

# Reviews / Comptes rendus

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## Books / Livres

### Japanese Internment: You Can't Take It with You ...

*Caged Eagles*. Eric Walters. Orca, 2000. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-555143-182-3 (bound), ISBN 1-555143-139-4 (pbk).

The decision by the Canadian federal government to intern Japanese Canadians soon after the outbreak of World War II took place when I was only halfway through grade one in Haney, BC. The persecution of Japanese Canadians affected the *issei* and *nisei* in different ways, but for those of us in the first few years of elementary school, the internment most likely touched us the least as we were still unable to comprehend what was happening. However, some fifty-eight years later, some of our childhood experiences and memories remain as clear as on that fateful day when we were forced to leave our home.

Eric Walters's opening quotation "You know you can't take all your dolls with you" vividly captures my own childhood experience, except that in my case, it was my pet dog Taro. Like the Fukushima family being moved to Hastings Park, our family was also initially moved to the staging area in Vancouver prior to boarding trains for the interior. As described by Walters, this initial move required that we do so with minimal personal belongings. Other household articles, furniture, and pets were to be left behind as this was a "temporary move." I was promised that the train taking us to the internment camp would be stopping in Haney to pick up Taro, but it didn't!

Although the author notes in his afterword that he experienced some difficulties in writing this historical fiction, he has successfully captured the very essence of the internment as experienced by a teenager. Walters has very skilfully integrated historical facts with other salient information which he obtained through personal interviews, thus providing a rare perspective that focuses on the wartime detention of Japanese Canadians. He is most successful in portraying the intergenerational culture clashes between the first generation *issei* and Canadian-born *nisei*. Traditional Japanese cultural values, beliefs, and family roles held by the *issei* are described to explain differences in *nisei* behaviour. In addition to providing an excellent description of various aspects of the removal of Japanese Canadians from the coastal areas of British Columbia, the book also serves as an important window into the socialization processes commonly associated with Japanese immi-

grant families in Canada. In this regard, the book is a must read not only for high school students, but also for university students in ethnic studies, Canadian studies, and other social science courses.

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### *The Secret under My Skin: An Island of Lost Souls*

*The Secret under My Skin*. Janet McNaughton. HarperCollins, 2000. 240 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-648522-7.

*The Secret under My Skin* depicts a world in the aftermath of a devastating eco-disaster. The rampant superstition and prejudice of the “Dark Times” of the twenty-second century are still a force in Terra Nova (Newfoundland) in 2368. A totalitarian Commission is in power, maintaining its authority by propagating irrational fears and hatreds through disinformation and the control and falsification of historical records. Relatively recently, “techies” (scientists, technologists and academics) have been used as scapegoats, resulting in the death of thousands in concentration camps during the “technocaust.” The novel’s narrator, fourteen-year-old Blay Raytee, lives and labours in a work-camp with many other orphaned children until she is chosen as an assistant by the lazy and selfish Marrella, an upper-class orphan who is being trained as a Bio-indicator (environment monitor) by pro-democracy activists William and Erica.

The text clearly reverberates with the echoes of various brutal regimes, including Stalinist Russia and Nazi-controlled Europe. Its literary antecedents are post-apocalyptic dystopias like Richard Jefferies’s *After London*, Aldous Huxley’s *Ape and Essence*, and Ronald Wright’s recent *A Scientific Romance*, as well as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (“who controls the past controls the future ...”). Dystopias invariably use the future to attack or expose problems in the present — in this case the continuing degradation of the environment and the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children. More generally, the novel indicates how fear, ignorance, and irrational prejudice can be orchestrated by those with power to help them keep that power — an important consideration in an era in which nationalism continues to be a potent force.

The novel does more than criticize, however. Blay exemplifies the joy of learning as she reads of Earth’s geological, botanical, and biological beginnings, and discovers relevance and personal meaning in poetry. She also encounters a feminist Weavers’ Guild — a forceful image of women working collectively for community and progress. Possibly McNaughton tries to squeeze in too much; Marrella’s attempts at channelling to “communicate with the Ancients” are inconclusive and confuse Blay if not the reader. But the theme that successfully holds the novel together is that of loss and recovery — for both society and individuals. Terra