

Cruel Guardians' — is a naive device, reminiscent of Emily Carr's *The book of small*, although Lim has nothing of Carr's inventive and lively metaphor. Nevertheless, despite the unpolished sentences, the truth of human experience shines through to warm the reader. It is what makes the difference between Lim's book and Hagbrink's. Both are accounts of things distant, one in time, one in place; both are full of the potential of strange matters to engage our attention, but one, drawing on his own childhood, manages to bring his scenes the other, lacking that invaluable asset, has nothing to substitute for it.

Laughter and a sense of humour are, Lim asserts, what have enabled the Chinese to survive, and this is borne out by the hundred black and white marginal drawings which fill his pages. Their spontaneous, comic liveliness is similar to that of Edward Lear and just as self-deprecating. Full of vitality, they dance off the pages with subtlety, irony or the author's own gloss on the inadequacy of the words. These quick sketches, in a variety of styles, are the most natural and exuberant accompaniment to Lim's stories. Beside them the colour plates seem stiffish, formal; they are quite beautiful where they depict something eloquently Chinese, such as the Opera or an elegant kite, but inevitably less successful where they compete with the sketches in depicting everyday life. *West Coast Chinese boy* is a sensitive addition to the growing number of Canadian books which capture, in word and picture, that near yet all too distant past in which so many unique Canadian childhoods lie buried.

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QUIET STRENGTH: BARBARA SMUCKER'S *AMISH ADVENTURE*

Amish adventure, Barbara Smucker. Illus. Caroline Price. Clarke, Irwin, 1983. 144 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-7720-1391-8.

"What's that orange sign? It's moving" yells Jack Turner to twelve-year-old Ian MacDonald. The triangle is on the back of the Amish buggy to caution drivers to slow down, but Turner, going much too fast in a rain storm, cannot stop. He hits the buggy, kills the horse, Star, and cripples the driver, Ezra Bender. Ian MacDonald's Amish adventure begins.

The action and suspense of this early scene in Barbara Smucker's new novel *Amish Adventure* are soon over, but throughout the book Ian continues to respond to the question which was thrown out in the heat of the moment. By living on an Amish farm for two months he begins to "adjust his eyes to a dif-

ferent way of living" [p. 70] — the Amish way of life first signalled to him by that orange triangle in the moment of crisis. He learns about himself, also, as the Amish way helps him to put his own life into perspective. As Ian learns, so does the reader: the Amish culture is alive and moving — but moving at a slower pace than Canadian culture in this twentieth century.

In *Amish Adventure* Mrs. Smucker stimulates our interest in another way of life, as she stimulated it earlier in *Underground to Canada* and *Days of terror*. She stimulates also strong emotional responses. This is a fine book: suspenseful, tough, and compassionate all at once.

I find *Amish Adventure* to be Mrs. Smucker's most skilfully presented book to date. She exercises good control, for the most part, over her structure: she juxtaposes scenes and setting to good effect (contrasting city and rural especially); she develops themes consciously but easily, often opposing isolation and community, hate and love, violence and peace; she uses symbolism with more skill and sensitivity than in her previous books. There are some weaknesses in characterization — Aunt Clem and Pete Moss, the antagonists, are not entirely convincing. The treatment of some scenes seems contrived to fit necessities of plot — see Aunt Clem's kidnapping of Ian; a few scenes are heavy-handed in their didacticism — see Ian's meeting with Pete Moss in jail. Smucker includes, as in her other books, helpful documentation and bibliography for readers who wish to acquaint themselves with the factual background of the book. Aside from the regrettably garish cover, the book's format is attractive, and Caroline Price's line drawings are delightfully suited to its various moods.

As Ian's story begins, he is struggling alone with the "heavy swinging doors of the highrise where he [lives] with his father." (His mother died just after he was born.) No one offers to help him. The scene foreshadows the physical and emotional struggles Ian will experience throughout the book. However, in the later struggles the Bender family will offer him help, and his loneliness will disappear as he lives within a loving community.

The readers learn, with Ian, about the history of the Old Order Amish people. More importantly, we learn about a different way of living: we experience life within that community with Ian, the welcomed outsider, a Canadian child of Presbyterian background.

Because there were no outside perspectives in her two previous novels, the effects were one-dimensional. Mrs. Smucker, herself a Mennonite, told a Mennonite story of escape in *Days of terror* from the point of view of a persecuted Mennonite family fleeing from the Ukraine in the 1920s to come to Canada. In *Underground to Canada*, she told of an escape to Canada on the Underground railway from the point of view of a black slave girl. In *Amish Adventure*, Smucker is doing several new things. Her time frame here is contemporary, not historical as in the other two; her setting now is for the most part Canadian, not American as in *Underground*, or European, as in *Terror*. Now Canada

is a fully realized place — not just a haven at the end of a journey. And now the story of those who have found the haven is told from the outsider's perspective. Two points of view, then, coexist in this book as Smucker tells two stories: of the modern Canadian boy and of the established Canadian Amish community.

Ian needs the Benders' warmth and rootedness as he struggles with his many problems: the loss of his mother, the absence of his father, their many moves and the adjustment to new friends. Through Ian's search for positive senses of home and identity, Smucker's narrative enacts the psychological journey towards understanding.

The Benders also need Ian. Ezra can no longer farm from his wheelchair, and John, the eldest son, in rebellion against strict Amish rules, has left the community. The farm will have to be sold. The Bender's struggles are primarily physical. Ian, therefore, proves invaluable to them, first by working hard on the farm, and more significantly, by contacting John and preparing the way for him to return to the community and save the farm. Ian needs to be needed. His contributions to the life of the family enable him to overcome the guilt he has felt over Ezra's accident. The quiet strengths of the Amish — perseverance, temperance, love, forgiveness — become his. In return the strengths he brings from the outside, his initiative and pragmatism, help the Benders.

This interdependence of cultures, however, is shown to be hard-won. Smucker does not ignore the inevitable conflicts, the antagonism and persecution which the Amish face in rural Ontario. They are spelled out in Jack Turner's belligerence after the accident, in the bullying by Peter Moss (an alienated teenager), in his vandalism of the Amish schoolhouse, and in his burning of the Benders' barn. Nor does Smucker ignore the conflicts within the Amish culture. Ezra's daughter has permanently exiled herself from the family to become a nurse in the city and to marry an outsider. John Bender has left because there is no room for non-conformity in the Amish faith. The Amish must honour strict rules and "live separate" from this world, as Reuben explains to Ian [p. 50].

Smucker confronted the question of separation before in *Days of terror*, where she expressed her reservations of extreme positions taken by any society on this issue. Ian and Andrew share with her certain reservations in response to what they cannot understand or accept about the Amish: Ian like them . . . He couldn't agree with them on their separation from the world and their refusal to use lawyers, and he wouldn't kneel on the floor with them at family worship, but he had already started to say his own silent prayers when they did. [p. 70]

Andrew said slowly. . . "I couldn't live under all your severe rules, Jonah, and I prefer to put my beliefs to the test of the world. But obviously you Amish should have the right to practise your religion the way you think best." [p. 12]

Finally, in the barn-raising scene at the end of *Amish Adventure*, Smucker weaves all of the threads of this novel together into the kind of powerful resolution that her two previous works have lacked. All of the characters join in a new-found understanding: John Bender, the prodigal son returned, affirms his Amish identity by “swinging his hammer from the centre of the highest rafter: he seemed to be holding the whole structure together” [p. 139]; Pete Moss, forgiven by Ezra and paroled by the courts, will help Ezra in subsequent barn-raising; Ian and Reuben carry nails and hammers together. Rebuilding the barn coincides symbolically with the rebuilding of relationships — between Ezra and John, and Ezra and Pete Moss; with the rebuilding of a healthy farm; and with the rebuilding of Ezra’s faith in life. For Ian, the life of cooperation here has replaced the life of isolation.

Amish Adventure dramatizes a belief in the inherent ability of goodness to overcome and reform evil. As we follow the Adventures of Ian and the Amish people, the orange sign, so obscure at the beginning of the book, becomes clear and meaningful to us.

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UN ROMAN HISTORIQUE

Jours de terreur, Barbara Smucker. Trad. de l’anglais par Paule Daveluy. Montréal, Pierre Tisseyre, 1981. 217 pp. 6,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89051-057-3.

Barbara Smucker est une Mennonite qui vit à Waterloo. A l’aide des épisodes racontés par des Mennonites vivant aujourd’hui au Canada et aux Etats-Unis, elle a écrit un roman intitulé *Jours de terreur*. Elle raconte ces aventures qui sont réellement arrivées, à travers la famille Neufeld dont le nom est fictif. L’histoire se déroule en Russie, dans un village mennonite en 1917 pendant la Révolution. Les Mennonites étaient en Russie depuis cent ans car:

“Un jour, l’impératrice de toutes les Russies Catherine II leur avait proposé: “Venez cultiver les steppes vierges de l’Ukraine. Devenez des modèles pour mes paysans russes. Faites germer le grain pour nourrir mon peuple affamé. On vous laissera vivre en paix.” . . . “Vous pourrez parler Allemand dans vos écoles, dans vos églises et à l’intérieur de votre propre gouvernement et, on vous exemptera pour toujours du service militaire. . . .” (p. 19)

Sous le régime tsariste, les Mennonites vivaient en paix mais voilà qu’en 1917, le parti bolchévique, dirigé par Lénine est sur le point d’accéder au pouvoir.