D'abord le canard et ses plumes imperméabilisées, l'oie et son sens de l'organisation, la dinde et son système de reproduction, la poule et son gésier, puis finalement le lapin avec son repas de crottin. Les courts textes sont construits de deux parties distinctes. Dans la première, on place l'animal dans une situation fantaisiste. Cette partie est construite en rimes, en utilisant un caractère d'imprimerie du type courier. Il est très agréable de lire cette partie à haute voix.

Cette petite histoire est donc suivie de la deuxième partie didactique, où l'on traite en prose du même sujet en utilisant cette fois un caractère d'imprimerie du type "boldface italic". Cette partie explicative n'est pas trop chargée, elle ne comporte que l'essentiel en utilisant des mots simples dans la mesure du possible.

Ce livre peut donc s'adresser à un vaste public. D'abord pour les tout petits qui aimeront se faire raconter les aventures de ces animaux et qui trouveront amusant de laisser leurs yeux s'attarder sur les images. Les plus vieux aussi apprécieront ces deux facettes mais, de plus, grâce à la partie explicative, ils apprendront des choses bien réelles sur ces animaux de la basse-cour.

Dans quelle catégorie placer ce livre? Il est vrai qu'il nous apporte une certaine documentation, mais à mon avis pas sufisamment pour l'appeler documentaire. Je ne crois pas que les enfants de six à douze ans le choisissent pour faire un travail scolaire. C'est donc pour cette raison qu'il trouve sa place avec les livres d'histoires illustrées. Ce qui n'enlève rien à son côté scientifique car lorsque les enfants apprennent en s'amusant, bien souvent ils retiennent la leçon beaucoup plus longtemps.

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A TOUCHING, BUT UNSENTIMENTAL STORY

Plan b is total panic, Martyn Godfrey. James Lorimer, 1986. 101 pp. $12.95, $6.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88862-851-X, 0-88862-850-1.

"I guess I got attacked by a grizzly bear because Sandra Travis is one terrific dancer." With this opening sentence, Martyn Godfrey draws his reader into a world where the narrator, Nicholas Clark, discovers adventure and important insights about himself.

Godfrey's strength as a writer for juveniles lies in his ability to blend

serious issues with an action-oriented plot, something he accomplishes by placing ordinary kids in demanding or unusual circumstances. Nicholas and his divorced father, an oil worker, have moved around often, coming at last to live in High Level, Alberta. Nicholas hates the insecurity of his life, and has come to translate this feeling into a dislike of himself. He is a thin weakling, he says, and ugly too:

> My nose covers half my face, which wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't painted with freckles. My hair is the colour of a rotting log, and it sticks out like the fur on those bushy guinea pigs.

Worse than his physical shortcomings, however, is an inner failing: he is, in his own words, "a wimp" who will gladly go out of his way to avoid a fight or any other kind of trouble. He seems to be an unlikely hero.

Nicholas is an outsider, but his need to love and be loved by others soon draws him into the very realm of social conflict he wishes to avoid. In the opening scene of the novel, Nicholas secretly yearns to dance with Sandra Travis, but fears her popular and powerful boyfriend. When she finally invites Nicholas onto the floor, he accepts, only to have his fears realized as the boyfriend punches him in the nose. The message Godfrey subtly works into the dance episode is that caring for others often involves risk and, sometimes, pain.

The role of the outsider is important in this novel, and defines two other central characters. Doctor Raghbir, Nicholas's confidant and surrogate father, came from India to High Level under a typical immigration agreement:

> Part of the deal of moving to Canada was that he had to spend six months working in the boons. When his half year was up, we expected him to head for the city. But he didn't. Just that fact made him one of the most popular people around.

The doctor's commitment to the community extends specifically to Nicholas, perhaps because, as an immigrant, he understands the challenge the boy faces. Another minority figure in the novel is Elvis, a Dene boy who befriends Nicholas with an invitation to visit his native settlement. Godfrey gives a touching but unsentimental rendering to the evolving friendship between these two boys; the author uses humor to advantage, especially in scenes such as the one where Nicholas learns from Elvis's grandmother the delicacies of cleaning a duck for supper.

By the time I had read to the part where Nicholas must fight off a bear in order to rescue his friend the doctor, I did not care that the plot converged on coincidence: I liked Nicholas and cheered him on during his supreme test of character. Godfrey's latest book is, I think, his best yet.

Lyle Weis *teaches Canadian literature and children's literature at the University of Alberta. His two children want him to review "lots and lots" — so they can have the books when he is finished.*

NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

Heart of a child: a Montreal childhood (in the 30's), Muriel Bousquet-Dupuy, Florida: Bousquet-Dupuy, 1986. 90 pp. $5.00 paper. ISBN 0-9692470-0-1; **No small legacy: Canada's Nellie McClung, blazing a trail for faith and justice**, Carol L. Hancock. Winfield, BC.: Wood Lake Books, 1986. 158 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-919599-33-8.

Muriel Bousquet-Dupuy's *Heart of a child* spans the fictional and confessional genres. Its vignettes are reminiscent of the story-telling modes of other French-Canadian and Québécoise authors, from the poignant portraits of Gabrielle Roy's *Rue Deschambault* to the horror shows of Marie-Claire Blais' *A season in the life of Emmanuel.* With its gestures to autobiography and reminiscence (the work is introduced as "a rendering of what it was like to grow up in French Montreal"), it portrays incidents of paternal tyranny which are as arbitrary and unremitting as those of Claire Martin's *In an iron glove.* The book cover description of a "charming comedy of life" (its psychological overtones are not to be taken lightly) seems scarcely to account for the constant turn, story by story, of the scene of childish pleasure to the site of soul murder.

Heart of a child could be titled "Broken heart of a child." In fact, given this topic and the mixture of analysis and narrative, it reads like the clinical case history of "little Marie." Marie is her father's "favourite," living under expectations which she can never fulfill. He forces her to attend deathbeds and funerals — both depicted as scenes of macabre accident and uncanny incident — at which he "comfort[s] her as best he could." The father considers the other children "idiots" and his *anglaise* wife a distinct inferior. He blames his spouse for their misdeeds and treats the children with a mixture of "cold indifference" and terrifying — and, it is implied, erotically charged — rough-housing, and punishments which are inflicted almost nightly. ("They lined up by the door of their parents' room and one by one were put flat on their stomachs on the big bed...") On the one occasion when she is beaten by her mother, Marie is overcome by a "sensation of pain mixed with pleasure" which later that night she tries to recreate by hitting herself with a hairbrush: