The new wind has wings, Mary Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson, eds. Illus. Elizabeth Cleaver. Oxford University Press, 1984. 112 pp. $15.95, $9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-19-540432-7.

The wind has wings, in its original edition, was widely praised, and quickly established itself as a standard in schools and libraries. No small part of its appeal was the vivid illustrations by Elizabeth Cleaver, who was awarded the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon medal by the Canadian Association of Children's Librarians for her work on it. So the appearance of a new edition of the book is a matter of some interest.

The new edition contains fifteen new poems, some of which are substitutions for poems from the first edition which have been deleted. For example, John Glassco's translation of "The white drake," one of a rather too long series of French-Canadian ballads, has been replaced by Gilles Vigneault's delicate "Lullaby" in Mr. Glassco's sensitive translation. Only one poem has been simply omitted, and that is a bit of whimsy called "The clouds" that will hardly be missed, though the editors mourn it.

The new pieces are generally of three kinds. Some, like the Vigneault lullaby or the selections from Phyllis Gottlieb's witty "A bestiary of the garden for children who should know better" are naturals for this sort of anthology — good poetry, but accessible and appealing in a way that makes you want to grab the nearest available child and start reading aloud. Another group of poems appears more questionable. There were several poems in the first edition that were difficult for children, and, rather than mitigating the difficulty, the editors have compounded it. Among the new poems are several which are about childhood, rather than for children (though few enough of the poems here were written with children specifically in mind). Frank Davey's "The piano" and Alden Nowlan's "I, Icarus" recount incidents remembered from childhood. Though children may be able to identify the experience, the perspective may well be alien to them, and they will have to stretch to comprehend it. P.K. Page's "A backward journey" and Roy Daniells' "So they went deeper into the forest" are even more remote, being meditations, fairly abstract, on childhood itself. What on earth will children make of them?

I can suggest an answer to that question by observing that, to my surprise, the Daniells poem is one of the most frequently requested by my own child. I suspect that she believes it to be a fairy tale that she has not yet fully understood, and, in a sense, her reading is valid. Her interest is undoubtedly also spurred by Elizabeth Cleaver's evocative illustration (fig. 1).

Finally, there are some new poems which represent what might be taken as an attempt to bring the new edition up to date. Dennis Lee and sean o'huigin,

Fig. 1

whose names will probably be more familiar to most Canadian parents and teachers than those of Charles G.D. Roberts or Dorothy Livesay, are the youngest poets in the book. Their poetry tends to be light, irreverent, and instantly appealing, though "Windshield wipers," the Dennis Lee poem, is very subdued. The editors read a great many young poets in the search for new material for this edition, but found few of them suitable.

For the new poems, there are new pictures, in Cleaver's arresting style. Moreover, some of the earlier illustrations have, at the editors' request, been redrawn. The illustration for "Rattlesnake," for example, which in the original presented a fragmented group of figures, now shows the snake winding through the grass (fig. 2). So, too, "White cat" now looks like a cat, though it isn't yet the scampering ghost of the poem. "Clouds" and the two poems called "Frost" are now printed onto their cloudy or frost grey back-grounds, rather than being framed in jarring white. The cover illustration, cleverly echoing the blues and reds of the original edition, makes this new edition look like the same book, though it is actually a different picture.

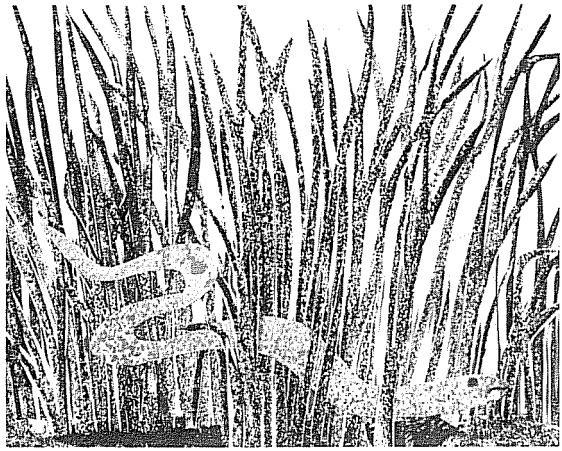

Fig. 2

Though the book's illustrations have won much deserved attention, and marry well with the poems, *The new wind has wings* can hardly be considered a picture book, and must ultimately be judged on its poems. Not all the poems here are to my taste, but any reader of any anthology would presumably say the same. Yet this selection is remarkably well-balanced, in tone and form, if not in the more pedestrian sense of allowing proportional representation to every region, race, and generation in the land. Even were the poems in existence which would allow such a portioning, and they are not, the editors would still have made their selection, and rightly so, by literary standards, rather than by the census. The literary excellence of some of the entries is certainly debatable, but I would gladly suffer through "The ice king," for example, for the pleasure of finding "For the sisters of the Hotel Dieu" or "One step from an old dance."

Many of the poems are difficult, but with the illustrations to entice, and a sympathetic adult to guide, children may thereby be led to stretch themselves beyond the egocentric here and now that lazy paedagogy prescribes for them. For one of the nicest points of balance in the collection is its combination of the plainly accessible and those poems which, as Wallace Stevens would have them, elude the understanding almost successfully.

If it seems elitist to be offering such a literary collection to this generation, what shall we call the result of excluding Canadian children, by our presumptions about their interests and capacities, from their own cultural heritage? I, for one, am glad that Mary Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson have, from the obscure realms of adult literature, rescued Duncan Campbell Scott, and E.J. Pratt, and F.R. Scott, and Irving Layton, for my children.

M.A. Thompson *is currently co-editing, with Mary Alice Downie and Elizabeth Greene, an anthology of new stories and poems for children,* The window of dreams.