What I found less satisfying in this admittedly accomplished book was the resolution of this masculinity question: bidding farewell to his former love interest, Fred accepts her sarcastic taunt, "You men are all alike," with a certain amount of satisfaction: "*You men*, I was thinking. I liked that, me and all the other men. I'm not a total outcast; I'm like the others, hard to understand." Granted that Fred has had opportunity to see the depths beneath the surface of his father's raging Old-Testament-patriarch performance of masculinity, does this resolution still enforce the notion of manhood as a rite of dissociation and independence? Clearly Johnston's novel also has enough depths beneath the surfaces to keep an adult reader pondering too.

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Bringing History in out of the Cold

Trapped In Ice. Eric Walters. Viking/Penguin, 1997. 206 pp. $19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-87542-2. ***Across Frozen Seas.*** John Wilson. Beach Holme, 1997. 120 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-381-7.

Across Frozen Seas is a young adult (YA) contemporary problem novel crossed with an historical fiction through a dream-fantasy device. Dave Young of Humboldt, Saskatchewan begins having dreams about being Davy Young, one of two cabin boys on the ill-fated Franklin expedition to discover the Northwest passage in the 1840s. A prologue mixes reported dream and present reflection. Then fourteen chapters alternate from real-present (narrated in the first-person past tense) to dream-past (narrated in first-person present tense). The present chapters shrink as the past takes greater hold on Dave/Davy, and as Dave's present life gets more problematic. In chapter fifteen the present Dave gets lost in a prairie blizzard outside his grandfather Jim's house, and Davy's climactic past scene in a similar arctic blizzard merges with the present. An epilogue in the present ties up the loose ends.

While there are creaks at the edges of both genres (undeveloped parental marital problems in the YA present; documentary history book information loosely packaged as fiction in the historical fiction past), the central story is gripping enough. The crossover dream-fantasy device is captivating at the outset as Davy and George run around Dickens's London, and Dave tries to sort out what's going on in his head, and again at the end when the past world and present world merge. For the most part, however, the crossover is simply a device to get into a historical story which otherwise can't be told in the first person since there were no survivors, and the device creaks as

Wilson tries to make Dave's dream situation have consequences in his present life. We get shrinks, bad effects at school, arguing parents, a boring life in Humboldt, Sask., Dave's fears of going crazy, etc. These are finally no match for the potential of the Franklin story, and end up as distractions from the historical account. Perhaps Wilson should have had the courage to just tell the story of the Franklin expedition cabin boy in the first person, and have it end when he dies. No need to explain where it came to us from.

Eric Walters chooses the historical character as his protagonist, and has her tell the story straight. There are no distractions from the historical story, which is the right choice here. *Trapped In Ice* was named a Canadian Children's Book Centre Choice, and it deserved the accolade. It is based on the actual events of the Canadian Arctic Expedition of 1913, and is a model of what historical fiction for children should be: respectful of the facts but knowing full well that a novel exists to do more than sugar-coat a history lesson. The Canadian government sponsored Vilhjalmur Stefansson's trip of scientific exploration in order to insure that Canada had more than a theoretical claim to any hitherto undiscovered arctic islands. Stefansson's captain was Robert Bartlett, who had captained Peary's ship on his expedition to the North Pole. Other members of the crew had accompanied Shackleton in Antarctica. Their ship, the Karluk, was caught in a huge ice pan and drifted west toward Siberia. Captain Bartlett's wisdom and determination led the ship's company away from the doomed ship, across the ice against immense obstacles, to remote Wrangel Island off Siberia. From there he and one other sledded to the whaling stations on Bering Strait and organized a rescue.

The story is told by Helen Kiruk, the thirteen-year-old daughter of the expedition's seamstress. She and her "almost eleven" year-old brother Michael actually did accompany their mother, against the wishes of Bartlett. Discovering this historical episode must have been like striking gold for Walters. Here we have the archetypal situation of the innocents entering danger without recognizing the implications. Their freshness and curiosity are a natural means of translating the history into a living world. Walters simply lets Helen tell her story, and ask the necessary questions (or have the expected frustrations) at the appropriate times, and we get all the otherwise specialist scientific, meteorological, geographical, or nautical discussion rendered in just the right register for us landlubber southerners. Along with Helen — whether she's listening to adult conversation, or writing in her diary, or nearly succumbing to hypothermia, or saving her brother from a polar bear — we gradually realize just how isolated and threatened they are.

Walters is also clearly fascinated by the character of Bartlett. Originally an outport Newfoundlander, the captain is a brusque, no-nonsense leader who is confident of his ability, yet humble in the face of nature. He also has a gramophone in his cabin and a collection of 200 records, his favourite being Mozart. Helen's insular bookishness chimes with this aspect of the captain. A brief quotation will capture the delicate characterization:

The music came to an end. I looked over and Captain Bartlett opened his eyes.

"Mozart. Beautiful music ... so hauntin', an' majestic an' lonely. It reminds me of —"

"Up here," I interrupted.

A flash of white formed into a smile and shone through his beard. I was thrown by the smile. I didn't think he knew how to smile.

"Exactly. Ya surprised me girl. Didn't think ya'd figure that...."

Trapped in Ice is a fine story, which adds a dimension of genuine humanity to a segment of history dominated by larger-than-life figures.

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A Village Nourished by Evil

The Wreckers. Iain Lawrence. Delacorte Press, 1998. 196 pp. $21.95 cloth. ISBN 0-385-32535-5.

One stormy night in 1799 the *Isle of Skye*, lured by false beacons, is wrecked on the rocky coast of Cornwall. John Spencer, the youngest member of her crew, survives the wreck of his father's ship only to find that the villagers are more dangerous than the sea. On this barren shore, looting wrecked ships has become the key to survival, and sailors who escape alive are murdered.

The first person John meets is the terrifying legless man Stumps, who hints darkly that he holds John's father prisoner and will kill him if John breathes a word. Spared from the wreckers' knives only by the last-minute intervention of Simon Mawgan, the brooding local lord, John must negotiate a labyrinth of intrigue to rescue his father and save himself. But whom can he trust? The village is full of ambiguous figures like Mawgan and the chilling Parson Tweed, as well as implacable enemies like Stumps. And is John's own father a gold smuggler? What was really in those barrels of wine loaded secretly by night in Spain?

This is a thrilling tale told at breakneck speed. John's quest for survival is set against a vividly-realized historical backdrop of poverty and desperation. This is a grotesque Dickensian world where hanged men wave in the wind and rats gnaw at the heels of a man chained to the wall of a drain pipe. There is even a mad widow who predicts the wrecks and "corpse lights" haunting the rocks. Fans of pirate tales will find much to please here.

Yet there are flaws. John's initial conversations with Mawgan seem inconsistent with the truths that we learn about him later. The premise that