

Perhaps these objections are mere academic quibbles, but a retelling of any symbolic story so specifically connected to a region, a religion, or a people should endeavour to preserve what is culturally unique to the tale or all stories risk sounding like the homogenized narratives so beloved of Disney productions.

The real strength and beauty of this book, of course, lie in Gal's full-page pictures. Here the artist is superior to the writer and the illustrations truer to the Russian spirit. The style of pre-Romanov aristocracy, the details of interior decoration, the characters extravagantly costumed in Boyar robes, the mixture of pagan and Christian, are handsomely depicted in *Prince Ivan and the firebird* by an artist-illustrator with a fine and delicate sense of colour and a remarkable sense of cultural detail. The firebird itself is especially handsome in its pinkish hues.

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OF RAVEN AND RESOLUTIONS

Raven and Snipe. Anne Cameron. Illus. Gaye Hammond. Harbour Publishing, 1991. 30 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55017-037-6; **Raven goes berrypicking.** Anne Cameron. Illus. Gaye Hammond. Harbour Publishing, 1991. 32 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55017-036-8.

Rather than surrounding these children's books with context about legends, I prefer to consider the sense a child approaching them for the first time might make of them. Legends, fairy tales and myths are all stories which externalize human emotions into scripted events. They offer a vivid description of how a specific problem is caused and an example of how others can generate an inventive solution to deal effectively with it. In *Raven and Snipe*, Mrs. Snipe invents a ritual to prevent Raven from greedily consuming all her family's stores of food and in *Raven goes berrypicking* other birds cope bravely with Raven's trickery and gluttony. Such stories tell us how we might behave and define a moral vision of social interaction. Their appeal to children is that they demonstrate a truth about human behaviour without being didactic. Legends are subtle, their ideas insinuating themselves gently because they arrive in the form of images and events, not lessons.

Of the two stories, *Raven and Snipe* is more successful in this regard, for the social problem of the glutton is resolved. It is important to touch emotional danger in books for children, and equally important to pull out of it successfully. Cameron takes the risk, but doesn't quite complete the loop to satisfac-

tion in the second title. Raven here is treated quite roughly by her companions, which children will appreciate because she was so nasty, but children will mind the sad note of lack of resolution in the final image: Raven is alone and distrusted. To have hope of resolving problems oneself, the child wants to see examples of how others do it. As it is, I suspect children will not be terribly interested in reading this book a second time.

Cameron's language is spare, controlled, yet humorous (Raven did not simply eat, she "chomped and snuffled, she munched and burped, she smacked her lips and slurped"). The illustrations are graphically strong, rich in texture and demonstrate that black and white techniques have special uses. The covers designed by Gaye Hammond are distinctive for they have the bold punch of road signs and this style is used to set off complex west coast designs. Unfortunately, these aboriginal designs are not identified, leaving us to wonder whether Hammond is borrowing, inventing, or reflecting personal history. Furthermore, the publisher provides information about the author. Since the illustrator contributes as much as the author in picture books, similar details about her would be welcome.

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POST-MODERN FAIRY TALE

Mr. Kneebone's new digs. Ian Wallace. Groundwood Press, 1991. Unpag., \$14.95 laminated boards. ISBN 0-88899-143-6.



Masterful writing and illustration in *Mr. Kneebone's new digs* depict the urban world in a state of decay and fragmentation. In Wallace's narrative an eclectic and sometimes psychedelic phraseology is a device which conceals and even distances meaning. The book's textual and visual off-centeredness is appropriate for the post-modern world without centre that Wallace depicts. Characters speak in their own idiosyncratic versions of an

urban psychosis, never awakening to the state of decay around them. Only April Moth has powers of self-realization. Through her, Wallace has created a kind of post-modern fairy tale heroine: her search for "new digs" is constituted