Harmony of Text and Picture in Picture-Books

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Harry Paints the Wind, Les Arnold. Designed by Rosemary Devries. London, Ontario: Applegarth Follies, 1975. Unpaged. $4.95 paper.

There are Trolls, John Green. Illustrated by Kenneth R. White. Winnipeg: Pequis. 1974. Unpaged. $4.50 cloth.

How Bruises Lost His Secret, C.H. Gervais. Illustrated by Patric Ryan. Coatsworth, Ontario: Black Moss, 1975. Unpaged. $5.95 paper.

The three books under review are picture books. They are Canadian picture books only in the sense that they have been written and produced in Canada. It is of no particular significance that one of them is set in a Canadian province; there is nothing Canadian about the background as there is nothing specifically Canadian about the images or themes. In another literary genre Christina Rossetti, Robert Louis Stevenson and Walter de la Mare, for example, have all three explored the nature of the wind. De la Mare asserts that "Nobody knows what the wind is. . ." "Who has seen the wind?" Christina Rossetti wonders, and in answer to the same question Stevenson writes:

> I saw the different things you did
> But always you yourself you hid
> I felt you push, I heard you call,
> I could not see yourself at all–
>
> O you that are so strong and cold
> O blower, are you young or old?
> Are you a beast of field and tree,
> Or just a stronger child than me?

Harry asks the same question in *Harry Paints the Wind.*

Harry is a sensitive child who lives on the sixth floor of an apartment block. At home he likes to listen to the sounds from the street below and from the sea which he can see from the balcony. At school he likes his class teacher, Mr. Burnett, he likes his own desk and he likes floor hockey in the gym on Thursdays. He dislikes Wendy, Jasmine and spelling. Closing his eyes to shut out what he has no desire to see, Harry retreats into his own imaginative world where he listens–he listens to the familiar sounds of the classroom and to the sigh of the wind "as it walked restlessly around the playground waiting for recess." Captivated by the sound, Harry resolves to paint the wind and in the art class, instead of the story book dragon he is

asked to draw, Harry draws the wind as a dragon that "swirled and groaned and wound itself around the paper like the wind winding itself around the apartment block at night". With little encouragement from his art teacher, who is concerned with more prosaic things, Harry continues his efforts to discover the nature of the wind, its form, its colour and its language. Always dissatisfied with his own best efforts, he realizes that the wind is neither dragon, nor fish, nor can he 'fix' it in shape or colour. There was the salt sea wind curling about his building, there was the red-hot prairie wind blowing over his grandfather's form, there was the city wind pungent with odours and blowing the washing dirty, there was the blue wind in the trees along the river bank. His world was full of winds, all different, always changing.

This attractive book is dedicated to Gareth, Jake and Megan and "all the other kids who tried to paint the wind." We all know some of them—these imaginative individuals who see more than is visible. The text is appealing. It catches the wonder, the optimism and the expectancy of childhood, and, at the same time, evokes a response from all of us who have, at some time or other, attempted to paint the wind, to capture rainbows, to turn illusions into reality. We, too, understood something of Harry's failure and frustration.

The verbal images are sharp and strong, showing us a wind "tapped from bread moulds", a wind which "coughed and bullied its way through the streets", a wind which "coloured the wheat gold and made it lean backwards and forwards in the schoolless summers", the wind that "curled saltily about his building".

Unfortunately the author has not been successful in sustaining the interest of the text to the end. It is because there is so much promise that the ending is such a disappointment. The text, perhaps, should have stopped one page earlier where Harry, musing on the elusive character of the wind, renews his resolve to find "the right colour and the right shape for a wind that kept on moving and twisting and singing". This would have avoided the incongruity of the last sentences which speak of swallowing rainbows!

Successful picture books are a happy blending of text and illustration. Certainly the sense of wonder which is evident in the text is depicted in the illustrations in *Harry Paints the Wind.* Throughout the book the face of Harry reflects a wistful dreaminess. There is much that is attractive about the decorative black-and-white collages which appear in profusion on every page. They may, however, be more appealing to an adult than to a child. And while colour is never as important as is the message in the picture book, a story which is concerned with colour seems to cry out for hue and tint.

The hand-printed lettering is not successful. The text is at times difficult to read and one page is scarcely legible. The sentence structure, unconventional capitalization and punctuation add nothing to the artistic whole.

A note on the back cover calls this a story for children. I have some reservations about this, as did also the bright seven-year-old with whom I shared it. She was glad that the art teacher did not laugh at Harry's

first drawing, but beyond that she had no comment.

There may be some doubt as to whether or not *Harry Paints the Wind* is really a child's book; there can be little doubt that *There are Trolls* is. This book also catches the curiosity, wonder and expectancy of the child's world—that world where there is no sharp division between reality and fantasy.

John F. Green and Kenneth White maintain that there are trolls. According to the D'Aulaires there are many kinds of trolls—"mountain trolls, forest trolls, water trolls, trolls with one head, trolls with three heads, trolls with twelves heads".[1] I must confess that I have never seen a troll and, since my mental picture of such beings had been coloured by the D'Aulaire representations, it took me more than a little while to accept as 'genuine White's cartoon-like creations. These are certainly not the trolls of Norwegian folklore but rather a modern breed possessed of rotund bodies (although some are thin!), bulbous noses, large button eyes, Pop-Eye-type appendages, and a certain winsomeness. They appear in most unexpected places, dress rather unconventionally, even for trolls, and have a most unusual diet. Unlike the Norse trolls who, according to legend, disappeared after they gazed directly in the face of the rising sun, these creatures may be seen almost anywhere. The black-and-white illustrations effectively complement the brief rhymed text. The amusing rhymes, presented in large, bold print, are catchy and appealing. The visual interpretation is simple and direct with a pleasing balance of the real and the fantastic. Children chuckle at one troll's diversified hat collection, another's attempt to find a sweater that fits, and still another's fondness for lemons. The ending comes rather abruptly but an air of anticipation remains.

The book has, in its present style and format, a simple charm which might be enhanced by the use of colour. The quality of the paper is good, and the cover sturdy, but unfortunately, the centre-sewn stitches in my review copy had broken before this review was finished!

A very different book is *How Bruises Lost His Secret.* This story is set in the real world, in an actual geographical location—Big Point in South Western Ontario. The main character is Mr. Brousseau, a farmer of rather uncertain disposition, known to all the villagers as Bruises. Bruises' secret concerns the peculiar mark over his right eye, a mark which neither he nor any of the adults of the village will ever discuss. The children provide their own explanations. Mr. Bruises has such a mark because he has such a bad temper, because he is so mean, because he had been a wrestler in a circus, because he had been born bad, because he is actually Cain from the Bible and so bears the Mark.

The mystery is solved when the shoemaker's relatives come to visit. Young Pierre, inexperienced in the ways of the farm, attempts to milk old Bossy and gets kicked in the head for his effort. The mark of Bossy's

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[1]Ingri D'Aulaire and Edgar Parin, *D'Auliare's Trolls* (Doubleday, 1972), p. 4.

hoof on Pierre's forehead is "very, very similar to the one Bruises had". The children draw their own conclusions—one wonders why it took them so long to do so—and Bruises loses his secret! Wishing to spare the feelings of the sensitive old man who feared their amusement, the children decide not to reveal their new knowledge. Their attitude changes, however, as they realize that the old farmer who "looked as mean as always" really "wasn't as mean as he looked".

Although the combination of mystery and humour makes the story mildly entertaining, the plot is slight and implausible. This is really all "much ado about nothing" and the reader knows it. The story does comment on human relationships as text and drawings combine to reveal a character who becomes more likeable as he is understood, but the plot is really too slight to sustain the mystery involved. The unsophisticated pen-and-ink drawings provide a literal interpretation of the text. Direct and uncluttered, they resemble the art work of a small child without the hallmarks of a child's imaginative creation. They do, however, serve well enough to complement a text which is too empty for excellent illustrations. I do not like this style of illustration, perhaps, because I share Bettina Ehrlich's dislike of what she calls "regression into artificial babyishness". Ehrlich believes that the illustrator of children's books "should have a lively recollection of his own childhood, and ability to creep back into it and recall what it felt like to be little but he should never try to paint like a child". [2]

The difference between a good picture book and a bad one may well be, like beauty, in the eye of the beholder. I can see in *How Bruises Lost His Secret* little to recommend it.

It is very difficult to catalogue the characteristics which are the essentials of an outstanding picture book, just as it is difficult to predict what children will find appealing in any single work. Egoff affirms that "the genius of the picture book lies in its balance of words and pictures, neither of which is complete without the other: together they form a perfect whole".[3] Certainly the best picture books are characterized by a harmony between the author, the illustrator, the designer, and the publisher. The story, told in two media, develops an interesting theme, and is marked by freshness, originality and imaginative quality. When evaluated by these criteria the three books under discussion must be judged undistinguished. *Harry Paints the Wind* and *There are Trolls* do have about them an imaginative quality; *There are Trolls* will doubtless delight and entertain many children. In *Harry Paints the Wind* graphics are unsuccessful and hence the book lacks that total harmony which results in an artistic unity. *How Bruises Lost His Secret* should perhaps have remained unpublished.

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[2]Bettina Ehrlich, "Story and Picture in Children's Books", *Horn Book Reflections*, ed. Elinor Field (Boston: Horn Book, 1969), p. 92.

[3]Sheila Egoff, *The Republic of Childhood* (2nd ed.; Toronto: Oxford, 1975), p. 271.

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Creative Canadian Children

MARILYN READ

The Art of Aluminum Foil. Jane Hinton and Hugh Oliver, General Publishing, 1974. 100 pp. $4.95 paper.

What To Do Till the Garbageman Arrives: A Miser's Craft Manual, Ruth Johnson, Gage, 1976. 117 pp. $6.95 hardcover.

One of our major reference tools for Canadian children's literature in English, Sheila Egoff's *The Republic of Childhood,* makes no mention of books concerned with arts and crafts suitable for use by Canadian children. Evidently output in this subject area in the past has been minimal, insignificant, and of poor quality. Therefore, it is a pleasure to note the appearance of two excellent books on creative crafts for Canadian children.

The former, Jane Hinton's *The Art of Aluminum Foil,* is an attractive, well-planned book of crafts constructed with aluminum foil. There are many ideas to tax the artistic imagination–they range from hanging decorations and table decorations to costumes, reliefs, and pictures. There is also a wide range in the complexity of the designs–from a simple pom-pom to hang on a Christmas tree to the intricate parts of a knight's costume. Approximately one-half of the book deals with crafts for Christmas; these include bells, angels, wreaths and chains. All are attractive and striking when finished, yet fairly simple in their construction.

The book is published in a large format and is sturdy, although it is paperbound. The attractive colour photographs of each of the twenty-five completed crafts add to the excitement of the creative spirit.

Each craft is approached first by a "Materials" section and then by an "Instructions" section. The materials list includes all regular and special items required in making the craft; the instructions are given with simplicity and are accompanied by helpful black-and-white photographs which explain carefully each step of the creative process.

The Art of Aluminum Foil is very flexible in its appeal. Many of the