

mother is depicted not as a one-dimensional ogre, but as a complex and often unknowable individual. The many small ways in which her mother hurts and attacks Jenny's self-image are presented gradually and with believable understatement, allowing the emotional content to be more powerfully felt.

At the end of this novel, Jenny's father names his boat after her, calling it the *White Wave* after the Celtic meaning of "Jennifer." The origins of Jenny's present self are satisfyingly linked together through this name, which was chosen by her birth mother because it echoed the story of Guinevere, and which links to her present relationship with her father as she rescues him when a storm wave washes him overboard. Having arrived at a full understanding of her past, Jenny now confronts the future with hope and strength, and when the final words of the novel declare "Jenny Johns is!", we believe it.

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## SPIRITED PROTAGONISTS

**Alcock and Brown and the Boy in the Middle.** George M. Morgan. Illus. Jennifer Morgan. Tuckamore Books, 1994. 57 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-895387-20-5. **Boys in the Well.** Cecil Freeman Beeler. Red Deer College Press, 1996. 128 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-136-5.

*Alcock and Brown and the Boy in the Middle* is a brief and simply told tale. In a normal size of type the text would likely occupy some fifteen pages. By setting this in 16-point type, reserving a deep bottom margin and incorporating a large number of line drawings, most of which are full-page, the publisher has managed to create a book with 33 pages of text. The tale has not become correspondingly enriched. The central person is an eight-year-old boy, a victim of polio, who has the chance, in St. John's in 1919, to witness the preparations made by Alcock and Brown for the first transatlantic flight. The boy learns — in part because Brown himself refused to be limited by his leg injury — that willpower and dedication are important in life. The book's format, rather thin story, and predominance of dialogue make it appropriate for reading to, or by, quite young, undemanding persons. In the historical context, the author does, however, manage to seize some of the excitement and wonderment with which the new, experimental technology of flight was viewed by contemporaries.

*Boys in the Well* is a more substantial narrative with considerable literary value. It continues to trace events in the life of the author's spunky young teenage heroine. In the 1930s her parents' farmhouse becomes the meeting place of several youths from diverse backgrounds. Several themes — blame and responsibility, loneliness, concern about others, and particularly the tentative transition from child to adult — help to structure the plot, but the didactic sense of the story remains secondary. What will draw a reader through its 26 chapters is Beeler's vigorous narrative style and the imaginative perceptions of his young Corinne Kragh who turns to the farm's

well both to dispose of her life's irritants (including, initially, boys) and to try to see herself more clearly. The gentle humour he draws from all of his characters (to say nothing of the animals that enjoy such a lively existence on these pages) is, like the personality of his heroine, always spirited.

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#### PICTURE BOOK ON UKRAINIAN INTERNMENT

**Silver Threads.** Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch. Illus. Michael Martchenko. Viking, 1996. 32 pp. \$19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-86677-6.

This is an unusual and in some ways quite difficult children's picture book. It tells the story of Ivan and Anna, who immigrate to Canada from the Ukraine. During World War I, Ivan is interned by the Canadian government as an enemy alien. Anna is left to work the farm alone until his return, kept company only by a spider. Michael Martchenko has done, as usual, superb illustrations to accompany the text. They capture a sense of Ukrainianness without being stereotypical.

The story is interesting and well-told, with sufficient repetition to keep children involved in the rhythm of the tale. The title, *Silver Threads*, refers to the spider which keeps Anna company while Ivan is gone. However, the spider is puzzling. The real point of the story is the historical lesson. By the end of the story, one gets the feeling the spider was superfluous, a connective device with little meaning.

The internment of "enemy aliens" during both world wars were important events in our history. Most Canadians know something about the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II; far fewer know that the same treatment was accorded other groups of "enemy aliens," some of them born in Canada, such as Germans and Ukrainians. From this point of view, the book is valuable and interesting, in that it resurrects a lost episode from Canada's past.

However, many people, especially non-Ukrainian-Canadians, will be uncomfortable with the book for the very same reason. They will not have the historical knowledge to put this story in context. The "historical note" by the author at the end of the book will not be of much help, as it essentially reiterates the same information given in the story. There is another side to the internment story, one not presented here, which raises the question: is it appropriate to treat such a complex issue with a simplistic good vs. evil story? Nevertheless, reading the book could offer an opportunity to discuss the difficult ethical and political issues raised by internment. These are heavier than the usual personal moral dilemmas offered by children's books. This is especially true if one goes beyond the happy ending offered by Skrypuch and points out (as she does in the "Historical Note") that many internees never had their property returned.

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