

Lyle Weis teaches Canadian literature and children's literature at the University of Alberta. His two children want him to review "lots and lots" — so they can have the books when he is finished.

## NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

**Heart of a child: a Montreal childhood (in the 30's)**, Muriel Bousquet-Dupuy, Florida: Bousquet-Dupuy, 1986. 90 pp. \$5.00 paper. ISBN 0-9692470-0-1; **No small legacy: Canada's Nellie McClung, blazing a trail for faith and justice**, Carol L. Hancock. Winfield, BC.: Wood Lake Books, 1986. 158 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-919599-33-8.

Muriel Bousquet-Dupuy's *Heart of a child* spans the fictional and confessional genres. Its vignettes are reminiscent of the story-telling modes of other French-Canadian and Québécoise authors, from the poignant portraits of Gabrielle Roy's *Rue Deschambault* to the horror shows of Marie-Claire Blais' *A season in the life of Emmanuel*. With its gestures to autobiography and reminiscence (the work is introduced as "a rendering of what it was like to grow up in French Montreal"), it portrays incidents of paternal tyranny which are as arbitrary and unremitting as those of Claire Martin's *In an iron glove*. The book cover description of a "charming comedy of life" (its psychological overtones are not to be taken lightly) seems scarcely to account for the constant turn, story by story, of the scene of childish pleasure to the site of soul murder.

*Heart of a child* could be titled "Broken heart of a child." In fact, given this topic and the mixture of analysis and narrative, it reads like the clinical case history of "little Marie." Marie is her father's "favourite," living under expectations which she can never fulfill. He forces her to attend deathbeds and funerals — both depicted as scenes of macabre accident and uncanny incident — at which he "comfort[s] her as best he could." The father considers the other children "idiots" and his *anglaise* wife a distinct inferior. He blames his spouse for their misdeeds and treats the children with a mixture of "cold indifference" and terrifying — and, it is implied, erotically charged — rough-housing, and punishments which are inflicted almost nightly. ("They lined up by the door of their parents' room and one by one were put flat on their stomachs on the big bed...") On the one occasion when she is beaten by her mother, Marie is overcome by a "sensation of pain mixed with pleasure" which later that night she tries to recreate by hitting herself with a hairbrush:

...Immediately, she was overcome with shame. She felt guilty, doomed to the worst of fates because this idea had crossed her mind. No doubt about it — she was surely the worst child on earth!

We finished *Heart of a child* with Marie at the “dawn of adolescence,” but there has been a glimpse forward with the mention of the “misdirected desire for excellence that was to cause problems for Marie all her life.” “Her relationships to others thus had to be continually rebuilt. She seemed doomed to friendships without a future.”

For some, the subject matter of *Heart of the child* would disqualify it for the child or adolescent reader. Even if this is not the case, the work is difficult to recommend given a certain interpretational confusion and a lack of deep representation of the child’s experience from her own point of view. Neither the diagnostic commentary nor the breezy ironies are likely to be of much help to the young reader trying to come to terms with the book’s strong subject matter and mixed messages.

In contrast, Carol Hancock’s *No small legacy* is all light where the other is shadow. If one is searching for positive role models for girls, then it would be hard to find a better example than Nellie McClung, whose own life so admirably combined the “personal” and the “political” and whose work presupposed, and aimed to prove, their intrication. The layout of *No small legacy* mimics this mixture, combining short chapters and many sub-chapters (each examining an aspect of McClung’s career or an issue raised by it) with copies of pictures, posters, and documents. Suitably, too, the author speaks from her own position as a United Church minister who has found in McClung an inspiration to carry on with the same battles that her spiritual foremother was waging sixty years ago. The book gives the reader a strong “feel” for McClung, and usefully corrects current tendencies to read “first wave” feminism and Christian socialism anachronistically. While the crazy-quilt organization serves a certain purpose, therefore, as does Hancock’s evident admiration for her subject, and while both of these encourage the reader to further exploration, such idiosyncrasy does have its price. Necessary background information is given too late or not at all; there is a fluctuating level of expected knowledge and background of the reader, there is much repetition; and there is a tendency to exhortation rather than demonstration. While the “roominess” of the book — matched with the use of the accompanying study guide — could make it a resource for discussion groups, its function for a more general audience is restricted. In short, *No small legacy* has all the strengths, and weaknesses, of a polemic — and a strategically placed one at that.

Both Hancock and Bousquet-Dupuy treat female life under patriarchy — a subject of interest and immediacy for girls and young women especially — but each work has a narrative mode that renders the book of a limited

usefulness for the very readership which needs such books the most.

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## COMMENT GÉRER UN ATELIER D'ÉCRITURE

**L'atelier d'écriture II**, Évelyn Tran et Marie-José Trudel. Montréal, Ville-Marie, 1984. 95 pp. 9,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89194-107-1.

Depuis plusieurs années, Évelyn Tran et Marie-José Trudel s'intéressent à l'enseignement du français écrit au primaire. *L'atelier d'écriture II*, destiné aux enseignants du primaire, se situe dans le prolongement de *L'atelier d'écriture I*. Cet ouvrage s'attarde sur les principes sous-jacents à la mise sur pied d'un atelier d'écriture, aux outils de gestion ainsi qu'à la pédagogie de l'écrit qui en découle.

Les auteures rappellent non seulement les *enjeux de l'écriture* à l'aide d'un schéma, mais précisent également que les activités proposées dans le cadre d'un atelier d'écriture visent en premier lieu l'expression personnelle. Ainsi par le biais de l'écriture, l'enfant s'approprie le pouvoir de se dire aux autres et avec les autres, en situation scolaire. Pour ce faire, il importe que la classe se transforme en "groupe-lieu-de-parole", propice aux interactions. Dans un tel contexte, l'écrit y prend sa véritable valeur d'usage, c'est-à-dire celle d'un message destiné à soi-même ou communiqué à autrui. Les écrits sont produits à partir de consignes précises dont le rôle est de provoquer l'imagination des scripteurs à partir d'éléments identifiés. Cependant pour que la communication souhaitée puisse avoir lieu et qu'un rituel de communication puisse se créer, une organisation spatio-temporelle s'impose. Les moyens préconisés par Tran et Trudel sont nombreux et réalistes. On suggère de prévoir hebdomadairement une période et un lieu d'échange ainsi qu'une fiche d'inscription. Quant aux modalités de présentation, elles vont de la lecture collective à la lecture en sous-groupe, en présence ou non d'invités. Néanmoins une telle mise en place ne suffit pas pour gérer les apprentissages scripturaux. On suggère deux outils de gestion — la feuille de route et le dossier d'écriture — qui situent et visualisent, l'évolution de la démarche de chacun. La lecture périodique des dossiers révèle notamment le rôle joué par la communication dans le processus d'écriture, les goûts et intérêts des scripteurs, l'importance ou non qu'ils accordent à tel type de textes et finalement le degré de cohérence dont ils font montre.