

shaded illustrations and the subtlety of the text. While Gay has called this latest book a more "normal" story than her previous ones that featured polar bears and moon ships, she is right to insist that in *Fat Charlie's circus* "there was no inventing of fierce animals or crazy things, but there was the emotion there that was very, very important."

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SECRET GARDENS, INDUSTRIAL PARKS

The refuge. Monica Hughes. Doubleday Canada, 1989. 140 pp., cloth. ISBN 0-385-25219-5.

In a 1986 interview in *Canadian Children's Literature*, Monica Hughes referred to herself as a "technological pastoralist" (*CCL*, 44 (1986) 6-18). This phrase evokes clearly the landscape of her latest novel, *The refuge*, which borrows the motif of "the secret garden" from Frances Hodgson Burnett's 1911 novel but relocates it in that paradigmatic modern wasteland, the industrial park.

The refuge is the story of twelve-year-old Barb Coutts whose life has been torn apart by her parents' separation and divorce. Barb must come to terms not only with her father's absence and indifference to her (he is one of Fitzgerald's "careless" people), but with a real decline in social and economic status. Her mother is determined to support herself and her daughter through her freelance journalism but this requires a move from their affluent home in Willow Heights on the southside of Edmonton, to a townhouse complex in the northside, working-class neighbourhood, of Westwood Acres. Hughes – who lives in Edmonton and has written about some of its landmarks in earlier novels like *The ghost dance caper* – makes wonderfully ironic use of the names of such subdivisions. While "Westwood Acres" suggests the rural and the pastoral, the neighbourhood in fact borders and industrial "park" and Barb's new bedroom

Faced west, with a splendid view of factories and warehouses, built variously of brick and stone, aluminum siding and rusting iron. Directly across the road was a two-storey brick factory of dirty yellow brick with a modern florescent sign: SMITHS' TOOL AND DIE WORKS (5).

Although the transition from her old to her new life is a painful one – and it is complicated by beginning junior high in the midst of such changes – Barb is able to draw strength from two sources. She discovers a "secret garden" hid-

den in the heart of the industrial park, and she establishes a friendship with classmate Stan Natyshyn, a sensitive and promising artist. Like Alice, Barb follows a rabbit which leads her to a narrow passage between two old warehouses. The warehouses have been joined together at the second storey and the passageway between them – where an early railway line once ran – has been fences in to create a space which effectively evokes the recent and fragile history of Edmonton:

[L]ater the roads in the north of the city were paved, and trucks became more important than trains to feed the industrial park with raw materials and take away the finished goods. The track fell into disuse. The space between the buildings was forgotten. The fence had been put up to stop tramps, and now even that was history. Seeds blew and seedlings grew and the rain and snow nurtured the forgotten bush and turned it into a secret garden (29).

The bush, which has in a small way reclaimed this space from history, "blaze[s] with branching clover, white and yellow, and with blue, white and purple flowers and a patch of orange poppies" (16). Its air is thick with the smell of hot nectar and the buzz of bumblebees. It is here that Barb – and, later, Stan – begins the task of reassembling her life as she domesticates the bush by building a lean-to, a reflecting pool, and so on.

The parallels between Burnett's *The secret garden* and Hughes's *The refuge* are obvious. Like Mary Lennox, Barb Coutts is geographically and emotionally dislocated; like Mary, she discovers herself through her identification with the world of nature. In both novels, the "secret garden" – abandoned, fully enclosed, and awaiting loving attention – suggests the inner resources and nascent strengths of the two young girls. Both novels are firmly rooted in a sense of place: Burnett's in turn-of-the-century Yorkshire, Hughes's in late twentieth-century Edmonton.

The differences between the two novels, however, are revealing and even disturbing. By relocating the secret garden in the heart of an industrial park, Hughes has brought an important new landscape to Canadian children's literature. In "My search for somewhere" (*Canadian Children's Literature* 48 (1987) 15-28), Hughes described her move from England to Canada (via Zimbabwe and Australia) and her attempt "to come to terms with this difficult land . . . that seemed to reject human footprints and deny myth" (22). Her evocation of particular landscapes and detailed settings obviously grows out of this sense of deracination. Landscape in *The refuge* is at once particular – the north-south axis of Edmonton with its grid of streets and avenues is scrupulously detailed – and, at the same time, part of a recognizably transnational urban wasteland. The threat of that creeping wasteland, and our fear of the social dissolution that it represents, is further enacted in *The refuge* through a melodramatic development and resolution of the plot. Barb's "refuge" is invaded

when an escaped sociopathic murderer returns to the spot and holds Barb captive: "The fence that had protected and enclosed the secret garden had become the bars of a terrifying prison" (120). Indeed, after Barb's rescue – Stan's part in this enables him to deal more assertively with his bullying father and brothers – the once "secret garden" is surrounded by a chain-link fence topped with a line of barbed wire and a notice saying that "the City would Prosecute Trespassers" (140). Although the rabbit which led Barb to her adventure is still able to squeeze under the wire, the reader is left with the sense of a world increasingly bereft of any of its traditional or imaginative places of refuge.

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UN ROYAUME À DORMIR DEBOUT

Le roi du sommeil. Gilles Tibo. Illus.auteur. Montréal, Leméac, 1989. 23 pp. 6,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-7609-9859-2.

Il était une fois un roi qui avait deux passions: dormir et pique-niquer. Il aurait bien aimé participer au grand pique-nique interplanétaire, mais ce jour-là il dormait, aussi le grand départ se fit-il sans lui. Survint un mouton au comportement infantile, exigeant et dévorant, véritable plaie d'Égypte pour le roi-adulte qui l'a sur les bras. Lui aussi aurait bien aimé participer au fameux pique-nique, mais au moment où l'occasion lui en est offerte, il sombre dans le sommeil, épuisé par sa propre tyrannie. Finalement, le roi prendra part au grand rassemblement, les piques-niqueurs ayant choisi sa planète pour leurs agapes annuelles.

Le récit, on le voit, relève de l'absurde avec quelques touches très légères d'un humour un peu narquois. Les enfants, qui n'aiment généralement guère aller se coucher et dormir seront-ils touchés par cette histoire peu dynamique et un peu triste aussi? Ce roi solitaire est plein de bonne volonté pour satisfaire les exigences de l'insupportable ovidé, mais il ne sait pas user d'autorité et ne réussit à calmer le phénomène qu'au détriment de sa propre existence, de sa propre liberté. Voilà une bien triste image des relations humaines qui fait envier le sort de Robinson sur son île déserte.