

Both *Peas Again for Lunch* and *Henry Finds a Home* have the quality of stories invented for children known by the authors. In the private situation, the interweaving of storytelling with the special relationship between adult and child gives the story a certain magic. Neither of these stories however, is sufficiently inventive or remarkable to warrant sharing with the wide audience assumed in publication. Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess* does display those special qualities of invention, playfulness, adequate challenge and subsequent resolution which lift the story out of the ordinary and make storytelling a celebration.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Myrna Shure and Geo. Spivak, *Problem-Solving Techniques in Childrearing*. San Francisco, Josey-Bass Inc., 1978.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Constance Kamii and R. deVries, *Physical Knowledge in Preschool Education*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1978; Joanne Hendrick, *The Whole Child*. St. Louis, C.V. Mosby, 1980.

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## Bubblegum Gumshoes: Canada's teen detectives

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*Susan Super Sleuth*, by William Ettridge. Illus. by Laura Piotrowski. Potlatch Publications, 1979. 120 pp. \$2.95 paperback. ISBN 0-919676-18-9.

*The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma*, by Eric Wilson. Illus. by Gavin Rowe. Clark Irwin, 1980. 103 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 0-7720-12946.

Since its inception as a popular fiction genre, the mystery story has gained a large and varied following among readers of all ages. Its popularity is due, in part, to the glimpse of human nature it proffers,

and to the satisfaction the reader gains in seeing justice prevail.

Early adult mysteries were usually of the British drawing room type. A murder might take place in the city, village, or country estate, but whatever the location, one could be sure that certain traditions would be upheld. The reader could rest secure in the knowledge that fresh flowers would be cut, tea would be served as usual, and the social order, though shaken, would continue to stand.

Such refinement eventually gave way to the mystery whose hard nosed, tough talking detective no doubt shocked a few mystery buffs with his coarse approach to life and the law. Eventually, however, the pendulum returned to centre, with a combination of the mystery of manners and the hard-boiled detective.

Detective stories for children certainly followed in the early footsteps of adult mysteries, if not the later. Nancy Drew, for instance, was nothing if not respectable, and the social structure described in her earlier adventures rivals that of Britain. There might not be a drawing room in sight, but at some point Nancy, correctly attired in frock or sports dress, was sure to preside over some pleasant repast. She was definitely from an upper middle class home but, as befitted her station and temperament, was always polite to those less fortunate - unless they were identified as evil-doers. Nancy was cultured, refined, athletic, popular, and wise beyond her years. She was, and is, truly food for daydreams as she speeds about in her little roadster.

Susan Super Sleuth, Canada's answer to Nancy Drew, is similar to Nancy but far more believable. Just as the early Nancy reflected the world of the 30's, so Susan reflects a more casual contemporary way of life. Like Nancy, she is a mystery mastermind, but except for her unusual detecting ability, she might be the girl next door. Laura Piotrowski's sketchy illustrations depict a long-haired girl dressed in slacks, cut-offs, or casual skirt when the occasion requires it. There is no written description of her, but in the first episode the reader learns she has one more year to go before university. In another episode Susan must spend part of her summer making up courses she failed during the year but there is little doubt she'll make it to university when she chooses. She is not particularly interested in athletics, wipes crumbs from her face with the back of her hand, and is, if not as cultured and well rounded as Nancy, far more believable.

The paperback entitled *Susan Super Sleuth* is comprised of four short stories about Susan, set in various Canadian locations. Author William Ettridge works well in the short story format, packing

mystery, clues, detection and solution in twenty to forty pages without duly rushing the story. His spare style necessarily limits much character development or feeling for the different locations of the stories, and some of the conversation between Susan and her friends seems stilted. What Ettridge does do though, and very well, is present problems and help his heroine arrive at ingenious solutions.

The first story has Susan and a friend being held for ransom after the friend's father wins a million dollar lottery. The others deal with international smugglers, diamond theft, and mysterious hotel thefts. In each case Susan arrives at the solution on her own, assisted only by the legwork of a friend or, in two cases, her policeman uncle. Her involvement in each of the mysteries is logically explained, and the knowledge she uses to solve them is not far beyond that of a girl her age.

Nine to thirteen year olds will probably be delighted with Ettridge's heroine who, he says, was created for his own teenage daughter. Ettridge continues to write part time, calling upon his background with the R.A.F. and his current work for Westinghouse in creating the stories, games and puzzles that he publishes in the *Canadian Children's Annual*. Susan Super Sleuth made her debut in the 1975 annual, and fans should expect more stories about her in future ones.

Another Canadian teen detective is Tom Austen, hero of *Murder on the Canadian*, *Terror in Winnipeg*, *Vancouver Nightmare*, and now, *The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma*. Each of these mysteries written by Eric Wilson is fast paced, exciting, and fraught with danger for Tom. As the titles indicate, Tom finds mysteries all over Canada. In this way his adventures are more realistic than those of the Hardy Boys or Nancy Drew who seemed to live in small town hotbeds of crime. Tom's character, though not well developed, is more believable, too. Not for Tom the firearms, motorcycles or cars of the Hardy Boys. He is definitely an amateur, albeit a talented one, and when he is involved in violence he copes as well, or poorly, as an average teen would.

*The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma* finds Tom, his sister and uncle in Toronto in search of the castle's missing owner and his hidden treasure. The setting is pure gothic: lugubrious butler, an electrical storm, disappearing bodies, and a castle complete with hidden passages. But action is not limited to the castle. Author Wilson tours Tom and the reader around Toronto making sure they visit Fort York, Kensington Market, Exhibition Stadium, and later, Niagara Falls. Unfortunately, there is little more atmosphere created by this instructional touring than there is in the Susan Super Sleuth stories where the locations and landmarks are mentioned only in passing.

The story itself, however, is an exciting one. Readers already familiar with Tom will read the story knowing that they can expect a fast paced thriller. Newcomers to the series will be intrigued by the cover which shows lightning over Casa Loma, a silhouette of Tom and Liz in a dark passage and a montage of other scenes from the story. Though Tom succeeds in solving part of the mystery the task of sorting out suspects proves too great for him and after witnessing a series of double crosses, he and Liz find themselves stranded with one of the crooks on a log which is about to go over Niagara Falls.

Justice does prevail in the end and the reader can be satisfied in that aspect of the mystery story. There were enough clues in both Tom's adventure and the Super Sleuth stories for a budding detective to have come close to the solution and that too provides satisfaction. The action and ingenuity in both books would seem to guarantee enjoyment, but still there is something missing. What of that other aspect of the genre which makes its intriguing, namely the glimpse of human nature it proffers? Where do we see into the characters – good and bad – and recognize the forces that cause them to act as they do?

Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys were too stereotypical to offer much insight into human nature but they did create memorable characters. Susan Super Sleuth and Tom Austen are more believable, but the reader never gets to know them. These juvenile mysteries, like too many others, rely on the exciting nature of the plot and fail to achieve the aim of any well written story: the creation of a world of characters who become as real to the reader as his own friends.

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