

The book is partly saved by the illustrations; these radiate the good humour and sense of enjoyment which the text praises but doesn't manage to capture. A swarm of flies circling the Wizard's wand, the mayor's official medal of a face with its tongue stuck out, and the little alligators and bugs at the bottom of the pictures making funny comments in voice balloons are the sort of details which delight and hold the reader, and in the long run probably convey messages more effectively than overt preaching can.

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FROM THE FAR EAST, TO PEANUT BUTTER AND HOCKEY

Letter to Vietnam, from the film by Eugene Buia based on the experience of Garry Son Hoan. Virgo Press, 1980. 93 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920528-11-2; *Suti, a foster child*, Willy Dirks. Highway Book Shop, 1980. 18 pp. \$1.50 paper. ISBN 0-8854-216-3.

In Toronto, Garry Son Hoan, the eight-year-old refugee in *Letter to Vietnam*, is surprised at the packaging of food: "Here they even put *milk* in boxes." Suti, the Indonesian child of the second book included in this review, wants to join Brownies. (Brownies in Indonesia?) Both books share a common theme, the conflict inherent in a child's experience of two cultures. In *Suti, a foster child*, a little girl on the island of Java moves gradually toward health, schooling and the accoutrements of western development as a adopted foster child of a Canadian family. Garry, on the other hand, is thrown into the conflict headlong when his parents in Vietnam put their three children on a fishing boat to leave the country forever: the parents remain behind.

Because of their subject matter, both books deal implicitly with the conflicting sets of values that individuals caught between two cultures must tolerate. The story of Garry's grief in leaving his parents, and his fear at moving into a totally unknown world, with no clear destination, is leavened by his gradual adjustment to live in Toronto as a Canadian. He discovers peanut butter (it almost chokes him), beavers, MacDonalds, Santa Claus and hockey. Because the text is written as a series of letters to his mother, Canada is revealed to us in a new perspective with connections and comparisons made to his former life in Saigon. Most haunting is his astonishment at the difference between Vietnam and Canada: he is surprised on arrival not to hear shooting or see guns. His implicit question, as he adjusts to life here, is "why are these two places so different?" Throughout the book there is tremendous tension caused

by the child's gain of a new life of possibility and plenty in Canada and his loss of his parents and family roots in Vietnam. In growing up, his task will be to forge a synthesis of these two disparate experiences and attachments. As the psychologist Arieti Silvano has remarked, conflicts, although anxiety-provoking, may also stimulate creative outcomes. (See *The intrapsychic self*, N.Y. Basic Books, 1967). The personal predicament of Garry Son Hoan can be seen as analogous to the on-going historical struggle which Canada as a nation faces in attempting to construct one unified country from two founding cultures. Garry's personal struggle is paralleled at the collective level by his new society.

In contrast to the straightforward documentation and the first-hand comment of *Letter to Vietnam*, the story of Suti's adoption seems to come from a great distance. The child's perceptions are not recorded and her life is described by someone who is an outsider to her culture. Although presented non-judgmentally, the story lacks the freshness and vividness of first-hand accounts. The attitude towards the child is patronizing: the Javanese social worker, sporting golden bangles, arrives at Suti's hut in a red sports car and "look[s] with pity in her eyes at the skinny little girl in the faded cotton dress." Western values are assumed to be the norm. The climax of the book is the announcement that the child has joined Brownies, an action made possible by her adoption by a distant foster family.

The format of *Suti* is a realistic documentary description of daily life in a foreign culture. The author, born in Java, emigrated to Holland and later to Canada. English is not her native tongue and this results in occasional unidiomatic expressions and overly simplified sentence structure. The book requires an editor. The illustrations are black and white line drawings, rather poorly reproduced; suggesting in style the work a western child ten- to thirteen-years-old might do. The text ends too abruptly, and, most disappointingly, does not explore the relationship of Suti to the Canadian family. In other words, this seems like an amateur effort.

In contrast, *Letter to Vietnam* is a highly professional production using the technique of the photostory. Photographs are combined with Garry's comments. In the best combinations, the photograph and the story make a point with more impact than either would have had alone. Because the book is based on a fifty-minute colour documentary film, the reality of the documentation is vividly explicit. The black and white photographs of the book were presumably made from colour negatives: this would explain their fuzzy quality. This is the book's only weakness. The reader wants to see those images of Saigon and Toronto streets more clearly.

Both books are intended for the seven to eleven year age range. But *Letter to Vietnam* is a documentary and must be understood as such. It is not suitable for use with children who have not reached the point of distinguishing fantasy from reality. (Some argue that this understanding is not fully reached before age nine.) Its emotional load is heavy: the reader must be able to tolerate tha

conflict of gains and losses too. Use of pictures or photos does not in itself make a book suitable for non-readers.

Letters to Vietnam is, however, impressive for the unobtrusiveness of those who made it. In the end, we have a sense of knowing this boy well. That he could share his concerns and life so comfortably is a tribute both to his resources and to the care of the documentors. The straight-forward presentation of fact and reaction results in no sentiment, no melodrama, no moralizing, yet the book becomes deeply moving, expressing both pain and joy. Keep the kleenex nearby! Garry sums up his struggle thus:

There is a baby in this house, there is food, and we are having a party. None of these things could be in Vietnam. I am sorry. I liked living there, and I miss you and Daddy . . . Canada is mine too. Canada is my home. Love, Garry.

This is a book which can enrich older children's perceptions of others' world views, and in so doing, contribute to the development of tolerance.

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CALEMBOURS EN PAGAILLE

Les voleurs d'étoiles de Saint-Arbrousse-Poil, Pierre Léon. Illustré par l'auteur. Montréal, Leméac, 1983. 161 pp. broché. ISBN 2-7609-9849-5.

Merlin, sabotier de Saint-Arbrousse-Poil (Québec) et chef d'une colonie de merles en visite chez leurs cousins des Roches-Saint-Pierre (France); Fifiard, merle blanc du Canada; Maurice, lapin en quête de ses origines; Pigou, renard rusé; Anne, jolie sirène; Fahra, princesse persane; Arabella, fière amazone; Joséphin et Cromagnon, affreux traîtres . . . voilà quelques-uns des personnages qui participeront à un étrange voyage interplanétaire. Ils rencontreront des Martiens, des animaux merveilleux, les sept nains de Blanche Neige. Ils délivreront une sirène prisonnière d'un requin, découvriront un trésor, charmeront une certaine princesse Sans-Sommeil . . . Certes, des lectures antérieures nous ont familiarisés avec la plupart d'entre eux ainsi qu'avec le gros de l'histoire, et pris individuellement, chaque personnage, chaque épisode manquent d'originalité. Le récit frappe surtout par l'étalement à la surface du texte, d'autres textes, contes, fables, devinettes qui ont peuplé notre enfance. Qui ne se souvient d' "Anne, ma soeur Anne . . ." ? Qui ne devine "Le corbeau et le renard" derrière le malheur d'une jolie cigogne bernée par certaine ruse de goupil? Dans ce livre où se mêlent aventures spatiales, personnages de contes de fées, de