

and story to form a distinctive fictional world. Whether it is *The Hockey Sweater* or *The Basketball Player*, *La Guerre*, *Yes Sir!* or *Floralie, Where Are You?*, the voices in Carrier's fiction often recall the fears and wonders of childhood and the ironies of adult hindsight looking back on childhood. Here, a fictional autobiographer relates the story of a boy's reluctant transformation into a basketball player. As well, the story reflects wryly on the significance of books — "all the books you must read if you want to travel far along the road of life" as the narrator repeats, the refrain gathering irony.

The language is artfully spare, and Sheila Fischman's translation, as always, is luminous. I was intrigued by Sheldon Cohen's illustrations: beginning with his library with English and French titles, the picture of Rocket Richard, of barbells and baseballs, Cohen renders the interplay between boyhood and books, sports and language that animates Carrier's story.

Irene Morck's story uses a pair of new boots rather than basketball, a city boy's day herding cattle rather than a novice seminarian's trials away from home as the plotline, a third-person rather than first-person point of view to tell a related story. Tyler learns that it is not the new boots that will impress his country cousins; the boots, to his accumulating dismay, get coffee stained, then get scratched, muddied, and waterlogged as the long day unfolds. Rather, it is his perseverance in herding an orphaned calf that signals one more step in growing up, one step closer to his cousin Jessica. The story, appropriately, is more plainly told than Carrier's, and the illustrations nicely match the pace and tone: Georgia Graham's cowboys and their clothes, the Herefords and the horses, the foothills and the river, are less distorted and fanciful than Cohen's depictions. Graham is sensitive to the rhythm, the meaning, and the mode of Morck's story, and the total effect — as with Carrier's latest — is an engaging story and an attractively made book.

*Neil Besner is a professor of English at the University of Winnipeg who writes mainly on Canadian literature. His most recent book is a co-edited collection, **Uncommon Wealth: An Anthology of Poetry in English** (Oxford).*

Canadian Landscapes

The Wind Wagon. Celia Barker Lottridge. Illus. Daniel Clifford. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1995. 46 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-234-3. *Little Net Fisher*. Jacques de Thorenc. Illus. Carlo Italiano. Trans. Jane Frydenland. Roussan, 1994. 70 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 2-921212-36-6. *Harold and Harold*. Budge Wilson. Illus. Terry Roscoe. Pottersfield, 1995. 45 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-919001-94-7. *Sharla*. Budge Wilson. Stoddart Kids, 1997. 168 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7467-5.

My students tell me that Canadian children's books should reflect the land we live in. These stories fulfil that criterion. The landscape of the prairies, the Gaspé coast, the shoreline of Nova Scotia and the bay at Churchill all figure promi-

nently in the outcomes of these stories for readers eight-to-eleven and twelve-up (*Sharla*). Furthermore they also capture the protagonists' awareness of their own responses to our landscape.

The prairies and the power of the wind cause Sam Peppard to dream of more than wagons called "prairie schooners." He creates a land-going sailing vessel — "the wind wagon." The humour in Lottridge's delightfully understated prose enhances her obvious love of the prairie from its stillness to twisters: "There's 'go with' [the wind] ... and then there's 'blown away.' Can't see there's much difference" (18). Despite the scoffers, Sam, a true pioneer of Canada or of Kansas (where the event happened and the story is set), puts his practical know-how as a carpenter and blacksmith into the fulfilment of his dreams. When they take an unexpected turn, he adapts accordingly. The illustrations are cleverly understated and are full of humour and action.

Equally adventurous, but in a watery realm, *Little Net Fisher* combines the folk tradition with "high interest" and "high vocabulary" (publisher's release). It begins with an overblown description of the "copper-haired siren named Queen Aurora. She lived in a gleaming castle ringed with tall towers. Its walls were inlaid with green and brown agates nestling prettily side by side" (5). Once the adventures begin, however, the action and the placing of the illustrations creates a rhythm to the story which is magical. The language is advanced and the chapters of the book are longer than one finds in other "chapter books," perhaps because the publishers wish to challenge the reader. Even given this, I nevertheless feel that the scope of the adventures within this geographical region would be enhanced by the inclusion of a map to explain that *Île Bonaventure* and *Rocher Percé* really exist and that the Giant's journey to the *Baie des Chaleurs* is indeed a long way. A folk story explaining the origins of Percé Rock deserves this attention to place.

The pacing of illustrations in *Harold and Harold*, one per chapter with repeated images as chapter headings, is pleasing and appropriately demonstrates the development of the plot. The action here is reflective of Harold's loneliness. The details and patterns of grey-and-white pencil drawings promote quiet perusal even when Harold is thought to be at sea in the storm. This prose challenges the reader with its gentle control: "He watched his handsome head turning this way and that. He admired his long legs and tucked wings. He could feel Harold's serenity and his stillness coming right into himself" (39). The boy and the bird share a love of place.

Sharla, on the other hand, hates her place in Canada. Taken from her home in Ottawa by parents whose unemployment has driven them north, this resentful teen takes out her anger on her family, on her school, and on the tourists who come to gawp at the polar bears. She turns to the shoreline where the waves mirror her anger and, later, where the polar bears demonstrate the true power of natural destruction. This gripping novel takes us beyond the point of confrontation to witness Sharla's recognition of the beauty of Churchill, Manitoba, and of the potential in her own life. Like *Oliver's Wars*, this is an insightful and well-constructed young adult novel.

My students and I agree that children's books should respond to serious issues which touch children's lives. These stories tell of formulating and fulfilling dreams, facing the trials of the Atlantic Fishery and explaining the geography of the place we live, and facing the hurt which we or our circumstances create. With that, another criterion is filled.

Hilary Thompson teaches English at Acadia University. She is a contributing editor to CCL. Her publications include Children's Voices in Atlantic Literature and Culture (Canadian Children's P).

Multiple Joy — the Book as Toy

To the Post Office with Mama. Sue Farrell. Illus. Robin Baird Lewis. Annick, 1994. Unpag. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-358-7. *Jordan's Days Are Numbers.* Barbara Dilella. Annick, 1994. Unpag. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-996-8.

Both *To the Post Office with Mama* and *Jordan's Days Are Numbers* are children's books with added features than turn them into toys as well as books. The inside cover map retracing the mother and tot's journey from home to the post office in *To the Post Office with Mama* and the fold-out birthday present poster at the end of *Jordan's Days Are Numbers* made an instant hit with my just four-year-old. The next morning I found him turning to those pages and, with fascination, retracing the red-pencilled journey on the map, or admiring that glossy poster bringing together Jordan and his wished-for animals. While the map provided the delights that the puzzlebook labyrinth afford his six-year-old brother, the animal poster, by identification with Jordan made that exciting yet foreign natural work a part of his own. While Jordan is pictured holding onto a rope and hauling in a benign whale, I couldn't help feeling that the bear looked just like our dog panting after an exhilarating walk. The cat is smiling broadly and the horse looks observant, as if it might make an interesting point any moment. However, considerable detail texture of tooth and hair creates a stylized, albeit censured, realism that banishes possible complaints about sentimentality or cloying anthropomorphism.

Through its unfaltering child's perspective, *To the Post Office with Mama* reaches the read-to child's sympathy in more subtle ways as well. From the initial scene with Shea proudly putting on mittens with the thumb "in a special place by itself" to another child walking on a snowy mound that makes him as tall as his mother, to the focus on the train's loud noises and wheels going "around and around," Farrell brings us down to a child's physical and sensual level of excitement. After Shea has proudly claimed to have put them in the garbage, illustrator Robin Baird Lewis has fun with the narrative when she pictures banana peels and candy wrappers fallen to the other side of the sagging garbage bin. Again the reading adult will notice that the apparently independent child putting on his own mittens in an early scene must be carried home, undressed, and put to bed in the final scene. I was reminded of my own tot who has "no legs" on similar occasions at the end of the day.