But along with the reading pleasures these tales afford runs a worry. In tales of the supernatural there can be no delicious shudder unless the reader either understands the true workings of the world based on both science and practical observation or has a strong understanding of a religion that establishes specific parameters for supernatural occurrences. Should we question whether families and schools in the twenty-first century have accomplished either task? Should we ask ourselves what core values popular culture actually gives children?

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A Potpourri of Angst

Up All Night. Ed. R.P. MacIntyre. Thistledown, 2001. 156 pp. $15.95 paper. ISBN 1-894345-27-4.

This collection of short fiction for the YA audience contains fourteen of the best stories from Thistledown Press's most recent short story competition. The tales run the full gamut of themes typically found in coming-of age stories with a story of the supernatural, a literary fairy tale, a legend, a sentimental dog story, three pregnant teenagers, two miserable beer parties, and some pretty gritty realism. Many stories handle the insensitivity of a teen's family, with "You Can Call Me Al" being at the top of my personal list of favourites. In a deftly written opening paragraph we see the teenage protagonist draw the personalities of her parents in a few well-placed brush strokes. Gradually, the class and cultural intolerance of their well-meaning insularity unfolds to ruin the hopes and dreams of a gauche young man from an impoverished background. The conflict is real, with the fifteen-year-old first feeling revulsion toward her Ukrainian cousin, turning to an aching empathy in the final scenes. The story is honest in its characterization and plot as well as its heartbreak.

Class conflict is well handled in several stories. It appears in contemporary dress in an upscale high school in "The Way Skin Grows," whereas "Snow and Apples" is set in the Middle Ages. The "Beast" in the latter story is a young but deformed peasant who is initially enamored with the runaway "Beauty," a spoiled nobleman's daughter, with readers being left to their own conclusions about interior vs. exterior beauty. Unfortunately, in the former story the reader is left to conclude the entire denouement, a leap too great in my view.

I question whether two of the stories, in fact, qualify as YA material, a genre that targets the middle and high school audience. Typically adults and small children exist only as backdrop in YA fiction. The protagonist of "The Piano Lesson" is eighteen, but in first-year university, while the protagonist of "Penance" can be guessed to be about six (since the older sister is nine). In this genre, the reader usually hears the voice of a teenage narrator telling the tale in first person; how-

ever, the narrator of "The Piano Lesson" sounds like a dispassionate adult who understands Chopin reasonably well and who wants to rehabilitate the image of the protagonist's gay piano teacher, while "Penance" is told in the voice of an adult lost in nostalgia. Despite this, "Penance" remains on my short list of favourites.

The third story on my list is "The Catalyst," because it takes the teenage characters way past the stereotype of science geek forced by her teacher to tutor the pregnant high school drop-out. The story grows into a tale of two girls, associates by happenstance, who gradually look beyond their differing priorities and dissimilar life paths, each with her own regrets and sorrows, abilities and accomplishments. The tension of the story builds due to their mutual selfishness, but the reader is able to see more than either of the girls do, which creates an empowerment that is wonderfully exhilarating to a teen reader.

Incidentally, while a reviewer usually ignores a certain amount of *errata*, when the editor's name is misspelled on the front cover the error is more than "unfortunate"!

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Historical Facts and Fictions

Sophie Sea to Sea: Star Girl's Cross Canada Adventure. Norma Charles. Sandcastle/Beach Holme, 1999. 140 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-404-X. ***The Lost Sketch.*** Andrea and David Spalding. Brandywine/Whitecap, 1999. 102 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55110-989-1.

These two Canadian junior novels have been written for classroom use, with teacher's guides available. These novels do for Canadian geography and art history what bibliotherapy does for a variety of emotional needs. Each novel contains factual inserts: geographical and historical data on each province for *Sophie Sea to Sea* and historical info on the Group of Seven painters in *The Lost Sketch*. Each insert includes several websites for additional research extensions. In *Sophie Sea to Sea*, each new chapter begins with a one-page fact sheet that includes sets of quick facts and a one-paragraph history of the province in question.

In *The Lost Sketch*, Willow and her brother Rick attend a summer canoe camp. They discover an abandoned boxcar on the old Algoma Central Railway similar to the one used by the Group of Seven painters in the 1920s. Inside they find bunk beds, an old stove, and evidence of artist residents: dried oil paints on a piece of broken china and an oil sketch! Was this the boxcar used by the Group of Seven? Was this an original Group of Seven oil sketch? As the mystery unravels, Willow is adept at searching the net and researches the Group of Seven for information on the use of the boxcar and who might be the painter of the sketch. The book is a fast-paced thriller with spunky protagonists set in a historically accurate context. While