

In contrast, illustrator Maryann Kovalski uses cartoon images whose breezy colours match the exaggerated comedy of the text. Her intense night scenes make junk seem almost alluring. This is Green and Kovalski's second book together (*Alice and the birthday giant*, 1989). Her flexible style helps the reader suspend disbelief as the child characters develop solutions adults seem unable or unwilling to try.

While Little consciously deals with social and personal problems, Green sneaks in these levels of meaning as subtext.

Little assumes children want a place in the adult world; Green draws adults into the child's fantasy world instead.

Marie Mendenhall is a freelance writer-photographer working in Regina, Saskatchewan.

AN EXIT OR; RESISTANCE, REBELLION AND LIFE

The rose tree. Mary Walkin Keane. Lester Publishing, 1992. \$16.95 paper. ISBN 1-895555-15-9.

Mary Walkin Keane's first novel, *The rose tree*, is about a woman's desperate struggle to find meaning among the absurdities of growing up rural Irish Catholic. The book is a deeply felt, skillfully rendered statement of faith in the individual. It is also a very good story that is being marketed for adults, but is equally suitable for adolescents.

The story is told by Roisin McGovern, a middle-aged Dublin teacher who grew up in a tiny Irish seaside village. The life Roisin knew in the 1950s and 1960s is so unbearable that escape from the memories is imperative. Roisin is searching for an exit.

Roisin tells her story with humour, but many of her early experiences are unhappy. Her teacher and fellow pupils are merciless to "eejit" Ben Thompson, a shy, inarticulate, artistic boy whose father is rumoured to have committed suicide. The beautiful mother of Roisin is unremittingly unkind to her "platterpudd" daughter. The man of Roisin's heart is also cruel. She is still coming to terms with getting pregnant by him as a teenager and giving up the baby. Thus the story.

As Roisin's tragicomedy progresses, the anti-heroine herself is usually in the wrong. She's off "for a quick look at the loonies." Or she is shouting at "mammy's pet," Fionnuala Fitzgerald: "Fitzgerald's bread would kill a man dead./Especially a man with a baldy head." Or she is expelled from school.

Yet each failure is compensated for by a spontaneous act of compassion. As when, a decade after taunting Fionnuala, Roisin comforts the now dying schoolmate tenderly. Indeed, Roisin is a most loving person: her whole story is an act of love. Furthermore, Roisin is actually heroic, because she finally does

find a way out that is better than madness, death, prostitution, alcoholism, or martyrdom—understanding.

By understanding the particulars of family, neighbours, lovers and friends through the generalities of culture—especially Irish literature and myth—Roisin redeems herself on the “Crucifix of reflection.” In doing so, she recreates herself as a woman rebelling successfully against a narrow society and a rigidly patriarchal church. She also thinks independently, as her mentor, the nun-scholar-mother figure amusingly dubbed “The Fly,” has taught her to do.

All this in a narrative that is erudite and richly textured, yet remarkably immediate, almost oral, as though the story really were told.

The rose tree makes its readers laugh, cry and think with Roisin. It leaves most young adult novels far behind, and approaches greatness.

Heather Kirk is a freelance writer living in Barrie. She is currently the associate editor of the *CANSCAIP News*.

OLD-FASHIONED BUT REFRESHING

Slipper Hbr. Yvonne Wilson. Illus. Elizabeth Owen. Wildthings Press, 1990. 154 pp., paper. ISBN 0-929065-02-6.

Slipper Hbr. is the story of five children and the adventures they have when they move to a rambling old house by the sea. It begins with the discovery of an ad in the paper, which says “For Rent. All summer. Slipper Hbr. Lge old house.” The children are tired of living in their cramped apartment, so they show the ad to their parents. Within a few days the family is happily ensconced in the house at Slipper Harbour, and the children are ready to go exploring.

When I began to read this book I had misgivings about it. It is written in an old-fashioned, episodic style that no longer appeals to most children. By the end I felt I had been given a breath of fresh air. It is a book that celebrates the everyday joys of life with an air of innocence which makes it a panacea to the stories of childhood angst so popular today.

The children do not do anything particularly exciting during their summer at Slipper Harbour, but their adventures are tinged with a magical quality. This feeling is created by the use of imaginary companions and a cast of eccentric characters who appear throughout the story. For example, there is the old lady who arrives at the door one rainy afternoon to give the children leaping and bounding lessons. And there is Johnson, a character who begins as a figment of the children’s imaginations, but later materializes in Slipper Harbour.

Although the mix of reality and fantasy add to the charm of the story, I felt the use of the imaginary friends was overdone. The book is intended for children who are past the age of imaginary companions, and they would probably find it rather silly that the children in the story (especially the older ones) believe so strongly in them. By the end of the novel the emphasis on their existence has