described background of a world very few children, or adults for that matter, know very much about. His angers and joys, his fighting and his friendships, all treated with honesty and insight, are emotions and events with which many children over the age of eight can identify.

Tom Moore shows every sign of becoming a notable writer and I look forward to reading his other works, such as a second children's novel, *Tom Cods, Kids and Confederation*, and a biography, also for young readers, of Sir Wilfred Grenfell, when these books become available on the "mainland." Breakwater Books is also to be congratulated for producing a fairly sturdy, pleasingly designed, and inexpensively priced paperback. A few carefully chosen illustrations, however, would help the non-Newfoundland reader's understanding of what, taken all in all, is still a fairly remote world.

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The Animal Story – A Canadian Specialty

WM. H. MAGEE

Great Canadian Animal Stories, ed. by Muriel Whitaker. Illus. by Vlasta van Kampen. Hurtig Publishers, 1978. 232 pp. $12.95 cloth.

During the last century the animal story has become something of a Canadian contribution to literature. In 1894 Margaret Marshall Saunders wrote one of the bestselling Canadian books of all time in *Beautiful Joe*, a sermon on the humane treatment of pets. A few years later, Sir Charles G.D. Roberts explored simple animal psychology in what he declared in *The Kindred of the Wild* (1902) to be the epitome of the animal story. As I have explained in "The Animal Story: A Challenge in Technique" (*The Dalhousie Review*, XLIV: 156-164 [Summer 1964]), he based his claim on the theory of evolution and developed an art which adapts it to fictionalization. Now, Muriel Whitaker shows us in a new anthology how animals have thrived in fiction during the three quarters of a century since Saunders preached and Roberts probed their welfare.

Dr. Whitaker, who has lived in remote country settings both as a child in interior British Columbia and later as an adult, has selected sixteen exciting animal stories, most from the last fifty years, to make them readily available for children. Some are short stories, some sections of novels, but almost all tell a good straightforward story: of the sixteen I found only one hard to read – "Baptism of Blood", George England's story of the seal hunt. At the same time they show an artistic restraint, with no sentimentality and little melodrama, and they develop a thoughtful view of life in Canada which makes them rewarding for older readers too.

These animals belong to the vast environment of nature which envelops Canadians. They create a centre for a drama of life which can be as intense as that of man's ambitions, loves and wars in stories of wholly human conflicts. In a country which grows wheat for the world, the struggle for food is a primal conflict which man and animal share. In these stories man is seldom if ever an observer. Instead he is an ally or opponent in the common struggle for existence, sharing one of four essential relationships with animals.

First, in the two Indian legends animals appear as supernatural forces working for the good or ill of man in kindness or righteous wrath. In George Clutesi's "How the Human People Got the First Fire" the deer provides mankind with fire when the wolves selfishly hoard it. In Christie Harris's "The One-Horned Mountain Goat" the goats destroy the hunters who slay wantonly for pride, not food. Here the overwhelming presence of nature that has permeated Canadian life and literature almost down to our day gains a living form and voice in animals of the forest. At the same time these fantasies develop an awareness of spiritual forces uncommon in our times and create a sense of ultimate power which stresses the littleness of man in a vast Canada.

At the second level, animals are simply the enemy of the more modern Canadian. They are the active force in the intractable and even hostile wilderness that the pioneer must subdue and cultivate. When the frontier farmer in Thompson Seton's "The Springfield Fox" raises chickens, he has to protect them from a clever vixen who desperately needs them to feed the cubs. In Jack London's "The Hunger Cry" man himself may become an inviting first course. After the wolf pack eats Bill and his dog, Henry has to struggle day and night to escape, which he does only with the help of a pack of fellow human beings.

On the third level, a good many animal storytellers treat animals as man's rival and equal in the fight for natural resources. To survive, men catch and eat animals and animals catch and eat men. Roberts explained this variation on the evolutionary struggle in his preface to *The Kindred of the Wild*, the essay which founds the theory of the modern animal story. In his own story, "On the Roof of the World", he shows a bear and an Eskimo as equally desperate and equally clever in trapping seals on winter ice, and if the man

wins he is only surviving as the fitter through the help of his gun. In other stories animals court their mates or flee from forest fires as determinedly as if they were human.

Finally, a man may make friends with an animal, whether for want of or in preference to human friends. Pets like the briefly deaf cat Tao in Sheila Burnford's *The Incredible Journey* makes friends instinctively with men and children, but wild creatures like a grouse and a beaver become much-needed companions to a lonely blind man and a naturalist alone in the backwoods in other stories. In "Kana Kree and the Skunk War", Mortimer Batten tells how a stubborn skunk responds in peace to the good will offerings of a kindly Indian after outraging the noses of more aggressive human beings. Such animals may even stand out as heroic while the men around them are pursuing their routine chores. A horse is the hero in "Nimpo", by Richard P. Hobson Jr., simply because he struggles to live his own life on his own terms, and a husky sled dog consciously saves a foolish man in Francis Dickie's "The Call of the Tame." These are the stories of animals who share the larger glories as well as the vast challenge of life with their fellow Canadians.

Like all other characters in literature, animal heroes must of course appeal to human readers, and so the storyteller must find a basis of common interest. Here it lies not only in the theme of a shared countryside but also in the techniques of modern fiction. These writers avoid both Aesop's talking animals and the peripheral animals who help characterize their owners in stories focused on man. These animals are neither pets like Miss Saunders', who lecture on humane care for themselves, nor part of the aura of caricature which surrounds odd grandmothers and uncles like Mazo de la Roche's animals in *Jalna*. Instead they provide central suspense because it is they who are in conflict with man, or joined with him in the common struggle against nature at large. They emerge as individual characters in their own right because they have distinctive if limited psychologies, strong in instinct but rational enough to make simple decisions.

The view of life is sombre in most of the stories, as befits the struggle for life in a hostile land, but it has its literary attractions. These animals live life to the full, and the energy and beauty of their lives become the art of these stories for human readers. The coloured illustrations give the text a visual appeal that enhances their beauty. The critical "Afterword" and notes on the authors help fit the stories into their historic time and place. And one amusing story, Farley Mowat's "Mutt Makes his Mark", in which a "Prince Albert retriever" "retrieves" a stuffed bird from a store window, reminds us that humour is another Canadian specialty along with the animal story.

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