

find a way out that is better than madness, death, prostitution, alcoholism, or martyrdom—understanding.

By understanding the particulars of family, neighbours, lovers and friends through the generalities of culture—especially Irish literature and myth—Roisin redeems herself on the “Crucifix of reflection.” In doing so, she recreates herself as a woman rebelling successfully against a narrow society and a rigidly patriarchal church. She also thinks independently, as her mentor, the nun-scholar-mother figure amusingly dubbed “The Fly,” has taught her to do.

All this in a narrative that is erudite and richly textured, yet remarkably immediate, almost oral, as though the story really were told.

The rose tree makes its readers laugh, cry and think with Roisin. It leaves most young adult novels far behind, and approaches greatness.

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OLD-FASHIONED BUT REFRESHING

Slipper Hbr. Yvonne Wilson. Illus. Elizabeth Owen. Wildthings Press, 1990. 154 pp., paper. ISBN 0-929065-02-6.

Slipper Hbr. is the story of five children and the adventures they have when they move to a rambling old house by the sea. It begins with the discovery of an ad in the paper, which says “For Rent. All summer. Slipper Hbr. Lge old house.” The children are tired of living in their cramped apartment, so they show the ad to their parents. Within a few days the family is happily ensconced in the house at Slipper Harbour, and the children are ready to go exploring.

When I began to read this book I had misgivings about it. It is written in an old-fashioned, episodic style that no longer appeals to most children. By the end I felt I had been given a breath of fresh air. It is a book that celebrates the everyday joys of life with an air of innocence which makes it a panacea to the stories of childhood angst so popular today.

The children do not do anything particularly exciting during their summer at Slipper Harbour, but their adventures are tinged with a magical quality. This feeling is created by the use of imaginary companions and a cast of eccentric characters who appear throughout the story. For example, there is the old lady who arrives at the door one rainy afternoon to give the children leaping and bounding lessons. And there is Johnson, a character who begins as a figment of the children’s imaginations, but later materializes in Slipper Harbour.

Although the mix of reality and fantasy add to the charm of the story, I felt the use of the imaginary friends was overdone. The book is intended for children who are past the age of imaginary companions, and they would probably find it rather silly that the children in the story (especially the older ones) believe so strongly in them. By the end of the novel the emphasis on their existence has

stretched the reader's credulity to the limit.

The most refreshing aspect of this book is the family harmony. It is a blended family with two children belonging to the mother and three to the father. We are told at the beginning which child belongs to which parent, but there is so much love and respect among them that these details are soon forgotten. Black-and-white pen and ink drawings reflect the warmth and charm of this fun-loving family and are the perfect complement to the story.

Despite the book's strengths, I still have misgivings about it. On the back cover the book is recommended for children in grades three to six, but it is unlikely to interest anyone over age nine. Children in grades one to three might enjoy it as a read-aloud story.

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ÉCHOS D'ANTAN

Échos d'antan. Francine Leboeuf. Montréal, Paulines, 1991. 72 pp., 6,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89039-491-3.

Le manuel simple et précis à la fois de Francine Leboeuf constitue un petit ensemble intéressant de données connues et moins connues sur la vie des ancêtres québécois. Bien des étudiants du cours secondaire ou le public en général pourront y trouver de l'intérêt en dépit de son allure un peu terne avec ses images grises, sans surprise, comme des tableaux déjà vus et explorés. Dans sa *Présentation*, l'auteur indique clairement l'objet de sa recherche: la "description de la société traditionnelle québécoise aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles". Et l'on peut déjà saisir le ton du recueil avec la référence à cette époque où "la vie s'harmonisait¹ au rythme des saisons..." En fait, cette introduction conventionnelle de l'ouvrage révèle d'entrée de jeu son attrait et ses faiblesses. Bien sûr, nombreux sont ceux et celles qui aiment qu'on leur redise encore et toujours cette vie "d'antan" rurale travailleuse et fraternelle dont les "échos" résonnent, semble-t-il, inévitablement de rumeurs idylliques. Comment expliquer autrement la vogue touristique, par exemple, du "Village québécois" de Drummondville ou du "Upper Canada Village", entre autres manifestations de cette aspiration au décor de jadis? Le document de Leboeuf satisfait certainement cet appétit répandu en sacrifiant parfois, lui aussi, à la représentation sans distance critique des dites valeurs passées. Car si ce manuel en quelque sorte d'un mode de vie disparu se fait précis, riche d'une documentation intéressante, il n'a pas toujours su résister au regard "bienveillant". Mais il peut s'agir davantage, en fait, d'un problème de style, le recours occasionnellement aux "formules" (par exemple, ces évocations de chansons à répondre, de lettres d'amour rédigées par l'institutrice ou de plats de Noël uniformément "tant appréciés de tous"). Les épithètes valorisatrices