

and his fear when he discovers that his best friend is gay slowly turns to shame as he realizes his own betrayal of that friend. He grows more flexible as he comes to terms with his father's illiteracy, a flexibility which changes his attitudes towards a number of things. Everything about Wick, from his tone, his actions, his attitudes, his diction to his feelings, is utterly convincing and realistic.

Through Wick, then, Bell presents the themes of the book: understanding, tolerance. This novel gives a penetrating glimpse of the vagaries and viciousness of human beings in their dealings with one another, but also of the compassion and understanding possible. It is a sharp book: challenging, demanding and intense, deeply moving without being sentimental in the least. *No signature* is, quite simply, a superb novel, with something to offer to any young person, yet also something important to say to adults.

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#### TO DREAM OF MAKING

**The worker in sandalwood.** Marjorie Pickthall. Illus. Frances Tyrrell. Lester Publishing Ltd., 1991. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895555-10-8 32pp; **The potter.** Jacolyn Caton. Illus. Stephen McCallum. Coteau Books, 1992. 36 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55050-037-6.

Opening *The worker in sandalwood* with its cabinet-like cover and end papers is entering a world poised between fiction and (arti)fact, dream and reality, coincidence, miracle and skepticism; the world of the sandalwood cabinet, as the first full-page illustration in this book so beautifully demonstrates, is both central to the story and shrouded by mysterious shadow. Hyacinthe, apprentice to a cruel and drunken wood-carver, Monsieur Oreillard, claims a young Christ visited him on Christmas Eve to comfort him and miraculously to finish carving the cabinet; whether he has merely dreamt this is never clear.

"The sun, not yet risen, set its first beams upon the delicate mist of frost afloat beneath the trees, and so all the world was aflame with splendid gold"—this line articulates with a rare subtlety the paradoxical meeting of divine and human, of static finity and infinite flux so pervasive in both text and illustration, and is perhaps the best indication of how well this new version serves Pickthall's old. Her story, first published in 1914 and collected in *Angel shoes and other stories* (1923) reads "sent his beams." That missing "n" (intentional or not) sparks my imagination; the elbow rubbing of "risen, set" pleads for a finer attention to (solid) frost embodied as moist and vaporous mist "afloat beneath"—this is language speaking of the oxymoronic nature of the ordinary, of the blurring of laws and states that compose everyday life in a world which just might brush up

against the divine. Frances Tyrrell's illustrations gentle this blurring into visual motif. The curl of a wood-shaving, a ripple of carpet, tips on a snowflake, the bend of an elbow: some detail of each picture slips slightly outside of its small white "frame," defies, in some simple way, the line between colourful picture and the white terrain of text.

This slippage is not Tyrrell's only visual motif. Circles of light irradiate the central part of this book, and much can be learned of a character based simply on his relation *to* that light—the cruel Monsieur Oreillard blocks it, Hyacinthe is embraced by its curve and glow, and the kind stranger crosses from curve to centre, radiating light as halo. These circles are echoed by swirls and curved lines—the wafting aroma of sandalwood (already smelling of the birds and lilies eventually, miraculously?, carved in it), gusts of frosted wind, cleared spaces on windows, wood shavings, the puff of a cold winter breath. These lines, these movements, draw almost every illustration into the circle of light, of infinity, of *possibility*, dwelling in the humble and commonplace.

This book is a delight. The illustrations have a subtle and graceful presence; they gleam. And the textual adaptation (which mainly smooths the grain of Pickthall's occasionally fulsome prose) breathes new life into a story that has been too long collecting dust on the shelf.

*The potter*, by Jacolyn Caton and Stephen McCallum, is also cast upon the incursion of the infinite, or at least the "mythic," into the ordinary world, but in a much different manner. Like *The worker in sandalwood*, this story has an unnamed and removed narrator, though she does not qualify her tale with hesitant alternatives as does the teller of Pickthall's. This narrator (who calls herself "the potter's daughter") tells of a potter who lived alone "at the edge of a sinking island" spinning vibrant pots and bowls. Caton's beautifully paced prose describing these pots is itself a work of art—both prose and pots are animate. And properly so, for this is a pot's story, a tale of origins for shards and fragments found in out-of-the-way corners, for pots left behind in dusty pawn shops. It is also the story of a misunderstood artist betrayed by neighbouring villagers who stand to benefit most by his craft. This latter story is an old one, and, while Caton's interpretation gives it a new spin, the rather pyrotechnical climax is not unexpected.

What is fresh, and quite lovely if a reader is not bothered by the implications for cultural difference (and I suspect in this instance one need not be), is Caton's creation of a collective myth for and from remnants of past civilizations. McCallum plays with this in his fine illustrations, decorating the cavern in which the potter lives with cave paintings closely related to the drawings on the potter's urns and bowls. These paintings are more than an attempt at mood or setting; McCallum's drawing suggests a connection between early artists and the potter, a connection later borne out by the narrator's insistence that finding traces of these pots or lumps of the potter's clay stirs one to dream of making. And it is this dream of making which drives the potter, his "daughter" and the makers of

this story. *The potter* enlivens a creative heritage in which both Caton and McCallum participate.

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## CHANGING THE VIEW

**The dinosaur duster.** Donn Kushner. Illus. Marc Mongeau. Lester Publishing, 1992, unpag., ISBN 1-895555-38-8.

It is especially true of children's fiction that it should give pleasure during repeated readings. *The dinosaur duster* passes this test through combining an ingenious plot and amusing details, such as the titles of imaginary Carpathian folk songs like "A soldier boy loves sour cabbage," with interesting information about Paris, Florence, and London. A teacher or parent could readily use this book as a springboard into geography or history, or for language skills such as writing some of the 24 verses of "When will uncle Dimitri finally go to bed?" Even without such guidance, the young reader will naturally absorb broadening ideas about how the large cities of Europe are both different from, and the same as, the large cities of North America.

The story, about talking dinosaur skeletons, gives a whole new meaning to the idea of knowing something in your bones. The stegosaurus and triceratops mounted in a North American museum not only can speak and learn, but were able to hear and learn folk songs while buried for millennia in the Carpathian mountains. They complain to their caretaker, Mr. Mopski, about being confined to only one view of the world. The stegosaurus is bored with his view of a city park; the triceratops is annoyed by the bustle of a city street. When Mr. Mopski resolves their problem by switching their heads, experts declare them to be new discoveries, a tricerosaurus and a stegatops. Such obtuseness, of course, gives delight to the knowing reader. (Kushner's assumption that all seven-year-olds know the difference between a stegosaurus and a triceratops is, I believe, well-founded.) Mr. Mopski, the tricerosaurus, and the stegatops are sent on a world tour during which they learn about other people and other ways and, ultimately, that there's no place like home. Once the dinosaurs are returned home as scientifically unimportant (after Mr. Mopski re-switches their heads), the dinosaur duster has his friends mounted on wheels, so they are happily able to learn about the world they live in.

The text's richness in entertainment and information is enhanced by Marc Mongeau's cartoon-like illustrations. His lively scenes are full of intriguing details including some great bone jokes, some of which involve their association