

THE ART IN CURRENT BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

Children of the Yukon, Ted Harrison. Illus. author. Tundra Books, 1977. Reprinted 1984. 24 pp. \$11.95, \$6.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88776-092-9, 0-88776-163-1; *The glory trap*, E.J. Gooden. Illus. author. Three Trees Press, 1983. 24 pp. \$12.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88823-075-3, 0-88823-074-5; *A whale named Henry*, M. Wylie Blanchet. Illus. Jacqueline McKay Mathews. Harbour Publishing, 1983. 46 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-920080-33-2; *The Christmas birthday story*, Margaret Laurence. Illus. Helen Lucas. McClelland and Stewart, 1980. Reprint 1984. 32 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-7710-4718-5; *The witch of Port LaJoye*, Joyce Barkhouse. Illus. Daphne Irving. Ragweed Press, 1983. 48 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-920304-26-5; *Flying Dimitri*, Blair Drawson. Illus. author. Groundwood Books, 1978. 32 pp. \$8.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-0006; *Miller's helper*, Wence Horai. Illus. Sarie Jenkins. Three Trees Press, 1983. 28 pp. \$13.95, 6.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88823-067-2, 0-88823-062-1.

In *Children of the Yukon* Ted Harrison has written and illustrated a handsome book which effectively conveys his love of the land, people, events, and activities of the Yukon where he currently lives, teaches art in high school, and paints and writes. Prior to moving to Canada in 1967 with his family, Harrison had traveled widely and had taught in such places as Malaya and New Zealand.

This factual book informs the reader about the gold rush and history of the Yukon, the ghost towns, and many of the activities that native and non-native children and families engage in during the changing seasons: snowshoeing, fishing, hunting, trapping canoeing, as well as church-going, and special festivals such as the famous "Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous" or "Discovery Day" held every August in Dawson City, where everyone dresses up in styles of the Gay 90's.

Harrison states in the introduction that, of all aspects of nature, he had been most impressed with the numerous, raucous black ravens and the big, expansive skies. He admirably conveys his impression in the twenty-one paintings (nearly all 26 cm x 20 cm) in which the spacious becomes both the background and the visual focal point in each of the bold, lively scenes, no two skies alike in shape, pattern, or color (fig. 1). The medium is acrylic paint, a water soluble polymer plastic paint with which the artist emphasizes a flat poster or cartoon-like technique, a broad, brilliant color palette, and thin, dark outlines surrounding each shape and image. The text and illustrations support one another and are logically integrated. The reading audience would be the upper elementary school child, though younger children would delight in the art. Harrison exhibits his paintings in galleries in major cities and the reviewer recalls a successful show recently here in Edmonton.

The glory trap by E.J. Gooden is an interesting little book, most appropriate

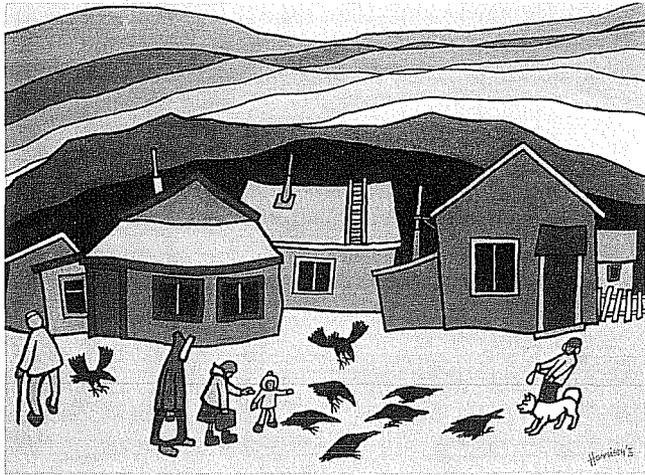


Fig. 1

for the upper elementary age reader. The illustrations reproduce original stained glass windows, by Ted Gooden, who was born in 1947 in London, Ontario. The original stained glass windows are on permanent display at the London Regional Children's Museum in London, Ontario. The author/artist was trained in art schools in Canada and England, served apprenticeships in his craft, and has been teaching stained glass while carrying out commissions for churches, public buildings, and individuals.

The glory trap is a tale recalled from Gooden's grandfather about a boy called Gert who was considered lazy and quite "Useless," never having done a "Useful" thing in his young life. After being sent out into the world by his parents, he meets a woman, Apsersayzer, who weaves a magic net, the glory trap, that enables her to become wealthy and powerful, and Gert "Useful" by ensnaring bird-flight, butterfly dust and the flicker of the snake's tongue. This is a false power. Eventually Gert changes into a bee and so becomes hard-working and "Useful" while Apsersayzer becomes a queen bee. This is a book of contrasts: the "Useful" and "Useless" in the tale and the light and dark of the stained glass; of the magic woven net and its parallel in the network of dark leading containing the colored glass of the windows. The eleven stained glass windows, which are mainly sombre cool greens and blues with some warm browns and yellows and milky whites, are suitably reproduced (as 11 cm x 17 cm full page plates) to reveal the character of the traditional stained glass technique employed; that is, the quality of reproduction shows they are stained glass, not colored woodcuts or paintings.

Of particular note are the author's description of the process for producing stained glass which has not changed much since its first use in the 11th century, and suggestions for introducing young people to the use of colored tissue paper and black cardboard for glass and lead, with scissors and glue replacing

lead cutting knives and solder (fig. 2). The renewed activity in this art form in the last twenty-five years seems to coincide with the creation of the famous Jerusalem windows, the stained glass designed by Marc Chagall in the early 1960s. *The glory trap* would contribute to a child's understanding of stained glass as a significant art form.



Fig. 2

M. Wylie Blanchet's *A whale named Henry* is an imaginative story emanating from some local geography and history: a lovable young killer whale, Henry, already thirty feet long, became trapped in a remote inlet on the coast of British Columbia. The manuscript was written in the 1930s as bedtime reading for her own family by Muriel Wylie Blanchet, an accomplished west coast author. This was long before the public became aroused and involved with issues relating to conservation and the preservation of the natural environment, conflicts between the international commercial whaling industry and the public good, the pros and cons of the capturing and public displaying in aquariums around the world of such magnificent creatures as whales, and the scientific study of personality and intelligence in whales and related sea life. The author died in 1961 and the publisher made several changes in the original manuscript.

A whale named Henry is a large format publication (23 cm x 30 cm) with a bold cover in color and forty illustrations in black and white. Mathews, the illustrator, could not have selected a more appropriate medium and artistic technique. The medium appears to be pen and black India ink which exquisitely lends itself to capturing the natural coloration of the killer whale and characterizing the range of behavior, from playful to menacing. Powerful, stark contrasts are obtained by juxtaposing jet black and pure white. (fig. 3) A range of more subtle gradations of grays is obtained through craftsmanlike use of drawing techniques such as stippling, cross-hatching, and variegated spacing and thicknesses of line widths. Most of the drawings — of Henry, fish, boats,

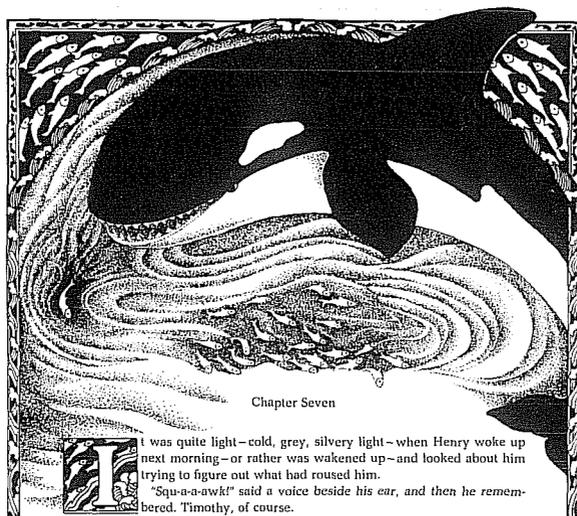


Fig. 3

seagulls, sky, water, waves, and foam — are full of movement and rhythm through the artist's skillful command of basic art elements: tonal treatment through lights and darks, and line and shape treatment resulting in patterns in repetition and variation. In sum, the illustrations create the gestalt effect of being informational and richly decorative. They complement the story.

There are several visual bonuses to be had, notably the thin borders which serve to frame and embellish each page with flowing patterns of fish, water, waves, and seaweed, and also the maps of the British Columbia inlet depicting Henry's changing locations. These suggest the flavor and charm of old world sea charts. Here is a book that would be most appealing to upper elementary school age children.

Margaret Laurence's *The Christmas birthday story* is an attractive book with simple, concise text, pleasing illustrations, and inviting layout. These attributes and its scale make it a pleasure to hold in one's hands. Throughout, a page of text is arranged facing an illustration, for a total of fifteen illustrations (25 cm x 20 cm). The illustrations are executed in the medium of collage; more accurately, the artist has used mixed-media in that a second medium, pen and ink drawing, has been combined with collage.

Collage was pioneered by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in the early years of this century in France, the name being derived from the French word which means to glue or paste. This technique involves arranging and adhering objects or materials on a flat surface to create a composition. At first it included newspaper, assorted printed and colored papers, photographs, and fabrics in combination with paint to provide a greater range of texture and surface treatment. Today collage includes virtually any flat or three-dimensional material which can be attached to a surface, and often no paint at all is used.

Helen Lucas has created compositions of from four to as many as ten solid colors of paper, muted in tone, for each illustration. Many subtle color relationships are developed as background to receive the drawings. Of the two major techniques used in collage in paper — cutting with knives or scissors, resulting in smooth edges and tearing paper shapes free-hand, resulting in irregular and ragged edges — the artist has used the cutting technique exclusively. Small and large shapes of color with smooth, flowing contours can be seen throughout the book. Pen and black ink are added to these color shapes to produce simple, delicate, thin line drawings of the story's characters. In several illustrations further selective use of line enhances visual interest by adding textural enrichment and a complex filigree-like quality to the otherwise simple and spatially flat arrangements.

Pre-school and primary age children will enjoy having this book about the essence of Christmas read to them. They, as well as older children, should respond positively to the artworks whose simplicity, directness, and easily understood process have the capacity to stimulate children to attempt similar techniques in their own art expressions.

The Indians of North America have a great tradition of oral legends. In *The witch of Port LaJoye*, Joyce Barkhouse retells one Micmac legend which exists in at least ten written versions. Set in Prince Edward Island it is a legend about a young Basque woman who marries a Micmac and becomes a healer, and about a mysterious bubbling spring and a magical stone. The young woman, known as La Belle Marie, accused by local settlers of practising, witchcraft, was condemned and burned at the stake in 1793 at Port LaJoye, not far from Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Daphne Irving, the illustrator, uses watercolor as the medium for the seven paintings. Each watercolor (12 cm x 14 cm) is reproduced in color to fill almost an entire page except for a thin black border and generous white space which frames each painting. This style creates a crisp, sparkling presentation which sets off each illustration on the page and also from the visual texture of the printed text, a treatment which enables the reader to enjoy each illustration as a work of art independent of the story.

Watercolor, generally, is considered one of the more difficult of the painting media to control and master. It has great range in technique of application and appearance and absolutely enormous sensory and expressive potential in the hands of an accomplished artist. The qualities of watercolor can be used effectively to convey a variety of effects from the most illusory, ethereal, ephemeral, spacious, and suggestive, to the most reportorial, photographic, precise, and detailed. The unique characteristic of watercolor is its transparency; the color, which comes in cakes or tubes, and the soft, fine pointed brushes and water used, permit very thin color to be laid over paper so that the paper and other color beneath, show through. Watercolor was an excellent choice for interpreting this story so full of sensory imagery. The artist has been ef-

fective in conveying visually the high points of the story.

The witch of Port LaJoye should be most appealing to readers in grade 5 and above.

Blair Drawson has created for young children a large format (22 cm x 29 cm) picture book *Flying Dimitri*. This is a story about a boy, Dimitri, who having given his dad a present of a necktie, gets ready for bed by brushing his teeth. While engaged in this mundane chore, he fantasizes about being able to fly over land, sea and outerspace-scapes, to Mars where he confronts Martians, a dragon, and an imprisoned queen. Dream and story end abruptly when dad peers through the bathroom door to check on Dimitri and tuck him into bed.

From the published book it is difficult to determine the original art medium used for the twenty-eight color illustrations handled in a representational style. The medium is most likely an opaque material such as acrylic or tempera.

Although this book follows the story pattern used in several other popular books that contain dream-like sequences sandwiched between reality, the story of *Flying Dimitri* is prosaic and uninspiring. On the other hand, a number of the illustrations — those depicting Dimitri flying over land, and through the ocean and outer space — are of high quality and significantly surpass the calibre of the story. They create murky, mysterious, and expansive moods of wonderment, where figure and ground become almost indistinguishable through the artist's use of analogous hues and closely related tonal values. This is the most outstanding feature of the book, providing a genuine pleasure.

The suggested level for *Flying Dimitri* would be pre-school through the primary years.

Miller's helper by Wence Horai is a story about a young miller, George, in a far away country, who sets out to find a rich, beautiful princess who lived in an enchanted castle beneath the sea. The princess offers immortality to anyone who finds her. Many have attempted and failed. George declines the offer of immortality but instead is granted his simple wish to return home to live a normal life and marry a beautiful girl, Dewa.

Watercolor appears to have been the illustrator's choice for the twelve full page (20 cm x 18 cm) illustrations in color. A representational style is used with a considerable amount of detail. The medium is handled mainly in a transparent manner with small areas treated in varying degrees of opacity in modeling figures and objects to create the illusion of three-dimensionality and shadow. Also colored crayon or chalk has been used to increase the impression of spatial depth while simultaneously revealing the surface of the rough textured watercolor paper. Aesthetic quality is especially strong in several of the illustrations owing to Sarie Jenkins' treatment of composition, and delicate and subtle variation in shape, pattern, and the watery pale color nuances. The weaker compositions tend to be static and overworked without maximizing the suggestive powers of watercolor; hence the young reader has little opportunity for personal involvement through linking visual with textual content. Overall,

the illustrations in the *Miller's helper* carry the story well and are, in fact, superior to the calibre of the story.

This book would be most applicable to middle and upper elementary school age readers.

Bernard Schwartz obtained his doctorate from the Pennsylvania State University and is professor of visual arts education at The University of Alberta, Edmonton. He has had a long-standing interest in the art included in books for children. In the course of raising his own six children he has spent many enjoyable hours reading to them.

UN PETIT ALBUM BIEN SYMPATHIQUE

Les aventures d'Electrozz et Bozz: Electrozz et Bozz au Québec, Prouche. Illus. auteur. Chicoutimi, Larouche, 1983. 22 pp. broché 4,25\$. ISBN 2-92056-00-5

Voici le début d'une nouvelle série d'aventures pour enfants sous forme de bande dessinée. Il s'agit d'une B.D. qui se veut amusante et éducative, exempte de sexisme, racisme et violence. On y trouve deux voyageurs intergalactiques qui visitent la terre (en l'occurrence le Québec) à la recherche de pommes et de savoir. Nos deux extra-terrestres, nommés Electrozz et Bozz, ont donc la curiosité des voyageurs dans certains contes de Voltaire, ainsi que la gentillesse de E.T. Electrozz est un robot, mathématicien et excellent pilote. Bozz est gentil, curieux, gourmand et un pilote exécrationnel.

Tout comme les Schtroumpf, nos visiteurs ne parlent pas comme tout le monde. Ils ont une forte prédilection pour les terminaisons en — ozz = leur soucoupe volante s'appelle le vessozz; l'appareil qui permet la communication entre terriens et visiteurs s'appelle le parlotrozz; et c'est grâce au phototrozz qu' Electrozz prend des clichés enregistrés sur des mini — cassettes.

Mais ce n'est pas la dimension science-fiction qui domine. Nos visiteurs (qui ne sont visibles qu'aux jeunes) rencontrent deux petits terriens, Julie et Simon, quand une fausse manoeuvre de Bozz fait atterrir le vessozz dans la piscine du parc près de chez eux. Julie et Simon font visiter à leurs nouveaux amis la forêt québécoise avec sa flore et faune, la ville de Québec, une ferme (encore un atterrissage raté de Bozz, cette fois dans un tas de fumier), Montréal, Percé et le barrage Manic 5. Ces visites représentent l'essentiel du livre, et expliquent le sous-titre "Les aventures d'Electrozz et Bozz; les extra-touristes."

Le dessinateur du présent ouvrage est le Chicoutimien Pierre Larouche, jeune technicien en architecture. Cet album, qu'il a édité lui-même, est le premier