

tell/ If it ain't gonna rain no more?" The lyrics, however, involve the internal rhyme "How in the hell can the old folks tell/ If it ain't gonna rain no more?" a liberty which may be of concern to some. Arching over all, the men's voices carry a cosiness redolent of the folk music tradition, with delightfully inventive between-verse takes, and a sound-over wrapping the entire composition in the song of insects on a summer evening in day-warmed grass.

Jean Stringam makes as much music as she can in between teaching adolescent and children's literature at Mesa State in Colorado where she is an assistant professor.

Some Shadows in the Bright Paddles

Bright Paddles. Mary Alice Downie. Illus. Martin Springett. Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1999. 111 pp. \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55041-516-6.

A "first flight chapter book reader" for Grades 3 and up, *Bright Paddles* may have some difficulty attracting its readers. The story combines fairy-tale qualities with an historical setting and time, but is not very engaging until the actual voyage begins halfway through the book (on page 58 at the end of Chapter 4). Even then, persistent readers may struggle with the combination of historical realism and fairy-tale events, which coexist with some difficulty in this story.

Certain characters are extremely memorable in their roles to hinder or help Anne and Meg, who are dressed as boys as they partake in an eighteenth-century journey to Grand Portage. Anne, the first person narrator of the story, and Meg join the voyageurs in order to reach their father in time to communicate with him before he is perhaps lost to his daughters forever. Mrs. Melmoth and Mr. Thorpe are evil enough to inspire great loathing in the reader, while the benevolent Jack, the most well-developed character in the novel, will be truly loved by the young reader. Anne and Meg pale a little beside these stronger characters and may fail to elicit the reader's sympathy and interest.

Martin Springett's black-and-white illustrations convey the characters and even the landscape in a compelling manner. The "really miserable times" that result from the difficulty of the journey through this land, and the weather that accompanies it, are credible and made tangible in the fatigue and hopelessness experienced by the girls and the voyageurs. The actual losses and potential losses are consistent with the brutality of the land, weather and voyage itself, while the humour displayed by various characters and in certain circumstances is an understandable attempt to deal with the difficulties that arise. The harmonious ending, however, takes the reader out of that harsh landscape back to the fairy-tale world as Meg and Anne transform themselves from boys back to girls. The very perceptive reader may sense that such neat solutions perhaps detract from the power and realism of the rivers, rocks and weather of eighteenth-century Canada, which could have been given a more enduring role and effect in the story.

The settings of *Bright Paddle* are memorable, displaying the contrasts that must have been remarkable at the time. Readers will feel as if they have been in the

confusing and muddy streets of Montreal, on the ox-cart going to Lachine, in the canoe on the Mattawa River, and in the bustling Great Hall in the stockaded post of Grand Portage (a map of the journey would have been useful and interesting). Readers will also feel that they have been adventurous in finishing a "chapter book" of over 100 pages, which has taken them over the rapids of rivers, through the fog and bugs, and away from treacherous and evil adults. However, the "bright paddles" that symbolize the journey are perhaps a little too bright to be easily accepted by all readers.

Margaret Steffler teaches in the English Department at Trent University.

Around the World in One Campfire

Ghostwise: A Book of Midnight Stories. Ed. Dan Yashinsky. Ragweed, 1997. 223 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 0-921556-66-7. *At the Edge: A Book of Risky Stories.* Ed. Dan Yashinsky. Ragweed, 1998. 254 pp. \$ paper. ISBN 0-921556-74-8.

Canadian-based storytellers commit their dramatic tales to text in *Ghostwise: A Book of Midnight Stories*, edited by Dan Yashinsky. As well as originating in the oral tradition, each story seeks to teach a message through the use of a supernatural element or paranormal occurrence. Many of the stories achieve the right degree of mystification to intrigue readers and to provoke an unsettling state of spookiness. However, none is truly frightening despite the introductory warning.

More aptly, many of the stories detail the wistful collision of spirits from other realms with the utterly mundane, the here and now. Tellers use humour in many of the pieces to help make a moral point or to ensure a lesson is learned. Still others, particularly those included in the section "Reaching Across," reel with an unearthly sadness. In "Ma Yarwood's Wedding Ring," Rita Cox tells a story in which a murder and robbery is avenged by the victim's deceased husband. The two spirits collaborate in order to recapture their stolen wedding ring as a demonstration of their enduring love for one another.

In each of the five loosely-themed sections there exists a mix of fable, urban legend, fairy and pourquoi tale. In addition, the telling or writing styles vary so greatly from one piece to another that at times it is difficult to make thematic connections and the overall feel is somewhat disjointed. Ironic as it may be, the book's strength ultimately lies in its diversity. Stories from different cultures and times give the anthology rich appeal. Among the most noteworthy are those told in distinctive voice with regional dialects, direct colloquial speech and a rhythmic pattern of language through repetition and rhyme. Vivid characterization of Stanley Sparkes's narrator in "The Two Tom Cats," for example, entices the reader with its urgent and conspiratorial nature: "One night, when the squids were in, we boys were down on the beach with a fire" (59). This authentic oral style translates well to the page and incites the imagination of listener and reader alike.

At the Edge, Yashinsky's more recent collection, is a similar project but with