For other reactions, I went to the neighbouring younger set. Suzanne Cox, 13, of Waterloo, Ontario, likes the story because it "shows that the lion is willing to take risks for his owner, Lizzy" — [reviewer's kibitz: some risk; it eats him happily for four two-page drawings in full, no-blood colour] and "they help and protect each other like a family." Suzanne admires Lee's work but thinks "younger children will enjoy this book."

Good, I tried Alyson Woloshyn, 8, of Kitchener, and she best "liked the part when Lizzy called Lion, Lion" and enjoyed this most of all Lee's books. Her brother, Cam, 6, best liked "the part when Lizzy's Lion start to bite the 'robber' — it was great, it was excellent."

The opinions of Julie Moore, 7, of Kitchener, confirmed that these tykes of tenderer years "liked the feeling of security and protectedness" — that's her father talking — "when the lion eats the robber." She was "most amused by the robber's continued protests while being consumed, read and re-read and insisted on sharing' — the juicier parts, no doubt.

The unofficial results suggest, besides danger pay for kindergarten teachers, that younger children who keep messy rooms (Lizzy's is so pictured) and fear intruders respond quite enthusiastically to the idea of having at beck and call their own (non-parental) private enforcer. At least, I hope that's what they think. I'd hate to get those kids angry.

Gerald Noonan *teaches literature and creative writing at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo.*

GETTING INTO FOCUS

Secret at Westwind, Joan S. Weir. Scholastic-TAB Publications, 1981. 206 pp. $1.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-71091-5; ***Police story,*** Michael Barnes. Scholastic-TAB Publications, 1981. 143 pp. $1.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-71032-X; ***Mystery at Black Rock Island,*** Robert Sutherland. Scholastic-TAB Publications, 1983. 193 pp. $2.25 paper. ISBN 0-590-71151-2; ***Who cares about Karen?,*** Alison Lohans Pirot. Scholastic-TAB Publications, 1983. 151 pp. $2.25 paper. ISBN 0-590-71148-2; ***With love from Booky,*** Bernice Thurman Hunter. Scholastic-TAB Publications, 1983. 160 pp. $2.95 paper. ISBN 0-590-71220-9.

The first of the five Scholastic-TAB titles under review here demonstrates the problems created by a shifting authorial focus, while the four other books illustrate the varying benefits of a solid centre. Joan S. Weir's *Secret at Westwind* has too many aspirations; it wants to be a mystery, but also a problem novel; it wants to introduce its 10 to 13 year old readers to Canadian art history,

but also to the various satisfactions of owning a horse. The result of this ambitious but unwise range is the lack of a distinctive character for the book. The ostensible unifying element is the first person narrator Sandy Middleton, who comes from Toronto to Langley B.C. to spend the summer with her Uncle Hob Taylor and his daughter Jody. Mrs. Taylor has left her husband, and Jody is taking the separation badly; she has severed her ties with her former horse-riding friends, because her mother was a rider. Sandy, too, is coping with a loss — her grandmother. Gran had provided a solid support for the unselfconfident Sandy and her death leaves the girl full of self-pity; Sandy needs to realize that she had used Gran as a crutch enabling her to avoid making friends. She learns this lesson with the help of the elderly Miss Rachel, who refuses to become a replacement for Gran. Once the lesson is absorbed, Sandy can see the problems of others more clearly, and can offer genuine friendship — especially to Jody, whose beauty and popularity cannot satisfy the gap left by her mother's absence. Unfortunately, this "problem novel" aspect of the book is not developed enough to allow us to dispense with the inverted commas. Because Weir has so many other irons in the fire she is unable to devote the necessary time to *showing* us that Jody is more than a dumb blonde, or that Sandy's problems truly warrant our attention.

The main subject of the novel is the unravelling of the mystery surrounding the theft of old Miss Rachel's three Group of Seven originals. Here again we find a lack of thoroughness. Although two characters are solidly established as suspects for most of the novel, it turns out that Sandy, and we, have jumped to conclusions, for neither is the culprit. The problem is that we have not been given enough evidence to prevent us jumping the same way Sandy does. In a mystery novel we have to assume, after a certain point, that the author has played her cards; we certainly don't expect her to have an ace up her sleeve. Yet Weir does. The clues that direct us away from the main suspects come late in the novel. The culprit should have been introduced more fully earlier on, and I think *would* have been if Weir had focused on writing a solid mystery. But the range of Weir's interests proves to be anathema to anything solid. Potential is there, but remains potential. A clearly defined focus suggests and elicits its appropriate range of subject and mitigates the chances of incongruity. In the four books left to review the focus is clear and the range well-controlled, though the quality of execution is uneven.

Police story, by Michael Barnes, is not a novel, but a compendium of information about modern police forces which offers chapters and black and white photographs on almost every aspect of police work — from scientific detection, fingerprinting, radio codes, and weapons, to airborne, underwater, mounted, motorcycle, and cruiser officers, to police dogs, stakeouts, and the Emergency Task Force. There is even a chapter on what it takes to get accepted into the force, and a "Glossary of Terms From the Crime World." Barnes's method is to use a combination of dramatized anecdote and straight

exposition. Though occasionally the anecdotes seem overly contrived, for the most part they usefully illustrate the subject under discussion. *Police story* is sure to be a success with those proverbial children who want to be police officers when they grow up.

Robert Sutherland's *Mystery at Black Rock Island* fulfills the promise of its title. David McCrimmon, from Woodstock Ontario, is vacationing alone in the Hebrides when he discovers a man dying at the foot of a cliff. With his last breath the man makes David promise to deliver a secret message to a contact on another island. Carrying out the request leads David into the world of MI5, double agents and international smuggling. Sutherland, like Weir in *Secret at Westwind,* has interests besides mystery; however, unlike her, he does not let those interests rival the pull of the mystery in the reader's attention. On the contrary, the author's love of the Hebrides and his fascination with the history and lore of the islands consistently contribute to the forward thrust of the plot. The story of the Conuil brothers, for example, who had sheltered Bonnie Prince Charlie after the battle of Culloden, and who then had escaped from the British by hiding on Black Rock Island, is no digression into Scottish history for its own sake — Conuil's cave, which the brothers used to outwit the British, figures importantly in the climax of the novel.

Sutherland displays a firm awareness of his limits by making no attempt to give David, or the central female character Sandy MacLeod, a depth of character independent of that strictly necessary for the plot. The hints of a romantic interest between David and Sandy — almost *de rigeur* in juvenile novels it would seem — remain hints, and are somewhat clichéd at that. Sutherland wisely does not go all the way.

Alison Lohans Pirot, in *Who cares about Karen?* goes further. The title is unfortunate because it suggests a rather self-indulgent focussing on one person's problems, whereas what we get is a quite powerful portrayal of the transformation undergone by two shy, self-conscious people placed in extreme circumstances. The scenario is a simple one: the car carrying five high school band members, returning from a concert tour to their home town of Silver Ledge B.C. along a mountain road goes out of control in a storm and plummets into Suicide Gulch (an unnecessarily melodramatic name). Dave and Shelley, the oldest members of the group, and normally the leaders, are injured; Ward Lewis, the older brother of one of the protagonists, is a potential psychotic and cannot be relied upon to help. Consequently, the responsibilities of survival fall on Ward's younger brother Stanley, and fourteen-year-old Karen McConnachie.

Pirot allows us to see both the interior and exterior of these last two characters by alternating chapters of first person narration between them. We see that Stanley's continual wisecracking and punning is a nervous attempt to compensate for the tension his brother Ward causes in those around him. In Karen's case, we learn that she has cultivated being nondescript both as

a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in reaction to her older sister's poise and beauty, and as a way of avoiding the embarrassment resulting from her thick glasses and night blindness. For both Karen and Stanley, the pressures of survival break down the superficial self-image and force truer character traits to emerge.

The transformation is convincing and satisfying because Pirot, again unlike Weir, has her focus clear. Her first interest is character, not mystery or adventure, and she takes the necessary time for gradual delineation. There are no extraneous interests; the survival situation serves only as a pressure-cooker for character development.

With love from Booky, by Bernice Thurman Hunter, is a delight. There are no pressure-cookers here, no adolescent "problems": and the kind of heavy weather they engender. There are, however, problems without the inverted commas, just as there are problems in life. For *With love from Booky* has the authentic feel of life in its pages; it is not a book whose contours one should stand back and admire, but a book to enter — to experience. In 1981 Hunter won the IODE Award and was runner-up in the City of Toronto Book Awards for *That scatterbrain Booky. With love* is a worthy sequel.

The book covers one year (June 1935 to August 1936) in the life of Beatrice Thompson (Booky), a 12/13 year-old from Toronto. The spot-light rests on Booky; visiting her relatives in Muskoka, scaring the little kids on the block with ghost stories, falling in love with her "Senior Fourth" teacher, falling in love with Georgie Dunn, getting fired from her first baby-sitting job, entering high school, sneaking into a movie on her first date, coping with the inroads of the Depression on her family, and experiencing the death of her beloved grandfather. Though some of this may sound like standard fare, Booky herself is not. Hunter has created a character who genuinely holds our interest. Obviously a lot of the author's past went into both "Booky" books, but we never get the feeling that Booky is a fictional device existing for the purposes of veiled autobiography. Beatrice Thompson breaks free of Hunter's history to become a person in her own right. Similarly, Booky is free of the "messages" that tend to cling to juvenile novels that attempt fuller character presentation. Though Booky's parents fight, though her grandfather dies, we never get the sense that Hunter is writing the book to help young teens cope with these problems — Hunter is no Judy Blume, thankfully. I am not saying that Booky's experiences will not offer solace or even guidance to a youthful reader in similar straits, they very well might, but Hunter is a novelist, not a child psychologist. I suppose this is another way of putting the novelistic paradox that the more fully developed, the more individual a character is, the more representatively human that character will be. Certainly Booky, in her responsiveness to the world expanding around her — symbolized aptly in her fascination with new words — is representative, in her individually, of human creative possibility.

Hunter's recreation of Depression Toronto is a novelist's account rather than a historian's or sociologist's; detail contributes to a tone of reminiscence which

stresses not the brute facts of depression existence, but the life that flourishes despite them:

> I had to wear two pairs of Dad's thick work socks with the toes folded over to fill out Willa's skates. But Glad was even worse off. She had to wear her running shoes inside Buster's skates to make them fit. Oh, but it was worth it! The sheer joy of sailing like seagulls, arms outstretched, the full length of the pond with the north wind pushing at our backs!

Similarly, while half the illustrations included are of period advertisements and newspaper stories, the other half are photographs of people. Mention of "DeForest Crosley" radios and "Tangee Natural" lip rouge is a nostalgic plus (as my mother-in-law, who was a young teen during the depression, and who was present when I first read *With love from Booky,* can attest); however, nostalgia will not take a children's novel very far. Without someone to be enraptured by the radio, and to steal her sister's lip rouge, the paraphernalia of the thirties' would remain just that. In Booky, Bernice Thurman Hunter has supplied that someone.

Laurence Steven *teaches English at Laurentian University and is the author of articles on Canadian and British fiction and poetry.*

COMPTINES DÉCEVANTES

Contes, comptines et chansons pour toi, Louise LeBel. Illus. Robert Bigras. Montréal, Ville-Marie, 1984, 55 pp. 8,95$. ISBN 2-89194-090-3.

Au premier coup d'oeil, *Contes, comptines et chansons pour toi* de Louise LeBel donne l'impression d'être une mine d'or pour l'enseignant(e) du français au primaire. Le titre nous promet tous ces outils que nous cherchons constamment pour augmenter nos programmes de langue. En ouvrant ce bel album on est encore bien content qu'il soit illustré d'une manière très attrayante, que la notation musicale soit incluse et que le contenu soit regroupé selon douze thèmes, offrant un conte, une comptine et une chanson pour chacun des douze. On s'imagine déjà enrichir plusieurs unités de travail pendant l'année.

C'est en regardant de plus près et en utilisant ce matériel dans une classe d'immersion française de première année que je me suis rendu compte de quelques problèmes. D'abord, j'avais jugé le livre approprié à ce niveau-là surtout d'après les sujets abordés; la visite chez les grands-parents, les animaux familiers, les saisons et le fêtes. Les grandes illustrations multicolores et pleines d'imagination de Robert Bigras s'apprêtent aussi à être exploitées, et avec de jeunes enfants, et dans un groupe. (Le colibri, le chien Berlin et plusieurs des