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Going for Eternity: A Child's Garden of Verses

• *Elizabeth Waterston* •

Résumé: *Dans cet article, Elizabeth Waterston tente d'expliquer la fortune littéraire du recueil de poèmes de Robert Louis Stevenson,* ***A Child's Garden of Verses****, dont le succès reste encore très vif de nos jours. D'après elle, plusieurs auteurs ont tout simplement oublié l'influence marquante que ces poèmes ont exercé sur leur première jeunesse.*

Summary: *Elizabeth Waterston discusses the reasons for the continued popularity of Robert Louis Stevenson's* ***A Child's Garden of Verses****, and suggests that many writers have forgotten the strength of the poems' influence on their pre-school days.*

When Robert Louis Stevenson rhymed "children" with "bewildering" in the trial edition of his verses for children, his friend Sidney Colvin objected. "A Cockney rhyme," he jotted into the margin of the little book titled *Penny Whistles.*[1] Stevenson responded with his own marginal jotting, "Good enough for me.... These are rhymes, jingles; I don't go for eternity." Whether or not he thought he was in the race for immortality when he published his little rhymes, *A Child's Garden of Verses,* first published in 1885, has proved to have great survival power. It is still available in all sorts of editions, variously illustrated, and is still a preeminent choice of educators as well as of parents and care-givers. It is a book for children too young to express an opinion of its charms; but many of us re-open it as adults to discover just how deeply it has sunk into our pores. Poem after poem chants itself: "I have a little shadow...," "The friendly cow, all red and white...," "The world is so full of a number of things...."

The influence of a book absorbed in pre-school days is hard to trace. Many writers by the time they reach maturity have forgotten just how strong that influence was. I once wrote to Dennis Lee, creator of *Alligator Pie* and other very popular books of children's poems, asking, "Would you mind

telling me if you ever read *A Child's Garden of Verses* very intensely? Was it important to you, either in early days, or when your own books were in process?" Dennis Lee, in very kind response,[2] began by saying that although the Stevenson poems were pretty certainly in his home, and read to him by his parents, "and I know I imprinted some of the poems," he was perplexed as to the degree of influence. He went on to list the poems that "came back with a rush to me." Then, after a disclaimer as to taking Stevenson as a model when he started doing his own poems, Lee continued, "All that said, I still think he's one of the half-dozen or so normative children's poets in English.... His best pieces are treasures, and part of the lifestream of children's poetry."

The treasures in *A Child's Garden of Verses*, in their lyric clarity, their whimsy and rhythmic excitement, offer great pleasure to the very young child, and to the adult who must act as mediator for this preliterate being. They also radiate light for students of child psychology, of cultural history, of biography, and of the literary institution that consists of the complex of writer, editor, publisher, reviewer and marketer of the book. For the child psychologist,[3] the opening section of *A Child's Garden* manifests Stevenson's remarkable retention of childhood attitudes and interests. The poems recall exactly the earliest responses to language: the delight in reiteration, the pleasure at new words. "The Swing," for instance, catches the child's fondness for repetition: "Up in the swing ... up in the air ... up in the air and over the wall ... up in the air and down" — that last phrase adding the joy of antithesis and surprise. The verses are sing-song chants, just beyond the "mum-mum" and "dad-dad" stage: in "Rain": "The rain is raining all around / It rains ... It rains ..." and then the joyous whoop at a delicious "big word": "It rains on the UMBRELLAS."

But there is something beyond the memory of word-play in these poems. There is also a catching of mind-play as the psyche develops. "Bed in Summer," the first poem in *A Child's Garden of Verses*, pouts at a common grievance of being put to bed too soon, when child-time is at variance with grownup-time, clock-time. The child initiates a "me / they" antithesis, the first mark of self-awareness. Bedtime gives way to "Night Thoughts," modulating into the terrors of "Windy Nights," with its haunting, frightening, galloping dactyls. "The Land of Counterpane" reflects ego-growth, as Lilliput becomes Gulliver, "the giant, great and still / That sits upon the pillow hill." Stevenson thus sings of timeless aspects of childhood, to tease the psychologist into analysis. But the poems also offer some time-tied motifs, of interest to the cultural and social historian. The social interests of late Victorianism appear in the smug piety of a tiny Briton pleased with the thought of "little children saying grace / In every Christian kind of place." British chauvinism is ironically punctured in "Foreign Children": "Little heathen Japanee /

O! don't you wish that you were me?" The poem catches the solipsism of any child, but more specifically reflects the imperial smugness that Stevenson himself had of course shucked off, perhaps in pre-school days. These two poems, which have caused some distress to politically correct educators, come with an irony and an accuracy from a particular period of materialistic self-satisfaction.

There are other obviously period poems: "The Lamplighter," of course, but also perhaps "From a Railway Carriage": today's diesel-drawn trains make no such pounding rhythms. The blocks and the toy boat, the story-books and picture-books and the pretend tools, the chisel and hammer of "My Treasures," all reflect modish "Froebelianism." Friedrich Froebel had convinced mid-century parents that all children should be offered "gifts" in simple shapes, that they should be entertained with nursery rhymes, traditional folk songs, and taught crafts such as simple weaving, and digging and planting. "Kindergarten" is an innocuous word to us today. In 1850, when Stevenson was born, it was a term fraught with controversy. Froebel, the German educator who coined the term, also minted the revolutionary idea that children should be treated like little flowers. Not as little beings born in sin, to be trained and directed with an unsparing rod toward adulthood, and not as seers blest, Wordsworthian beings with visions superior to the limited perceptions of adults: the Froebelian concept was that childhood should be a time of gentle growth toward happy and sociable maturity (see *The Education of Man).* Robert Louis Stevenson was raised by modern parents. Like any Froebelian adept, Margaret Balfour Stevenson kept a journal of her child's doings, his games and fantasies, pets and toys.[4] Solo play and companionable make-believe with his cousins both flourished in Stevenson's childhood garden. These pleasures were shadowed, however, by feverish illnesses, asthma and bronchial troubles and a growing threat of tuberculosis. Between the sunshine and shadow of Stevenson's childhood and the actual penning of the verses stretch years of other experiences which intensified and sophisticated his poetry. As a young man invalided to France and Switzerland for treatment of his lung troubles, he watched wistfully the lively games of little children and published two articles, "Notes on the Movements of Young children" (1874) and "Child's Play" (1878).[5] Surprising productions for a young bachelor of twenty-four and twenty-eight! Then Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne, the American divorcee whom he eventually married after a theatrical transcontinental pursuit, brought a ready-made family into his life. (Incidentally, in Monterey, California, where Stevenson followed Fanny during that melodramatic courtship, he must have lived within a few blocks of one of the earliest trainees in kindergarten work. Kate Douglas Wiggin, later to write *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and other popular children's books, was teaching kindergarten classes in Monterey in 1879.) In 1880, after his marriage and return to Europe, Stevenson helped his stepson

Lloyd Osbourne write and print little books with titles such as *Martial Elegy for Some Lead Soldiers*, surely renewing his memories of his own collection of tiny warriors. Those memories welled up soon in that very different elegy, "The Dumb Soldier," about a lost toy, underground through a long winter of forgetfulness, but waiting to reappear. "I shall find him, never fear, / I shall find my grenadier." Stevenson found his grenadier, and all the other toys and dreams and experiences that had lain buried in the maturing years, in a series of reclaimings, between 1881 and 1884. Again there was a timely stimulus. Books for children were proliferating. A thin trickle had been coming from John Newbery's press since the beginning of the century, but it was while Stevenson was a young man with literary ambitions that serious writers began working this new field: Lewis Caroll, with *Alice in Wonderland* in 1865, Christina Rossetti with *Goblin Market* in 1869, George MacDonald with *At the Back of the North Wind* in 1871. Rhymed picture books for very young readers flourished in the 1880s, following publications by Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane, and Kate Greenaway.[6] It was Greenaway's work that stirred Stevenson to have a go at nursery rhymes. Her *Birthday Book* sold 150,000 copies in 1880. Stevenson, on holiday in Scotland, in the climate of his childhood, close to young Lloyd and strapped for money, re-entered the garden of his memories and dashed off a few little poems.[7] Over the next four years — crucial ones in RLS's private life and in his development as an artist — he returned again and again to the composition of little rhymes for little people. He mocked his own work in this genre in letters,[8] but he was intense, even obsessive, in his careful revisions and deletions. When he had completed forty-eight poems, he put out *Penny Whistles* as a trial run. Forty-one of these survived his friends' criticism and his own censorship and made it into the final *Garden of Verses*, published in 1885. This final version contains sixty-five poems, including a set of Envoys. The final envoy, "To Any Reader," reminds the reading child, lost in the book, to remember the writer who dreamed up the poems while remembering himself as a child in a garden. So the poetry leads back to biography. *A Child's Garden of Verses* reveals many of Stevenson's persistent motifs. Recalling Northrop Frye's phrase, "Fables of Identity," we recognize with amazement the way the tiny poems unroll all the kinds of stories that Stevenson would go on telling as a way of defining himself. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is often instanced as epitomizing the neurosis of a split personality. Long before he wrote that classic, Stevenson revealed his döppelganger bent in "My Shadow." For the wanderlust that would catapult him into a fabulous series of voyages, there is a diminutive version in "Foreign Lands." "Marching Song" swings with the military zest that carries Alan and David along the road to the Isles in *Kidnapped*. Rebellious dreams of piracy, raids, and anti-social adventure, released in *Treasure Island*, were pre-released in "A Good Play."[9] Finally, for anyone studying the "literary institution," the whole cycle of book production from inspiration to

publication to distribution to reviews and imitative responses, *A Child's Garden of Verses* offers great rewards because there is so full a record of the book's history. Stevenson was well enough known and well enough connected to pull a full range of reviewers into contemplation of his book. Regardless of the critics' views, *A Child's Garden of Verses* continued to be bought by generations of parents, aunts and godfathers, and to be enjoyed by generations of children. Do the poems still work? I can only say that they worked for me when I read them to my own children, and as for grandchildren, the only rival I have found so far in the popularity sweepstakes is Lee's *Alligator Pie*. At the outset, Stevenson may not have known he was "going for eternity." Later, however, when he penned the final envoy "To Any Reader," I believe he was at least playing with the idea of immortality. He knew that his poems would hold any child's attention. Perhaps he may have guessed that over many years adults, also, looking "through the windows of this book," would remember their own childhood, and the child who played, and the man who wrote in the garden.

Notes

1 *Penny Whistles* (Cambridge, privately printed, 1993). Of the three known copies extant, one is at Houghton Library, Harvard, and one at the Beinecke Library, Yale.

2 From a letter to me dated 14 March 1991.

3 See Piaget; Droz and Rahmy.

4 Her *Notebook, 1850-1870,* is held at the Beinecke Library at Yale University, MS uncat. 370 List Sect II, no.1.

5 "Notes on the Movements of Young Children," published first in Portfolio, London, 1874, is reprinted in *Juvenalia and Other Papers* XXI, 126. "Children's Games" is reprinted in *Miscellanies* XX, 157.

6 Crane's *The Baby's Opera* appeared in 1877, Caldecott's *John Gilpin's Ride* in 1878, and Greenaway's *Under My Window* in 1878.

7 The manuscript notebook containing these first poems is held at the Beinecke Library as MS 3071.

8 See *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson.*

9 See Paul Maixner, *Robert Louis Stevenson, the Critical Heritage.*

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***Elizabeth Waterston**, Professor Emeritus at the University of Guelph, and one of the founding editors of **CCL**, is currently editing Robert Louis Stevenson's **A Child's Garden of Verses** for the University of Edinburgh Press. This fall the University of Toronto will publish her book, **Wrapt in Plaid**, which (among other things) reminiscences about the patterns of reading of Canadian children and young adults in her generation. Professor Waterston has published widely on Canadian and Scottish literature, and is co-editor of **The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery** and co-author of **Writing a Life: L.M. Montgomery**.*

George Hutchinson, a Canadian Illustrator of Robert Louis Stevenson's ***Treasure Island***

• *Wendy R. Katz and Lilian Falk* •

Résumé: *L'artiste néo-écossais George Hutchinson a fait paraître en 1894-1895 une série de dix-huit planches pour* ***l'Île au trésor****. C'est le premier à avoir illustré cette oeuvre en travaillant seul. Sa série, négligée, est remarquable pour l'attention qu'elle porte à la narration romanesque. Cet artiste injustement oublié a servi de modèle au personnage principal du roman* ***The Master*** *d'Israel Zangwill.*

Summary: Nova Scotian artist George Hutchinson illustrated a serial version of ***Treasure Island****, the first to be illustrated by a single hand, for* ***Chums*** *magazine in 1894-95. This largely overlooked version, containing eighteen drawings, is noteworthy for its careful attention to the story's narrative point of view. Of further interest is the nature of* ***Chums*** *itself as a home for* ***Treasure Island****. Also of special note is the Nova Scotia background of Hutchinson, who worked in London as an illustrator and there attracted the attention of writer Israel Zangwill, who used Hutchinson as the basis for his novel* ***The Master****.*

The work of Nova Scotian artist George Hutchinson appeared in one of the earliest illustrated versions of *Treasure Island* and the first one to be illustrated by a single hand. Hutchinson's illustrations accompany the serialization of *Treasure Island* in *Chums* magazine from August 29, 1894 to January 2, 1895, almost eleven years after the first serialization of *Treasure Island* in *Young Folks*. The drawings in *Chums*, eighteen in all, two of which appear as covers for their relevant numbers, trace with care the narrative point of view of the story, including the first-person narrative shifts from Jim Hawkins to Dr. Livesey and back again to the boy. Published during the last year of Stevenson's life, the illustrated serialization concluded just weeks after the author's death. A death notice follows the last instalment in the January 2, 1895 number. Hutchinson was a Nova Scotian who became a successful illustrator in London in the 1890s, producing illustrations for books and

Fig 1
Jim peering tentatively round the inn door

periodicals, for general readership as well as for young readers. The discussion that follows will examine the *Chums* illustrations as they follow the narrative point of view of *Treasure Island*, present a brief account of *Chums* as an appropriate home for *Treasure Island*, and shed some light on the mystery of George Hutchinson, a largely forgotten illustrator, himself a treasure "not yet lifted."

The Illustrations

John Scally, in *Pictures of the Mind, The Illustrated Robert Louis Stevenson* (1994), omits Hutchinson's illustrations from among his representative pieces for *Treasure Island*. The omission is understandable: with a rich variety of illustrations to choose from, Scally has had to be selective. However, he also attempts to develop a chronological record of pictorial interpretation, and in the interest of such a record, the omission of Hutchinson seems something of an oversight. In his brief introduction to the *Treasure Island* illustrations, Scally declares, "It was not until 1899 that *Treasure Island* found its first single illustrator, Walter Paget" (26), a statement not strictly accurate. Even allowing that the *Chums* 1894 illustrations appeared in a serialization rather than a single volume edition, and its unsigned initial letter pictorials may have been done by a house illustrator, the eighteen illustrations (approximately 6" x 8" each, extended over three columns of print) were executed by a single hand. Moreover, Hutchinson's illustrations show an artist interested not simply in the piratical cutlass-and-bottle-of-rum brand of illustration but one who seems to have made a considerable effort to translate into visual images the narrative shifts in the text.

Initially, Hutchinson takes on the job of establishing Jim's presence in the illustrations as a visual guide, the first-person narrator made visible. In the text itself, Jim Hawkins begins as an observant eye witness rather than a full participant in the adventure. His presence as spectator is captured in Hutchinson's first illustration of Billy Bones chasing Black Dog out of the inn, accompanied by the caption "The Captain aimed ... one last tremendous cut" (Stevenson 4). As the pirates flash their swords and catch the eye of the reader, they also catch that singular eye of Jim, here only a head peering tentatively round the inn door (fig. 1). Also captured here are the details of Black Dog's mutilated three-fingered hand, Billy Bones's scar, and the notched frame of the inn sign that has caught Bones's cutlass and thus saved Black Dog from being "split ... to the chine" (50). The internal strife among the pirate gang is yet another observed feature of this illustration, as is the pirates' ferocity: Black Dog's cutlass is thrust, as it were, into the page itself. The pirates are the organizing centre of the illustration, but Jim is essential as a narrative guide.

Fig. 2
Jim identifies Black Dog

In subsequent illustrations, the narrative point of view is carefully developed as Jim is gradually absorbed into the adventure and claimed by the pirates. In the second picture, for example, Jim is seen holding the wrist of Billy Bones while both figures watch the departure of the morally and physically blind Pew, who has just delivered the black spot. The physical connection between Jim and the pirates is made throughout the text as Jim is drawn to them and into their story. Still, Jim is observing rather than participating, as Hutchinson also shows us in the third illustration, that accompanying the death of Pew. When curiosity urges Jim to creep back to the bank to see what is going on at the inn in chapter 5, he sees the death of Pew, still another consequence of those internal quarrels among the pirates. Pew's fatal encounter with the horse riders is shown from a long view over Jim's shoulder. Hutchinson insists on Jim's being in the picture, but solely as an observer, peering over the bank.

The long views that separate Jim from the pirates become slightly more complex when Jim meets the deceptively pleasant-tempered Silver. Hutchinson shows the back of Jim again in the first illustration to include Long John Silver, set in Silver's Spy-glass tavern, that "bright little place of entertainment" (58). With its windows and open door, the "Spy-glass" is a great place to "see," remarks the observant Jim, and it is here where he recognizes the pirate Black Dog, a customer seated "at the far side" (58) of the tavern, whom he last saw fleeing from the wrath of Billy Bones. In the text, Silver takes Jim's hand (making another piratical claim upon the boy), and it is precisely at this time, when Jim and Silver are physically touching, that Jim identifies the "outsider," Black Dog, and sees him make his escape (fig. 2). Hutchinson chooses not to show the two holding hands because he needs Jim's right hand to point the reader in the direction of Black Dog and he also needs Jim's back so that the scene can be examined from over Jim's shoulder, from Jim's point of view. Nonetheless, he groups Jim and Silver together as a couple, with Jim's body slightly superimposed on Silver's to establish their intimacy, however short-lived, and he continues to distance Jim from the figures of the more unambiguous pirates, in this case by using the inn door as a visual partition.

Three illustrations that follow Jim's chance intelligence-gathering in the apple barrel appear finely sensitive to the changes in Jim's character. The first depicts Jim as the familiar eye witness, reporting the news of the planned mutiny under Silver's leadership to Livesey, Trelawney and Captain Smollett. Jim's back is once again to the viewer so that we look, like Jim himself, at the three adult men in the cabin receiving the news. Although the perspective separates Jim from the adult listeners, there is no spatial gulf, no rift. All three keep their eyes fixed on Jim, as the text demands, and as is required for the reciprocity of feeling demanded by their relationship. The second illustra-

Fig. 3
Jim witnesses the murder of an innocent hand

tion in this group, which became the cover for the October 10, 1894 number of *Chums*, shows Silver's murder of Tom, one of the innocent hands (fig. 3). It is this event, of course, the murder of an innocent man, that turns Jim's world upside-down, an event after which, he says, "the whole world swam away from before me in a whirling mist; Silver and the birds, and the tall Spy-glass hilltop, going round and round and topsy-turvy before my eyes" (99). Hutchinson's picture shows Silver seizing the branch of a tree to maintain his balance as he hurls the deadly missile of his crutch to murder the innocent man. With Spy-glass hill in the background, the reader/viewer regards the scene of murder over Jim's shoulder, his back once more to our view. Significantly, Jim's figure is more prominent than those in the murder scene, forcing our gaze to return to him. The picture's perspective thus transposes the victims of the event by directing our focus on Jim, reading the murder scene predominantly for its having registered a seismic blow to the boy's consciousness. In the third picture of this sequence, Jim meets the maroon, Ben Gunn. The new Jim, the Jim who has seen the murder of an innocent man, "a human life cruelly cut short" (99), is now the Jim who can be drawn with a pistol in his right hand as he meets this strange new terror: "As soon as I remembered I was not defenceless, courage glowed again in my heart; and I set my face resolutely for this man of the island, and walked briskly toward him" (121). It is Ben Gunn on his knees to Jim that Hutchinson offers in the illustration, and even though we see Jim again from the back, he is clearly no longer the same boy.

At this stage of the text, as Stevenson reveals in "My First Book," the narrative ran into an impasse.[1] Stevenson was stumped and could take the story no further until he shifted the narrative point of view from Jim to Dr. Livesey, a shift which allowed Stevenson to return to the time of Jim's leaving the ship. Hutchinson, not about to offer illustrations without the figure of the boy, gives only one for this new narrative sequence. When Livesey, still narrating at the end of chapter 18, sees Jim climbing over the stockade, Hutchinson seizes the opportunity to bring back the boy, seen from the perspective of Livesey. The reader/viewer now looks at Livesey from the back and observes Jim from over Livesey's shoulder. The illustrator has thus subtly drawn the reader's attention to the pivotal narrative shift.

Hutchinson continues to show his sensitivity to the text when, in chapter 19, Jim resumes his hold on the narrative. No longer an observer but a full participant in the action, Jim emerges, if not from obscurity then from relative seclusion, to become the lead actor. Hutchinson's illustrations record this change: the reader/viewer has no further vantage point from over Jim's shoulder. Even though Jim continues to mediate the action as narrator, Hutchinson visually relocates him to a different space and presents a longer view of the boy. This has the effect of drawing him into more intimate rela-

Fig. 4
Silver seated with Jim alongside

tions with the pirates and removing him to a sphere too perilous for close contact.

Hutchinson's next task, not altogether successfully executed, is to represent the heroic and fearless Jim as he moves steadily away from a position of safety into the reaches of combat and eventual capture. The illustrator selects for depiction the pirate attack in chapter 21, specifically the image of Jim with his cutlass up, face to face with the pirate Anderson. A picture of Israel Hands approaching Jim with a dagger as the boy momentarily lets down his guard and another of Jim trying to escape up the ship's shrouds are attempts, however static, to place the boy precisely at the edge of heart-stopping danger. Finally, when Jim is captured and becomes the prisoner of Silver and his mates, Hutchinson gives us a fearless young prisoner, straining in the enemy's grasp as he confronts Silver and the other pirates just moments before he defiantly takes credit for the failure of their mutiny.

Hutchinson's final task is to re-establish visually the relationship between Jim and Silver. When the pirates give Silver the Black Spot, Silver is seated with Jim alongside, very much a pair whose shared space is set against the space occupied by the pirates and divided pictorially (recalling the illustration at the Spyglass tavern), by a door (fig. 4). In the subsequent illustrations of Jim with Silver, Hutchinson continues to pair them and separate them from the rest. In one of these, based on one of the most interesting incidents in the text, Silver leads Jim on a rope, ostensibly to secure the prisoner while on the climb to reach the treasure. The ascent is a struggle for the one-legged Silver, and as the hill becomes steeper and stonier, Jim has to "lend him a hand, or he must have missed his footing" (266). It is this supportive Jim, pushing Silver up the hill, that we see in the illustration (fig. 5). The brutal Silver must be made vulnerable in order for the reader to accept the Silver who is allowed to escape.

The last picture of Silver takes place at the end of the climb as Silver and Jim look across at the pirates who see that the cache of treasure is gone. Silver has already passed Jim a pistol: "Well, there we stood, two on one side, five on the other, the pit between us, and nobody screwed up high enough to offer the first blow" (282). The viewer looks over the shoulder of Jim and then across a divide. It is this picture of the pirates on one side and Silver and Jim on the other, regarding each other from across a gulf, that visually settles the question of which side Silver is on.

The *Chums* readers whom the Hutchinson illustrations were meant to please would doubtless have admired them less for their illumination of the Stevenson text than for their intrinsic visual appeal. But the success of the illustrations, as our discussion has shown, depends to a significant degree on their thoughtful interpretation of the text. Unfortunately, Stevenson's opinion of the Hutchinson drawings remains unknown; we have been un-

Fig. 5
Jim pushing Silver up the hill

able to uncover any reference by the author to either the *Chums* serial or its illustrations. However, in an appreciative note on the *Treasure Island* illustrations of French artist George Roux, probably written in 1885 but unpublished until 1982 (see Carpenter), Stevenson makes clear his views of book illustration in general and provides some evidence that he would have approved of Hutchinson's efforts. "A picture in a storybook," Stevenson writes, "... should narrate. It should be the handmaiden of the text, competing with it upon equal terms, telling the same story in all its typical moments, with another accent and the stamp of a different mind" (Carpenter 323). Hutchinson's work duly narrates, and in so doing reveals both a respect for the integrity of Stevenson's text and an ability to translate this regard into a sustained series of images, a complementary visual reading of the story that truly helps the *Chums* readers to "see."

Chums, An Illustrated Paper for Boys

Chums itself, subtitled "An Illustrated Paper For Boys," was just that; it included a great number and variety of illustrations, chiefly of soldiers, seamen, and sportsmen. Published by Cassell's from 1892 to 1934 and first edited by Sir Max Pemberton, *Chums* was a perfect home for *Treasure Island*.[2] It emphasized action and adventure and liberally dispersed throughout its pages various scenes of fighting. When *Chums*, under the 1894-1907 editorship of Ernest Foster, began the serialization of *Treasure Island*, the magazine was in its third year of existence. Foster had taken over from Max Pemberton and was evidently determined to steer the enterprise to success over the stormy seas of formidable competition. *Chums* was dedicated to one principle over all others: popularity and sales. "Price One Penny" stated on top of the cover of each issue performed the crucial task of enticing customers and ensuring continued prosperity.

The aggressive sales tactics of *Chums* are evident in the pitch of one or two issues. Each issue promises even more exciting reading matter than the last, but the most concerted effort to bring in new readers is made at the start of a new volume, when readers are urged to invite their uninitiated companions to begin reading the new serials being launched: "Now is the moment to grip them by the scruff of the neck and to make them happy," the Editor exhorts his faithful friends in the August 29, 1894 number, the one with the first instalment of *Treasure Island* (Foster [?] 13). *Chums* medals are awarded to those "workers" who enlist the greatest numbers of new readers. Various competitions were regularly announced, and results duly published. Readers were invited to comment frankly on the quality of the magazine. Prizes (guineas, silver watches, cricket bats, pocket knives, and a pneumatic-tire bicycle) were awarded, even for the most cutting criticism. Readers were also

encouraged to write to the Editor on every topic of interest. The Editor engaged in exchanges with the forthcoming correspondents, who regularly saw their names in print.

But beyond mere sales, these tactics had yet another consequence, one that has strong bearing on the readers' perception of, and reaction to, the reading-matter itself. Unlike any reading taught in school, reading in *Chums* was a matter of pleasure. In addition, it was offered for a candid evaluation of its merits. Thus, even if the readers could not communicate their pleasure to, say, Robert Louis Stevenson directly, being invited to communicate it to the eager Editor was surely not without satisfaction.

A deft stratagem for involving the readers in the world of *Chums* was the name itself. By a clever piece of linguistic manipulation, the name signifies both the readership and the name of the magazine. The readers of *Chums* are, of course, themselves "chums," and the Editor is their friend. The masthead of the magazine offers a striking pictorial representation of these relationships (fig. 3). The two boys on the left are on "the outside" and the "inside" at the same time. One boy, seated, dressed in a school uniform, holds an open issue of *Chums* on his knee; the other, standing, and dressed for the outdoors, looks on attentively. The circle is thus complete; the picture is doubly self-referential: two chums are reading *Chums* together. The readers and the reading-matter are merged.

Serialization was essential to the survival of this magazine, as it was to many others. Two serials were begun in each new volume, but they did not end simultaneously. A new serial would begin to fill the place of the one that had just ended. *Treasure Island* was a splendid choice for *Chums*. The author was famous, the book already renowned. The division into sections of two chapters at a time was perfect: the story progressed significantly in each instalment, and yet fresh suspense was built up. Here is an ending which will make it hard to wait a whole week until the next issue: "Perhaps I had heard a creak, or seen his shadow moving with the tail of my eye; perhaps it was an instinct like a cat's; but, sure enough when I looked round, there was Hands, already half way towards me, with the dirk in his right hand." This, from the 21 November 1894 instalment (III, no. 115), is followed by the tantalizing "To be continued" (202).

Treasure Island had all the hallmarks of a *Chums* adventure. The action was removed in time and place, the narrative was delivered in the first person, the hero was a young boy, just a little older than the average reader, but not over the threshold separating boy from man. Yet the young hero was admitted to the company of adult men as a near-equal. The hero can perform many acts of physical bravery on the same level as the adults, but he is more nimble, more curious, more hot-headed and ready to take risks. He still evokes paternal concern in his adult companions. But he is clearly on his way to full

acceptance in the adult world, even if that world is one where grown men are willing to abandon their normal duties and to risk everything, to kill and be killed, for the sake of riches amassed by acts of lawlessness and violence.

George Hutchinson

If *Treasure Island* was a natural choice for *Chums* serialization, was George Hutchinson a good choice for its illustrator? The requirement was that the illustrations should make the most of the action and drama of the story. George Hutchinson, then at the height of his popularity as illustrator, capable, imaginative, and a good draughtsman, was quite able to deliver what was needed. His illustrations were important in their own right, recreating the excitement of the story in visual terms and offering their own intrinsic pleasure and artistic appeal. They are subordinate to the text, but they maintain an autonomy at the same time, at least in the sense that they superimpose an interpretation that must take on a life of its own: if Jim has his hair tied back with a ribbon on his first appearance, the ribbon must be present throughout.

If the drawings often occupy only about half a page, they loom much larger, and dominate the page — the print is arranged to accommodate them. Moreover, the pictures, which come on the first page of an instalment, often illustrate lines on the next page. When an illustration begins on a recto page, the textual lines it illustrates often appear on a verso page. In many cases, then, the pictures and the text could not be seen at the same time, building suspense and urging the reader on. All illustrations, whether of an interior or exterior scene, are carefully detailed, all human figures fully realistic in their stance or motion. That is, they are realistic as figures, not as characters. Jim has no distinctive features apart from being an average British boy. He is, if not Everyman, then Everyboy, with whom the *Chums*' readers can easily identify. Billy Bones is as ferocious as the stroke of the artist's pen can make him. Long John, the one-legged man, is pleasant and smiling. It is difficult to suggest latent treachery in his appearance, but it is possible to show how everyone was taken in by his deceptive looks.

Who, then, was the illustrator commissioned to provide these illustrations?[3] He worked in London, producing cartoons and illustrations for various periodicals such as *The Illustrated London News* and *The Idler*. He was versatile and a good worker; it appears that he produced commissioned work on schedule, unlike many others. He had a wife and family, and was always eager for commissions. When they came, bills could be paid and some small luxuries indulged in. In between commissions, he tried to do portraits. When things went well, he could even afford to travel back to Canada for a visit. For this man, who was so good at depicting the British at

their favourite and perhaps to him occasionally bizarre pursuits, was really a Canadian.

George Hutchinson's home was in Great Village, Colchester County, Nova Scotia, a place known to literary historians as the childhood locale of poet Elizabeth Bishop. Bishop, Hutchinson's great-niece, lived intermittently in Great Village with her maternal grandparents, Elizabeth Hutchinson Bulmer, Hutchinson's sister, and her husband William Brown Bulmer.[4] Born in 1852, Hutchinson left the village as a young man, went to London, and studied at the Royal Academy from 1880 to 1885. He was the winner of a £50 prize in 1885, presented by the Academy's President, Sir Frederic Leighton. Notably, it was he who did the illustrations to the first edition of Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* in book form (1891 by Ward, Lock and Bowden). In the early 1890s he was "discovered" by the novelist Israel Zangwill, who engaged him as illustrator for Zangwill's own humour magazine, *Ariel*. When the sometime Canadian Robert Barr (educated in Canada, he left at the age of 26) and his British friend Jerome K. Jerome started *The Idler* together in 1892, both Zangwill and Hutchinson became important contributors. Hutchinson illustrated some of Zangwill's most successful works, such as *The Bachelors' Club* (1891) and *The King of Schnorrers* (1894), where the illustrations fully match the humour of the written work. He also illustrated many of the articles which appeared in *The Idler* as part of the series "My First Book." He did not illustrate Stevenson's "My First Book," but did an excellent job on Israel Zangwill (*The Idler*, 1893).

Hutchinson is listed in Canadian references as a Nova Scotian painter of modest output. In British references he is listed as an English cartoonist and illustrator.[5] That the two artists were really one and the same person was a happy discovery attendant on a work on Zangwill's half-forgotten novel *The Master* (Falk 1993). In the novel, Zangwill depicts the life of a young boy who grows up in Nova Scotia, but goes to London to study painting and becomes a successful artist. Once thought to be based on the life of Nova Scotia artist Gilbert Stuart Newton, the novel was evidently based on the life of George Hutchinson, the last illustrator to furnish a pictorial interpretation to *Treasure Island* in Stevenson's lifetime.

The *Chums* serialization of *Treasure Island*, coinciding as it does with the last year of Stevenson's life, had a special historical significance that the magazine's editors were quick to perceive when they learned of Stevenson's death. In the last instalment, the editor appends a note on Stevenson's death for the information of his readers: "Just before we go to press with the present number of 'Chums' — containing the final chapters of 'Treasure Island' — the news of the passing away of Robert Louis Stevenson, in far-off Samoa, is flashed to this country; and it is with deep sadness we realise that the incomparable Story-teller is no more" (*Chums* 299). In the 9 January 1895 number of

Chums, the very next week, readers are treated to a reduced facsimile specimen of Stevenson's handwriting from a page of *Catriona* and are reminded to reread an article on Stevenson's life and work, "The Author of 'Treasure Island'," that was included in the same number of *Chums* that began the serialization of the book. If Stevenson's death added historical sharpness to the serialization, his prominence added literary lustre to *Chums* itself. The brief entry for *Chums* in the *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* notes that "In 1894 [*Chums*] ran *Treasure Island* (the second time that Stevenson's book had been serialized) 'with new and original illustrations'" (117). Of all the adventures published by *Chums*, it is the inclusion of *Treasure Island* alone that is clearly worthy of note in the *Oxford Companion*, and for its "new and original illustration" as well as for the text. Until now, George Hutchinson's illustrations have been largely overlooked.[6] As an extremely sensitive example of the integration of text and visual image, they deserve to be rescued from neglect and given a recognized place among that group of images inspired by the story of *Treasure Island*.

Notes

1 In "My First Book," Stevenson remarks on the problem he encountered after a relatively trouble-free, chapter-a-day routine writing *Treasure Island*: "Fifteen days I stuck to it, and turned out fifteen chapters and then, in the early paragraphs of the sixteenth, ignominiously lost hold" (2:16).

2 *Chums* ran as a weekly from 14 September to 2 July 1934 (vols. 1-42) but continued as an annual from 1935/6 to 1941 (vols. 1-6).

3 Lilian Falk's "A Nineteenth Century Literary Representation of Nova Scotia Dialect" discusses Israel Zangwill's *The Master* (1895) and argues that the novel is based on the life of George Hutchinson. The argument appears to find further support in correspondence between Zangwill and Hutchinson preserved in Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem (File A-120). The existence of this correspondence was pointed out to Lilian Falk by Meri-Jane Rochelson of Florida International University.

4 For the relationship between Hutchinson and Bishop, and further unravelling of the Hutchinson mystery, see Sandra Barry's "What's in a Name? The Historic Sites and Monuments Board and the Gilbert Stuart Newton Plaque Error." Further information on George Hutchinson is found in Sandra Barry's *Elizabeth Bishop, An Archival Guide to Her Life in Nova Scotia*.

5 George Hutchinson is listed in J. Russell Harper's *Early Painters and Engravers in Canada*. He is also cited in *History of Great Village, Nova Scotia*, compiled by the Members of the Women's Institute, and in Donald MacKay's *Portraits of a Province*, an unpublished manuscript. Among the British and American references which list or name George Hutchinson are Algernon Graves, *A Dictionary of Artists, 1760-1893*; Simon Houfe, *The Dictionary of British Book Illustrators and Caricaturists, 1800-1914*; and J. Johnson and A. Greutzner, *The Dictionary of British Artists, 1880-1914*; Walter

Klinefelter, *Sherlock Holmes in Portrait and Profile*; and James Thorpe, *English Illustration: The Nineties*. The British and American books refer to Hutchinson's work only, not the person.

6 Kevin Carpenter mentions Hutchinson in the course of his 1982 *Notes and Queries* article, "R.L. Stevenson on the *Treasure Island* Illustrations," which reproduces a hitherto unpublished commentary by Stevenson on French artist George Roux's illustrations of *Treasure Island*. (The manuscript is located the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.) Carpenter concedes, regarding the illustrator of *Treasure Island* in *Chums*, that "Little is known about Hutchinson; he illustrated a number of serials in *Chums*" (323n.). Roger Swearingen, who mentions the *Chums* serialization in his PhD thesis, *The Early Literary Career of Robert Louis Stevenson, 1859-1881*, notes that he did not actually see a copy of the magazine; he makes no reference at all to Hutchinson (420).

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An Interview with Deirdre Kessler

• Shannon Murray •

Photo credit: *MacNeill Photography*

Deirdre Kessler

Résumé: *Dans cette entrevue, l'auteure Deirdre Kessler nous parle de l'importance de la littérature dans ses activités professionnelles et personnelles; elle s'attache à définir la place privilégiée qu'occupe l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard dans son imaginaire et nous fait part de ses projets d'écriture.*

Summary: *In this interview, children's writer Deirdre Kessler discusses the place of writing among her varied interests, the importance of Prince Edward Island to her life and art, and her plans for the future.*

Part I: Writing for Children

SKMM: *You have a wonderfully full and varied CV: university and school teacher; poet and fiction writer for adults and children; literary critic; lobbyist for the arts;*

textbook and technical writer; administrator of a research institute. When you're asked at parties what you do for a living, what do you say?

DK: I say, "I'm a writer." If anyone then asks what I write, I put children's fiction first, then talk about whatever project I'm currently working on — the script for the Parks Canada video on Montgomery, the biography of Wanda Wyatt, or teaching children's literature.

SKMM: *Where does "children's writer" fit in all those other occupations?*

DK: Being a children's writer fits under and around and over all of the other things I do to earn a living and keep my mind active. Some of the stories that please me most on the deepest levels are stories for young people.

SKMM: *What started you in that direction?*

DK: It's likely that the stories I was read as a child started me in the direction of writing children's stories myself. My mother, Irene Donnelly, had a profound appreciation for good writing and good stories. She was superb storyteller, as were her mother and father before her, and had a keen eye and ear for what would appeal to us children. Childhood books gave me tickets to ride. Like many other writers I know, I not so much *read* books as *lived* them.

Among other childhood passions, which largely had to do with animals and the outdoors, I was horse crazy; I *lived Black Beauty, My Friend Flicka*, the Black Stallion books. When I was seven I took a train by myself from Philadelphia to Detroit and spent the summer with cousins at a horse farm near Pontiac, Michigan. My cousin, Cecily, and I were responsible for Softy, the pony she deeded to me the next summer when she got a horse, and for the other six horses in the barn. We cleaned stalls, carried water, fed, and groomed the horses, and when we were all through, we got to ride. That was the payoff. I never complained about the hard work.

We played Pony Express by stacking bales of hay in the exercise yard and jumping on and off Softy as he cantered. We shot each other off Softy, who would simply graze around us while we lay dead on the ground. We didn't even need a bridle for him. Softy lived to be 38 years old and always had a good home.

Cecily and I would enter into extended fantasies together — she was a reader, too, and so we did characters and dialogue from our favourite books, like R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. The barn most often became a pirate ship. Hanging from the rafters was a hayhook on a block and tackle that we swung from. We used a bale grappler as Captain Hook's hook. We were fearless.

SKMM: *You've said that you had no idea that the Brupp books were for children when you began them: do you now have a sense that there is some material for children and some that is not?*

DK: Yes, I do. When I wrote the first Brupp book, I thought of it as of St.

Exupery's *Le petit prince* — that it suited any audience. And I was adamant about the harsh episodes in the early Brupp stories. I thought that children saw reality and needed confirmation in book of what they saw in real life. But, yes, you're right — I now have a sense that there is some material which is better for older children, and some better for younger ones. I understand the general ways in which certain ages take in the world and so am better at directing stories to one audience or another; however, there are always children who seek levels of reality their peers do not seek, and so the challenge is to allude to things at the perimeter of a story which the general reader might miss but the seeker will find. I am eternally grateful to writers who showed me the edges of reality when I was a child.

SKMM: *If you imagine a child audience as you write, how do you keep your address to that audience honest? Do you think as a child?*

DK: It is and always has been easy for me to see as a child and thence to think as a child. The honesty in writing comes from being true to the story rather than being true to the audience, though in the end, the ring of truth encompasses them both.

SKMM: *You've had the unpleasant experience of being banned in one bookstore because of a parent's objection. And you've not shied away from death and even sex (I'm thinking of your contribution to* ***The First Time****, which Sue Johanson recommended all parents buy their kids for Valentine's Day) in your work for young audiences. Should there be boundaries for a children's book?*

DK: Boundaries. Parents set boundaries for their own children. It is their responsibility to put books in front of or take books away from their children. Writers need to write the stories that have deep meaning to them and leave the setting of boundaries to others.

SKMM: *What do you hope your books mean to the children who read them?*

DK: Freedom. Permission to be. I hope my books are lifelines and imagination quickeners and maps to other places and times. That's what books were and are to me.

SKMM: *Is there one book that you wish you had written?*

DK: *Charlotte's Web.*

Part II: The Place of Place

SKMM: *I think of you as in some ways a true Islander: valuing community, loving the land, and loathing the Bridge. But you're a "Come from Away," aren't you? How did the narrative of your life bring you to Prince Edward Island?*

DK: One day I flipped a penny: heads, Prince Edward Island; tails back to Toronto. My then-husband and I were searching for jobs in the Maritimes.

We'd both taught high school in Saint John, New Brunswick, and had left those positions and our cottage overlooking the Kennebecasis River when my sister had a baby girl in Toronto and I wanted to be close to them. After two years in Toronto, we decided to move back to the Maritimes. But there were no teaching jobs anywhere to be had. We travelled through New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and were heading back west when we thought about Prince Edward Island. A neighbour in New Brunswick once had told me she thought PEI would suit me, so I wanted to come here. My ex-husband wasn't crazy about the idea. We flipped a coin. I'm still here.

SKMM: *Though the Island is clearly in your blood, the desert seems to be a competing landscape. The Island and the desert seem like opposites to me. Are they?*

DK: You're right about the Island and the desert. They are exactly opposite to me. Here, everything is so close, so easily touched and shaped — the landscape is almost doll-like in size and concept. There is so much foreground here — flowering shrubs, dunes, woodlots, farmsteads, villages everywhere. The desert has that pure horizon — no lupins or maples or gabled houses obscuring it. The touch of humans is not everywhere seen.

SKMM: *PEI appears to be particularly fertile soil for writers; why do you think that's so (or is it)?*

DK: What occurred to me in 1996, when I understood something about L.M. Montgomery and had been a writer myself on Prince Edward Island for nearly two decades, was that Montgomery created a template of sensibility which she placed over the Island and which is added to on an unseen but very real level by everyone who reads her work and appreciates her love of this place. She has made Prince Edward Island a good place to be a creator. It is no small thing that she was a woman who made her living — and a good one — as a writer.

SKMM: *The cat in your* ***Another Story for Another Time*** *series, Brupp, is very much an adventurous cat, travelling, taking risks, and trusting that nine lives is not his fate. What appeals to you about that sort of picaresque, wayfaring character?*

DK: Probably Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* had the most influence on me as a writer. My mother read us *Huckleberry Finn* when my brother was eight, I was six, and my little sister was four. I reread it every few years and connect instantly with myself as a child listening to the world unfold its small and large mysteries as Huck and Jim float down the Mississippi. And, of course, I love to travel in that desultory sort of way — with no fixed destination, camping wherever whim takes me.

SKMM: *While there is a strong regional connection in your writing (a real thrill for my Islander students who recognize the John Hamilton Gray ferry or the Hillsborough Bridge in your books), Brupp has found his way to translations in other languages. How does the story travel?*

DK: The Brupp stories have been published in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. The books were seen at the Bologna and Frankfurt book fairs, and the rights were bought there over the years. Brupp seems especially popular in Germany, where there have been both trade hardcover and mass market paperback editions. Both Dutch and German editions are illustrated, which the English versions are not. The foreign editions have a little note at the beginning, which loosely translates as, "Brupp lives in Canada. There, things are much different from here — other islands, other water, other names. But cats there are the same as ours. A cat is a cat, after all."

Part III: Writing, Runaways, and Wildlife

SKMM: *When I taught* ***Brupp Rides Again*** *in a UPEI Children's Literature class, the students were especially taken with Brupp's imaginary journal. It strikes me that in much of your children's fiction, either in Brupp's journal or his songs, in Lena's songs or the poems in* ***Lobster in my Pocket****, and even in* ***A Child's Anne****, your own characters imagine, define, and express themselves as writers. Tell us about Brupp's journal and about the place of writing in your children's writing.*

DK: I never thought about this before in the way you frame it. I see that you're right that the characters do express and define themselves as writers. Brupp keeps an imaginary journal as he travels across Canada, distilling what he has seen or learned along the way, keeping himself company by writing when he has no other companion.

When I hear and overhear children at play, I note they often make up songs which unfold from their tongues as smoothly as water flows over stones in a creek. I sense that narrative structure is a brain function, something we humans just do. And when we are lucky to be well-fed and happy and allowed time and place to play, well, the stories and songs we create come naturally and joyfully.

When children are in the moment — not distracted by shame or guilt or interfered with by adults who have intentions they want children to take on, children enter and leave the characters of their imagination seamlessly. The intoned, sung, or spoken narratives of children as they play are like birdsong, bees in flowers, a breeze whispering through summer branches.

When I write, I go inside the characters. They then create the diaries, the songs, the poems. Their act of creation has the valence of my own, of course. If I were a dancer or a painter, my characters would likely do those things more.

SKMM: *You've written elsewhere of your tendency to write runaway girls, "girls with sharp tongues, sharpened sensibilities," and, of course, sharp knives. Are you still drawn to that kind of character?*

DK: When I wrote the essay, "Runaway Girls and Sharp Knives" [95], I think I was at the end of that thematic phase. My preoccupation now is with the theme of home. *Ranch Gang*, the novel I put aside for three years as I completed other projects, focuses more on the achievement of and consequent wrangling with the object of the quest of runaways: home.

SKMM: *I'm not at all surprised to find that you spent two years as a veterinarian's assistant; you love, you've said, "moving among other species." And in all the children's work I've read by you, there is a child rescuing another creature (whale or lobster or bigfoot), or a creature rescuing a child. Where does that connection come from, and why has it proved so satisfying in your writing?*

DK: Interspecies communication is now understood and valued by many more people than when I was growing up. I have never made the hierarchical divisions that most humans make regarding species. My abiding attraction to native North American culture and spirituality is precisely because of this. Barry Lopez's tale, *Crow and Weasel*, and other contemporary children's books have done much to educate about the nature of interaction among the species that share the earth.

One of my earliest memories is being face-to-face with a praying mantis. My mother explained to my little sister and me that the mantis was an insect. That was the first time I'd heard the word, *insect*. The word meant magic — for here was a creature rubbing its forearms together in prayer, and its face looked like something from a fairy story. Imagine the difference in my attitude if I'd been taught, "Eeeuuu, yuk! Kill it!"

SKMM: *In **Bigfoot Sabotage**, your character, Maya, opens the book with a revealing dream-flying experience: where did that idea for dream-flying come from?*

DK: Dream-flying is one of my greatest pleasures. Sometime in the mid-1970s, I subscribed to Karl Pribram's *Mind-Brain Newsletter*, and read about lucid dreaming. I set up dream flight experiments and they succeeded, unlike the actual flight experiment I performed when I was ten and jumped off the garage roof and landed on my hands and knees in the gravel of the alley. Actually, when I was between the ages of four and seven, we lived next to a Pennsylvania State Highway Department garage, where a huge pile of cinders was kept for various road uses. My brother, sister, and I used to dare each other to jump from a high wall beside the cinder pile. We used to fly off that wall and have our landing cushioned somewhat by the cinders.

Part IV: Other Connections

SKMM: *You've taught children and you've taught children's literature and writing for children to adults; do you connect your life as a writer and your life as a teacher?*

DK: At the 1988 Calgary Olympics Writers' Festival, Candas Dorsay, a writer from Alberta, flopped down in the hospitality lounge after one of her sessions with the public and she said, "I'm going to have a pin made. It's going to say: 'Don't ask me, I just write the stuff.'" That's how a good part of me feels when I teach children's literature and when I teach creative writing. But then there is the appreciation and awe I have for writers and my interest in critical thought which see me through as teacher.

SKMM: ***A Century on Spring Street: Wanda Lefurgey Wyatt of Summerside, Prince Edward Island (1895-1998)****, your biography of an Island benefactor of the arts, recently won a writing award from the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation. Does that award mark the end of an era for you?*

DK: It does, indeed. I spent a year and a half travelling from Charlottetown to Summerside to visit Wanda Wyatt and to work in her elegant house, reading all of the 104 volumes of her diary and going through hundreds of letters and thousands of documents she and her family saved. Wanda was related, by the way, to Montgomery's good friend Nora Lefurgey Campbell. The awards night fell very close to the one-year anniversary of Wanda's death. Driving the familiar route to Summerside to the heritage ceremony, especially coming across the Blue Shank Road at dusk, I felt I was finishing a long project in a perfect way.

SKMM: *And now you're the co-chair of the L.M. Montgomery Institute at UPEI, preparing for the fourth international conference on Montgomery, L.M. Montgomery and Popular Culture, and helping, among other things, to ensure that Montgomery's work is explored, valued, and known. What do you see yourself doing with the Institute?*

DK: There is much about Montgomery that has become part of popular culture, especially here on the Island; but there is also a wide and deep exploration of the author, her creations, and her era which the L.M. Montgomery Institute can enhance. Dr. Irene Gammel and I took on co-chairship from you in 1997 — notice it took two of us to do what you did alone — and we both have interests in the publishing of research around Montgomery. We've started a newsletter and have been working on a bibliography. The essays from the conference you hosted in 1996 on Montgomery as a touchstone of Canadian culture were published in 1999 by the University of Toronto Press (*L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture*, edited by Elizabeth Epperly and Irene Gammel). Of course, I'm pleased that my essay, "L.M. Montgomery and the Creation of Prince Edward Island," is included in the book. What else would we like to see happen through the Montgomery Institute? We would like the works of Montgomery to have a stronger presence in school curricula, especially here on Prince Edward Island. And we are looking forward to hosting summer writing workshops. We're thrilled that Governor General Adrienne Clarkson has accepted our invitation to attend a reception in her honour as

part of the Institute's June 2000 conference. Dr. Clarkson has an honorary degree from UPEI and was present at the Institute's first international conference in 1994. Recently, the Institute began a CD-ROM project entitled *The Bend in the Road: An Invitation to the World and Works of L.M. Montgomery*. This multimedia project is a new direction for the Institute. My co-chair is now Dr. Beth Percival, one of the original members of the L.M. Montgomery Institute.

SKMM: *"Making the connections" seems at the heart of your interest in the work of Copthorne Macdonald, an independent scholar, inventor, and writer who has published two books on the subject of wisdom and how we build a wisdom-based society. You've said that, "According to Cop, if we can align our own little experiments with the larger experiment of the universe, we can begin to sense the higher potentials of the process." What are your own "little experiments," and how do they play themselves out?*

DK: My own little life experiments sometimes blow up. About 20 years ago I thought I could write a story which would demonstrate — make transparent — how human genetics work. I had a vision of how the perfect metaphor and perfect set of characters would work in a perfect narrative. I still am working on that particular story. I have a lot to learn. Portions of the story, "Miss Kincaid Turns to Stone," have been published in a Toronto literary magazine, *paperplates*.

SKMM: *Imagine a dinner party at which all your strongest influences, dead and alive, are present: whom would you invite?*

DK: I love this question. At the dinner would be Georgia O'Keeffe, Mark Twain, Emily Dickinson, Dr. Frances Dees-Porch (my mentor), Irene Donnelly (my mother), Raoul Julia (actor), Crazy Horse, Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Vincent Van Gogh, Walt Whitman, L.M. Montgomery, Elizabeth Epperly (writer & Montgomery scholar), Linda Tellington Jones (animal whisperer), Harrison Ford (okay, so he's not a strong influence), Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan writer), Shannon Murray (that's you), John W. Smith (poet), Bernie Lucht (CBC producer of *Ideas*), Zora Neale Hurston, Deirdre McClure (musician, conductor & my niece), Lesley-Anne Bourne (writer), Richard Lemm (writer), and Lao Tzu. The dinner would be outdoors, under a ramada in a garden in Tesuque, north of Santa Fe.

SKMM: *And what's next for you?*

DK: Next for me is completion of a young adult novel, *Ranch Gang*. I have also begun writing a new children's book I've been holding close to my heart for three years. And in the summer of 2000 I'm holding Camp Deirdre! Two of my nieces and one nephew all have little babies who need to be introduced to Prince Edward Island in the summer.

Work Cited

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Le Problème du corpus de textes littéraires en classe de langue première. Itinéraire pour une ouverture des corpus au primaire et au secondaire

• *Jean-François Boutin* •

Summary: *In the last of his three-part series, Jean-François Boutin examines the literary dimension of children's literature and discusses its place in pedagogical, cultural, and institutional discourses.*

Résumé: *Dans la dernière partie de son enquête sur le statut de la littérature pour la jeunesse, Jean-François Boutin analyse la dimension littéraire des oeuvres destinées à l'enfance et à l'adolescence, et examine son inscription dans les pratiques culturelles et scolaires.*

> La rencontre décisive entre l'enfant et le livre se produit sur les bancs de l'école.
>
> — Gianni Rodari, *Grammaire de l'imagination*, 1997, p. 164

Liminaire

L'univers littéraire s'immisce dans la vie d'une personne dès la prime enfance. D'abord par la voie (voix ...) de l'oralité, puis par celle de l'écriture à travers les textes littéraires, plus ou moins denses et nombreux selon le milieu familial, qui viennent interpeller le jeune enfant. Arrive plus tard l'époque où l'école doit activer davantage la relation — c'est du moins ce que l'on souhaite ... — entre le littéraire et l'élève encore novice. En principe, l'institution scolaire devrait réussir, par diverses interventions, à transformer

le jeune en personne cultivée, c'est-à-dire en une personne habile avec le langage et éprise de littérature. En théorie, du moins ...

La réalité, malheureusement, est autre. La rencontre souhaitée ne se fait pas toujours. Le contact, souvent, s'éteint. Un bon nombre de jeunes délaissent progressivement l'univers littéraire. Pourquoi donc? Les raisons pouvant expliquer cette désaffection sont multiples, mais la question du *corpus des textes littéraires présents à l'école* reste fondamentale. Quelle(s) littérature(s) les agents du milieu scolaire doivent-ils offrir aux enfants et aux adolescents afin d'éviter une rupture souvent irrémédiable?

Voilà la question sur laquelle nous avons décidé de nous pencher. Le problème du corpus littéraire se pose de façon vive en classe de langue première, car «après avoir été longtemps tenue pour évidente, la nature de la littérature est perçue aujourd'hui comme incertaine, sujette à discussion» (Dufays *et al.* 1996a, p. 62). De plus en plus, on parle des littératures ... de «la» littérature et de ses pré/para/sous-littératures ... La littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, notamment, a pris un essor remarquable auquel l'école ne peut rester indifférente:

> Une didactique du littéraire ne saurait passer sous silence l'extraordinaire effervescence du corpus de littérature de jeunesse depuis quelques décennies. Des revues et des colloques lui sont consacrés. Malheureusement, peu d'enseignants l'utilisent systématiquement. (Lebrun, 1997, p. 65)

Paradoxalement, cette effervescence du littéraire est telle qu'on ne sait plus vraiment à quel corpus il faut se référer, ni comment on doit le construire, ni de quelle manière il faut l'exposer aux élèves. Dans cet article, le dernier d'une série de trois publiés dans *CCL/LCJ*[1], nous tenterons toutefois d'esquisser quelques grands principes devant guider l'établissement de corpus pour la classe de langue première et prônant une *ouverture* aux textes littéraires, quelle que soit leur origine éditoriale. Nous reviendrons d'abord sur les points saillants des articles précédents, puis nous nous livrerons à une analyse critique des arguments et des justifications des acteurs du *champ littéraire* (Bourdieu, 1992) qui se sont questionnés au sujet du problème du corpus littéraire de référence en classe de littérature. Tout cela dans le but de soumettre «des pistes stimulantes et judicieuses pour le choix des œuvres des corpus» (Melançon, 1997, p. 7), en espérant que ces balises d'un nouvel «enseignement de la lecture littéraire parviennent peut-être à réconcilier plaisir et apprentissage» (Dufays *et al.*, 1996a, p. 116).

1 Rappel des études menées antérieurement

Poser la question du corpus littéraire pour la classe de langue première implique l'examen de la notion de *littérature*. Par ailleurs, comme ce corpus se destine à un public constitué d'enfants et d'adolescents en cours de scolarisation, l'idée de *littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse* doit aussi faire l'objet d'une analyse approfondie. Nous avons mené cette réflexion en procédant d'abord à l'étude des écrits pertinents, puis en dépouillant plus d'une trentaine d'entrevues[2] avec des personnes concernées de près par notre problématique.

1.1 Des idées opaques

Premier constat: il ne semble guère possible de parvenir à la formulation de définitions concordantes des deux idées de littérature et de littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse. Comme le précise Pierre Bourdieu (1992), le champ littéraire, en tant qu'espace déterminé et régi par une institution «mère», donne lieu à de très nombreuses luttes pour la possession des capitaux symboliques, économiques, etc., qui sont nécessaires à l'ascension des agents au sein même du champ. Cette situation empêche l'atteinte d'un consensus:

> On le voit, prétendre définir le concept de littérature de quelque manière, c'est courir le risque de privilégier une chapelle – un système de valeurs – au détriment des autres, et de mêler à l'analyse «objective» des contenus textuels l'imposition «subjective» d'une valeur, nécessairement relative et contestable. Cette relativité des définitions du littéraire a été particulièrement mise en exergue par les travaux de la sociologie des institutions (Bourdieu, Lafarge) qui voient dans la littérature non pas une valeur déterminée, mais un champ de bataille où s'affrontent les défenseurs de diverses valeurs ... (Dufays *et al.*, 1996a, p. 69)

La littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse est aussi difficile à définir que le concept de littérature. Les écrits révèlent en effet une absence remarquable d'unicité: «Il est vrai qu'on a affaire avec la littérature de jeunesse à un domaine extrêmement hétérogène, difficile à définir» (Friot, 1995, p. 5). D'autant plus qu'elle a été désignée par différentes appellations. Ainsi que le signale le didacticien Claude Simard (1997a, p. 68), tout ce flou sémantique rend encore plus incertaine la détermination des visées de l'enseignement de la littérature en classe de langue première. De son côté, Michel Thérien, après avoir souligné la relativité de la définition du fait littéraire, même par le recours à la notion tout aussi ambiguë de *littérarité*, reconnaît que cette équivoque influe directement sur l'institution scolaire quant au choix des textes littéraires à présenter aux élèves: «Il n'existe pas, du primaire à l'université, de consensus sur un corpus d'œuvres» (Thérien, 1997, p. 22).

Un ensemble de textes faisant l'unanimité fait défaut, de toute évidence. Nous tenterons donc de soumettre des propositions didactiques susceptibles de faciliter la constitution d'un corpus littéraire pertinent en classe de littérature.

1.2 Trois représentations

La série d'entrevues que nous avons effectuée en Europe, à l'automne 1996, et au Québec, au printemps 1997, est venue confirmer un autre constat issu de l'examen des écrits recensés, soit l'existence d'une triple manière d'entrevoir l'espace littéraire. En effet, tous ceux et celles qui s'intéressent à notre problématique défendent, avec plus ou moins de passion, l'une ou l'autre de ces trois représentations du champ littéraire:

> 1- Il n'existe qu'une seule et unique littérature, où les textes destinés à l'enfance et la jeunesse doivent obtenir une reconnaissance aussi valable que toute autre œuvre dite littéraire.
>
> 2- Il existe au contraire deux espaces littéraires distincts et autonomes au sein du champ: la littérature générale et la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, entités qui possèdent chacune des caractéristiques propres, mais qui demeurent toutefois autant «littéraires» l'une que l'autre.
>
> 3- Enfin, le champ littéraire constitue un espace légitimé où se retrouvent des textes reconnus et consacrés par l'institution littéraire. Autour de cette littérature «véritable» gravitent plusieurs pré/para/sous-littératures, dont la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse. Les textes de cette dernière n'ont pas atteint un degré suffisant de littérarité et de légitimité pour accéder au canon littéraire. Ces œuvres doivent servir tout au plus à guider le lecteur, en l'occurrence l'enfant ou l'adolescent, vers la littérature légitimée.

La grande majorité des 32 personnes interviewées (professeurs, didacticiens, chercheurs, écrivains, illustrateurs, éditeurs, spécialistes de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, etc.) n'ont pas hésité à appuyer l'une ou l'autre des trois conceptions identifiées. Près de la moitié d'entre eux ont opté pour une *représentation unifiée* de l'espace littéraire. Écrivains, illustrateurs et éditeurs adhèrent massivement à une telle idée. Environ 20% des répondants, principalement des spécialistes de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, considèrent que la *représentation bipolaire* du champ littéraire est la seule qui puisse convenir aux besoins particuliers des pédagogues, des lecteurs, des créateurs ou des médiateurs de littérature de jeunesse. Enfin, seulement un peu plus de 10% des personnes — toutes et tous professeurs ou didacticiens de la littérature — estiment que le champ littéraire demeure le lieu de légitimation des œuvres littéraires. À leurs yeux, seule la *représentation hiérarchisée* de cet espace paraît satisfaisante.

Comme nous venons de le rappeler, l'unanimité est loin de régner parmi les différents auteurs qui s'intéressent aux deux champs à l'étude, littéraire et scolaire. Comme on ne s'entend pas sur ce qui caractérise la *littérature* et la *littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse*, on entrevoit le champ littéraire de façon assez divergente selon le statut qu'on y occupe. Examinons les arguments et les justifications invoqués pour défendre l'une ou l'autre position.

2 Analyse critique des arguments en présence

Une seule et unique littérature ... Deux littératures distinctes et autonomes ... «La» littérature et des pré/para/sous-littératures, dont la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse ... Qui a tort et qui a raison? Quelle(s) littérature(s) pour quel(s) corpus? Afin d'y voir plus clair, il importe de soumettre à un examen critique les fondements des opinions des personnes consultées. Cet exercice de rationalisation nous permettra de clarifier les enjeux liés à la présente problématique et de dégager des lignes directrices pour la constitution d'un corpus littéraire en classe de langue première.

2.1 La représentation unifiée

Notre série d'entrevues atteste une forte adhésion des personnes interrogées (près de 50%) à la représentation unifiée du champ littéraire — une seule et unique littérature —, position déjà révélée par la recension des écrits. Quels sont les motifs invoqués par ces personnes, pour la plupart des créateurs et des diffuseurs de littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse?

Si ces gens paraissent convaincus de la justesse d'une conception univoque du champ et qu'ils s'expriment avec conviction, ils ne se donnent guère la peine de fonder véritablement leur position. Celle-ci demeure peu argumentée, ses défenseurs se contentant, notamment en entrevue, d'émettre des jugements de valeur qui relèvent d'une idéologie de la revendication. Ils se limitent, dans bien des cas, à dénoncer une représentation *réductrice et infériorisante* de l'enfance, souvent présente chez ceux et celles qui ne partagent pas leur conception:

> Vous connaissez cette réflexion qu'avait rapportée Cocteau en sortant du théâtre. Il entend un couple dire «Ce que c'était bête ! Si on avait su, on aurait amené les enfants.» Au fond, ça prouve toutes les attitudes qu'il y a face à la littérature de jeunesse. Comme c'est pour les enfants, ça ne peut pas parler de sentiments profonds, ça ne peut pas parler de choses graves, ça ne parle que de «cul-cul-tries» [sic], de sucreries, de banalités, voilà! (Anne-Marie Pol, Paris, octobre, 1996)

Ces personnes s'offusquent aussi d'un certain élitisme qui glorifie la littérature consacrée et qui tend à dénigrer les textes littéraires d'enfance et de jeunesse. Les spécialistes de la littérature sont pointés du doigt pour leurs propos parfois sévères: «Certes, je sais que l'idée d'imposer un canon littéraire suscitera inévitablement des soupçons d'élitisme [...] Je crois néanmoins à la nécessité de faire lire en classe une sélection d'œuvres «classiques»» (Vandendorpe, 1992, p. 4). Si les partisans de la littérature unifiée déplorent pareil préjugé, on ne retrouve malheureusement pas, dans les transcriptions des entrevues, d'arguments substantiels qui justifient cette dénonciation. Quelques uns, comme Rolande Causse, laquelle ne peut toutefois pas se résoudre à défendre de façon explicite une représentation unifiée du champ littéraire, évoquent l'impact négatif d'un tel élitisme sur l'élève:

> La confusion est là: la littérature, avec tout son chapeau doré, avec tous ses écrivains les plus grands, les plus célèbres, ne peut pas être lue par tous les jeunes, parce que ça leur tombera des mains et que ça fera peut-être du mal à leur désir de lecture qui est tout à fait grand et possible dans la littérature de jeunesse. (Paris, octobre 1996)

Certains tenants de la position unitaire ne se satisfont pas des seuls jugements de valeur et expriment des justifications plus solides. L'écrivain et enseignant Yak Rivais, qui se trouve parmi les plus radicaux à défendre l'idée d'une seule et unique littérature, cite l'exemple d'écrivains célèbres. «Tournier vend ses bouquins aux deux [enfants et adultes], Gripari les vendait aux deux, Roald Dahl aussi» (Paris, octobre 1996). L'exemple de Michel Tournier est d'ailleurs repris par de nombreux auteurs. L'idée sous-jacente est qu'écrire pour un public de jeunes ou un public d'adultes, c'est d'abord et avant tout écrire, en considérant bien sûr les besoins particuliers des destinataires, mais c'est toujours écrire. Pour illustrer cette perpective, Anne-Marie Pol (Paris, octobre 1996) compare l'écriture, comme le font aussi l'illustrateur Claude Lapointe et l'écrivain/éditeur Robert Soulières, à une autre forme d'art: «C'est comme si vous vous demandiez si un pianiste est un plus grand musicien qu'un violoniste ... Ce sont toujours deux personnes qui font de la musique.»

S'il n'existe aucune véritable distinction face au travail de création, qu'en est-il du côté textuel? Pourquoi les œuvres issues de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse seraient-elles aussi littéraires que celles qui appartiennent à la littérature canonique? Fondamentalement, parce que ces écrits permettent à l'enfant «d'élaborer des hypothèses concernant la construction du sens du texte» (Goldenstein, 1990, p. 126), exactement comme le fait tout adulte lorsqu'il parcourt tel ou tel livre. Il ne faut surtout pas «refuser les raisons de l'un et accepter les raisons de l'autre» précise Bruno Roy (1994, p. 11-12).

Dans la même veine, Christian Poslaniec (1992, p. 19 – 40) s'est livré à une expérience révélatrice que nous désirons rappeler. Il a proposé à différents lecteurs 15 extraits anonymes et sans titre. Les sujets de l'expérience devaient notamment déterminer si chacun des extraits était destiné aux adultes ou aux jeunes. En bout de ligne, Poslaniec a constaté qu'il était extrêmement hasardeux de «séparer les hommes des enfants», c'est-à-dire de relever des traits distinctifs entre les œuvres écrites pour la jeunesse et celles rédigées pour des adultes. Poslaniec explique les résultats de son expérience par le fait que la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse propose de plus en plus d'ouvrages qui possèdent des niveaux variés de lecture, qui aspirent à une complexification du littéraire par le recours à l'ironie, le pastiche, *etc.*, qui cherchent à innover, c'est-à-dire à réinventer les codes littéraires. Claude Lapointe considère d'ailleurs que les textes pour l'enfance et la jeunesse pourraient aller beaucoup plus loin. «On n'a pas encore exploité, sur un plan large, assez de domaines, de chemins, de possibilités de communication, de fiction, avec le texte» (Strasbourg, août 1996).

Du groupe des didacticiens de la littérature et des littéraires rencontrés en entrevue, Jean-Louis Dufays est le seul à défendre une représentation unitaire du champ littéraire. Il tire cette conclusion de la démonstration de Poslaniec:

> Il n'y a pas vraiment de rhétorique qui soit exclusive à la littérature de jeunesse, il n'y a pas de vocabulaire qui lui soit exclusif, il n'y a pas de contenu thématique qui lui soit exclusif; il y a peut-être, tout au plus, pourrait-on dire, des tendances. (Louvain-la-Neuve, août 1996)

Toutes ces considérations appellent à un réexamen du statut de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, comme le souhaitent les défenseurs de la conception unitaire qui, à l'instar de Daniel Chouinard (1996, p. 108), exigent la disparition de l'enclave dans laquelle l'institution littéraire confine la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse «du seul fait qu'elle s'adresse à un public non adulte.» La représentation unifiée constitue en toute vraisemblance un point de vue digne d'intérêt pour le remaniement des corpus littéraires. Par contre, elle devrait être davantage fondée, ce que nous tenterons de faire dans la suite de cet article.

2.2 La représentation bipolaire

Si de nombreux agents des champs littéraire et scolaire s'insurgent contre le fait que la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse soit marginalisée, voire dépréciée, plusieurs spécialistes revendiquent au contraire l'autonomie d'une littérature qu'ils considèrent distincte de la littérature générale, mais qui demeure toute aussi littéraire. Bernard Epin est en accord avec cette vision en

constatant l'émergence d'un champ historiquement et économiquement construit, un phénomène idéologique, artistique, esthétique et social lié intrinsèquement au statut de l'enfant, ce qui le distingue de «l'autre champ», celui des adultes (Paris, octobre 1996).

Selon les partisans de la représentation bipolaire, la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, pour maintenir son indépendance face au champ littéraire «légitime», doit en effet tout miser sur son public cible: les jeunes. C'est à cette condition qu'elle peut devenir «une littérature à part entière, tirant sa spécificité de celle du public auquel elle s'adresse.» (Escarpit et Vagné-Lebas, 1988, p. 27). Grâce aux jeunes, elle obtient son autonomie, grâce à leurs goûts et à leurs besoins littéraires, peu importe la pertinence de ces besoins, le danger des modes éphémères et même la qualité des textes offerts aux lecteurs ...

L'idée d'enfance occupe visiblement beaucoup d'espace dans l'argumentation présentée par les tenants de la représentation bipolaire du champ littéraire. Il y a une littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse parce que les enfants existent. Sans destinataires, point de littérature ... Les jeunes lecteurs doivent parvenir à éprouver ce quelque chose plus ou moins défini qu'on nomme communément *goût de lire*. À tel point que ce besoin devient la pierre d'assise de l'autonomie de ce second champ littéraire qu'est celui de l'enfance et de jeunesse, ainsi que la seule véritable raison d'enseigner la littérature:

> Quant à la «didactique de la littérature-jeunesse», celle-ci consiste essentiellement en l'utilisation en classe d'ouvrages destinés à la jeunesse. Rappelons que cette utilisation se fait dans un seul but: celui de développer chez les élèves le goût de lire. En d'autres mots, la raison d'être de la littérature de jeunesse et de sa didactique réside dans la richesse du plaisir associé aux émotions plurielles que recèlent les livres destinés aux jeunes. (Gervais, 1996, p. 48)

La littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, parce qu'elle est plaisante, agréable, amusante, transmettrait un goût de lire aux jeunes qui leur permettrait un jour de passer aux lectures sérieuses, profondes, sages. Dès le début des années 1980, Denise D. Escarpit soutenait cette idée en affirmant que la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse revêtait «des formes littéraires variées qui, souvent, relèvent du divertissement» (1981, p. 7). En divertissant, en amusant, les textes de cette littérature donneraient le *goût de lire* ... Et les œuvres de Camus, par exemple, ne pourraient pas éveiller aussi le goût de lire? La question peut paraître grossière, mais elle dévoile la faiblesse de la définition de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse en tant que stricte source de plaisir. Comme si on ne pouvait ressentir ni plaisir, ni agrément, ni bonheur en parcourant *L'Étranger* ou en lisant Homère ... Comme si seuls les enfants ressentaient l'émerveillement suscité par la lecture des contes illustrés *Boréal-*

Express ou *Le Balai magique* de Chris Van Allsburg.

«Le plaisir de lire est un peu comme un coup de foudre. Il faut réunir les bons partenaires» (Demers, 1994, p. 32). Une telle affirmation, prônant la séduction du lectorat, est réductrice. L'acte de lire ne se limite pas au seul attrait exercé par le texte littéraire sur le lecteur. Des considérations familiales, sociales, culturelles, esthétiques, intellectuelles, idéologiques, voire politiques, influencent à chaque fois la perception que se fait tout lecteur d'une œuvre donnée, bien au-delà du strict goût. Comme l'a si bien démontré Roland Barthes, lire — et aussi écrire — de la littérature, d'abord et avant tout, «c'est *déjà* organiser le monde, c'est *déjà* penser» (Barthes, 1966).

Autre argument invoqué pour défendre une conception bipolaire de l'espace littéraire, la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse a pour fonction de préparer lentement les enfants à migrer de ce champ vers celui de la grande littérature, celle pour adultes. Dans cette perspective, la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse est définie comme une littérature transitoire. Dominique Demers (Québec, avril 1997) note: «Il y a tellement de différences, l'album, *etc.* Et même le petit roman. C'est une littérature de transition». Comme si on quittait cette littérature pour ne jamais y revenir ... Comme si on ne relisait jamais, à l'âge adulte, des contes traditionnels, nos bonnes vieilles bandes dessinées, un *Bob Morane* délabré mais particulièrement stimulant, la prose prenante du *Petit Prince* ou ce voyage insolite au centre de la Terre imaginé par Jules Verne ... Combien d'adultes lisent, régulièrement ou à l'occasion, des textes littéraires qu'on dit appartenir à l'enfance et à la jeunesse?

Sans même s'en offusquer, plusieurs tenants de cette représentation dévoilent l'existence de pratiques éditoriales parfois discutables, qui visent à distinguer et à affranchir le champ littéraire pour l'enfance et la jeunesse du champ pour adultes. Sur le plan de la *forme des textes*, Dominique Demers avance que «la plupart des éditeurs tentent ainsi de mieux répondre aux goûts des jeunes tout en tenant compte de leurs habiletés en lecture»; elle explique que les tactiques éditoriales sont telles qu'on tient de plus en plus compte de critères comme la simplicité du vocabulaire ou de la syntaxe, la longueur réduite des paragraphes et les ressources typographiques (caractères originaux, mise en page aérée, illustrations voyantes, *etc.*) afin d'offrir aux jeunes lecteurs des livres qui aiguiseront leur goût de lire. «C'est un autre art, c'est un autre champ littéraire!» (Québec, avril 1997). Bref, on crée désormais une littérature de plus en plus «artificielle», élaborée sur mesure pour les enfants et les adolescents, ce qui n'est sûrement pas sans conséquences esthétiques, cognitives et bien sûr qualitatives ...

Selon cette pratique éditoriale, il importerait avant tout de satisfaire les désirs immédiats des lecteurs. On en vient à segmenter ainsi le processus de lecture en trois étapes: 1) les premières lectures, 2) les lectures de jeunesse et 3) les lectures adolescentes, ce qui influe directement sur le *contenu des*

textes qui sont sélectionnés. Aussi mise-t-on sur la «littérature miroir», proche du vécu des jeunes destinataires. Le risque d'une dérive hyperréaliste est grand quant aux thématiques et aux valeurs qui y sont véhiculées. Un exemple parmi tant d'autres? La récente collection de romans pour adolescents *Watatow* (Québec/Amérique Jeunesse), inspirée de la célèbre série télévisée de Radio-Canada. Le lecteur se perd dans un univers où fiction et réalité s'entremêlent pour acceuillir toutes les problématiques psychosociales contemporaines.

D'autre part, on semble tenir pour acquis le présupposé que les contenus des textes littéraires pour l'enfance et la jeunesse doivent rester fortement accessibles aux jeunes. De trop grandes contraintes narratives, des thématiques inusitées ou des structures complexes risqueraient de repousser les lecteurs. N'est-ce pas pourtant sous-estimer les capacités créatrices des enfants que d'évoquer ces présumées barrières? L'écrivaine Susie Morgenstern se résigne ainsi aux limitations qui seraient supposément inhérentes à la création littéraire destinée aux jeunes:

> Ça me convient très bien de dire qu'on est une littérature spécifique. Quand on écrit pour des jeunes, on sait qu'il y a certaines règles ou certaines contraintes. On les suit, on n'écrit pas de phrase avec 875 mots. On sait qu'il ne faut pas barber l'enfant. (Nice, août 1996)

Il est incontestable qu'un enfant de 8 ans ne pourra saisir dans toute sa densité un texte de Chateaubriand, de Madame de Sévigné, de Maalouf, de Nothomb, de Conrad ou de Kokis, pour ne citer que ceux-là. Mais ne peut-il pas être sensible à certains aspects des œuvres de ces écrivains reconnus? Un enfant qui parcourt les récits d'Andersen, de Dickens, de Ross, d'Ungerer ou d'Hergé, par exemple, n'est-il pas plongé dans des fictions qui conduisent son imaginaire vers des horizons insoupçonnés, au même titre qu'une enseignante universitaire qui s'évade à travers la poésie de Gaston Miron ou la prose d'Ernest Hemingway?

Bien plus, cette lectrice avertie ne pourrait-elle pas à son tour, si elle s'en donne la peine, être franchement touchée par le clin d'œil ironique au goût de lire de l'album *L'Art du pot* de Jean Claverie et Michelle Nikly, par l'insoutenable destin du jeune héros du roman *Je suis le fromage* de Robert Cormier, par la beauté philosophique du récit *Le Héron bleu* de Cynthia Voigt, par la puissance ténébreuse de l'adaptation en bande dessinée de *Pierre et le loup* par Miguelanxo Prado, par le pied de nez que fait Maurice Sendak à la psychologie de l'enfance et à la psychanalyse dans son conte moderne *Max et les maximonstres*, ou par *La Bergère de chevaux* et ses magistrales envolées oniriques (Christiane Duchesne)? Probablement ...

En résumé, retenons que les tenants de la représentation bipolaire du champ littéraire assoient leur position sur l'existence de critères propres

à la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse tels que l'âge des lecteurs, sa mission «pédagogique», qui se réduirait au développement du goût de lire en vue du passage à «l'autre» littérature, ou ses formes simplifiées et ses contenus proches de l'expérience immédiate des jeunes lecteurs.

2.3 La représentation hiérarchisée

La dernière grande représentation du champ littéraire qui émerge des écrits et des entretiens tend à hiérarchiser le champ littéraire en fonction de la légitimation des œuvres par l'institution littéraire. Ainsi, il existe le champ légitimé de «la» littérature, auquel se greffent des sous-champs, moins littéraires, dont celui de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, malgré sa croissance continue. Cet essor attise d'ailleurs la méfiance des tenants de la conception hiérarchisée. En effet, si la production de textes littéraires ne cesse de croître, donc si la *quantité* d'ouvrages augmente, cela augurerait mal quant à la *qualité* de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse.

> Cette littérature est aujourd'hui de plus en plus largement diffusée, mais, là encore, la quantité n'est pas toujours gage de qualité [...] les enseignants se doivent d'être, pour leurs jeunes élèves, des guides et des conseillers solides dans cette production abondante et [...] inégale. C'est souvent à cet âge que s'allument les vocations de lecteurs, ou que la flamme s'éteint. (Massart, 1996, p. 44)

Certains spécialistes se sentent presque contraints de souscrire au discours de consécration, même s'ils souhaiteraient que le statut de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse soit reconsidéré par l'institution littéraire. C'est le cas de Monique Lebrun, qui remarque que ce problème de reconnaissance reste inévitablement lié à la qualité d'une écriture qui laisse trop souvent à désirer dans de trops nombreux livres. «On publie énormément, plus particulièrement au Québec: plus de 200 œuvres [par année] en littérature de jeunesse. C'est beaucoup ...» (Montréal, mai 1997). Cette surproduction, d'après la didacticienne, fait en sorte que la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse n'est pas reconnue par les départements d'études littéraires dans les universités, ce qui relègue les textes littéraires d'enfance et de jeunesse à la périphérie du champ littéraire. «Donc, c'est un sous-champ, mais qui est tout aussi valable que n'importe quel sous-champ» (Montréal, mai 1997).

Il ne faut toutefois pas oublier que la publication de masse existe aussi en littérature pour adultes. Pensons par exemple aux romans de Mary Higgins Clark, John Irving, Arlette Cousture, Michel Tremblay, Daniel Pennac, Patrick Modiano, etc. Remet-on systématiquement en question la qualité — comme on le fait pourtant en littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse — des textes littéraires de ces écrivains reconnus?

D'après Monique Lebrun (Montréal, mai 1997) et Christian Vandendorpe (1992, p. 3; 1996, p. 163), les jeunes, souvent très influencables, ne choisiraient pas vraiment les ouvrages en fonction de certains critères de qualité qui sont autant de «filtres» auxquels les adultes, eux, recourraient. Les adultes sauraient éviter l'effet d'entraînement produit par les *collections*, omniprésentes en littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse — pourtant nombreuses aussi en littérature pour adultes. Le marché du livre montre cependant que les lecteurs d'expérience sont influencés par les innombrables «stratégies publicitaires» auxquelles ils sont soumis: collections de prestige (*La Pléiade, NRF...*), prix littéraires (Goncourt, Renaudot, Fémina ...), formats et types de papier novateurs (par exemple ceux de l'éditeur Actes Sud), notoriété d'un auteur (pensons à Anne Hébert, Robert Lalonde, J.M.G. Le Clézio, Alexandre Jardin, Nancy Huston, Gabriel Garcia Marquez ou Umberto Eco), avis des critiques littéraires dans les différents médias, *etc.*

Pour en revenir aux collections, le didacticien Karl Canvat est forcé d'admettre, dans un ouvrage récent, que le «marketing littéraire», bien que fort efficace en littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, se manifeste aussi en littérature pour adultes, sans atteindre toutefois les «grandes» œuvres, qui seraient à l'abri de toute stratégie mercantile.

> [...] la sobriété ou, au contraire, la surcharge de la présentation suffisent souvent à elles seules à opposer genres «littéraires» (légitimes) et genres «paralittéraires» («mauvais genres»). Ainsi, par exemple, les collections paralittéraires recourent volontiers au vocabulaire de la couleur. Celle-ci fonctionne bien entendu comme indicateur différentiel visuel facilitant le repérage sur les rayons, mais elle connote aussi la thématique abordée et/ou le public visé: «Bibliothèque rose», «Bibliothèque verte», «Bibliothèque rouge et or», pour la jeunesse; «Série noire», «Fleuve noir», «Carré noir», «Le Masque noir», etc., pour les adultes. (1999, p. 114-115)

La supposée faiblesse qualitative de nombreux textes pour l'enfance et la jeunesse incite la majorité des didacticiens de la littérature à penser que cette littérature, dans son ensemble, ne possède ni la force esthétique et linguistique ni la grandeur nécessaires pour être admise au sein du champ littéraire. D'apès eux, on n'y retrouverait pas le même niveau de littérarité que dans les œuvres du canon littéraire:

> Il me semble que la question essentielle, d'un certain point de vue, est la suivante : est-ce que dans cette production, dans cette littérature, il s'invente de nouvelles perceptions du monde, de nouvelles façons de dire, de décrire, de raconter le monde, de nouveaux usages du langage qui font découvrir à l'homme autre chose de lui-même et du monde? (Georges Legros, Namur, août 1996)

Le professeur Legros répond par la négative à son interrogation et ajoute que la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse constitue un mouvement littéraire «d'épigones», un lieu qui ne fait que répéter, imiter ce qui a été créé auparavant. «Je ne vais pas conclure que ce n'est pas de la littérature, mais que c'est de la littérature de suiveurs, si vous voulez» (Namur, août 1996). Vincent Jouve, à sa façon, remet aussi en question la valeur de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, qu'il entrevoit davantage comme un regroupement de textes à vocation utilitaire:

> L'analyse littéraire [...] a besoin de s'appuyer sur des œuvres pourvues elles-mêmes de dimensions multiples: l'étude des *textes-documents* (qui reflètent *telle dimension* de la société et de la culture) ne sera jamais aussi formatrice que celle des *textes-monuments*. (Jouve, 1996, p. 43)

Nous sommes en droit de nous demander si ces spécialistes connaissent bien les textes littéraires d'enfance et de jeunesse, car il nous semble au contraire manifeste que dans de nombreuses œuvres s'inventent des perceptions et des manières novatrices de raconter et d'écrire l'aventure humaine sous toutes ses dimensions. Par exemple, dans le roman *Deux heures et demie avant Jasmine*, l'auteur François Gravel utilise un procédé narratif inusité, où la brève durée du récit devient le moteur d'une anticipation amoureuse très forte. Dans la pièce *Les Souliers rouges*, Tiziana Lucattini repousse les limites du théâtre social par une critique virulente des mœurs de la société matérialiste italienne. *Feng, fils du vent* de Thierry Dedieu constitue un conte hautement philosophique sur le thème de la mort, dont le dénouement déroute le lecteur. Et que dire des aventures baroques de *Théodore Poussin* (Frank Le Gall), une série de bandes dessinées qui se démarque par ses jeux spatio-temporel, son lyrisme insolite et une qualité d'écriture relevée.

Les tenants de la représentation hiérarchisée devraient reconnaître que l'arbitraire sévit lorsque vient le temps de juger si un texte donné est littéraire, peu importe son public cible. «Rien, donc, sinon une série de conventions socio-institutionnelles définies par le champ littéraire («l'institution littéraire») ne distingue ce qui est «littéraire» de ce qu'il ne l'est pas» (Canvat, 1999, p. 85). Il appartiendrait donc aux instances du champ littéraire d'évaluer la littérarité des œuvres de littérature, celles pour l'enfance et la jeunesse comprises. Cela revient à dire que le destin d'un texte, qu'il soit destiné aux enfants, aux adolescents ou aux adultes, repose entre les mains de personnes (éditeurs, créateurs, critiques, professeurs, *etc.*) qui, une fois dotées d'un pouvoir idéologique et d'un capital symbolique, se basent sur des critères subjectifs pour apposer ou non le sceau de la consécration littéraire.

Un bon nombre d'adultes, dont maints spécialistes, ont manifestement l'impression de fréquenter, grâce à «la» littérature, ces fameux textes littéraires novateurs et affranchis de toute banalité, aussi bien sur le plan formel que

sur le plan idéel. Dans sa thèse, Jean-Louis Dufays a clairement démontré, au contraire, que toute œuvre littéraire, aussi banale ou magistrale soit-elle, ne peut se constituer ni survivre sans le recours aux *stéréotypes*, ces principes élémentaires de la cognition qui sont en fait des schémas organisationnels régissant l'intégration des éléments d'un phénomène donné, qui en orientent le sens et qui hiérarchisent ses fonctions (1994, p. 349). Le didacticien constate que la stéréotypie, implicite dont se servent pourtant les professeurs Legros et Jouve pour nier la littérarité des textes de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse, anime tout autant les œuvres du canon littéraire. Il le prouve d'ailleurs en se référant à un célèbre poème de Charles Baudelaire, *L'albatros*, «chef-d'œuvre de la poésie française [...] monument de la littérature» qui, néanmoins, doit sa force esthétique et sa splendeur lyrique aux très nombreux stéréotypes qui forgent son contenu (1994, p. 30 – 35). Tout texte littéraire comporte sa part de stéréotypie et en est tributaire de sa légitimation — ou non — au sein du champ littéraire.

> Ma seconde préoccupation concernait les phénomènes de stéréotypie. Ceux-ci, on le sait, n'ont pas bonne presse. Qu'il s'agisse de clichés de langage, de poncifs thématiques ou d'idées reçues, la banalité, sous toute ses formes, est de nos jours unanimement honnie par la classe intellectuelle. Ce refus ne date pas d'hier. Cela fait près de deux cents ans que, dans la foulée du grand chambardement romantique, les concepts de nouveauté et de d'originalité sont devenus les principaux critères de valeur des productions culturelles. Dans ce contexte, la reproduction de stéréotypes apparaît comme le péché mortel, le signe flagrant du manque d'inspiration ou de la paresse. Sur le plan littéraire, cette suspicion à l'égard du déjà-dit concerne tout autant la lecture que l'écriture. Si le bon écrivain est celui qui se garde de sacrifier aux formes conventionnelles, le bon lecteur est celui qui sait s'abstenir de projeter ses stéréotypes sur le texte et résister au charme envoûtant des représentations convenues. (1994, p. 7-8)

Baudelaire a bel et bien reproduit, de façon manifeste, divers stéréotypes. Pourtant, l'institution lui a assigné la plus haute marche du podium — stéréotype éprouvé! — du canon littéraire. Parce que l'omniprésence des phénomèmes de stéréotypie leur en enlève la justification, les littéraires doivent mettre fin à des pratiques résolument méprisantes à l'égard des textes pour l'enfance et la jeunesse. Sinon se perpétuera cette regrettable mais tenace tendance à la ségrégation des corpus, attitude qui n'a pourtant plus, comme le demontre Dufays, sa raison d'être.

Pierre Yerlès évoque un autre écueil qui suscite la méfiance des spécialistes de l'enseignement de la littérature en regard de la légitimité de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse : une certaine fragilité cognitive et émotive liée au jeune âge des lecteurs. Ces derniers devraient être initiés progressivement aux diverses facettes de la littérature. D'où l'existence de

deux espaces littéraires fort différents: «celui d'une littérature plus éruptive, si je puis dire, et celui de la littérature plus associative, sécurisante en quelques sorte, dont [...] l'enfant a besoin» (Louvain-la-Neuve, août 1996). Pourtant, combien de millions d'êtres humains se sont rendus au bout du monde — et ailleurs! — avec Tintin et Haddock, Alice, Tom Sawyer, Blanche-Neige, Gulliver, Jeanne de Rouville ou Yoko Tsuno, laissant ainsi libre cours aux explorations audacieuses de leur imagination et à l'insécurité justement «éruptive» de leurs expériences littéraires?

Aux yeux du professeur Yerlès, est littéraire tout texte qui entre en rupture avec cette soi-disante sécurité. Les œuvres doivent briser le statisme, la routine, la monotonie de la vie quotidienne.

> L'important, c'est qu'il y ait une rencontre avec ce frisson, avec cette attraction fascinante que tout ce que la littérature fait surgir comme pulsions, comme désirs, comme structurations, fuites ... (Louvain-la-Neuve, août 1996)

Cette plongée dans l'inconnu, cet enchantement, nous apparaît tout à fait possible à partir d'un conte aussi étonnant que *Chien Bleu* (Nadja), de légendaires récits tels que *Le Baiser maléfique* (Robert Soulières) ou *Le Chat et le diable* (James Joyce!), de la remarquable richesse graphique et narrative de la série de bandes dessinées *Yakari* (Derib et Job) ou de romans surréalistes comme *Le Buveur d'encre* (Éric Sansvoisin), en somme à partir de nombreuses œuvres littéraires d'enfance et de jeunesse.

L'interrogation d'Yves Reuter adressée à la didactique de la littérature prend ici toute sa signification. «Peut-elle accepter le clivage des discours entre d'un côté lecture, écriture et langue et de l'autre la perpétuation des valeurs littéraires?» (1987, p. 58). Surtout si ces valeurs dépendent des idéologies en jeu au sein du champ ...

Une telle discrimination appliquée à la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse devient doublement malheureuse pour les élèves de la classe de langue première. D'une part, les jeunes n'ont manifestement pas l'impression de fréquenter «la» littérature, donc de ne point participer au mouvement littéraire, ce qui n'améliorera en rien l'image peu reluisante qu'ils se font ou se feront des «grands» textes littéraires (Friot, 1995, p. 5-12; Vlieghe, 1995, p. 27; Gervais, 1997, p. 23; Lebrun, 1997, p. 68). D'autre part, en prétendant sans cesse qu'ils aiment des œuvres banales, complaisantes, faciles, rachitiques, on finira sans doute par les convaincre que «la» littérature est tout simplement inaccessible et qu'il ne leur reste plus qu'à se confiner aux mangas et autres *Frissons*, ou à se vouer à d'autres passions, moins nobles ...

La vision hiérarchisée de l'espace littéraire comporte de graves risques pédagogiques. À trop vouloir sélectionner, trier et surtout glorifier, on en vient à créer des ghettos littéraires hermétiques, où on sépare enfants, ado-

lescents et adultes, et où les migrations deviennent très incertaines pour la masse des lecteurs. La didactique de la littérature peut-elle participer à une telle ségrégation?

3 Pour une approche ouverte des textes littéraires en classe de langue première

Pour la disponibilité d'esprit face à la pluralité des manifestations de l'imaginaire, pour une culture individuelle diversifiée, pour l'exploration de toutes sortes de formes de littérature, il convient d'élargir le corpus littéraire de référence en classe de langue première en reconnaissant que la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse fait partie intégrante du champ littéraire. Au même titre que le sont la poésie versifiée, les *classiques*, le naturalisme de Zola ou le théâtre de Beckett. Qu'on cesse de nier sa littérarité et qu'on admette plutôt l'originalité et la richesse de ses formes et de ses contenus. Non à une hiérarchisation stérile de l'univers littéraire, non à une dichotomie jalousement gardée! Oui à la littérature, et à ses textes d'enfance et de jeunesse, qui constituent une part importante de sa nature!

Pour parvenir à cette fin, il faudra que l'institution scolaire participe à un tel changement de cap, notamment en accueillant un plus grand nombre de textes issus de la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse. «Ce que l'école doit viser [...] c'est le changement de ses corpus» (Lebrun, 1997, p. 68). Dans ce sens, il importe que les programmes officiels, du préscolaire au secondaire, inscrivent à l'agenda de la classe de langue première la fréquentation de corpus littéraires variés, constitués aussi bien de textes de l'édition pour l'enfance et la jeunesse que de celle pour les adultes, dans une perspective d'*hétérogénéité* caractéristique d'une pensée *postmoderne*.

3.1 Hétérogénéité des corpus en classe de littérature et postmodernisme

Pourquoi un corpus littéraire hétérogène? Pourquoi un corpus littéraire ouvert aux nombreuses manifestations de la littérature? Spontanément, nous répondrons qu'il nous semble que «l'enseignement de la littérature se doit d'initier les élèves à la fois à la diversité des manifestations textuelles et à la (re)connaissance des textes» (Dufays *et al.*, 1996a, p. 68). Une telle entreprise n'est viable qu'à la condition que les corpus littéraires présentés aux élèves comprennent des textes de nature diversifiée, entre autres ceux pour l'enfance et la jeunesse.

Cette réponse n'est cependant pas suffisante. Il importe de s'arrêter à l'idée d'hétérogénéité afin d'en démontrer la nécessité pour l'élaboration de corpus littéraires ouverts, en nous rattachant aux idées postmodernes, ce qui

représente une toute nouvelle avancée en didactique de la littérature. La postmodernité, courant de pensée qui déborde largement le cadre littéraire, s'est récemment constituée comme mouvement multidisciplinaire de création, de transformation et d'analyse des formes multiples de l'existence, notamment sous l'impulsion des théoriciens comme Jean-François Lyotard, John Barth, Guy Scarpetta et Michel Maffesoli.

«Le postmodernisme [...] n'est pas le modernisme à sa fin, mais à l'état naissant, et cet état est récurent», avance Jean-François Lyotard (1981) sur un ton déjà polémique. Michel Maffesoli décrit plutôt la postmodernité comme une manière nouvelle de sentir et de vivre:

> Le souci de la forme [...] autre manière de dire la force du style, exprime bien le paradigme esthétique de la postmodernité: la naissance d'un nouveau moment fondateur, l'émergence d'une nouvelle culture [...] Une esthétique, bien sûr, qui ne se réduit pas à l'art mais qui renvoie aux émotions partagées et aux sentiments vécus en commun. (1993, p. 41-42)

L'idée d'hétérogénéité occupe une position centrale dans la grille d'analyse postmoderne: «la passion de l'hétérogénéité est un fondement de cette esthétique», écrit France Fortier (1993, p. 6). On définit ce concept comme «code ouvert à tous les métissages» (Gagnon, 1993, p. 62), ou «processus d'interaction, de métissage» (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 45) sur lequel plane toujours «l'ombre de Dyonisos, le dieu «aux cents visages», le dieu de la versatilité» (Maffesoli, 1993, p. 110). Dans ce sens, le processus d'«hétérogénéisation» abolit, selon Maffesoli, toute tentative d'encadrement, de limitation et d'uniformisation de l'expérience : «non plus une valeur unique et une vérité qui en rendrait compte au travers d'une analyse rationnelle, mais une multiciplité de valeurs (modes, manières d'être, styles de vie)» (1993, p. 155).

Appliquée à la littérature, la pensée postmoderne cherche à ouvrir l'expérience littéraire à toutes les formes possibles de métissage. «À une esthétique moderne qui lie [...] la littérature à son essentialisation, le postmoderne oppose un éclectisme» (Dion, 1993, p. 94) qui vise «un nouveau découpage du champ littéraire (Fortier, 1993, p. 5).

Dans une littérature aux aspirations postmodernes, on ne retrouve «plus d'universalisme, plus de monopole de sens, plus de «grands récits»», précise Régine Robin (1993, p. 9). Les pratiques littéraires hétérogènes et le métissage des textes servent, en postmodernité littéraire, à «déboulonner le double principe à la base de la valorisation littéraire, à savoir celui d'un sujet propriétaire exclusif de son discours et qui se doit d'engendrer une œuvre absolument unique et originale, en rupture totale avec l'esthétique qui l'a précédée» renchérit France Fortier (1993, p. 31). Ce but, la littérature postmoderne ne peut l'atteindre que par le métissage, par un corpus

hétérogène, par son ouverture aussi bien sur la nouveauté, le recyclage ou, surtout, l'ordinaire:

> Il faut considérer le sens commun non pas comme un «pré-texte» préfigurant le véritable texte que l'on peut écrire [...] mais comme quelque chose qui a sa validité en soi, comme une manière d'être et de penser se suffisant à elle-même, et n'ayant pas sur ce point besoin de quelque arrière-monde que ce soit. (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 216)

La perspective postmoderne a le mérite de désacraliser la littérature, ce qui devient très intéressant pour la didactique de la littérature dans la mesure où l'ouverture de ses corpus évite l'esprit de ségrégation. L'élève qui aura la chance de fréquenter un corpus hétérogène pourra goûter aux innombrables facettes de l'aventure littéraire, aussi bien du côté de l'enfance, de l'adolescence ou de l'âge adulte, y faire des choix et y construire ainsi ses connaissances et surtout ses propres territoires imaginaires.

L'ouverture littéraire du corpus aura donc pour mission de réunir des œuvres issues des deux principaux secteurs éditoriaux: l'édition pour l'enfance et la jeunesse et l'édition pour les adultes, pour reprendre le modèle proposé par Raoul Dubois (Paris, octobre 1996). Cet ensemble hétérogène de textes contribuera, dans un premier temps, à rendre le contact entre l'élève et le livre le plus stimulant et agréable possible. Mais un corpus littéraire ouvert ne saurait se contenter du seul goût/plaisir de lire comme leitmotiv. Les élèves, aussi bien au primaire qu'au secondaire, auront à saisir progressivement les composantes du texte littéraire (approche interne) ainsi que les mécanismes de production et de réception des œuvres. Cela s'avère fondamental, comme le précise Claude Simard: «Les notions littéraires doivent devenir pour les élèves des outils de lecture et d'écriture les aidant à mieux traiter le langage et à intégrer les discours littéraires à leurs pratiques culturelles» (1997b, p. 204).

Un corpus ouvert permettra à l'élève de construire des savoirs littéraires dont la genèse est double, ainsi que le suggèrent Dufays, Gemmene et Ledur (1996a, p. 119). D'abord, ces connaissances enrichissent la fréquentation des œuvres littéraires, mais c'est à la lecture des textes que l'élève peut acquérir ces connaissances. Il conviendra par conséquent d'adopter une approche bidirectionnelle en classe de littérature: les livres du corpus seront lus à la fois comme des exemples reconnus pour leur valeur esthétique intrinsèque, puis comme des documents, c'est-à-dire des outils qui favorisent l'appropriation du sens des œuvres. L'élève aura à «identifier les stratégies textuelles particulières en usage dans un texte et en tirer des opérations de construction de sens aussi riches que possible» (Vandendorpe, 1996, p. 164). Concluons donc que l'enseignement littéraire offre aux élèves une chance incomparable d'exploration de multiples dimensions de

l'existence, à la condition que son corpus soit des plus riches et des plus diversifiés, des plus hétérogènes et métissés.

3.2 Trois principes pour la constitution de corpus

Voici quelques principes généraux pouvant guider la constitution d'un corpus ouvert d'œuvres littéraires en classe de langue première. Il ne s'agit que d'indications didactiques; chacun devra y puiser les informations qui correspondent aux besoins des élèves, à ceux du maître ainsi qu'aux savoirs qu'on voudra construire ensemble en classe de littérature.

Principe premier: une ouverture sur tous les textes

Notre réflexion nous a conduit à opter pour un corpus littéraire hétérogène, c'est-à-dire varié et ouvert aux diverses littératures, dont celle pour l'enfance et la jeunesse. Ce corpus des métissages, en présence tout au long de la scolarisation obligatoire, sera le lieu de rencontre des textes issus de l'édition pour l'enfance et la jeunesse *et* de ceux de l'édition pour les adultes.

Dès le primaire, les *classiques* feront partie de l'enseignement littéraire aux côtés des œuvres d'enfance et de jeunesse. On pourra déjà s'y initier aux notions de genre, de personnage, de schéma narratif et même aux grandes écoles littéraires. L'ordre secondaire prendra la relève en poursuivant ce qui aura été amorcé auparavant. Par contre, on continuera d'y utiliser les textes littéraires pour l'enfance et la jeunesse. Les récits illustrés seront exploités par les enseignants, car les albums, dont l'esthétisme relève à la fois de l'image et du langage, méritent d'accompagner l'adolescent dans sa quête identitaire:

> Un arrimage est à faire [...] Les collègues du secondaire devront penser à réutiliser les procédures [et les textes] ayant cours au primaire, les collègues du primaire devront peu à peu habituer leurs élèves aux situations de lecture [et d'écriture] qui les attendent ... (Lauzon, 1994, p. 233)

Cette fusion s'impose pour favoriser une pressante harmonisation des ordres d'enseignement quant à la fréquentation des textes littéraires. «Le clivage devient de plus en plus flagrant entre le primaire, où le texte est réduit à sa fonction de modèle éventuel pour la rédaction, et le secondaire, qui ouvre sur le littéraire» (Lebrun, 1997, p. 53).

Principe second: un choix éclairé de textes littéraires

La construction de tout corpus d'œuvres littéraires est indissociable d'un processus qui lui sert d'assise: la sélection des textes. Comment sélectionner avec rigueur les œuvres qui doivent constituer le corpus de référence en

classe de langue première? Pour répondre à cette question, nous nous référons à nouveau à Jean-Louis Dufays et à ses collègues (1996a, p. 120-121), qui proposent trois critères complémentaires à utiliser pour choisir les textes littéraires du corpus.

Tout d'abord, il convient de considérer les besoins, attentes et intérêts des *élèves* de la classe de littérature. «Ne serait-ce que pour entretenir un climat de travail motivant, il paraît didactiquement pertinent de choisir des textes à la portée des apprenants». Ensuite, il faut tenir compte de l'*enseignant*, de ses goûts et de ses valeurs: «il est légitime que chaque professeur privilégie en partie des textes qui le motivent, l'aident personnellement à penser et à vivre, car c'est de ceux-là qu'il pourra le mieux communiquer l'intérêt à ses élèves». Enfin, l'*institution culturelle* impose ses usages et ses biens symboliques. «Ces différents textes et codes font en quelque sorte partie de la «grammaire culturelle» de la société où nous vivons, ils constituent, pour notre époque, une base incontournable de savoirs». Le recours à ces balises aideront, nous le croyons, tout enseignant et ses élèves à constituer, en classe de littérature, un corpus d'œuvres hétérogène, riche et équilibré.

Une autre approche, en lien direct avec les propositions précédentes, se révèle fort intéressante pour la mise en forme d'un corpus *signifiant*. Elle est directement issue de l'activité *Le Goncourt des lycéens*. Instauré par Martine Burgos, ce procédé didactique permet aux élèves de participer directement aux différents enjeux et luttes pour la légitimation de toute œuvre rencontrée en classe ou à l'extérieur du cadre scolaire. Par leurs lectures critiques et leurs prises de positions argumentées, les élèves sont appelés à établir un corpus littéraire fidèle à leur cognition et à leur culture. De cette façon, on les associe directement à l'évolution du corpus littéraire de leur classe.

> Offrir aux élèves la possibilité de déployer leur faculté critique en leur donnant le droit de porter un jugement de valeur sur des textes présents en classe [...] c'est leur permettre de se considérer et de se comporter en *sujets-lecteurs* auxquels on accorde suffisamment de crédit pour leur confier la mission habituellement réservée aux lettrés, aux experts, aux adultes, aux professeurs: choisir, distinguer [...] s'exercer au choix, à l'élucidation et à la maîtrise de leurs propres critères de distinction. (1996, p. 267-268)

Principe final: une ouverture sur le monde

Un corpus ouvert et bien constitué ne pourrait se satisfaire de la seule réunion de l'édition pour l'enfance et la jeunese avec celle pour les adultes. Au contraire, les élèves ont tout à gagner de la fréquentation de textes littéraires originaires de toute culture et de tout pays. La littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse possède justement l'énorme avantage de ne point connaître de frontières; voilà une

autre raison qui milite en faveur de sa présence accrue en classe de littérature! Quelques exemples: *La Bottine magique de Pipo*, conte mythologique rédigé et illustré par des Québécois, qui raconte l'origine de ... l'Italie!; la série de bandes dessinées *Dan Cooper*, qui relate les aventures de cet aviateur canadien aux quatres coins de la planète — et même de l'espace —, pourtant créée par le Belge Albert Weinberg; *Antarctique* (Helen Cowcher) qui, comme son nom l'indique, est un fabuleux récit qui se déroule dans le plus grand désert de la planète; les escapades grecque et turque de l'héroine québécoise *Clara Vic*, de l'écrivaine Christiane Duchesne; et ainsi de suite!

Comme le soutient Aurélien Boivin (1994, p. 70), «l'idéal serait, certes, d'amener les jeunes à lire aussi des œuvres [...] de la francophonie, voire des œuvres du grand corpus des littératures étrangères». Michel Thérien (1994, p. 71) exprime son accord face à un tel élargissement du corpus littéraire de référence en précisant qu'au-delà de l'étude de la littérature nationale, les élèves doivent être mis en contact avec la littérature d'expression française ainsi qu'avec toute littérature écrite ou traduite en français. Toutefois, le problème de l'accessibilité de ces textes se pose. Les littératures antillaise et africaine, par exemple, sont malheureusement l'objet d'une diffusion restreinte, du moins au Québec. Il faudrait renverser cette situation.

Conclusion

La didactique de la langue première doit accorder plus d'espace à la didactique de la littérature, aussi bien dans le cadre de ses réflexions disciplinaires qu'à l'occasion des modèles et pratiques qu'elle propose pour l'école. La didactique de la littérature, pour sa part, doit ouvrir son corpus à un éventail beaucoup plus large d'œuvres littéraires que les seuls textes d'un certain canon. Dans ce sens, il faut cesser de percevoir la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse comme un champ littéraire distinct de «la» littérature ou comme une pré/para/sous-littérature.

Les luttes intestines pour la reconnaissance de la valeur symbolique des œuvres littéraires s'avèrent finalement stériles, car les principales victimes de ces combats intellectuels ne sont pas ses propres protagonistes, mais bien au contraire les élèves de la classe de langue première, dont on déplore fréquemment l'attitude négative à l'égard de la littérature. Qu'on arrête de leur faire croire que leurs lectures et écritures littéraires ne possèdent pas les qualités esthétiques requises pour se mériter un tel titre. Au contraire, celles-ci participent de l'attitude postmoderne!

À l'école, une didactique de la littérature qui se prétend novatrice devra considérer avec la même attention et surtout la même valeur littéraire les textes des albums illustrés, des contes traditionnels et modernes, des légendes, des fables, des poésies d'enfance et d'adolescence, des romans

pour la jeunesse, de la bande dessinée, de la poésie libre, des *classiques*, du *surréalisme*, des *postmodernes*, de l'*Oulipo*, *etc.* Son corpus sera hétérogène.

Concrètement, au primaire, on pourra travailler à partir des œuvres de Dante, d'Apollinaire, de Steinbeck, de Racine, de Rimbaud, d'Ionesco, de Shakespeare, de Césaire, de Leclerc ou de Jacques Poulin ... tout en ne négligeant pas la bande dessinée. Ainsi, à la suite de la lecture collective d'extraits de *Calligrammes* de Guillaume Apollinaire, des élèves de 1re année du primaire (6-7 ans) de la région de Québec ont rédigé avec brio et diffusé eux-mêmes leurs propres calligrammes. Au secondaire pourront être présentés des albums tels *Le Prince grenouille* (Jacob et Willem Grimm, Betty Schroeder), *Les Trois Clés de Prague* (Peter Sis), *Le mot sans lequel rien n'existe* (Claude Clément et Sylvie Montmoulineix), *L'Épave du Zéphir* (Chris Van Allsburg) ou *Oncle Gilbert* (Benoit). De plus, on pourra comparer avec les étudiants les troublantes fuites des héros de *La Route de Chlifa* (Michèle Marineau), *Sarah de Cordoue* (Rolande Causse), *Les Choses de la vie* (Paul Guimard) et *Un homme qui dort* (Georges Perec). On y fera l'étude de l'œuvre poétique de Jacques Prévert et de Rina Lasnier, de la prose de Rudyard Kipling et de Georges Sand. On y analysera, par exemple, les trames narratives d'épisodes des aventures de Tintin, d'Astérix le Gaulois, de Corto Maltese, de Thorgal ou d'Isa (*Les *assagers du vent*). Bref, Marie-Josephte Corriveau hantera la classe de littérature en compagnie du Capitaine Achab, de Madame de Bovary, de Raoul de Cambray et de ... Cendrillon!

Les jeunes des premières années du primaire aiment la fiction. Pourtant, plus ils avancent dans leur scolarisation, moins ils s'y intéressent. Vers la fin de l'adolescence, nombreux sont les jeunes qui ont définitivement abandonné les voies de la littérature ... Pour contrer ce phénomène déplorable, il importe de repenser le corpus d'œuvres littéraires de la classe de langue première en fonction d'une intégration des positions des créateurs, analystes et médiateurs de littérature. Nous devons encourager le «glissement d'une conception «classique», fondée sur l'évidence, le respect de la norme et de la hiérarchie, à une conception [...] «soupçonneuse», prônant l'originalité, la différence» (Canvat, 1999, p. 285). C'est essentiel.

Pour la beauté de lire et d'écrire des phrases qui enflamment les esprits et enivrent les âmes. Pour la littérature. Pour les élèves.

Notes

1 Boutin, Jean-François, «Le problème du corpus de textes littéraires en classe de langue première. Examen des idées de «littérature» et de «littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse», *CCL/LCJ* 91/92, automne/hiver 1998, p. 83-102. Boutin, Jean-François,

«Le problème du corpus de textes littéraires en classe de langue première. Entrevues avec 32 agents des champs littéraire et scolaire en regarde des idées de *littérature* et de *littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse*, *CCL/LCJ*, 94, été 1999, p. 42-59.

2 Pour de plus amples précisions quant à la méthodologie utilisée pour cette recherche, consulter l'article susmentionné.

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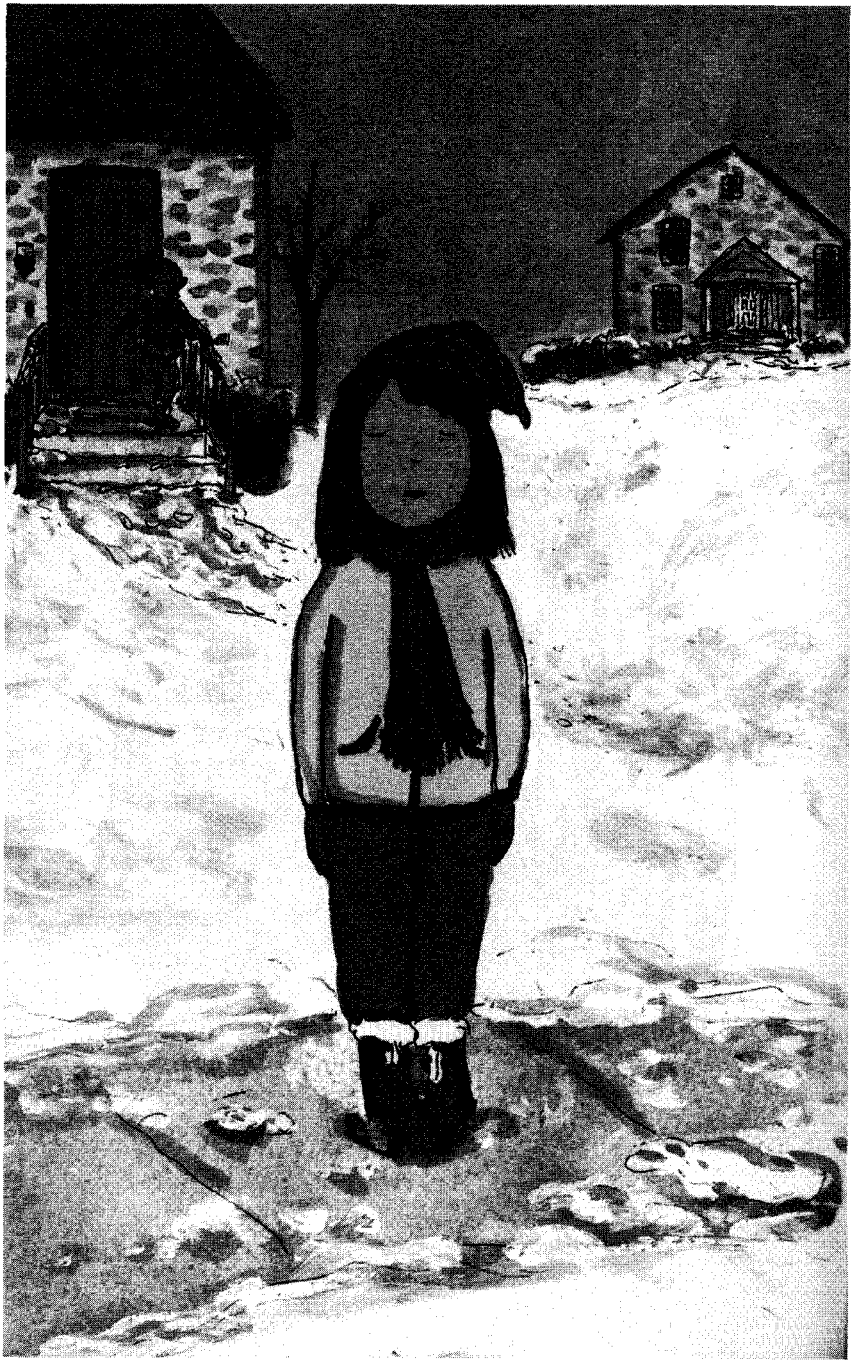

Illustration by Jennifer Plecas, from ***Emma's Magic Winter***

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Books / Livres

A Medley of Motifs: Boots, Mittens, Robins and a Dream of the Beach

Emma's Magic Winter. Jean Little. Illus. Jennifer Plecas. HarperCollins, 1998. 64 pp. $19.95 cloth. ISBN 0- 06-025389-4. ***The Money Boot***. Ginny Russell. Illus. John Mardon. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1998. 56 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55041-370-8. ***Andrew's Magnificent Mountain of Mittens***. Deanne Lee Bingham. Illus. Kim LaFave. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1998. 46 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55041-389-9. ***Jingle Bells***. Maryann Kovalski. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1998. 39 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55041-383-X. ***Fishes in the Sea***. Maggie Spicer and Richard Thompson. Illus. Barbara Hartman. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1998. 30 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-555041-387-2. ***Robin with a Red Hat***. Sukhder Kaur Dosanjh. Vantage Press, 1998. 20 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 0-533-12227-9.

With a pile of three children's books sharing Christmas or winter settings and three more having an end-of-winter and dream-of-summer theme (both sets for younger readers), I am challenged to look for other elements to cross-reference their connection. Surprisingly, multiple similarities do suggest themselves. As in a universal cerebral internet, not unlike the Collective Unconscious, I sometimes wonder whether ideas circulating in the air may have a way of infiltrating our brains independent of direct communication through speech or written language. What else may explain how writers not in correspondence with each other come up with the same ideas or think along related lines?

In Jean Little's *Emma's Magic Winter* and Ginny Russell's *The Money Boot*, a friendship between two girls in the first and between two boys in the second shapes the story and action. In *Emma's Magic Winter*, Emma overcomes her shyness by bringing a pie over to meet a new neighbour, Sally, and in *The Money Boot*, Jim's friendship with Gary is bonded through their adventures together during the Christmas vacation. At the end of the story, the boys decide to team up in their school assignment about what they did dur-

ing their holidays.

In both books, a boot motif helps the stories along. When Emma uses the pie as an excuse to introduce herself to her new neighbour, she notices a pair of red boots just like her own beside the front door. Immediately she is heartened and concludes that the two girls may have something in common. In the following chapter, Emma starts what turns out to be a great little game with the talismanic boots. Waiting outside for Sally to join her, Emma initiates this game of magic:

> 'Magic Boots, make me vanish,' Emma said.
> 'What did you say?' said Sally.
> 'I told my boots to make me vanish.'
> 'When will they do it?' Sally asked.
> 'They did it already,' said Emma.
> 'If you still see me,
> your boots are magic too.'
> 'I still see you,' said Sally.
> 'Now make *me* vanish, Emma.' (23-24)

For me, this delightful scene captures the true spirit of little girls at play. Throughout the story, Emma's new friendship enriches her life, directly and indirectly. After breaking the ice to make this new friend, Emma battles her excessive shyness about reading aloud at school by the less challenging task of reading to Sally's toddler brother, Josh. But then, still fretting about the prospect of standing before the class, Emma on Sally's suggestion decides to wear the magic boots while reading in class! Of course, it works! I did wonder about whether this plan might have caused other problems in messy weather but I guess that would make for another story. At any rate, *Emma's Magic Winter* is compassionate and funny, true in its understanding of children's fears and in the patterns of play they invent to deal with those fears. The illustrations are lively, making use of bright primary colours and simple shapes with bold crayon-like contours.

Rather more functional than magic, the boot in *The Money Boot* becomes the means by which Jim and Gary, playing amateur detectives, solve the case of the stolen coins. As in *Emma's Magic Winter,* the boys' friendship is warmly drawn. Gary's confession that he had read his Christmas gift to his friend, appropriately a detective story entitled *The Case of the Missing Microchip,* before wrapping it, adds a human touch offsetting a sense that the characters in this book tend to seem a bit flat. Of course, character in *The Money Boot* is not a focus but more a function of plot in this small-league detective story.

Neither stereotypes nor realistically-delineated characters, the robber cleaning lady and Mr. Paralova did trouble me slightly, however. I found

myself wondering about the motive for the cleaning woman's crime and feeling vaguely distasteful about Mr. Paralova's cardboard benevolence. Certainly, the cleaning lady is presented unsympathetically while she irritably, and for her own good reasons, shuns the boys' assistance during her getaway. Employed as a cleaning lady, however, she cannot be quite as destitute as a bag lady. Still, why does she filch her employer's old boots for her husband? Either she is a kleptomaniac or a woman in considerable need. Perhaps Mr. Paralova would have done better to spread his munificence with his cleaning lady. However, my children were not bothered by this detail.

Although young readers may not be encouraged to consider the underprivileged, this moral lapse is countered by a puritan view of money guaranteed to please parents. Jim must buy his own batteries since money does not normally grow on trees — except during rare literalizations of such proverbs as occurs in this story. The scene in which the cleaning woman drops coins and they fall through the branches of a cedar bush stands out in the book as one of the cleverest.

A few other details bothered me, such as Jim's sprained ankle in chapter one not preventing him from hunting for batteries for his flashlight all around downtown Toronto, and then chasing down the robber cleaning lady. Perhaps the very short chapters undermined my sense of time having passed. However, as my own experience with children confirms, kids do recover very quickly. Other details worked well, reinforcing a friendship theme or preparing the reader for the action, such as the background hockey game between the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Rangers, and Jim's Christmas gifts of a magnifying glass, a flashlight, the detective novel and the puzzle which the friends complete together. In short, *The Money Boot* is adequate in its assembly of parts; however, I could not escape the feeling that the story does feel rather rough around the edges. Like the simple text, the black and white sketches, one per chapter, are sufficient to hold the budding reader's attention but not exactly mesmerizing.

Also taking place during the Christmas vacation, Maryann Kovalski's *Jingle Bells* makes a light-hearted read. Here the absent-minded and eccentric but not unenergetic grandmother's personality galvanizes the story and action. The story opens with a confusion of arrivals and departures as the grandmother arrives to take her granddaughters, Jenny and Joanna, to the airport. A litany of worries, in the manner of a Munch picturebook, follows:

> 'I hope we did not forget anything,' said Jenny.
>
> 'I hope we did not forget anything,' said Joanna.
>
> 'Oh I do hope we did not forget anything,' said Grandma. (13)

In *Jingle Bells,* illustrations round out the text, and here the cameo of Grandma with her bubble of thought demonstrates the illustrator's creativity. Built on the well-known Christmas carol, the story is simple — a sleigh ride in which Grandma ends up driving rather recklessly — but the pictures are full of gusto and enliven the story considerably.

Grandma's scatterbrain finds a parallel in Andrew's forgetfulness in *Andrew's Magnificent Mountain of Mittens.* Anguished parents and children anguished by their parents' displeasure on this account will find much to laugh at in this book. Andrew's grandmother comes up with the solution of attaching strings to Andrew's mittens, but the strings are torn on the jungle gym. Truly repentant, Andrew decides to illustrate each pair of his lost mittens and then posts them all around the school. On a farcical note, one even turns up on the principal's back! At the climax, a "magnificent mountain of mittens" duly accumulates in the principal's office, following in the tradition of bedlam that accrues, for instance, with Jillian Jiggs's pigs. That the principal, himself, has even lost a pair is well taken considering his grumpiness on summoning Andrew to his office, and the last straw of Andrew's lost hat at the end adds a humorous touch of resignation to this common complaint of childhood (and adulthood).

Using patterns of repetition like those in *Jingle Bells, Andrew's Magnificent Mountain of Mittens* makes a hilarious read. However, I was disturbed by the illustrator-bungled colours (my children noticed too), incorrectly depicting the green mittens with strings as yellow and orange, and later presenting a blue pair for a lost purple set. Thankfully, LaFave did, however, take care to insert the hat in the illustration of the mountain of mittens on page 26, which is only later discovered missing on the last page of the story.

Sukhdev Kaus Dosanjh's *Robin with a Red Hat* is a whimsical little book first readers would be able to read; but the material seems more suited for the younger child. When spring is in the air and the "mountains seemed to reach the clouds and the clouds wandered around in the blue sky" (3), Robin, sporting the imaginary jauntiness of a red hat, feels inspired to fly over the city and zoom down to a little girl's house. Robin explores the phenomenal world, first viewing itself in a mirror and then, while drinking from a jug, dropping its hat. Helpfully, a little girl retrieves the hat for the bird by filling the jug with more water. Here a scientific learning experience would seem to have been transposed or at least empathetic. The book is written in simple language carrying poetic undertones but I found that the story lost both my own and my young reader's interest. The black-and-white illustrations seemed to inhibit his appreciation as well as the story's poetic potential being all but subliminally lost.

Again, *Fishes in the Sea* may entertain a younger child, but the book is simply enough written for a young reader to read. Essentially a counting book with rhymes written around aspects of a summer day, *Fishes in the Sea* distinguishes itself from other counting books by counting not only up to ten

but also counting back down to one. I found the rhymes zippy, with just the right jingle-jangle to please young listeners, and the illustrations, richly coloured in blues and reds and golds, pleasing to all.

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A Story of Friendship and Imagination

The Cherry Pit Princess. Lynn Manuel. Illus. Debbie Edlin. Coteau Books, 1997. 101 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-118-6.

Being best friends is one of the great joys of childhood. With your best friend, you share everything and you can always be yourself. Trouble is, sometimes the person who wants to be best friends with you is not the person you want to be best friends with. Manuel adds to this conundrum the more pragmatic puzzle of how to save a cherry orchard from the realtor.

These two problems are woven together in the story of Dagny and Megan, who grow to realize that a person can have many kinds of best friends. Dagny's most outstanding trait is her imagination and her ability to invent stories. Throughout the book, her impromptu stories about princesses serve as catalysts for further action, as the girls try to come up with ideas to save Aunt Allie's cherry orchard. Megan, more down-to-earth and perceptive, desperately wants to be Dagny's best friend. She and Dagny often enjoy the cut and thrust of childhood debate, which demonstrates Manuel's keen observational skills:

> '... When cherries turn black they taste like the night.'
>
> Megan shook her head. 'The night doesn't have a taste.'
>
> 'Yes, it does,' said Dagny. 'It has a black cherry taste.'
>
> 'Does not.'
>
> 'Does too.'
>
> 'You just made that up,' said Megan.

Despite their brief arguments, as the girls come up with ideas such as fortune cherries and tree rentals, readers come to appreciate how people with different but complementary personalities can become close friends.

Manuel's writing is finely crafted with loving attention to the great design principles of unity and variation. Each chapter of the book ends with a refrain-like scrap of dialogue, in which the speakers and the topic vary, but the form remains the same. Touches of colour flicker through the pages — e.g., the pink of cherries in icing, pink lemonade, and princess garments; the black and white of a puppy in soapsuds, a cat, piano keys; and the yellows of gold coins, dandelion chains, and Megan Canary's surname. Images of swirling and twirling add energy, and the references to various imaginary kinds of cherry pits (e.g., giggle pits, spinach pits) serve as symbols of Dagny's fertile imagination. Even spitting appears in amusing and acceptable forms (spider's spit, spitting cherry pits). Manuel's delight in sound is contagious as the reader relishes the repetition of delicious phrases such as *lickety-split, splattering of pizazz, not one pinch, tickled pink,* and *double-dip.*

This is an entertaining story of friendship, imagination, and working together to solve problems.

***Catherine Simpson**'s second picture book, **Sailor: The Hangashore Newfoundland Dog**, was published by Tuckamore Books. She lives with her husband and son in Lewisporte, Newfoundland.*

Double Threat Talent Survives (barely) Designer Disservice

The Strongest Man This Side of Cremona. Georgia Graham. Red Deer College P, 1998 (Northern Lights Books for Children). Unpag. $17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-182-9.

Illustration from ***The Strongest Man This Side of Cremona***

The Strongest Man This Side of Cremona by Georgia Graham delivers a message for urbanites terrorized by potential Y2K disasters: make friends with a farmer, and further, learn an important lesson from the rural community. Graham considers the definition of "strength" and gently reveals how young Matthew re-evaluates his understanding after his solid world is blown apart by nature's whims.

While Graham's vocabulary is not particularly adventurous, her description of the tornado is vivid enough, and the story's instruction is served well by her richly coloured and deeply detailed images. So, supported by strong art and sturdy prose, how could such a book go even slightly askew? Well, just because Georgia Graham authored and illustrated this production doesn't mean she also was responsible for its design. I suggest that obligation lies with Kunz and Associates and I further suggest that they are guilty of designer disservice: a good designer makes a story effortless to read. But for page after page with few exceptions, Cremona becomes simply too hard to read.

Stature, style and unwise competition compose the trio of sins. Not only is the text size puny (especially the x-height), but I've seen friendlier fonts out of Revenue Canada. Even a point or two up and a slightly heavier weight could have armed these worthy words better instead of abandoning them to an unfair battle with encroaching and massively distracting visuals. When such an ironic imbalance sacrifices readability, a great literary faux pas has been committed. A sensitive yet firm art editor would have chosen the font more wisely and encouraged the illustrator to smooth and simplify her textures (while retaining the appropriate tornado traits) into softer, plainer but still rich areas of colour and tone against which the words would happily rest.

Additionally, with some simplification in the distant foothills, the relentless aspect to Graham's realism could be tempered while all the middle and foreground would be enhanced: the weather-beaten wagon, the madly hairy collie and its floppy, storm-tossed ears, the looming hugeness of cows, sinewy arms and sinewy cabbages — all would remain impressively as Graham's visual testament.

As I speculate upon how Graham-the-artist could have learned a lesson on select simplification from Graham-the-writer, I must wonder how closely the text-first, pictures-second production formula was followed. For had it properly been adhered to, Graham would not have been placed in the strange and unnecessary situation of competing with herself and so weakening her own project.

As an addendum, it is good to see Georgia Graham marketing at the back of the book her impressive skills in a limited-edition print series of her cows or cabbages. "Why not?" I say as I tip my hat off to her savvy and the book's message of community spirit — both are more greatly needed on the

Canadian publishing scene today.

***Robin Baird Lewis**, an established children's book illustrator (**Red is Best**, et al.), innoculates herself regularly with heavy doses of P.G. Wodehouse and Hunter S. Thompson.*

Learning to Swim

Stella, Star of the Sea. Marie Louise Gay. Groundwood/Douglas and McIntyre, 1999. 32 pp. $15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-337-4.

This beautiful book is discovered, like one perfect shell, with a shock of pleasure. Deceptively simple prose and sly humour spin a timeless tale of siblings at the seashore. Young or old, readers have all been a Stella trying to share something loved with someone loved; or a Sam, overwhelmed by the world's complexity.

The text's comforting message is both concrete and metaphorical. Stella says star(fish) fell from the sky; when Sam points out they might have drowned, Stella explains "they learned to swim." Sam will follow suit, in the water and in life.

Whimsical illustrations employ a horizon line which suggests the immensity of the world viewed from a child's perspective. Shimmering colours hold the promise of a perfect summer's day.

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Harper Winslow's Inspirational Writing

A Fly Named Alfred. Don Trembath. Orca, 1997. 144 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-083-5. ***A Beautiful Place on Yonge Street***. Don Trembath. Orca, 1998. 192 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-121-1.

"Learn from me. Let my story inspire you": A pompous young writer speaks these words in Don Trembath's newest novel, *A Beautiful Place on Yonge Street*.

While the narrator, the sardonic Harper Winslow, rolls his eyes at the orator, the reader can apply these words to Harper as he tells his story in this and the preceding novel, *A Fly Named Alfred*, the second and third novel in a trilogy recounting the misadventures of the adolescent hero. At first glance, Harper Winslow is hardly a disenfranchised youth. He is a white, upper-middle-class male from the outskirts of Edmonton. His father is a doctor and town councillor, while his mother runs a clothing boutique. Yet, between the lines, the often-sarcastic Harper reveals a different story altogether. Neglected by his ambitious parents, threatened by his schoolmates, plagued with low self-esteem, Harper's only friend is a man who behaves strangely, particularly when he has not been taking his medication (*Fly* 127). Harper is alienated, unable to communicate with his parents or peers. He does find a voice and a way of communicating, however, most evident in the narration of his own story. By giving Harper the gift of writing, Trembath overturns the stories of disconnection with tales of empowerment and connection. An endearing character, Harper Winslow battles his problems and actively creates his own identity by writing.

These two novels reveal stories of abuse indirectly through the sarcastic humour of the hero. That Harper might have little self-esteem is hardly surprising given the relationship with his parents. While confronting overt abuse and threats on the schoolyard, Harper faces more insidious threats at home in the form of neglect and verbal abuse: "My mom and dad were out — surprise, surprise — so I was home alone" (*Fly* 9). His sarcasm allows the reader to see what Harper will not reveal directly: the ongoing nature of his aloneness. Harper faces his parents' indifference when he appears with a bloody nose from an altercation: "Dad told me to watch where I'm going, and Mom told me to get the 'Stain-Away' because I was wearing a new white T-shirt" (*Fly* 35). Just as detrimental to this adolescent's sense of self is the continuous verbal criticism from his father: "'I'm pretty skinny,' Harper explains, 'so Dad says, everyday'" (*Fly* 27). Likewise, Harper is the butt of his father's jokes: "He told everyone we saw over the holidays that I had shaved for the first time in my life, and that I would do it again next Christmas whether I needed to or not" (*Beautiful* 47). Too busy with her own concerns to pay heed to her son, his mother is no better. Nor does he find refuge in his much-older siblings. Harper retells his brother's version of their past: "I remember when I was a kid, and you were a teenager, and you used to pound the crap out of me all the time" (*Beautiful* 117). In *A Fly*, a schoolmate, Tommy, forcibly enlists Harper to uncover the real identity of "Alfred," the author of the column, "Fly on the Wall," in the school newspaper. Of course, Alfred is Harper. With serious threats and no easy resolution — if Harper reveals his authorship then he will also face punishment as Alfred — this novel confronts issues of abuse head on by showing that Tommy is motivated to antagonize by his parents' misguided responses to him. Harper feels sympathy for Tommy, realizing that the youth is afraid of his own father.

Because Harper is telling his own story, he avoids direct confronta-

tion with pain through his humour and sarcasm. However, the undertone of abuse illuminates the positive connections that Harper's writing creates. The central focus for the narrative action in *A Fly*, Harper's column brings him to an understanding of, and perhaps a friendship with, Tommy. In *A Beautiful Place*, Harper meets his first love, Sunny, at a youth writer's camp, showing that writing is a site of connection. Indeed, Harper's writing teacher, in *A Fly*, encourages Harper to write notes to his father to facilitate communication. Likewise, in *A Beautiful Place*, Harper explains that "writing is the one thing that keeps me connected to my parents" (10).

Moreover, writing is a way of understanding and creating one's identity, both novels suggest. Harper realizes that he has been hiding behind the identity of Alfred in *A Fly*, and the novel ends with his real identity about to be revealed. In *A Beautiful Place*, Harper's relationship with Sunny, facilitated by his writing, leads to better relationships with his family, highlighting this adolescent's continual progression. In both novels, the most powerful signifier of Harper's developing identity is that he is his own narrator. At one point in *A Fly*, Harper exclaims, "I'm no author, believe me" (90). This metafictional moment, one of many, is ironic. Harper is indeed the author, of his own story, and, ultimately, of his own life — an empowering message for us all.

Trembath leaves the conflicts mainly unresolved, the questions unanswered: will students guess Alfred's identity? Will Sunny and Harper's relationship survive separation? This lack of resolution underscores the vitality of these two novels. They attempt not to solve but to negotiate conflict. Harper's tales are inspirational learning tools. Readers might learn the valuable lesson with Harper: one can handle, but not necessarily solve, life's problems. Of course, by refusing to invoke closure, Trembath also encourages the reader to anticipate the next adventures of this tragicomic hero. And we do.

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Teen Pain: Relationships and Growing Up

One Thing That's True. Cheryl Foggo. Kids Can, 1997. 128 pp. $16.95. ISBN 1-55074-411-9. ***Carving My Name***. Mary-Kate McDonald. Thistledown, 1998. 137 pp. ISBN 1-895449-83-9.

It's hard enough to relate to teenagers once one has reached adulthood, let alone write convincingly from a teenager's perspective. Yet both Mary-Kate

McDonald and Cheryl Foggo do just that in their respective books.

Foggo's is a story of a thirteen-year-old girl, while McDonald's is a collection of stories about teenagers at various stages. Both are written in the first person for the most part, both are about relationships, and both are on the whole from the perspective of girls who live in western Canada. Out of nine stories in McDonald's collection, eight are written in the first person and seven figure girls' voices.

One Thing That's True's thirteen-year-old is on that cusp of having just finished junior high but not started high school, so life is complicated. As well, she and her family are black and her parents add racism to their problems. Life gets more confusing when her parents reveal that her brother isn't their birth son, and his convict birth father wants to meet him. Her self-image is subsequently challenged as she moves from being a kid to becoming a teenager.

The first and the last stories in *Carving My Name* are written from two different boys' perspectives, one seventeen years old, the other fourteen. The rest are written from the viewpoint of girls who range from about eleven years old to seventeen. All of them deal with an immediate problem concerning a relationship, and all of them have as a common thread teens who come from a non-traditional family. Four focus on a problem with a friend or lover, and the others have to do with family problems, which are usually provoked by a father who is either physically or emotionally "not there."

One Thing That's True is a good fast-paced read. Foggo sets the story up like a bit of a mystery, with hints throughout such as "... as if she knew what was going to happen" (23). The thirteen-year-old's voice is authentic, although a little wiser than perhaps most thirteen-year-olds' would be, but then as her grandmother says, she is the strength of the family (112) so a little more wisdom coming from her isn't so out of place. Foggo manages to keep the girl sounding authentic throughout the book.

McDonald doesn't quite reach the same smoothness for a couple of reasons. One is in her choice of names for her teens. Edgar, Maybelle, Lucy and George don't seem like '90s kids' names, and there is nothing to suggest in their respective stories that they aren't about '90s teens. Another reason is that some of these teens are incredibly articulate. In "Four Mile Road" the protagonist talks to her best friend without a hitch for almost two pages, in analytical detail, even though she is suffering a good deal of anguish at the time. A little fumbling or word searching would have added some authenticity. However, McDonald redeems herself by admirably conveying the terrible emotional pain each of her stories express. They are a sharp reminder of the horrible difficulty of being a teenager.

Both books convincingly bring back that un-nostalgic feeling of how bad the teen years can be, although *One Thing That's True* does have a happy ending. In *Carving My Name* the stories generally have some resolution but

they aren't really happy. However, when you're a teen life isn't always happy anyway, is it?

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Trouble in Teendom

Stranger at Bay. Don Aker. Stoddart Kids, 1997. 246 pp. $5.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7468-3. ***What They Don't Know***. Anita Horrocks. Stoddart Kids, 1998. 240 pp. $9.99 paper. ISBN 0-7737-6001-6. ***Angels Turn Their Backs***. Margaret Buffie. Kids Can, 1998. 239 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-415-1 (bound), 1-55074-417-8 (pbk.)

Three recent young adult novels, *Stranger at Bay* by Don Aker, *What They Don't Know* by Anita Horrocks, and *Angels Turn Their Backs* by Margaret Buffie each approach serious ethical and/or emotional problems of their teenage protagonists with a vigorous honesty. Aker's hero has to choose between stealing drugs from his father and telling the cops the truth that will implicate him; Horrocks's narrator focuses on the rage her little sister experiences when she learns the truth about her paternity; and Buffie's protagonist battles both the fear of insanity and her actual illness, agoraphobia.

All the young adults suffer the impact of a realignment of their parents' conjugal affairs. Aker's book involves the effect of a father's remarriage, job loss, and relocation on fourteen-year-old Randy who is still suffering the trauma of his mother's abandonment of him as a child. Similarly, the sisters in Horrocks's story must adjust to their father's remarriage after their mother chooses a career incompatible with child-rearing. Buffie's book, with the mother as custodial parent, traces the consequences on fourteen-year-old Addy of a marriage break-up subsequent to the mother's relocation for her career. The adults in each book proclaim repeatedly the importance of cooperation and communication in building a successful family unit. The teens, however, experience agonies about who gets membership in the new configuration. Who has the right or obligation to belong to that "happy family who works things out together"? This conflict accounts for parents and children continually misjudging each other's value systems throughout the novels. In the end, all three authors come down firmly on the side of the parents, believing, it seems, that it is more productive to define the family according to current cultural mores rather than to right the teen's injured sense of truth and justice at the base of the conflict. Practical or cynical? Apparently it depends on which side of the generation divide you see from.

All three authors choose first person narration with varying effect. Aker's hero, Randy, gives a particularly wry and self-deprecating view of teendom as well as life-with-parents in an often acerbic tone which is genuinely funny from first chapter to last. Horrocks's tale is told by an older sibling who tries to make sense of her fourteen-year-old sister Hannah's sudden change to antisocial, even self-destructive, behaviours. This narrative device effectively turns an otherwise simple, linear plot into a puzzle, a mystery to be solved, as Kelly's love for her sister forces her to become involved in the chaos of Hannah's life. The author reproduces letters, notes, essays, and stories which Hannah has created throughout her school years and stored in a private box under her mattress, an innovative method for conveying the well-balanced happiness and buoyant history of this now-troubled girl. Horrocks's use of the searing sarcasm of the self-involved teenager attempting to delineate herself against her family and peers is effective because the artifacts of Hannah's early life create a sympathetic perspective and because the older sister's personality becomes a buffer for the reader.

Buffie's heroine, Addy, has a sarcastic tongue as well, but we are not given a view of her personality prior to the onslaught of her agoraphobia. Readers need to see Addy making some kind of valiant attempt to create a life for herself in order to make a positive connection with her; instead, Addy watches her favourite movies repeatedly, reads her favourite novels again and again, cries a lot, and invents lies for her mother. Until the last few pages of the tale, she is a spoiled, rude, self-interested misfit who is fighting mental illness. A misanthropic heroine can make for marvellous irony or deft insights, but Buffie gives us only a disagreeable teenager.

All three protagonists — Randy, Kelly, and Addy — are announced by the authors as being unusually intelligent. Aker's Randy has a memory which enables him to accurately recall pages of written text years after having read them. The plot hinges on Randy's use of his particular gift which inadvertently embarrasses a teacher and creates the motivation for revenge. His giftedness also justifies the engagingly sophisticated humour in Randy's criticism of his uneducated, non-intellectually inclined stepmother. In Horrocks's tale, Hannah speaks resentfully of her older sister's academic accomplishments which teachers ill-advisedly use to remind Hannah of her own disinterest in scholastic achievement. The contrasting valuations serve to add credibility to Kelly as a reliable narrator. In Buffie's story, Addy's high intelligence is only mentioned in one brief flashback in which Addy expresses dismay that her scholastic abilities have alienated peers, whereas her only-ever best friend (before the move) accounts intelligence to be one of the reasons she likes the painfully shy Addy. Otherwise, Addy's superior abilities have no impact on the tone, characterization, or plot of the novel.

Buffie's excessive descriptions of the embroidered pictures, of Addy's emotional takes on events, of her parent's quarrels, slow the pace of the

narrative to near tedium. In addition, the supernatural element in the tale never quite meshes with, nor delineates by apposition, the novel's realism. The deceased expert on stitchery whose workroom Addy inherits, Lotta Engel, was also a victim of agoraphobia. For the major part of the novel this apparition seeks to further entrap poor Addy with her unfinished art projects in scenes invariably dark and filled with foreboding. A scruffy African Grey parrot who sometimes acts as a medium for Lotta dominates many of the scenes, but Lotta is able to assume aspects of corporeality in removing needlework stitches and in communicating directly with Addy on occasion and through dreams on others. Essentially, the parrot is both annoying and superfluous: neither does he add to characterization nor does he advance the plot.

Horrocks opens her novel with a chapter in which older sister Kelly muses on the nature of story and suggests various tale openings she could employ. In doing so, Horrocks cleverly previews some of the main elements of the story to come; however, without any preliminary sense of Kelly as a character available, the ideas seem more author-driven than character-driven. Horrocks also ends the tale with Kelly's further musing references to story, thus creating a strong sense of closure to an essentially linear structure. Initially the narrator suggests that Peter Pan is a thematic model for the ensuing tale, and we are left to puzzle out how this intertextual reference fits the story we are given. When Kelly revises her observation with the offend comment that Hannah's "story turns out to be about Humpty Dumpty, not Peter Pan" 240 pages later, it's tempting to feel the irritation of having been misled rather than the intended relief of understanding.

Aker opens his tale with Randy's nightmare, a recurring event which, combined with subsequent experiences of *déjà vu*, we gradually learn stems from his repressed memories of his separation from his birth mother. Between times, Randy's healthy and exuberant sense of self seems so unconnected to this trauma that it comes as something of a surprise each time it surfaces. Similarly, at the end of her novel Horrocks involves the father in a near-fatal auto accident that neither arises from characterization nor from any logical plot necessity. It's mere melodrama. Perhaps both authors believed ongoing pain would prevent a cloying "happy ending," but believable resolutions can only spring from characterization that moves the protagonist through the plot.

These reservations aside, the novels contain much to respect. Aker writes strong conflict which includes nuance and humour, and Horrocks gets the tragedy of the downward spiral in Hannah's choices heartwrenchingly right. Both are acclaimed highly teen-worthy.

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The Japanese-Canadian Experience in World War II

War of the Eagles. Eric Walters. Orca, 1998. 224 pp. $15.95 cloth, $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-118-1, 1-55143-099-1.

The historical backdrop for Eric Walters's novel *War of the Eagles* is World War II, and Walters uses that context to explore issues of racism, nationalism, cultural diversity, and identity. Set in the Prince Rupert area in BC, the novel focuses on the friendship between two boys: one, Tadashi, of Japanese descent, and the narrator, Jed, of Tsimshian and English descent. The novel provides a poignant and powerful rendering of the events leading up to the internment and evacuation of Japanese-Canadians. Walters is dealing with sensitive material here, and for the most part, I think he is successful in creating a novel that illustrates to young readers the painful experience of internment, as well the extent to which racism is embedded in notions of Canadian nationality.

One of the things that worries me a bit about this book is the rather tricky territory on which Walters treads when he is probing the issue of cultural difference. The book does, without question, perform the important work of pointing out that diverse cultural practices need to be respected, but at times it verges on oversimplifying those practices in ways that might perpetuate rather than challenge stereotypes.

It is the complexity of Jed's character development, and the ways in which the social issues in the novel are played out through that development, that in the final analysis make this novel worth reading. Jed's rejection of his mother's Tsimshian identity in favour of his father's English heritage indicates his desire to be a member of the ethnic majority, and to avoid the sting of the racial slurs that are sometimes hurled at him. His own brief slip into shouting racial slurs against the Japanese-Canadian boy, Toshio, indicates how confused Jed is about racial identity, and demonstrates how easily even those with the best of intentions, even Jed, whose best friend is of Japanese descent, can be guilty of racism. Jed immediately realizes what a terrible mistake he has made, and seeks forgiveness, but he has difficulty finding the opportunity, since the very next day the Japanese-Canadian children are removed from the school. Having the one event follow the other is an effective narrative strategy; Jed's childish slurs of the previous day are not, of course, the cause of the removal of the children from the school. In juxtaposing the two events, however, Walters shows us that in a way they are related; he places both events on a continuum of racist assumptions that enable the larger horrors facing Japanese-Canadians at the time.

While Jed takes responsibility for his own racial slurs, the novel evades the issue of responsibility for the wide-scale abuses of the Japanese-Canadians during and after the war. Jed's mother tells him that "Sometimes things are so big, we can't control them. Things just happen and we can't make them un-happen" (137). While it is not really within the pa-

rameters of this novel to explore the complex set of events that led up to the mistreatment of Japanese-Canadians like Tadashi and his family, it seems to me that it is important for young readers to know that although it is certainly true that sometimes things happen on a scale so large it is difficult to stop them, it is a mistake to believe that "things just happen." Perhaps a foreword or afterword that provided more details about the history of Japanese-Canadians on the west coast, as well as a reference to the formal apology and compensation offered to Japanese-Canadians by the federal government in 1988, would have provided a needed sense of the political and social forces, and the people behind them, that led to the tragic events described in the novel.

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Spider's Web: Not for Netizens

Spider's Web. Sharon Stewart. Red Deer College P, 1998. 143 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-177-2.

I admit I enjoyed reading this book, and many young teen readers may also enjoy it. *Spider's Web* does not overly whitewash the experience of growing up, and it provides situations that meet parental requirements — no sex, no drugs, no loud music — yet may still appear hip to some younger readers. If these are your criteria for selecting youth literature look no further.

Spider's Web suffers somewhat in the cultural and technological domains. Spider's mom Joanna *Webber* is marrying Andrew Craven, a geeky computer industry giant who has both a son and a personality that Spider has to learn to appreciate, after she gets over her mother's perceived betrayal for remarrying. Mom has a career, but her happiness seems to be predicated on *finding a man.* While this is a legitimate choice, the two other strong female characters are also problematic. Mia Par is Mr. Craven's Manila-born executive secretary who functions as Spider's nanny through the novel, and is obviously miffed about not getting her man. The black female detective, Les Johnson, who eventually arrests the hacker who stalks Spider through the story, is conspicuously token. These are roles that reinforce stereotypes, rather then explode them. Equally disconcerting is Spider's wariness of foreign things; she never eats garlic at home (but knows what a *barista* is), and is troubled by the names of European cars, yet shops at Le Château and wears Docs. Such inconsistencies are rampant. The sentiments and attitudes would have been progressive in the '70s, but lag somewhat in the '90s.

Spider's Web is a *good read,* with a catchy buildup to a climactic revelation worthy of the best afternoon teen-soap, but this does not deflect awareness from problems. Stewart trips over her Net nuances, and the plot twists around incongruencies that pit incompatible technologies against one another. There is some problem with admitting that the inspiration for a book that purports to be net-savvy was inspired by an article about Bill Gates's house, as the "About the author" notes admit.

Why do I see these "details" as problematic? Well, if the detective fiction writer thinks that .308 cartridges work just fine in a blunderbuss, we have a logical problem that may thwart the reader's enjoyment as much as the narrative development. In *Spider's Web,* Spider moves into a house with a computer that can alert the authorities at the first sign of trouble, and can access her stepfather's corporate electronic art collection, yet Spider uses a modem when connecting to the Internet through a command-line interface. She communicates in a text-only environment while using a natural language processing capable computer. Overall, a more sophisticated presentation of the medium, cultural and gender issues would have better served the narrative.

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Pedagogy and Human Interest in Two Historical Children's Novels

The Golden Rose. Dayle Campbell Gaetz. Pacific Educational P, 1996. 156 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-895766-21-4. ***Prairie Fire!*** Bill Freeman. James Lorimer, 1998. 196 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 1-55028-608-0.

Two books about pioneering in the mid-1800s in Western Canada should invite comparisons, but *The Golden Rose,* by Dayle Campbell Gaetz, and *Prairie Fire!,* by Bill Freeman, are studies in contrasting approaches to writing historical fiction for eight-to-thirteen-year-olds. Neither novel is entirely successful in the proportioning of pedagogy and human interest.

The Golden Rose focuses on a family of English settlers who almost destroy one another through inner conflict triggered by the death of the older daughter on their arrival at their site in the BC Interior. Although, traditionally, pioneering chronicles focus on the conditions and challenges of an alien, hostile environment, Gaetz draws attention to the often unexpressed dysfunction of families subjected to physical and emotional rigours for which

they are unprepared. The fourteen-year-old heroine, Katherine, feels isolated and inadequate after her sister's death, becoming the scapegoat of the family's projections, while other family members come to exhibit their worst qualities: her older brother turns sullen and selfish, her father becomes increasingly domineering and insensitive, while her mother retreats narcissistically into the accusatory silence of a suicidal grief. It is up to Katherine, with the aid of a Native boy her age and a tiny rose-shaped nugget that symbolizes her sister's delicate, caring spirit, to find the inner qualities she needs to heal the family's wounds and restore harmony.

Sometimes, however, the human drama seems to unfold at the expense of the physical one. Surprisingly, the idealized landscape of England is never evoked, while natural and topographical details relating to day-to-day existence are scanty. In addition, the important scene where Katherine and her father encounter a bear in their garden is clumsily drawn and strains credibility. *The Golden Rose*, however, rises above such lapses through its often moving account of the debilitating effects of destructive family dynamics on its most vulnerable, yet ultimately most courageous, member.

Prairie Fire! is strong on instruction and weak on human interest. The seventh novel in the history of the peripatetic Bains family follows the fortunes of Peggy Bains and four of her children as they stake their claim in the newly formed province of Manitoba, build a modest house, plant their crops, and deal with explosive situations both natural and human. *Prairie Fire!* succeeds as a practical compendium of survival skills for homesteading but is hampered throughout by a lack of human focus. *Prairie Fire!* seems too self-consciously a book in a series, rather than a compelling story that can stand on its own. Younger children who have not read the previous volumes will be disadvantaged: they will find the efforts at "catch-up" in the early pages distracting, while Freeman's choice to focus more or less equally on all the characters makes the story less involving than that of *The Golden Rose*. Indeed, the Bainses in this instalment are a family without inner conflict and, therefore, without great interest.

Prairie Fire! also illustrates the profound challenges in presenting to younger readers charged subject matter like bigotry and racism. The novel takes place six years after the Red River Resistance and execution of Thomas Scott by Métis leader Louis Riel. The Bainses, among the first of an influx of European settlers into traditional Métis territory, find themselves in the midst of a simmering land dispute which is resolved, at least at the local level, during the novel's climax by an act of Métis neighbourliness. This resolution suggests that while the violent prejudices of racial stereotyping were a fact, they did not so much embody an ingrained characteristic as a superficial trait readily overcome, hardly an apt representation of the collision of historical forces the novel attempts to portray.

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Sorrows of the French Revolution

The Dark Tower. Sharon Stewart. Scholastic Canada, 1998. 232 pp. $4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12438-2.

According to the publisher's information sheet this book is aimed at readers aged from ten to fourteen. An older readership would also be appropriate.

For six years, beginning in June of 1789, the Princess Royal of France, Marie Thérèse Charlotte (familiarly called Mousseline) narrates what she is able to understand of the momentous events taking place around her. Stewart is convincing in putting the reader into the mind of a privileged, wilful girl who is eleven at the beginning of her story and seventeen at the end. For younger readers, however, difficulties might arise from the horrendous experiences detailed in the girl's first-person tale.

Taking as inspiration the sketchy diary left by the historic Marie Thérèse, Stewart has embroidered a series of intimate tableaux, dated as to month and year, whose dominant theme is tragedy. A little too persistently throughout the six years, the young heroine identifies each of her life's "Sorrows" (always pathetically capitalized). She describes her rebellion at the rigours of court etiquette, her wonder at the people's hunger and suffering, her bewilderment at widespread popular hatred, her self-righteous apology for the good intentions of her papa, King Louis XVI, her fear of revolutionary threats to absolute royal authority and prerogative, her repulsion at physical seizure and imprisonment. Finally, the reader will be able to evoke the gruesome images, as Mousseline does, of the final, successive, incomprehensible horrors as the guillotine beheads her father, her mother, her aunt, and as the appalling cruelty of the New Regime's jailers slowly and inhumanely kills her younger brother, heir to the throne. The five years take the maturing Mousseline through the frightful solitude of lonely captivity to the relative deliverance of exile and an arranged marriage. As the girl herself testifies, it's the stuff of a young girl's most terrifying nightmares.

The book is good history, though. The reader will get a good feel for the daily life and manners of the French royal court, its dress, its activities and its assumptions. Stewart cleverly imbues her characters with vital personalities, creating a high degree of human interest at the emotional level of her young heroine. And she gives her historical canvas some breadth by contriving a series of letters from anti-monarchists out in the provinces. Above all, the author expressly provides a poignant history lesson: that violent revolution is not a sensible or kindly way to reform governmental structures.

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History and Connections to the Present

Last Summer in Louisburg. Claire Mowat. Key Porter, 1998. 152 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55013-941-X.

This is the third of the Mowat novels that concern the doings of Andrea Baxter. As in the other two, Andrea finds herself away from home for the summer, this time working in historic Louisburg, her prize for having won an essay writing contest at school. At Louisburg, Andrea's job is to dress in eighteenth-century costume, and with others, to carry on the daily activities such as they would have been at the time that the mighty fortress guarded access to the St. Lawrence for the French overseas empire.

More than this, Andrea, to her delight, is given the opportunity to act a minor role in a movie being shot at the fortress. In addition to such friends as Justine, her roommate, and Jacqueline, "Jackie," her boss, Andrea develops a friendship with Calvin and Deborah, who play the lead roles in the costume drama that the movie is. Each of the three Andrea novels has at least one moment of suspense and mild terror, and the one for *Last Summer in Louisburg* involves Andrea's being lost in a canoe in a thick harbour fog after having lost her paddle during the shooting of a scene for the movie. Even more dangerously, Andrea's canoe is headed out to sea on the outgoing tide. But Mowat's concern here is not to try to tackle the mystery or adventure writers on their own ground. Rather, this novel, like the others, explores the issue of connection. The connection is not just that of family connections as in *The Girl From Away* and *The French Isles*, although that is a part of the fabric of the novel. The emphasis here is on the connection of history, the role of the past as it impinges on the present. The result, as the book makes clear, is that the past influences and shapes our present. It is never just costume drama like a movie to be forgotten when the credits are run, or an artefact abstracted from life. Behind the costumes and the make-up are real people, with real feelings, living real lives.

Mowat makes her points about history on two levels.

First, as Andrea goes about her daily work schedule, it occurs to her that the eighteenth-century games that the children have been taught to play for the benefit of the tourists, and that she and Justine supervise, are not just re-creations of something dead and gone. With all the twentieth-century distractions and electronic games banished to the world outside the fortress, these are exactly the kinds of games kids could, and would, play if this were their only world, and these were their only implements. In these and the other activities, eighteenth-century Louisburg lives again.

Second, history comes alive in a very personal way for both Andrea and her mother, Doris, in the discovery of their relationship to Jackie Cormier. So conscious is Doris of history's impact that she is initially reluctant to allow Andrea to go to Louisburg when she hears of Andrea's winning of the prize. As she later admits, her concern was focused on a repetition of what

had happened to her a generation before happening again, to Andrea, now, in the present.

The fact that Andrea's romantic attachments, such as they are, with Calvin, the gaffer, and Marc, Justine's brother, are much more innocent than Doris's with Jackie's long gone father, Pierre Belanger, is testament to Mowat's light-handed and engaging treatment of the life of a fifteen-year-old. Here is none of the grittiness of the S.E. Hinton school of teenage angst, of the later Judy Blume, or the earlier Kevin Major. There's no need for that in a book that captures well the elements of the life of a typical mid-teen who is gradually learning about life and herself, and which wants to make its points about history and its impact on the present, and about connectedness at the personal and the national levels.

Through the course of the Andrea books, Andrea has been getting older. We follow her progress as we follow the progress of Marianne Brandis's Emma in the Emma trilogy. Will there be another book chronicling the further adventures of Andrea Baxter? I, for one, hope so, and look forward to it.

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Writing Historical Fiction

The Brideship. Joan Weir. Stoddart Kids, 1988. 218 pp. $6.99. ISBN 0-7736-74748. ***The Accidental Orphan***. Constance Horne. Sandcastle Books, 1998. 135 pp. $8.95. ISBN 1-888-551-6655.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in children's literature is how to write historical fiction for a young audience. How can an author bring another time to life and make it relevant to an audience reared on the Spice Girls? The author has a responsibility to the audience to make history lively, and a responsibility to history to be accurate.

Both *The Brideship* by Joan Weir and *The Accidental Orphan* by Constance Horne illustrate unusual aspects of Canadian history. They tell young audiences what their history teachers will not: that a significant number of emigrants to Canada did not particularly want to leave home. In *The Brideship*, Sarah is one of many British orphans chosen to be brides for miners in British Columbia; the girls do not know of their fate until they are on the boat. In *The Accidental Orphan*, Ellen runs onto a docked ship when she is accused of theft, and the ship takes off for Canada. She is placed on a

family farm in Manitoba. Of the two books, *The Accidental Orphan* is the most historically accurate, although neither book is artistically satisfying.

The Brideship has a promising start, when Sarah, her cousin Maude, and the other orphans are held captive in one room of the ship, rarely able to leave, and hardly given enough to eat. This part of the book will keep children captive themselves. However, once the girls reach Canada, the story loses momentum completely. Sarah and her friend Lizzie give their future husbands the slip and go up the coast to a mining town, where they have two rather unconvincing romances. Suddenly Sarah loses all of her desire for independence that made her an interesting character at the beginning. The plot turns creakily on revenge as well as romance, as the girls seek to reveal the cruelties of the minister who brought them over. Sainted cousin Maude, who died on the ship, warned her against Lizzie, but this turns out to be a red herring for the reader. However, it seems counter-intuitive, since dying sainted cousins in the nineteenth century tended to be right about such things.

The descriptions of the ship and of the mining town seem historically accurate, but there are certain slips in fact, attitude and language that make the book ultimately unconvincing as historical fiction. The governesses and nannies travel West because they have been usurped by "graduates of the newly opened Secondary Schools for Women." This gives the impression that female education was more developed than it was; furthermore, the idea of a nanny being thus displaced is inaccurate, as nannies were not middle-class women, and these schools were only affordable to the middle class. Also, the phrase "high school graduate" was not in existence in 1862. When Maude dies, the narrator writes: "It was funny — until that moment Sarah had never realized that young people could die." Both the language and the sentiment are foreign to the nineteenth century. In a time when infant and child mortality were high, it would have been unusual for Sarah not to have encountered death at an early age. Later in the text, Josh the missionary describes how Lizzie has cheered him up: "She said to stop worrying about all the things I wasn't, and to just go ahead and be myself." Nothing could sound more modern.

The Accidental Orphan by Constance Horne has fewer moments that jar the reader. This story will interest girls who are currently reading *Little House on the Prairie*. Like Sarah, Ellen finds herself with a group of orphans on a boat headed for Canada. The children do not know what awaits them, only that they are intended to work on farms. The journey is over soon, and the bulk of the book takes place in Manitoba. Horne shows us the historical details of life on the farm in the late nineteenth century, such as how to clean rugs with snow. Ellen is a likeable character, but not a highly developed one. Perhaps her circumstances are simply too fortuitous for the reader to feel much for her: the family she finds herself with treats her as one of their own from day one. Although we do see the harsh treatment of one of the orphans, Ellen's situation seems far too lucky. We get little sense of the extreme cul-

tural isolation and maltreatment of the British orphans. Ellen's homesickness never hits home, and her frustrations seem "tacked on" after her kind reception.

Young girls will enjoy these books, but there remains much more to be said about teenage pioneers. I hope other young adult writers will take up the challenge.

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Growing Up in an Earlier Canada

The Doctor's Apprentice. Ann Walsh. Beach Holme, 1998. 150 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-389-2. ***The Shacklands*** Judi Coburn. Second Story, 1998. 287 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 1-896764-13-4.

Maturing into the adult world poses many difficulties for contemporary young people. These two lively new historical novels show some of these difficulties in a rather different context, as faced by young Canadians in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Both novels affirm the resilient spirit and courage of their leading characters, and emphasize the possibilities available to them in a rapidly-changing land. *The Doctor's Apprentice* is set during the Gold Rush in Barkerville, BC, in 1868; *The Shacklands* takes place in Toronto between 1908 and 1910. Although the difference in the nature of the two communities is almost as great as their geographical distance from each other, both novels show their young characters facing similar challenges: resisting family pressures regarding their future careers, reacting to addiction and other problematic behaviour in the people around them, and facing their own dark memories and anxieties about the future.

The two novels are, however, very different in tone and focus. Walsh's, a sequel to her *Moses, Me and Murder*, is essentially an adventure story and climaxes with a ghostly visitation during the great Barkerville fire. Its humour, plot and sketchy characterizations are aimed at younger adolescents. Coburn's novel, considerably longer and more complex in its cast of characters and presentation of social issues, has no dramatic climax and no real resolution. Rather, it reflects the ongoing encounter of its heroine with the decisions and conflicting loyalties presented by everyday life. While both novels make effective use of their period settings, involving the reader in the social environment, Coburn's does so in far greater depth.

Coburn and Walsh are careful to detail the physical locality of their stories; both give the impression of having walked patiently over the sites, tracing the past beneath the overlay of the present. Hills and marshy ground become again as significant as they were to the foot traveller before the automobile erased them from consciousness. Both books end with historical notes on the locations, events, and real-life characters included. Coburn's book is further enhanced by many photographs and two maps. The maps unfortunately did not reproduce well, but the photographs contribute greatly to the novel's sense of almost documentary realism. The striking cover photograph of a young woman in Edwardian dress catches the viewer with her direct, intelligent gaze and aptly suggests the character of Jessie Robertson on whom the novel centres.

The Shacklands is not, however, told in the first person, and although it focuses on Jessie, the point of view occasionally shifts rather jarringly to other characters. Coburn might have been wiser to stay with Jessie, presenting other characters' points of view through dialogue and letters as she already does to good effect. Frequent time-shifts early in the book may also confuse less-skilled readers, though Coburn helpfully dates most of the episodes, and the narrative eventually continues in a more linear fashion. Although *The Doctor's Apprentice*, on the other hand, opens with a shocking nightmare based on Ted's previous experiences with a murderer, its first-person narrative proceeds in a straightforward, often humorous, style.

Coburn presents Jessie's experiences with education, family life, and in the workforce from a moderate feminist and socialist perspective. For example, she leads the reader to empathize with Jessie's resistance to her uncle's pressure to give up school and stay home to care for the family after her mother's death. This attitude is an interesting contrast to L.M. Montgomery's approving presentation of Anne's decision at the end of *Anne of Green Gables* to give up her college scholarship and stay home to look after Marilla. Although while employed at clothing factories Jessie realistically accepts working conditions which seem arduous, even outrageous, to modern readers, her participation in a strike is presented with great sympathy. *The Shacklands* thus tends to look at the past from a contemporary point of view, revealing how attitudes and freedoms we now take for granted came about from the efforts of previous generations.

The Doctor's Apprentice does not deal with such large social issues, but resembles *The Shacklands* in showing its young protagonist coming to understand an adult who is haunted by guilt. Younger than Jessie, Ted quickly finds relief from his nightmares in working for an eccentric Barkerville doctor who has his own problems dealing with troubling memories. Despite its dark subject matter of guilt, anxiety and drug addiction, however, the novel retains the jaunty tone of an adventure tale, and problems are resolved by the end. This book presents neither the difficulties nor the rewards of Coburn's novel, whose open-ended conclusion appropri-

ately reflects the complexity of the choices and decisions facing its young characters. For different readerships, however, both novels provide a vivid and well-researched encounter with the challenges facing young Canadians in an earlier time.

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Selina Returns

Selina and the Shoo-Fly Pie. Barbara Smucker. Illus. Janet Wilson. Quilts by Lucy Anne Holliday. Stoddart Kids, 1998. Unpag. $18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-3018-4.

Selina and the Shoo-Fly Pie attempts to recreate the delight of *Selina and the Bear Paw Quilt* (1996). However, when it is read in isolation, both the significance of Selina's close relationship with her grandmother and the importance of the quilt designs framing each illustration are lost.

The story's prosaic language results in unexceptional characters who never really come alive. Rudimentary dialogue like Mother's "Be more careful. You are growing up. Already you are seven and this fall you will start grade two" may be intended to give the feeling of someone new to English-speaking, but the effect sounds mechanical. Bumps in the narrative, such as the letter from Grandmother informing her Mennonite family that "We Mennonites are against slavery ... yet we cannot take sides and be part of the terrible fighting. For this we are resented and sometimes even hated," interfere with the flow of the story. Since Selina's family fled to Canada because of the American Civil War, they know first-hand the war's effects upon their culture. Although this letter provides background information for the reader, such information would have been conveyed better in an historical introduction. Finally, the story's climax is flawed. While the main theme highlights the importance of living in a land of freedom, the rejuvenation of cousin Henry — traumatised by the conflict — is not satisfactorily explained: it seems unlikely that the ravages of war can be overcome by an afternoon's visit to a sawmill coupled with teasing Selina about accidentally smashing her Shoo-Fly Pie.

Janet Wilson's paintings provide a welcome respite from the story's

tediousness. Their rich colours bring a depth to the characters not realized in the text, and vignettes such as Selina's joyful reunion with her grandmother provide a beautiful contrast between youth and age. Wilson's realistic paintings accurately depict the period, especially in the clothing. While the illustrations seem a trifle static, each represents a sentence in the story, as when

Illustration from ***Selina and the Shoo-Fly Pie***

Selina gently rubs her hands over Grandmother's Bear Paw Quilt. The real strength of the book appears in Holliday's exquisite quilt designs, which frame each of Wilson's scenes. Beautifully done throughout, they suggest such themes as enduring love, especially where they surround Selina and Grandmother making the Shoo-Fly Pie with stitchings of flies, the pastry shell, and hands filled with hearts.

As a companion piece, *Selina and the Shoo-Fly Pie* is satisfactory, and themes like family, tradition and peace are reinforced by both the illustrations and the quilt designs. However, it lacks the delight and the art of *Selina and the Bear Paw Quilt.*

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Strong-minded Girls

Brave Highland Heart. Heather Kellerhals-Stewart. Illus. Werner Zimmermann. Toronto/New York: Stoddart Kids, 1999. 32 pp. $18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-30990. ***Little Kim's Doll.*** Kim Yaroshevskaya. Illus. Luc Melanson. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1999. 24 pp. $15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-353-6.

These two picture books are similar in that they both offer an intimate portrait of a family. By intimacy, I refer not only to the focus on a child's desire to have something and the parents' desire to raise their child responsibly and lovingly, but also to the visual representation of family.

The illustrators of both books depict the images of family in close-up, as a glance at the final page of each book will illustrate. However, a comparison of the final illustration in *Brave Highland Heart* with the cover of *Little Kim's Doll* will indicate the differing focus of each book: the first focuses on the relationship between a young girl and her father, whereas *Little Kim's Doll* deals mostly with the relationship between mother and daughter.

Perhaps even more insistent than the family theme is the depiction of a single-minded young girl stubborn to have her own way. The unnamed young narrator in Kellerhals-Stewart's story wants her family to accept her as an equal; she asserts her right to stay "up all night like everyone else." Kim, in the other story, expresses her desire for a doll and she cunningly rejects her mother's gift of a rifle. Both books end not only with the gratification of the girls' desires, but also with a vision of family (and, in the case of *Brave Highland Heart,* community) solidarity.

Another feature of both books is their particularity of setting. *Brave Highland Heart* takes place in Maritime Canada, probably Nova Scotia with its tradition of the ceilidh. The verbal text is spare, but the mention of tossed salads, baked pies, baked ham with pineapple, mustard pickles and such

Illustration from ***Brave Highland Heart***

indicates a North American cuisine; the illustrations give us a distinctly North American house and barn and large kitchen. *Little Kim's Doll*, on the other hand, takes for its setting the city of Moscow during the Stalinist regime. The verbal text announces place: "the name of the country was Russia, the name of the city was Moscow." Illustrations depict Red Square, a window sign in the Cyrillic alphabet, a large statue of a heroic working couple carrying hammer and sickle, soldiers in Russian uniform and so on. Setting serves as a useful backdrop to stories about strong-minded girls, and it offers an opportunity for the young reader to begin to learn something about both history and culture.

In terms of verbal and visual style, the two books contrast. *Brave Highland Heart* uses first-person narration with a considerable amount of dialogue, and some nifty diction (words such as "beetled," "fetched," "acacia," "ceilidh"). Werner Zimmermann gives his watercolour illustrations vibrancy and texture. The drawing is realistic. *Little Kim's Doll* is more stylized, the drawing harkening back to a visual style we might associate with the 1930s and '40s. The pastel work is soft and warm, and the figures have the comforting quality of toys, despite a rigidity that reflects the strictures of life under Stalinist communism. In keeping with the stylized drawing is the poetic prose. Sentences are cleanly written and rhythmic.

The stories here are simple, even conservative. The girls hold out for what they want, but what they want is not really much of a challenge to normalcy. The one girl wants to participate in the ceilidh, and she does. The other wants a doll. What saves both books from assuming complete ideological comfort is the one girl's assertion that she deserves to be treated equally with her brothers, and Kim's pacifist preference for a doll over a rifle. We might read both books as challenges to complacency; conversely, we might read them as safe expressions of familiar family values manifested in less than familiar circumstances. (I am, of course, assuming a readership for *Brave Highland Heart* that lives beyond rural Nova Scotia.) Neither book strikes me as compellingly new or challenging, but they are attractive and well-intentioned.

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Boys With Toys and the Marketing of Children's Literature

Matthew and the Midnight Pilot. Allen Morgan.Illus. Michael Martchenko. Stoddart Kids, 1997. Unpag. $7.99 paper. ISBN 0-7737-5852-6. ***Matthew and the Midnight Ball Game*** Allen Morgan. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Stoddart Kids, 1997. Unpag. $7.99 paper. ISBN 0-7737-5853-4.

Repetition is a crucial part of the writing and reception of children's literatures. Children who are at all encouraged to be sensitive to language depend on repetition and contrastive variation for the pleasure and learning afforded them in literature. But repetition is, most unfortunately, also a key element in the marketing of children's books based upon serial characters like Matthew, the überboy, Franklin, the anthropomorphized turtle, the ever-game Hardy boys, and so forth. In the case of the Matthew books there is a clear sense of pandering to repetition as a marketing principle that gets books off the shelves and into weary parents' households. Symptomatic of this, are the blurbs for both these books, with their exclamatory "Matthew is back! And this time he's ... [fill in the appropriate book concept/authorial pitch]." The formula is tiresome but part of the larger picture, which involves the marketing for a "brand new TV Series soon to be aired on the Family Channel!"

Allen Morgan has produced sensitive work in the past. His *Jessica Moffat's Silver Locket* deals effectively with issues of family, mortality, and remembrance. But these Matthew books were upsetting for the way in which they so obviously cater to a larger strategic design that involves a particular market (young boys), the ingenuous blurring of fantasy and reality (always an issue when developing a sense of literary culture) through the familiar device of the dreams that enable Matthew's somnambulant fantasies, and promoting a simplistic formula that ensures a market niche (not always the way to entice cynical parents looking to stop the onslaught of some of the more egregious aspects of mass culture from overtaking the household).

With these two latest Matthew books, the pattern becomes clearer: boys are the centre of action in this universe, particularly if it involves adventure or sport — women and girls are excluded from this scenario except for brief appearances where they don't "understand" or where they're vaguely diminishing of their sons ("My mother says I am [a turkey], sometimes"); sports and boys with toys rule; and when in need of a dash of fantasy, anthropomorphize away (both books have their epiphanic moments signalled by the appearance of birds, either flying airplanes or playing on baseball teams). The formula is furthered by the almost complete lack of family context — namely, you can't play sports or have an adventure in the context of the family and both sports and adventure involve midnight escape from the house and mother's bedroom surveillance. If the oedipal resonances of all this haven't set your readerly antennae on high alert the lack of sensitivity to matters of narrative cliché and so forth should. Do we really need another "boy" character who fronts as a marketing prop for the Toronto Blue Jays (morphed into the "Toronto Turkeys")? Do we really want another writer

engaging unquestioningly with one of the nadirs of mass culture (professional sports)? And do we really want to teach children that adventure is devoid of family context (not to say that it can't be)?

No doubt some readers will answer these questions in the affirmative and these books belong on their shelves. More cynical readers will want to avoid these books out of the basic principle that children, if they are to develop in ways that give them some basic tools to fend off the intrusions of marketing culture (and the dull mind-clutter it produces), would do well to read authors and books that make some small effort to produce a fantasy world that does not rely on tiresome clichés ("Boys, after all, will be boys!"). (For instance, Peter Sís's wonderful book on his father's adventure in Tibet and the adventure of his discovery of the story itself, *Tibet Through the Red Box*, evokes a welter of qualitatively superior visual and literary resonances that make the Matthew books read like the backs of cereal boxes.) This is not to say that clichés themselves cannot be useful. A group of children to whom I read these stories on several occasions anticipated most of the moves made by Morgan, and moved on to parodying and inverting them with no small delight. Matthew's cheesy smile when caught by his mother listening to a baseball game while wearing a baseball cap in a bed surrounded by the detritus of fandom (a scene aptly caught by illustrator Michael Martchenko) inspired a canny routine on bad faith, disobedience, and the conventions associated with both.

Children are wildly more inventive and subversive than Morgan would have them be. The Matthew books envisage the imaginatively sterile world of suburban middle-America (though clearly depicted as occurring in Toronto via the visual stratagem of the CN Tower, itself a troubling enough feature of this "Canadian" book), in which affluence, technology, banality, and mass culture reign, even in children's (read boys') predictable fantasies.

Daniel Fischlin *teaches Renaissance literature and literary theory at the University of Guelph and goes home to learn from his three daughters, Hannah, Zoë and Esmé.*

The Immigrant and a Sense of Belonging

The Boy in the Attic. Paul Yee. Illus. Gu Xiong. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1998. Unpag. $15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-330-7. ***The Red Corduroy Shirt***. Joseph Kertes. Illus. Peter Perko. Stoddart, 1998. 32 pp. $12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-30664. ***A Gift for Gita***. Rachna Gilmore. Illus. Alice Priestley. Second Story, 1998. Unpag. $12.95 cloth, $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-896764-12-6.

The immigrant experience is featured in all of these books. Young readers will gain valuable experience about the world around them and will see how young immigrant children deal with change, friendship, family loyalty, and cultural differences.

Change is difficult for everyone, not just children. However, children often have to take changes, decided by others, in stride. In two of these stories, *A Gift for Gita* and *The Boy in the Attic*, the young protagonists have just adjusted to their new country, Canada, and have made a good friend when they are faced with moving away.

For Gita, her new world stability is challenged when her father considers a new job which will take the family back to their native India. The move does not take place because her parents cannot face such a change since they too have become attached to Canada and their new life. Her grandmother's grace and wisdom help Gita understand that even for older people, leaving friends and a familiar way of life is difficult. As well, Grandmother explains to her the gift of memories we take with us through life, represented by some beautiful nesting dolls which represent Gita's grandmother's insights.

The Boy in the Attic is a ghost story that will appeal to children who have an imaginary friend. Kai-ming, who has recently arrived in Canada, finds a magical friend, Benjamin, in the attic of his first Canadian home. Whereas Gita received dolls from her grandmother, Kai-ming has a magical black butterfly, sent by his deceased ancestors. It is due to the butterfly's presence that Kai-ming is able to communicate with the ghost who does not speak Chinese. They establish a warm relationship without parental interference, unlike the two immigrant boys in *The Red Corduroy Shirt* This story has death and abandonment as subliminal themes. When Kai-ming must move, he feels hurt and betrayed by Benjamin who refuses to come with Kai-ming to his new house. Kai-ming comes to understand that the gift of friendship can be kept alive through memory, just as Gita did. He too gives a gift, the black butterfly, to Benjamin, as a reminder of their summer together. This gesture indicates his acceptance of his situation and ends the story on a positive note.

These two books will appeal mostly to children between the ages of four and nine. In *A Gift for Gita* the family discussion shows respect for all family members. The story is also consistent in the development of all the characters from Gilmore's previous Gita books, that will satisfy her audience. The intergenerational aspects of the Gita stories are very instructional to children who do not have older adults in their lives.

On the other hand, the adults in Yee's story seem distant and glaringly absent. At the beginning of the story they seem to take an active role in connecting Kai-ming to his dead grandparents. However, with the introduction of the black butterfly (the spirit of these dead ancestors), the parents fade into the background. The absence of Kai-ming's parents sends a negative message to young readers as does the idea that Benjamin's mother punished

him in a manner that turned out to be fatal for him.

The third story, *The Red Corduroy Shirt*, is aimed at a slightly older audience. There are some pictures accompanying the story (which is more complex), and the adults play a greater role in the action. Friendship is clearly the main theme here and like the other books the friendship involves children of different races and cultural backgrounds. In this story, however, both children are immigrants. Jake, through whose eyes we view the action, is clearly enamoured by his classmate's exotic home, family and customs. He is prevented from keeping Jerry's beautiful red corduroy shirt due to his mother's stereotypic bias, which is silently but clearly communicated. The relationships here deal with generational issues, family loyalty, as well as with friendship. The story ends on a note of compromise. Readers will encounter the cultural biases and differences we all confront daily in a multicultural society. This story, partly autobiographical, rings true.

The artwork in each of these books adds an essential element to the success of the stories. The drawings by Alice Priestley are not only beautiful framed pictures, but also clearly illustrate the love shared among family members. She gives life to the emotions expressed in the story. Gu Xiong's strong illustrations of Yee's story continue a tradition of beautiful looking books for Paul Yee's work. They make the story believable, although one drawing has a significant mistake in it: young hockey players are wearing ice skates to play street hockey in midsummer warm weather, something the truly observant young reader will notice. The large-size book has full-page drawings. Peter Perko's illustrations are simple pictures of times gone by, the 1950s. The old fashioned quality of them brings the story alive. The small size of the book and its beautiful dust jacket illustration invite the young reader to pick up the book.

Young readers will find relevant human experiences in these books — family relationships, the importance of friendship, and dealing with change and new cultures.

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Sacred Journey

Spirit Quest. Diane Silvey. Illus. Joe Silvey. Beach Holme, 1997. 58 pp. $8.95. ISBN 0-88878-376-0.

Mother-and-son team Diane and Joe Silvey use their Coast Salish background to create a rich redemption legend in *Spirit Quest*.

The story covers the adventures of Kaya and Tala, teenage twins, as they journey over land and water to bring back a stolen box containing the spiritual qualities of their people. The talkative Yaket (also known as Y), son of the Thunder God, and his giant eagle aid them in their search.

The adventure unfolds in the non-linear tradition of oral storytelling, especially when the twins are separated early in the story. Tala pursues the sacred box, following his Grandfather's teachings to ward off temptation and find his spirit guide, the wolf. Kaya, determined to find her brother, undertakes a more metaphorical journey. At one point, for example, her anger at Y transports them to the celestial world, where she consults a shaman and sees a vision of her brother's earthly trial. In the latter part of the book, their journey involves increasingly otherworldly creatures. They confront and overcome strange deep-water fish, hawkmen, and finally underworld spirits that try to prevent them from bringing the box back to their people.

Award-winning illustrator Joe Silvey provides ten major drawings, plus the cover, underscoring the mythical nature of the creatures and the journey itself.

Quest stories usually include the inciting incident, or the moment when the hero knows he/she must right a wrong, while revealing the hero's character and reasons for undertaking such an apparently unavoidable quest. When this story begins, the theft has already occurred. The Grandfather counsels the twins, mentioning the treacherous path ahead and the need to listen to their hearts, before he mentions the sacred box and its contents. Choosing to begin the story in this way places the emphasis on redemption and the restoration of a nation, rather than on identifying or blaming the evil spirits causing the problem, or even outlining the hero-characteristics of the twins. The twins, as teenagers, represent the hope of their people. But we do not learn details of their personalities or even their gender until Chapter Two. Similarly, the box contains qualities such as honesty and gentleness, making the quest an obvious metaphor for the struggle to retain traditional spiritual and cultural values.

Diane Silvey's work as teacher and social activist, although never didactic, is aptly represented in the development of this expertly crafted legend. As well as two previous children's books called *Little Bear's Vision Quest* and *Whale Girl*, she has developed thirteen curriculum books for non-readers, seventeen mini-readers and a First Nations cultural book.

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A Traditional Sliammon Story

T'aal: The One Who Takes Bad Children. Sue Pielle with Anne Cameron. Illus. Greta Guzek. Harbour Publishing, 1998. 27 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55017-180-1.

As a non-Native reader, I am certain to have cultural blinders that prevent me from appreciating the full richness of this traditional Sliammon story. What I offer here, then, from the perspective of my own British-Canadian heritage, are my impressions of what to me is a wonderful book. In *T'aal: The One Who Takes Bad Children*, Sue Pielle, with Anne Cameron, tells a traditional tale from the Sliammon people on the coast of British Columbia. This tale about the origin of mosquitoes teaches the importance of listening to and learning from one's parents and grandparents. The two main characters in this story are a brother and sister who obey the rule of their village that all children must be inside once darkness falls; otherwise they will fall prey to T'aal, the terrifying creature who lurks in the night to steal away bad children. The two children are sent out one night with special permission to tell their grandmother that their mother is about to give birth. Their father tells them that as long as they hold hands, they will be safe from The One Who Takes Bad Children. When one of them trips, however, their hands break apart, and The One Who Takes Bad Children immediately snatches them up.

The rest of the story tells of the resourcefulness of these children. This story emphasizes, though, that their resourcefulness is not innate, but rather the result of what they have learned from their mother, father, and grandmother: "'Mother says,' the sister reminded her brother, 'that any time anything goes wrong we're to keep our heads calm, and THINK'" (14). The story, then, encourages independent thinking, but in the context of family traditions and wisdom.

Indeed, this story is very much a celebration of family. The events of the narrative are driven by the joyful and celebrated birth of a new baby, and the story ends with the grandmother inviting the two children to "Come see the new person who came to live with us last night" (26). The legacy of mosquitoes, formed by the ashes of the burned body of The One Who Takes Bad Children, is a minor irritation in the presence of human love and the importance of family. Greta Guzek's illustrations provide a striking complement to this engaging story. Guzek makes dramatic use of perspectives and shadows to heighten the elements of fear and suspense.

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Folktales and Resonance with Tradition

Necklace of Stars. Veronica Martenova Charles. Stoddart, 1996. 32 pp. $17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-29674. ***"Mind Me Good Now!"*** Lynette Comissiong. Illus. Marie Lafrance. Annick, 1997. 32 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-482-6. ***The Enormous Potato.*** Aubrey Davis. Illus. Dusan Petricic. Kids Can, 1997. 32 pp. $14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-386-4. ***The Fish Princess.*** Irene N. Watts. Illus. Steve Mennie. Tundra, 1996. 24 pp. $17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-366-9. ***Simply Ridiculous.*** Virginia Davis. Illus. Russ Willms. Kids Can, 1995. Unpag. $14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-107-1. ***Som See and the Magic Elephant.*** Jamie Olivero. Illus. Jo'Anne Kelly. Hyperion, 1995. Unpag. $20.95 cloth. ISBN 0-786-800-259. ***The Vision Seeker.*** James Whetung. Illus. Paul Morin. Stoddart, 1995. Unpag. $18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-29666.

Each of these picture storybooks for younger readers owes various debts to tradition: four (*"Mind Me Good Now!", The Enormous Potato, Simply Ridiculous* and *The Vision Seeker*) are direct retellings of traditional folktales; two (*Necklace of Stars* and *The Fish Princess*) are original stories which rely heavily on folk elements; and the seventh work (*Som See and the Magic Elephant*) is a story invented after a folk style. The group raises significant questions about the operation and evaluation of traditions in children's literature. Ultimately, the success of each work rests in its engagement with and respect for the demands of the tradition(s) at play in its conception and presentation.

Both Aubrey Davis and Virginia Davis approach their tellings as knowing outsiders: he is a professional storyteller; she, a prominent librarian and consultant. There are stories to be told and they tell them exceedingly well, but neither book offers the insight into oral tradition — particularly its function and significance — that Comissiong and Whetung provide as insiders to the cultures represented through their narrations. *"Mind Me Good Now!"* and *The Vision Seeker* invite modern young readers into literary experiences where they encounter the real mystery and power of oral tradition, be it a cultural other or their own heritage tradition.

Quite another manner of tradition is central to *Simply Ridiculous*: namely, the conventions of nonsense, a venerable tradition within children's literature. Silly, impatient Willy consults an elder first to learn the gender of his unborn child and later to ask about a name for the baby boy. He forgets the name and tells his tale of woe to a passerby who exclaims, "Why, it's simply ridiculous," which Willy consequently calls the child. The quality of the ridiculous exudes throughout the book, emphasized in the illustrations, which are certainly captivating and decidedly modern in aspect yet consistent with this timeless tale. This book is, then, highly successful because it celebrates (even by citing a source) the demands of the traditions it employs.

The Enormous Potato falls short of its full potential as a book to read to the very young because Davis and Petricic do not achieve a marriage of text and illustrations, the paramount tradition operative in the picture-book genre. Davis artfully tells the humorous story of a farmer who plants a potato eye

which grows into a mammoth potato that in turn requires a team (accumulated through incremental repetition) to harvest and eventually to eat until, like the story, it is gone. The illustrations are in vivid and intense colours (blue against golden-yellow background), of bold yet starkly simple design — common characteristics of the best storybooks — yet the pictures are strangely at odds with the story. The central figure bears more resemblance to a cartoon detective or a video game character than a farmer, pictorially evoking competition in an electronic age, a value at odds with the implicit message of this venerable story, namely the potential for accomplishment through cooperation. A commitment to market appeal has seemingly assumed primacy over tradition to this work's detriment.

In *"Mind Me Good Now!"* Lynne Comissiong deftly transposes oral tradition into a written text, maintaining the immediacy of oral tale-telling. A

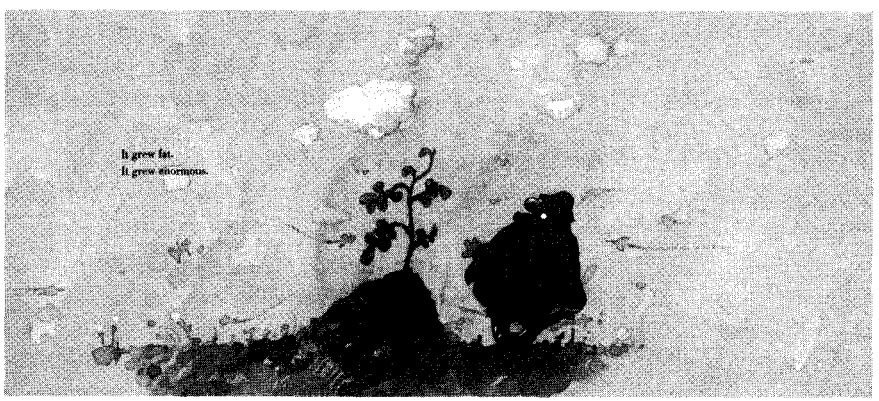

Illustration from ***The Enormous Potato***

specialist in Caribbean folklore and head of the Trinidad public library system, Comissiong is able to present this cautionary tale with integrity and cultural veracity by working within the conventions of children's literature as well as within oral tradition. Such credentials are shared by few who continue to exploit traditional tales as fodder for children's books which, for the most part, benefit neither the traditions and cultures being presented nor the youthful reader. Comissiong's unselfconscious use of local dialect, rhyme, and repetition are most important in enticing readers into the Hansel and Gretel-like tale of two disobedient children who fall under the spell of the supernatural *Cocoya,* a frightening female figure, whom they outwit through exposure to natural sunlight which destroys her. Marie Lafrance's lively illustrations resonate the same playful yet intense mood and convey the Caribbean culture in tone and image.

Text and illustration likewise mesh in *The Vision Seeker,* a powerful

tale of how the Anishinaabe people received the first Sweat Lodge. A practitioner of the Sweat Lodge teachings himself, James Whetung recounts the story of Little Boy's vision quest with conviction and the intent of promoting informed appreciation for First Nations' traditional knowledge among contemporary non-Natives and preserving the teachings for today's aboriginal youth. This telling is traditional in substance, cadence, and form, opening with a greeting and identification of the speaker by spirit name and clan affiliation. The teller is merely a narrator, not a performer, crisply giving voice to the teachings which relate the events of Little Boy's quest and his encounters with the Seven Grandfathers of his people who give him gifts necessary to begin the healing of his society. In keeping with custom, a traditional salutation also closes the text. Morin's paintings are culturally appropriate, full of symbolism, and deft (except in his human representations). Apart from a jarring design flaw (stark white type on darkly-coloured pages), this is a fine book which engenders inter-racial understanding and real appreciation of oral heritage.

By contrast, *Som See and the Magic Elephant* is a post-colonial anachronism, exploiting the tradition of an *exotic other* for didactic purposes; it imitates folklore and passes the result off as culturally correct. This is a simple story of a girl helped to cope with her grandmother's death by a magnificent supernatural elephant. The narrative line is amplified with cultural details and supplemented by illustrations based on traditional silk-dying techniques. Yet the book has no claim to tradition as a supposed "original folktale" (a term that is an oxymoron). However well-intentioned, it is simply the self-conscious and limited invention of two artists rather than the product of a people, communally owned and handed down over time through tradition.

The Fish Princess, while a distinctly better story, also uses tradition, but in a sometimes confusing way. The narrative, while replete with traditional motifs, lacks resolution and confounds even a careful reader. A foundling girl, reared in isolation by a grandfather figure, is strangely drawn to the sea. She angers the local people by freeing a large salmon from a net, is rewarded with a circlet of gold, and subsequently captures and sacrifices this salmon king to be united with him. The work bespeaks Celtic traditions in particular, but is perplexing rather than compelling because the eclectic elements do not coalesce as in true folktales, honed through many tellings by different narrators. In keeping with Tundra's established tradition of children's books as works of art, the illustrations are what distinguish this work.

Certainly the best of the original stories, *Necklace of Stars* is a deeply-felt work in which the author-illustrator weaves dreams, folklore, history and personal experience into an engaging tale of a young boy's commitment to his home high in the Andes. Miguel encounters the spirits of his mountain ancestors who tempt him to join them, but elects to stay where he belongs. Charles incorporates into her story specific traditions that she handles with respect; her narrative has its own integrity which is represented through

engagement with nature and various (oral, written, documentary and mystical) traditions. This book works because Charles has something of significance to say, namely a reverence for nature and the magic of the Andes. And, as C.S. Lewis would have it, a children's book is the best way for her to communicate her message.

Children's books that treat traditions with respect can be compelling and enhance the intellectual and emotional understanding of young readers. But disregard for the true nature and demands of traditions — the wisdom of the ages and what has worked over time — generally results in lesser works which diminish rather than enrich children's life experiences.

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The Place of History

Zack. William Bell. Doubleday Canada, 1998. 169 pp. $14.95 paper. ISBN 0-385-25711-2. ***The Last Safe House***. Barbara Greenwood. Illus. Heather Collins. Kids Can, 1998. 120 pp. $14.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-509-3. ***Tubman: Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad***. Rosemary Sadlier. Umbrella, 1997. 96 pp. ISBN 1-895642-17-5. ***Mary Ann Shadd: Publisher, Editor, Teacher, Lawyer, Suffragette***. Rosemary Sadlier. Umbrella, 1995. 80 pp. ISBN 1-895642-16-7.

The spring of 1999 was the time of Kosovo, cruise missiles, refugee camps, Littleton, Colorado, gun control, and Tabor, Alberta. Just over two hundred years of mass media saturation has given us a daily redefinition of the new as an ongoing renewal of something we still wish to call "history." For all of the trauma of the present, the triumph of a notion of time as history generates a counterforce of active forgetting that utilizes the shock of the new as way of forgetting yesterday's concerns. The question of history for an information society becomes a crisis of excess: there is too much in the news *today* for us to bother with memory. The return to basics movement in Ontario's schools implies this: forget media studies and history; science and math are all that matters.

All four books here have something to do with the history of slavery in North America and make claims that history is a topic of some importance. Rosemary Sadlier's two books, *Tubman* and *Mary Ann Shadd*, operate from her perspective as President of the Ontario Black History Society. The two women who are her subjects have heroic status — leaders, revolutionar-

ies, visionaries, authors of change — but their individual stories are not given priority over larger patterns of change and resistance that frame the entire experience of African Americans in the New World. Harriet Tubman was a conductor on the Underground Railroad, and Sadlier understands that the meaning of Tubman's life for younger readers will depend on their knowledge of all the conditions surrounding the secret passage of African-American slaves northward to freedom. The fact of slavery is represented visually in the book through maps that spatialize historical time into borders, territories, passages, and migrations.

Place has returned as an object of interest for historical thought in order that the relentless onslaught of time as history might be contained by relative calm of spatiality. During the 1850s, Harriet Tubman's resistance to slavery was based in St. Catharines, Ontario, which experienced an economic boom after the Welland Canal was opened in 1829. Sadlier's broad historical interests lead her towards many fascinating digressions concerning the geopolitics of the Niagara Peninsula. Readers also learn that Tubman and other travellers along the Underground Railroad did not exactly find freedom north of the border: "Advertisements in the St. Catharines *Standard* required teachers with at least a third-class standing qualification for the Coloured School, established in 1856, while White students would be taught by teachers with no less that second or first class standing." Sadlier concludes her book with a consideration of Tubman's return to the United States, a chronology of significant events, and a long consideration of the Tubman genealogy in both its Canadian and American branches. Familial ties suggest the material legacy of Tubman and a series of complex linkages that operate across the Canada-US border.

Though not as famous as Harriet Tubman, who was involved in the planning of John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry and in carrying out the Combahee River raid of 1863, Mary Ann Shadd is also an African-American hero. As a writer and journalist, Shadd was involved early on with the *Voice of the Fugitive* newspaper, founded in Windsor, Ontario, to promote "the abolition of slavery, emigration from the United States to Canada, temperance and the education of Blacks." Readers of Sadlier's book learn of all the politics behind the publication of the *Voice of the Fugitive*, the establishment of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada in 1851, and the rise and fall of Black communities in Ontario, such as the Dawn Settlement near Chatham, once the home of Josiah Henson, Harriet Beecher Stowe's main source for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Canada's involvement with resistance to slavery is the topic of Barbara Greenwood's *The Last Safe House*. As a collection of fiction and historiography, the book hints at suggestions that many historians have made concerning the limitations of objective history. Clearly, when history is aimed at children, the dry objectivity of dates, treaties, elections, economic change, and national identity is something to avoid. For contemporary historical consciousness, the "how" of representation reaches a crisis with what

is essentially (and ethically) unimaginable: violence, slavery, genocide. Greenwood and her illustrator, Heather Collins, generally steer a wide course around horror; when they don't, such as in the illustration of a fifteen-year-old boy being whipped, readers may question the whole enterprise. While the desire to educate here is admirable — day-to-day life on the plantation is well represented — an interlude on how a white child might make gingerbread cookies is highly insulting to those of us who remember how widely racist stereotypes circulated in pre-Civil Rights North America. An interlude that is valuable, however, involves a brief workshop in effective techniques of oral storytelling.

In reading *The Last Safe House* and William Bell's *Zack*, I'm left unsettled by an underlying assumption that history must be edited for children, that we as Canadians need refuge in the illusion that Canada was a safe haven from the racism of antebellum America. In *Zack*, the son of a famous African American Blues singer and a White, Jewish father comes to terms with both his racial identity and collective, African-American past while living in Fergus, Ontario. Although most readers won't feel for a minute that William Bell has got under Zack's skin, the paint-by-numbers feel of fiction for young readers carries Zack through so many landscapes of cultural politics that we can't help but be interested in Zack's journey. History here asserts itself as archaeology when Zack discovers a box of artifacts once owned by Richard Pierpoint, an African-American veteran of British military action during the Revolutionary War and the war of 1812. Zack's history essay on Pierpont is one the book's strongest passages.

Bell has skill as a writer, especially during a scene where Zack is roughed up by US State Troopers while on a journey to Natchez, Mississippi, to visit his mother's father. The reason why Zack's mother shuns her father — won't even speak of him — is unclear until Zack the detective discovers that it is because after years and years of Southern racism, he dares to dislike Whites. Even after Zack has been exposed to Mississippi racism, he completely rejects this kind and hospitable man. The racism in Fergus is conveniently displaced onto a girl who is visiting from Detroit; Zack's beautiful blond girlfriend suggests that love and acceptance of African-Canadians is the norm of the North. While William Bell has filled his novel with historical specificity, he seems unable to conceive of how Zack is able to sing the Blues. The Great Migration from Mississippi north to Chicago was an above ground railway, but it did not eliminate the racist legacies of slavery. I do not believe that Zack could possibly reject his grandfather, because if as historical beings history doesn't mean *everything* to us, then it means nothing.

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Historical Testimonies of Aztec Civilization and the Conquest of Mexico

Lost Temple of the Aztecs. Shelley Tanaka. Illus. Greg Ruhl. Scholastic/Madison, 1998. 48 pp. $21.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-12478-1. ***What the Aztecs Told Me.*** ISBN 0-88899-306-4 paper, 0-88899-305-6 cloth. ***Broken Shields.*** ISBN 0-88800-304-8 paper, 0-88899-303-X cloth. Both books: text and design by Krystyna Libura, Claudia Burr and Maria Cristina Urrutia. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1997. 32 pp. $15.95, $6.95 cloth, paper.

These three books effectively complement each other in vibrant depictions of the events leading up to the arrival of Hernán Cortés in 1519 and the Spanish conquest of the great Aztec city of Tenochtitlán. *Lost Temple of the Aztecs* provides an amazingly in-depth and engrossing account of the clash of two cultures and world-views, by weaving together the historical testimonies recorded by Bernardino de Sahagún in the Florentine Codex: *General History of the Things of New Spain* with a variety of indigenous accounts recorded in renowned histories of this period. The other two books are actual adapted excerpts of Sahagún's account made clear to young readers by the testimonial style of the opening lines: "I, Bernardino de Sahagún, Spanish friar, came to Mexico in the sixteenth century as a missionary. For many years I

Illustration from ***What the Aztecs Told Me***

met with the elders of the people who knew the language, beliefs and customs of their land. I have written down what they told me, so you could know how they lived before the Spaniards came" (*What the Aztecs Told Me*). *Broken Shields* opens with the testimonial lament of the defeated Aztecs: "Let

us sing our grief, let us lament our fate so that no one will ever forget what our people have suffered, when they came, when they subjugated us, there in Tenochtitlan, they the Spaniards."

Together these two translations of the original Mexican children's books published by Tecolote, bring alive the well-selected excerpts from the chronicles, wonderfully illustrated with good quality reproductions of paintings taken from the original codex. The two Groundwood books can be all the better appreciated after reading *Lost Temple of the Aztecs*, which contextualizes and explains such topics as human sacrifice, religious beliefs, contrasting warfare strategies, and the effects of the smallpox epidemic on the Native American population.

Children interested in art will be especially fascinated by the codex paintings representing diverse aspects of both the daily life of the Aztecs and the special ceremonial practices depicted on the first pages of *What the Aztecs Told Me*. While the subject of human sacrifice did dominate much of the Spaniards' accounts of Aztec civilization, dedicating the first six pages of the book to this controversial practice gives the unfortunate impression of a sensationalistic approach to representing the Aztecs as the incomprehensible other, despite the fact that Sahagún's mission was to record their points of view. This could have been avoided by simply reorganizing the material so that the subject of sacrifice would still retain its significance, but would be integrated within a wider cultural context introduced by the pages depicting the quotidian life of the people, their knowledge of nature, medicine, astronomy, and the flora and fauna of Central Mexico. This criticism, however, only pertains to a first reading of the book, which given its fascinating story and aesthetic impact will not be the last. Again, young readers can refer to *Lost Temple of the Aztecs* for a discussion of human sacrifice that explains the belief system behind this practice, while also offering the more ideologically-oriented interpretation that "these sacrifice ceremonies were intended to show people just how powerful the Aztecs were" (28). The uninterpreted accounts of Sahagún complement the multifaceted, mosaic structure of *Lost Temple of the Aztecs* in which continuum, albeit a problematic one, bridges the years 1519-1520 and 1978 when construction of the Mexico City subway unearthed the Great Temple.

Read together, these three books implicitly configure the dynamics of representing self and other in which an uncanny mirroring effects the identifications of the "I" (eye) with civilization, and the other with barbarism. While the Spaniards were said to be horrified at the sight of the bloodstained temples where Aztec priests tore out their victims' hearts, the Aztec account of how the Spaniards ransacked the Feast of the gods, cutting off the drummers' hands and heads, represents the Spaniards as the godless barbarians (*Broken Shields* unpag., *Lost Temple of the Aztecs* 30). The irony of not recognizing in the Spaniards the same imperialistic objectives that motivated Moctezuma closes *Lost Temple of the Aztecs*: "They didn't realize that the Spaniards were warriors like themselves who had come to the New World to

gain riches and glory for their country and their church ... But for the Aztecs the Spanish victory meant much more than defeat in war. It meant the loss of their entire civilization" (46). This last sentence overstates the loss, for just as Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, chief archaeologist of Aztec sites and consultant for this book, is the direct descendant of the emperor, many other Mexicans are the descendants of the Aztecs, whose culture — more enduring and pervasive than the concept of "civilization" — was not suddenly lost in battle. *Lost Temple of the Aztecs* is itself a rich testimony of cultural memory and metamorphosis, presented in a highly integrative format combining direct testimony, thoughtful interpretation, paintings, and artifacts that will bring alive the Aztec heritage for young readers.

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Our Best Friends/Ourselves: Together With Animals

52 Days By Camel: My Sahara Adventure. Lawrie Raskin with Debora Pearson. Annick, 1998. 86 pp. $14.95, $24.95, paper, cloth. ISBN 1-55037-518-0, 1-55037-519-9. ***Animal Senses: How Animals See, Hear, Taste, Smell and Feel.*** Pamela Hickman. Illus. Pat Stephens. Kids Can, 1998. 40 pp. $14.95. ISBN 1-55074-423-2. ***Canadian Endangered Species.*** Colleayn O. Mastin. Illus. Jan Sovak. Grasshopper Books, 1995. 31 pp. $10.95, $18.95, paper, cloth. ISBN 1-895910-09-9, 1-895910-08-0. ***Giraffes.*** Bobbie Kalman and Greg Nickles. Crabtree, 1997. 32 pp. ISBN 0-86505-641-2, 0-86505-741-9, cloth, paperback. ***In Like A Lion.*** Julie Lawson. Illus. Yolaine Lefebvre. North Winds, 1998. 30 pp. $17.99. ISBN 0-590-24938-X. ***On Safari.*** Tessa Paul. Crabtree, 1998. 32 pages. ISBN 0-86505-589-0, 0-86505-597-1, cloth, paperback. ***Safari.*** Robert Bateman. Illus. Robert Bateman. Penguin Canada/Madison, 1998. Unpag. ISBN 0-670-87970-3. ***Wild Talk: How Animals Talk To Each Other.*** Marilyn Baillie. Illus. Romi Caron. Owl Books, 1996. 32 pp. $6.95, $17.95, paper, cloth. ISBN 1-895688-55-8, 1-895688-54-X.

This group of eight books, each one sporting an animal-related title, can be divided into three distinct categories. The first includes fives volumes dealing with a number of different species. In the second group containing two books, the author writes about a single species or one particular animal. Finally, the last category with one remaining volume barely deals with animals at all.

Animal Senses, Wild Talk: How Animals Talk to Each Other and *Canadian Endangered Species* form a subgroup of the first category. Each author, taking a particular perspective, presents valuable information about different animals. Pamela Hickman writes *Animal Senses* for readers from seven to eleven years of age to introduce them to the ways animals sense their environment. She offers them ways to investigate through the manipulation of their own sensory perceptions. In so doing she both appeals to and stimulates scientific and intellectual curiosity. Each of the five senses is discussed with details about various species, their sensory organs and how those organs give them special capabilities. We learn about the frog's capacity to see all around without head motion and about the giant squid who has the largest eyes of any creature, allowing for excellent underwater vision. Readers are encouraged to find their own field of vision with instructions for doing so. Other methods are presented, enabling readers to investigate how a hawk or insects see, how to test binocular vision and what it would mean to see as a nocturnal being. Although there are numerous books available dealing with sensory perception, what makes this particular volume especially valuable is the author's skill in helping readers relate directly to the facts she presents. This reviewer was impressed by her explanation of "Losing Touch." She writes that getting used to things allows animals to focus on new feelings. They will not remain distracted by feelings that persist. Using the parallel with how we quickly "forget" the clothes we put on is an excellent idea. In her final section, "Surprising Senses," Hickman reminds us that certain of our animal friends are capable of sensing things and in ways that far outstretch human capabilities. Humans have had to invent high-tech machines to help them do things for which some animals have a natural ability. In this volume, which encourages direct, scientific investigation of the questions and problems at hand, Pat Stephens's clear illustrations are informative and helpful.

In *Wild Talk: How Animals Talk to Each Other,* Marilyn Baillie orients readers by reminding them of different forms of human communication. Then she lists a number of ways various other species of animals or insects communicate with one another in order to achieve similar results. Each chapter or section of the book which follows examines in greater detail one of these methods and its apparent motivation and goals. Baillie chooses from a vast palette and the resulting picture is one of great variety. She includes the graceful mating dance of the Japanese crane and the strong scented territorial markings left by ring-tailed lemurs. She explains how a hungry female firefly can fool another kind of male firefly by purposefully blinking his special mating signal. When the amorous insect flies to her, he will be surprised to find he is her dinner, not her partner. The author also discusses some of the mysteries of animal communication, explaining that humans have not been able to discover why whales sing. There is a concluding "Who's Who" of each animal in the main body of the text, telling where these animals live, their size and some other physical characteristics. The final page offers a summarizing quiz, "Who am I," where readers are given hints and

Illustration from ***On Safari***

must discern to which species each question refers. Children will enjoy this challenge.

Colleayn O. Mastin's *Canadian Endangered Species* is an informative and important volume. Each section begins with an eight-line two-verse poem summarizing the situation and the problem. There then follows a more extensive prose treatment explaining how the animal once thrived, how humans have disturbed the natural balance and the resulting endangered status of the particular species. A beautiful illustration by Jan Sovak accompanies each entry. Mastin tells the sad story of the extirpated swift fox, extinct in Canada due to the human population's careless disregard for this lovely small creature's needs. Vancouver Island marmots, barely three hundred of whom remain, are threatened by logging developments and ski resorts which are gradually taking over this animal's habitat. Each entry emphasizes the precarious position of these species due to destructive and careless human behaviour. We use poisons and pesticides, rob or otherwise disturb nesting sites, hunt, cause chemical and noise pollution and deadly oil spills. This book conveys important information to young readers. An incorrectly placed comma and a typographical error reveal some slight problem with proofreading.

Two books, *Safari* by Robert Bateman and *On Safari* by Tessa Paul, comprise the second subgroup of the first category. *Safari* is Bateman's first book for children. He presents his fascination with Africa as a fascination for African animals. His tableaux of rhinos, gorillas, zebras, lions, leopards and others are accompanied by information about each, often with the author's personal note or perspective. This reader would have preferred a more extensive textual treatment, but brevity has a certain value and Bateman's

emphasis is clearly that of an artist and a conservationist. His concluding words, an appeal for nature's world and its preservation, are of prime importance. Tessa Paul's *On Safari* includes more information about each animal than does Bateman's book, but this reviewer would still consider the contents rather sparse. In this age of public and educational television where in-depth nature programs are frequently aired, children are primed and able to absorb more from books. *On Safari* includes the distinctive prints of each animal and illustrations that depict clearly and attractively various aspects of the particular animal's behaviour. A useful index and glossary are also included.

The second category, books about a single animal or species, includes *In Like a Lion* by Julie Lawson and artist Yolaine Lefebvre. This beautifully-illustrated volume is crafted for ages five to seven years. The story it tells is based upon the actual occurrence of a cougar's visit to the Empress Hotel in Victoria, BC. The illustrator, employing the wet-on-wet technique of dropping watercolours on soaking wet paper and letting them flow and blend freely, creates hide-and-seek illustrations. She invites readers to search for the hidden cougar. Lawson's story stresses the unique cougar qualities, the special privilege of this remarkable sighting and visit and the respectful, humane manner in which the conservationists ensured that the cougar's needs were met. The story is told in the first person from the point of view of a fictional child of a conservationist. This perspective allows the author to remain in touch with a child's reactions to and involvement with this intriguing, engaging and quite dramatic series of events.

In *Giraffes*, Bobbie Kalman and Greg Nickles present their material in what is generally an orderly, absorbable manner. At times they offer children ways to understand the information by relating it to themselves or to familiar objects. The photography and art work used reinforce the giraffe's amazing qualities. There are, however, several problems with this volume. The system of words included in the "Words to Know" has not been carefully planned. Did the authors/editor intend that those included should be presented in bold in the body of the text? Some are, but some are not. Some words that are printed in bold in the text are not included in "Words to Know." This is puzzling. A game on pages sixteen and seventeen is based on a relatively small map of Africa printed with numbers and icons for the type of terrain. Drawings of nine subspecies of giraffes are also given and readers are to match the number of the giraffe to the number on the map in order to identify each one's habitat. This reader found the exercise somewhat cramped and too busy for comfort.

Finally, Lawrie Raskin's *52 Days by Camel: My Sahara Adventure* is really not about camels. The title refers to a sign indicating the number of days required to travel to Timbuktu by camel. Raskin is in love with the Sahara. He is fascinated by all the ancient and exotic aspects of desert culture, and his excitement is infectious. Nevertheless, this love affair means he

Illustration from
In Like a Lion

brings little critical perspective to what he writes. No mention is made of the cruelty involved in weighing down donkeys as beasts of burden: rather we are told how intriguing are the ancient streets of Fez, built at a time when motorized vehicles were not even imagined. Similarly, an interesting photograph of men working in a tannery does not include any comment on the practice of turning animal skins into leather. What about women? Here, too, Raskin's critical faculties are muted. He appears to be excusing the lack of gender equality and the proprietary attitude toward wives. Perhaps his vision has been clouded by his cultural appreciation. As he relates his travels to Fez, Marrakesh, Timbuktu, and the salt mines of Taoudenni, he tells readers many surprising facts about the dangers of desert weather conditions, the value and history of salt, and various aspects of nomad life. The photography is often breathtaking, inviting readers to share in the excitement the author experiences in his adventures. He does tell us a few highly informative facts about camels, but for someone who himself owns over 400 of them, one would hope for more. Raskin's editor is clearly comfortable with split infinitives and does not object to ending a sentence with a preposition or to excessive use of exclamation points. In conclusion, desert enthusiasts will be keen; animal enthusiasts not so.

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Now That You Have Asked, I Will Tell You

Funny You Should Ask. Marg Meikle. Illus. Tina Holdcroft. Scholastic Canada, 1998. 156 pp. $6.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-12489-7.

Having made a career of answering wacky questions on CBC Radio's Gabereau show, Marg Meikle appears to be making a career of answering them in books as well. *Funny You Should Ask* follows in the footsteps of two previous titles, *Dear Answer Lady* and *Return of the Answer Lady*.

Covering sixteen topics from animals, the body, clothing, and cool stuff, to time, useful information and weird words and phrases, there are burning questions that beg answering. Ever wonder where one goes to the bathroom in an igloo? Look no further. Why can't you tickle yourself? Marg has come up with the answer. Have you been told you are one brick short of a load? Are you curious about where the yo-yo came from? Hankering to understand why men's and women's shirts button on opposite sides? If so, your search has ended here. If deeper understanding is the focus, forget it. I was left with more questions of how one goes to the bathroom in an igloo. Perhaps another book?

What else are you dying to know? Is the book readable? Yes, but it requires a sophisticated reading level. The answers are written in a friendly and irreverent style — in answer to "Did Sir Isaac Newton really get hit on the head by an apple?" she quips, "This is a question of utmost gravity." And it is ripe with opportunity for bad jokes. But we will get to the core of the matter. Some answers include added features. After the answer regarding real rules on breaking apart a wishbone for good luck, the following highlighted information appears, *"Whoever wins the wishbone pull definitely gets a lucky break which is where that expression comes from."* In addition, websites on duct tape and marbles are included for inquiring minds who need to know more.

Illustration from ***Funny You Should Ask***

What *Funny You Should Ask* really lacks is an index. Unlike an encyclopedia whose structure insures success in locating information, finding an answer in this work is hit and miss. The Table of Contents is not helpful unless the question is the leading question, but even that is misleading. Those listed are actually heading pages with clever drawings by Tina Holdcroft. A further search is still in order. As well, deciphering the code under which a question is classified is frustrating. My search for marbles took a while — did I see it under Sports, Odds and Ends, Science, or where? The book would have been better served listing the questions as its organizational tool. Thank heavens the book is only 156 pages!

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Critical Approaches to Children's Literature

Children's Literature Comes of Age: Towards a New Aesthetic. Maria Nikolajeva. (Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, v. 1816; Children's Literature and Culture, v. 1.) Garland Publishing, 1995. 239 pp. $35.00 (US) cloth. ISBN 0-8153-1556-2. ***Rediscoveries in Children's Literature.*** Suzanne Rahn. (Garland Reference Library of Social Science, v. 862; Children's Literature and Culture, v. 2). Garland Publishing, 1995. 185 pp. $35.00 (US) cloth. ISBN 0-8153-0930-9.

As introduced by its general editor Jack Zipes, the Children's Literature and Culture Series is "international in scope and [is] intended to encourage innovative research in children's literature with a focus on interdisciplinary methodology" (1: xii). The first two volumes admirably display these characteristics and herald a collection of valuable, thought-provoking works which will certainly help promote scholarly interpretation and greater appreciation of children's literature and its significance throughout a literate person's entire life. Nikolajeva would have us consider children's literature directly as an art form, that is *as literature,* by de-emphasizing the traditional relations to pedagogics and submitting the works to the same critical approaches and theoretical gazes assumed towards other categories of literature. Rahn revisits particular forms, specific authors and their works which, having seemingly failed the test of time and been discarded or disregarded, yet are argued to be worthy of contemporary critical attention from adults and reading by today's children.

In *Children's Literature Comes of Age*, Nikolajeva strives towards a contemporary theoretical analysis using a model she calls historical poetics and a method rooted in semiotics. Her focus is on inherent features of the texts — that is, on "tendencies, regularities and their possible explanations" (4). Her study opens with an interesting discussion of world literature for children versus national literatures. The works assume a noteworthy and illuminating perspective from the outset, countering the isolationism so typical of much English-language criticism, especially American scholarship, through her tendency to emphasize European works, especially the Swedish and Russian ones the author knows best. She raises many questions regarding cultural relativity and translatability of children's books, the unpredictable rejection or celebration of some of one culture's children's books by another before she presents in the second chapter an argument for children's literature as a canonical art form. This approach enables her to devote the third chapter to reviewing the history of children's literature from a semiotic perspective. This overview leads to her proposing in Chapter Four a periodization (or general stages of development) which is seemingly applicable to all countries and language areas, namely: (1) adaptation of existing adult literature and of folklore for children, (2) didactic, educational stories written directly for children, (3) establishment of children's literature as a literary system with different genres and modes, and (4) polyphonic, or multivoiced children's literature. Chapter Five consists of a discussion of new structures within children's books; it follows the notion of the chronotype developed by Bakhtin and applied here to a range of works. Analyses of "Intertextuality in Children's Literature" and "Metafiction in Children's Literature" comprise the final two chapters, demonstrating the contemporary evolution of children's literature "towards complexity and sophistication on all narrative levels" (207). The author concludes with a disclaimer, noting the as-yet limited quantity of "literary" children's literature. She points to a movement of the literature as a whole towards mainstream literature, and the consequent call upon grownups who provide children with books to keep pace with the changes. It is, she concludes, through ensuring comparable rather than special treatment for the field that children's literature can be duly appreciated and its importance within our global cultural legacy be fully recognized.

Rediscoveries in Children's Literature commences from Rahn's recognition that serious critical analysis has remained restricted to three groups of children's books: the undisputed "classics"; works by a few contemporary authors, destined to become classics; and largely maligned formula fiction. Most simply "'good books' — books of high quality, distinct individuality, and staying power" (2:xiv) — were ignored, and children's literature as an academic field of study narrowed in scope. In nine highly effective essays, Rahn seeks to redress this situation, broadening our perspective on what qualifies as literature for analysis and what makes any given book worthy.

One particular measure she explores to good effect is the degree to

which works have endured with their readers, though not necessarily with critics. Her consideration of the Betsy-Tacy stories by Maud Hart Lovelace reveals such an enduring attachment to this series among adult women sufficient to found a Betsy-Tacy Society (1990) and support a newsletter ever since. Her analysis of the toy theatre reveals such impact of this popular amusement that Winston Churchill may have unconsciously borrowed from his favourite toy theatre play in constructing his famous 1940 "we shall never surrender" speech (36).

Rahn explores the fairy tales of Frank Stockton, revealing the challenges within them for adults as well as children; recaptures the significance of the toy theatre as a form of influential literature for the young; presents the complexities involved in Selma Lagerlof's creation of the Nils books and in the multiple levels of their contemporary appreciation. She also offers insight into the very modern nature of older works, such as Dorothy Canfield's Made-to-Order stories which may have appeared in the first quarter of the century but are immediately current in promoting personal empowerment among children. Similarly Rahn shows how Florence Crannell Means's popular ethnic literature for the young was distinguished by its decidedly humanistic vision when her many books appeared over forty years ago; and today some are exceptional in that they remain well worth reading for more than mere historical significance. Rahn also interprets the social and psychological significance of one distinctive character-type, the cat-child central figures in works by Beverly Cleary and Ursula Moray Williams, and focuses her critical attention on appreciating one particular — and seriously maligned — work, *Fungus the Bogeyman* by Raymond Briggs. She concludes her illuminating and engaging work with a consideration of Diana Wynne Jones's revolutionary fantasy as a means whereby today's children can make sense of the unpredictable, ever-changing contemporary world. In sum, her critiques show just how much more there is than first meets the eye in all the works she considers — hidden treasure which she maintains, "We should not rest content until we have it all" (178).

Both works are well worth close and repeated reading, and each will undoubtedly stimulate further delving into the extended and valuable listings provided of primary as well as secondary sources. Rahn's is the more fully realized work, while Nikolajeva's broad-ranging treatise is, in many ways, exploratory as well as experimental, and certainly challenging throughout. Rahn's style is compelling and masterful: she writes with forthright lucidity, deftly weaving her argument by invoking enough of the texts to create an engaging storyline through which she fashions and supports her literary, social, and historical insights. It is much harder to read Nikolajeva's work, and not only because the print font is considerably smaller. English is not Nikolajeva's first language as is evident in the numerous problems of expression and apparent direct translations which create a decided awkwardness, understandable yet especially unfortunate in a theoretical and potentially contentious work. Her argument is certainly of such significance

as to have commanded thorough editing to achieve its maximum impact. It is, however, replete with broad generalizations and essentialisms. The scope of this study, especially its international perspective, and the limits of a single, average-sized volume necessitate brevity in references, but comments such as that Disney films are "typical American interpretations of European texts" (1:26), or that in "Japan or among Australian Aborigines ... most art is created within predetermined rules" (51) are neither felicitous nor constructive, let alone true. One such statement reveals the definite limitations of Nikolajeva's work as cultural scholarship, namely that "There is little in the *Anne of Green Gables* series that makes the books specifically Canadian" (22). This comment demonstrates a severe lack of knowledge of Canada and Canadianness, for Montgomery's works are profoundly Canadian as variously indicated by Rubio and Waterston and throughout the 1996 conference on L.M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture at the University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown, PEI. A reader necessarily challenges some of the many such statements, presented as authoritative judgments, when they are made in his/her area of expertise, and comes to doubt other aspects in what is in many respects a ground-breaking analysis. Nikolajeva's various comments about folk tradition, especially folktales, strike me just this way, as she fails to appreciate accepted knowledge within the field, e.g., distinctions between mutable oral tales and literary established versions. Still, her study is an impressive and valuable piece of scholarship.

It is high-calibre works such as these two volumes which are needed in abundance to provoke further study that will, in turn, drive forward scholarly enquiry into children's literature. The field is richer as an academic enterprise when its practitioners are challenged to think more deeply and appreciate more fully, but it is the works themselves that will reap even greater benefit from quantitative and qualitative advancements in criticism. We owe that to tomorrow's children.

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The Powerful Pleasure of a Performer of Poems

Teaching to Wonder: Responding to Poetry in the Secondary Classroom. Carl Leggo. Pacific Educational P, 1997. 144 pp. $19.95 paper. ISBN 1-895766-31-1.

Poet, professor, teacher, with two master's degrees and a doctorate "all sig-

nificantly informed by deconstruction" (74), Carl Leggo's pedagogical poetic/prose scholarship is in itself a work of art. Thoughtfully and skilfully crafted, Leggo's text coherently suggests devices we can use to become "enthusiastic performers of poetry" (12). Chapter one offers the promise that a learned poet will answer the age-old question "What is a poem?" and then surprises us by solving problems we may have encountered with this genre.

In a deceptively simple structure of a Forward and Afterword sandwiching five chapters about his modern approach to poetry, Leggo compresses a world of wisdom for those open to exploring. He interweaves research and scholarly literature in support of his ideas with ease and logically deconstructs opposing arguments en route to reconstructing them in his reader-response approach, illustrated with examples and activities. In the end, he returns to where he began, extending the invitation to continue pursuing what is a poem and offering a poetic response followed by a rich variety of anthologies to help us continue the performance-in-progress.

To read Leggo is to relish the domain of a master craftsman of the English language. Unintelligibility equalling profundity is happily not a criticism anyone could level against this text. It is thoroughly readable. His words, like Donne's, will no doubt "continue to exercise their power in the lives of readers, generation after generation" (14).

While Leggo is the first to defer closing down a poem or to preclude alternative readings, he seems to succeed only partially in avoiding closure in his presentation of cultural-criticism, which by its very nature can all too easily become exclusive. He elaborates only five perspectives which, by virtue of selection, assume superiority and, not surprisingly, become privileged over the multitude of equally deserving others. Such is the dilemma of diversity An unsuspecting, perhaps uninformed, reader may not be aware of how easily privileging occurs. Reference to the multitude of other paradigmatic choices could help ensure that readers understand the endless possibilities here.

Rarely do we revel in a pedagogical text but some, like this one, are a must in our libraries. As much about good teaching as responding to poems, this book opens new vistas of teaching, reading, writing and appreciating poetry. Alone, or with a companion video, it can revolutionize the teaching/performing of poetry. Multitudes of learners deserve direct access to Leggo's powerful voice, perhaps through a parallel volume addressed directly to secondary students.

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Mini Reviews

We Don't Have To Be Friends. Grant Nolin. Tree Frog Press, 1995. 158 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88967-071-4.

In this fast-paced novel a teenaged girl, Bonnie, lands what sounds like a peach of a summer job, working as a housekeeper for a movie star of about her own age, while a film is being shot in Canmore, her own town. But the young star, Ashleigh, is moody and difficult and a disappointment to Bonnie, who had hoped to become her friend, or at least to rub shoulders with her Hollywood glamour. Nolin is a fairly graceful writer, and shows a certain amount of perceptiveness in his characterization. But the plot of this novel is predictable from beginning to end and reads like a movie-of-the-week: you don't mind it so much at the time but afterwards you wish you'd gone for a long walk instead. Yes, the two girls dislike each other intensely at first. Yes, they slowly learn about each others' lives and problems. Yes, they both grow up somewhat, and yes, they end up fast friends. Yawn. Time to turn off the TV.

Stars. Eric Walters. Stoddart, 1996. 315 pp. $6.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7447-0.

I have one really big question to ask about this book: where is the sex? Quite seriously, in a book about eight teenaged boys and two grown men on an adventure/survival trip in the wilderness, no one even mentions sex, or girls, or even the female half of the race? Not even once? It just ain't natural.

The book is not *about* sex, of course. And it doesn't have to be. It is about a young car thief , Joseph, who with seven other young offenders is sent off on a wilderness trip with two social workers, Gord and Stan. The program that sends them on this journey is called S.T.A.R.S.: Striving Through Adventure to develop Responsibility and Success. The acronym basically summarizes the book. That is exactly what happens. Troubled boy Joseph, through portages and teamwork and the support of father-figure Gord, survives the wilderness and decides he will mend his ways and survive in life, too. But the writing in this book is so wooden and its characters, especially Gord and Stan, so much like cardboard-cutouts of real people, that I'm afraid I didn't believe a word of it. Of course difficult kids can grow into reasonably sane and successful people; I'm sure it happens all the time. But I'm also sure it doesn't happen like this. Just as real boys have sex, if not in their lives, at least on their minds, almost all the time, so genuine fictional characters are individuals who muddle through, not die-cast paper people who move unerringly from problem to solution in a two-dimensional world.

Melody Collins is author of a young adult novel, ***The Magic Within.***

Illustration from ***A Sled Dog for Moshi***

A Sled Dog for Moshi. Jeanne Bushey. Illus. Germaine Arnaktauyok. Hyperion, 1994. Unpag. $14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920534-85-6.

A Sled Dog for Moshi is more than just a story about an Inuit girl's longing for a pet; it is a tribute to sharing, trust, and the importance of friendship. With the aid of Arnaktauyok's cool pastels, Bushey lulls us into Moshi's Arctic, a world where we cannot help but notice "the changing shadows on the ice made by small clouds drifting across the sun." Once here, we meet Moshi, who devalues her family's working sled dogs after she witnesses the fancy tricks done by the small white terrier brought from New York by her new friend Jessica. When one of these sled dogs saves the girls in a sudden spring storm, Moshi decides that usefulness is more valuable than fanciness. Yet for all its clarity of voice, Bushey's prose carries one central flaw. In sharp opposition to the genuine and unromantic portrait of Inuit life, Moshi's companion — Jessica, a Caucasian city-slicker fresh from New York — comes across as wholly one-dimensional, leaving us to wonder whether her cultural heritage extends any further than owning a small white terrier that can do tricks. This discrepancy is most likely a testimony to the book's informational intent — there is, for instance, a glossary at the end that defines terms associated with Inuit experience. While Jessica's lack of substance does not ruin an otherwise purposeful book, the imbalance between the two girls at times tends to reinforce the notion that "culture" is something that belongs only to those who are different from the mainstream.

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The Haunting of Drang Island. Arthur G. Slade. Illus. Ljuba Levstek. Orca, 1999. 160 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-111-4.

If *The Haunting of Drang Island* were ever to hit the screen it would surely be a b-movie. With a queasy blend of clichés, shallow characterizations, and Norse myths oddly displaced to the coast of British Columbia, Slade's boy-meets-girl adventure tale comes up dry. Perhaps what is most unfortunate is that the book — with its back cover promise of blending real and invented worlds — sounds so inviting. Even though Slade has done his homework on Icelandic legends and myth, his digressions into these realms often read like a facts sheet, an intrusion which not only fractures the plot but diminishes any chance of the eeriness he seems to be trying so hard to evoke. We learn, in spurts, that the girl has run away from her parents, and that the boy has been labelled by his father as lacking responsibility. While these attempts at characterization carry the potential of deepening the plot, in the end they are left ultimately undeveloped. Instead of encouraging our protagonists along, we end up searching for reasons why they shouldn't be eaten up by the various beasts and ghouls who, at least, find them so appealing.

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