

moment, whether it be her interest in Native Indians, her husband's military aides, her dog's misdemeanours, her eccentric neighbours, her church activities, the winter snow, the sleighing and tobogganing, the sudden spring flowers. She was, it seems, a vivacious (though often sickly) woman, with a lively mind, a keen sense of humour, and a vivid imagination. And, as if another talent was needed, she was an excellent sketcher as well — many of her sketches illustrate this book.

It is, then, certainly a book packed with information, a treasure for the devotee of either Canadian history or children's literature; and to enhance its value as such the editors have provided an excellent introduction, ample footnotes and several valuable appendices. Clearly, *Canada home* can be read by the student of history or literature with great profit. But, again, I suggest that it is also a book to be read at leisure — to be picked up and read in moments of relaxation, and if put down it will be picked up again with renewed anticipation and pleasure. What more could be required of a book?

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#### ROMANCE AND REALISM: NOVELS BY PAUL KROPP

*Baby baby*, Paul Kropp. Collier Macmillan Canada, 1982. 91 pp., \$3.50 paper. ISBN 02-997640-5; *Gang war*, Paul Kropp. Collier Macmillan Canada, 1982. 93 pp., \$3.50 paper. ISBN 02-997620-0; *Snow ghost*, Paul Kropp. Collier Macmillan Canada, 1982. 93 pp., \$3.50 paper. ISBN 02-997610-3; *Wild one*, Paul Kropp. Collier Macmillan Canada, 1982. 91 pp., \$3.50 paper. ISBN 02-997630-8; *Wilted*, Paul Kropp. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980. 111 pp., \$10.50 cloth. ISBN 0-698-20493-X.

The last of the five novels listed above, *Wilted*, is by far the most sophisticated, while the remaining four belong to Paul Kropp's "Series Canada" and feature the limited vocabulary characteristic of the series. Despite the fairly broad

strokes of "Series Canada," however, these novels remain convincing portrayals of realistic characters. *Baby baby* looks at the romantic idealism of teenage love in the face of an unwanted pregnancy, while *Gang war* and *Snow ghost* center on adolescents from socially and economically deprived families. Kropp's long novel, *Wilted*, also falls into this category, dwelling on problems found in contemporary family life. The exception to this pattern is *Wild one*, an account of a young girl saving a horse and training him to be a champion. All these novels are about the difficulties of growing up, signaling to young readers that life is far from easy and that life's problems often have no ready answers.

Nowhere is this more the case than in *Baby baby*. The love Lori and Dave share is very real, but it is not the love for a lifetime. This lesson they painfully learn when Lori's pregnancy forces them to decide about their future together. While physically capable of producing a child, neither is psychologically mature enough to be a good parent or in a position to offer the baby a secure home. That giving up the baby is the right decision is underlined by the situation of Tammy, Lori's best friend's sister. As an unwed mother, Tammy experiences the many difficulties of raising a child alone, and reveals what might happen to Lori if she keeps the baby. The final scene of the novel is especially poignant, revealing as it does Lori's pain in parting with her new son.

Very different from *Baby baby* are *Gang war* and *Snow ghost*. The main characters of both novels are so-called "tough guys," an image which masks their own insecurity. Without a mother and out of touch with his father, Charlie, the leader of the Saints in *Gang war*, learns that beating the Punks, a rival gang, is not as important as developing a meaningful relationship with Lisa and getting back together with his father. In *Snow ghost*, Martin, who describes himself as a "hood," is invited by his teacher, Crawford, to a cabin north of La Pas for Christmas. The plane, piloted by Crawford's brother, goes down on the flight in, leaving Crawford's son, Doug, and Martin to hike the fifteen kilometers for help. Martin's struggle against the cold and snow marks him as a very different person from the boy at the beginning of the novel, who boasted, "Dope is my survival kit. When things get rough, I smoke it."

*Wild one*, the fourth of the "Series Canada" novels reviewed here, is the least effective. While *Baby baby*, *Gang war*, and *Snow ghost* focus on growth in the main character, emphasis in *Wild one* is on plot and action. Kate saves Wild One from Banner, the fraudulent trainer of Cherry Hill Farm, and is herself given the opportunity to train the horse. She takes up the challenge, and the story concludes with Wild One winning the big race. Not only is the plot a rather tired one, but Kropp has some difficulty developing it. He devotes considerable time, for example, to the animosity between Kate and Banner. This promises a showdown, and, while Banner's horse does appear in the big race, no further conflict develops, leaving the novel hanging badly. An other problem surrounds the character Steve. At the beginning of the novel, a self-indulgent, rich kid, who wishes only to return to his city friends, he is transform-

ed at the end into the nice guy who is concerned about others and has learned to love the farm. This change is difficult to accept, largely because the novel is not long enough to allow for adequate development of Steve's personality.

The verisimilitude lacking in *Wild one*, however, is the strongest feature of the longer work, *Wilted*. While Kropp is not needlessly sensational, he pulls no punches in this account of family break-up. The deteriorating relationship between Danny's parents, the result in part of his father's excessive drinking, produces a tense and insecure home environment. Danny's mother is physically abused by her husband, his older sister finds solace in drugs and counter culture, his younger brother lives in constant fear, clinging to Danny for protection, and Danny himself is far from being a positive thinker. In the midst of this, Danny meets Samantha, who has it all, good looks, brains, a comfortable home, and loving parents. To get Samantha, Danny must vanquish her self-elected boyfriend, and, while one rarely solves anything with a fight, this one does wonders for Danny's self image. *Wilted* is not, however, a novel that ends with a simple happy ending. Although Danny wins the girl, there is the sense that things are far from resolved: Danny's favorite teacher is dead of a heart attack, his father is nowhere to be found, and the washing machine remains repossessed. The message is clear: the happy ending is a thing of dreams, not of real life.

These novels provide teenage readers with situations to which they can readily relate. Many of Danny's insecurities, for example, are those of all teenagers; one does not have to come from a broken home to experience them. And every adolescent probably knows a couple like Lori and Dave, and suffers the pain of first love. Kropp's stories also teach some valuable moral lessons. Martin in *Snow ghost* learns about responsibility, while Charlie in *Gang war* discovers that revenge and pride are poor reasons for violence. Kropp, too, shows no reluctance in addressing the awkward, sometimes embarrassing problems of adolescents, including everything from birth control and teenage sexuality to bad complexion and problem perspiration.

Kropp's novels have other strengths as well. *Wild one* places great stress on action, which in part makes up for weaknesses in characterization. *Snow ghost* contains elements of the adventure story, as two teenage boys find themselves in unusual and dangerous circumstances. There is the enigmatic figure of the "Snow Ghost" itself, which as a thing of Martin's dreams becomes a frightening reality for him.

But the major accomplishment of the four novels from "Series Canada" is that they remain convincing, despite the limited vocabulary Kropp uses. For the most part, Kropp captures well the nuance of adolescent speech, something which is best revealed, of course, in *Wilted*. Perhaps there is a bit too much of "boy meets girl" in the novels, but this is easily justified in developing stories appealing to teenagers. It should be noted, too, that Kropp's use of the first person in *Snow ghost* and *Wilted* is especially effective, heightening as it does

the realism of the two novels. One thing, however, must be improved: the drawings in the four novels of the "Series Canada," indeed the drawings in the complete series, are appallingly bad. They are a real disappointment after the attractive and imaginative covers of each book of the series.

Despite some flaws, these novels are well crafted stories realistically portraying teenage sentiments. They are rarely preachy, and are likely to attract a wide readership. The "Series Canada" is valuable in providing stories for slow readers, who wish to read something that recognizes their maturity in every other way. It will certainly be valuable in the classroom, and to this end a Teacher's Guide accompanies the series. Discussion of *Wilted* is perhaps best concluded with the remark that it is an accomplished novel written by someone who understands teenagers.

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## DÉMYTHIFICATION D'UN VIEUX CONTE

***Drôle de pique-nique pour le roi Craquelin***, Jean-Marie Poupart. Illus. Mireille Levert. Collection Jours de fête. Montréal, Leméac, 1982. 144 pp. 9,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-7609-9841-X

Cet ouvrage demande des jeunes auquel il est destiné des connaissances de base: celle des contes de Perrault les plus populaires et un vocabulaire assez étendu. Il convient aussi qu'ils soient déjà entraînés aux finesses de la langue.

Au début du récit, Craquelin, souverain de Soupe-au-lait, entouré de son bouffon, Triplesot, de sa fille, Craquelinette et de la gouvernante de cette dernière, écoute un récital de chants. L'arrivée inopinée d'un chasseur incite le groupe à se rendre dans une forêt où le roi suggère de pique-niquer avec les victuailles que son fou ira quérir au palais. Pendant l'absence de ce dernier, le loup survient, avoue avoir dévoré la grand-mère du petit chaperon rouge et craindre la poursuite du chasseur qui a d'ailleurs disparu. Après le festin champêtre, le petit groupe explore les environs et tombe sur la maison de l'aïeule. . . devenue le centre d'un parc d'attractions. A la suite de force palabres et malversations du loup, la compagnie se disperse. Le chaperon rouge accompagne Craquelinette au palais, la gouvernante s'assoupit dans le lit de la grand-mère, Craquelin sur un banc en compagnie du loup saturé de nourriture. Tandis que Triplesot lit, le chasseur s'arrache les cheveux d'impuissance. Le texte, en gros caractère d'imprimerie, s'agrémenté d'illustrations en noir et blanc.