

quatch, the mythical beast of which the Terrible Three are mortally afraid. But then this is, after all, a romantic comedy in which trials and tribulations are either blessings in disguise or temporary setbacks on the narrative road to a happy resolution.

Given its middle-class albeit zany family and its emphasis upon male character and action, it is possible that *Take the big picture* would not fare well under the scrutiny of marxist or feminist criticism. There are, however, a variety of possible readings of this text. It can be read as an indictment of the school system or a diatribe against fast foods. More positively it can be considered as a plea for animal rights or as a celebration of spirit and action on the part of older women. Granny orchestrates events: she even operates a successful halfway house with a minimum of exploitation. Criminals are redeemable and need not always be young male hoodlums on motorcycles: they can as easily be old female imposters in stolen cars. The pretensions of the market-place are cheerfully ridiculed when a rare book dealer pays vast sums for small volumes whose age and origin have been "authenticated" by the recent toothmarks of ravenous young children. While large extended families, a sense of community and the celebration of traditional festivals are upheld, it would take a wildly zealous historicalsocial literary critic not to enjoy the simple spoof being played upon many conventional assumptions.

All in all, the deft prose style combined with keen characterization and mystery will sustain the young reader's interest. The clever structure in which the camera zooms in on travellers and stay-at-homes alternatively, then switches skillfully from main story line to tale-within-tale provides the stuff story spells are made of. Intriguingly Reaney leads us to a grand finale in which experience and fancy merge in the yarn that is spun from them both. Since the ink well is dry we are encouraged to write beyond the ending and it is the measure of Reaney's accomplishment that the reader of any age will find the invitation irresistible.

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HISTORY LESSONS

White mist, Barbara Smucker. Irwin, 1985. 159 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7725-1542-4.

Caring and committed in her approach to historical fiction for young peo-

ple, Barbara Smucker in her newest book stresses the influence of the past upon the present. A history of exploitation, greed and racial discrimination has left modern communities on the Great Lakes with a legacy of environmental and social problems whose range is certainly suggested, although hardly encompassed, by *White mist*. The pollution of a lovely beach and the anxiety of two Native Indian teenagers about their identity in a white-dominated society are her major concerns here. Smucker has chosen to develop these parallel concerns not, as she usually does, through a straightforward, realistic narrative, but through the device of time-travel fantasy. Unfortunately, an awkward and perfunctory handling of this device and a cargo of too many social issues cause the novel to founder.

We have to admire, nonetheless, Smucker's attempt to show the interconnectedness of many different social problems. To understand why Lake Michigan's beaches are polluted, and why unemployment and alcoholism drive native youths to suicide, she looks back 150 years to the destruction of the forests and the forced removal of native people from their lands. May Apple, adopted in infancy by a kindly white couple, denies her Indian identity and withdraws from the Sarnia schoolmates who tease her. Her adoptive parents run a nursery in the summers on a Michigan beach which has become badly polluted; hired to help them this year is Lee Pokagon, who has quit school and is acutely depressed about the suicide of his closest friend on the Sarnia reserve. May's curious name, the vision of a dignified Indian chief which appears to each of them, and a swirling white mist are portents of the strange journey they must take together, to the mid-nineteenth century-boomtown of Singapore, and then to the village of Chief Pokagon of the Potawatomi, to participate in a life lived in harmony with nature. Lee and May return from their travel to a past time with a new pride in their heritage, and pass on the wisdom of this heritage at a citizens' meeting about the polluted beach.

Just as Smucker differentiates among the responses of people concerned about the pollution, she differentiates between the attitudes of Lee and May towards their common ancestry. That their fantasy experience in the past could make such a sudden positive change in attitudes of both of them, and that inspiring volunteers at a local meeting could halt the pollution of the Great Lakes, would seem to be optimism almost as fantastic as the time journey itself. One thinks, instead, of the moving conclusion of John Craig's *Nobody waved goodbye*, where two boys discover that their interracial friendship and well-meaning local efforts to protect native rights are not, in themselves, sufficient to combat the big corporations and development interests. While the conclusion of *White mist* may make everyone feel better, it denies the complexity of the real issue.

Indeed, *White mist* is overweighted with earnest presentation of issues. And, as so often happens in this genre, the journey through time is merely

a pretext for history lessons — in logging methods, in maple syrup making, in traditional Indian clothing, and so on. May Apple frequently and conveniently recalls chunks of history books, as few teenage girls are wont to do. ...when she closed her eyes something Uncle Steve had once read aloud to her from one of his history books flashed through her mind. By 1837, the Potawatomi, Ojibwa and Ottawa tribes were either expelled to territories far to the west of restricted to cramped reservations within their ancient homelands.

In Smucker's earlier novel *Underground to Canada*, such passages are much more effectively concealed by the urgency of the story itself.

White mist has no magic, although it does have an honest concern for important social problems and the teenagers who are about to inherit them. What might be magical in this novel is simply improbable (the infant May's being abandoned on the Appleby's doorstep and adopted by them, apparently with no questions asked by the police or welfare agencies), and the transition from present to past is confused by too many pretexts and devices (the mist, the storm, the Petoskey stone, the tea, the moccasins, the Chief's hypnotic power, and so on). Without some real sense of magic, fantasy cannot succeed; and without artistry, fantasy does not easily cohabit with social realism.

White mist includes a bibliography of 22 works useful for further study of the historical and environmental issues raised in the novel. The cover illustration, by Laszlo Gal, is outstanding: it uses the image of an hour-glass, through which the sand is running from the buried town of Singapore in the top half towards the strong, searching faces of Lee and May in the bottom half, to suggest the effect of the past upon the present and the urgency of our obligation to deal with the problems we have inherited.

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UNE PAGE D'HISTOIRE POUR LES 12-15 ANS

Georges-Étienne Cartier, Thérèse Fabi. Montréal, Hurtibise HMH, 1985, 70 pp. broché. ISBN 2-89045-643-9.

Cartier a vécu de 1814 à 1873. Cet épisode correspond à la gestation et à la naissance de la confédération canadienne. Pour rendre cette page d'histoire attrayante à ses destinataires, les élèves du début du secondaire, Thérèse