

tions keep the wackiness spinning steadily. While Reid weaves the classic repetitions any much-loved spoken tale should have, MacKenzie's wonky perspectives and wealth of witty visual detail distract delightfully (A park monument to a spokes ... frog?, a sardonic maritime shop sign reads "EB A. Ground, YACHTS"). All are drawn in a confident, fluid and exact line so that even the clothespin and laundry line pulley is dead on. The pastel hues are saved from "cuteseyness" by a clear light source with shadows to match and so the three-dimensional look is suggested in this not-so-nonsensical tale. Conrad School is wonderfully fortunate to have such a light-hearted gem as this, dedicated to them.

But even as illustrations support and augment the picture book, so must the design. A simple improvement for *Follow that bus* perhaps would be to render the hand-styled title letters larger, bolder and maybe with a thin outline to firmly establish the all-important cover on the bookshop shelves.

Almost directly opposite in colour treatment is Pierre Pratt's *Follow that hat* (*Leon sans son chapeau*, in French). Here we see richly deep and textural colours, yummily scumbled across black underpainting which remains in rough outlines to illustrate *le pauvre* Leon's pursuit of his hat. The story grows increasingly wilder and funnily fantastic ("*Faster*, he told the conductor of the Rapido-Expresso-Transcontinental-London-Santa Fe-Istanbul train") until it seems that Pratt's story runs off the word-play rails. In a miscalculated Brechtian move, Pratt lapses into rhetorical questions and asides which only distract and puzzle in either translation. Nevertheless, Leon comes full circle through a world of tiny-headed, square-bodied, and long-armed people, as he reclaims *son chapeau* only to ... you guessed it, see its twin soar off into the blustery sky over angled row housing and streaming hair!

Design falters again when black type is poorly placed on dark ultramarine or cobalt blues. It's simply too hard to read. Although a pity Pratt's feast of colour and craziness is slightly diminished by this weakness, the book celebrates a stimulating and lusciously-hued land of his happy creation.

Robin Baird Lewis is an illustrator and art teacher. Her seventh title, *To the Post Office with Mama*, will be published by Annick Press in the spring of 1994.

TWO WINNERS FROM PETER CUMMING

A horse called Farmer. Peter Cumming. Illus. P. John Burden. Ragweed Press, 1984. 37 pp., ISBN 0-920304-34-6; **Out on the ice in the middle of the bay.** Peter Cumming. Illus. Alice Priestley. Annick Press, 1993. 32 pp., \$15.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-276-9, 1-55037-277-7.

Peter Cumming's *A horse called Farmer* won the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia first prize for children's fiction in 1980, was first published by Ragweed

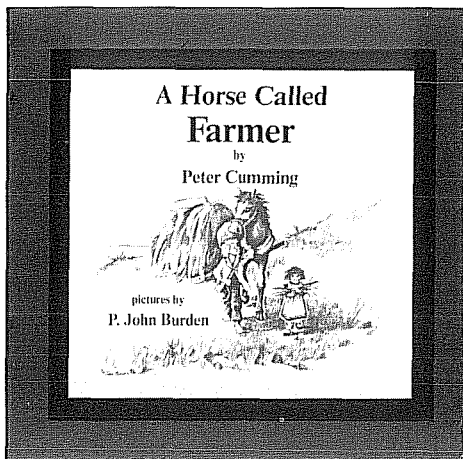
Press in 1984, had its fourth printing in 1989, and has appeared in French, German, Danish, and Welsh editions, as well as a mass market Scholastic edition for schools and as a CNIB talking book. The popularity is well deserved; Cumming has captured the single-minded, plucky courage of the small Magdalen Islands horse that through instinct, a remarkable sense of smell, and a passionate longing for his island home, found his way back to his little barn and the children he

loved. The journey took place in 1923, across sixty miles of shoreline and dunes, culminating in a two-mile channel swim in the fog.

The story has the reassuring there-and-back-again structure that children enjoy. It opens with Farmer in his Entry Island home, a horse's paradise of open spaces to run when work is over, a good master, a snug stall in a tiny, familiar barn, and children to bring him carrots in the fall. The idyll is broken, however, when Farmer is sold one winter and taken to the other end of the Magdalen chain. The horse's shock and confusion at the strange, whip-cracking master, the new smells, the big, draughty barn, and the barbed wire fences are conveyed effectively by short sentences and paragraphs with repetitive structure. Initially I felt the repeated phrase "smelled strange" was overdone, but my children were caught up by the rhythm and chimed in ominously as the words ever more clearly signalled Farmer's predicament. Finally, the next summer, someone forgets to close the gate and Farmer heads home. The swim across the fog-bound channel is the climax of the story and Cumming recreates Farmer's emotional turmoil through the simultaneous pressures exerted by the terror of swimming, and the insistent pull of the home he can now smell.

P. John Burden's charcoal drawings convey the full range of Farmer's emotions; the technique is stark enough for the terror of the channel swim, but detailed enough to support the perceptible changes from security, to confusion, through terror, to relief at homecoming.

Out on the ice in the middle of the bay is a quite beautiful picture book. With Alice Priestley's soft, coloured pencil pastel drawings and Cumming's balanced patterns of words, sentences, and scenes the whole has a dreamlike, poetic aura enveloping it which well suits this story of discovery, innocence, and wonder. Summary is easy: In an eastern Arctic November little Leah (about four) wanders from her drowsy home out onto the ice in the middle of the bay where a giant iceberg looms above the scene. At the same time a polar bear cub, Baby



Nanook, wanders toward the same spot from his sleeping mother bear on the other side of the berg. Both Leah's dad and Mother Nanook notice the absences at the same time and rush to the rescue. In the meantime the children have met and fallen asleep together under the moon in the shadow of the iceberg. The parents have a standoff and are about to attack each other when the children awaken and separate them. The parents gradually back off without violence, and go their own ways with the young ones. The iceberg is left under the moon in the middle of the bay.

Cumming balances all actions through parallel structure, thus stressing the similarities between the lives of humans and bears. Here the young ones meet:

Out on the ice in the middle of the bay, Leah was wandering, Baby Nanook was roaming, the sun was sinking, the moon was climbing, the iceberg just standing, when all of a sudden ...

Little Leah saw Baby Nanook.

Baby Nanook saw little Leah.

And here Dad and Mother Nanook meet:

Leah's father was racing, Mother Nanook was lumbering, the sun was disappearing, the cold moon rising, the iceberg just standing, when all of a sudden ...

Leah's father saw Mother Nanook—right in front of him!

Mother Nanook saw Leah's father—right in front of her!

Priestley's illustrations extend the parallel structure through deft use of perspective, proceeding from individual closeups of the respective families, to a panoramic sweep of the bay with the iceberg dominating and the two young ones dwarfed on opposite sides of it, to a closeup of the young ones meeting. The pattern is repeated in essentials with the parents. Throughout, the iceberg—"a magical island of snow"—is left singular, except for one drawing where it balances the community church's steeple. Whether this juxtaposition is intentional or not, it lends support to the other-worldly atmosphere. The story places the human and animal worlds in a balanced relationship within a unifying nature. And because the text and illustrations complement each other so well, the wonder is tangible.

Laurence Steven is associate professor of English and vice dean of Humanities at Laurentian University.

