

cerned with old age, death, disintegration and/or despair. Coincidence? Perhaps. These are without doubt compelling and powerful subjects.

It does seem, however, that somewhat more of a balance would not have lessened the impact of the collection. Weather commentators have been discouraged from dwelling upon the "misery index" as they so delighted to do, emphasizing the discomfort of a humid day, and keeping all sufferers' minds firmly fixed upon it. It was deemed to be in the public interest that the practice be discontinued. This analogy is brought to mind by the 'despair quotient' of the *anthology*. The quality of writing is superb; perhaps the lightest moment in the entire collection is that in which an old woman decides not to commit suicide after all. Not yet.

Is happiness (much less humour) so much less meaningful than decline and decay that it deserves to be ignored? So one might be led to assume. Secondary school students, animal high spirits notwithstanding, are already quite sufficiently a prey to *weltschmerz* and gloomy introspection without any prodding in that direction.

It was the custom at the great triumphs given to successful Roman generals that a slave should ride in the victor's chariot, to whisper in his ear at intervals "You too will die", lest vaingloriously he forget his own mortality. Do the riders in the triumphant chariot of youth really need such an insistent reminder? *Joan McGrath* is a Library Consultant for the Toronto Board of Education.

INDIAN SONG

Windigo: légende indienne, Paule Doyon. Sherbrooke, Naaman, 1984. 53 pp. 4,00\$ broché. ISBN 2-89040-287-8.

Paule Doyon's fictionalised version of the Indian myth of Windigo constitutes a powerful parable of the destruction of the Indian population, first by violent conquest and then, more insidiously, by the inculcation of Western values. The great chief Windigo lives happily with his wife Petite Ourse until she is killed during a tribal war. When he takes as his new wife one of his captives, Honda, it appears that life will continue as normal, but a change is ushered in by the arrival of a symbolic white man, Wasihu. Through contact with Wasihu, the familiar pattern of degradation of the Indian at the hands of white civilisation is operated through firearms and whisky. Gradually, Windigo loses his solitary nobility and becomes a servant of Wasihu, giving him his hunting grounds, his possessions, even his wife Honda. Eventually, Wasihu's ascendancy becomes so strong over Honda and Windigo's two children, William and Milly, that the entire family is induced to leave the world of nature with him and go and settle

in the city. Windigo never adapts and returns to his hunting grounds, making only rare visits to his family in the city. Honda, William and Milly, however, become almost totally Westernised: Honda as a traditional North American housewife, obsessed by consumerism, and Milly as a hospital nurse. The major victim is William, the son of Windigo and Petite Ourse, who is reduced to a life of aimless unemployment and alcoholism. The parable ends with Windigo's valley being flooded by the white man and with Windigo himself journeying back to his mythical eternal past where, in the night sky and the snow he is reunited with the dead Petite Ourse. A jarring note is added, however, by the fate of Milly: on the eve of her wedding with one of her patients, Bill, she takes her mother to the new lake which now exists over Windigo's valley and bathes in it. Immediately, her arm goes blue and cold and resists any attempt by the doctors to warm it. The coldness spreads to the rest of her body and she dies, unable to be reached by Western medicine and the final victim of the cultural divide which the story so convincingly portrays.

The story is particularly successful in its exploitation of the format and tone of the legend, with its circularity and, in particular, its poetic and fantastic quality. The ending is a variation of the Noah-myth: the Great Spirit punishes the West for polluting the natural world and destroying the Indian civilisation by causing a massive snow-storm to fall upon the country and by destroying Milly. Only Windigo is saved, by being ordered to make a strong pair of snowshoes and to walk into the blizzard. Quite convincingly, his journey becomes that of the epic:

“Windigo avançait, infatigable. Puis, la neige frôla les nuages, Windigo continuait sa marche, tantôt dans la neige, tantôt dans les nuages. Les deux se confondaient si bien qu'il eut vite l'impression que la neige avait envahi le ciel et les nuages, la terre! Il marchait maintenant à travers les constellations, se dirigeant vers l'étoile qui n'avance jamais, l'étoile qui enforme le froid en son centre. Windigo avait atteint la maison de Petite Ourse”.

Where the story is less successful is in its depiction of white civilisation which is necessarily caricatural and centered upon industrialisation, with its accompanying pollution of the environment, materialism and degeneration. Angry writing it may be, and it certainly raises important issues in a powerful manner, but they run the risk of being defused by being so familiar. It is perhaps to the strength of the general argument itself, however, that this depiction should be so weak in comparison with the evocation of the life of Windigo with Petite Ourse and his eventual reunification with her. His last march back to his homeland in the sky triumphs in the reader's memory over Wasihu's tinny modern universe.

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