



## *Editorial: The Dark Side*

Even if we can't picture ourselves as co-warriors with the angels, most of us would like to think that, given the choice, we could resist the lure of the dark, that we could tell the difference between what is and what ought to be, and that we'd know a devil to see one. (He'd be the one with the horns.) The writers we feature in this issue may not agree.

The dark is not so easily known or understood, they claim. Indeed, the idea of the devil or of a menacing darkness stirs their imaginations to dramatic expressions of the problem of evil. And what is that problem? Its character has changed over the course of centuries of Western thought, but it is usually registered in two questions, moral and metaphysical: Why does it exist in the first place? Why do we seem incapable of surmounting it? The answers remain elusive.

This issue of *CCL* is devoted to writers who are willing to ask those questions in children's literature, willing to explore the problems of unmerited suffering and oppression, to investigate the illusion of loveliness that disguises the dark. The philosophy of life in Michael Bedard's, Dennis Foon's and Carol Matas's art defies any cursory formulation, but the writers' guiding ideas of good and evil, the dark and the light, can be recognized clearly. And though none offers a solution to the problem of evil, the writers we feature here do portray, either explicitly or implicitly, ways in which we should confront it. But it is not the task of these writers to delineate the cuter, rather safer side of the "bad" world: schoolyard bullies, snotty cliques, or telephone hogs. Theirs is children's literature, to be sure, but these are not demure writers. Foon has dramatized plays about sexual abuse, racism and alcoholism. Bedard has written novels about the mysterious grip one person can have on another. Matas has written about the Holocaust and witch-burnings. Not a pencil-case thief in sight.

While these writers differ markedly in subject and approach, they possess at least one arresting commonality. In her article on *A Darker Magic* and *Painted Devil*, Joanne Findon argues that "the greatest wrong," in Bedard's eyes is "to seek to control another person." That same belief belongs to Matas, as she tells us in her lively conversation with Perry Nodelman: "Someone once said evil is the desire to control other human beings. I think that's a pretty good definition and have adopted it as my own. From Hitler down to the class bully this definition seems to apply." Finally, as Sarah Gibson-Bray points out, many of Foon's works are concerned with the "politics of domination," which the

dramatist abhors. All of these writers are concerned, then, with the snuffing out of individuality, creativity, will and choice by a malevolent force. None seems to suggest that we can ever completely vanquish evil or eliminate the dark, because, like the dissonant notes which seem to swell the harmony of a composer's masterpiece or the shadows that seem to set off the light of a painting, the dark gives meaning to the light. As Matas puts it, "like form and shadow, they co-exist" in all of us. It is partly because of their daring and their convictions that none of these writers sits comfortably on a shelf with a group of "like" writers. Foon, for instance, stands alone. He has practically invented his own genre, "child advocacy theatre." Matas takes on aspects of history in her fiction that less brave writers would rather not touch. And because Bedard has altogether defied categorization, but has been most consistently called a fantasist, we thought we'd give you Judy Saltman's breathtaking survey of the development of fantasy writing in Canada, so you can see where a well-read expert might put Bedard's elusive works. Finally, we hope these articles and interviews help you see that that figure with the horns you thought you could spot easily looks different in the works of these three Canadian writers. So different you may not recognize him.

Marie C. Davis

