season, whether the subject matter is tense or active or neither, she habitually uses short snappy sentences (all too many beginning with "for") and sentence fragments that carry a story forward at a rapid clip but also produce a staccato, hiccoughing effect. Her typographical emphases are obtrusively frequent. Ritualistic repetitions that probably echo the verbal formulas of oral storytellers become monotonous and suggestive of laziness, at least to adult eyes and ears. A penchant for word-play and verbal whimsy sometimes misleads her into near-coyness or even downright obscurity, as in "At the other end of awesomeness, there was Mouse Woman. . . ." Nevertheless, her descriptions are concisely evocative, and she places her bits of information and her provocative hints with a sure hand. Mouse Woman has found an appreciative biographer and an efficient teller of tales.

The stories are also well served by their illustrator, Douglas Tait, whose drawings range from a naturalistic sketch of an Indian girl picking berries, her basket suspended from a headband, to stark, startling, macabre pictures of an avid-eyed vulturous bird poised on a bare, sculptured branch and a worried little mouse, presumably Mouse Woman herself in mousy guise, crouching anxiously upon an enormous, long-toothed skull. Except for a handful, such as the recurrent sketch of Mouse Woman in hat and dancing blanket, a picture of a lordly bear enthroned in the darkness of a den-like lodge with totem-carved entrance pillars, and a portrait of Great-Whirlpool-Maker as a wild-haired brave with eyes almost mad enough to burn holes in the page, Tait's drawings are all realistic, and thus indicative of the reality that generated these richly imaginative stories in the minds of a complex, clever people.

In short, as she is presented in this book, Mouse Woman was well worth resurrecting, and so were the characters who live again to receive her benign busybody attentions.

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The following free booklists are available from Irene E. Aubrey, National Library of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N4:

*NOTABLE CANADIAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS/UN CHOIX DE LIVRES CANADIENS POUR LA JEUNESSE

*SOURCES D'INFORMATION SUR LES LIVRES CANADIENS-FRANCAIS POUR ENFANTS/SOURCES OF FRENCH CANADIAN MATERIALS FOR CHILDREN

*CANADIAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS: A TREASURY OF PICTURES/LIVRES CANADIENS D'ENFANTS: UN TRESOR D'IMAGES

Poems by Kids?

GERALD NOONAN

The Thing in Exile, Steve, Stu, & Mark. Books by Kids, Toronto, 1975. 56 pp.

My Third Eye: Images of a Cold Country, ed. Russ Hazzard. All About Us, Ottawa, 1976. 60 pp.

Once Upon A Time I Love You, Jason Hearne Perry. Intermedia, Vancouver, 1975. 56 pp.

The most interesting of these three volumes of poems by juveniles is *My Third Eye,* and the most interesting part of it is the Introduction, perhaps because like superior poetry the Introduction leaves you wondering. The book is the product of fewer than twenty pupils in St. Norbert Community School, near Winnipeg, a school run by parents and a part-time teacher in a converted trailer. In such a school, it is quite possible, as the Introduction reports, to read E.J. Pratt, Irving Layton, "Pound and many others" to ten-year-olds, but if the pupils "do not always 'understand' a particular poem" one wonders to what extent the practice "produces a fine understanding of poetry itself" and to what extent "it allows a child to enter deep into the poetic process".

One should be able to judge by the product, I suppose, and, as I say, the poems here, by pupils age six to twelve, are most interesting, but I wonder about the similarity of pattern imposed upon the children, and whether they themselves are aware of the subtleties that make one pattern poem memorable and another merely an exercise.

An interesting poem that follows the title pattern of "My Third Eye" begins:

> My third eye can draw Death
> And put it in a glass jar
> And seal it up tight and air-free.

It ends:

> My third eye is. . .
> . . .as calm as a caterpillar
> And he isn't afraid of anything
> But me.

There's a subtle coherence there that I don't find in another poem of the same pattern that ends:

> I hate my third eye.
> I hate my third eye so much
> I killed it.

It would be a massive case of academic overkill to invoke intentional fallacy in this juvenile court except that the adult Introduction does invite academic comparison. Editor Russ Hazzard implies strongly that these poems represent the unfettered spirits of children who but for the grace of St. Norbert's would be restricted by "boring and. . .difficult rhyme schemes" in the conventional school system. It is true, as he says, that here we do not have "poems full of bunnies, Santa Clauses, and the other silly subjects" that are encouraged in the conventional system. But isn't that simply a direct result of the adult decision not to encourage them, and to encourage other subjects?

Though I sympathize with Hazzard, commend him, and agree with him, almost, I do keep wondering if a six-year-old would think "My third eye" or "I am. . .(various objects)" equally silly as subjects if they were not sanctioned in advance by obvious adult conviction. And I wonder: if twenty pupils follow teacher's suggestion in applying one transcendent poetic formula, to what extent are the best results as printed here the product of adult selectivity? And how many of the children if left to their own devices would go back to doodling mythologically with the bunnies and Santa Clauses of their peers?

Further, I wonder: if these children are saved from the rigours of conventional teachers and conventional rhyme schemes, how come so many of the poems, more than a dozen, are perfectly formed haiku? Do "the free and active minds of six to ten-year-olds" as the cover-blurb says, normally run to three lines of five, seven and five syllables respectively?

In general, I am inclined to accept, with the cover-blurb, that "the world of childhood" is "a space where imagination roams" but I think it is the adult who defines it; it is the adult, not the lively child, who "articulates the charm and delight of discovery". In short, it is still adults who write the best children's books. And *My Third Eye* is the best of these three volumes because it has the most adult control.

In that *Once Upon A Time I Love You* is a family production, there is some adult control but the editorial standards are too permissive for what is subtitled "A Whole New World of Poems, Rhymes, Songs and Stories for kids". As a result, the good things of unpretentious charm and vivacity:—for example, from "Purple Pastures",

> O me, O my, O molly
> I'm lonely and I'm lost
> I long to lie so lovely
> On my bed of purple moss

and from "Bratty Lou and Goobilygobilygobilygoo",

> But one funny morning, there was something new
> It happened when Bratty was feeling kinda blue
> She opened her mouth to say I gotta go poo
> But all that came out was Goobily Gobily Gobily Goo

are outweighed by the tendentious and dull. Too often a story is more summarized than activated, and some of the authors were either brought up

on the "See-Jane-Run, Run-Dick-Run" reader, or else they were the people who wrote it. Surely it's tiring to have unfunctional repetition such as this:

> One of the big boys decided that he was king, and nobody else could be king. This, of course, made all the other children want to be king. But the king-boy wouldn't let anyone else be king. And just to prove it. . .(p. 32).
>
> Whenever she wished, she was careful to know exactly what she wanted and only then did she wish her wish.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> There was still one wish which they couldn't quite wish because they didn't know exactly what it was they wished for (pp. 52-3).

Perhaps the fear of using more varied diction is consistent with the reluctance to attempt even a modicum of plot intricacy, and perhaps both, in turn, are related to what seems to be, in some stories, a mindless egalitarianism. In "We are all queens and kings", to fight for superior position is wrong and the intended moral is pacifism, I guess, although the only argument used is either egalitarian or anti-monarchist: "Either they were all kings and queens, or no one was a king or queen". In "Silly Sally", the little girl wants to be best at running, colouring, and dancing and cries when she isn't–(though the story says, illogically: "she still thought she *was* the best"). Sally accepts the fairy princess's explanation that, win or lose, Sally is "always the best anyway".

> Nobody can be better at being Sally than you. That's because you're a very special person. There's only one Sally like you in the whole world. And nobody can be more beautiful than that Sally, right?

So Sally never cried again, "because even when she lost, she knew she was the best–not the best runner maybe, or the best colourer or the best dancer, but the very best Sally".

Better the kid should learn something, I think–something less facile as in "Be Proud Jasmine" where the girl learns that when you're tired and lose confidence, you should "remember the good things you've done".

Facility is evident in *The Thing in Exile,* facility of line and subject. Unlike the children represented in *My Third Eye,* the three teen poets, Steve, Stu and Mark are old enough to know their intentions but their intention is not deep enough to do for the teen writer what Pratt, Layton or Pound presumably do for the sub-teens of St. Norbert: provide a dimension of wonder, or some extension of mind.

The poem "Gunfighter", for instance, may be a parallel for some TV skits as it cites how the man

> Polished his boots and buttons,
> Shaved his chin,
> Waxed his moustache,

But at 1 minute past High Noon,
As the sheriff's bullet pierced his gut,
He said,
"Damn, fergot muh gun".

This calibre of writing does more for the teen poet, I suspect, than for the teen reader; the satisfaction comes from putting it into words, not from encountering the idea which undoubtedly is more accessible and enjoyable on TV.

There are better poems in this collection, those whose conceits are more pat than trite: the untitled stanzas, for example, juxtaposing Catholic schoolchildren "being tended/ by penquins/ dressed as nuns" with Arctic polar bears "being observed/ by nuns/ dressed as penquins". The poem concludes: "it was an exchange program".

There are worse poems: one about an escalator that concludes (lamely), "You're always/One step ahead".

Their deft use of lines indicate that these writers have been taught some techniques (as in St. Norbert's Community School perhaps?) but the unexamined ideas and obvious echoes–

Nearby the women stood
Giggling
And talking of one another's clothes

suggest they should ponder once more some of those adults like Eliot, Donne, Pratt, Layton and Pound.

All three of these volumes are achievements for the poets and publishers and I think are apt to be more rewarding for them (helping to distance and objectify their literary program), and for aspiring writers (helping to assess the current standards) than for the general child audience which is apt to be in each case more confused than captivated by the uneven quality and divergent aims.

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