

que, Bill Freeman montre comment l'intérêt particulier peut s'opposer à l'intérêt commun. Au jeune lecteur de faire le bon choix.

Tous ces contrastes qui animent le récit, aident surtout les jeunes à mieux comprendre la complexité de la vie humaine qui, depuis 1873, a moins changé qu'on ne le croit.

Un bon livre à lire aux enfants à partir de 6 ans ou à leur faire lire dès l'âge de 8 ans.

Dietlinde Bailet, Docteur ès Lettres, professeur agrégée, enseigne à l'Université Acadia à Wolfville en Nouvelle-Ecosse.

LYN COOK RE-ISSUED

The little magic fiddler, Lyn Cook. Macmillan, 1951; reprinted 1981, Donna Grescoe, Winnipeg, Man. 252 pp. \$5.95 paper. No ISBN, *A treasure for Tony*, Lyn Cook. Highway Book Shop, 1980. 172 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88954-224-4.

The 1981 *Writers Union of Canada Directory of Members* entry for Lyn Cook lists ten works of children's fiction and three picture story books. The two books under review here, *The little magic fiddler* and *A treasure for Tony*, are an early and a late work of a Canadian who, as a writer, children's librarian, and teacher of creative drama to children, has been contributing to children's literature in Canada for almost forty years. In 1978 she received the Vicky Metcalf Award in recognition of her books for children.

As a reviewer, I have from the outset a number of reasons that are not literary reasons for hoping to like these two books. They are both published in Canada by small publishers who are likely to face problems of distribution. They both depict energetic female protagonists with a dream that they are able to nourish — to be in one case a concert violinist and in the other a ballet dancer. They both provide Canadian children — or rather an intended audience of girls from nine to twelve or so — with stories where the assumed common background of tacit knowledge and allusion is not British or American but Canadian. In *Fiddler* there are references to the C.P.R. Hotel, Portage Avenue, the Golden Boy on the Manitoba Parliament Buildings, the Hudson's Bay Company, Henry Kelsy, Lord Selkirk and Seven Oaks; in *Treasure* there are references to sugaring-off parties, the Gatineau Hills, the Rideau Canal, the National Library, the Southlanders who fled from the highland clearances, Glengarry, and Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. And finally both books give careful attention to recreating for the reader a recognizable Canadian setting.

The reservations that I have about the books (apart from a complaint that *A Treasure for Tony* fell apart, page by page, as I read it) have to do with literary

standards, but my reservations were not shared by the children to whom I read parts of these books. I thought, for example, that the style of writing in *Fiddler* which was almost entirely in dialogue was slow and uneconomical; they said they liked lots of dialogue. I thought, but the children didn't, that the author's pedagogical urge ought to have been better concealed in scenes such as one on a street-car in which Donna and her friend Mary-jo discuss how Manitoba got its name: "From the Indians. It's really two Indian words, Manitou and Bau and they mean Spirit Strait. . . . The Indians used to think. . . ." etc.

Despite the fact that *The little magic fiddler* is based on the life from age nine to fourteen of a Winnipeg violinist Donna Grescoe, one shouldn't read it for its conveyed sense of realism. An endnote explains that "all the events concerning Donna and her violin, the peanut shell, the Santa Claus parade, the broken fiddle, the scholarship and the years in Chicago and New York are true" and have been woven together "with imaginative incidents from Donna's life among family and friends." In reading the book I felt the severe constraints that this biographic form about a living person must have imposed upon the author. First, Donna, her warm and supportive family, and her admiring friends are depicted only from their smiling, sunny side. Donna's friends are never shown to be jealous of her success, for example, nor do her siblings ever appear to resent the way that fostering her career during the depression must have drained family financial and emotional resources. (A comparison with Katherine Paterson's *Jacob have I loved* suggests to what extent the representation here of the performing artist's relation to her family is an idealized portrait.) And, second, events at times appear to have been included in the book simply because they happened that way in real life, not because they contributed to a good story. For example, in Chapter Two "In a Peanut Shell" Donna makes her public debut at a Kinsmen Banquet playing first inside a peanut shell on four wheels and later emerging through a little door in her peanut shell to receive cheers from the startled audience:

Bump! Bump! *The Peanut was moving!* The wheels were turning slowly and shaking the whole shell. . . .

The door was opening. . . . A startled gasp rose from the people at the tables spread before her.

What is of interest in this book is the way that it draws on the experience of a Ukrainian-Canadian family. Babchia, the grandmother who came from the Ukraine to Winnipeg in 1900, initiates Donna and the reader into an acquaintanceship with the Ukrainian language, Ukrainian cooking, proverbs (*D uspichu treba maty dowira*, which, we are told, means "Everything will come out all right if I don't worry about it.") and Ukrainian legends. The most important of these legends, and the source of the book's title, is Babchia's tale of Myro, a Gypsy wanderer from Babchia's native town of Borshchow, wh

played the violin with such magic that all who heard him had to dance and sing. But one day the king's soldiers, who came to the village to recruit men to fight, killed Myro in the forest as he was trying to escape conscription. His violin mysteriously disappeared, but for more than one hundred years since that time, Myro's unmistakable music has been heard by villagers "when the grain is being planted" or "in the light of the moon when only the dogs howl on the village street." The thought of Myro sustains Donna throughout the few rather minor set-backs that occur in her successful career. But the readers hears so much about Myro — by the end perhaps too much — because his legend is the way that the book attempts to give literary shape to the unpatterned events of human life.

I found *A treasure for Tony*, written some thirty years after *The little magic fiddler*, a more satisfying and energetic book. Where *Fiddler* is unified by its musical theme, *A treasure for Tony* is held together by the resistance of eleven year old Tony to her family's being forced off their dairy farm twenty-five miles from Ottawa by a new housing development and rising taxes. Like the characters in *The treasure seekers*, Tony thinks up schemes to restore the fallen family fortunes; one is to sell sleigh rides by the hour to Ottawa people and the other, more romantic, is to find the hidden treasure that Adam MacLeod, the first pioneer settler on their farm, was rumoured to have hidden in the old barn. The treasure hunt motif is one thread of interest in the book as Tony searches for clues, trying to recreate the historical experience of Adam MacLeod. In the root cellar in the barn, she finds an old torn bill of accounts inscribed with a few decipherable words:

10 bushels of seed wheat	£2 5s
A pair of oxen	£12
Widow O'Connell	£20

Somewhat later Tony is taken to the National Library where she finds research material on pioneers in Lanark County, learns how to use the card catalogue and microfilm machine, reads the original deed to the farm and passenger lists of immigrant ships, and is able imaginatively to recreate pioneer experience. The treasure, when Tony finally finds it, turns out to be of a different kind than was expected and is of no practical use in saving the farm. But there is a happy ending anyway: the Conservation Authority decides to preserve the farm as a conservation area and museum; Tony inherits a legacy that allows her to follow her other dream and study ballet at the National Ballet School in Toronto; her family decides to adopt eight year old Gavin, whose troubled homelife has been another source of mystery in the book and who turns out to be a ward of the Children's Aid; and her father has an idea, which apparently did not occur to him before — that by taking the money he gets for the old farm he can buy a new dairy farm in Glengarry Country, another Scottish settlement.

Whereas *The little magic fiddler* is rather short on dramatic incident *A treasure for Tony* has, if anything, too much. There are plot elements in *A treasure* from three different genres: the treasure hunt; the career story of Tony's plans to be a ballet dancer; and to a lesser extent, the genre of Y.A. realism, which seems to be influencing the treatment in the book of Tony's friends (children from the new housing development like Joanna, who is black sophisticated, and abandoned by her mother, or like Gavin, who Tony suspect may be a battered child). These disparate elements aren't brought together entirely successfully, but the attempt is a book worth the reader's attention

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DISTANT TIMES AND PLACES

A northern alphabet, Ted Harrison. Tundra Books, 1982. 32 pp. \$10.95 cloth ISBN 0-88776-133-X. ***Children of Lapland***, Bodil Hagbrink. Tundra Books 1979. 28 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-114-3. ***West Coast Chinese boy***, Sing Lim. Tundra Books, 1979. 64 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-121-6.

Ted Harrison's paintings of the Yukon warmly suggest the pleasures of a cold climate. Clear, flat, jewel-bright colours fill in simplified outlines and stylized backgrounds, and an abundance of hot pinks, reds and oranges is quite startlingly appropriate. The clean lines, simplicity and brilliance are a joyous celebration of the atmosphere, light and landscape of the North. It is a pity then that the pictures, as they appear in this third book for children, *A northern alphabet* are so small. An awkward inch of white frame, containing words beginning with the appropriate letter of the alphabet, reduces and dominates each one (how much better they are without it may be seen by looking at the cover) and incidentally draws attention to the signal weakness of the book: its words

I suspect that Ted Harrison, like many another adult, hasn't realized that precisely because the alphabet is so simple and structured, it is extremely demanding. Indeed, there are such numbers of artistically beautiful alphabet books which fail in the matter of words that it is easy to believe the alphabet an intrinsically dull form (though fit for children, of course). Yet if you consider that old favourite "A was an apple pie. B bit it. C cut it" etc., it is quite clear that the words of an alphabet book require a particular imaginative effort; and also that Harrison has assembled his words with doggedness rather than inspiration. Like small children regimented into rows, they have all sort of spirit and personality just waiting to be released to play the game that will set them free. And there are, of course, as many games to be played with word