illustrations. This effectively destroys the marvellous impact of such books as *Zoom at Sea* (surely one of our modern classics). I understand about space limitations and production costs, but a book like *Zoom at Sea*, which married text and illustration so magically when first published, has been seriously dishonoured here, as have *The Dingles* and *Very Last First Time*. These outstanding picture books cannot be sliced up this way. The pictures are half their soul. And I pity the child who reads them here for the first time and never realizes how luminous they once were.

Letters to the Wind ought to be subtitled "Classic American Stories and Poems for Children." For it is an extraordinarily American collection. There is nothing wrong with that, and Celia Barker Lottridge makes no bones about it in her introduction. But it should still be on the cover, and the title-page, in the interest of (American?) forthrightness.

That quibble aside, this is a handsome and almost "serious" anthology, which is not to say it hasn't plenty of fun in it. But one can feel the seriousness of intent behind it, the care that has been taken. It contains work by all the major American authors and poets who are read by children, from Mark Twain to Katherine Paterson, from Langston Hughes to Shel Silverstein. Lottridge has been wise and circumspect in her selection. And although I wish the excerpts from longer works had been more clearly identified as such, the excerpting itself has been carried out smoothly, with no jarring endings or visible seams.

Because of its size, *Letters* really can offer different things to different readers (or a single reader at different times), from folk-tales to contemporary realism, from comedy to haunting modern fairy-tales. It feels very much like an anthology that will last, one that honours and delights in the American litarary heritage.

Someday I hope an anthology will appear that does the same for Canada.

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Waving the Loyalist Flag

Meyers' Creek. Connie Brummel Crook. Stoddart, 1995. 293 pp. $6.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7436-5.

Meyers' Creek is the second novel in a series that focuses on the struggles of a real-life United Empire Loyalist family forced during the Revolutionary War to begin a new and dangerous life in a desolate land. The human interest potential is high in *Meyers' Creek* as events unfold through the eyes of a Loyalist daughter, an ancestor of the author. Yet from the derivative opening (the first lines of description feature the familiar image of the feisty, spirited girl despairing in her red hair!) to the listless conclusion, *Meyers' Creek* must be seen as a flawed successor to Crook's first novel, *Flight*.

Betraying a basic principle in novel construction, Crook packs the first quarter with action, but from there, the narrative line is weak. While Crook succeeds in involving her main character, Mary Meyers, in the early action, the focus shifts from the book's heroine, who, at best, becomes merely an indirect

witness to events. There exists little to hold reader interest, either through suspense or identification with the main character. In addition, dialogue in the novel often seems forced and unnatural, with at least one glaring anachronism: one male character speaks of "making strange," (223) a usage that did not come into being until the twentieth-century.

The novel begins as Mary sneaks aboard the family's wagon so she can be part of the cross-border raid her father and brothers plan in order to take back the possessions the family lost when the American rebels forced them from their home. Alert readers will sense something inconsistent here, for this deliberate disobedience signals an irresponsibility unexpected in the nineteen-year-old eldest daughter of a pioneer. Perhaps to stir initial interest, Crook tries to make her heroine quirky and unpredictable; but the rest of the novel shows her staid and dependable.

Perhaps more significant is Crook's unwillingness to confront the ambiguity of her characters' actions, abruptly veering away from conflict whenever it threatens the ideality of the family. Adolescents in the age range for which this book is intended are always quick to pick up on attempts to evade issues. What Crook does with annoying frequency is introduce a conflict, then ignore or minimize its potential implications as if, again, she were trying to create interest but without risking the reader's disapprobation.

Crook's idealizing of the Loyalists leaves her open to the charge of stereotyping. An old problem in schools is the disparity between American and Canadian accounts of the Loyalist movement. Crook, a former teacher, enters heartily into the fray by portraying the few rebels who appear as either simpering cowards or vicious brutes. The result, in one scene, is that she forgets to give the reader essential information: After Mary sees six men sneaking toward the house where her father and brothers are inside claiming their possessions, she fires shots in the air to warn them of the threat, and the rebels are duly rounded up. But how did the rebels learn about the planned raid, Mary wonders? The important question is asked, but in the heat of trying to portray the six rebels as obsequious murderers and thieves, it is never answered.

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A Teenage Thriller Centres on an Abducting Father

How Do You Spell Abducted? Cherylyn Stacey. Red Deer College Press, 1996. 135 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-148-9.

In July and August of 1996 this novel for ten- to fourteen-year-olds caused a brief censorship brouhaha which temporarily increased its sales. Michael Coren, who obviously hadn't read the book with an open mind, wrote in *The Financial Post* that it was pernicious rubbish that would teach children to hate their fathers. An Alberta MLA, who hadn't read the book at all, suggested it should be banned.

It is, in fact, a very ordinary teenage thriller with a bad title (spelling has nothing to do with the story). The situation that gives rise to the plot is realistic: