

ethic (although the children are nominally Catholic) and the implicit supremacy of white, Anglo male power. In characterizing the children Traill subscribes to the racial and gender stereotypes of her era. Louis is given the "French" qualities of instability, inventiveness, and love of fine food; Catharine is dependent and motherly and the only one to suffer serious injury; Indiana is a pure noble savage prepared to sacrifice herself for her white benefactors; and stalwart Hector Maxwell is ever the prudent, nation-building Scot.

Traill's overt purpose is to teach her young readers about the natural history of Canada while entertaining them with a fantasy describing how her heroes manage to enjoy two full years on their own in the wilderness near Rice Lake, their survival skills enhanced by those of the Mohawk girl who fortuitously joins them. On their own level, the white children re-enact the pioneer fable that had brought their parents (and their author) to the New World: reason and knowledge, properly applied to the natural abundance of North America, will inevitably produce relative prosperity. The plot is fleshed out with encyclopaedic nature lore, instructions on conduct, and Christian proselytizing as the white children gradually convert their Indian friend. Once baptized, Indiana becomes an acceptable spouse for one of her playmates. After the children are found their adventure eventually culminates in a double marriage blending the country's British, French and Indian heritages, the latter two being subsumed into the dominant white, English-speaking order, thus on a personal level replicating the projected national pattern of their country's social history.

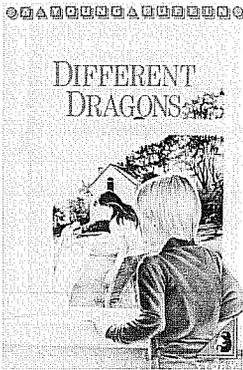
For its inscription of the mindset of early Victorian Canada, *Canadian Crusoes* should quickly acquire an essential position in the field of Canadian Studies as well as on the shelf of significant texts in Canadian literature, history, and, of course, children's literature.

Carole Gerson, *author of A purer taste: the reading and writing of fiction in English in nineteenth-century Canada (forthcoming from the University of Toronto Press), is currently researching early Canadian women writers.*

TRIUMPH OF COURAGE

Different Dragons. Jean Little. Illus. Laura Fernandez. Viking Kestrel, 1986. 123 pp. \$12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-670-80836-9.

The title notwithstanding, *Different dragons* is a gentle story with an uncomplicated story line and asatisfying conclusion. The action is lively, the dialogue natural, the humour refreshing.



Nine-year-old Ben Tucker is not looking forward to the weekend with Aunt Rose: she does write interesting stories, but she is almost a stranger. He would be interested in exploring the old house where Dad had grown up, but is afraid to go visiting without the rest of his family. Ben's Dad tells him that everyone has to deal with his own dragons, and suggests that during this visit Ben might slay a dragon or two himself. Ben promises to try to have a good time but he cannot pretend to be happy about Aunt Rose's surprise--the huge Labrador retriever from next door is to spend the weekend with them. He cannot be convinced that Gulliver Gallivant is not a fierce monster

ready to devour him.

In the next day and a half Ben makes a number of discoveries. Aunt Rose is not a dragon; Gully is actually friendly and playful, and terrified of thunder. Huanda, the girl from next door, improves upon closer acquaintance. By the time the weekend is over a wiser Ben has triumphed over a number of dragons. He is also the proud owner of a cream coloured Labrador retriever with floppy golden ears.

While Ben's transformation in just a few hours may strain credulity a little, the plot does unfold naturally and the characters behave convincingly. The book has something to say about the importance of courage in making adjustments, in meeting challenges, and in dealing with personal fears. This theme is one which Jean Little has explored in other books, notably in *Listen for the singing*, and *Mama's going to buy you a mocking bird*. Indeed, most of her characters find a way to take control of their own lives. Only an author knows the degree to which a work is autobiographical: in *Different dragons* the city of Guelph, the old family home, *The secret garden*, the writer who works full time with the aid of a computer, and the gentle Labrador retriever are all important parts of Little's own story as she reveals it in interviews, in conference papers, and in her recent *Little by Little*. Certainly her accomplishments have demonstrated her own ability to deal with dragons.

Different dragons is a delightful book. The half-dozen full page black and white sketches, though not essential to the story, do effectively catch the mood and appropriately highlight some key incidents.

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