Rescue at Harper's Landing, H. Maxwell Butcher. Horizon House Publishers, 1981. 154 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-88965-048-9; ***Billy Higgins rides the freights,*** Gloria Montero. Illus. Olena Kassian. James Lorimer and Company, 1982. 119 pp. (The Adventure in Canada Series). $4.95 paper, $12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88862-579-0, 0-88862-578-2; ***The baitchopper,*** Silver Donald Cameron. Illus. by Alan Daniel. James Lorimer and Company, 1982. (The Adventure in Canada Series). 167 pp. $4.95 paper, $10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88862-598-7, 0-888-599-5; ***Salut, gadou!,*** Malcolm Reid. Illus. by Rose Zgodzinski. James Lorimer and Company, 1982. (The Adventure in Canada Series). 119 pp. $4.95 paper, $12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88862-576-6; 0-88862-575-8.

The title of H. Maxwell Butcher's *Rescue at Harper's Landing* refers to rescues both physical, as one might expect, and spiritual; unfortunately, the latter type is the book's *raison d'être.* For *Rescue* exists primarily to serve the author's Christian intentions and only secondarily to provide 10 to 12 year olds with quality adventure fiction. These two aspects of children's literature are not mutually exclusive, as C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* illustrate only too well. However, for any children's writer, Christian or otherwise, one element must underlie all others: the desire to tell a story. Lewis, again, is a case in point. While the Christian element in his fiction is covert, the adventure seethes and crackles, holding the reader securely until the final page. Lewis was a storyteller; his non-fictional works abound in illustration and anecdote. H. Maxwell Butcher is an Anglican minister, and he is far too ready to sacrifice the story for the point from the pulpit. The book consists of three parts and an epilogue and focuses on the dilemmas that Tom Brown (son of the widow of the former Anglican minister of Harper's Landing) gets into with his French/Indian Catholic friend Walter Labrette. Part I has Tom and Walter stranded on an island in the river by spring break-up. They are rescued, but the climax of the incident is their halting attempt to pray, rather than what could have been a harrowing open-boat rescue. Part II, which takes place the following summer, finds Tom lost in the forest while searching for Walter. He is rescued by the new Anglican minister, Mr. Mortimer, but, again, the climax comes earlier, when Tom defeats panic and lulls himself to sleep by singing "Safe in the Arms of Jesus".

If, given Part I, Part II was somewhat predictable, Part III, taking place the following Easter, is downright hackneyed. Mr. Mortimer, it turns out, is single. He and Tom's mother decide to marry. Bud Swinson, the recluse trapper, gets baptized after revealing that Tom's dad had died while saving his life. Tom and Walter affirm their burgeoning faith as the section closes. But Butcher can't let the fiction, such as it is, do its own work. In true *deus ex*

machina fashion he adds an Epilogue to display the fruits of Christianity: Tom becomes the minister at Harper's Landing, Bud Swinson is in charge of the thriving town store, and Walter Labrette, rising to his appropriate station in life, is Swinson's "very capable" assistant. We are even told that Walter's drunken and abusive father has mended his ways and taken to going to church. Hallelujah! That an author's predilection — whether historical or religious, political or social — can determine the course and circumstances of a novel without smothering the creative life in it is attested to in varying degrees by the first three titles in James Lorimer's "Adventure in Canada" series.

Gloria Montero's *Billy Higgins rides the freights* dramatizes the story of the British Columbia Relief Camp Workers Strike of 1935 and the subsequent "On-to-Ottawa Trek" undertaken by more than a thousand unemployed workers atop a CPR freight, to persuade Prime Minister R.B. Bennett to rethink his economic policies. Bennett's refusal to negotiate, and attempt to forcefully disperse the strikers, resulted in the Regina Riot of July 1st, 1935. This incident forms the climax of the book. The catalyst for all these events is lanky, freckled Billy Higgins, who, on his 13th birthday, is informed by his recently unemployed father that he will have to quit school and begin drawing relief to help support the family. Thus begins Billy's adventure. On the whole, Montgero manages adequately to integrate Billy's personal situation into the larger Depression scene. She skillfully presents the Trek as Billy's rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. The innocence/experience motif spans the book and there are poignant touches in Billy's finding a "No Trespassing" sign at his old fishing hole, or in the returning Billy's meditative observation that his father seems somehow smaller.

Still, after all is said and done, and despite these gestures at character development, Billy Higgins exists to get the story of the Trek told to children in a more palatable fashion than that of a history text. The historical labour scene, not Billy Higgins, dominates Montero's interest. (The book's pre-publication title was, significantly, "On to Ottawa"; and an earlier book by Montero, *We stand together*,is subtitled "First-hand accounts of dramatic events in Canada's labour past"). This concern for the historical setting leads to short cuts in character, such as Billy's recurrent exclamation that Mr. Bennett will "just have to help us." These passages, forming the transitions from one historical episode to the next, assume the appearance of filler.

But the history itself, caught by Montero with an accurate sense of what will interest younger people, allows us to forgive the fictional lapses. A genuine sense of camaraderie evolves over the course of the novel, reaching its apex as the strikers face the whistling bullets in Regina. Readers will be carried on the flow of this tide, even when their interest in Billy himself occasionally ebbs.

The baitchopper, by Silver Donald Cameron, is clearly the best book of the

group being reviewed here. Where Butcher is primarily a minister, and Montero a popular historian, Cameron is a storyteller. He is not afraid to sacrifice historical veracity in the interests of a well-paced adventure. The history in question is the Nova Scotia fisherman's strike of 1970-71. Cameron's earlier book *The education of Everett Richardson* documented this 15 month struggle of the Canso Strait fishermen for union recognition. At one point in his presentation of a mass of tedious data Cameron says, "If this were a novel I could wave a hand and abolish the tedium. But it's not a novel: these are real people, real events."

In *The baitchopper* the tedium is abolished. Though the novel parallels history in many ways — the formation of a union, the illegal strike, the resulting court injunction and prison terms which bring workers across Nova Scotia off the job in support of the fishermen — the events have been stream-lined and focus largely on Andrew Gurney, the 13 year old son of Alphonse Gurney, the Widow's Harbour striker who receives the heaviest jail term (8 months). Cameron gives as much time to Andrew's fictional episodes as he does to the historical ones; much of the power of the novel stems from confrontation scenes between sons of fishermen on one side and sons of businessmen and management on the other. With the boys echoing their fathers' sentiments in word and deed, Cameron perceptively demonstrates how blood and class loyalties quickly assert themselves in a crisis.

Revealing a deft awareness of just how much labour intrigue a children's adventure narrative can bear, Cameron situates the climax of the novel on the open sea, in Andrew's struggle to save his father's fishing boat the *The Dolly C.*, whose moorings have been cut, from massive waves and collision with a tanker. The tension of this chapter and a third is at times awesome, the detail is fascinating, and the enthusiastic welcome by the striking fishermen of nearby L'Anse au Griffon is genuinely moving. *The baitchopper* is no sugaring of the history pill; it is juvenile historical fiction as it should be written.

Malcolm Reid's *Salut, gadou!*, though not historical fiction, certainly lives up to the publisher's blurb for the series, which says the stories are "about real-life kids in real-life situations." The action, situated in Québec City, follows 12 year old Geneviève Roussil and her friends as they attempt to save the home of their youth club — the Monde des Jeunes — from sale and demolition by its land developer owner. Support marches, peaceful civil disobedience, police-enforced eviction, and public demonstrations all come into play. This, however, is only one strand of the story; another is Geneviève's relationship with René Gadoury (Gadou to his friends).

Of the writers discussed here, Reid is most adept at, and most interested in, character creation. Unlike Billy Higgins, who never manages to shed completely his status as fictional device for forwarding the action, Geneviève and Gadou emerge as personalities distinct from the action they are a part of. Gadou, though an intelligent enough 12 year old, feels snowed under by the rules and

regulations which fill his environment, from those of his father to those represented by his school principal Mr. Langevin. Reid captures precisely the atmosphere of both Gadou's school and the tobacco-shop pinball hangout he frequents after the final bell. Though the latter is an escape, it is also stifling, and when Gadou is offered a weekend in the country his relief is genuine. This is the person Geneviève spends much of the novel trying the recruit to the cause of the Monde des Jeunes. If Gadou is sullen and cynical, Geneviève is impetuous, imaginative and — Reid is not afraid to suggest — something of a busybody. From the outset she is utterly convinced Gadou will love the Monde des Jeunes once he tries it — and this despite his clear resolve to head in the other direction. They are, however, interested in each other, and Reid registers well their incipient adolescent emotions.

If there is a fault in *Salut, gadou!* it is Reid's tendency to indulge in left-wing trendiness. There is a strain in the novel suggesting that any submission to authority makes one a dupe. From Gadou's confrontation with the droning Mr. Langevin, to the land developer's stereotyped pose as a bird of prey, to Geneviève's parents' struggles for a "cours de morale" to enable their daughter to avoid religious studies, the novel implies that the system is there to be bucked. Consequently, there are occasional moments of unintentional irony, such as Geneviève's isolating herself "in the soundsystem corner of the house". As the advertising jargon makes clear, at this point the system has been absorbed all too well. If one can overlook these irritating lapses, *Salut, gadou!* can be a pleasure; though one still wonders just how grade 7 and 8 teachers are going to employ the "teachers' guide" that James Lorimer & Co. are preparing for the "Adventure in Canada" titles. But holding the spectre of teachers' guides aside, James Lorimer must be congratulated for introducing such a creditable series. Let us hope the standards can be maintained.

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CINÉASTES ET DETECTIVES!

Les aventuriers de la canicule, Marie-Andrée Clermont. Montréal, Fides, 1982. 181 pp. 6,95$ broché. ISBN 2-7621-1173-0

Pour les jeunes — et les moins jeunes — qui aiment le mystère, le suspense, voici un livre fascinant, stimulant. Dès les premières pages l'intérêt est créé. On lit, avidement, pour suivre les péripéties d'une aventure qui se révèle très vite être un véritable drame. Au sens premier du mot, d'abord, car il s'agit