

## *Review articles & reviews / Critiques et comptes rendus*

### TWO FINE SEQUELS

**My family vacation.** Dayal Kaur Khalsa. Tundra, 1988. 32 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-226-3. **Could you stop Josephine?** Stéphane Poulin. Tundra, 1988. 24 pp., \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-216-6.

Sequels can be problematic. The wells of some authors, like Beatrix Potter, never seem to run dry. If she is known above all for *The tale of Peter Rabbit*, many others, like *Tom Kitten* and *Jemima Puddleduck*, also rank as masterpieces. Other children's writers – L. Frank Baum's name springs immediately to mind – never duplicate their initial achievements. Like Potter and Baum, Canadian author-illustrators Dayal Kaur Khalsa and Stéphane Poulin often retread familiar, proven ground – childhood reminiscences from the 1950's and the escapades of Daniel's cat Josephine. But both Khalsa's *My family vacation* and Poulin's *Could you stop Josephine?* retain the freshness and vigour of their prototypes. Moreover, like most good children's books, they address two audiences – children, who look for a good story and absorbing pictures, and adults, who appreciate irony, satire, and wit.

Khalsa, who died tragically of cancer at age 46, had an uncanny memory for what the 1950's world of an American kid looked like. In her straightforward tale of May and Richie's family trip to Florida, she paints familiar incidents that should strike a responsive chord in many adult readers. As I read *My family vacation*, I chuckled more than once at reminders of my own family's 1959 Florida trip: loving "everything about [the motel] – from the big bouncy beds to the paper covers on the drinking glasses to the writing paper and envelopes in the night-table drawer," avoiding the hotel's social director like the plague, and going to a real nightclub on the last night.

For adults, the book's interest lies in its central irony: the children's innocent enjoyment of Florida kitsch at its worst. The frontispiece sets the tone: May's family sits at the dining room table perusing flashy Florida travel brochures. It is a 1950's suburban interior – tinny four-branch chandelier, comfortably drab furniture. On the wall are reproductions of two Vermeer domestic interiors, a wry reminder of a loftier aesthetic.

Khalsa's brilliant, solid-colour acrylic masses and superimposed planes transform Floridian poor taste into pure design, elevating even the most kitsch of tourist traps: "El Club Flamingo" is a sweeping horseshoe curve of tiers of

round, white tables studded with oval, raspberry-coloured chairbacks, separated by the bold, flat black arch of a room divider crowned with huge, pink flamingos.

The children's innocence redeems this tacky world. May takes simple pleasure in collecting free souvenirs (hotel soaps, feathers from Parrot Jungle, and the "little pink paper umbrellas" from the nightclub). She and Richie enjoy a penny arcade, miniature golf, and a bowling alley "that usually didn't allow children": "But since you two look like big spenders from the North," said the manager, "I'll skip the rules today." The existence of these two innocents abroad is a charmed one.

In *Could you stop Josephine?*, the third in Stéphane Poulin's series on his feline escape artist, Josephine proves that she can elude her master Daniel as well in a rural setting as in Montreal, stowing away in the trunk of the car for a free trip to his uncle's farm.

Young readers will enjoy the usual breathless chase (kids against Josephine and her animal friends), and especially the game of spotting Josephine on every page. (Poulin's triumph is the wheatfield, where my daughter delighted in detecting the animals by the ears, tail and face barely peeping out over the top of the ripening grain.)

For adults, the interest lies in the book's mock-serious tone. With their unsmiling, strangely-rounded, sallow faces, Poulin's people evoke the haunting, bleak figures in the works of Canadian Miller Brittain, or American Reginald Marsh. Yet the story is essentially comic, as Daniel frantically pursues his elusive cat – over fences, into barns, under tractors, along cliffs – confronting threatening bulls and stampeding piglets along the way. The ominous quality of the full-page oils (the greens deepen into black with the approaching storm) meshes perfectly with the text, for Daniel's panic is deadly serious:

Rain came down. Thunder roared. Lightning flashed. It was a very big storm.

"Josephine is scared in storms," I told him.

"ALL animals are scared in storms," Norman said.

"Josephine doesn't like to get wet," I said.

"NO animal likes to get wet," Norman said.

"DUCKS like to get wet," I said.

"Ducks aren't animals," Norman said.

With a flash of lightning illuminating the two boys in the barn (Daniel hunched over in despair, Norman frowning and resigned), and the two cats in the gloom of the rafters, the illustration captures this mood perfectly.

Poulin's small pencil drawings on the left-hand pages intensify the humour; my favourite is a rear view of the two cats, heads touching and tails

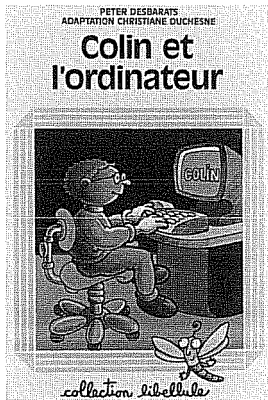
linked for security during the storm.

I'm not sure how much farther afield Daniel can pursue Josephine – to Paris? to Tokyo? – without running out of steam, but I'm looking forward to more exotic fare from Poulin's fertile pen and brush. Khalsa's production, tragically, is over – a great loss to the Canadian picture book world. Two more books – *How Pizza came to our town* and *Julian*, are out with *Cowboy Dawn* due this spring. Khalsa was too weak to complete the illustrations for another text, *The snow cat*. It is doubtful that another illustrator could successfully take it on, given the crucial role Khalsa's own childhood memories played in her pictures. With its rich content, both literary and pictorial, her completed body of work is an enduring legacy to Canada's, and the world's children.

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## LA SIMPLICITÉ OU LA GRAMMAIRE?

**Colin et l'ordinateur.** Peter Desbarats. Adapté par Christiane Duchesne. Saint-Lambert, Héritage, 1988. 61 pp., 4,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-7625-4020-8.



Dans les grandes lignes, l'auteur nous raconte l'histoire d'un petit garçon de 8 ans à qui la solitude pèse. Ce sentiment comporte toutefois des ramifications profondes.

En l'absence de son père, trop souvent parti en voyage d'affaires et les journées de travail trop longues de sa mère, Colin se replie sur le jouet d'adulte qui le fascine, l'ordinateur, d'autant plus, que pour l'instant, il n'a pas de camarade de quartier avec qui jouer. A partir de cet exposé de la situation, *Colin et l'ordinateur* constitue une histoire simple dont le ton, léger dans l'ensemble, cache les préoccupations profondes du jeune enfant, préoccupations que

d'autres jeunes de son âge partagent également.

Parmi les thèmes présentés on retrouve 1) l'absence d'adulte au foyer qui engendre la peur, l'ennui et la déception, 2) la problématique de la société de consommation qui examine la menace de la technologie nouvelle, en l'occurrence la crainte de la mère face à l'ordinateur, de même que les exigences croissantes du travail sur l'individu, 3) la disparition des éléments de stabilité affective si nécessaires à l'enfant, relatée à travers le divorce des