

sa chambre; et qu' après tout, sa mère n'est pas si vieux jeu, ni si maniaque que ça.

Loin de moi l'idée de rejeter une lecture aussi édifiante, présentée sous des dehors aussi distrayants. Je ne peux cependant m'empêcher de regretter que la fertilité de l'imagination n'aille ici de pair avec une égale originalité dans le domaine de la psychologie et des valeurs morales. A ce point de vue, *La fille à la mini-moto* diffère peu des "sweet dream romances", la collection bien connue pour adolescentes.

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LEGENDS AND LISTS

The salamander's laughter and other poems, Anne Corkett. Illus. Sylvia Hahn. Natural Heritage/Natural History, Inc., 1985. 65 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-920474-35-7; *The concrete giraffe*, Lola Sneyd. Illus. Doug Sneyd. Simon & Pierre, 1984. 63 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88924-140-6.

Orpheus, who sang the sun into rising every morning, was not simpleminded in his work. He put words to music, and by inextricably linking sound with sense, invented poetry. Freshness of vision, a goodness of fit between form and content, a masterly management of semantics and syntax — these are all artisan's tools at the disposal of the poet. And wielded with skill and inspiration what results is, pure and simple, a poem.

Too often, mistaking youth for a form of cultural handicap, we patronize children by offering them mere pap as literature. Noting that their infant expressive skills are as yet halting, we assume that their *impressive* capacity is also limited. And so we offer minimal materials for little minds. Very simpleminded of us. Better we offer too much, and allow the child to spit out what he can't yet use, than risk malnourishing his immense capacity for cultural, spiritual and intellectual growth.

And in this spirit of providing rich forage, *The salamander's laughter and other poems* offers very good poems, small, lovely artifacts — flints chipped with a consummate patience and skill from the dense midden of ancient verse. Some, for example, hint at being venerable keys to a safe passage through the mysterious world:

Hawthorn, Hawthorn
bend your branches low
Your blossoms are fair
but your thorns are bare

and I would go
unharmèd.

Others, like “Lajban’s poem”, encapsulate the very heart of legend:

They say they winter there,
geesè and wild swans
on the moon’s cold surface
and when they preen themselves
their pale feathers fall to earth.
That is why you say it feels
like flying watching snow.

In a different spirit, “The flying octopus” narrates in six triplets the adventure of a youngster who, having invited an octopus to tea, is chagrined when the octopus gripes, “‘It’s so sad for me to know that nobody alive/ can understand that tea for two with me must be for five.’” The expression is light and funny, and the strong rhythm gives the lines great appeal.

The salamander’s laughtèr offers stimulating and pertinent models for developing young tastes for both reading and writing poetry. Every detail, from page layout to type selection and paper choice contributes to the impression of fine quality. There is no clutter in this book. Each poem has a page to itself, and the pages all have a pleasingly spare, considered look to them. Each poem is faced with an illustration, in black and white. Hahn has prepared emblematic illustrations, suggestive of ancient woodblock prints. The great strength of this book is in the sheer quality of its writing, however. The richness of language and Corkett’s mastery of traditional poetic forms will find readers among the most sophisticated.

Reviewers of Lola Sneyd’s *Asphalt octopus* found the work “sunshiny”, with a “fresh and newly minted flavour”, marked with a “keen sense of humour”. The same can be said of both the themes and the sentiments expressed in her new collection, *The concrete giraffe*.

Perhaps the strongest pieces in the collection are some of the shorter ones. Their strength is derived from their clear imagery, their universality of theme, and their fresh — occasionally novel — expression. “Nature’s miracle”, for example:

The butterfly holds no butter,
The sea-shell holds no sea,
But nature’s greatest miracle is:
An acorn holds a tree!

This is clearly not the first instance of natural wonders encapsulated in a figurative acorn, but it is a newly-turned and pleasingly rhythmic rendering nonetheless. “Ambitious me” also pursues a familiar theme, presenting a witty and succinct Procrastinator’s Self-Analysis:

I'd change the world
If I could be parted
From my toughest job
Getting me started!

Not so successful are the poems which are little more than lists, sightseeing itineraries for Toronto. In "School trip magic" (whose title promises at least a surprise), we might be reading copy from a tourism brochure typeset to look like a poem. The list does not, unfortunately enhance the sense-of-place which the poem is presumably trying to establish. Names of buildings and monuments do not *evoke*; they do not modify and embellish the cumulative impact of all that has gone before. Sadly, they remain mere geographic coordinators, no more. And therein no magic lies.

Allan Gardens' flowers, lime and banana trees
Kensington and St. Lawrence Markets with
cheeses and fish from all over the world
hospitals, churches, old buildings and new
Eaton Centre, Metro Library, the Roy Thompson Hall
CN Tower, Art Gallery, Ontario Science Centre
star-filled skies at the McLaughlin Planetarium
the Museum, Casa Loma, Old City Hall
Chinatown, Royal Alex, and Honest Ed's store

Other poems are flawed by imagery which does not quickly resolve into sharp focus. "In the subway" posits the train as a "one-eyed monster/ Electric eel. . .", which screams malevolently into the station. It "spits out" passengers, engorges itself anew, and departs. At the risk of taking it all too literally, the mundane fact that trains load through their sides and not their 'mouths' makes it difficult for the reader to apply Sneyd's image to experience.

And there are a few problems with sudden changes of tone or theme which leave the reader adrift. "Toronto — 3,000,000 and Growing", moves along quite smartly in its development of a sort of paean to urban growth:

New buildings climb to the stars
Men in hard hats, pre-cast forms
Solar-powered earth-machines moving
Harnessed winds from thunderstorms

The first three verses evidence urban order triumphing over natural chaos. Underground malls, for example, have "No winter storms or summer heat/ Just weather that's bright all year." But suddenly, in the terminal quatrain, we encounter thoughts which have filtered in from some other poem whose theme is ecological consciousness-raising:

We'll find the solution to pollution
Our land will be acid-rain free

Toronto's lights will outshine the stars
Wildlife and people live in harmony

Most of us learn very young the folly of changing horses in mid-stream. Here the writer (or maybe the poem) gets all wet, and the reader wonders why she chose to make the leap.

Simplemindedness is perhaps one of the commonest failings in verse written for children. Demon didactics can make pedants of even the best-intentioned, and a writer who is short on craftsmanship (or an understanding of children) is practically doomed to add another to the flood of little volumes for little minds: brainteasers and little verbal puzzles palmed off as poetry or verse for the very young. These pass the time. They're fun. They endure one — perhaps two — readings. But a bit like fast food, consumption of these confections doesn't nourish: it just fills up the time.

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LE MYSTÈRE DE LA NUIT

Les longs bras de la nuit, Pierre Tousignant. Illus. Françoise La Mothe. Laval, Mondia, 1984. 24 pp. 3,75\$ broché. ISBN 2-89114-222-5.

Qui d'entre nous peut affirmer n'avoir jamais eu peur de l'obscurité? Même parmi les adultes, certains ressentent un malaise quelconque au moment d'être privés de lumière. Ainsi plongés dans l'obscurité, leur imagination donne libre cours à la fantaisie et ils sont en proie à toutes sortes d'inquiétudes. Ces états de frayeur sont également éprouvés par notre héroïne, une petite fille de sept ans nommée Julie.

Les longs bras de la nuit présente un thème éducateur puisque tous les enfants craignent l'obscurité ainsi que les mystères qui l'accompagnent. Aussi captivant qu'il soit, le thème de la peur dans le noir domine ce livre par ailleurs banal et sans originalité. C'est l'histoire d'une petite fille que les parents envoient faire une course au magasin du coin et qui, au moment d'une panne d'électricité, se trouve soudainement entraînée dans un monde imaginaire. Guidée par plusieurs mains, Julie pénètre dans une immense grotte parmi des êtres mi-enfants, mi-chats. Ces étranges personnages l'invitent à jouer avec eux et parviennent à lui faire surmonter sa peur excessive de l'obscurité.

Julie ainsi rencontre l'image personnifiée de la nuit et apprend que sa frayeur provenait des histoires de fantômes et de monstres que les grands racontent pour vaincre leur propre peur de la nuit.