

WARM MY CHILD IN YOUR WINGS

The crane girl. Veronika Martenova Charles. Illus. author. Oxford University Press, 1992. 32 pp., \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-19-540877-2.

Mother's song

If snow falls on the far field
where travelers
spend the night,
I ask you, cranes,
to warm my child in your wings.

Anonymous (ca. 733) from *A book of women poets from antiquity to now*.

The above poem was written by a tender Japanese mother as her son left home for a faraway place many, many years ago. She requests that, if it should snow, the cranes keep her child warm in their wings. The poem reveals an ancient mythology—that cranes symbolize nurturing; so virtuous and just, cranes behave as surrogate animal parents when the child leaves the human parent(s).

The crane girl, a beautifully illustrated tale about a child's natural sorrow, builds on this ancient Japanese and Chinese tradition of the analogy between crane and parent, but with a beautiful twist. Our hero, little Yoshiko, leaves her parents because she *believes* they do not love her. In effect, she leaves her human family and joins a crane family because she mourns, she yearns for things the way they used to be—the way they can never be again. So the cranes are used here as surrogates for the [still loving] parents, but also as keepers for a child who must make a huge adjustment as her status in the family changes.

Yoshiko reads her status as “lost” because a new baby brother, Katsumi, has intervened in the family's world. Without commenting on this intervention, the crane family welcomes Yoshiko into their flock when she is in greatest need. Wisely, Yoshiko returns to her human family only after her needs are met: that is, the crane girl overhears her sad parents mourning for their precious first-born child. In telling the story of their loss, Yoshiko's mother performs the “magic” of parenting: she recognizes her daughter's *omamori*, a kind of amulet that the crane girl wears around her neck at all times. We might interpret this recognizing as acknowledgement of the daughter; the mother whispers the daughter's name. Thus Yoshiko is named, is loved, is wanted, and is restored to human life, having been well-protected as all family members adjusted to a new family unit, but especially while Yoshiko adjusted to her new role within that unit.

The *omamori* is a totem to parental love. All readers, especially those between the ages of three and seven, will notice that Yoshiko the girl and Yoshiko the crane girl never remove the *omamori* from their necks. Katsumi, too, has his own *omamori*. It is, in fact, the *omamori* that sets Yoshiko off wandering in sorrow through the forest. “She was sure her parents wouldn't even notice if she went away.” Although Yoshiko's parents of course do notice, all children will see that it is Yoshiko who *feels* as though her parents will not notice, and this is the

significant point.

While Yoshiko cares for her own sorrowful feelings, the curious reader will also notice from the misty illustration, that Yoshiko passes a roadside stone figure dressed in a (real fabric) pink apron. Martenova Charles explains at the back of the book that this is one of many *dosojin*, images found in Japan and believed to be the guardians of communities and the roads that lead to and from them, often honoured by children in a January celebration. It appears from the illustration that the dosojin know that Yoshiko is leaving, and will keep watch on her. Young readers can feel safe if they have the feeling of abandonment by their parents or displacement by a new sibling. The beauty of the tale is that first, the feelings are normal, second, parents sometimes do not show their love enough, and third, soon things will return to normal among loved ones. In fact, the cranes, the omamori, the dosojin all celebrate the responsibilities of parents to be eternally—quietly—vigilant of their beloved young. So, if *The crane girl* is a cautionary tale at all, it is addressed to crane-parents.

WORKS CITED

Anonymous. *A book of women poets from antiquity to now*. Eds. Alik Barnstone and Willis Barnstone. New York: Schohen, 1980.

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FOOTNOTES IN CANADIAN HISTORY

Bonanza gold, The Klondike stampede. Pierre Berton. Illus. Henry van der Linde. McClelland & Stewart, 1991. 88 pp., \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-7710-1432-5, 0-7710-1433-3. **Parry of the Arctic, Jane Franklin's obsession, A prairie nightmare, Steel across the plains.** Pierre Berton. Illus. Paul McCusker. McClelland & Stewart, 1992. 92 pp., \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-7710-1434-1, 0-7710-1435-X, 0-7710-1440-6, 0-7710-1441-4. **Dr. Kane of the Arctic seas, Trapped in the Arctic.** Pierre Berton. Illus. Paul McCusker. McClelland & Stewart, 1993. 83 pp., \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-7710-1447-3.

Pierre Berton's series of popular history books for twelve- to fourteen-year-olds, "Adventures in Canadian History," keeps expanding, even as their "Canadian content" shrinks. While earlier titles in the series chronicled significant moments in the building of a nation (notably Berton's four books on The War of 1812), some of the more recent ones have little to do with Canada at all. For example, *Dr. Kane of the Arctic seas*, the third in the "Exploring the North" series, tells the story of an American from Philadelphia who searches for a lost Englishman in the seas off the Greenland coast. The connection with Canada is tenuous at best.

Indeed, it seems as though Berton is driven in his choice of subjects less by their historical relevance than by the personal appeal of a character. Berton likes stories of the Promised Land, stories of ambitious mavericks doomed to disillusionment who engage in wild, idealistic quests for honour, fame or