

Crossing Racial Barriers

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No Word For Goodbye, John Craig. Peter Martin Associates, 1969 repr. 1974. 194 pp. \$2.95 paper.

Who Wants To Be Alone? (original title *Zach*), John Craig. Scholastic-Tab, 1974. 239 pp. \$1.30 paper.

It is not without significance that both of these books are dedicated to Indians. In both John Craig writes about Indians, but he writes with insight and with understanding of Indians as people and members of the human family. Both books affirm simply but convincingly that "There is a destiny that makes us brothers/None goes his way alone." Craig succeeds in assuring the reader that understanding rooted in love and friendship can triumph over the prejudice, the hypocrisy, and the social injustice which separate us from one another. In *No Word For Goodbye* Ken Warren and his Ojibway friend, Paul, two fifteen year olds, "talked as much as they did, not in spite of the fact that they were different but because of it, and because, in spite of all the disparities in their mutual experience, they were alike in their ages and in their wonder at the star and moon and wind and heat and rain and all the things of nature that went to make up that summer and their common universe." (p. 97)

Zach Kenebec, the eighteen year old Agawa in *Who Wants To Be Alone?*, discovers that people, regardless of their skin colour and nationality, are much alike and "that real affinity, having something in common, has nothing to do with things like race or age or sex or colour or being rich or poor or where you were born or any of these things. It cuts across them all. It's believing in the same things, being committed to them. Having common values." (p. 236)

Ken Warren, in *No Word For Goodbye* first meets Paul Onaman when the young Indian comes with his father to work on the dock at the Warren's summer cottage on the south shore of Lake Kinniwabi, directly opposite the Indian encampment. The development of a warm friendship between the two boys is central in a plot which has strong and convincing action. Interest is high throughout. Paul's brother, John, is implicated in a series of robberies; a devastating forest fire endangers the area; a large Corporation threatens to oust the Ojibway tribe from land where they have lived for generations. There is racial prejudice, there is hatred and there is violence. But there is also understanding, there is love, and there is trust. Craig is able to weave all of those elements into a compelling story with a moving climax. The story is an excellent one with strong appeal for readers in upper elementary and junior high school.

Who Wants to Be Alone? is more appropriate for senior students. Zach Kenebec, the central character, is engaged in a search - a search for his own identity. All his life he had believed himself to be an Ojibway, but after the tragic fire which destroys his home he learns that he is not an Ojibway at all. The tribal Chieftain informs him that he is an

Agawa and now that his uncle and aunt, his only relatives, have died in the fire he is the only one of his tribe left alive. Convinced that a man cannot know what to believe unless he first knows what he is, Zach sets out to find word of his people. His search takes him across the border, through a number of American States, and back across the border again into Western Canada. Everywhere he goes, from poverty-stricken reservation to university campus, he asks the same questions but no one can provide him with any information as to who he is or where he has come from. His search is far from futile, however, since he learns much from the experiences which befall him and the people who share these experiences as they pursue their own private searches. There is Willie, the athlete, who had not known how to cope with success; there is D. J., the kind young girl whose parents gave her everything and who has rejected it all; there is Joe who is trying to escape from his parents and their kind of life; there is old McGee who has become disillusioned in his fight for social justice. Together they make an odd group but, as Joe states in the climactic decision arrived at by the group, "It is better being together than it is being apart."

The plot of *Who Wants to Be Alone?* is not as strong or as structured as is that of *No Word for Goodbye*, and at times the sequence of events appears slightly contrived, but Craig's skill as a storyteller prevents the book from becoming merely another catalogue of social ills. The book is rather a painful probing of the human condition. Again, as was the case in *No Word for Goodbye*, contemporary social problems are exposed, but here the problems are more generalized. The restlessness of youth and their repudiation of many of the values of their elders, labour unrest and angry picketers, drug abuse and impaired driving are all topics as current as the morning newspaper, and they are all part of a plot in which there is also room for honest self appraisal and concern for others on the part of some of the characters.

Craig's characters are credible because he writes with a knowledge of human nature. Paul and Ken, Zach and Willie become very real individuals as the plots develop, and even minor characters are generally well delineated. Ken's Aunt Marion who emerges as something of a stereotype should perhaps be noted as an exception.

Craig is a sensitive and talented writer. He writes feelingly of the beauty of the natural landscape and the changing seasons, of stormy skies and sun-washed waters. In vivid and sometimes poetic language he communicates the weariness of the tired and dejected, the despair of the defeated, the bitter resignation of those who have suffered injustice and the idealism of those who have caught a vision of how life might be.

His themes are not new but he brings to their development a freshness, a conviction and a simple but captivating style of writing. Always concerned about the individual, he reminds the reader again and again that "no man is an island." It has been said of John Craig that he is a Crusader. Whether or not he consciously sets out to champion the cause of justice for all is unimportant; the fact is that his writings proclaim that there are social wrongs which need to be made right. His books may indeed help young people - and adults as well - grow in

compassion and human understanding. Willie in *Who Wants to Be Alone?* maintains in his theme song that our survival may depend upon "our struggle for truth." This struggle is evident in the two books under discussion and, indeed, in most of Craig's work.

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Légendes Du Canada Français

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The Magic Fiddler and Other Legends of French Canada. Claude Aubry. Graphics by Saul Field. Translated from the French by Alice E. Kane. Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1974. 116 pp. \$2.95 paperback reprint.

Storm Oak. Andrée Maillet. Illustrated by Kathryn Cole. Translated from the French by F.C.L. Muller. Scholastic-Tab Publications Ltd. 1972. 64 pp. \$.75 paper.

In his preface to his retelling of ten legends of French Canada, Claude Aubry gracefully acknowledges the inspiration he found in Saul Field's original portfolio of embossed colour engravings, *Legends of French Canada*. Reproduced in five colours, these provided the illustrations for the 1968 cloth edition, published simultaneously in French and English with the aid of a grant from the Canada Council. A highly attractive piece of Canadian book production, the original edition's design was distinguished, and Aubry's text combined with Field's graphics to evoke a complex response to the tales. This paperback reprint of the English version presents Field's work in black-and-white reductions which are feeble shrunken ghosts of the earlier reproductions. Deprived of their subtleties of colour and texture, we search in vain for those "richly symbolic and lively" qualities to which Aubry pays tribute.

Nonetheless, this cheaper edition is welcome, since, fortunately, Aubry's versions of the legends are quite colourful enough to do very well on their own, thanks to the power of the material itself and, more particularly, to the charm and interest of the attitude he adopts to that material. As Marius Barbeau stressed in his introduction, a legend yields itself readily to the imaginative shaping of the artist. Aubry has put his own stamp on this traditional material through the special quality of his narrating voice, which speaks to us in the wry, affectionate and urbane tones of what he terms a contemporary "honnête homme". Such an approach gives a sophistication to this collection that may not please everyone, but is to me a happy departure from the time-worn device of inventing some stereotyped village ancient to serve as narrator.