

of Brown's art.

Annora Brown has written about her life as a prairie artist who grew up in Alberta in the early part of this century. On the one level, the book gives an account of the circumstances surrounding an artist who lived in the isolation of a small prairie town, and of the courage and determination needed to pursue her profession. On another level, it is a document of some value as a record of the social fabric of a town at a particular time in the province's history. Brown's references to aspects of Alberta's art scene in the first half of this century are personal and interesting.

This book is written in an informal style that reads easily, but occasionally references to various time periods and events in the author's life are not clearly indicated, and this lack of specificity is somewhat confusing. The parts of the book that deal with the author's pioneer childhood would appeal to children ten years of age or older. Primarily, *Sketches from life* is most valuable as a personal view of a dedicated painter whose love of her prairie environment inspired her art and her writing.

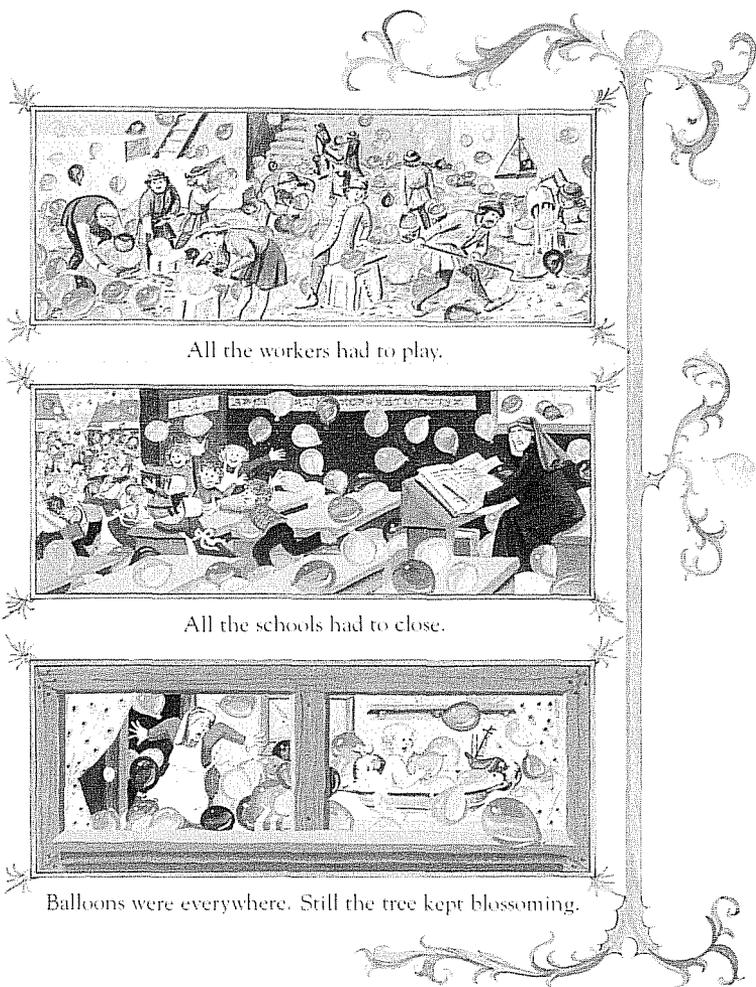
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## MIDDLE AGES FOR YOUNG AGES

**The balloon tree**, Phoebe Gilman. Illus. author. North Winds Press, 1984. 32 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-71410-4; **Tatterhood**, Robin Muller. Illus. author. North Winds Press, 1984. Unpaginated \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-71411-2; **Hans Christian Andersen's "The little mermaid,"** Margaret Maloney. Illus. Laszlo Gal. Methuen, 1983. 32 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-458-95110-2.

All three of these fairy tales are noteworthy, not only for their "medieval" quality, but also for their remarkable illustrations.

Dubbed "an original fairy tale illustrated with a medieval flavour," Gilman's *The balloon tree* is evidence of her classical art training as well as her knack for light-hearted adventure. In the story a wicked archduke plots to take over a kingdom in the king's absence by destroying Princess Leora's balloons: not only her prize possessions but also, when released, the only means of warning her absent father of danger. Leora uses the sole surviving balloon in the kingdom and a helpful wizard's spell to make a balloon tree whose "zillions" of balloons flood the kingdom, bringing about the return of the king and a comic dénouement. What sets the book apart is its spectacular illustrations so reminiscent of a medieval illuminated manuscript. Decorative borders of leaves, birds,



and animals frame each page of text. Stylised landscapes of walled medieval castle and town soaring above peasants at work in the fields have that uneven perspective by which men in the distance are almost as big as thatched roofs in the foreground. Illustrations counterpoint text with copious expansive detail, as in the case of the picture for “All the workers had to play” at the final onslaught of balloons (fig 1). The illustration shows eleven workmen at their usual jobs, except that balloons intrude in every function — chopped, barrowed, shoveled, poured, and borne away. This picture is itself only one of six panels on facing pages which similarly and often humourously elaborate the dispersal of the balloons. And the pictures are spiced with details at least tongue-in-

cheek if not downright modern. Leora's bearded father wears the royal crown and robe, and glasses; her bedroom sports her kindergarten drawing of him labelled "DAD" and a rocking horse — sorry, unicorn. While the story entertains, then, the illustrations of Gilman's book persistently fascinate and often amuse.

Winner of several awards for illustration and design, Robin Muller offers us in his retelling of "Tatterhood" the familiar medieval world of fairytale, with its castles, quests, and handsome princes. Tatterhood is the wildly dressed, giant-spoon-wielding, goat-riding sister of beautiful Belinda whose head through a witch's spell is exchanged for a calf's. Tatterhood not only rescues her sister's head from the witches' castle against great odds, but also arranges for both their marriages to princes, climaxed by her own last-moment transformation into a beautiful maiden, before her suitor Galen's bewildered eyes: "As you see me, so I am." In a style otherwise reminiscent of good realistic animation, the illustrations excel in the portrayal of expressive faces: the wild grin and tufted hair of baby Tatterhood, so akin to the leering goat upon which she rides, with her parents' horrified looks in the background; and Galen's astonished visage at Tatterhood's transformation, with her back as yet to the reader, until the page turns to reveal the beautiful face which we saw Galen seeing.

Readers of Maloney's *Little mermaid* who know the author as curator of the famous Osborne Collection at the Toronto Public Library, and illustrator Laszlo Gal's previous work in editions of *El Cid* and the *Iliad*, will not be disappointed in this latest venture. Here retold is Andersen's poignant tale of the mermaid who gave up her beautiful voice and gladly endured the stabbing pain of walking on human legs, all in order that the prince she saved from shipwreck might, of his own will, return her love. When he marries another, she even refuses to murder him to save herself magically from dissolution into seafoam; casting herself into the sea and imminent oblivion, she is strangely transformed into a daughter of the air as a reward for her suffering in love. A comparison of Maloney's opening with that of Horace E. Scudder's translation approved by Andersen in 1870-71 (in *Classics of children's literature*, eds. Griffith & Frey, Macmillan, 1981) reveals the telling power of Maloney's version. Scudder's begins:

Far out in the sea the water is as blue as the petals of the most beautiful corn-flower, and as clear as the purest glass. But it is very deep, deeper than any cable will sound; many steeples must be placed one above the other to reach from the ground to the surface of the water. . . Now, you must not believe there is nothing down there but the naked sand; no, — the strangest trees and plants grow there, so pliable in their stalks and leaves that at the least motion of the water they move just as if they had life. (105)

Notice now in Maloney's retelling the relative compactness of phrase with its attendant quicker movement yet still resonant timbre:

Far out at sea the water is as blue as cornflowers and as clear as crystal. But it is deeper than any anchor can reach or many church spires one upon another could fathom. Do

not imagine that only bare white sand rests below. Far from it! Wondrous trees and flowers grow and sway in the water like living beings.

Certain "medieval" features are again present in Gal's illustrations, such as decorative borders featuring sea creatures, and panoramic, detailed harbour- and undersea-scapes. [See the cover of *CCL*, #34.] Most noticeable is the apparent contrast of colours, between the fleshtones and gold-rusts of the mermaid, her long spreading hair, and the sunlight of the upper world, and the blue-greens of the waves, bubbles and splashes of the sea. But the texture and interpenetration of the colours is so rich that the illustrations invite a less dichotomous and more sustained contemplation, a strange consolation to so haunting a tale.

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## ARTS ET MÉTIERS ANCIENS

***Un serrurier en Nouvelle-France***, Danielle Pigeon et Hélène Charlebois-Dumais. Illus. Marie Trudel et Robert Lemire. Editions du Méridien, 1984. 94 pp. \$13.95 broché. ISBN 2-920417-94-0.

Ce premier ouvrage de la collection *Arts et métiers anciens* "se propose d'initier l'enfant à l'histoire sociale à travers la vie d'un artisan serrurier oeuvrant à Montréal au XVIIIe siècle." Fidèle à une très ancienne tradition littéraire, les auteurs se proposent d'instruire leurs jeunes lecteurs tout en les "divertissant," tâche difficile dans une oeuvre où le côté didactique doit demeurer prépondérant. La solution choisie par les auteurs est un genre de biographie romancée. Ce mélange de fiction et de documents a, malgré bien des avantages, quelques inconvénients liés au genre même et bien difficiles à éviter.

Ainsi le récit, tel une gracieuse rivière dont le cours naturel se heurte à de trop gros rochers, se trouve parfois suspendu par des explications historiques. Le rythme général reste néanmoins rapide et le texte agréable à lire, les phrases étant courtes et précises.

"Ignace ne se lasse pas de regarder travailler son père. Dès qu'il pénètre dans la forge, il a l'impression d'entrer dans un monde magique tout plein de mystère. Le bruit des marteaux frappant sur le fer rythme ses journées" (p.38).

Ce sont précisément ces journées de travail, cette vie de l'artisan du XVIIIe siècle, qui assurent le fil conducteur du récit et lui donnent une structure très