tensions and rivalries of the small, but rapidly growing, white community in Kitimat.

Although most of Varley's memoir is concerned with external events, and descriptions of places and people, she does give us glimpses into her inner life as a child.

> As a child growing up on Kouwthpega Ranch, I never doubted in my childish mind for one second that I belonged there — that I belonged to my parents, to my family ... And yet, I knew that the inner circle of my parents did not include everybody in the same way. There were those who fitted and those who did not fit. And those who fitted best with my parents were mostly those who were most foreign to *my* inner circle of being.

A free use of dialogue helps to give her narrative immediacy and an appeal beyond its specific interest as local history. Varley frequently interrupts or concludes her anecdotes with comments and reflections, particularly on the subject of ecology, what has happened to Kitimat since it became an industrial centre in the 1950s, and on the native people, for whom she and her parents evidently always had considerable respect. As in the Symons book, these passages are sometimes clumsy and obtrusive, particularly in the introduction. The reminiscences which are the true subject matter of both books are so compelling and well described that the reader might better be left to draw his or her own conclusions from them.

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All you Need Is Love?

JACQUIE HUNT

Mountain Rose, Patti Stren. Illus. by the author. Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1982. 30 pp. $12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-525-35228-7.

A theme, insistently threaded through Patti Stren's work, from the somewhat mawkish dedications to the resolutely happy endings, is the need for totally accepting, non-critical love. Certainly, this desire is one easily recognized and deeply shared by children, and the reassurance that it can be fulfilled gives Stren's books their appeal.

In her early stories, the treatment is of utmost simplicity, and Stren's wit and humour retain the upper hand. A hug, after all, represents a fairly uncomplicated flow of affection, and the pictures of a forlorn little porcupine embracing a telephone pole arouse sympathetic amusement. More important, the real humour of self-knowledge bubbles through as the hero gets fed up with himself for accepting halfway measures.

The suggestion that love involves risk, delightfully depicted in the final scenes of *Hug Me,* is more vigorously developed in *Sloan and Philamina.* The original audacity of Philamina makes possible the unlikely friendship, and her temerity in agreeing to the party confrontation ensures its continuance. Again the sentiment is leavened with humour as Stren allows her imagination free rein in sketching ant/anteater adaptations of normal friendship pursuits. A darker note, hinted at in *Hug Me,* that love invites censure of the outside world, is integral to both theme and development.

The same themes infuse *There's a Rainbow in My Closet:* an unlikely but apparently satisfying friendship develops between the soulful Emma and the bumptious Edgar; the insensitive outside world appears in the form of negative teachers wielding punitive red pens: and one still needs courage to be oneself. However, unlike the earlier stories where Stren's tendency toward sentimentality is controlled by the fantasy mode, here she neglects to maintain the necessary distancing from her heroine and remains tangled in her own feelings. The longing of a little porcupine is touching; the incessant yearning of a little girl becomes embarrassing. Moreover, the unvaryingly tremulous tone becomes wearisome, and the very simple style, effective in the earlier books, cannot support the extended, often repetitive narrative. *Mountain Rose,* Stren's most recent book, appears to represent a marked and surprising shift in tone and style. The characteristic swiggly line-drawings replete with asides and sly commentary remain, but the delicate whimsy of *Hug Me* and *Sloan and Philamina* has given way to cartoon-like sketching, and the gentle sentimentality that tended toward the maudlin in *There's a Rainbow in My Closet* is replaced by a strident toughness. Nevertheless, Stren's prevailing theme of the need for uncritical acceptance and love again controls the story, and the brash figures which now dominate were evident in more minor roles in the earlier works.

Rose, an enormous infant born to circus parents, grows into a gigantic child reared by a well-meaning aunt after her parents' untimely demise. In the one scene of subtle humour, the aunt tries to build Rose's confidence by stressing her attractions, pointedly omitting reference to her size. But Rose remains unconsoled until one day she is spotted by a wrestling coach while she is rescuing a small boy from the school bully. He takes her under his wing and institutes a vigorous training schedule (depicted in the only really cheerful drawings). Before long, Rose is winning titles and beginning to feel good about herself.

The phrase is reminiscent of the artistic Emma of *There's a Rainbow in My Closet.* Although Emma "feels good" when she is painting, she remains unhappy and insecure until her grandmother's lavish praise encourages her to be herself fully and do her own thing. Rose looks happy and vibrant as she trains, but is only totally content (if not a little smug) when she begins to win.

Perhaps it is inevitable in a story that centers around wrestling that the characters should become increasingly unattractive. Certainly, the rogue's gallery of Rose's competitors is a gruesome lot, and the visual expressions and commentary of the spectators are painfully true to life. This free-wheeling uncouthness comes as something of a shock, although perhaps it shouldn't because it has been present in more muted form in all Stren's work. The porcupines in *Hug Me* are decidedly unsympathetic, delighting mainly in the damage their quills can inflict; the anteaters in *Sloan and Philamina* descend to poison pen letters, and the joke-telling Uncle Lou gets rude catcalls from his audience. Even Edgar in *Rainbow in My Closet* is a pretty rough diamond. But what works as a contrasting element causes unease when it dominates. We accept that Emma is attracted by Edgar's self-confidence; we rejoice when the anteaters are won over by Philamina and her friends; but we do wonder at Rose's basking in the adulation of the brutish and fickle wrestling crowd. Rose, needless to say, wins the world championship and is even congratulated by Gardenia Gus, the men's wrestling champ, but her coach, irked by the latter's male condescension, challenges him to a match assuring Rose she will "beat the pants off him." Rose trains vigorously observing a strict regime while the overconfident Gus watches soap operas and gorges himself. Despite her fears of being "creamed," Rose soon has Gus on the run, but then his trunks slip revealing the elephant birthmark that proves him to be her long-lost brother, and they fall into each other's arms in joyful reunion. Sibling affection is much to be commended, but Rose's instant adoration of the obscenely fat and egregiously conceited Gus seems uncritical in the extreme.

It seems to me that in *Mountain Rose,* Stren has chosen an impossible vehicle to forward her injunction that we love and approve. In a prose style replete with coarse street language, she gives us an ungainly heroine engaged in a violent sport, egged on by a tough-minded coach, approved by mindless onlookers, devoted to a brute of a brother ... and then asks us to love the whole lot. I found it impossible.

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