

malheur que Lisbelle Chatereau, la première victime, fut l'amie de l'inspecteur, apparemment inconsolable. Histoire d'amour à renaître sans doute dans d'autres ouvrages de Francine Pelletier.

Dès l'abord le lecteur remarque dans ce texte l'importante présence d'une technologie ultra-moderne. Maison mobile, projecteurs tridimensionnels, espaces délimités par des champs de force, communicateurs personnels, systèmes d'éclairage, commandés à distance: tout parle ici d'une société extrêmement développée. Et pourtant, il est évident que l'exploitation de l'Arkadie se poursuit, malgré ces inventions géniales, au prix d'une nature profondément dérangée. Le mal moral et le mal écologique vont ainsi de pair sur Arkadie, comme sur terre.

Il y a peu de points lumineux dans ce sombre récit d'une belle planète vouée à dépérir en nourrissant les industries terriennes. Et pourtant, c'est avec satisfaction que l'on apprécie le témoignage de la petite chanteuse Alexandrina Guerti ("ti-Guer" = tigre), qui avec vaillance pousse son auditoire à dépasser la sordide réalité afin d'effleurer un merveilleux salutaire. (En fait, son vrai "crime" c'est de s'éloigner trop du réel, quand elle aurait dû agir de façon immédiate et utile pour protéger les siens. Les jeunes lecteurs de ce récit remarqueront aussi qu'à cette époque future, la femme a évidemment acquis de longue date un statut d'égalité absolue. Peuplé d'agentes, de mineures, de techniciennes et de femmes scientifiques, sans parler des artistes (il y a même une metteuse en scène), cet univers, si loin de l'idéal, présente quand même le modèle d'une société où hommes et femmes oeuvrent et se divertissent ensemble sans préjudice ni pour l'un ni pour l'autre.

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MISSING THE STARS

Shooting for the stars. Denis Côté. Trans. J. Brierley. Black Moss Press, 1990. 120 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-215-2; **The invisible empire.** Denis Côté. Trans. D. Homel. Black Moss Press, 1990. 102 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88753-213-6.

Canadians, as Leonard Cohen observes in *The favourite game*, are desperate for a Keats. Students of Canadian children's literature would settle for something a little less lush – say a Twain, or a Kipling. Denis Côté, on the strength of these two novels, will, alas, not fill that niche.

The problem is not with M. Côté's choice of themes; both novels are set in the near future, and both deal with subjects of which most young juveniles are presumably aware. Michel Lenoir, the protagonist of *Shooting* is a hockey superstar in a collapsing civilization. Asked to compete against "The human ma-

chine" – a team of robots – Michel begins to acquire a social conscience – a process which culminates in the discovery that his team's owner is not only involved in robot manufacture, but in a far more sinister plot to use android technology to establish human tyranny. (Adolph Eichmann in aluminum!) The novel concludes with Michel's discovery that, since his owner controls the media and the police, Michel is in effect powerless to resist him.

Empire concludes with a similar loss of innocence. Investigating the murder of his idol, pop star and activist John Goodman (a cynical rip-off of John Lennon, complete down to Asian wife), Nicholas St-Laurent uncovers a bizarre cult dealing in brainwashing and death. He is almost killed by his withdrawn and neglected teen-age sister who has, unbeknownst to her indifferent brother, also become a member of the cult. At the novel's close, he must accept both his own guilt and his failure to secure any social response to the villains.

What is right about these two novels is their refusal to deal in moral oversimplification and cheap assurances of a rosy future. (*Shooting* has won three awards including the Canada Council prize for juvenile literature.) What is wrong with them is almost everything else. Characterization is shallow, the plots deal with predictably trendy issues, and occasionally rupture, rather than merely suspend, the reader's sense of disbelief (as when Nicholas' guitar deflects his sister's bullets!). Dialogue is also predictable and wooden – even at the hands of two different translators (I have not had an opportunity to examine the French text). M. Côté's demonstrated skills as a storyteller are, in short, inadequate to his moral vision – as Twain's and Kipling's are not. A juvenile audience can be no excuse; children – especially children – deserve better. Despite M. Côté's ten novels, even desperate Canadians will have to allow him a little more time to master the tools of his craft.

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MIXING FANTASY AND REALITY: FOUR PICTURE BOOKS

The tinder box. Michael Bedard. Illus. Regolo Ricci. Oxford University Press, 1990. 28 pp., \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540767-9; **The magic paintbrush.** Robin Muller. Doubleday, 1989. 32 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-25228-5; **The beast.** Alice Bartels. Illus. Gilles Tibo. Annick Press, 1990. Unpag., \$14.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-101, 1-55037-102-9; **Cowboy dreams.** Dayal Kaur Khalsa. Tundra Books, 1990. 32 pp., \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-245-X.

Because children must discover both the possibilities that life offers as well as the restraints it imposes, tales that mingle fantasy and reality are particularly