

holidays there will be no more school on the island. The students are glad. In the English version they run out the door, shouting, "Thank you, sir. Merry Christmas!" This rather callous, abrupt response is not explained or alluded to further. In the French version, however, there is a short paragraph before the children flee that prepares the reader. The teacher is thinking to himself, and understands the students' reaction to his news. Most of them are poor, with the sea being their only livelihood; they must grow up fast and take their place alongside their parents. No wonder they don't care about school. The difference this one short paragraph makes, both to the flow of the story and the reader's understanding of the situation, is immense.

As for the two chapters that have been deleted entirely, they provide readers of the original version with excellent background to the history of the island and the McGuire family, and to the future of the children. There is more talk and reflection than action here, but these sections provide a richness that is noticeably absent in the abridged version.

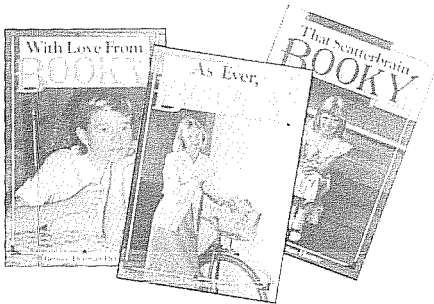
Because of the extensive cuts, the text is often choppy and transitions are extremely jarring at times. While what is left is, for the most part, well translated, it is unfortunate that so much has been removed. What remains does not do full justice to Monique Corriveau's work.

Despite any weakness, however, it is encouraging to see that English Canadian publishers are recognizing the value of French Canadian children's writers enough to have their works translated. This cultural exchange will further enrich the already excellent children's literature of both languages.

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### THREE BOOKYS AND A NEW HUNTER BOOK

**That scatterbrain Booky; With love from Booky; As ever, Booky.** Bernice Thurman Hunter. Scholastic-Tab, 1989. \$9.95 paper, boxed set. ISBN 0-590-73408-3. [Each book published separately 1981, 1983, 1985 with individual ISBN's]. **The railroader.** Bernice Thurman Hunter. Scholastic-Tab, 1990. 150 pp., \$4.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-73421-0.



The three volumes that comprise the Booky series have the special strength of novels that were lived and researched. These first-hand accounts of growing up in a working-class family in Toronto during

the Depression are unabashedly autobiographical. Hunter creates a real, complex, and interesting girl who expresses the struggles of adolescents and the hurts of poverty in a moving way without ever seeming pathetic, powerless, or bitter. Frayed collars are turned, cardboard insoles are cut, and coal ashes are sifted for unburned lumps. Bits and pieces of family life form an unpretentious, seemingly unconscious lesson in history without relying on galloping story lines or great events whirling in the background. Little wonder that, as social history joins political and constitutional history in our schools' curriculums, teachers have begun to use Hunter's *Booky* series with other works in the first person and oral history traditions. Also, little wonder that these books, acclaimed on first publication (*That scatterbrain Booky* won the 1981 IODE award), were re-released in 1989 as a boxed set.

If *Booky* was lived not researched, the opposite could be said of *The railroader*. Its illustrations are from an archival collection and its acknowledgements include CN Public Affairs. The book's main character, Skip Skinner, though only twelve years old, has an overwhelming passion to work for the railroad. His friendship with Charlie, an old crossing watchman, provides a hook for much information on railway lingo, the flagging of trains, and so on – material not of sufficient interest to sustain the reader. Unlike *Booky*, whose inquisitive and optimistic nature tossed her from one intense statement of career choice to another, Skip is a one-dimensional character. Reader interest is maintained by making old Charlie's small-town railway crossing the site of disturbing drama. Early in the book, a little boy has a leg and hand severed by the wheels of a train. Skip finds the "small grubby hand curled loosely like a fallen leaf." Soon after, Charlie reveals to Skip that his own son had been killed years before "hookeying a ride" on a train. Thanks to Skip's carelessness, his three-year-old sister is endangered by a train; thanks to Skip, old Charlie is saved from equally terrible dangers – all these events seem staid when compared to the simple integrity of *Booky's* recounting day-to-day events.

The resulting book is a collection of information on the railroad held together by a strained plot and a main character lacking the depth, the subtlety and the charming humour of *Booky*. The book is not without its saving graces. It is populated with lively and interesting older people. Hunter's visually sharp details of life in another decade shine through. Though set in 1947, it has topical currency being published as railroads face crisis in Canada. Yet, I must believe that there are many more interesting things to be said about railway history than the rather technical odds and ends contained in *The railroader*. The *Booky* series remains Hunter's best work, not to be topped by the less autobiographical *Margaret* series, *The lamplighter* (based on stories from her father), and certainly not by her latest book, *The railroader*.

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