against you. When they presented a group seminar on your novel* ***False Face****, they chose one student (David Upper) as primary lecturer.*[1] *Then, by pre-arranged design, as soon as he started to express a point of view, someone would jump up from the audience and interrupt him. If he said he would speak on Native rituals, someone would declare herself an expert and come up and take over; likewise, there were experts on divorce, race, etc. etc., all of whom silenced him. After all this, David took off his hat and sunglasses (he had fairly long hair) and revealed his "real identity" as the author, Welwyn Katz. He then gave his/her point of view, and defended him/herself in relation to all the topics. He ended by saying of* ***False Face*** *that, despite all these dissenting voices, "It's a damn good story!"*

WWK: What an interesting children's literature course you must have, Marianne! And thanks to your student, David Upper. I hope he was speaking as himself rather than in his role as me! This anecdote addresses so much of what I want to say about the reading of books generally, as well as the reading of my own. A story has an integrity, and if the story is to be enjoyable, it probably cannot be interrupted by other voices crying "foul." Most readers, and especially children, read a story from beginning to end, and as far as I know, don't interrupt themselves to think upon topics such as divorce, race, point of view, etc. Of course, critics and academics do do that, sometimes.

MM: *Some theorists would say that the reading of a book depends on whether the reader is the author's "intended reader." In the case of children's literature, some break this*

down into age groups. I never like to think of a book as intended for a certain age group. Do you write for a specific age group?

WWK: First, I never write for a particular reader, or even a group of readers. I don't determine the age-range for any of my books: my publisher decides that after they are written. Who I do write for is my own particular characters, who usually have problems (who doesn't?) and who need to deal with them. When I imagine characters, at first they seem rather like ghosts, or, perhaps I should say, more like beings with bits of them in this world and the rest of them in another. That is, I see parts of them (usually their hearts and minds) rather more clearly than others, when I begin thinking about a book. As I think through their dilemmas, and build a plot around them, the characters become more and more like real people to me. In my latest book, *Out of the Dark*, Ben was and remains my son, and I love him now and loved him all the way through writing the book, even when he was being the most idiotic in his behaviour with the other children in Ship Cove. Now, when I say this, I'm not saying that I am the murdered Frances, who in my book was Ben's real mother. What I am saying is that I love Ben the way any mother who gives birth to a child loves that child. I did give birth to him — in a way, more than Frances did — and I understand him deep to his core, and weep for him still, when I remember his terrible moments in the parking lot and what has happened to him because of them. I cried many times when I wrote this book. Sometimes I simply had to get up from the computer and go away from Ben who so desperately needed comfort. It was hard for the mother in me to not let him have that comfort until he had earned it, until he had done all the things he needed to do to come to terms with himself and his past. I dream about him and wonder about him still, three years after the book came out. Obviously, then, to me Ben is real.

I hope I am a good enough writer to bring characters like Ben to life in the *reader's* eyes too, whoever that reader might be. I work very hard, in fact, not ever to misrepresent my character's heart and mind, but to let the character show by his/her thoughts, words, and actions, what he/she is feeling, and to write it so that even when the *character* doesn't know why she/he is feeling the way she/he does, the *reader* will. And so, what I hope for from my reader is a kind of dichotomy: that the reader, while retaining the intelligence to put together clues about my character's dilemma, on an emotional level will "become" my character.

I know that when reading a story that is exactly what I want: a believable plot-line, realistic setting, honest characterization and the intelligent weaving-in of the outer truth that the characters can't yet know; and as well and equally important, a story that will make me "enter into" the story and "become" the main character. So, for example, I would like my reader to forget for a brief space of time that she's a professor teaching the book or a literary critic judging the book as to its political correctness or interpreting it in the light of the newest theory. I want that reader to *become* Ben, to cry for him as I did and as many other people — admired writers such as Kit Pearson, for example — told me they did. I want them to remember what it was like to have *become* Ben when they later teach and analyse the book.

In a recent article in *CCL*, [Cornelia Hoogland's "Constellations of Identity in Canadian Young Adult Novels" 86, 23:2 (Summer 1997)], I felt that what I got was a post-modernist's attempt to deconstruct *Out of the Dark* and another of my books, *False Face*, into political statements. I think that books are about individuals, and are not political statements about people as a whole. Individuals think what they think, and feel what they feel, and do what they do, because they have individual pasts that have made them the way they are.

To be true to the individual characters in my books, I must sometimes allow them to think or act in a politically incorrect way. This is not me, Welwyn, thinking that way, or a statement from me that all people should think in that way. It is just the thoughts or action of one character who is to me a real person, and who must therefore be honoured by truthful representation, warts and all.

I have found it very painful over the last decade when people try to reduce some of my books into mere political statements. In her article, Cornelia Hoogland quotes a graduate student, Kara Smith, as saying "I don't feel that everyone Tom would have come across on the First Nation's [actually Six Nations'] Reserve would have been that way."[2] In fact, Tom encountered only two people. These two people were individuals with their own way of behaving. One of them was a child who'd lost interest in Tom after he moved away (children do often do that). The other was an elder. Even elders are individuals. To imply that I use his comments as the voice of an entire people is unfair, both to me and to *False Face*.

Smith goes on to express another opinion: "Tom was left with the following impression then: I don't belong here because my mother is White, and therefore I belong in the White world (whatever that is). I doubt this is the message a First Nations' Reserve would convey, speaking from a person's point of view whose husband is Mohawk" (Hoogland 33). Does Kara Smith's marriage to a Mohawk make her an authority on *all* Mohawks? I wonder what she would have to say about the news story run on television on March 12, 1998, about the black man, adopted and raised by Mohawks in Quebec, and married to a Mohawk woman, with whom he has children, who has spent his whole life on the reserve, and now cannot be part of the community because, the tribal authority dictates, he is not Mohawk by blood?

I do not try to make a blanket statement about all Reserves or all native people using just one news story. Individuals are all different. It is not the novelist's job to make sweeping statements about political things, but to write stories about events that could have happened to people who could have been real individuals. I really disagree with those postmodernists who think that any book can or should be broken down (deconstructed) into elements taken out of context. Catherine Madsen in the Winter 1996/7 issue of *Cross Currents* writes that we have found over the last few decades, "with a mixture of elation, anxiety, and plain irritation, that any theory of the world we construct can be deconstructed."[3] Should the post-post-modernist's task then be to deconstruct the deconstructionists?

MM: *I think it's important for people to understand the nature of writing fiction, the emotions involved in it. You are not doing a politically correct social study — you are*

writing a novel. It contains feeling, and sometimes the feelings of flawed individuals. It is unfortunate when readers and critics do not realize that.

I think that you do portray convincingly how an adolescent's mind works. Of course, Tom would be confused about his identity, based on his heritage and on the society he's now living in. Of course, Ben will have trouble adjusting to a different culture and place. Do you really feel that you are in your character's mind at the time, thinking as he would think?

WWK: Yes, I do think so. But it is more complicated than that. I'm also being the author. I'll talk more about this later if you like. But yes, I generally enter the mind(s) and heart(s) of the adolescent protagonists to a very deep level, as deep as I can go in my imagination. And I have very rigid rules about point-of-view in my own writing. What I consistently try to do is to allow my main character(s) to be in the place they want or need to be, while at the same time allowing myself to use that desire of theirs to let me enter one of their minds so that I can observe and narrate the entire scene through that particular character's viewpoint.

I try to keep to one point of view per scene if I have more than one protagonist. For instance, in *Whalesinger* there are three main characters: the mother whale, Marty, and Nick; and even if more than one of them are in a particular scene together, I try to choose only one of the main characters to be the eyes, ears, brain and heart for the plot elements and reactive moments of the scene. I then transcribe this by writing it all down for the reader. Because this requires that a main character be present in each significant scene, I do occasionally break this rule (usually because it would be horribly complicated to have the main character(s) present and might require pages and pages of artificial scenes). In *The Third Magic*, for instance, in one scene I allow the bad guy to be a point-of-view character. The plot required the reader to know what happened at a certain point, and I simply couldn't place Morgan or Arddu in the scene where the thing happened because each had chosen to be somewhere else at the time. And, of course, I sometimes make mistakes. I've recently found a point-of-view inconsistency in a scene between Laney and Tom in the school cafeteria, since the publication of *False Face*. Darn.

So, I *believe* I am in my character's head. I absolutely loathe it when characters are so obviously made to do exactly what the writer wanted. I think a writer should never manipulate characters, turning them into puppets. Characters should be real enough to have their own reasons for everything they do or say. And sometimes these things are not politically correct.

MM: *Can you explain, then, how you are conscious of being the author, even while entering the mind of a character?*

WWK: I'm not entirely within the character at any time in the book, because I have already decided on the external structure of the book and so am also generally keeping an eye on that structure. I think that I become a bit schizophrenic when I write. I am both me, the tactician and writer, *and* whichever main character I have chosen to be the point-of-view character for the scene. The characters tell me what they are doing and why. I listen and try to see how that fits into the external structure I'm trying to work with. If it doesn't, I go back to

the character and offer him/her alternative reasons why they might do something different. If they accept that, then they will do what they want to do, and I am benefiting because I don't need to change my external structure of the book.

Sometimes, however, it becomes impossible to rationalize what the character wants and needs to do at a particular point in time with my own external structure. I have notes of my plotting for *False Face*, for instance, where I wrote down a question: Why would Laney go to her father's place after the scene in the store? I wanted her to do that, because I wanted him to be in the climactic scene, and I could think of no reason for him to come into the house of the woman he loathes except to confront her morally. That required him to know that she was trying to sell artifacts. But I knew Laney would never tell him that important fact about her mother. And so I changed the external structure to put the police in the scene, giving Laney every reason to choose to give them her father's address rather than her mother's. That got her there. She had the small mask in her backpack. I remember asking myself if Laney's dad was the kind of person who would go through her backpack, and saying, no, no, he wouldn't, not unless he had a good reason. That was why he decided to look for a sweater or something else warm that she might have in there. So this is how it works, me entering the character's mind and asking them why they might want to do something, and if they don't, I have to re-plan my plot so that it will allow the character's wants and needs to take priority. I honestly can't explain it further.

Perhaps there is a part of me that has always been the adolescent I once was. But even that doesn't explain it, because I think my main adolescent characters are all different from each other and quite often extremely different from the adolescent I once was. At bottom, I suppose it all comes down to how an individual writer's imagination works.

Oh, yes, and one further thing. Have you noticed how most adults think that kids or adolescents are virtually another species? In stores, for instance, they always wait on the adult first, even if the kid has been there for ages. I hate that! I think that adolescents have the same kinds of minds and hearts as adults do, the same reasoning skills, the same rights, and the same basic needs. The big difference between adults and kids is that all kids are on a journey to adulthood, and the really interesting kids turn it into a quest. By contrast, most adults have reached their goal (hah! okay, they think they've reached their goal, and wonder why they aren't happier!) and so are no longer questing. That pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is still there for the really interesting kids, though to the vast majority of adults it has long been given up for lost.

I think kids are human beings. And so I listen to them, really listen. I ask them about important things. Maybe that's why I understand so well how adolescents think and feel. I'm known as "Ikuko-Mama" to the sixteen or so fourteen-to-eighteen-year-olds in the Japanese Anime Club my daughter belongs to. These are kids who love Japanese animation. They joke that I am, in alter ego, the only mother figure in one of their favourite animation series. In a way, then, I'm one of them. They still will keep secrets from me, as all kids do from all adults, but they trust me to understand them if they do tell me things.

MM: *What is it like to look at the world through Ben's, Laney's, Tom's, Marty's, Kinny's (etc.) eyes?*

WWK: Well, it depends on the eyes. The eyes of my characters see what hurts them, and look for what they need and want. Sometimes they get to see what they need and want, and then I am happy for them. Sometimes they are only able to see what hurts them. Then I, too, am hurt. When they reach a moment of epiphany, as Morgan does at the end of *The Third Magic* when she realizes that she must nurture, love and raise to adulthood a baby who will kill her only friend, I weep with her — and with her, I'm proud of the honour she has that will make her do it. When I wrote the final line of the book (before the epilogue), I jumped up and down and laughed and cried for the rightness of it all, the blending within Morgan of circle and line. She and I both celebrated her moment of truth, and we both wept at it. I am not Welwyn at times like these, I am somebody else altogether, a blending of Morgan and Welwyn, perhaps, neither one thing nor the other, but both in one.

Yes, I think that's the best way to describe it. I am the union of the writer and the character, in control of my words (though lines like that last one in *The Third Magic* come to me from "above," not through any conscious effort of my own), and controlled by the character's feelings. Yes, it's complicated.

MM: *Could you tell us something about the point of view in* ***Out of the Dark*** *— so totally within the boy's mind?*

WWK: *Out of the Dark* is, of all the books I've written, the dearest to my heart. It is also, I think, my best book. I thought long and hard about point-of-view in this book. For a while I tried writing it in the first person. But it didn't work for me. Though I had thought that a first-person viewpoint would not be much different from that of a third-person one, it turned out I was wrong. First-person can be so whiney. Anyway, I decided to use third-person, and so to narrate only the scenes in which Ben participates. It was very difficult to do this, partly because I had to link the narrative so tightly to Ben and Ben only, and partly because it was emotionally horrible for me to be only in Ben's head all the time, when he is so screwed up, so sad, so lonely, so devastated by guilt.

When I use two points-of-view (that is, when I have two protagonists between whose heads I can leap, so allowing the story to be told through two sets of eyes and ears, two minds and two hearts) the job of story-telling is much easier. But I simply couldn't allow myself that luxury in *Out of the Dark*. If I had, I would not have been able to make Ben's aloneness so complete for the reader. Had there been a second protagonist, each reader would have "become" Ben, and then, in relief, (s)he would be allowed to leave him and "become" that other point-of-view character, and so (s)he would not be the same kind of lonely that Ben is. I want the reader to *be* Ben. And so I deliberately decided that his loneliness would be the reader's, that his way of looking at the world would be the only one I would allow the reader to have. It gave me some hard moments, let me tell you. But I thought it extremely important to do it this way. It was also, though I see that only in retrospect, an incredible intellectual challenge, to weave three sets of stories together with only one person's mind and heart to make it all intelligible — or

rather, I suppose, two people's — Ben's and the reader's!

MM: *It is perplexing, then, when an adult academic, reading against the intended reader, reads the book so differently, as a sociological map. I think we have to find a better way of bringing literature for young readers into fields of academic studies, a way that doesn't lose the emotion and pleasure one can derive from the story.*

WWK: Your comment is, I think, a very important one. The academic way of tearing a book apart can be exactly that: destruction. Academics can be guilty of reading a book through a particular lens, or theory, and thus destroying the part of that book that had once been alive. No one should study children's books academically who doesn't, first and foremost, love and honour the stories they have to tell.

This is not to say that academics cannot criticize a book. I've analysed many kids' books myself. But when I am critical of a book it is because I think the novelist hasn't been true to the characters, or the plot is unbelievable, or the setting is false, or there is something seriously wrong with the point-of-view, or any of those things that remove me from the world of the story and make me think like a critical writer. When many academics criticize a book, however, it is because they are bringing to it the ammunition that goes with their own agenda. They have so much riding on getting academic papers published and having their own trendy theories accepted, they simply look at books as meat to be torn to pieces and devoured.

Now I'm probably going to get into trouble about saying that, but I don't really care any more. There comes a point when you simply have to fight against the gag of political correctness and *say something*. As you must see, Marianne, it is not only books that can be criticized for being politically incorrect. In fact, I will go further. I will come right out and say that when a *book* is labelled "politically incorrect," then the *author* will be branded with the same words in the public eye.

MM: *It is true that some of these critics who read books as if they are sociological documents forget that they are works of fiction with a great deal of literary tradition behind them. How would you classify your books?*

WWK: I don't classify my books at all. Some people have said my books are in the genre of "magic realism" similar to that Robertson Davies used. All I know for sure is that to satisfy me, my books must be realistic enough to allow any willing reader to enter the story, while still containing the sense of "other" that is not "realistic" at all. You could call the one common element in my books magic, I suppose, but then there is *Whalesinger* which contains no "real magic," only the magic of a mother whale whose singing can change history — or so she thinks. I like to think of my books as "edgy," or "pushing the boundaries," something like that.

I absolutely agree with your statement that some critics read books as if they are sociological documents. Get a life, guys! That's what fiction is about — people with lives that are not necessarily consistent with particular societies and whose behaviour does not always follow the rules.

MM: *Regarding your mention of "real magic," I always ask the students, in relation to* ***False Face****, if it is fantasy or realism. I don't want them just to say, it's a mixture. I want*

them to realize that what's fantasy for one culture is reality to another, that Natives would be insulted by the white world calling the "magic" of the mask just a fantasy. So, for some of us, the book is totally realistic and possible.

WWK: Yet again you've got me thinking! *False Face* is certainly realism to Laney, Tom, Alicia and Ian! As for readers, I don't know. Some native people have responded to it with such outrage (that I, a white person, should dare to tell "their" stories; that I, a white person, should use the sacred symbol of the false face in stories at all) that I guess it must hold the authority of realism for them, too (though of course that may not be the reason). By the way, in case you want to know how I answer their objections: First, this is not a native story, and it is not one that any of them have tried to tell; so how can I be accused of taking their stories away from them? Second, I believe that all stories worth thinking about are at bottom about important things like faith, love/hate, prejudice, etc., and there is no way to let such issues into a book if you leave out everything that is sacred to somebody! In any case, not all natives have responded in this way, and not even all Iroquois. I bought my own set of masks from a store called Min's on the Six Nations Reserve. Surely if they can accept their craftsmen selling such masks to tourists, they have no right to object to seeing them written about in books! Yes, indeed, some natives would indeed be insulted by the thought that some white people would imagine the power of Gaguwara to be mere fantasy.

MM: *I wonder if you can say more about "binary opposition"? The criticism is that Tom only sees himself vs. one other — Native vs. White — and that the book implies that only those two exist.*

WWK: Gosh. Binary opposition. If I understand that concept correctly, it has something to do with a polarization of representations within a book, that somehow the really intelligent reader can reduce my books to two opposing statements or theories. In *False Face*, for instance, does it mean that Hoogland has reduced my book to the issue of white vs. native? I had a hard time understanding what she had to say about this. She says that "the novel does not suggest how Tom can deal with these submerged tensions or how they might co-exist with other aspects of his life" (Hoogland 34).

Well, here she is both right and wrong. Where she is right is that I do not, and Tom does not, and Laney does not (etc.) solve all Tom's problems for him. I do not believe in a book ending with everybody riding off happily into the sunset. Such would be too simplistic and utterly unrealistic. What I hope happens to my characters is that by dealing with each individual event throughout the story they gain new tools for dealing with life, so that at the end there is *hope* for them, but no *promises*. They are human, after all. They will continue to make mistakes, and continue to learn from them or not, depending on their individual internals. How can I or anybody else promise anything else for anyone? Promises for salvation are within God's domain, not the author's.

However, Hoogland is wrong because *all* my protagonists in *all* my books do a lot of growing and changing (otherwise they could not, at the end of the book, confront the problems that beset them throughout the book). I think it is made amply clear at the climax that Tom has had a real insight into his own

character that enables him to understand Alicia sufficiently to prevent her from doing what she might, so easily, have done to Laney. I think this has to do entirely with his coming to understand that he has been doing with his mother and with the other kids in school (Laney excepted) exactly what Alicia does to Laney: looking at things in a prejudging (prejudiced!) way by choosing as preferable exactly one external characteristic over another. Tom is prejudiced against his own mother and what he has inherited from her — even prejudiced therefore against parts of himself —simply because he perceives his mother as "only white." Alicia is prejudiced against Laney simply because she perceives Laney as "only an alter ego for Ian," because of her external likeness to him. By linking himself to Alicia — by seeing their common error — Tom is able to say the right thing to stop her.

And what is that right thing? "There's somebody *in* there behind those looks!" he cried, to Mrs. McIntyre, to all of them to himself. "You don't know who, you never even tried to find out. You just looked and decided, and the real person never had a chance!" Is this the voice of someone who still looks on the world as divided into two opposing parts, white and native? How, then, can Hoogland think that I leave the book with Tom having acquired no grace to deal with his "submerged tensions"? (Hoogland 34). And when she breaks *False Face* into only a "White" vs. "Native" issue, she merely repeats the errors that Tom and Alicia both make until they realize the truth: that the world cannot be broken down into two opposing halves. Neither can a book, unless it is a very bad book, and I do not believe that *False Face* is that.

I believe that the great evils of the world have often come about by people or nations concentrating on the *differences* they find in themselves from other people or nations. I believe that there is a necessity for people to concentrate on their common humanity rather than to separate themselves into opposing and perhaps even hostile groups. When I say that Tom's tears are universal, I mean it. We *all* cry. We *all* are the same in that *human* way (among many others). Yes, of course, I believe we are all different, too. Isn't that obvious to anyone who reads my work? What my characters come to believe is that their differences are not great enough to be used to support statements like "natives are better than whites," or "whites are better than natives."

Now for *Out of the Dark*. Hoogland suggests that this is a simplistic book that can be reduced to two issues. Other people besides Hoogland have been upset by *False Face*, and so I was willing to take the time and the effort here to show my side of things. But I refuse to defend *Out of the Dark* against Hoogland's accusations. No one else has ever said anything negative in public (or in private as far as I know) about this book since it was first published in 1995. Anyone without a prior agenda who reads *Out of the Dark* will know that Hoogland's statement that it "deals with identity and belonging in an unsatisfactory way" (Hoogland 34) is simply nonsense.

MM: *Would you comment on the article about your portrayal of mothers which appeared in CCL a few years ago? [Adrienne Kertzer, "Mad Voices: The Mothers of Welwyn Wilton Katz," CCL, 21.1, no 77 (Spring 1995)].*

WWK: Regarding that article, where "my" mothers were indeed presented as harmful or useless by their absence, or mad or bad by their presence in my books: I found I couldn't even finish reading the article the first time I saw it, it seemed so nonsensical to me. Since then I have reread it and found that the writer wasn't entirely off the mark in the specific points, though I think her overall thesis is all wrong. For example, while I agree that the mother whale is a loving example of "motherhood" to both her calfling and Marty, I don't see that I have had to leave the world of humanity in my books to portray decent, kind, loving mothers. For example, Jenny in *Sun God, Moon Witch* is a really good mother to Patrick, and a loving mother-substitute to Thorny, telling her the truth about why Thorny's real mother is absent in her life (and that she hadn't abandoned her at all.) The Moon Witch in that book is not a mother-figure to Thorny, and doesn't pretend to be. She is, however, the mother of Belman (Bel = Baal) and their behaviour to each other is not that of the victim-son and victimizing mother, but equally vicious in their attempts to destroy each other (which happens to be well-researched mythology). Marty's mother in *Whalesinger*, though absent from the book, is not a bad mother; indeed, she is shown in Marty's flashback discussing her daughter's problems with the psychologist, something that a mother who didn't care would never do; nor would she have given permission for the tests if she wasn't worried about Marty's learning disability. As well, Ben's mother in *Out of the Dark* is incredibly present, though dead. And she is *not* harmful by her physical absence in the book. Frankly, I don't think I've seen a mother anywhere in literature more loving, more kind, more supportive of her children. What is harmful about her absence is that Ben feels that he is responsible for it, not that she isn't there for him now.

Out of the Dark shows that when you take responsibility for things that are *not* your responsibility you can make yourself sick. It is through Ben's own actions, in a sense rebuilding his mother as something alive to him forever, that Ben is freed and made whole again. There is also in that book, by the way, Gudrid, whose wisdom exceeds all the other Vikings' put together, and who loves her son Snorri heartily and healthily. I know that this book came out after the article on "the mothers in my books" but it was not written in response to the article; in fact *Out of the Dark* was at the publisher's before the article was even published, I believe.

I don't think strong mothers are either non-existent or omnipresent in society. Nor do I think the other kinds of mothers must be "absent" for their children. I think there are plenty of weak, loving mothers in society, such as Mrs. Aubrey in my first book *The Prophecy of Tau Ridoo*. I think there are also mothers struggling to do their best in alternating custody situations for their children, such as Mike's mother in *Witchery Hill*. I think there are rather stupid mothers who believe they know best for their children, and try to stop those children from doing whatever they want, only to find out that their interference causes more damage than good: such as Kinny's mother in *Come Like Shadows*. I think there are some mad, bad mothers, such as Mrs. McIntyre in *False Face*, whose madness and badness comes out fully only in the right circumstances. And then I think there are some mad, evil mothers in real life who torture their little two-

year-olds, or starve them to death, or imprison them. I have never portrayed such a mother because such a situation would be too odious for me to bear writing about. But Jill Paton Walsh did, in *Chance Child*. Let's face it, Mrs. McIntyre is not a loving mother, and she favours her older daughter, but if you were to ask her how she felt about her children before the masks entered her life, I think she would say she loves and treats both her children equally, and she keeps their life running efficiently and well. Of course she doesn't, but she *thinks* she does. I think, frankly, that I have portrayed mothers in my books in most of the ways they can be in life — as a varied group of specific individuals.

MM: *What role does research play in your creation of these stories and characters?*

WWK: I do enormous amounts of research for most of my books. With regard to setting, I try to make a research trip to all of the place(s) where the book will take place (the North Pole was, unfortunately, beyond my resources, though I read a lot about it when I decided to set *Time Ghost* there.) For *Out of the Dark* I certainly went to L'Anse Aux Meadows and Ship Cove and walked the bog so often I can see and feel it now. For *Whalesinger*, besides living in the area for a year, I went back for a week-long research trip to make sure the setting was exact. I also did a lot of research on whales, and on Francis Drake and his circumnavigation of the globe, including the controversy over the location of Nova Albion and the six weeks or so that he stayed there. Nothing that I said in the book about him was made up by me. There really was a coastal frigate that had to be left behind when Drake set off across the Pacific. Drake really did abandon several crewmen. There really were two Doughty brothers. Drake really did execute one and keep the other near him in the way I described. I learned about these things from the journal kept by the ship's priest as well as accounts from the Spanish Inquisition of what sea-captains had to say about meeting Drake after he'd robbed their ships.

Although *Whalesinger* runs a close second on the amount of research I did, probably *Come Like Shadows* was my most research-intensive book. Overall it took just about a year to plan the plot and research the history of Macbeth the man and Macbeth the character in Shakespeare's play, to follow the real Macbeth's footsteps from his birthplace in Dingwall (where they don't even know about him!) to the place of his death in a stone circle near Lumphanan, to learn as much as possible about the Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, to find a perfect place for the staging of the play in Edinburgh, and to learn how professional acting companies put on a play, from its first day read-through till opening night and beyond. Lots of work, but tremendously fun as well.

MM: *Would you comment on your use of language and imagery? It's your writing ability that makes the books what they are. And let's not forget story. My student was right — in the end, it's the fact that something is a "damn good story" that counts.*

WWK: I love language. I love the way words sound in my mind and on my lips. I think about how each sentence sounds, both by itself and in juxtaposition with its neighbours. I am absolutely rigid about how a section ends, or a chapter. It must be *right*. And the best sentence in the book should be, I think, the last one. It should make me want to laugh and cry at the same time. I don't always

succeed in this, of course. But there have been whole books I've rewritten (*Come Like Shadows* is one) simply because I had written the perfect last sentence, and it didn't work with the rest of the novel as it was.

Given all this, however, I feel I have a long way to go. I look at writers like Cormac McCarthy (*Suttree*) or Claire Mackay and feel incredibly humbled at their immense and appropriate vocabularies. Sometimes what I think I ought to do to increase my facility with language is read with a dictionary and notebook in hand, but then I think that would take me too far away from the story and the reader wouldn't like that, so I don't.

I took a workshop last summer with Tim O'Brien (*In the Lake of the Woods, The Things They Carried,* etc.) and learned a lot about the value of simplicity. He would throw away every adjective and adverb in the dictionary, and he tells his workshop participants that above all things one should simply let the story tell itself. But in fact what he is really doing in his own work is telling you the story *himself.* You can see this in *In the Lake of the Woods* when he tells you at the beginning of the book what the story is going to be, what the ending is certain to be, and then he tells the story (and somehow manages still to keep you in suspense about what's going to happen). I think this is successful because he makes his characters so fascinating and enigmatic (and obviously, therefore, never goes into their heads at all), rather than because his stories are intricate or even particularly "grabby."

Well, Tim liked my characters, loved my dialogue, and hated my narrative style. I think he hated it for two reasons. First, my style is not identically structured sentences one after the other, very clear, very "upfront," coming right out and telling the reader the story. Rather my style is complex with layering that reminds one of previous scenes or that foreshadows scenes to come, like voices drifting in from outside (as occurs in *Out of the Dark*). The second reason Tim hated my style, I think, is that he feels most comfortable with third person fly-on-the-wall narration, and I try very hard to let the story come to the reader from the eyes and ears of the main characters. Doing this introduces the characters' own uncertainties into the logic of the plot, and so makes the plot less simple to delineate, but it brings the reader much closer to the characters (they *become* them, rather than *observing* them). The way I write, the reader must deduce the story; the way Tim writes, the reader is handed the story as if it were something already complete, existing before he wrote it. I have to say I really liked *his* style. So maybe future stories from me will be plainer. Who knows?

MM: *What part does feminism play, or not play, in your writing?*

WWK: Feminism has no place in my writing, except that I don't see males and females as unequal in potential. (I think that feminism is supposed to promote *equality* of the sexes, rather than *female superiority.*) I suppose that feminists who see my portrayal of some female characters as stronger than some male characters might find a political message. But I have also portrayed some male characters as stronger than some female ones (e.g., Lucas, though enthralled by the man he sees in the ancient mirror, is stronger in fighting the three weird sisters than Kinny, who knows she is in peril yet thinks there is nothing she can

do about it.) So, let the feminism issue rest. I just write my characters to be what they have to be, given their initial problems and their need to sort these problems out. I abhor the idea that female protagonists should represent the whole of female *homo sapiens;* or that male protagonists represent the whole of male *homo sapiens.* It is irresponsible writing to do such a thing. Characters are *individuals,* not *universal types*!!

MM: *Is there a kind of censorship in a critic's response to a text? What role might a critic or academic play in silencing a writer's voice?*

WWK: This is the most important question you have asked. I believe that it is worse for the work of dead writers, who cannot come to their own defence in interviews such as this one. But it has an important effect on living writers also — for example, myself.

The critics do not affect what I write, or even how I write it. They have never once made me be untrue to the book I am writing. What they do do is make me not *want* to write.

Imagine, if you will, that the conception of a baby takes perhaps five months, instead of the usual short but pleasant interval. Imagine then, that instead of nine months of being pregnant, gestating this new life within yourself, you need only, say another five or six (or maybe, two or three years). Imagine then that labour lasts a year or two or three instead of eight to thirty hours. Imagine the intense love, bonding and devotion you would feel for the child that is finally born after such an interval — from sheer cognitive dissonance if for no other reason! Now imagine putting enormous loving energy into that newborn child, feeding it, taking it to the doctor, guiding it, comforting its sorrows and sharing its delights, until the child is grown to full independence and can leave you and go into the world with all your gifts to it intact and sufficient to help this new young adult live its life with as much happiness and success as possible. Imagine that process taking, say, a year or so instead of the usual 18 to 20. Now imagine that your child is defamed in the public press, attacked for invalid or poorly understood reasons; imagine that a whisper campaign is started against this child of yours that he/she is "politically incorrect" or a representative of some political group. Imagine being the mother of that child, standing by helplessly while slowly, inevitably, your child loses her/his lovely and hard-won freedom, strength, independence, and personal power. Would *you* want to create more such children, only to see them personally attacked and perhaps destroyed?

When I wrote *False Face* I had never heard of the "appropriation of voice" issue. It took almost a year before the whisper and letter campaign against that book reached me. I was never given a chance like this to tell of my feelings, my research, my point-of-view as an author. Now it is eleven years later, and though I have been nominated for four Governor-General's Awards (and actually won one), won the International Fiction Contest (for *False Face*), the Vicky Metcalf Award for a body of work, the Ruth Schwartz Award for *Out of the Dark,* and the Max and Greta Ebel Award for *False Face* (for a book that fosters understanding between peoples!) as well as garnering numerous other honours in

this country and in the United States, librarians in small public libraries are still told by certain powerful other librarians that I am a controversial writer, and some teachers are even told that they should not teach my books. One librarian I met in a small town in the BC interior told me he had taught *False Face* in a largish city in Alberta until he was told by his superiors that he couldn't do it any more.

"Oh, yes, buy her books if you want to, but don't display them; keep them behind your desk in case any child asks to read them." (The last is an exact quotation from a librarian I met at a school where I was doing a reading.) I hear about these things only in passing. Imagine what I'm not hearing!

My books are my children. I love them dearly, warts and all. Some of them I love with an even greater passion than others, but all of them are very special to me. I have done my best to give my characters skills and a sense of self-confidence to help them to thrive. I have sent them out into the world with hope and love. And when they are unfairly attacked or treated with disdain — or worse, when they are torn to pieces and bits of them taken to build some other person's theory about *me* — well, I just don't want to write any more. I just don't want to do it.

That's where I am right now. In more than two years I have been incapable of creating characters and letting them make books for me. I have written a new version of *Beowulf* for kids aged nine and up, but I haven't been able to do anything truly original. I have lost my will to take on the hard, hard mother's role for any new novel. That's what the whisper campaigns and academic dissections have done to me, the mother of these books. I no longer feel good about making a new life, only to see its brightness grow tarnished and fail, simply to serve other people's purposes.

MM: *Why do you think your books are singled out, picked on?*

WWK: If it is true that they *are* singled out for criticism, it could be because over the last eleven years I have defended my books both in writing and in public addresses, defended my own writer's view, defended the right of all writers to an imagination, and spoken out against political correctness as a noose around the artistic neck. No doubt that has made some supposedly objective people who disagree with my views more or less hostile to my books.

Another reason why I think my books are singled out is because they may be threatening to some readers for reasons other than political correctness and academic theories contrary to the spirit of my books. (Political activists and people whose livelihood depends on grimly-held academic theories must respond to my books because the books are too well-reviewed by other individuals and receive too many awards for them to be ignored.) When I talk about my books possibly being "threatening" to some people, I mean that there are evil, mad mothers out there in the real world, and people are threatened when a novelist acknowledges this in a book (such as *False Face*). There are frightened people who are hanging on with their fingernails to the "real world," and the possibilities of there being other worlds beside this one (*The Third Magic*) or inexplicable strangenesses in this one (whales that can change history in *Whalesinger*; real magical powers in *Come Like Shadows* and many others; gods bringing their battles to the earth and using humans like pawns in *Sun God, Moon Witch*) terrifies them.

In fact, however, I generally *don't* think that my books are singled out for criticism in the *majority* of cases. I think what happens is that there are so few critics and academics taking children's literature seriously in this country that the opinions of the very few of them that are critical of my books are given far more weight than they ought to carry. I do wish that there were more people in Canada taking children's literature as seriously as they ought. We need more reviewers, more review journals, and much more public education. Too many adults think children's literature is only for children. One of my daughter's friends was not allowed to do a Grade 12 Independent Study Project on Children's Literature because the teacher said it wasn't literature. Imagine!

MM: *It is very painful for a writer to have her children attacked. It is also sad that there are some academic writers who have lost the pleasure of reading. It is my hope that more and more critics will learn again to enjoy the books they read and that PhD studies will not forsake literary appreciation and sympathy for authorial intent. My biggest wish, Welwyn, is that you will write more novels! They have given me, my students, and my children great pleasure.*

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Notes

1 This seminar was presented in the Winter of 1998 for 37-274, Children's Literature, at the University of Guelph.

2 Kara Smith, cited by Cornelia Hoogland, "Constellations of Identity in Canadian Young Adult Novels," *Canadian Children's Literature*, 86, 23:2 (Summer 1997), 32.

3 Catherine Madsden, *Cross Currents*, Winter 1996-1997,

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Illustration from ***Flying Dimitri*** *by Blair Drawson* *(reviewed on page 88).*

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Books / Livres

A Sense of Hope

Uncle Ronald. Brian Doyle. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1996. 138 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-267-X.

The young male heroes in the books of well-known Ottawa author Brian Doyle struggle to grow up in the midst of racial prejudice, poverty, missing fathers, environmental damage, troubles at school and, in this novel (the writer's seventh), violence on many levels, from child and wife abuse to cruelty to animals and sudden death. This sounds like a heavy agenda, but there is often a comic-book zaniness in Doyle's writing that lightens the atmosphere and suggests that the conditions of life, however terrible, are nonetheless ultimately manageable.

The narrator of *Uncle Ronald* is, he tells us, one hundred and twelve years old, and the story he tells is about his own boyhood, when he was sent by his mother to stay with his uncle in order to escape the brutal beatings of his father. In a small village north of Ottawa, Mickey meets not only his uncle, a gentle giant of a man who demonstrates that size and strength can be peacefully employed, but also a number of colourful characters who provide the comic-book atmosphere. These range from the identical twin O'Malley sisters (suspected of braining a bailiff with a chamber-pot and then shooting him dead), to the prolific McCooey family ("Mean Bone McCooey, who fights all the time ... Mouthwash McCooey, who swears all the time ... Tommy Twelve Toes McCooey, who has six toes on each foot and can outrun a deer") to Even Steven, the village gossip, who longs to be a hero and is shown by Uncle Ronald how to become one through peaceful and legal means. The village is under siege by an armed force of government tax collectors, and the antics of the inhabitants, who lack the wherewithal to pay their taxes, provide the undercurrent of comic violence that is the counterpart to the very real violence of Mickey's home life.

By combining realism with comic violence Doyle takes a certain risk. In the hands of a less skilful writer young readers might be disinclined to recognize the difference and decide to take none of it seriously. But most children are adept at separating the two, and Doyle relies successfully on their abilities as well as his own fine writing. Thus, both Mickey's moments of stark fear and the pervasive sense of dread that dominates his life (he sees his father lurking threateningly in every corner) are memorably realized. One such moment occurs when Uncle Ronald is showing Mickey how to harness Second Chance Lance, the horse he had rescued from its cruel owner through an act of heroic strength. The reader may have momentarily forgotten Mickey's brutal beatings with his father's belt, but even while absorbed in the task at hand, Mickey has

not: he recalls, "I never thought I would ever like the feel of belts and buckles." The constant fear under which abused children live, affecting them both emotionally and physically (as in Mickey's chronic bed-wetting) is forcefully driven home at moments like this.

The book ends with two suspenseful scenes, the first fraught with the threat of violence that fails to materialize, and the second depicting violence of an unexpected kind. The accidental death of Mickey's father effectively demonstrates that uncontrolled rage is self-destructive, and in the end we expect Mickey and his mother to move into a happier future. Doyle's books are aimed at readers in the nine-to-twelve group; older children might enjoy the story, but, sadly, one feels they would be unlikely to accept either the happy ending or the saving presence of a loving adult as realistic possibilities in situations such as this. It might be argued that Mickey is an uncomfortably passive victim in this story, but by the end it is clear that he has quietly absorbed the lessons in non-violence exemplified by Uncle Ronald. And perhaps his inability to help himself is the most realistic reminder of all: the vicious cycle of an abused child becoming in turn an abusing parent can best be broken by the sympathetic teaching of nurturing adults.

Doyle's writing is both rich and economical in creating a vivid sense of place and time, in this case Ottawa and rural Ontario in the late nineteenth century. But this book is mainly remarkable for the warmth and compassion, never descending into sentimentality, with which it treats Mickey and his troubles. While it should appeal to a wide audience because the liveliness of the story is not sacrificed to the lessons that support it, I can't think of a better book for a child who needs a sense of comfort and hope for the future.

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Too Many Blankets

The Town That Floated Away. Sandra Birdsell. Illus. Helen Flook. HarperCollins, 1997. 164 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-224545-0.

This playful novel by Sandra Birdsell, best known for her adult fiction (including *The Missing Child*, nominated for a Governor General's Award), began as a radio play (now available as a CD) and has recently won the Saskatchewan Children's Literature Award.

Because I am not a child, I cannot say that this book appeals to all children; I can say that, on my first reading, I completely enjoyed the book, identifying with both the child heroine and her parents. The adult in me, though, kept intruding. I was aching to analyse, to find meanings. Is this an allegory? Is this about Canada? I tried reading it as a satire. However, I couldn't help but remember my own homesickness as a child, a severe homesickness that I experienced whenever I was away from home. I had to wonder what kind of reader Birdsell had in mind.

I can only guess at how a child would read this text. I believe that children would easily respond to the humour and cartoon-like characters, the language play, the jokes and riddles, the depiction of adults as silly and often fallible, the portrayal of children as intelligent and adventurous. Children will also respond, deep down inside, to the main message of the book — that a child needs her parents in order to grow up and develop. If the family bond is split too soon, the child will shrink away, become a "morphan."

Again the adult in me intrudes. Is this work about Canada? Birdsell's real home town of Morris, Manitoba, which once floated away in a flood, forced Sandra into homesickness in Winnipeg. This helps us place the town. Furthermore, the town of Wellington, which floats away, is obviously English, while St. Boniface, which remains, is French: is this a reversal of the Quebec Separation issue? Why is the town floating North, the inhabitants disappearing under the ice and snow? Is this about the displacement of Native peoples?

Any allegorical significance eludes me in the end, but does lurk there, somewhere beneath the surface of the story, at least for the serious adult reader trying to use her "academic expertise." What is important is that the foolish adults make the mistakes which lead to tragedy, that some foolish adults do not respect the intelligence and individuality of children, and that people can disappear if they lose their community and family. Virginia is not a superhuman child, but an ordinary, intelligent one, who uses her brain to help bring her town back. She learns that having Preposterously Protective Parents "is like having too many blankets when you really only need one to keep you warm. And what's so awful about that? It's certainly better than not having any blankets at all ..." Underneath all those layers of blankets is a shrinking child, a child who *is* the significance of the story, for both the child and the adult reader.

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To See Ourselves

Takes: Stories for Young Adults. Ed. R.P. MacIntyre. Thistledown, 1996. 150 pp. $12.95 paper. ISBN 1-895449-54-5.

Fiction with young protagonists should be "like good rock and roll ... slightly outrageous and raw," according to R.P. MacIntyre in his Foreword to *Takes*, Thistledown Press's latest short story collection for youthful readers. Several tales in the two earlier anthologies, *The Blue Jean Collection* (1992) and *Notes across the Aisle* (1995), both products of national story-writing competitions, fit his prescription. None do in *Takes*, a more homogeneous, polished, and restrained gathering.

Not that all of the fourteen stories in *Takes* lack dark, disturbing currents or whiffs of political incorrectness. Three in particular are disquietingly memora-

ble. Mansel Robinson's "Hockey Nights in Canada," the most enigmatic contribution, implies strongly that Canadian small towns impose a stultifying Philistine ethos upon youngsters of average means; hockey is the principal way upward and outward for boys who excel at it. The narrator yearned to dance on skates, "But you didn't say that too loud around here. Those boys who wore figure skates were accidentally on purpose made to feel unwelcome...." Less clearly, the story seems to be making a larger comment about failures of will in both people who dream rather than dare and those who flare and fizzle.

A similar suggestion about small-town life emanates from "Things Happen," by Helen Mourre. Thirteen-year-old Binny, son of strait-laced parents, has nothing respectable to do in early July except chores and nothing to look forward to but church camp by a polluted lake. He falls back on the companionship of a light-fingered young ne'er-do-well, and their quest for excitement results in unintended disaster for a friendly, vulnerable, mildly raffish teacher. Mourre deftly implies that Binny's father, a disappointed man, self-righteously imposes the disaster on someone less guilty than he — though he does not realize it — of the behaviour he condemns.

L.J.M. Wadsworth's "The Boy Who Saw" is a touching but also oddly cheery fantasy built upon the grim reality that pallid people, life's losers, are often almost invisible to "normal" indifferent or casually cruel people around them. A goblin lurks in the wings of this story, about to collect such a person, the schoolboy Wilson. The goblin is "definitely wicked," says Wilson, yet it promises translation to a better place, one where Wilson is "needed." The goblin is ultimately less frightening than human society, wherein the boy's only reliable solace is a doughnut.

Separately or entwined, the twin longings to be fearlessly independent and to belong dominate most of the other stories. Bibliotherapy is evident in several. For instance, an unhappy adolescent girl goes to ugly extremes to consolidate her group membership in Megan K. Williams's "The Initiation," only to learn that she is as despised by the mean-minded group as the victim she hands over for torture. The protagonist of Ed Yatscoff's "Scarecrow" receives the same humiliating lesson from a trio who tantalize and then betray him.

The most overt bibliotherapy is in Bonnie Blake's "To Each His Song," an object lesson on the mindless cruelty of racism. Li Song, a visiting student from Japan, is a gravely charming, intelligent youngster. But he is shunned or targeted. The story has some quirky charm, especially in Li Song's culturally induced misinterpretations of Shakespeare. But the message over-rides art. Similarly, fantasy plays second fiddle to thesis in Margo McLoughlin's "Flying," an exemplum championing the talented who "fly" in the face of conformist mediocrity and envy. The only really funny story is Joanne Findon's "On the Road." Two fifteen-year-old Sarahs, ancestress and descendant, run away from home down the same road and meet in a time warp. E-mail letters and 1854 diary entries recount their mutually bewildering interchange. For once, a fictitious intrusion of present into past affects that past. And on top of the comedy, the reader enjoys knowing what the characters do not.

In sum, *Takes* is a pleasant, reasonably varied read. But I suspect that it will

be an assigned text more often than a freely chosen entertainment. The authors' desires to encourage and give moral reinforcement shine through with "uncool" earnestness. If, however, as modern orthodoxy maintains, the young strenuously prefer literature about people like themselves, then this collection should find receptive audiences, captive and even free, as a worthy adjunct to other fiction.

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The Art of Multicultural Living

Tiktala. Margaret Shaw-MacKinnon. Illus. Laszlo Gal. Stoddart, 1996. 32 pp. $17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-29208. ***Big Boy.*** Tololwa M. Mollel. Illus. E.B. Lewis. Stoddart, 1995. 32 pp. $18.95 cloth. ISBN 07737-2851-1. ***Marisol and the Yellow Messenger.*** Emilie Smith-Ayala. Illus. Sami Suamalainen. Annick, 1994. Unpag. $14.95 cloth, $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-973-9, 1-55037-972-0. ***Freedom Child of the Sea.*** Richardo Keens-Douglas. Illus. Julia Gukova. Annick, 1994. Unpag. $16.95 cloth, $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-373-0, 1-55037-372-2.

Timely subject matter, such as multiculturalism in children's books, as in any book, is not enough without an impressive writing style to keep both the sentiments expressed and the educational value alive and flourishing. Four picture books excel above the commonplace, conveying complex ideas concretely, imaginatively, and without didacticism. The characters are able to hold up the burden of the messages convincingly and innovatively. The books go beyond the boundaries of the basic moral of the tale, and have the staying power to provoke a reader's thoughtfulness and wonder.

Tiktala, by Margaret Shaw MacKinnon, is inspiring both for its content and style. Concerned with the future of soapstone carving, and set in a far northern village, the story reveals the child Tiktala who proclaims to her elders that she will carve in soapstone. She cannot see, however, beyond the material value of the art. In short, she lacks "heart." In order to understand the significance of becoming a true soapstone carver, she must go on a three-day journey in search of her spirit healer. The journey becomes a spiritual quest, which in the end deepens her role as an artist associated with Inuit art.

Although realists may balk at the idea of a young child wandering alone in the harsh north, the author is skilful in blending fantasy and adventure with striking touches of realism. The effect is pleasing and satisfying. Moving and brilliantly realized is the author's rendering of the inner creative process, and how the child comes to see creative endeavour as a sacred undertaking.

The book exceeds itself in its portrayal of the need to recognize and keep alive culture and tradition. The book also captures the importance of art itself and its place in the world, challenging artists, young and old, to question their own role and motives.

The double-page colour illustrations by Laszlo Gal complement the story with the same mix of realism and fantasy. The artist's application of soft blues, greens, and design within design capture Tiktala's inner journeying.

Tiktala is appropriate for people of all ages, a welcome addition for its theme of multiculturalism, and also as an inspiring prod for anyone grappling with the creative process.

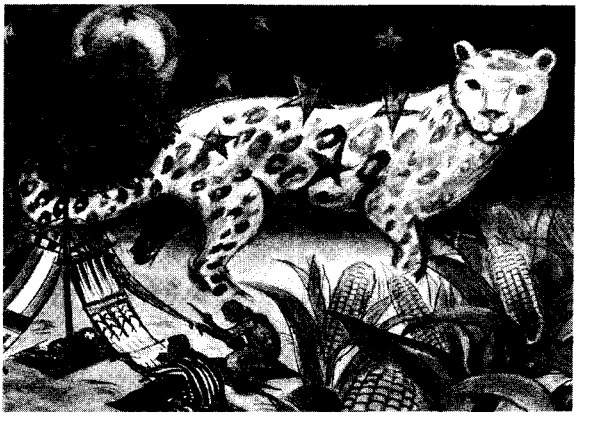
Tololwa M. Mollel in *Big Boy* writes for a younger audience (four to seven years), but, like Shaw-MacKinnon, gives, as he says, "a mythical element in a realistic framework." In the Author's Note, Mollel gives credit to a motif he encounters in African folklore — that of a prodigious boy endowed with

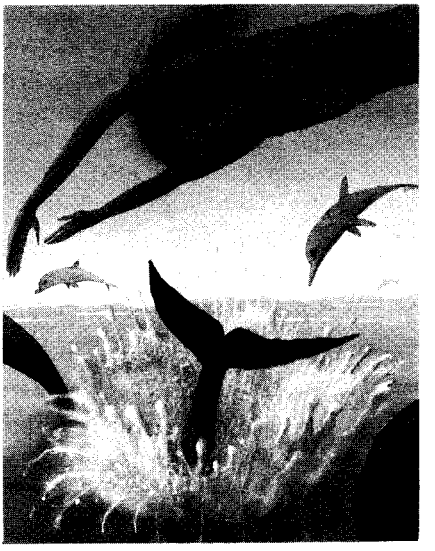
miraculous powers who is seemingly invincible. *Big Boy* features a child frustrated at being too young and too small to engage in the activities of his older brother. During naptime, the child is granted a wish to become big. In fact, he becomes a giant. An accumulation of haphazard events resulting from his huge size becomes insurmountable for him. In the end, he longs to be nurtured and cared for by his family, acknowledging readily that, after all, he is just a little boy. He awakens reassuringly in the arms of his family.

Perhaps not the most inventive plot, for the dream is a convenient device used again and again, as is the theme of one's desire to be other than what one is, but Mollel's gifts lie in his ability to tell the story convincingly through a child's eyes. The rhythmic prose and repetitive structure are appropriate and engaging for young readers. Mollel is able to retell a folktale so that readers appreciate its cultural context, which is then universalized. His depiction of the boy and his family is exceptionally endearing, and the boy's trials are unique, showing aptly aspects of African culture. Included also is a glossary of the words used throughout the story in Kiswahilli.

The pictures by E.B. Lewis bring to life the child's adventures in double-page colour spreads. The pervasive browns and tans call up the African landscape, and gently radiate with the warmth of the community depicted.

Marisol and the Yellow Messenger, by Emilie Smith-Ayala, is more challenging stylistically and thematically, in comparison to either *Big Boy* or *Tiktala*. At first, the text might appear prosaic at times, the sharp transitions jarring with the story's poetic elements and careful building of imagery. On closer reading, however, one comes to appreciate the complexity of the subject matter, and the great sensitivity and skill of the author in expressing a child's harsh arrival from a politically torn country where her father has been killed and the remainder of her family forced to flee to Canada. The story's focus, however, is on the child's difficult adjustment to a new country. The text successfully captures a child's deep loneliness and her need to belong, which she discovers is resolved not by leaving behind the birth country she loves, but by bringing it forward with her.





The story brings these elements together by a careful selection of images: a dream of a multi-coloured cloth; a yellow bird of hope, trust, and confidence; even the significance of the child's name, Marisol, which translates, intriguingly enough, as ocean and sun. This book celebrates the bringing together of two cultures with enough poetical power to evoke different meanings in different readers.

The colourful impressionistic illustrations by Sami Suamalainen complement the text by depicting the happier memories of the child, and the inner journeying of the child who struggles to find her place in a new world. The book is suitable for children of all ages.

Freedom Child of the Sea, by Richardo Keens-Douglas, is for ages seven and up, and draws its inspiration from the Caribbean oral tradition. Like the other three books, it weaves fantasy with realism. It is told in the first person from the perspective of a small child who is saved from drowning by a small magical boy —the Freedom Child whose face is beautiful, but whose body is covered with welts and scars. Safe on land, the narrator encounters an old man who tells him that the scars are for the suffering of the mythical Freedom Child's people who were brought from Africa in slave ships, and how the Freedom Child and his mother must live in the sea until the world learns true compassion and understanding for all people.

The subject matter is challenging, but its message of hope is sure. The text significantly conveys the idea that the stories of people who have suffered cruel injustice must never be forgotten or ignored. The stories must be told and passed down from one generation to the next as a way of continuing to right the wrongs that were first inflicted on a nation's ancestors. Appropriately, the narrator runs home to tell his family about the old man's story.

The double-page colour illustrations by Julia Gukova richly comple-

ment the layering of metaphor in the story, with their blend of surrealism, suggestive design, and folk-art style.

All four picture books are highly recommended both for their vital subject matter and striking artistry which has created beautifully realized stories and illustrations.

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The Anglo-American Face of Malinche; or All Mothers Are Bad Mothers

Esteban. Gilberto Flores Patiño. Trans. Linda Gaboriau. Cormorant Books, 1995. 96 pp. $12.95 paper. ISBN 0-920953-92-1.

Esteban is the eight-year-old protagonist and first-person narrator of this short novel. He has moved to the small Mexican town of San Miguel de Allende, a well-known artists' colony, with his American mother who is a painter. While he knows nothing about his father except that he lives somewhere in the United States, the reader starts to assume that he must be of Mexican origin, given that Esteban is vehemently Mexican and, more significantly, because the ideological representation of culture and gender is absolutely manichaen. Esteban's mother is the archetypal bad mother and whore, a demonized representative of Anglo-Saxon language and North American culture. Her own son refers to her as a gringo (meaning "foreigner") throughout the novel. The divine realm is dominated by the benign Mexican patriarch, Marcela's father, and all things Mexican and Spanish. Unfortunately, the oppressive binary structure underlying Esteban's narrative destroys the illusion of the child's point of view, since the prejudiced and the manipulative propagandist erupts at every turn in the story to expose the author's own fixations and fears.

Ironically, Flores Patiño is very good at representing the child's point of view whenever the issues of culture and gender are absent. His observations on imaginative and imitative play are convincing and well expressed in Esteban's affectionate monologues with his little wooden horse. A fine example of the author's understanding of the child's desire for continuity and meaning occurs when Esteban watches an equestrian competition on television. He does not accept the limits of reality imposed by the frame of the TV screen and constantly wonders about what happens off-screen. His thoughts on the difference between the child's and the adult's experience of time, and how they value objects for emotional or pragmatic reasons, also ring true.

In sharp contrast to these lyrical insights, most of the novel deals with Esteban's mother and the pain and worry that she causes him by her extreme negligence. She abandons him each weekend to go drinking, after which she brings strange men home to spend the night. He therefore depends a lot on Marcela, his best friend and schoolmate, and her family. While both Marcela's parents are Mexican, the ideologically biased representation of gender difference continues to be the operative structure. The father is the embodiment of

understanding and tolerance, while the mother is neurotic, demanding and unforgiving. The prime example of this dichotomy occurs when the children pretend to make a chocolate cake and cover her kitchen table and oven in mud: "Marcela's mama got mad and she was going to spank her, but her papa came when he heard all the yelling and told her, calm down, woman, calm down, smiling as if nothing had happened, and it's true that nothing had happened, but Marcela's mama thought something awful had happened, calm down, what's the fuss, we'll clean the stove, period, they're children, he said, they're children and they don't know what they're doing" (12-13).

The resonance of Christ's words "for they know not what they do" inflates this character to mythic proportions and sets him up as the divine adversary of Esteban's mother, for despite the characterization of Marcela's mother as the short-sighted hysterical housewife, she does tuck the children in at night and tells them bedtime stories. Esteban contrasts her with his own mother by saying "But my mother isn't like that, she's different. She reads me stories I don't really understand" (12). There is much emphasis on the fact that Esteban's mother does not speak Spanish and while we assume that her son must, at least, understand everything that she says to him in English, it is not clear whether the barrier to communication is linguistic or psychological and, in the final analysis, the boundaries are blurred because her difference is represented as a tightly-sealed package containing the loathed characteristics of being a gringa, an immoral and promiscuous woman who is agnostic and maybe even atheist, of speaking only English and single-mindedly pursuing the fulfilment of her sexual desires and her career as an artist.

Saturdays are marked by the way her mouth smells (presumably due to her habitual Friday night debauchery) and how she yells at Esteban as if he were her worst enemy when he inadvertently wakes her up too early, after which she characteristically complains about the splitting headaches that prevent her from spending much time with her son. The good/bad dichotomy is also played out at school where Esteban favours Señorita Estela over the principle "Señora Green:" "But it has nothing to do with her [Señora Green], it's just that I like Spanish better. And I like Señorita Estela better too, I don't know why, but I like her better" (31) Esteban may not know why, but Flores Patiño and, by now, the reader know only too well that aside from any essential personality traits, gringos are bad, Mexicans are good. The fact that Esteban lives with a single mother who has always spoken English to him and yet he does not accept that language as "natural" is unconvincing, given that children are so linguistically adaptable, and the increasingly cynical reader may wonder whether Flores Patiño has been less linguistically adaptable and feels displaced as a Spanish writer in Montreal.

The hierarchy of values attributed to gender is blatant in what Esteban says to his little wooden horse concerning the fundamental role of parents: "your mama was the wood of the tree. But who was your papa? And who was mine?" (32). The mother as raw material implies that the father is the informing spirit, an analogy that also applies to Esteban whose Mexican loyalties suggest that despite the fact that his father is incognito, he has inherited his love of Mexico, spicy food, the Virgin, and Spanish.

Half-way through the novel, Esteban's mother disappears during one of her Friday night sprees and the rest of the novel deals with Esteban's vigil and search for her. On Monday, her body is found and Esteban describes his grief at seeing her black coffin lowered into the grave, and his understandable horror at knowing that she has been tortured and murdered. After the overwhelmingly negative representation of this character, the reader cannot help but interpret this senseless crime as the subconscious expression of the author's senseless desire to punish her. Esteban consoles himself with the idea that hell does exist (contrary to his mother's anti-Catholic scepticism) and that its torments await his mother's killer.

The uncanny duplication of the desire to punish the male killer consciously and to punish the bad mother/whore unconsciously is echoed in the last paragraph by Esteban, who by now has been reduced to a ventriloquist's dummy for the author's repressed discourse: "So it was something like that, as if I had been dreaming something really awful, that awful thing that happened to my mama, and at the same time I couldn't remember it, and all that was left was the fear of something I couldn't explain" (96). These telling last words sum up the greatest flaw in Flores Patiño's writing. Despite his evident talent at representing a child's point of view, the author's overbearing fears and desire for revenge thwart the protagonist's unfolding and replace his discourse with harangues that come from elsewhere and lead nowhere.

According to one of the most prominent Mexican newspapers "El Excelsior" "*Esteban el centauro* [Spanish title] is one of those books which will hence forth become a part of our daily life and our dialogue, in the same way that de Saint-Exupéry's *Little Prince* never leaves us." This ludicrous comparison overlooks the fact that no insight is gleaned for the protagonist or the reader by the senseless slaying, and that besides being completely unsuitable as children's literature, *Esteban* expresses little more than raw resentment against the maternal figure which in Mexican terms corresponds to the maligned figure of Malinche, the Mexican Indian mother (traitor) and whore of Hernán Cortés, whose conquest of Mexico was facilitated by Malinche's talent as translator and interpreter. By displacing the indigenous mother with the Anglo-American mother, Flores Patiño has only shifted this culturally entrenched hatred from one alienated feminine figure to another. Woman as difference remains the enemy, the something that Esteban (Flores Patiño) fears and can't explain.

Latin American Perspectives in Children's Literature: Mythical and Contemporary Struggles in the Work of Luis Garay.

Jade and Iron: Latin American Tales from Two Cultures. Patricia Aldana (ed.). Illus. Luis Garay. Trans. Hugh Hazelton.. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1996. 64 pp. $18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-256-4. ***Pedrito's Day.*** Luis Garay. Stoddart Kids, 1997. 32 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-29992. ***The Long Road.*** Luis Garay. Illus. author. Tundra, 1997. 32 pp. $17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-408-8.

Jade and Iron: Latin American Tales from Two Cultures is a collection of indigenous legends and folk-tales, each retold by a different contemporary writer with

illustrations by Luis Garay. The elements of jade and iron represent the meeting of the Aboriginal and European cultures in the formation of Latin America. The African cultural component is briefly mentioned on the jacket flap ["[H]undreds of different cultural entities, drawn from the aboriginal, slave and conquering peoples, co-exist"], but the selection of stories ignores the African presence, in favour of the dichotomy represented in the title. This is a glaring omission given the importance of African heritage and culture in Latin America, and it also mars the Introduction by making it an incomplete and simplistic account of history: "Despite their tragic history, however, both Native and European Latin Americans have created a rich and complex culture." It would be preferable not to speak of culture in such a broad context if no mention is made of other contributors such as Arabic and Asian settlers who were not conquering peoples, yet played significant roles in creating the diverse cultural reality that is only partially represented in this book.

The recommended age level for this book is seven and up, and while most of the stories are suitable reading for this age group, the treatment of gender issues in some of them is highly problematic. This would not be a problem for older readers who can use their critical skills to analyse the underlying cultural assumptions at work in the stories, but such a response cannot be expected from children who first and foremost read for pleasure. Explicit misogyny on the part of the father character determines the plot structure of "The Legend of Manioc," a mythic account of the origin of the root and staple food of indigenous people of southern Brazil. The story represents the birth of a girl baby who is completely rejected by her father by virtue of her sex. Her father "Zatiamaré was so furious that he would not look at her face. He did not even give her a name." He won't speak to his daughter saying "[S]he's no more important to me than the wind." The little girl asks her mother to bury her alive. "That way her father would be happy, and maybe she would be good for something." And indeed she is, for with time she is transformed into the plant that will feed all her people. Manioc's worth, as the food source for her people, is predicated upon her abjection as a worthless being (female child), and this paternal and culturally ingrained contempt for the feminine is hardly a story that we want to pass on to children. To compound this problem even further, the myth structure of such tales encourages passive reception of what sound like universal truths.

Mythic representations of the origins of life-sources such as fire and food make up the majority of the indigenous stories in this collection and, for the most part, they are appropriate for this age group. Many of them are especially interesting for the recurring ecological theme. Human beings are represented as sharing the same interests as other forms of life, and such unreasonable actions as overhunting inevitably lead to disaster. On the other hand, when creatures representing Nature are nurtured, as in the story "Ñucu the Worm," they in turn protect humankind by ensuring an abundant food supply and even by saving the Earth from cosmic cataclysms such as the sky falling.

The editor characterizes the dual structure of the book, which is divided into two parts, by saying that "[T]he Native stories, for the most part, explain in mythical form how the world and the things in the world that are important—

food, fire, volcanoes — came to be. The Latin stories tend to be about people and their relationships with the natural world and each other." While the Native stories do deal with myths of origin, they also explore humankind's relation to Nature, whereas contrary to the editor's description, not one of the European legends explores this theme. Most of the stories in Part II are based on superstitions, and fear of witches and male sorcerers who seduce young girls. (The only character of African origin is a beautiful witch who, despite only helping people, is about to be tried by the Inquisition when she escapes from prison through supernatural means). Again the theme of seducing and kidnapping girls, on which two of the tales are based, does not seem appropriate for young readers and one wonders if the editor assumes that the simple structure of myths and legends automatically makes them suitable for children without giving any consideration to the content.

Introducing children to Latin American culture through indigenous myths and colonial tales is potentially a great idea, but more thought should have been given to the selection of stories. Those selected should present a more inclusive cultural heritage, and be inspirational instead of perpetuating gender and racial biases. However, Luis Garay's artwork is rich and mysterious, as are the majority of tales included in this book.

Luis Garay is also author and illustrator of *Pedrito's Day*, a simple and poignant story of a young boy's daily struggle to survive with his mother and grandmother. His absent father works in an unspecified location referred to simply as the North. It is not clear whether Garay considers the designation to be so overladen with meaning that no further details are required or whether, this being Pedrito's story, the father's exact whereabouts are secondary.

The book's jacket states that Garay "believes young people deserve quality as well as a chance to experience the reality and delights of cultures other than their own." *Pedrito's Day* achieves both these objectives for the art work and the narrative are lyrical and well crafted. The representation of Pedrito's reality does portray both the pleasures and the hardships of the working class in a developing country. The rich environment is effectively evoked through description and drawings that have the sensorial fullness associated with mural paintings. The bustle of the marketplace with all its scents and sounds recreates the sense of community and the diversity of a traditional, peasant market. The text effectively complements the drawings to create an environment filled with sound, colour and smells: "the newly made hats and baskets smelled like a freshly mown meadow." On the other hand, the stark representation of Pedrito's home, with its cracked adobe walls and dirt floor, also tells of the poverty which would be unfamiliar to many North American children.

The protagonist works as a shoe-shine boy and his struggle to save up enough money to buy a bicycle may also be alien for children who are accustomed to receiving such items as birthday gifts or even outside of any special occasion. Pedrito's reasons for wanting a bicycle are also more multifaceted than just the desire for carefree play: he is keenly aware of his share of the family's responsibility and thinks of the bicycle as a mode of transporting his mother's market loads, although he also imagines that he would ride it over bumpy lanes as if it were a stallion. "But best of all, owning a bicycle would

mean that he was big, almost as big as Pedro himself." There is much emphasis throughout the story on the importance of growing up and being big enough to merit having a bicycle. On the first page, we find out that in every one of the letters that Pedrito's father sends from the North, he asks whether his son is big enough yet. It is not clear why it is so important to grow up and be as big as the father, but even when Pedrito becomes temporarily distracted and takes part in a spontaneous soccer game, afterwards he feels "more grown-up than he ever had as he sat with the older boys on the curb." These many unexplained references seem to allude to a subtext perhaps dealing with the sense of frustration that comes from feeling "underdeveloped" or not fully able to forge one's own destiny. This national theme is not mentioned explicitly, but the absent father is a painful reminder of this lack, while his long-distance contribution to the family's economic situation and sense of excision is ambiguously elided with his status as benefactor, as "the big Pedro in the North."

There is a sense of guilt for all these children who know that they should be working even while they are kicking a ball around. This innocent act leads to Pedrito's losing the money for which his aunt had asked him to get change. He is faced with the moral dilemma of deciding whether to tell the truth or make up some story about the money's disappearance. The child's life is portrayed as involving more responsibility and realistic daily hardship than we are accustomed to seeing in children's books and in this sense, too, *Pedrito's Day* opens a window onto another social and cultural reality.

The role of the absent father, who sends letters and money from the North, is also a realistic detail, given that many Mexican and Central American families are separated in order to earn money, but it undermines our sense of the achievement that Pedrito could have enjoyed, had he been able to save the money himself by working within the local economy. The underlying implication that all will be well thanks to Uncle Sam is problematic, and promotes the kind of mythification of the North that many Latin Americans have come to resist or at least to question. The opening lines begin: "[T]here was a Pedro, but he had gone North to work. So now there was only Pedrito — little Pedro — at home with his mama and his *abuela* [grandmother]." They effectively suggest a sense of loss created by this separation, but also suggest a devaluation of the feminine world that little Pedro is reduced to living in, hence the constant desire to grow up and fill that lack left by the absent patriarchal figure.

Pedrito makes the right decision when he tells his aunt the truth about having lost the money and gives it to her from his own hard-earned savings. He is clearly growing up because he faces the situation in the most honourable way possible, and this is reinforced by his mother's admiration of his brave behaviour. The closing words "[N]ow he is big enough" imply that growing up is a complex process of learning to accept responsibility and knowing how to relate to family and community members. Being old enough to have a bicycle means more than having long enough legs or good enough coordination to ride it. Garay manages to imbue this simply told story of challenges, struggle, and the final reward with the idea that Pedrito deserves a bicycle for facing up to his responsibility to replace the lost money instead of lying about the circum-

stances. An unresolvable tension remains between advocating this kind of achievement on the personal and interpersonal level, and obliquely representing the socio-economic problem of the migrant father, who is only able to contribute to his community from the politically complicitous North. Garay goes on to tell the story of the need to escape to the North in order to survive political persecution in *The Long Road*. This book is suitable reading for a slightly older child since it deals with the consequences of civil war: the destruction of home and homeland, exile, and the difficult adaptation to a new home.

Ironically, or perhaps, felicitously, the young boy who is the protagonist longs "to see the busy city, the town beyond the mountain and, most of all, the long and dusty road leading there." While this wish to explore the world beyond the perimeters of his native village refers to a trip to neighbouring areas, the reference to the long and dusty road becomes a potentially positive metaphor for the constant movement and change of life. José gets his wish to take a bus trip across the mountains to spend Christmas with his grandmother, but when he returns to his devastated village, the motif of the journey assumes a broader significance because he must escape the country with his mother. In this story, the absence of the father is explicitly linked to political persecution and disappearance. Upon learning that he must leave everything behind, José's confusion and fear are compared to the "awful empty way" he had felt "when his father had been taken away to prison. They had heard nothing from him since."

The violence wreaked on his village takes place while we witness José's happy visit with his grandmother. The only two illustrations dealing with the war-torn area depict a few burnt-out homes, and a soldier patrol armed with a machine gun whom the refugees must evade in order to cross the border at night. Garay manages to communicate the fear and injustice of war without actually depicting any of the scenes of violence that children might automatically associate with the glorified versions exploited and propagated by television and video games.

The rest of the story deals with the details of flying to the North, going through Immigration, living temporarily in a shelter for refugees, learning to speak English and settling down in a new home where cultural continuity is nevertheless maintained. While Garay's representation of the journey might seem unnecessarily mundane and pragmatic, the simple details of the family's daily struggle will strike children as interesting and help them to imagine the experience of emigration. The strangeness of the new environment is represented in such simple terms as the "bulky unfamiliar jacket" that José must now wear and how "his boots squeaked on the packed snow." The context of José's exile is broadened when at school the children are asked to trace their journeys on a large map, and José realizes that many of them have come from even farther away. While exile is a painful experience for many adults who can rarely accept the arbitrarily imposed journey away from home, Garay presents this story of loss from the adaptable position of the child whose very nature it is to be in the perpetual process of becoming familiar with the world: "Soon a week passed, and then another. The strange faces in the classroom became familiar. José's English improved even more. The cold seemed less bitter. It was almost time for his birthday."

The surprise birthday party, so cherished by all children, is an occasion

to bridge José's past, present and future. The guests are both Hispanic friends from the shelter where the family first lived, and newer friends from school. The "sweet smell, the mix of cake spices and ginger he remembered from Grandmother's, ... the Spanish voices he did not need to strain to understand, ... a piñata full of candies" contrast with the new experience of making a snowman. The gift of a puppy replaces Pinto, the family dog that was abandoned when they fled. The possibility of not only adapting, but of belonging is poignantly expressed when "[F]or the very first time, José felt that the long road that had led him here could be a road to happiness he had not known since an evening long ago in the kitchen of his Uncle Ramón."

The Long Road provides us with an opportunity to talk to children about political conflict and exile in realistic and understandable terms, while focusing on the potential that all journeys hold. This book would be valuable to both children who have had to endure the experience of exile, and to those who have never pondered such a reality. Regardless of, or even due to, their differences, children can identify with José's sense of alienation and loss, as well as with the joy of finding friendship and a sense of self that allows for difference.

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Keepers of Nature, Keepers of Stories

Keepers of the Night: Native Stories and Nocturnal Activities for Children. Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac. Illus. David Kanietakeron Fadden. Fifth House, 1994. 168 pp. $16.95 paper. ISBN 1-895618-39-8. ***Tales Alive.*** Susan Milord (reteller). Illus. Michael Donato. Vermont: Williamson, 1995. 128 pp. $19.95 paper. ISBN 1-913589-79-9.

"In Native North American tradition the family is the center of the community, the meeting place of all of a person's relationships" (*Keepers of the Night* 123). In western society where capitalism dominates, the workplace is the centre of community, and personal life is marginalized, through the rendering of time as a scarce resource. We are in desperate need of visions of how to live that reach beyond the consumer hysteria of mass culture and the frenetic competition of a global economy.

Keepers of the Night, the third in the fine Keepers series, offers such a vision. Caduto and Bruchac provide a holistic and interdisciplinary curriculum that includes Native stories, traditions, information about the natural world at night and extensive field-tested activities: the book will be of significant value for teachers and youth group leaders pursuing environmental studies with school-age children. With the exception of the Native stories (in larger print), it acts more as a reference guide for leaders, with comprehensive instructions for night-time activities, detailed information about the natural world (from star

constellations to the mating dance of the woodcock, spiralling up into the sky), and an emphasis on ethical qualities of care for others and for the earth.

Tales Alive flattens rather than enriches a sense of specific cultures because the particularities of culture and location are lost when the stories are all told in the same voice. Intended for the use of children seven to twelve years old, Susan Milord offers ten tales in large print, each from a different world culture, plus a variety of activities after each, described so that children can do them with little adult assistance. The cultures selected range in general location from Argentina to Russia, with an Inuit tale representing Canada. Each country is located on a tiny logo-like map heading the activities sections, with its flag, major languages, and capital city. Its purpose in orienting children is clear, but to attribute specific cultures to nation states reduces the differentiation of cultures and gives an appearance of unity that belies the difficulty aboriginal groups have had in attempting to address real grievances with national governments.

In both books, what impresses is, first, the inventiveness and moral economy of the tales, rich and delightful to read, and, second, the way the activities extend the reality of the story, connecting it to daily life and thus embedding the story in children's experiences. To go out into the night and see the constellation of the Pleides, after reading the Onandaga tale "The Seven Star Dancers," is to understand the patterns of stars differently, not as mere scientific fact, but connected to living social and historical traditions.

Storytelling of cultural tales remains of paramount importance because embedded in stories is the group's cultural knowledge of how to behave well towards others and towards the earth. In "The Great LaCrosse Game," for instance in the Keepers book, the animal kingdom is divided into two teams, those with wings and those with fur. One small winged and furry animal doesn't know which side to join. Otter insists no one should be left out, and of course, Bat makes the winning goal for his side. One of the great lessons of aboriginal cultures is that everyone counts; to be present is to be part of the Circle of Life, and to be acknowledged for the contribution one makes to the life of others.

The illustrations are important in both books, and are of three types: full-page story illustrations, activity illustrations, and illustrations of the natural world. *Tales Alive* features full-colour pictures, although the activity illustrations in pale mauves and grays look insipid. However, the line drawings of animals — hare and walrus and toad — are life-like and vibrant. In *Keepers of the Night*, Carol Wood's drawings of native implements and constellations are clear and tidy. Kanietakeron's story illustrations are crude in style, with a rugged forcefulness. Jo Levasseur's black-and-white scratchboard portraits of nighttime are, however, magnificent. These black-and-white works of art go beyond superb draughtsmanship to create a wonderful depth of night space and lovingly crafted night animals. The spotted owl in a Douglas fir, and the mother bear with cubs drinking from a lake as the moon rises, are worth the price of the book. (Why is Kanietakeron recognized both on the cover and in a bio section, and the other two illustrators only in the acknowledgement section: does one have to be Native?).

Regarding their impact, *Keepers of the Night* is more cohesive, comprehensive and focused in the world it presents, and offers a wealth of little-known

information. *Tales Alive* offers less information but is aimed directly at children. Both books will be popular with teachers. Note that Caduto and Bruchac remind us not to change the stories, reinventing different endings and so on, but to respect the structure of each tale as it stands, out of respect for its cultural origins. These stories can be enjoyed as they are for the gifts they tacitly offer as commentary on how to live on the earth.

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Raffi Songs to Read Only Partially Successful

Everything Grows. Music and lyrics Raffi. Photo-illus. Bruce McMillan. New York: Crown, 1993. Unpag. $4.99 paper. ISBN 0-517-88098-9. ***Like Me and You***. Music and lyrics Raffi and Debi Pike. Illus. Lillian Hoban. New York: Crown, 1994. Unpag. $16.50 cloth. ISBN 0-517-59587-7. ***Rise and Shine***. Music and lyrics by Raffi, Bonnie Simpson, and Bert Simpson. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Random House Canada, 1996. Unpag. $19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-679-30819-9. ***Tingalayo***. Music and lyrics by Raffi. Illus. Kate Duke. New York: Crown, 1993. Unpag. $4.99 paper. ISBN 0-517-56926-4.

These four books are part of the Raffi Songs to Read series. The books take a single song and add illustrations appropriate to the lyrics. At the end of each book, the melody and chord symbols, along with the lyrics, are provided for musically literate parents and children. As stand-alone books, these are only partly successful. The melodies are not always easy to learn. For example, the rhythm in *Rise and Shine* is syncopated, which makes it tricky. *Everything Grows* is also more rhythmically difficult than most children's songs. This is, of course, less of a problem if the child and parent already know the tune. The lack of guitar tablature along with the chord symbols may pose difficulties for amateur guitarists who wish to play and sing the melodies.

The other problem with these books is that the lyrics are divided unevenly to link up with the illustrations. If there is only one phrase per illustration, you are forced to move quickly; if there are several phrases, you can linger, but the unevenness can be difficult for a child who wants to look at the pictures as well as sing the song.

Of the four books, *Rise and Shine* has the best illustrations. They are bright depictions of various regions of Canada. However, as mentioned above, the tune and rhythm are difficult to pick up. *Tingalayo*'s catchy melody and charming illustrations make it the most successful blend. The other two books were nicely, but not memorably illustrated.

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Is There An Echo in Here?

I Promise I'll Find You. Heather Patricia Ward. Illus. Sheila McGraw. Firefly, 1994. Unpag. $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55209-094-9. ***Petula, Who Wouldn't Take a Bath.*** Linda Bailey. Illus. Jackie Snider. HarperCollins (Alligator Press), 1996. Unpag. $7.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-648088-8. ***Would You Love Me?*** Andrea Wayne von Königslöw. Illus. author. Annick, 1997. Unpag. $15.95, $5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-431-1, 1-55037-430-3.

Some people claim that there are only five story plots in existence, and that our entire literary history revolves around them. But three recent picture books, which bear more than a passing resemblance to their literary ancestors, invite a closer look at similarities and differences.

In its theme, its format, and even its colour scheme, *I Promise I'll Find You* begs to be compared to the classic *The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown (illus. Clement Hurd). In both books, a mother promises to search for her missing child, travelling across land, water and sky to find him.

First-time author Heather Patricia Ward may lack the deftness of a Margaret Wise Brown, but there is no doubt about the seriousness of her purpose. From its dedication "To all of the missing children in the world..." to her final note stating that a portion of the author's proceeds will benefit child-locating agencies, this book is intended to move adults to tears while providing entertainment for their children.

In that sense, it harks back to Robert Munsch's *Love You Forever*. But Sheila McGraw's illustrations here are completely different from her work in the Munsch book. Like Hurd, she uses a rich, intense palette and puts an emphasis on mass and form over line. In each spread, a tiny image of the missing child stretches his arms toward his passing mother, who repeatedly fails to spot him. She promises to search "until the day [is] done," and "as every day [goes] by." These small touches provide a chilling undercurrent to the soothing tones and bright pictures.

The almost unbearable tension contrasts sharply with the reassuring mood of *Runaway Bunny*. Hurd celebrates his bunny reunion with a cuddle on mother's lap. In McGraw's reunion scene, mother and child stand side-by-side with their backs to us. But even though the theme is dark, the text moves along with a light touch, and there is much here that will appeal to a child. This book shines with the strength of its vibrant, accomplished pictures.

The jingle-jangle rhyme scheme of *Petula, Who Wouldn't Take a Bath* is reminiscent of the *Jillian Jiggs* books by Phoebe Gilman, but this story of a grime-covered girl whose skin begins to sprout vegetables echoes an even older tale. "The Radish Cure," from Betty MacDonald's middle-grade book *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle*, was recently adapted for the picture book market under the title *Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle's Won't-Take-A-Bath Cure* (illus. Bruce Whatley). It tells how a mother plants radish seeds on her sleeping daughter, successfully frightening the disobedient girl into the bath when her skin starts to sprout.

Petula, on the other hand, revels in the fact that vegetables have begun to grow spontaneously all over her body. Nothing curbs her aversion to

bathtime, until the neighbours launch into a feeding frenzy and threaten to "pick her." The moral is clearly spelled out: "The next time *your* mom says you need a good scrub,/please remember Petula and ... jump in the tub!"

The rollicking text echoes Petula's ebullient spirit. Unsuspecting readers may trip over interruptions in the rhyme and metre which distinguish Petula's voice from that of her mother and emphasize moments of high drama. But the galloping text and zany illustrations suit the story well and rescue it from didacticism as the energy builds to a satisfying shout and splash. Petula is a likable character whose story is sure to delight young listeners.

In the book *Would You Love Me?* a child asks "Would you love a cow that eats up people's clothes?" and the adult replies, "Yes, I'd hug her tight and then pat her soft nose." Sound familiar? Barbara M. Joosse used a similar premise in *Mama, Do You Love Me?* (illus. Barbara Lavallee).

In *Would You Love Me?* each picture shows a different child or (in several cases) no child at all. Without the narrative framework or consistent characters of the Joosse book, *Would You Love Me?* asks readers to make some sophisticated inferences. The visual clues are sometimes subtle, as in the picture of the crowing rooster, where the child holds her hand over her teddy bear's mouth. Slight inconsistencies from page to page make it hard to find a unifying pattern. The question "Would you love an elephant with a long trunk?" refers to a physical characteristic, not mischief-making behaviour, and the response ("Yes, I'd let him sleep with me on my top bunk") seems to come from the child's point of view, not the parent's. In some spreads we are inside the child's imagination, while in others we see the parent's response.

But in spite of slight inconsistencies, there is plenty of child appeal in this book, with lots to look at and to enjoy. The pictures are light and loose, with a touch of naivete that creates a kind of tenderness which is appropriate for this text. Whether or not the echoes are intentional, these three picture books resonate with others in the field of children's literature. They provide an interesting opportunity to compare and contrast various styles and approaches.

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Text and Illustration for Children Seven Years of Age and Younger

Night Fun. Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Ron Berg. Annick, 1997. 24 pp. $16.96 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-487-7. ***Flying Dimitri.*** Blair Drawson. Illus. author. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1997. 32 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-284-X. Originally published in 1978 in a substantially different form. ***Mary Margaret's Tree.*** Blair Drawson. Illus. author. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1996. 32 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-259.

This book for ages three to six was inspired by a favourite nursery rhyme, "Hey,

Diddle, Diddle" of the author, Patricia Quinlan, who dedicated *Night Fun* to her son, Kevin. An experienced author, Quinlan's rhymed storyline features Kevin on a dreamlike fantastical voyage in a night-time galaxy in search of fun along with characters Spoon, Dog and Dish. Kevin rides through space with his Mother Goose storybook of rhymes in hand like a traveller's tourbook, exploring planets Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Pluto while comets and asteroids shoot by. Young storybook listeners will be especially comforted in knowing that Kevin will awake from his dream in the safety and security of his own bed and home.

Berg's detailed and surrealistic colour illustrations in mixed media fill ten 8 1/4" X 10 1/2" pages: images just slightly larger than postage stamps of small parts of the full-page paintings appear on the opposite page together with text. Both illustrations nicely complement each other and offer a delightful bonus when the young child is invited to finger-point-out where the smaller image can be discovered within the larger artwork. This game-like activity that engages the young child in careful observation is a small though important step in promoting visual literacy, valued today in the curriculum goals of many progressive school systems.

Each of Berg's illustrations is full of subject matter depicted in rich representational detail. Bright luminous colours sharply contrast with dark skies, creating a feeling of a mysterious and expansive cosmos. Text and illustrations support each other in a book that is a successful bedtime story for any young child.

Like *Night Fun, Flying Dimitri*, by well-known Canadian commercial artist Blair Drawson, is a fantasy story. Dimitri, a lonely boy, lives with his father in a huge house. One evening while brushing his teeth before bedtime, he fantasizes about being able to fly through outerspace to Mars (illustrated in this issue on p. 66). There he confronts Martians, a fire-snorting dragon and an imprisoned queen in a high stone tower. En route over the ocean he enjoys splashing with the great whales. He saves the beautiful queen and the story abruptly ends when he tumbles back to earth where he is tucked into bed by his father.

Drawson's 26 illustrations in this 8 1/2" X 11" book include among them full-page and double-page artwork. Executed in full-colour in what appears to be an opaque medium such as tempera, gouache or acrylic, the artwork surpasses the rather prosaic storyline in its imaginative content, composition and perspective, as well as in its aesthetic merit. About half the illustrations are done in warm muted oranges, yellows, ochres and browns; the other half are done in cool blues and greens. All are subtly shaded in graduated tones, very richly textured, and appropriate to the specific subject matter presented. The artwork is the outstanding feature of this book and will engage young children's detailed and prolonged scrutiny.

Flying Dimitri is suitable for children ages four to seven.

Blair Drawson's most recent children's book, *Mary Margaret's Tree*, is for children ages three to six. Mary Margaret, the little girl featured in the story, goes out one spring morning to plant a tree but she finds herself beginning to shrink as the tree grows huge. She climbs the mighty tree to see the world from this high perch and also busy insects and birds while she settles snugly within a large flower. Her imagined episodes take story readers and viewers through nature's four seasons, including a winter spent hibernating in a dark cave with a collection of wild animals. Mother finally summons Mary Margaret to dinner and a subsequent return to reality.

Drawson has created 23 illustrations in full-colour in an opaque medium. Several full-page and double-page illustrations are included. The front and back inside covers represent the tree, highlighted in the story, as it may be seen through nature's four seasons. Two of the illustrations may be disturbing to young children. One depicts Mary Margaret growing roots from her feet and green shoots out of her head and hands. In another she becomes a tree with her face embedded in a thick gnarled trunk and her outstretched arms as limbs. The artwork, overall, is imaginative especially in its conception of scale. *Mary*

Margaret's Tree presents rich contrasts of flat, smooth areas against richly textured and mottled areas to create pleasing compositions. Illustrations and text are well matched in this charming book.

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The Old and the New (and the Old)

Dennis and the Fantastic Forest. Adrian Raeside. Illus. author. Doubleday Canada, 1997. 32 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-385-25531-4. ***Eenie Meenie Manitoba: Playful Poems and Rollicking Rhymes.*** Robert Heidbreder. Illus. Scot Ritchie. Kids Can, 1996. 32 pp. $14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-301-5. ***Ogre Fun.*** Loris Lesynski. Illus. author. Annick, 1997. 32 pp. $5.95 paper, $15.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-446X, 1-55037-447-8.

A couple of false assumptions about children's literature exist among the general public, and those who work with children's books sometimes encounter them. One of these is the belief that all children's books are written in verse. Another is the assumption that medieval fantasy elements like trolls, dragons and giants create automatic child-appeal. These days, although re-tellings of traditional folktales are still popular, most original stories steer clear of verse, and few new books are set in the old goblin-and-wizard territory. However, three recent Canadian picture books demonstrate that the oral tradition continues to influence new material, with varying degrees of success.

Dennis and the Fantastic Forest is the third in the Dennis the Dragon series by Adrian Raeside. His career as an editorial cartoonist is evident in the polished, funny, readable cartoon-style illustrations in this book. When the forest burns down, Dennis becomes over-zealous with his re-planting campaign, until trees crowd out his fellow citizens and cause havoc in the town.

Traditional themes, like "too much of a good thing," and "the wicked must be punished" are present here, along with the familiar fire-breathing dragon. But stories rooted in folklore are structurally solid and, unfortunately, this book does not live up to that tradition. When the townspeople complain, Dennis lists his reasons for liking trees, but says nothing about their overabundance. Then he notices that "a few of the trees [are] still looking lean." Dennis transfers these lean trees to the forest and becomes a park ranger. By the end of the story, it is not clear whether the town has been restored, but in a surprising denouement, Dennis sprays his brothers with an extinguisher to punish them for having set the original fire.

The problems with structure and clarity are compounded by the struggle to tell the story in verse. The metre is uneven, the text occasionally slips from past to present tense, and some of the rhymes (e.g. playgrounds/duckponds and

streams/jeans) are forced. Most unsettling are the places where the action seems to have been driven by the need for a rhyme. The idea that townspeople might "wear [trees] as hats" is delightfully silly, but the humour stretches too far when trees are used to "dress up their cats." And it seems unlikely that the tree-dwelling "jackaroons" would have existed if it weren't for the "raccoons" which preceded them.

It is unfortunate that such a problematic text has been paired with these appealing illustrations, especially since the story might have worked just as well with little or no text. In this book, the trappings of traditional storytelling have been borrowed without its corresponding strengths.

In *Eenie Meenie Manitoba,* Robert Heidbreder draws from the oral tradition in a different way, and with more success. Many of the thirty-eight oh-so-Canadian poems in this collection have been fashioned around the rhymes and rhythms of old jump-rope chants, counting-out games, fingerplays and lullabies. Instead of "teddy bear, teddy bear, touch the ground," we now chant, "Nova Scotia lobster, touch the ground." Monday's child is now "a humpback whale," and "I trucked into Toron-to-to/To see what I could tow tow tow" refurbishes an old clapping rhyme. It works. Heidbreder handles rhyme and metre skilfully, and the watercolour illustrations by Scot Ritchie are fresh and funny. Small icons identify those poems which can be clapped, jumped or acted out, and the accompanying directions are phrased as suggestions (e.g. "Try telling your future with this poem"), keeping the tone light.

Iona and Peter Opie, who scrupulously documented the history of children's games and songs, might raise their eyebrows at the way Heidbreder has reworked the old standards, and it isn't likely that these carefully-Canadian rhymes will infiltrate the playground, with its relentlessly oral culture. But as a book of poems to read and act out, this sunny volume offers plenty of fresh material.

In *Ogre Fun,* author-artist Loris Lesynski successfully builds an original story around a rhyming text and a traditional motif — the interaction between humans and ogres. Gronny ignores the warnings about contact with humans, and returns home with a bad case of the yawns. It spreads quickly, but Gronny solves the problem by relying on his wits and courage.

Lesynski's rhyme and metre never falter, and she uses the verse form to dramatic effect, building tension just before a page turn and resolving it in a phrase which packs extra punch because of its rhyme. When Gronny shocks his family by yawning hugely at the dinner table, we're told, "They'd never seen a yawn before./He heard his Mogre say — [page turn] — Gronathan, you wretched boy,/ you stop it RIGHT AWAY!" The careful placement of text on the page, along with changes in the typeface, underline the fact that this story is meant to be shared aloud. Incorporating elements from the oral tradition into a modern-day format with brisk pacing and wonderfully funny illustrations, Lesynski has achieved a satisfying blend of old and new.

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Young Mother Goose

Fly Away Home. Directed by Carroll Ballard, with Jeff Daniels, Anna Paquin and Dana Delaney. Columbia Pictures, 1996.

"You didn't know I could fly," says the inventor, trying to ingratiate himself with the daughter he hasn't seen for nine years early on in Carroll Ballard's *Fly Away Home.* "I wouldn't go bragging about it" comes the cool reply. Readers of Bill Lishman's autobiographical *Father Goose* are in for a surprise when they come to the movies. Lishman told of how, with the help of his family and friends, he taught a group of domesticated Canada geese to fly and in his ultralight plane guided them through their first migration south. For the film, screenwriters Robert Rodat and Vince McKerwin have largely jettisoned reality in favour of a story that is both more dramatic and less interesting.

For those who have read the book or who know of the adventure, here's the advice — forget what you already know. Lishman's story provides the basic narrative of the film, but little else. Lishman's real family who receive the author's "deepest gratitude" for their inspiration and help in the book's dedication must have been surprised to find themselves missing from the film. One suspects that Canadian teamwork has been downplayed in favour of American heroism.

Lishman, here renamed Tom Alden and played by Jeff Daniels, is a principled (read eccentric), divorced inventor living in "Ontario, Canada." That this "Canadian" has a daughter with a Kiwi accent requires a little explanation. However, a dreamlike car crash, probably one of the least violent ever seen on film, takes care of Jeff Daniels' ex-wife, a singer living in New Zealand, and leaves the way clear for Anna Paquin to be transplanted to rural Ontario. (To be fair, Lishman's own sculptures are used in the film and he is one of the pilot doubles for Jeff Daniels.)

It is too bad that the narrative Rodat and McKerwin have created is so lacking in originality. Truly it comes dangerously close to made-for-television clichés about relationships and right-thinking eccentrics clashing with by-the-book authority. That the film rises above the level of formula is due to the skill of the performers and, above all else, director Carroll Ballard.

Fans of *The Black Stallion* and *Never Cry Wolf* know that Ballard is a master of the wordless sequence. Give him humans interacting with animals in a natural setting and he and cinematographer Caleb Deschanel, his associate on the other two films, can make magic. Shot for the most part against an autumnal landscape, the film is visually striking, and some of the composition is reminiscent of paintings of Andrew Wyeth. Paquin's scenes with the geese are charm-

ing, even funny, and you would have to be pretty hardened not to get a little excited or misty-eyed when the geese do finally take to the sky.

The best moments in the film are the lyrical aerial sequences, significantly without Rodat and McKerwin's dialogue. Daniels and Paquin make an appealing father-daughter team, ably conveying their evolving relationship even in silence. There is one wince-inducing scene toward the end of the film when, having run out of fuel and crashed, he must encourage her to fly on alone with the geese, that brings the film to a grinding halt for a deeply unfortunate inspirational moment. While the narrative runs its predictable course, the craft of the director makes it hard to resist, so it is formula given first-class treatment.

According to the rhyme, "Old Mother Goose, when/She wanted to wander/Would ride through the air/On a very fine gander." And — with a 1990s makeover — she still does.

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Happily Ever-Single: Disney's *Hunchback* and the Modern Hero without a Mate

The Hunchback of Notre Dame. Buena Vista Pictures / Walt Disney Productions, 1996. 90 minutes, colour. Directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise.

Disney's recent attempt at adapting Victor Hugo's classic novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* into an animated feature has sparked more than a few suspicious reactions. Those critical of past Disney films (myself included) may expect to enter the theatre and see "Beauty and the Beast, Part II." Fortunately, such is not the case with this film. Disney's current rendition of the story of Quasimodo changes Victor Hugo's original story of tragic eloquence to one which is admittedly "happily ever after." It does, however, retain some of the novel's more interesting and important features.

First, the film keeps the cathedral of Notre Dame as its centrepiece, much like Victor Hugo does in the novel. Both the film and the book open with the ringing of the bells of Notre Dame, which in the film is accompanied by the song "The Bells of Notre-Dame," which is fully six minutes long. Further, the detail and attention to the cathedral as not only a place for sanctuary and imprisonment but also as a character itself is not unlike Victor Hugo's treatment of her as a force and presence in *Notre-Dame de Paris.*

Disney should also receive recognition for retaining some of the more difficult and adult parts of the novel. The film's "Hellfire" sequence is certainly among the most memorable of these, where Claude Frollo reveals his lustful desires for Esmeralda. Both the music and visual content are surprisingly adult: an image of Esmeralda dances in the flames of a huge fireplace as Frollo sings "this burning desire is turning me to sin." Disney could have easily overlooked Frollo's sexual desire for Esmeralda and replaced it with fear or jealousy, but I think the right decision is made to characterize him in his disgusting complexity

as a hypocritically chaste and pious man who is overcome with sexual desire for someone whom he detests.

The greatest acclamation, however, goes to Disney's very wise choice in keeping Quasimodo "single." In a "happily-ever-after" world, the thought of marrying Quasimodo and Esmeralda must have crossed the writers' minds, as it certainly crossed the minds of the viewers. If Quasimodo in this film must be a hero rather than a tragic victim, at least he is one who is not compromised or complicated with a love interest. Unlike countless other Disney films, this hero doesn't go off into the sunset with his newly-acquired mate. At last, Disney is telling young people that they don't have to end up with Prince Charming or Princess Jasmine to be a hero! Quasimodo's real dream of being part of the people (beautifully expressed in Tim Hulce's performance of the song "Out There") is realized in the end. In this way, Disney departs from the repetitive themes found in many of their past films.

True, Quasimodo is a hero rather than tragic figure in this film, but he lives in a world not entirely unlike that of Victor Hugo's creation. The film owes its richness to the genius of Victor Hugo, but its own boldness establishes itself as Hugo's worthy benefactor.

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***The Adventures of Dudley the Dragon.* TV Ontario (Dragon Tale Productions).**

Quietly, amidst the noise and confusion of children's TV shows, a gentle revolution has been taking place on TVO. This is the appearance of a series of productions which thoroughly engage, instruct, and impart cheerfulness to those children lucky enough to watch them. I count myself among these. Immobilized for the better part of a year by a disability, I have been forced to leave a university teaching career and find new activities around the home. After about six months virtually every hit TV show has lost its appeal, even the tragi-comic soaps for the uninitiated. One series of programs, however, has kept fresh — TVO's offerings for young children. Programs such as *Inquiring Minds*, *Polka Dot Door*, and the *Crawl Space* cluster near the noon slot where pre-schoolers, kindergarteners, kids home for lunch, and especially unemployed adults can enjoy them.

Foremost among the TVO offerings, in my own mind and among most children who watch, is *The Adventures of Dudley the Dragon.* The premise, a simple one, is of a not-so-magical, actually rather inept, dragon who goes through a series of adventures with a small group of children and various forest inhabitants. The children are, in fact, the heroes or protagonists in each adventure as they attempt to sort out their own feelings and values, and help Dudley decide on appropriate moral choices.

These are often concerning environmental responsibility or just the

good and bad aspects of growing up, of friendship and respect for others, and always involve Dudley's happy and lovable participation. On the darker side, some episodes can be positively scary for some children — those who have not had their sensibilities blown away by cartoon violence. Good theatre has always had the power of imagination and when subjects like Vernon the Toxin are encountered by Dudley, it is spooky — even for me. The complaint here is that of a good Hitchcock film — it is just done too well! The forest troll of some episodes may also transcend the scary boundary for some kids.

This is not just a children's program, for it excels in production values, music, story line and guest appearances. Notable on the series are Graham Greene's cameos as Mr. Crabby (Apple) Tree (he is outrageously funny), Diana Flack as the adventurous singing butterfly (and Venus Fly-Trap lady — a 1950s horn-rimmed glasses spin on the *Little Shop* character), Mary Walsh (of CBC's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*) as a real Frog Princess (who still loves to eat flies and deals with prejudice and sexual stereotypes), Saul Rubinek as a spirited new version of the King of the Forest (Oz's Cowardly Lion), and a variety of Canadian character actors providing many delightful cameo roles.

The music for Dudley is spirited and adventurous and, of greatest significance to the young, singable. The sight of Dudley driving and singing "I love to drive my Big Red Car" is hilarious and drives home the message of needless air pollution as Dudley drives miles to deliver a handful of berries to Sammy the Frog. This particular program visits some of the major cities of Europe and the Mediterranean with a strong message of pollution and how the individual can help stop it. Dudley expresses his own opinion, of course, that it's all the *other* cars.

Variety and melody are the hallmarks of Dudley's music, while background themes emphasize harp and wind instruments. The number of songwriters for this show is impressive, as is its credited technical support.

As an anthropologist and archaeologist, I can hardly complain about Dudley and Company's moral judgment that taking treasure from ancient sites is not right. However, I love this series because I can be just what I am inside, a Big Kid. We all love adventure and light-heartedness, at least we should, and that is what Dudley provides best.

The series creator, and voice of Dudley, Alex Galatis, has done a marvellous thing for young Canadian children. He has given them songs, adventure, a sense of importance and participation, and most significantly, the view that adults can and should be both responsible and silly. In the grown-up real world, when famed interviewer Marg Delahantey of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* can interview Prime Minister Jean Chretien in his office about golf protocol, *and* swoon on the floor just to be near Him, I am reassured that all will be right with the world and that Dudley's message, that silly *and* responsible is okay, rings true.

Largely through its innovative use of songs and live action adventure, the series has a universal appeal. Its appeal is both whimsical and direct, lyrical and lackadaisical. The emotional, intellectual, and moral involvement of children viewers is enhanced by an interactive adventure format with Dudley as the lovable and indecisive chief protagonist. High marks go to this series for

creative writing (stories and songs), production values, and general overall silliness. What kid could resist?

Lawrence J. Jackson is an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology, University of Western Ontario and writer-in-(his)-residence in Port Hope, Ontario. He does not know Farley Mowat. This article is Lawrence's first non-archaeological publication although he has authored numerous popular articles on archaeology, notably in the ***Rice Lake Vacation Guide*** *— a much-loved source of local fishing lore.*

Reviews in this issue / Ouvrages recensés

Announcements / Annonces

The Eileen Wallace Research Fellowship in Children's Literature, valued up to $5,000 (CDN) per annum, invites proposals for research and scholarship using the resources of the University of New Brunswick's Children's Literature Collection. Proposals are welcomed from anyone who can provide evidence of competence and scholarly background and outline a practical and worthwhile project using the resources of the Collection. Application forms are available from: Office of the Dean of Education, The University of New Brunswick, PO Box 4400, Fredericton, NB, Canada E3B 5A3. (506) 453-4862. Deadline for application is March 1st of any year, with the fellowship to be awarded after July 1st of the same year.

Winners of the Mr. Christie Book Awards include Kenneth Oppel for his fantasy, *Silverwing*, Robert Soulières for his mystery novel *Un cadavre de classe*, Kevin Major for *The House of Wooden Santas* and Dominique Demers for *La Mystérieuse Bibliothécaire*. In the junior category winners were Lucie Papineau and illustrator Marisol Sarazin for *Pas de taches pour une girafe*, and Barbara Nichol and Philippe Beha for *Biscuits in the Cupboard*.

Groundwood's 20th Anniversary First Novel for Children Contest has been won by Kingston-based author Sarah Withrow for *Bat Summer*. Runner-up was *A Gift for Ampato* by Susan Vande Griek from St. Andrews, NB. The prize includes $5,000 plus a $5,000 advance against royalties. Publication of the winner is expected in the fall of 1998 and of the runner-up in the spring of 1999.

For the second year in a row the YA category of the Jewish Book Awards has been won by Carol Matas, for *The Garden* (Scholastic), her sequel to last year's winner, *After the War*.

The Children's Books History Society (British Branch of the Osborne Collection and Lillian H. Smith Collections) in liaison with Library Association has awarded the Harvey Darton Award for 1997 to two books: John Goldthwaite's *The Natural History of Make-Believe* (Oxford University Press), and Peter Newbolt's *G.A. Henty 1832-1902; a bibliographical study* (Aldershot: Scolar Press).

The first joint conference of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL) and the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) will be held at the University of Calgary from July 5-9, 1999. The theme of the conference is the end of the century, with a focus on the state of children's books, publishing and culture with papers in both French and English. Featured speakers will include E.L. Konigsburg, Tololwa Mollel, C.J. Taylor, Laurent Chabin, Dominique Demers, Jack Zipes, and Sheila Egoff. Professor Jon Stott will conduct a workshop for teachers. For more information visit the conference Web Site at http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/chla99 or e-mail Roderick McGillis at rmgilli@acs.ucalgary.ca or Claude Romney at jcromney@acs.ucalgary.ca.

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