

There is no indication in IDON East's corporate profile that educators were part of the project at all. In fact, their stated aim — "to carry out research and development projects and continue to exploit the resulting technologies to provide information and communications technology based products and services" — perhaps best expresses the purpose of these CD-ROMs. Learning and literature are more than the marketing of products, and with the wonderful material being produced by authors, teachers and students, especially on the WWW, there is no need to accept less than what print already provides.

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## FILM REVIEWS

### DISNEY'S *POCAHONTAS*: THE EMPTINESS INSIDE

Four hundred years after a young Native American risked her life to make peace with British colonizers, Walt Disney Studios have trivialized that child's remarkable story in a cartoon which glosses over both generosity and genocide with saccharine songs, designer emotions, political correctness, cute animals, and the love of a "copper-skinned" "babe" for an invading white hunk. "The worst thing that could happen is [for *Pocahontas* to look] like a bunch of white guys from the Valley made it," notes the film's director; unfortunately, that is precisely how the movie looks.

Granted, Native American activist Russell Means (the voice of Pocahontas's father, Powhatan) calls *Pocahontas* "the finest work ever done on American Indians by Hollywood" and Native American Irene Bedard (Pocahontas) suggests that "some little girl [wanting] to be Pocahontas [instead of Barbie]" is "a step in the right direction." But it seems an awfully small step. These "Indians" are noble savages, their spirituality reduced to the profundities of Grandmother Willow, a tree spirit who confides: "My bark is worse than my bite." The English colonizers are as evil as the Indians are good. The dignity of Pocahontas and Powhatan evaporates when they "sing white" (in the voices of Judy Kuhn and Jim Cummings).

The film's constructions of gender and age are equally dubious. The transformation of the historical ten- or eleven-year-old girl into a mature sex object — complete with cleavage, full red lips, flowing black hair, one-strap doeskin dress, and fetishized animal movements — has inspired viewers to call Pocahontas "Poca-Barbie," "Snow Brown," and "a busty native Babewatch-style gal and her commanding white lover, who looks like a dancer from Chippendale's." Who, one must ask, is this movie for? Both my ten-year-old son and my five-year-old daughter like Pocahontas. But what they like is not the Pocahontas-Smith romance, but Meeko, the raccoon, Flit, the hummingbird, and Percy, the dog. When critic Mal Vincent asks, "Does anyone expect accuracy from a movie that

is stolen by a mischievous racoon and an energetic hummingbird?” though, I have to answer, “Yes.” For as children watch the cute animals, they absorb gross historical inaccuracies and racist and sexist ideologies.

*Pocahontas* depicts two dangerous, seemingly contradictory, fantasies: (1) that of transparent translation between cultures — Pocahontas learns to speak English instantly; Smith changes from Indian hunter to Indian lover unproblematically; and (2) that of impermeable racial and ethnic boundaries — the film ends by emphatically retracting the miscegenation it has flirted with throughout. If this is 1990s “white” consciousness, then I’m with Kekata, a Native American who sings: “Beneath that milky hide / There’s emptiness inside.”

Instead of watching this film, children might better surf the Internet — past Pocahontas dolls and Meeko’s home page — to Paul Giese’s Web site, “Indian Opinions about Pocahontas.” Otherwise, they will be left with very pastel traces of a once-powerful story — a story about a child. For, as Buffy Sainte-Marie laments, the film *Pocahontas* has “appropriated the name of a real person whose life had an honour and value of its own, which children of the world might have liked to know about.”

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS / ANNONCES

Nous avons le vif plaisir d’annoncer à nos lecteurs que notre collègue Suzanne Pouliot, professeur titulaire à la faculté d’éducation de l’Université de Sherbrooke, vient d’obtenir le prestigieux prix international IBBY. Cette distinction est accordée aux chercheurs dont les travaux ont particulièrement contribué au rayonnement des études consacrées à la littérature de jeunesse. Auteur de trois ouvrages, Suzanne Pouliot a publié, ces dernières années, plusieurs articles dans *CCL/LCJ*.

We are pleased to announce that our colleague Dr. Suzanne Pouliot, full professor at the University of Sherbrooke Teachers College, has obtained the prestigious International IBBY Award. This distinction is granted as a recognition for her significant contribution to Children’s Literature Studies. Author of three books and numerous contributions, Dr. Pouliot has published several articles in *CCL* in the last few years.

The Children’s Literature Roundtables of Canada have awarded the 1996 Information Book Award to *In Flanders Fields*, by Linda Granfield, illus. Janet Wilson. *In Flanders Fields* is also winner of the 1996 IODE Book Award.

*Of Things Not Seen* (Stoddart), by Don Aker, has been awarded the 1996 Ann Connor Brimer Award, presented each year to a distinctive Nova Scotia writer.

The 1996 Governor General’s Award winners were: Paul Yee for *Ghost Train* (Groundwood), best children’s book in English; Gilles Tibo for *Noémie—Le Secret de Madame Lumbago*, best children’s book in French; Eric Beddows for *The Rooster’s Gift*, text by Pam Conrad (Groundwood), best illustration in an English-language children’s book. No French award was given for children’s illustration.