

the courage of Canada's Chinese community during the 1930s. Both Gillian Chan and Paul Yee have identified themes which are relevant to today's adolescents and they have embodied those themes in fully-realized characters, passionate dialogue, evocative settings, and compelling narratives.

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A NOVEL THAT DELIVERS WHAT IT PROMISES

Amy's Promise. Bernice Thurman Hunter. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1995. 200 pp. \$4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-24621-6.

So many books relate stories that are linear in structure: a central problem, which is identified quickly, an orderly build-up, a climax, and a denouement. *Amy's Promise* follows this pattern too, but only to a point. The novel's striking feature is its portrayal of the daily struggles of a family, whose plight could go on conceivably in the same way for years. The author focuses not on the single big dramatic moment, but on the little rifts that change direction for this family, and give renewed and significant hope, as a result. While the characters seek respite from their trials, Hunter, refreshingly, also allows the characters to express and to own the hurt that accumulates over the years — the family cross to bear.

Told in the third person, *Amy's Promise* is appropriately a coming-of-age story, the setting of Toronto in the mid-1920s captured as naturally as any familiar modern-day setting. Its short chapters and selective diction encourage young teens (ages nine to thirteen) to keep reading with success, while the novel's compelling themes are challenging, thought-provoking, and as contemporary today as they were yesterday. The family problems are seen through the eyes of twelve-year-old Amy Phair, soon to turn thirteen. She wrestles with feelings concerning the death of her beloved mother, an alcoholic and neglectful father, an overburdened grandmother who depends heavily on Amy to help care for her three younger brothers, and the uprooting of the youngest sibling, Janey, at birth. She is sent to live with other relatives upon the death of the mother.

Amy grows up faster than most children her age as a result of her background. Her additional role as peacemaker is realistically and movingly portrayed as tension mounts between the father and grandmother. Amy's responsibilities leave her little time to develop a bond of friendship with her new companion Winnie, or to devote her time to playing the piano, for which she discovers she has a gift. Though she meets the demands of her family dutifully and with sincerity, she does, however, think for herself. The author's skill is in the ability to balance the child's genuine display of obedience and familial submission with her own growing neediness, confusion and anger. The tension that unfolds is her desire for a "normal" family and childhood pitted against the bittersweet love she possesses for her family just as they are. The result is a drama that is both heartfelt and convincing.

Nevertheless, the drama could have reached more heights with a less stereotypical father. Readers glimpse plainly enough his inconsistent behaviour because of his drinking problem. His broken-heartedness over his dead wife is also illustrated clearly. Readers, however, only get to perceive him primarily as a door-slamming, surly character who lives in a foul-smelling room. The highlights that occur between Amy and her father are either predictable or eclipsed. In a scene showing Amy as a competitor at a piano concert — her participation hard won by her own determination — her father attends predictably at the last moment, to Amy's relief and joy. The father's pride in his daughter's accomplishments, however, is illustrated through hearsay only. Direct contact between father and child might have dramatized a more tender moment, and developed a new understanding between the two family members. Even so, the child's gifts are measured by the father only in so far as they remind him of his musical but dead spouse. Though a start in revealing the father as coming out of his shell, this idea is made neither explicitly or implicitly in the text. And what about the other children? What will finally draw him to them?

To this reader, the father's character is oversimplified. His further development is curiously sacrificed, perhaps to keep the focus, although too forcibly, on Amy.

Circumstances surrounding the father, other characters who people the book, even the physical details of the house and furniture — all come to life vividly. Amy's quest to rebuild her life, to move from tragedy to the realization of her dreams, her ability to renew hope for herself and for her family-in-crisis are on the whole realized movingly and with great conviction.

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A UKRAINIAN-CANADIAN EASTER MIRACLE

Anna Veryha. Gloria Kupchenko Frolick. Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992. 132 pp. \$14.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-02-954131-X, ISBN 0-02-954138-7.

Anna Veryha describes in authentic detail a Ukrainian-Canadian girl's Easter weekend on an Alberta farm in 1942. The details of everyday life, however, frequently interrupt, overwhelm, and obscure the relatively simple story; instead of aiding, the details hinder the reader's imaginative participation in Anna's experiences.

Nine-year-old Anna is constantly worried: her mother is about to give birth; her older sister, Dotsia, is about to leave for university; her father has quarrelled with his close friend, "Uncle Victor"; and her father seems to be always angry with her. The Easter weekend turns out to be crowded with chores, preparations for the traditional meal, visits, church, and even illness — a "momentous" time for Anna. While her father is with her mother at the hospital, Anna's grandmother and a city cousin arrive to look after Anna and her sister. Finally, with