

derstand," Kacer gives her heroine precocious insight and a deep skepticism about what she sees at the camp. And because Clara is suspicious about the educational and cultural possibilities available at Terezin, readers are allowed to question also. So when Clara is given a role in Hans Krása's opera, *Brundibar*, and then is part of the cast that performs the opera for the June 1944 visit by the Red Cross, readers are behind the scene, wrenchingly aware of the larger theatrical performance forced upon the camp inhabitants by the Nazis. Initially the children dream that they can use the visit to inform the Red Cross about the reality of their conditions. But Kacer convincingly conveys the impossibility of this dream and demonstrates how the very excellence of the performance is itself a defeat. The more the Red Cross is impressed by what they see, the more Clara and the other performers despair. In this way, Kacer does not simply celebrate the performances of *Brundibar*, but foregrounds her dilemma and our own. How do we write about/respond to the artistic accomplishments that took place in Terezin? When Clara first hears the opera's plot, she is "transfixed" by its "innocent but important message." Yet her conviction that its plot allegorically represents "a group of children banding together to defeat one wicked person, the evil Adolf Hitler," is short-lived. Like Clara who is ambivalent about planting flowers in Terezin "to fool the visitors" but longs for the beauty that the flowers represent, the child performers themselves recognize the opera's function as temporary escape at best. Readers will share their ambivalence: the opera is wonderful, but Terezin is still Terezin.

Kacer quotes an actual review of *Brundibar* that concludes: "*The children have won.*" Originally published in *Vedem*, the children's secret magazine in the camp, the review expresses the hope of those who did not yet know their fate. But Kacer knows their fate, and, immediately following the review, she writes an account of cast members receiving deportation orders. Kacer refuses to indulge the easy cliché that the triumph of art keeps Clara alive. Repeatedly we see that participation in *Brundibar* keeps no one alive. Clara is simply lucky. Kacer knows that Clara's story is exceptional — the real children did not defeat Hitler — and she doesn't let her readers forget it.

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Of Cheechakos and Sourdoughs: The Lure of the Klondike

Destination Gold. Julie Lawson. Orca, 2001. 224 pp. \$19.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-155-6, 1-55143-157-2.

It is late July in 1897, and a young sixteen-year-old boy is off to seek his fortune in the Klondike Gold Rush, convinced that he can save his mother and sister from the debts precipitated by his father's untimely death. And he of course succeeds, but then, was there really any doubt?

Well, actually, quite a bit! In *Destination Gold*, British Columbia's award-winning children's writer Julie Lawson does not provide a fairy tale version of this seminal event in western Canadian history. In fact, she suggests that this journey is one that

few in their right mind would ever consider. Her hope, instead, is to tell her audience what it was really like, even for the very few who actually succeeded.

Ned Turner, the tale's hero, very quickly must face the bitter realities of his quest: friends who prove untrustworthy, crooks who cheat him out of all his supplies, and a seemingly unending trail perfumed by the stench of the carcasses of dead horses. But this is not to be a story of just one boy's maturation journey, for Lawson also chronicles the life of Ned's sister Sarah, who comes to join her brother in his Yukon adventure, and of Catherine, a young girl who goes to the Klondike not to find gold but to escape her rather brutal past. Inevitably, all three stories become enmeshed into one. Though the final confrontation between Ned and Montana Jim, the villain responsible for Catherine's problems, is unfortunately foreshadowed by the cover of the text, the inevitability of the conclusion does not detract from the magnetism of the story.

Taking advantage of her present position as writer-in-residence at Burton House Writer's Retreat in Dawson City, Lawson makes the reader fully aware of the uniqueness of this "northern experience," providing a wealth of data on the actual Klondike Gold Rush as well as a wonderful selection of historical photographs that graphically portray the bitterness of the everyday life of the "cheechako," the unprepared novice. And along the way the reader also learns why the few who survived the Klondike nightmare were called "sourdoughs." Seems the yeast in sourdough bread helps prevent scurvy. Remember that the next time you go in search of gold.

The author's biography at the end of the book includes a snapshot of Lawson in her Yukon winter finery, red nose ablazing. The "cheechaka" has clearly become a "sourdough" and *Destination Gold* is the gift she provides us in celebration.

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Female Strength: Nineteenth-Century Novels

Heart and Soul: The Story of Florence Nightingale. Gena K. Gorrell. Tundra, 2000. 146 pp. \$22.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-494-0. *Earthly Astonishments.* Marthe Jocelyn. Tundra, 2000. 179 pp. \$24.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-495-9.

On the surface, these two books deal with a similar theme. Although *Heart and Soul* is a biography and *Earthly Astonishments* is a fictional novel, both works focus on heroic figures in the nineteenth century. The first tells the story of the renowned social reformer, Florence Nightingale, whose accomplishments spanned the reign of Queen Victoria and beyond; the latter narrates the tale of Little Jo-Jo, who, measured at twenty-eight inches tall, survived seemingly insurmountable odds and ultimately rose up with more dignity than most giants can muster. More importantly, both heroines grew up fearing that they were freaks.

In a superbly written and illustrated book, Gena Gorrell shows the reader how Florence Nightingale struggled with her bursting intelligence and sense of social