

MINI-REVIEWS

I Live on a Raft. Jerzy Harasymowicz. Trans. Seymour Mayne. Illus. Sharon Katz. Concertina, 1994. 24 pp., \$3.75 paper. ISBN 0-9697709-1-X.

Canadian poet Seymour Mayne here offers a selection of quiet little poems by the poet, Jerzy Harasymowicz. The illustrations are rendered on a Macintosh LC by Sharon Katz. The book is small, unassumingly stapled, almost a tiny pamphlet. It works, though, because the poems are fine, and the visuals are appropriately restrained.

The title, *I Live on a Raft*, provides the point of view for these reflections.

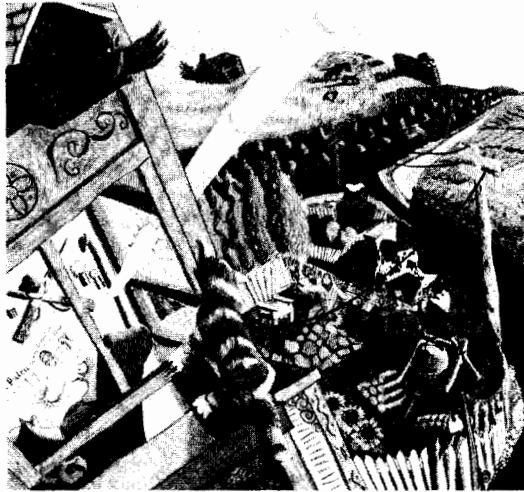
In spring
I sit down to write a poem
Adding a word
I begin to wonder
 Suddenly leaves
 fly by my hands
 announcing
 autumn

Modest understatement, words chiselled to fit small spaces, the passage of time witnessed from a quietly drifting raft, a successful little book.

Allan Sheldon teaches English and Children's Literature at Medicine Hat College in Alberta.

The Longest Home Run. Roch Carrier. Illus. Sheldon Cohen. Trans. Sheila Fischman. Tundra Books, 1993. Unpag., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-300-6.

The Longest Home Run has been translated and adapted from the original French version. Adeline, the protagonist, is part of her father's vaudeville act. When this two-person magical show passes through a village, Adeline shows up at the local baseball pad and demonstrates that she, a girl, can hit the ball better than any one of the boys. A retired baseball coach recognizes a great ballplayer in Adeline's hit, but is outraged when this potential world-class talent turns out to be a girl rather than a boy. The book emphasizes the older generation's stereotypical opinion about a girl's abilities which results in denying a talented child, the character, the opportunity to develop her potential. The theme of male domination of women's rights is further developed on a domestic level. Adeline's father, a magician on stage but quite a little man in reality, uses her as a prop in his act. He makes her disappear in a trunk, a euphemism for non-existence. Off-stage, he denies her presence so that her admiring baseball boys have no access to her. One persistent boy catches a last glimpse of her: boxed in her father's truck she is carted off to his next gig. On- and off-stage, Adeline's life can be summed up as the clichéd role of a woman: to be subservient to and controlled by the man in her life. For the protagonist, there is no way out of this box. But the reader



is encouraged to liberate this girl through the style of the illustrations: we are given multiple imaginative perspectives, all painted in vivacious colours. The expressive drawing of the images reveals the judicious touch of an accomplished artist.

Jetske Sybesma, M.F.A., PhD., is a professor of Art History in the Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta.

Louis Riel. Rosemary Neering. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1992. 64 pp., \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88902-214-3.

Of all Canadians, Louis Riel is the most written about. The Riel literature is massive. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that we have yet another volume on the life of this man who has intrigued Canadians for well over a hundred years. Rosemary Neering has produced a very brief biography that is directed at young readers. The sixty-four pages of text includes some three dozen illustrations, so the actual text — divided into fifteen chapters — is very short. The presented Riel is not inaccurate. At the same time we are not given a particularly full Riel. What we get is a totally politically correct and sanitized Louis Riel. Here is a man who represented oppressed Métis and aboriginals. They did no wrong and the white population of Canada rarely did anything right. Young people will not be harmed by reading Rosemary Neering's biography. At the same time they will get nothing approaching a full picture of this enigmatic Canadian.

Donald Swainson teaches history at Queen's University. His many publications include "Rieliana and the Structure of Canadian History" in Hartwell Bowsfield, ed., *Louis Riel: Selected Readings*, Toronto, 1988.