McSmithers is at it again, par d'intempestifs conseils.

Or, et telle serait notre lecture pragmatique de ces histoires, l'auteur narrativise cette idée selon laquelle tout prescriptif ("tu dois/tu ne dois pas") s'appuie sur cette clause présupposée qu'à celui qui énonce le prescriptif, la prescription s'applique aussi. Par exemple, que l'on change le but de la promenade, et donc que l'on inverse les vitesses de croisière respectives de Mommy et Bonnie, et celle-ci se trouve fondée à dire à sa mère:

"Hurry up, Mommy! Come on, let's go!
My mother, the snail — you're much too slow!".

Ce qui autorise à reprocher ou à conseiller, ce n'est pas l'autorité intrinsèque de l'adulte, mais la place que l'un des interactants occupe par rapport à la bêtise faite ou à la bêtise à éviter et par rapport à l'autre interactant.

De bonne grâce, Mommy McSmithers accepte la leçon, et voilà vulgarisée la thérapie familiale. Le dernier temps est donc celui de la concorde,

"Two super McSmithers are at it again
Keep your eyes on us both . . ."

Voir même, celui du retour au paradis perdu, à la symbiose originelle, où le corps de l'une se confondait dans le corps de l'autre; "my daughter, the snail" et "mother, the snail" conduisaient inévitablement à cette page de *Hurry up, Bonnie!:*

"Want a ride on my back?"
asked Mommy McSmithers.
"Oh, yes I do" Bonnie replied. "I'm the shell on
the snail's back — see our shadow!"
"One big snail!" her mother sighed.

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DRESS CANADIAN: THE JEANPAC SERIES

I wish there were unicorns, Karleen Bradford. Illus. Greg Ruhl. Toronto: Gage, 1983. 160 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7005-8; ***The other Elizabeth,*** Karleen Bradford. Illus. Deborah Drew-Brook. Toronto: Gage, 1982. 160 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7004-X; ***Skate like the wind,*** Joan E. Ford. Illus. Greg Ruhl.

Toronto: Gage, 1983. 128 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7009-0; ***Champions,*** Marjorie Holland. Illus. Maureen Shaughnessy. Toronto: Gage, 1983. 160 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7006-6; ***The mystery of the ghostly riders.*** Lynn Manuel. Illus. Sylvie Daigneault. Toronto: Gage, 1982. 144 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7000-7; ***The DNA dimension,*** Carol Matas. Illus. Greg Ruhl. Toronto: Gage, 1982. 144 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7003-1; ***Kirstine and the villains,*** Elfreida Read. Illus. Greg Ruhl. Toronto: Gage, 1982. 160 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7001-5; ***Race against the dark,*** Elfreida Read. Illus. Tony Heron. Toronto: Gage, 1983. 160 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7008-2; ***Ski for your mountain,*** Sharon Siamon. Illus. Brenda Clark. Toronto: Gage, 1983. 176 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7007-4; ***The ghost of Pirate Walk,*** Jerry Williams. Illus. Barry Rubin. Toronto: Gage, 1982. 112 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-7715-7002-3.

In the language of clothes, jeans are democratic and economic, long-wearing and practical. They defy sexual categories and, designer jeans to the contrary, they leave no room for high fashion. They are in essence comfortable, to be put on and then quickly forgotten. Unfortunately, the same is true of the recent Jeanpac series, a list of ten novels published by Gage. Gage surveyed teachers and booksellers who agreed that a market exists for cheap juvenile titles by Canadian authors. The Jeanpac series is the result, books geared toward the eight to twelve-year-old and intended for a double market, school and bookstore.

The weakness of the series lies in this attempt to appeal to both markets, combining the requirements of suitability for the classroom and popularity outside. The covers of denim blue, with an illustration enclosed within the stitched pocket, indicate the sameness and safeness of the books. They are jeans made respectable. Each book's individuality dissolves within the egalitarian cover design. Inside the books may be different — fantasy, science fiction, adventure, problem novel — but outside they are democratically denim and a bit too clean at that. Will children really take to the familiar denim cover or will they be suspicious, disdainful of the obvious adult ploy to catch their interest? Children's slang usually changes as fast as adults can break their code. The same may be true for books with denim covers.

Certainly the books are modestly priced, $2.95 for a paperback ranging from 112 to 176 pages. Although the authors are predominantly female, they carefully avoid sexual bias in their choice of central characters, often using a well-balanced group of siblings. Two sisters share the spotlight in *I wish there were unicorns;* two brothers are equally important in *Race against the dark.* Such a balance is admirably faithful to the jeans metaphor, a metaphor that in other ways is highly unsuitable for literature. In concentrating on the language of clothes, the authors have slighted the clothes of language; the jeans metaphor does not work well with questions of style. One pair of jeans after all resembles another. Hence in the Jeanpac series language rarely calls attention to itself; illustrations

appear but do not add to the text; characters may joke but there is little humour; several books deal with adventure, but where is the suspense? The books are definitely Canadian in their setting from sea to sea, and their liberal sprinkling of metric language. (This raises an interesting distinction between Canadian juvenile fiction and adult fiction. When was the last time a Canadian adult novel kept referring to metres and tonnes?) If their style is Canadian, then we truly are bland. Beside the work of Kevin Major, Monica Hughes, and Janet Lunn, most of the Jeanpac series fades quickly. We may well need more Canadian writing to compete with British and American works, but we need writing that is innovative, not simply imitative.

Of the ten books, seven are varieties of realistic fiction that illustrate how difficult it is to write well in this form. Two of the books, Joan E. Ford's *Skate like the wind* and Sharon Siamon's *Ski for your mountain,* concern female athletes. In *Skate like the wind,* thirteen-year-old Lindy Bernard is a figure skater facing her first Canadian Championships. Except for a tendency to vomit before performing, Lindy is just perfect. Her mother is understanding and skilful in massaging tight muscles; her coach is demanding but not tyrannical. It is true that Lindy has a competitor to worry about, yet even though Shannon Briggs comes first and Lindy only second, we all know that Shannon leads a dreadful life having to put up with her ambitious, fur-wearing mother (all the heroes and heroines in the Jeanpac Series come from financially modest homes).

In addition, Lindy has Brad, a former neighbour and now rising male skater, who manages to win the novice men's championship and gives Lindy her first kiss. As in other Jeanpac novels, a male interest seems both obligatory and prepubescent. Lindy may have a crush on Brad, but he only kisses her in public after her victory. Left alone, the two prefer a pillow fight. In its innocent assumptions about behavior and its romantic ending, *Skate like the wind* seems a throwback to the days before juvenile fiction discovered "the problem." Ford attempts a slightly unusual technique for the series by italicizing Lindy's internal thoughts. The device, however, fails to convey the texture of anyone's thoughts, let alone the specific quality of a thirteen-year-old facing her first major competition:

> What was it a local reporter asked me after the Divisionals? It was a logical question, really. Oh yes. "Why do you think you won?" I don't think I gave a very good answer then and I doubt if I could now. Balance, rhythm, a compact body all had something to do with it.

Ski for your mountain is more contemporary in that the female athlete is given numerous problems, but the structure here is still conventional, the one-problem-after-another pattern of the modern adolescent novel. One change is the book's focus on unathletic and recently orphaned eleven-year-old April. Her father's death has led her to move to northeastern Ontario to live with her uncle and aunt and with skiing hopeful, cousin Karen. Karen promptly resents her cousin

for displacing her from the centre of attention, and suspects April's motives regarding fourteen-year-old Danny, the obligatory male interest. Not only does April have numerous difficulties in adjusting, but Karen's father also has his own problems. He runs a small ski resort and now wealthy businessmen want to buy him out. In Jeanpac, money is the root of all evil; the rich businessman is always subject to suspicion and usually dangerous.

April's crisis regarding her relationship with her cousin turns on her guilt for provoking Karen's skiing accident and her relief when her dead father's insurance policy saves the resort and therefore the family. Typical of the unsophisticated character development in these books, April is totally taken aback when Karen confesses her jealousy:

> "No!" Karen went on, looking into April's eyes with her large blue ones. "I have to tell you! I was jealous — I was afraid Danny liked you better." April stared back. It was hard to believe. Karen . . . the blond goddess, the champion . . . jealous! Of her! But it was true, Danny had sometimes made a fuss over her.

The four exclamations in as many lines are typical of the book's style. After April's own skiing accident, she sees stars; her initial loneliness is described as a "huge emptiness inside." Gage boasts that no readability formula was used in judging manuscripts, but a formula need not be applied consciously. Clearly most of the writers share a belief that their readers need simple sentences with lots of emphasis. (Such simple sentences inevitably produce unsatisfying resolutions.) But if children cannot handle complex sentences, how will they deal with complex ideas? The adult novel of ideas is simplified into the adolescent problem novel.

Three of the books are problem novels: Marjorie Holland's *Champions;* Karleen Bradford's *I wish there were unicorns;* and Elfreida Read's *Race against the dark.* In *Champions,* twelve-year-old Mary-Lynn is partially blind and as a result self-conscious, happier with animals than with her peers. School bullies (another essential part of the Jeanpac world) trip her so that her glasses break. Not ready for a male interest, she puts all her energy into training her two dogs.

Everything in the book revolves around Mary-Lynn's obsession with her dogs. An entire school year passes but we learn nothing about it. The focus is urelenting and unconvincing. Would even a girl as troubled as Mary-Lynn think of nothing but her dogs for so long? One dog develops *Collie Ectasia Syndrome,* and in view of his approaching blindness, the veterinarian suggests that he be put to sleep. Mary-Lynn understandably refuses and her attempt first to protect and then to train the dog to adjust to his blindness helps her handle her own handicap. That the lesson is obvious does not prevent its expression on the last page. Mary-Lynn, like April in *Ski for your mountain,* has a sudden revelation:

Dogs with handicaps . . . and people . . . aren't all that much different . . . they can be happy the same as everybody else.

A child fascinated with dogs may not care if this lesson is obvious; for others the story will be too singleminded in its development and simple in its solution.

This need for a happy ending affects other books. In *I wish there were unicorns,* the problem is divorce. Rachel, angry at moving from Toronto to the country, blames her artist mother for the divorce, for not being the ideal brownie-baking mom. Only when her father announces his forthcoming marriage does Rachel begin to understand her mother's point of view, and even then it takes more to make her accept the move to the country. As a talented ballet dancer, part of her problem stems from her belief that the country means an end to her dancing plans.

Here Bradford breaks free of the stifling non-literary quality that affects so many of these books. Rachel actually reads other books and has a stuffed animal, a unicorn, that she loves because of the book, *The last unicorn.* The animal represents the special imaginative life that she longs for. When another unicorn dies in T.H. White's *The once and future king,* Rachel explains its death to her sister as the inevitable death of the beautiful and the perfect. It is the symbol of what she feels is missing in her own life. Bradford gives her other literary references, the Narnia books and Penelope Farmer's *A castle of bone.* This imaginative and literary quality enables Rachel to triumph at the end, moving beyond her view of the unicorn's death to see that life still holds possibilities. Her decision to enrol in the local ballet school is linked with the unicorn:

In her imagination she saw the unicorn standing there again, pure and perfect.
Who says unicorns don't exist, she thought defiantly.
Of course they do.
You just have to know how to look for them!

The final problem novel, *Race against the dark,* combines the problem, a mentally handicapped brother, with a drug smugglers plot. The chapter titles reveal the emphasis on adventure: "Worrying News," "An Angry Fist," "A Tough Decision," "Panic on the Big Wheel," "An Unbelievable Plan," etc. The fourteen-year-old hero, Jason Harrington, worries about his grandmother and his father, as well as about the future of his eleven-year-old mentally handicapped brother Robbie. Robbie needs to become independent, but Jason is reluctant to stop protecting him.

For once the sense of danger is convincing. Jason's father is behaving strangely and secretively. We see the events from Jason's limited point of view and truly cannot make sense of them. Why are there strangers in the city home? Why was their intrusion not reported to the police? What is the father's sudden new source of income? The answers are simple, but Read controls our point of view so that we cannot be certain until the end. The double plot of smugglers and

of Robbie's growing independence comes together well except for one ironic note. Read carefully guides her treatment of marijuana with the child reader in view. Jason recognizes the drug only because the police once visited his school to caution the children against different drugs. When Robbie asks if marijuana is bad, Jason replies, "It makes you kind of stupid. I don't know how bad it is, but it's against the law to sell it." The number of children who try drugs in Canada may be growing, but no children experiment with drugs in the Jeanpac world.

The remaining two realistic novels are also adventures. Although both mention ghosts in their titles, there are no actual supernatural events in either story. In both Jerry Williams' *The ghost of Pirate Walk* and Lynn Manuel's *The mystery of the ghostly riders,* children are detectives. In *The ghost of Pirate Walk* the two boys, Ricky and Tony, are only nine and in the end they have to rely on an adult to solve the mystery. Ricky's sister misses her teddy bear, and Ricky's mother cannot find her pearls; citizens complain that a ghost has been chasing them along Pirate Walk. Ricky and Tony may be puzzled and frightened, but the readers will not be for long. Clues appear so frequently that no suspense can be maintained. The book is an example of how assuming a child reader cannot handle the complexities of the adventure story destroys the purpose of the work. An unexciting adventure story is a contradiction that will attract few readers.

In contrast, *The mystery of the ghostly riders* is more successful, combining adventure, a hint of the supernatural, and historical research. A family of three children, ages eight to thirteen, travel from the Okanagan to Hamilton to help their father complete his research for a book on an Ontario Loyalist family. Before leaving the Okanagan, the children hear the story of Flame Cranberry, "the child of the Ogopogo," who mysteriously appeared in the Okanagan in 1838. Then in Hamilton they meet Gaylan Stubblefield who bears an uncanny resemblance to the description of Flame. The resemblance suggests connections and soon there are other clues and supernatural occurrences.

In their attempt to discover the identity of Flame Cranberry, the children experience firsthand the difficulties of historical research. Their assistance to their father and their own hunt produces an effective history lesson on William Lyon Mackenzie and the 1838 rebellion; the children experience both the tedium of unsuccessful research and the joy of a discovery. Just as in *The ghost of Pirate Walk,* the ghosts have rational explanations. The difference lies in the suspense and the treatment of history. In this case, the Jeanpac idea works: suspense grabs the reader; the history lesson pleases the teacher.

The final three novels are all varieties of fantasy, and in general, achieve more than the realistic novels. Karleen Bradford's *The other Elizabeth,* Carol Matas' *The DNA dimension,* and Elfreida Read's *Kirstine and the villains,* all raise challenging questions about their subjects, and, in the last case, about the nature of children's literature.

The other Elizabeth is a combination of historical fiction and fantasy. During a visit to Upper Canada Village, Elizabeth Duncan enters Cook's Tavern and inexplicably travels back in time to become Elizabeth Frobisher, a child during the 1812 war. Her transformation is not instantaneous. Initially she remains the modern child bewildered by the change, but gradually the other girl's thoughts take over.

The shift to Elizabeth Frobisher is never permanently established, for the other Elizabeth's knowledge keeps intruding and ultimately enables Elizabeth to save Jamie, the male interest, from drowning. Elizabeth Frobisher goes on, however, to marry Jamie, a fact Elizabeth Duncan later learns from her twentieth-century grandmother, a descendant of the earlier Elizabeth. A family story has survived of how the non-swimming Elizabeth saved Jamie. The story raises disturbing questions about the nature of identity and freedom, the relationship of past to present, and refreshingly refuses to answer them. Readers learn some history, details of pioneer life such as the attitude towards girls' education, and stories of United Empire Loyalists. They never learn the answer to the fantasy:

> What had happened? . . . If she hadn't gone back Jamie would have drowned. If Jamie had drowned she would never have been born.

The DNA dimension also refuses to give simple answers. During a snowstorm in Winnipeg, four children vanish into another world, a Utopia gone bad. In the world of Pred, people are programmed to remove negative character traits and perform well at their assigned tasks. The children are captured and quickly assigned suitable careers: Rebecca will become an intellectual; David a programmer; and timid Beth, a maid. Beth's nasty self-centered brother, Norman, is assigned to the military.

The children learn that Pred is the achievement of Kard, originally president of a medical complex. From genetic engineering to improve plants and animals, he has moved to wiping out disease, and then to his vision of the perfect society. The dangers of his vision are emphasized when Norman manages to oust Kard and seize control. For Norman, the perfect society has only one command: Thou shalt please Norman. He dismisses his sister's objections to alcohol by reminding her of his absolute power:

> 'You have to remember I can do whatever I please,' Norman said, snickering. 'If I can run a country, I can sure drink wine.'

Fortunately, in this future world, the military mind is inferior to the intellectual. Rebecca and David defeat Norman by relying on a weapon David admits stealing from a bad science fiction film.

Once Norman is defeated, the children learn Pred's history and recognize the Canadian parallels in the climate and the inhabitants' complacency. But once back in 1983, Norman remains unrepentant and announces his intentions:

Like when I'm older I'm going to inherit lots of money and lots of power and lots of businesses. And I'll make sure that I get into the field of genetic engineering. . . . I'll do here just what I wanted to do in Pred.

The evil, wealthy businessman is here again. With this announcement, a happy ending is impossible. The book concludes with the other children determined to fight Norman. Evil in *The DNA dimension* is not science; it is the human desire for power.

The final novel, *Kirstine and the villains,* is the most ambitious technically. Like others in the Jeanpac series it is a detective story; Kirstine wants to clear her father's name after he is accused of theft. Like others, the family unit is important and financial difficulties are implied when Kirstine's father has trouble finding another job. There is even a school bully, Melvin. Nevertheless from its opening sentence, "Kirstine walked along the road and thought about Villains," this novel indicates its difference. It is conscious of style and assumes that children can enjoy literary sophistication. The villains of the title are both the suspected thieves and the villains of various fairy tales who appear to aid Kirstine in her investigation. The Wolf, the ugly sisters, the Troll, the Ogre, and the thirteenth fairy all help Kirstine understand the psychology of a villain. For once, the villain is not the standard, rich businessman. Kirstine learns that in her endeavours to discover the truth, good and evil become confused. She gradually discovers possible worthy motives for the theft and changes her view of fairy tales. The traditional tales, "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Little Red Riding Hood," and "Cinderella," she finds distasteful, and finally agrees to read her sister "Beauty and the Beast" only because in that tale the beast is sympathetic and ultimately not a villain at all.

Kirstine and the villains is a witty and humorous celebration of imaginative literature. Even the illustrations are more powerful than in the other books. But it is the humour and innovative approach that stand out. Each villain defends his behaviour in the fairy tale. The Mean Old Troll explains that he tried to stop Billy Goat Gruff from crossing the bridge for ecological reasons. The Wicked Ogre defies Kirstine to think of a couplet as famous as "Fee fi fo fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman":

'I can't think of one just like that!' Kirstine protested. 'There you are,' said the Wicked Ogre triumphantly. 'You're lucky to have me on your side.'

In its mad logic and rhythm, the dialogue resembles the world of Alice. Read even mocks the fine line between fantasy and realism, once again giving credit to children's ability to enjoy sophistication:

'Well, we really got ourselves mixed up in quite a little drama there,' said the Wolf. His big red tongue was hanging out hungrily for a lick of Kirstine's popsicle. Only his story line prevented him from snapping at it.

Later another villain tells the Wicked Ogre he cannot punish the bully: "You can't do that, you're not in his story."

A book like *Kirstine and the villains* indicates through contrast what is lacking in many of the Jeanpac books. They are too often pale imitations of a juvenile fiction that is already too plentiful. A Canadian setting is not sufficient reason to choose these books over their American and British competitors. Even an eight-year-old can appreciate imagination, style, and wit. That we are now capable of writing the same dull stories as other countries is no reason to be proud. Jeans are, after all, American and once we put them on, it's almost impossible to tell us apart.

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A WINNER WRITES ABOUT WINNING

Journey through a shadow, Jaylene Butchart. Seal Books, McClelland & Stewart-Bantam Ltd., 1983. 63 pp. $2.50 paper. ISBN 0-7704-1825-2.

This book captured the 1982 Young Canadian Writers Award which, explains Classic Bookshops' President Brian Melzack in the foreword, "grew out of a desire on the part of Classic Bookshops to say thank you to Canada and Canadians for the support they have given us over the years." To celebrate the opening of their hundredth store, Classic initiated the award, observing that the "future of Canadian culture lies in the hands of the young . . . ." Of the over 600 manuscripts submitted, *Journey through a shadow* took the prize.

It would be at the least philistine to cavil at concrete encouragement for young writers. And there is clearly no arguing with the premise that old writers must be succeeded by young ones; or that young writers need both practice and exposure. True, too, that without readers, writers would not receive support in the form of awards or readership. So certainly it is to be hoped that competitions such as this serve to encourage the young writer, and in corollary, that they do not simply create in every school kid the idea that he or she is a writer.

But whether or not the gratitude of a commercial bookseller towards the clients who augment his coffers is analogous to a sensitive and challenging literary appreciation on the part of that sponsoring agency is perhaps another question. Perhaps. We do not know if the criteria for the award were literary or commercial; were the judges charged with searching out fine new blood for the Canadian literary stable, or were they scouting budding producers of books that sell well? The two goals are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they