

Domestic Problems and the Child as Questor

HILARY THOMPSON

Patrick and the Actors, Margaret Keith. Penumbra Press, Moonbeam, Ontario, 1981. 206 pp. \$15.95 hardcover, \$10.95 paper ISBN 0-920806-31-7; 0-920806-34-1.

Mr. McUmphie of Caulfeild Cove, Ainslie Manson. Queenston House Publishing, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1981. 80 pp. \$10.95 hardcover, \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-919866-72-7; 0-919866-75-1.

The child with a problem who works out a solution without parental involvement has been a central figure in children's stories based on the quest motif. The problem which separates the child from the domestic world is only the beginning of a mythical pattern. In a fully developed quest, that domestic problem will be submerged in the child's journey to self awareness.

In both *Mr. McUmphie of Caulfeild Cove* and *Patrick and the Actors*, the initial separation from the comfortable domestic world is caused by changes within that world. The children, Jill and Gordon, find the gnome-like Mr. McUmphie on their first journey alone to the beach. This diversion from their normal behaviour is caused by their mother's preoccupation with her infant twins. For Patrick, in *Patrick and the Actors*, the domestic world has been destroyed by his parents' separation, his father's job "up north on the pipeline" and a feckless babysitter who "watches T.V. all night and lies in bed all day."

The physical journey Patrick undertakes with the Caravan Theatre Company on their Ontario tour teaches him how to work for a living, how to make friends, how to cope with fear, and how to use his talents well. His companion actors also grow in knowledge and self-awareness. The adventure is gripping, especially for readers who were, or are, theatre-struck children and who can thus share Patrick's fascination with his new profession. Unfortunately his unnoticed absence from home and school for months on end seems so strange that it causes the reader to pause and doubt the credibility of the plot. Nevertheless, in other respects the style of writing is consistent in tone and the book is eminently readable.

There are times when readability and tone are lost in *Mr. McUmphie of Caulfeild Cove*, especially in the self-conscious literary chit-chat between the mother and her children. However, once we meet the delightful Mr. McUmphie in his hideaway cave by the stream we are captivated. The children find a guide and companion in this old sea-captain from

whom they learn how to tie knots, how to cope with emergencies, how to be resourceful, and how to appreciate the twins. This book, like *Patrick and the Actors*, is an enjoyable light read. Children from elsewhere in Canada will be surprised and intrigued by Mr. McUmphie's wintering alone in a cave, but this makes his hideaway all the more magical.

Both of these books would be best read by children under twelve. *Mr. McUmphie of Caulfeild Cove*, being accompanied by unpretentious but interesting illustrations by Janet Stretham, is more appropriate for a younger age group. Perhaps it is because of the ages of their readers that the authors use domestic strife as the cause of their heroes' quests and see the effect of these quests largely in terms of solution of domestic problems.

Hilary Thompson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia. She has published Warm is a Circle, a book for small children.

ABC's for the Youngest Canadians

SARAH VANDERBURGH

ABC, 123 The Canadian Alphabet and Counting Book, Vlasta van Kampen. Hurtig Publishers, 1982. Unpaginated \$5.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88830-223-1.

ABC et/and 123, Barbara Wilson. Illus. by Gisèle Daigle. Press Porcepic, 1980. Unpaginated \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-165-2.

The Canadian ABC Book, Roy Peterson. Hurtig Publishers, 1977. 56 pp. \$4.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88830-146-4.

Elfabit, Steve Pilcher. Hayes Publishing Ltd., 1982. 28 pp. \$11.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88625-042-0.

The Great Canadian Alphabet Book, Philip Johnson. Illus. by David Peacock. Hounslow Press, 1981. 28 pp. \$10.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-88882-043-7.

Canadian children today are exposed at a very early age to the alphabet. They are bombarded by the psychedelically-coloured letters of television shows, which flash by them at dizzying speeds. They are