

written nearly twenty years ago.

Robena's rose-coloured glasses is a later work, first performed in 1978, and has much more to commend it. The story revolves around Robena the maker of miraculous rose-coloured glasses that can transform the outlook of their wearer. Robena simply wants to use the magical glasses to help people improve their outlook on life. The villain of the piece Z.B. Squintee wants to mass produce the glasses for profit. The unscrupulous Squintee tricks Robena into giving him both the glasses and enough information to mass produce them.

While still possessing a few of the faults of Ms. McMaster's earlier work, *Robena's rose-coloured glasses* is a well crafted example of its genre. There is far less senseless manipulation of the audience and some excellent use of metaphor and imagery to help move the plot along. It has warmth and honesty which is not present in *The haunted castle* making it more accessible to its audience of three-to-eight-year-olds. The suggestion that either of these plays will reach ten-to-twelve-year-olds is a little misleading, especially when performing for a sophisticated urban audience. However, there is no doubt that both of Ms. McMaster's works could be performed successfully with young actors aged twelve and up as suggested.

While not every play for young audiences will be equal to the best work of Dennis Foon or Rex Deverell, two authors the reviewer holds in high esteem, there are many good works being written by Canadian playwrights and it is good to see Canadian plays getting into print. Hopefully, publishers will continue to take the risk of publishing some of the excellent contemporary works which not only entertain but through the use of believable characters, dramatic actions and imaginative plots inform and stimulate young minds.

Bernie Warren, a director and playwright for *TIE* and *YPT*, has taught drama and theatre in schools and universities in America, Britain and Canada. Currently, he is Co-ordinator of the Drama in Education Program, Department of Theatre, Concordia University, Montreal.

HITS OR MYTHS?

Who was that masked man?, collectively created by Gloria Latham, Linda Carson, Wayne Specht, Sandy Kovak, Susan Snowdon. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 28 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Axis Mime, B.C., 1984]; **Teri and the river crystal**. Mary Polito. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 21 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Kawartha Summer Festival, Ontario, 1985]; **The Bird Prince**. James Defelice. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 40 pp., \$5.00.

[First produced: Chinook Theatre, Alberta, 1985]; **Star gates**. P.L. Campbell. Copyscript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 28 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Citadel Theatre, Alberta, 1984].

Gloria Latham writes in her introduction that *Who was that masked man?* enabled her to explore "how people mask themselves" in a story situation – an important topic that is of great interest to many students at any number of levels. The plot involves a rock star who always performs in a mask because it makes her feel powerful. She is attended by her faithful friend who envies Pepper but hides it in her servant role. Pepper's mask is stolen; a detective who hides his lack of experience behind a mask of bravado sets out to find it. He does, but Pepper in the meantime has found a way of performing without her mask. (The play does not deal with whether her audiences will still continue to pay to see her *without* her mask!)

Having seen this play twice, I wish that Ms. Latham had written it to be performed by a company interested in generating in its audiences some thought about this significant aspect of their lives. Unfortunately, Axis Mime Theatre uses this thin plot as a scaffold for presenting their skills at clowning, lazzi, dance, and a limited amount of mime. The result in performance is noisy, incoherent and without substance; as a script it becomes a lengthy series of descriptions on how to play the non-dialogue scenes.

In her introduction, the author tells us that "hundreds and hundreds of drawings and letters" show that the "Broom dance" is one of the most popular parts of the show.

As the music starts up, the roadies decide to dance with their mops and brooms. They use their brooms in a number of ways: as brushes for hair, as wigs, guitars, horses, etc. The dance is full of energy and fun.

The author puts this down to "three simple people representing a moment of glory when they can be stars. That feeling of importance rests within all of us as we try on all our masks." I don't think you get this kind of thought within the first five minutes of the play's exposition. The audience responded, I believe, because it was the only piece of coherent work they could recall. I also have trouble with any script (and performance) which asks the audience to "clap along" in the finale – a spurious means of encouraging response, in my book!

Audience participation? Oh, yes. On page 11 a bit of teacher "pre-prep" gives rise to some children raising their hands (the "active" part) and on page 19 there is a vulgar bit of business involving blowing the nose and the direction that if the children signal that the "villain" has entered, they are to be *ignored*.

One of the difficulties in reviewing play scripts for young audiences is that so little information goes along with them. I am not sure why *Teri and the river crystal* was written; a footnote which cites the *County of Victoria Centen-*

nial History leads me to believe that there is a point to it all but it remains hidden from me. I presume, as there is a reference to Saskatoon, that this play is about one of the great rivers that flows through Saskatchewan. As such one would suppose that the mythic references might possibly be somewhat Canadian? No. We have a nice Canadian girl and boy all wrapped up with the Celts and the Greeks: the Celtic "river naiad, Sabra" (try not to think of the Middle East) rises out of our good old murky Canadian water to meet with Bazil Fury (of that fine old Greek family – the Furies) Why "Bazil?" From "basilisk", naturally, and you will not be surprised to hear that "if [Bazil] attains his power . . . his eyes will somehow light up *or stand up* (italics mine) and be suddenly dazzling. Then, (wait for it), "those he looks upon will suffer his evil wishes." Unfortunately the rest of the play isn't nearly as interesting as the cast descriptions.

In the opening two young girls who have just been let out of school for the summer holidays' break into song. (The audience "could be encouraged to clap or sing the chorus"). These two are good friends yet only now Vivian discovers that Teri lives beside the river and only now that Teri thinks to invite her home. There seems to be a lot of song and dance about a "show" which gets put on hold when Randy, a friend of Teri's, fishes out a magic River Crystal. No one seems the slightest bit concerned about this fascinating find. Teri's Aunt Edna goes off to Bingo (you see, it *is* Canadian, after all) and up out of the river comes Celtic Sabra. Right away we are into "aud. part." – the children (two only) are asked to keep her watered as she doesn't want to dry up.

It seems that Sabby and Bazil have a little power struggle going between them which comes to a head every couple of hundred years or so. Bazil tempts Randy into pushing Vivian into the river; Teri plunges in and rescues her. Randy uses his guitar to reflect Bazil's basilisk stare back at the Fury. Baz grumpily retreats, Sabra tinkles her chimes, Teri "reverently" casts the crystal back into the river (easy come, easy go) and the kids begin to plan the "show". (You've forgotten? No matter.)

Now, I realize that I have been irreverent but this play breaks every rule of the theatre – it lacks logic, tension, it avoids dealing with any of the issues, the audience participation is silly, the language is trite and the whole thing lacks any kind of meaning. I read so many of these sorts of plays which are written for kids and I see so many of these kinds of plays being done for kids, which is even worse. There is no need for it! There are lots of playwrights writing plays about Canada and the human condition. There are lots of wonderful stories, told in rich, evocative language . . . better your students should read or hear a good story than this sort of thing. Saves money, too.

Well, here we are again! *The bird prince* has every cliché in it – a dark forest with gnarled trees, "Stonehenge"-like rocks and the young heroine, carrying a lute who is, in her opening words, "trying to find Daniel, Prince of this ancient land," a villain called Fomor who somehow resembles Darth Vader,

the heroine's mother Tara, Queen of Light, who makes her appearance on stage as a white sheet, the hero who keeps changing from a dove into a crow (why do all the interesting bits happen off-stage or behind a rock?) and his trusty side-kick, Oswain. There is even a magic apple to eat!

The thing that really irritates is that Tara has sent her daughter off to free Daniel from the curse of Fomor but in the end it is Tara who does the freeing through her magic. My question is why didn't she do this in the first place? Then, just when something seems to be happening, our trusty hero and his sidekick decide it is time to take a nap, thereby giving the nasty Fomor one more chance to exert his power. Did I forget to mention that he has a ring which flashes a beam of light which turns people to stone (literally, into boulders!) After a lot of folderol, not to mention brouhaha (Fomor is given to laughing "Ha Ha!") we get to the battle during which we have the old reflecting trick with a bit of mirror and the ring, and Fomor is turned into a tree. (Don't ask me why, I *thought* it was boulders). Astral takes the ring, saying darkly, "I have better uses for this ring. But I dare not mention it now –" and tells her mother that she wants to stay on earth.

ASTRAL: . . . It doesn't matter, mother. You let me come here. Now I want to stay.

DANIEL: As my Queen. The Queen of Atha.

(ASTRAL turns and looks at him. She takes out ring.)

ASTRAL: And this will be my wedding ring.

Voice of TARA: I will miss you, Astral.

ASTRAL: Goodbye, mother.

The final chorus includes the line: "Tra la, la la, la la." Indeed and indeed! So much for love and proposals and so much for saying "thank you" to the nice lady who helped Daniel win back his kingdom and, of course, so much for Daniel whose bride will be wearing *that ring*. This is one marriage that could literally go on the rocks!

Campbell's *Star gates* is a play by an "old hand" at this kind of thing and does it show! It is such a relief to read a script that knows what it is doing, does it well and is coherent, logical and above all, literate. It is also funny when it needs to be and serious *always*. By that I mean that the problem is a real one. Hainos has stolen the key to the Star Gates and in so doing the destruction of the Minder, who takes care and worries about the universe, has begun. One of the Minder's arms has turned black and is withering and what's more we see this happening! She is slowly turning into the Never Minder. There is lots of chasing and tricks but in the end, with the help of the earthling protagonist, the Man in the Moon, and of the magic word which we, the audience, have invented, all is sorted out and Hainos is banished to Ultima Thule again. But, we are reminded, "we cannot remove all the evil from the universe. We can only ever drive it away from our gates."

Paddy Campbell! understands how to get an audience to participate and also

knows that participation so willingly given must be valued by making a difference to the play. Our help is needed and if it were not for the password that we have created, things might have turned out very differently. There are other sorts of activities for the audience and I still have problems with what O'Toole (1976) calls "peripheral" participation but it works well with this age group who love to help. The play uses language beautifully, it never condescends nor does it pander in any way and for these great blessings we are all very thankful. Recommended? Yes. And with a teaching pack to go along with it and perhaps a classroom visit from the earthling before the show, we might have something very good indeed both in terms of theatre and of education!

References

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Juliana Saxton teaches *Theatre and Drama in Education at the University of Victoria*. She is a playwright, actor, producer who has been involved with *Theatre for Young Audiences for the last 15 years*. She is co-author, with *Norah Morgan*, of *Teaching drama: A mind of many wonders*.

REALISM, FABLE AND WOMEN PIONEERS

The fisherman's revenge. Michael Cook. Playwrights Canada, 1985. 81 pp., \$7.95. ISBN 0-99754-385-5; **Love and work enough**. Collectively created by Nightwood Theatre and Theatre Direct. Conceived and edited by Peggy Sample. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 29 pp., \$5.00. ISBN 0-88754-431-2. [First produced: Nightwood Theatre and Theatre Direct, Ontario, 1984]; **The bittersweet kid**. Peggy Thompson. Copsycript. Distributed by Playwrights Union of Canada. 33 pp., \$5.00. [First produced: Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, B.C., 1982].

Michael Cook's *The fisherman's revenge* is more than a fairy tale with a moralistic ending. In fact, the virtuous message of the play is all but camouflaged by its clever staging, flavourful dialogue, and poetic images. While the story involves the plight of a handsome young man in pursuit of a beautiful maiden, there are several subplots underscoring the main action which result in an ap-