Smith is a professor of history at the University of Calgary.

Predictably, Smith's *From the land of the shadows* is massively documented with eighty-six pages of footnotes and bibliography, compared to Dickson's no footnotes and scanty, four-page bibliography. Smith has supplied more details about some periods of Belaney's life and has corrected Dickson's errors. For example, Smith identifies the young man in a First World War army uniform, labelled "Archie Belaney" in Dickson's book, as Archie's younger brother, Hugh. But while Smith's facts may be numerous and useful, his analysis is strangely flawed.

Smith's hypothesis, that Belaney had serious emotional problems caused by his having been deserted by his parents at a very young age, is neither wrong nor new, just overworked. In *Wilderness man*, Dickson says the same thing, only he says it better, and he says other things as well.

In *From the land of the shadows*, over and over again, frequently in paragraphs exhibiting poor coherence and inevitably at the end of a chapter to create suspense, Smith restates his hypothesis obsessively. Here is an example: "Grey Owl could not completely escape from his past. The key to his creativity and his genius lies in his childhood in England. A combination of circumstances led him to enter into a fantasy world of his own making, one which would totally devour him."

With such simplistic analysis, Smith cannot do justice to Belaney's civilized complexity, as does Dickson. Furthermore, Smith's evidence becomes distorted. Other people, also surely fallible, even mere chance witnesses like one "Stan Cuthand" interviewed by telephone fifty years after an event, are unfairly given more credence and respect than Belaney, if their views match Smith's. Finally, non-psychological factors like economics, politics, and the exigencies of literary creation are generally ignored. According to Smith, for example, the only possible reason for Belaney joining the army during World War I is his emotional turmoil.

Perhaps, seeking a popular audience, academic historian Smith succumbed to the temptations of pop psychology and the cheap exposé.

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A VOICE FOR SHLEMIEL

Doctor Dwarf and other poems for children. A.M. Klein. Ed., Mary Alice Downey and Barbara Robertson. Illus. Gail Geltner. Quarry Press, 1990. Unpag., $12.95 $7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-919627-41-2, 0-919627-43-9; **Noodle, Nitwit, Numskull**. Meguido Zola. Illus. Jillian Hulme Gilliland. Quarry Press, 1990. Unpag., $12.95 $7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-919627-87-0, 0-919627-89-7.

Doctor Dwarf and *Noodle, Nitwit, Numskull* are books based on Jewish and Yiddish lore. The first is a book of poems, some based on Jewish legends, written by one of Canada's poet-laureates; the latter is a book of short (oral) tales, recorded by a well-known children's author. What is interesting about the two books is the way the fool-type permeates characters and characterization. In fact, his fool-ishness is the *modus operandi* of *Noodle, Nitwit, Numskull*. I like the way Meguido Zola's narrator begins the book: he says he is passing on stories about Shlemiel – "this ninny, this nincompoop, this foolish shmendrick and shlimazl" – as he recalls hearing them from his grandfather, the "rabbi, the wandering scholar and storyteller." In his turn, of course, the grandfather had heard the stories from his grandparents, and the grandparents from their grandparents, and on it goes until we are remembering back as far as the medieval period in Poland.

As in all oral narratives, the narrator makes the claim to truth: this is just the way it happened to Shlemiel. Not only is this an old story that has been handed down from father to son, but it is a story for and about the Jewish people. All this formula information we get in a short framing prologue to Zola's tales, seven of them to be exact. The tales are structured, then, in a simple frame narrative which ends, it seems, quite randomly. Probably Zola has many more tales, or many more variants of tales about the Yiddish Fool, Shlemiel, in his repertoire, but used only enough to keep a child's attention.

The tales are short and end abruptly after the turning point – a moment meant to reveal the Shlemiel's total foolishness and therefore yield a chuckle or two. The first tale is one of the silliest in the book. Shlemiel is a forgetful fool, so he needs to make notes about where he has placed his clothes when he undresses for bed. This way he is able to find his clothes in the morning, and get dressed for the day. The problem for Shlemiel is, however, that having found all his clothes, he cannot "find himself." The narrative ends there, while the silhouette illustrations show the silly Shlemiel contorting his body in order to find his self. If they experience this whole page of text and art metaphorically, young readers may see (foolish) adults in this light in everyday life. Shlemiel's behaviour is used to highlight the paradoxes and ironies involved in frail adult living.

Shlemiel, the hero (or anti-hero) of Zola's prose tales, also figures in the Klein poems selected for inclusion in *Doctor Dwarf and other poems for children*. Edited by Mary Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson, the book is beautifully illustrated by Gail Geltner, well-known for her work in *Everywoman's Almanac 1988*, and her contribution to the Women's Press postcard series. This means that when possible, speakers are interpreted as girls – for example, in the dreamier poems, "Heaven at last" and "Orders." Often Geltner's "audience" includes girls, boys, moms and dads, and also interesting, less radical variations of Shlemiel himself – as with the title poem, *Doctor Dwarf*. This elfin healer "learns his lore from fairies" and not from conventional science. He

is on the cover of the book – a chubby, bearded and disheveled little man carrying a basket of herbs and flowers. For younger children, the illustrations may be more interesting than the poems, and some parents may think this makes the book problematic. After all, Abraham Klein uses slant-rhymes and imperfect rhymes, and prosaic rhyming schemes. He is no Dennis Lee. And although he looks a bit like Jelly Belly, Doctor Dwarf is definitely his own man.

Another wizened elderly male who knowingly entertains little Jewish children with his brand of lore is "Elijah" who tells "stories/Of lovers who elope;/And terrible adventures/With cardinal and pope." There are other old singing men, gently mocked: the "Wandering beggar" and his "privileged" literary cousin, the "pedigreed peddler," "King Elimelech," and the familiar "Junk-dealer" who hawks in "quaint refrains," and who is also "A Hebrew most ungrammared" because "he sells God rags." Because it is a three stanza poem, "Junk-dealer" is easily tolerated by the young reader. The longer Klein's poems go on, the more likely they are to disquiet the child reader. The shorter musical poems seem to work best; the more elegiac pieces, and the poems which depend on heady conceits may distance young readers or, at best, may push them toward a premature appreciation of the illustrations.

That being said, Quarry Press can be proud of these two books for two reasons. First, these are political books; by being what they are, they remove the Jewish literary experience from what the dominating culture has interpreted, for children especially, as marginal and ethnic. Neither book has the quality of story or story-line that we get in a book as precious as *Grandmother came for Dworitz*. But each book offers something else. The illustrations are very bright and full, even though they are in black and white. If the illustrative portion of the books overpowers the text, it is best to think that the illustrations are exquisite, not that the texts are inadequate. The texts may be simply and unfortunately a little out of step with a contemporary readership. But this too is not such a bad thing. *Noodle, Nitwit, Numskull* and *Doctor Dwarf* recuperate and celebrate a past which is as officially Canadian as any other, but is not experienced as such. Not many Shlemiels, wandering beggars and junk dealers have voices in Canadian children's poetry and tales. Even if the illustrations may be out of sync with the texts, appealing to younger children while the texts remain aloof, I won't be the one to say "Shlemiels's waiting for his supper!"

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