board. The superstitious captain loves routine and distrusts females; the girl, for her part, embodies the intuition and adaptability that are truly required to live in unity with the unpredictable ocean.

Reminiscent of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the plot of *The Good Companion* turns on a willful act of rejection, the results of which rebound painfully on the doer, eventually to his spiritual benefit. Hoping to free himself from the bad luck that a woman on shipboard will surely bring, the captain unceremoniously dumps the young intruder at the nearest port. This, of course, is when his bad luck begins. The echo of Coleridge is unmistakeable when the girl dreams the same dream as the captain and his crew: "The shared dream carried the fishermen and the redheaded girl together on a boat which became a bird that flew high above a storm, then floated easily on the great swells of the sea." Just as the act of spontaneously blessing — where once he had shown contempt — releases the Ancient Mariner from his spiritual exile, so the captain is reclaimed from a deadly storm by a moment of compassion for the girl he now imagines he sees tossed by the wild ocean. The interruption she has created in the captain's life shows the limitations of the routines he had lived by as well as the importance of being open to change. Joan Skogan uses their encounter to vividly illustrate how a strength can become a weakness and a perceived weakness a strength.

Despite their complexity and depth, both these books are intended — and are suitable — for eight- to ten-year-olds. The ideas of order, necessity, and change are conveyed in a fashion that allows the reader to consider a single part of the pattern or the greater whole that the parts comprise. Since this is, by and large, the way we make sense of the world, both *The Great Race* and *The Good Companion* are likely to suggest some of those intriguing connections between reading and experience that the best children's literature can help us to discover.

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Thinking About Hard Questions in Children's Holocaust Fiction

Clara's War. Kathy Kacer. Holocaust Remembrance Book for Young Readers. Second Story, 2001. 196 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-896764-42-8. ***Daughter of Light***. martha attema. Illus. Stephen McCallum. Orca, 2001. 133 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-179-3.

In late 1944, more than four years after the Nazis occupied the Netherlands and two weeks after the Nazis cut the electricity, Ria, the nine-year-old protagonist of martha attema's *Daughter of Light*, worries about her mother's pregnancy. Convinced that without electricity her mother cannot give birth safely, Ria decides to confront the mayor. She does this despite her father's warning that such "reckless action" will endanger them all; Ria's family is not Jewish, but her father is in hiding and the mayor is believed to be a Nazi sympathizer and possible collaborator. Yet Ria's "reckless action" proves far from futile. Sneaking into the city hall, she overhears the Nazi plan to raid a neighbour's home where they rightly suspect that Jews are hidden. By the time that the mayor complies with Ria's request and restores the

electricity, Ria has learned that far more is at stake than the safe delivery of her sibling.

Basing the novel on a war memoir in which the baby's father made the same request to the mayor, attema makes her protagonist a child and implies that the mayor responds to the child's request because she reminds him of his daughter. Although attema asserts that "small events like those in this story of light gave people hope," she gives her readers far more than a simple hopeful narrative. The plot emphasizes that Ria's misguided adventure saves some lives only by accident. By insisting on this, attema avoids a weakness of much Holocaust fiction for young readers, books in which our longing to give children heroic and exciting adventure stories about the Holocaust overcomes our adult knowledge of a more painful historical reality. In addition, even though *Daughter of Light* has the predictable happy ending in that Ria's mother gives birth successfully and the baby's arrival coincides with the moment that the mayor temporarily turns on the lights, attema qualifies the triumph of this ending by continuing her story after the lights once again go out.

Not only are we never certain why the mayor restores the electricity, but we are also left in the dark about his motives for later visiting the family and returning a locket Ria had accidentally left behind in his office. The locket had once belonged to Ria's best friend, a Jewish child, who has been deported. The mayor's behaviour puzzles Ria. Dismissing anti-Semitic rules as "crazy," Ria is also unable to comprehend why the mayor would help her family but not help Rachel's. Essentially endorsing Ria's confusion, the novel is unable to answer Ria's questions: "War did not make any sense." In a novel in which "grown-up talk" about the concentration camps is cut off with ellipses, attema foregrounds the irrational nature of the mayor's behaviour and thereby challenges her readers to ask similar questions. Yet attema, perhaps sensitive to the age of her implied readers, hesitates to probe very far. When Ria is unable comprehend the mayor's contradictory behaviour, she sets her question aside; it is "too hard to think about."

At what age do such questions become easier to think about? attema's publisher recommends Daughter of Light for ages seven to eleven; in contrast, Second Story Press recommends the first book in their Holocaust Remembrance Series for Young Readers, Kathy Kacer's *Clara's War*, for ages ten and up. *Clara's War* is less hesitant to address difficult Holocaust questions. The novel tells the story of a Czech Jewish family (thirteen-year-old Clara Berg, her parents, and her eleven-year-old brother Peter) sent to Terezin in March 1943. A camp used by the Nazis to house Jews before sending the majority to the death camps, Terezin is also notorious for its function in Nazi propaganda as a model ghetto. In her preface and author's note, Kacer meticulously presents this historical background and clarifies the relation between history and the fictitious elements of her text. The preface bluntly tells us that only 132 children survived Terezin. Thus in imagining the story of one of those child survivors, Kacer recognizes that she has a dilemma — how can she tell the story of one child's survival within the expectations of children's literature, i.e., that child protagonists survive because they learn to make the right choices, that evil is defeated, that "faith," "courage," and "hope" — all mentioned in the preface — are universals that triumph always?

Kacer's solution is to transfer her narrative dilemma to her heroine. Through the use of a narrator who constantly explains what Clara is thinking, even if it is only to clarify that what Clara experiences at Terezin is "too much for [her] to un-

derstand," Kacer gives her heroine precocious insight and a deep skepticism about what she sees at the camp. And because Clara is suspicious about the educational and cultural possibilities available at Terezin, readers are allowed to question also. So when Clara is given a role in Hans Krása's opera, *Brundibar*, and then is part of the cast that performs the opera for the June 1944 visit by the Red Cross, readers are behind the scene, wrenchingly aware of the larger theatrical performance forced upon the camp inhabitants by the Nazis. Initially the children dream that they can use the visit to inform the Red Cross about the reality of their conditions. But Kacer convincingly conveys the impossibility of this dream and demonstrates how the very excellence of the performance is itself a defeat. The more the Red Cross is impressed by what they see, the more Clara and the other performers despair. In this way, Kacer does not simply celebrate the performances of *Brundibar*, but foregrounds her dilemma and our own. How do we write about/respond to the artistic accomplishments that took place in Terezin? When Clara first hears the opera's plot, she is "transfixed" by its "innocent but important message." Yet her conviction that its plot allegorically represents "a group of children banding together to defeat one wicked person, the evil Adolf Hitler," is short-lived. Like Clara who is ambivalent about planting flowers in Terezin "to fool the visitors" but longs for the beauty that the flowers represent, the child performers themselves recognize the opera's function as temporary escape at best. Readers will share their ambivalence: the opera is wonderful, but Terezin is still Terezin.

Kacer quotes an actual review of *Brundibar* that concludes: *"The children have won."* Originally published in *Vedem*, the children's secret magazine in the camp, the review expresses the hope of those who did not yet know their fate. But Kacer knows their fate, and, immediately following the review, she writes an account of cast members receiving deportation orders. Kacer refuses to indulge the easy cliché that the triumph of art keeps Clara alive. Repeatedly we see that participation in Brundibar keeps no one alive. Clara is simply lucky. Kacer knows that Clara's story is exceptional — the real children did not defeat Hitler — and she doesn't let her readers forget it.

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Of Cheechakos and Sourdoughs: The Lure of the Klondike

Destination Gold. Julie Lawson. Orca, 2001. 224 pp. $19.95 cloth, $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-155-6, 1-55143-157-2.

It is late July in 1897, and a young sixteen-year-old boy is off to seek his fortune in the Klondike Gold Rush, convinced that he can save his mother and sister from the debts precipitated by his father's untimely death. And he of course succeeds, but then, was there really any doubt?

Well, actually, quite a bit! In *Destination Gold*, British Columbia's award-winning children's writer Julie Lawson does not provide a fairy tale version of this seminal event in western Canadian history. In fact, she suggests that this journey is one that