

reader on to the next. This book is available in French as *Cléo, la souris express*; I find the gender transition rather intriguing.

Jeni Mayer's *The mystery of the Turtle Lake monster* demonstrates that writing for younger readers is not as easy as the work of an experienced author like Dorothy Joan Harris makes it look. When I read this book aloud to my younger child, I felt some impatience with its style, and was able to omit many phrases and sentences without losing any of the flavour or plot. However, my resident grade seven student, who reads for plot rather than style, liked the book enough to make it the subject of a very successful classroom presentation. Nonetheless he did comment that he had figured out the mystery long before the child sleuths who discover the origins of a Saskatchewan Nessie. As with the Hardy boy novels, the reader here identifies firmly with the youthful detectives who eventually outwit evil adults. On the basis of my limited household experience, I would suggest that this book meets both the reading level and sleuthing skills of children of about nine to eleven years in age (grades four and five).

Carole Gerson, who teaches in the English Department at Simon Fraser University, prepared this review in consultation with Rebekah Gerson and Daniel Gerson, both students at L'Ecole Bilingue in Vancouver.

TWO FACETS OF CHRISTMAS

Grandfather Christmas. Brian Pilkington. Breakwater, 1990. Unpag., cloth. ISBN 1-55081-019-7; **The little crooked Christmas tree.** Michael Cutting. Illus. Ron Broda. Scholastic-TAB, 1990. Unpag., \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-73652-3.

Grandfather Christmas and *The little crooked Christmas tree* are two picture-books that focus on familiar Christmas images – a department store "Santa Claus" and the Christmas tree – to explore respectively the societal and spiritual aspects of Christmas. Interestingly, neither has a child hero. Rather, the books show childlike protagonists gaining self-realization only at Christmas-time because it enables them to give to others in their own unique way. *Grandfather Christmas*, by Icelandic illustrator/author Brian Pilkington, is a light-hearted exploration of the life of Harry, a grandfather, whose highlight of each year is playing Santa. A kindly, very active old man, he lives with his children and looks after his grandchildren, but tries to find various part-time work on the side. Harry's life is humorous because his unusually long, luxuriant beard causes him continual difficulties. Harry's misadventures while working as a hotel porter and his innovative compensations while bathing or exercising are extended by the detailed, exaggerated colour drawings. Espe-

cially funny aspects are highlighted by captions, reinforcing the cartoon impression. This book will appeal to young readers.

By contrast, *The little crooked Christmas tree*, written by Michael Cutting and illustrated by Ron Broda, explores the serious side of Christmas. It tells of a small evergreen which deformed its branches by sheltering a dove and her offspring. Although neglected, isolated and derided because of its appearance, ultimately the tree is amply rewarded for its selfless act. It continues to flourish. At Christmas it forms the centre for human celebration and thereby finally learns the true meaning of being a Christmas tree and of Christmas. Spectacular jewel-toned illustrations elaborate the main action of the text. The three-dimensional effect of these paper sculptures complements the timeless, fairy-tale quality of the story. My only criticism is that because the text seems superimposed onto the page with delicate, emblematically decorated plaques, I am unfortunately reminded of epitaphs. However, this would probably not strike five- to eight-year old readers, the targeted audience.

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UN POINT TOURNANT DANS L'OEUVRE DE DANIEL SERNINE

La Nef dans les nuages. Daniel Sernine. Illus. Jean-Pierre Normand. Montréal, Paulines, 1989, 153 pp., broché, 5,95\$, ISBN 2-89039-028-4.

Sous un titre serein, aérien, Daniel Sernine livre le cinquième tome de ce que nous appellerons sa "saga de Nouvelle-France". Le prolifique écrivain québécois pour la jeunesse en a planté le décor dans *le Trésor du Scorpion* (1980), bientôt suivi de *l'Épée Arhupal* (1981) et de *la Cité inconnue* (1982), puis des *Envoûtements* (1985). La série participe du roman historique par sa référence constante à des lieux et des événements de l'épopée française en Amérique du Nord, mais cette classification ne s'applique que très lâchement à l'univers romanesque de Sernine, plus proche du *gothic novel*. En effet, ce que ses romans successifs donnent à lire, c'est un Québec fantasmatique, vaste étendue d'eaux, de forêts et de cavernes, dont la demeure emblématique est un manoir abritant caves et souterrains. Tout au long de ces récits, une famille de seigneurs – les barons-corsaires Davard – et quelques familles de paysans – les Bertin, les Michay et les Vignal – occupent le devant de la scène. Dès *le Trésor du Scorpion* est mise en place une thématique dominante: la sorcellerie. Dans cet art maléfique se rejoignent les cultures de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Monde. Les Davard se sont adonnés au culte du Mal. En s'établissant en Nouvelle-France, ils s'initient aux pratiques magiques des Indiens et pervertissent leurs rites. La présence des démons devient plus oppressante dans