

their work with a young audience.

The reprints of original documents and photographs make Almighty Voice much more than a paper figure. The two commentaries, one by Senator F.W. Gershaw from *The Calgary Herald* in 1955, the other by H.S.M. Kemp, written for *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police Quarterly* in 1957, and finally the historical note by James MacNeill are an excellent idea. The discrepancies between the three and the play itself make a compelling comment on history and its interpretation.

This is a good edition, with the criticisms already noted. History can be taught most effectively from an interdisciplinary approach, and participation theatre is particularly effective. But, like any other method, it must be approached with the proper amount of preparation and research by the teacher. It is a tool only, a vehicle to bring history to life. It can well become a deterrent if misused.

To end with Leonard Peterson's own perspective: "if we admit to our native heritage and ancestry as well, our history and geography may come together, and we may, within ourselves, begin to find shape, substance and worth."

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Treasure Trove, Real and Spurious

PATRICK VERRIOUR

Chinook, Paddy Campbell. Playwrights Co-op, 1973. 25 pp. \$2.50 paper.

Treasure Island, An adaptation in four scenes by James Iwasuk. Playwrights Co-op, 1972. 33 pp. \$2.50 paper.

In a few short years the proponents of child drama have helped shatter that traditional and popular misconception that "theatre" is reserved for the privileged few. Besides championing the cause of creative drama in education, professional children's theatre companies have taken "participatory" plays to the schools, involving student audiences in a wide range of imaginative experiences. Provided that the dramatic script and overall production are technically sound, the story well-written and absorbing, and the actors

sufficiently sensitive and versatile to respond to suggestions from the children, the performance of a "participatory" play can be a most powerful stimulus to a child's imagination. No longer is he cast in the role of passive spectator; he is a valued participant in the unfolding make-believe world of drama.

Paddy Campbell's *Chinook* is firmly rooted in this new dramatic field. As well as being a highly polished piece of writing, the play demonstrates the author's deep understanding of the interests and needs of children and a healthy respect for their worth as thinking individuals. The success of "participatory" drama depends largely on the author's ability to provide opportunities for spontaneous improvisation without sacrificing a tight control on the plot's direction. In *Chinook*, the actors are given sufficient freedom to develop and extend the range of each character; yet, at the same time, the author's strong sense of commitment towards children, whom she calls "people" throughout the play, is felt in the dialogue which respects their intelligence and involves them in every crucial decision that is made.

The only major fault of the play is that it is so firmly entrenched in the already rather stereotyped pattern of contemporary child drama. Although Paddy Campbell is quick to discount any attempts to restrict the setting to a specific locale or historical period and while she stipulates that the personae should only be lightly invested with an "Indian aura", the characters in this Western Canadian tale are all too familiar. *Chinook* is the typical young hero, brave and impetuous, but not without fault, while *Starchild*, the heroine, is sensible and sensitive yet timid. The forces of good and evil are etched in monochrome: *Ice-Woman* is the cold, aloof witch of winter and her adversary, *Fire-Woman*, is the personification of light, goodness and warmth. These weaknesses in characterization could be attributable to "participatory" child drama itself, which relies so heavily on the audience's instant identification with a character.

On the other hand, one of the chief successes of the play is *Rattle*, the speechless friend and companion of the two children. Initially, *Rattle* uses mime to inform the waiting children that the patriarchal storyteller has been abducted by the *Ice-Woman*, thus sparing the members of the audience a lengthy barrage of verbal narrative while simultaneously cultivating an interest in 'body-language'. Because of his physical defect, *Rattle* has to be resourceful, and yet at times he is quite helpless. It is *Rattle* who elicits sympathy from the audience when he is hurt on the mountain side and the "people" are asked to assist in his transportation across a crevice. Indeed, the sensitive portrayal of *Rattle* demonstrates that there is room in child drama for characters who will provide children with insights into the workings of human nature.

Like other plays of this type, *Chinook* cleverly explores the many facets of a child's imaginary and sensory experiences as well as giving him the opportunity to play a very decisive role in the plot's final resolution. The 'people' are called on to provide verbal suggestions, assume many different physical shapes, and even tip the balance in favour of the forces of good so that the

Ice-Woman can be banished to the North Pole until the next winter. The integrity and sincerity of the playwright are never in doubt; however, one might hope that future plays will try to move beyond traditional story settings and present less typical characters caught in more contemporary conflict situations.

In sharp contrast to the carefully planned structure of *Chinook*, James Iwasuk's theatrical adaptation of *Treasure Island* is a ramshackle piece of drama. Barely recognisable as Stevenson's story, the entire play is bedevilled by a multitude of plot inconsistencies and contradictions which stretch the reader's patience to breaking point. The persistent lack of stage directions does nothing but add to the confusion. To add further insult much of the dialogue can only be described as both crude and banal.

For the most part, the play revolves around the undisclosed identity of Long John Silver and the resulting conflict which occurs between Silver and Jim Hawkins, once the pirate has been revealed in his true colours. The first grotesque scene at the "Admiral Benbow" sets the tone for the rest of the play. That most sinister of literary characters, Blind Pew, is reduced to a clumsy, fumbling idiot by an artful Jim who waves an onion under the blind man's nose, thus thwarting the other's keen sense of smell. Pew is finally driven off by the dead Captain Flint—Billy Bones, Stevenson readers—who clutches at the wretched man while in the throes of *rigor mortis*; exit Pew screaming. At this point the hysterical Jim is calmed by the arrival of the doctor who informs us that a stranger, Long John Silver, has saved the day by telling the doctor about the planned attack on the inn. How did Silver know? Where did he get his information? No-one bothers to ask.

After pausing briefly for a pointless piece of audience participation in which Jim directs loaded questions at the children—presumably to allow for a scene change—it's off to Treasure Island. Aboard the ship are the captain, who never appears on the voyage, the doctor, Jim and the pirates, who have been hired by Silver, know all about Flint's notorious first mate and yet, save for Israel Hands, have not the slightest idea who will lead them in mutiny.

From then on the inconsistencies appear at breakneck speed. A torn piece of treasure map mysteriously turns up in the hands of the pirates (we were led to believe that Jim had the only intact original). Silver warns the doctor that there could be pirates aboard (a curious piece of information coming from that would-be turncoat). Jim escapes overboard and his pirate jailer decides to tell Silver that he murdered the boy (after being explicitly ordered to keep him alive). Jim mysteriously appears on the island in company with Ben Gunn (my copy shows no scene change and the rest of the plot could well have been played out in "Davy Jones' locker"). On the island the doctor runs round with a "barrel filled with guns and a barricade" and builds a stockade by himself as the captain happily reads the map (offstage). A single explosion demolishes the entire stockade. Will the valiant doctor have to fight the pirates single-handed? At last the captain is stirred into action and appears to shoot a pirate "in a poking manner". At this point, a dummy named "....." is carted dead onto

the stage; alas, poor "....., he was our best fighter."

At times the reader is convinced that he is being confronted with a ghastly parody of the original, especially as the strongest epithet these lusty sea-dogs can hurl at one another is "blighter" (used frequently). Jim's reaction to Silver's treachery is equally colourful: "I hope you choke on your rotten treasure"—and so is the doctor's comment: "I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Long John Silver. Somewhere, somehow, there's punishment for men like you." Perhaps the most memorable lines belong to Ben Gunn. My favourite gem is, "Belly empty. Thirsty gut. What you need is coconut." In brief, Stevenson did it better.

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Campbell's Variety: Five One-Acters

MARSHALL MATSON

The Heart Specialist, J. Gounod Campbell. Playwrights Co-op, 1974. 44 pp. \$2.50 paper.

Three One-Act Plays: The Bleeding Heart of Wee Jon, Summit Conference, Was She Sown or Was She Reaped? J. Gounod Campbell. Playwrights Co-op, 1975. 56 pp. \$3.50 paper.

Midashasassesears, J. Gounod Campbell. Playwrights Co-op, 1973, Repr. 1974. 24 pp. \$2.50.

These five one-act plays are to be performed by high school actors for audiences up to high school age. They require no more than six to eight actors and only one set per play.

Of the five plays, *Was She Sown or Was She Reaped?* would probably least appeal to children, although bookish or sexually precocious teen-agers might enjoy it. Formally, it is the most interesting, a send-up of melodramatic technique. The "dialogue" consists entirely of asides or addresses to the audience. The play is not merely a formal parody, however; it exposes a ridiculously teeming web of irregular sexual relationships beneath incommunicative, non-demonstrative, and apparently respectable Victorian domesticity. In the course of the play we learn that the two daughters of the family and the boy-