

richesse qui ne demande qu'à être exploitée à des fins constructives ou destructrices selon le vouloir humain. On peut aussi savoir gré à Daniel Sernine de choisir la plupart de ses personnages fictifs parmi la population québécoise. Il donne ainsi l'exemple d'un dégageant possible de soucis par trop mesquins et chauvins.

Dans le courant du roman, il est fait allusion à deux oeuvres précédentes mettant déjà en scène Argus, les Eryméens et les terriens: *Organisation Argus* et *Argus intervient*. On souhaite que Daniel Sernine donne bien vite une suite au présent ouvrage qui mérite d'être lu par tous, jeunes et adultes.

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#### FUTURIST ROLES FOR WOMEN

**Sandwriter.** Monica Hughes. Stoddart, 1986. 160 pp., \$18.95 \$4.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 458-802-506, 416-955-207; **The promise.** Monica Hughes. Stoddart, 1989. 160 pp., \$19.95 \$10.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-7737-2372-2, 0-7737-5347-8.

Sandwriter, "the ancient priestess [who] held the whole planet of Rokam in her hands," is the link between two fantasy-novels for adolescents by Monica Hughes. In the beginning she is a god-like figure; in the end she turns out to be a mortal, but endowed with supernatural forces that allow her to guard the well of life deeply hidden in the heart of a desert.

In *Sandwriter*, Hughes presents sixteen-year-old Princess Antia, blindly intent on helping her tutor Eskoril in his attempt to take over the two continents of Rokam: Komilant, wealthy and serene, and Roshan, a poor and austere desert world. In this first Rokam fantasy, Antia learns to look behind the appearance of things and to recognize what really counts in human life: wisdom instead of power, responsibility, modesty, and loyalty. Penetrating through the desert to the caves where Sandwriter lives, Antia finds no treasure, "just water. The most precious thing on Roshan." The symbolism is obvious: refreshed by the maternal water of life, and emerging from the uterine caves, Antia is reborn into mature existence: "She felt as small as a grain of sand and as great as the whole world of Rokam."

Rejecting her tutor, Eskoril, and fighting him as the traitor he is, Antia remembers nonetheless the love she once felt for him and thus remains faithful to herself. This seems to me a remarkable switch in a book for young readers. Antia finds her new life is possible only when she accepts the consequences of her past life. Children's literature (and literature in general) is often more black and white in its view of redemption. *Sandwriter* communicates some of

the essential ambivalence of human lives and feelings instead of offering a simple ready-made solution.

At the end of *Sandwriter* Antia and her future husband pledge their unborn child to be Sandwriter's successor. *The promise* begins when that child, Rania, celebrating her tenth birthday, receives a gift from Sandwriter reminding her parents that they must fulfil their promise. Antia has tried to forget the pledge (which does not seem logical if one considers Antia's development in the first book – but from a technical point of view is necessary, to stress the contrast between two different worlds).

Rania is not ready to leave her family, her palace, her life. She is sent, against her will, to confront a whole world alien to her. Like a nun entering a convent, she must take off her clothes and have her long hair cut off before she enters Sandwriter's caves. Rebellious at first, Rania, like Antia before her, learns to accept her new life. "She was as small as a grain of sand. She was nothing. But, borne upon the back of the planet, she too was part of the Dance." After four years, however, she has a breakdown and all her suppressed needs for love, understanding, and play – in short for a child-like human life – return. Sandwriter eventually understands and sends Rania to live with ordinary people for a year. When Rania returns to Sandwriter's caves, she accepts her vocation and rejects what she has longed for: a husband, children, an ordinary life. "When Sandwriter took off my robe and cut my hair I was reborn as an apprentice. Then I had no choice. This time it is I who choose.' . . . The two moved towards each other, the old woman and the young girl, and embraced as equals embrace."

Rania has become an autonomous female being, getting off the beaten track of ordinary female lives and making her own conscious choice. That is, no doubt, an important message in a book for girls, who still are confronted not only with societal expectations but also with a literature teaching how to be "real" girls, how to become "real women": being submissive, having children. On the other hand, Rania's choice is in a way no real alternative to the traditional female role. She chooses to sacrifice her personal wishes and to serve the whole country. She can easily be compared with a nun, and in the Western world nuns have always been considered as one ideal of femininity. Thus, although describing strong and autonomous young women who never feel inferior to men, both books' emancipative frame remains rather restricted. In Rokam, almost all of the women marry and have children (or want to), and although two extraordinary women decide on another role, that role is as typically feminine as the first one. Both novels are set in an archaic fantasy world where all roles (not only gender roles) are clearly defined; one could interpret these books as matriarchal fantasies.

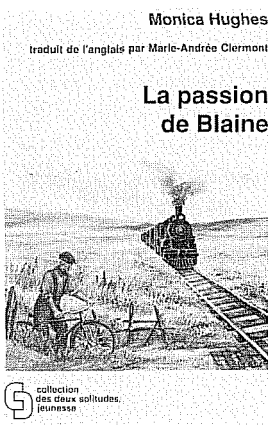
Monica Hughes succeeds in evoking the atmosphere of two realms within her *imagined* planet, particularly the beautiful and terrifying world of the desert, and in obliquely raising our consciousness of different ways of treating

nature. One may read these books as dealing with ecological problems, or as describing a person's search for herself or for her duty toward society. But any pedagogical purpose is unobtrusively transmitted in a well-told story.

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## UNE TRADUCTION TRÈS ADROITE

**La passion de Blaine.** Monica Hughes. Trad. de Marie-Andrée Clermont. Montréal, Tisseyre, 1989. 247 pp., 10,95\$ broché. ISBN 2-89051-358-0.



Ce récit passionnant dont les nombreux rebondissements remplissent le lecteur tour à tour de nostalgie, de tristesse ou d'émoi contient en fait une leçon de morale essentielle qui se résume par ce proverbe "Le feu n'en vaut pas la chandelle." Poussé par une soif d'aventures insatiable, Blaine, un garçon qui rêve toujours de s'évader de sa campagne natale, finit par s'engager dans l'armée au moment de la guerre mondiale et découvre que la fascination de l'inconnu et la recherche des grandeurs ne sont en fait pas aussi glorieuses qu'on pourrait le croire. Examen approfondi du conflit entre les êtres d'une même génération et celui des générations

entre elles, avec à l'appui les faits historiques qui s'y rattachent, le livre se termine sur un retour à l'objectivité chez le jeune adulte qui a eu la chance de si bien s'en tirer. Ce livre pourrait avoir comme mission d'enseigner la pondération en montrant comment la vision du jeune personnage se termine par une prise sur la rude réalité, malgré tout empreinte d'une certaine douceur.

*La passion de Blaine* constitue l'histoire d'un jeune à travers les périples d'une vie jusqu'à l'âge adulte. Il doit faire face à des sinistres, la séparation de ses parents, la mort d'êtres chers, une guerre sanglante. . . L'enfant, toujours poussé par un désir d'inconnu, comme sa mère, poursuit son chemin à travers les moments d'amertume, de dépression, de joie et de peine qui font la trame de la vie de chaque individu, mais il accepte également toutes les situations qui constituent un nouveau défi et s'y lance les yeux clos. L'on espère qu'à la fin il ait acquis un peu plus de sagesse. La traduction, par endroits, ressemble à un véritable tour de force. En effet certains passages sont rendus de façon si adroite qu'ils en deviennent d'une beauté incomparable. La traductrice réussit