

Nevertheless, the drama could have reached more heights with a less stereotypical father. Readers glimpse plainly enough his inconsistent behaviour because of his drinking problem. His broken-heartedness over his dead wife is also illustrated clearly. Readers, however, only get to perceive him primarily as a door-slamming, surly character who lives in a foul-smelling room. The highlights that occur between Amy and her father are either predictable or eclipsed. In a scene showing Amy as a competitor at a piano concert — her participation hard won by her own determination — her father attends predictably at the last moment, to Amy's relief and joy. The father's pride in his daughter's accomplishments, however, is illustrated through hearsay only. Direct contact between father and child might have dramatized a more tender moment, and developed a new understanding between the two family members. Even so, the child's gifts are measured by the father only in so far as they remind him of his musical but dead spouse. Though a start in revealing the father as coming out of his shell, this idea is made neither explicitly or implicitly in the text. And what about the other children? What will finally draw him to them?

To this reader, the father's character is oversimplified. His further development is curiously sacrificed, perhaps to keep the focus, although too forcibly, on Amy.

Circumstances surrounding the father, other characters who people the book, even the physical details of the house and furniture — all come to life vividly. Amy's quest to rebuild her life, to move from tragedy to the realization of her dreams, her ability to renew hope for herself and for her family-in-crisis are on the whole realized movingly and with great conviction.

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A UKRAINIAN-CANADIAN EASTER MIRACLE

Anna Veryha. Gloria Kupchenko Frolick. Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1992. 132 pp. \$14.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-02-954131-X, ISBN 0-02-954138-7.

Anna Veryha describes in authentic detail a Ukrainian-Canadian girl's Easter weekend on an Alberta farm in 1942. The details of everyday life, however, frequently interrupt, overwhelm, and obscure the relatively simple story; instead of aiding, the details hinder the reader's imaginative participation in Anna's experiences.

Nine-year-old Anna is constantly worried: her mother is about to give birth; her older sister, Dotsia, is about to leave for university; her father has quarrelled with his close friend, "Uncle Victor"; and her father seems to be always angry with her. The Easter weekend turns out to be crowded with chores, preparations for the traditional meal, visits, church, and even illness — a "momentous" time for Anna. While her father is with her mother at the hospital, Anna's grandmother and a city cousin arrive to look after Anna and her sister. Finally, with

the birth of a boy — an “Easter miracle” — all is resolved (we are led to believe), and Anna goes to sleep feeling “really, truly happy.”

What I take to be the book’s goals are admirable and ambitious: to create a picture of Ukrainian-Canadian life on a prairie farm, to describe that life from a child’s perspective, to emphasize the interrelationship of death and life and renewal. The motif of death recurs frequently, from the opening burial of the (slightly smelly) dead mouse to the mention of the bird graves, the repeated references to the dead baby brother, and Anna’s climactic collapse in the cemetery — all set against the anticipated birth of a new baby. On the cover of the book the Kurelek painting of a bluebird’s nest (which Frolick says inspired her story) draws attention to the rebirth motif; but since Anna remembers only briefly a baby bluebird that had fallen out of its nest, the symbolic significance of the cover illustration is easily overlooked.

The narrative point of view, third person but limited primarily to that of Anna, is not convincingly controlled. Anna sometimes appears to be too perceptive or too knowing for her nine years, as when she thinks that Tony, to whom her older sister is attracted, “is even vainer than Dotsia,” or when she seems to know that the grandmother would “complain within her son’s hearing — to rebuke him.” The narrator’s comments are at times directed to a child audience and at other times to adults, as when Gregory Veryha dances in front of his wife: “he swayed his slim, strong body in a graceful and sensual sway to some music in his head. Anna felt strange seeing her father behave this way — strange, but excited.” Such frequent and abrupt shifts between adult commentary and child observation are both confusing and disturbing, for Anna seems to exhibit an inappropriately mature awareness of psychological and sexual tensions. This inconsistency is reinforced by the narrator’s diction: Anna’s thoughts may be reported in childish idiom, as in “her pee,” but also in words such as “palliasse,” “chasuble,” “flounce,” and “sad-miened.”

To provide the background information, flashbacks constantly interrupt the main narrative. There are even flashbacks within flashbacks. Thus, the time sequences are not always clear — a problem compounded by inconsistent use of tenses. Many details, however interesting in themselves, do not contribute to the characterization or to the action; they may contribute descriptive texture, but sometimes at the expense, unfortunately, of narrative clarity.

The main strength of *Anna Veryha* is that it does provide much factual information about Ukrainian-Canadian farm life in the 1940s. However, because of its weaknesses in narrative technique, the book falls short of recreating Anna’s experience imaginatively. Although Frolick has elsewhere written well about Ukrainian-Canadian traditions (see, for example, “Khrystos Rodyvsya! A Memoir of a Special Ukrainian Christmas” in *Canadian Geographic*, Nov./Dec. 1992), this novelistic memoir for children is less satisfying.

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