above all, of finery, male and female. No popular Regency romance ever dwelt more lovingly on dress.

But amidst all this froth, we have too the portentous-sounding Storm Oak, a wood of myths, and a jealous female ghost who dies of love and is bent on having the heroine do the same. The result is fantasy in a muddle, complicated by the presence of seven knights doomed to be vultures for seven years, and a nest of gigantic helpful wasps, whose queen tells the princess a tedious *pourquoi* tale, to no great purpose.

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Canadian Children's Drama

EUGENE BENSON

Inook and the Sun, H. Beissel. Playwrights Co-op. (344 Dupont St., Toronto, M5R IV9), 1974. 76 pp. $3.20, plus .25 postage.

Waterfall, Book and Lyrics by Larry Fineberg, Music by W. W. Skolnick. Playwrights Co-op, 1974. 32 pp. $1.95 plus .25 postage.

Boy Who Has a Horse, Bonnie Le May. Playwrights Co-op, 1974. 31 pp. $1.50 plus .25 postage.

The Song of the Serpent, Betty Lambert. Playwrights Co-op, 1973. 49 pp. $2.25 plus .25 postage.

Cyclone Jack, Carol Bolt, Musical Score by Paul Vigna. Playwrights Co-op, 1972. 27 pp. $1.50 plus .25 postage.

Inook and the Sun is the best of five Canadian plays listed above and it is against the excellence which it establishes that the other plays for children can be evaluated.

Inook, like all children's classics (*Gulliver's Travels, Alice in Wonderland*), appeals alike to adult and child. Beautifully written, it does not seek to condescend to what we imagine children's taste to be but seeks rather to elevate a child's taste and imaginative stretch. Beissel himself writes in the Introduction: "*Inook* is not primarily written for children, though it is easy to see why it should have a special appeal to them. The play is intended to offer something to all ages, each according to his state of consciousness." The play, precisely because it is so beautifully written and so superbly crafted, succeeds in having this

multi-level appeal. Children will be fascinated, awed, saddened, delighted, astonished by the perils of Inook - the Cariboo dance and hunt, the killing of the Polar Bear by Inook and the death of his father, Inook's journey in search of the sun which leads him to the underwater cave of Sumna, Goddess of the Sea. There follows a battle with the Monster of the Sea, an escape from sharks and finally the entry into the Great Hall of the Iceberg where Inook finds the sun that he will bring back to his own land.

If this literal level of the play has a powerful appeal for children there is much more on the symbolic and mythopoeic levels. *Inook and the Sun* is also a morality play about adolescence and maturity, about living and dying, about the unique capacity of the imagination to give meaning and significance to what is otherwise meaningless. *Esse est percipi.* When Sumna changes from an "ugly hag" into a beautiful woman (the ancient motif of the "loathly lady"), Inook says, "How you've changed! You're almost as beautiful as the Spirit of the Sun." Sumna replies, "It's you who's changed. Understanding has changed you, and courage. The better you understand and the braver you are, the more beautiful I and all things shall be." Inook learns to understand that it cannot always be summer, that "all things have their season." He may marry the Sun, but he is warned that always the Sun is betrothed to the Spirit of the Ice. Such Blakean contraries are intimated in the Raven's first song where we are told that "White is black, and black is white."

One of the dangers in writing Indian or Eskimo plays is the temptation to write in stagey English ("Me great Father of all my people"). Beissel avoids this danger by disclaiming any intention of trying to recreate in English Eskimo language or customs or attitudes. "In the arctic," he writes, "I saw fundamental patterns of life and death and quest lying open to the mind that are buried in our urban civilization." Precisely. Henry Beisell has written a Canadian classic because he has tapped archetypal patterns and feelings; the play may benefit (as the author hopes) from a Bunraki type treatment, but it can as easily be scaled down to suit the limitations of small school productions. The Playwrights Co-op is to be congratulated on presenting this superb children's play in such a tasteful format; the drawings of Norman Yates complement the text handsomely.

Waterfall, book and lyrics by Larry Fineberg, music by William Skolnick, was originally commissioned and produced by Young People's Theatre, Toronto; the author characterises his play as "a Grimm fairy tale come to life, Walt Disney without sweetness."

The play is concerned with the quest of Who, a young magician, for a certain waterfall in the forest that brings enchantment and peace. Predictably, various obstacles are set in Who's path. He is deserted by Zampa his gipsy assistant, two Trees try to prevent his entry into the forest, he is attacked by Muscle (who is described as being "like an oversized amoeba"). Later a Slig (a sign post) gives Who confusing directions and a Molew (a mink-like animal) warns him about Lurga, the terrible beast of the forest who guards the waterfall. On his arrival at the falls, there is a great battle between Lurga and Who (Who wins!).

While *Waterfall* has some of the ingredients of a successful children's play, it is, ultimately, a rather mediocre play in execution and in its language. There is a rather promising character, Zampa, in the opening scene who is dropped arbitrarily. There is no reason why he could not have been reshaped a little and given the role and function of Noodles. The encounter with the two Trees who try to prevent Who's entry into the forest is muddled and uninventive. The moral of the play is much too obviously stated by Boxy when he explains the reason for the various trials that Who had to endure in his quest. "We wanted to kill your enthusiasm so we could mold you, and make you into a creature, like Slig." The language of the play mirrors the action - it is tired and hackneyed: "Zampa is big on the basics. Okay kid, set up the act." And again, "How boring you are. No wonder you had to leave all those towns. You're like a child who's wet his pants. You won't accept anything." The inexactitude of language here (what is the justification for the simile of the last quotation?) is symptomatic of *Waterfall* which depends on stage business rather than on a genuinely conceived and developed dramatic situation.

Boy Who Has A Horse, first produced at the Canmore Opera House, Heritage Park, Calgary in 1972, is primarily directed at children in Grades 4, 5 and 6. The play tells of the efforts of the Mounties to induce Sitting Bull and his people to return to the United States. This historical and tragic episode in Canadian history is viewed through the eyes of a young Indian, Red Feather, later named Boy who Has A Horse. This material, so well treated from another aspect by Sharon Pollock in *Walsh*, is wasted in the hands of Bonnie Le May. The author seems to accept the argument of the Mounties (as stated by the young Mountie, Grizzly Bear Face who "has a beard, short hair, Ontario background") that the Sioux (and Boy Who Has A Horse) are better off to conform to the white man's ways; no attempt is made, even with historical hindsight, to suggest that perhaps the Indians' way of life, if not superior to the white man's, was certainly beautifully attuned to tribal and ecological factors. Little attempt is made to illustrate the tragic quality of Sitting Bull's people who were political refugees and who were forced by the Canadian government to return to the US. in the years 1880 - 1881 (Sitting Bull was the last to return and he was shot and killed in 1890). The simplistic nature of the play can be summed up by the author's own précis is the last scene: "Boy consults Old Woman about the meaning of his dream and shows his leadership potential by helping her." *Boy Who Has A Horse* is a badly flawed play that cannot be recommended by this reviewer.

Betty Lambert's *The Song of the Serpent* is a robust, gutsy play that children will enjoy. Actually it is a melodrama, as the author tells us, with vile villains (Corrigan and Knuckle - both Americans), a pure heroine (Priscilla), wooden (Indian) hero, Jason; "and just a touch of MISCEGENATION, RAPE, ILLEGITIMACY, RACIST CONFLICT and DRUNKENNESS, not to mention DEATH and DESTRUCTION." Betty Lambert triumphantly unfolds her tale of the Cariboo Country, B.C. in the year 1866, a tale that tells of a secret goldmine guarded by a Serpent, an Indian under sentence of death (he is saved on the last

page), a young half breed who discovers his father (on the last page), an Englishman who drinks too much which may have accounted for his marrying an Indian woman, Priscilla, an impossible prig of a girl, and a Baron who actually says things like, "Aha! Dastards! Vipers! Blackguards! Claim jumpers!" This is a fine improbable play that I enjoyed very much; melodrama is a low form of art, but it can be amusingly entertaining in the hands of a writer who knows how to utilize and guy its preposterous conventions.

Cyclone Jack by Carol Bolt was commissioned and first produced by Young People's Theatre, Toronto, in 1972 and later toured the schools of Ontario in 1973. Like much of Bolt's work (*Buffalo Jump, Red Emma, Maurice*), *Cyclone Jack* is concerned with social justice and the exploitation of people. In this play Carol Bolt cleverly relates two dominant and traditional figures of exploitation - the athlete and the Indian - in the person of Tom Longboat (known in the play as Cyclone Jack), long distance runner from the Brantford Iroquois reservation who won the Boston Marathon race of 1907. In a series of swift, impressionistic sketches, Bolt shows us Cyclone Jack winning the Boston Marathon and being given a victorious reception at Toronto City Hall, brings us to the Grand Central Hotel where Flanagan and O'Rourke oblige with a song and dance routine, and shows us the 1908 Olympics where another winning long distance runner, Dorando, is introduced to act as an ironic foil to Cyclone Jack. Dorando is exploited by his manager and ends in the hospital; this prefigures the fate of Cyclone Jack who finished as a garbage truck driver in Toronto at the age of 35. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

This is promising Bolt country but, unfortunately, that promise is not redeemed. The author does not seem able to make up her mind whether to deal with her material in straight-forward fashion or treat it farcically. The play dithers precariously between two genres. Even the characters are cardboard figures - Flanagan is the stock figure of the ruthless boss, Cyclone Jack's girl friend is vapid and stereotyped (fittingly she is called 'the lovely Lauretta Maracle'). We are *told* that Cyclone Jack will be exploited and cast aside when he stops winning races, but this is never dramatised directly for us. Every page of *Cyclone Jack* shows evidence of Carol Bolt's skill as a dramatist, but the play as a whole lacks an artistic focus that might have unified excellent but disparate elements.

It should be noted, finally, that musical scores are available from the Playwrights Co-op for *Waterfall* and *Cyclone Jack*. Write Playwrights Co-op., 344 Dupont St., Toronto, M5R 1V9

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