

partly because Katz has managed to make the whale's perceptions and ways of thinking alien enough that the animal does not become anthropomorphized, and partly because of the very human-seeming feelings of the whale – feelings of loneliness, isolation, concern for her calf, grief, love. Somehow the alienness of the perceptions and the humanness of the motions combine to create a powerful unity that become the whale, and could be nothing else.

The plot is also engaging. As Agatha Christie's continued popularity proves, we never grow out of our love of mysteries and adventure, no matter how mature we become. Katz uses a mystery format in this novel, centering the action of the plot on both a suspected murder and an illegal search for sunken treasure. Katz leaves the reader guessing about the murder until the last chapter of the novel. Thus the author is presenting three quite different lines of action in this novel. She is following the personal and interpersonal development of the two young people. Then Katz presents the plot concerning the whale, summered off shore, with her racial memory of another summer off this same shore, centuries before, and sees the past of that far-off time repeating itself in the present. Finally, there is the double mystery about Richard's death and the sunken treasure.

Katz's control over her material in this novel is masterly. The plot is continually fascinating. This novel should be too complex to work well in its 212 pages, yet it works extremely well, because of the author's skill in being succinct and yet penetrating in what she does present. The theme of the importance of emotional openness and love to heal many of the hurts even young people have already sustained informs this novel on every level. Tied in with this theme is the idea of trust, the need for vulnerability, and respect of the other, the damaging effects of hatred and bitterness, the need for forgiveness. And woven throughout all is the Song of the whale, tying places and times together in a unity that transcends all the individual elements of the novel, making it a spiritual *tour de force* as well. This is one novel not to be missed.

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## LOVING TIES WITH GROWING THINGS

**The pumpkin blanket.** Deborah Turney Zagwyn. Illus. author. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1990. Unpag., \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88902-741-2; **Maxine's tree.** Diane Leger-Haskell. Illus. Dar Churcher. Orca, 1990. Unpag., \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-920501-38-9.

Both of these picture books offer the child reader a lesson we might loosely call ecological: we are deeply connected to the earth. Each has a rural setting, the remote farm of Cleo and her family in *The pumpkin blanket* and Carmanah Valley on the west coast of Vancouver Island in *Maxine's tree*. The illustrations share a primitive quality reminiscent of the work of Ann Blades. Such similarities, however, are superficial; the differences between these books are more striking. Although both deal with the emotional connection between the natural and the human, *The pumpkin blanket* is the more daring and the more intricate of the two.

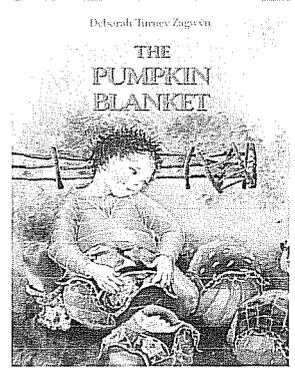
*Maxine's tree* tells the story of Maxine's affection for Carmanah Valley and especially for one sitka spruce; she plays under it on weekend camping trips while her father and other volunteers build trails through the rainforest. As a note at the end of the book informs us, the trail builders hope to raise public awareness of this region's beauty and fragility. The plot turns on Maxine and her cousin Eddie discovering a clearcut section of forest. When Maxine becomes aware that her tree and its surrounding forest might suffer the fate of the section she has seen brown and bare, her great-grandmother encourages her to hope that if more people come to the forest they might wish to save it, but she offers only passive hope: "We'll just have to wait and see." Maxine doesn't wait. Instead she lays claim to her special tree, marking it with a piece of driftwood with her name on it. The result of Maxine's initiative might not, in the long run, save the forest, but it is surprising, and it does impress on us the book's message that human care and community effort can lift the spirits. In an important sense that has nothing to do with exploitative ownership, everyone who joys in the beauty of the forest owns the forest. And Dar Churcher's illustration points out that this ownership has nothing to do with nationality. This book is about caring proprietorship; everyone from everywhere is a proprietor of the earth's beauty.

*Maxine's tree* presents this message simply. Text and illustration face each other comfortably on verso and recto. Twice we have a double-page illustration, once when we see a panorama of the valley with the clearcut section scarring the mountainside, and once when Maxine has run into the forest to find markers everywhere. Perspective is generally straightforward. Figures are clearly represented and the shapes are infused with bright swatches of colour: green, blue, yellow, red, amber. Churcher's watercolours capture the softness of moss, fungus and fern. This is a place of light and warmth. The illustrations invite the eye to examine not only the texture, but also the shapes, and the adventurous eye will find creatures not mentioned in the text. The life of the forest is also signalled on the white recto pages beneath the printed text where Churcher decorates the page with a hedgehog, a beetle, a slug, a lizard, a snail, or some forest vegetation. The message is perhaps signalled as clearly as possible on the cover where Maxine lovingly hugs her tree.

The cover of *The pumpkin blanket* also depicts a child in a loving relation-

ship with growing things. Here Clee affectionately wraps a piece of her blanket around a pumpkin that is as round and as orange as the sweater Clee wears. The story makes clear, however, that Clee's relationship with the pumpkins involves sacrifice; to protect the pumpkins from the October's frost, Clee must give up her precious blanket. This explains the predominance of brown in this book. The story is a bittersweet investigation of time, the passing of the seasons and the passing of childhood.

In both text and pictures this is a superior book. The text is inset in the pictures, usually in a carefully balanced way, the soft brown panel of text in one page set off against the soft brown panel in the opposite picture. Often pictures form a double-page spread separated down the spine of the book, a technique that nicely captures the sense of continuity amid discontinuity that the book communicates. The narrative works both visually and verbally, the complete information often coming to us only when we allow the pictures to work against the words of the text. For example, the opening two-page spread tells us in words that "when Clee was born, the Northern Lights shook their folds above her bed." Words also tell us, if we read sensitively enough, that the blanket the family finds comes from the wind; it is a gift of the seasons, or, more properly, of the Northern Lights themselves. But only from the picture do we realize that Clee comes into the world in autumn; the leaves have left the trees, the ground is barren, and the pick-up truck is loaded with produce. A lone coyote baying to the sky is balanced by the family gathered round Clee's cot and framed by the window of their house. We have a privileged view of the house and surrounding landscape with the Northern Lights shimmering and the blanket floating towards the front door. The brown panels that hold the printed text act as windows superimposed on the visual image. Only once is this panel shown behind the visual image, on a page in which the perspective shifts dramatically. This shift reminds us of a power that controls the narrative. In other words, behind this story of a girl who learns to live without her security blanket is the story of a mysterious power that inhabits nature. The blanket itself represents this power, and it is a cute and important moment at the end of the book when we see Clee watching from inside her front door as twelve jack-o-lanterns shine on the front porch. She holds behind her back a small remnant of her pumpkin blanket, the blanket which the printed text indicated had blown away "on a playful current of wind, into a sparkling sky."



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