

cial issues are largely shaped by the attitudes and the actions of their parents: not only do children tend to imitate their parents, but children who lack information are more likely to make poor choices. By evidencing this, Craddock's plays speak as much to parents and teachers as to young adults about prevalent and important social issues.

Marissa McHugh obtained a B.F.A. in Theatre Performance from the University of Regina in 2002 and is currently an M.A. student in drama at the University of Guelph.

Summer Reading for Fall, Winter, or Spring / *Jean Stringam*

No Missing Parts & Other Stories about Real Princesses. Anne Laurel Carter. Red Deer, 2002. 136 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-2531-1.

Dead Man's Gold and Other Stories. Paul Yee. Illus. Harvey Chan. Groundwood, 2002. 112 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-475-3. Ages 11+.

Revved. R.P. MacIntyre. Thistle Down, 2002. 173 pp. \$16.95 paper. ISBN 1-894345-46-0.

Fractures: Family Stories. Budge Wilson. Penguin Canada, 2002. 195 pp. \$16.00 paper. ISBN 0-14-331201-4.

Tunnels! Diane Swanson. True Stories from the Edge. Annick, 2003. 140 pp. \$18.95 cloth, \$8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-781-7, 1-55037-780-9. Ages 8-12.

Samurai Spirit: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Life. Burt Konzak. Tundra, 2002. 132 pp. \$12.99 paper. ISBN 0-88776-611-0.

Nerves Out Loud: Critical Moments in the Lives of Seven Teen Girls. Ed. Susan Musgrave. Annick, 2001. 112 pp. \$19.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-693-4, 1-55037-696-2. Ages 14+.

You Be Me: Friendship in the Lives of Teen Girls. Ed. Susan Musgrave. Annick, 2002. 123 pp. \$18.95 cloth, \$9.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-739-6, 1-55037-738-8. Ages 15+.

One of the pleasures of this particular group of young adult books is the multicultural or international aspect of many of the volumes. The subjects and genres of Anne Laurel Carter's historical fiction are varied: an Irish/Newfoundland fairy tale, letters written by a young Acadian woman, and several romances set on the prairies in a past century. Both Canadian and Chinese ideologically, Paul Yee's collection is also realistic as well as fantastic. Diane Swanson's non-fiction roves the world in search of amazing tunnel stories, and Burt Konzak's collection of samurai lore from

Japan spans centuries past at the same time as it delves into the present. And finally, the second book edited by Susan Musgrave contains four tales with international authors and settings. Readers will want to join in a salute to the authors of these rich collections and to the publishing houses that recognize the importance of multicultural and international literature for younger readers.

Each book has highly individualized strengths and much to offer the reader. With that perspective established, I claim the pleasure of roaming freely and critically through all eight volumes. Let me say at the outset that Anne Laurel Carter captures the telling detail, indulges in no superfluities, and constructs resolutions that ring true in her collection of ten love stories, *No Missing Parts & Other Stories about Real Princesses*. She opens with the first European arrivals to Canada and continues on with tales set in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. "The Legend of Princess Sheila NaGeira" is set in Ireland, the High Seas, and Newfoundland and is based on a legend with a modicum of historicity. While it is told with the romance of a fairytale, this version contains far more detail than oral tradition can carry. It bears repeating orally for a few hundred years in order to hone it to its elemental parts. Let's place it next to "Cinderella" and "Sleeping Beauty" in our storytelling and see what elements survive.

Epistolary novels were the height of fashion in the mid-eighteenth century, making the structure of "Far from Home: Marie Robichaud's Journal," set in the winter of 1755-1756 during the Acadian exodus, historically appropriate. The writing is highly romanticized with many complications and few resolutions, also indicative of the epistolary novel form. Set over a century later, "One Mighty Kiss," brings us to 1891 in which young Nellie of Regina makes a marriage decision for the Métis Jean-Pierre and against the NWMP officer Fitzhenry, all based on a single kiss from each. The brief, lyrical free-verse poem reflects the capriciousness of a young girl caught up in the physical and the romantic here-and-now, but it's hard to admire a story that contains no sense of good judgement or socio-economic consequence for choices made. I should have waited a few more pages, for the next tale, "Badlands," is stark realism on the prairie, well written in every respect, with the female protagonist verbally conscious of avoiding her mother's fate — death by overwork.

One of my many favourites in the collection is "Leaving the Iron Lung," in which a 12-year-old polio victim exposes, through her love of hockey, gaps in the fabric of family that cause her to grow out of her own self-absorption. Carter draws her characters with depth and, avoiding didacticism, deftly discloses Pauline's discoveries made with the help of her Tante Marie. Unfortunately, the title of the book is unpleasant in all its connotations. It's even worse once the reader knows that the story from which it is taken centres on a selfish girl who rejects her former boyfriend when he returns from active duty in World War II as an amputee. I also found disconcerting the author's note at the end of "No Missing Parts." Because readers want to believe in the reality of a tale, an author doesn't get high marks for confessing she has told a family tale inaccurately. Knowing the new "truth" both undercuts the story and destroys, rather than serves, family history telling.

Paul Yee has found his own truth about the immigrant experience in his unusual and fascinating collection of tales, *Dead Man's Gold and Other Stories*, a collection that will broaden the young adult reader's appreciation of multicultural literature. Each begins as historical realism depicting the various situations that drew Chinese immigrants to labour in the New World from the mid-nineteenth century

to the late twentieth. At some point, however, each tale fuses with a ghost story, a popular Chinese narrative form, to create tales unlike any in either culture. There is not a happy ending among them; neither are they tragic — melancholy, eerie, perhaps. The tenth tale, set in 1955, seems more modern in tone and content than any of the others because it shows the son as having a legitimate point of view and the father as acquiescing to it (even if as a ghost).

Readers of all ages will enjoy R.P. MacIntyre's *Revved*, a collection of five short fiction tales and a novella, all set in contemporary Canada. He opens the book with two very funny stories. The narrative voice for "The Euthanasia Party" is marvelously droll, with some clever wordplay and punning, making the hyperbole of the plot wonderfully ridiculous. The next story, "The Gene Thief," is equally funny — I laughed and smiled all the way through it. The plot is outrageous soap opera and wouldn't work if the narrative voice weren't so droll and the humour so right on the mark. Of the approximately 80 stories considered in this review, only two use humour. Why do we take ourselves so seriously? Why do we adults give teens so little to laugh about?

MacIntyre's next stories change in tone and mood to give a sober analysis of a girl's relationship with her father. Another explores the difference between what a film is in itself, what surrounded its production, and what the high school crew learned. A third takes place on a graduation night that ends with five baffled teenagers in an unlocked jail cell telling their "stories" to a wistfully befuddled Constable. MacIntyre concludes this tale with an epilogue in which he gives a perceptive disquisition on the differences between a story with a resolution and a slice-of-life where "things just go on" (106). The final offering in the collection is a long short story (novella perhaps) in which the teenage protagonist searches for his sister and the meaning of her behaviour. I was riveted to the story because the four main characters are developed beyond the stereotypes at their base, and I felt a genuine sympathy toward each one.

A similar connection happens between the reader and Budge Wilson's latest collection of stories, *Fractures: Family Stories*. Somehow, there is something gentle about this group of stories, even those containing violence and fear. Perhaps it's the wisdom that underscores each one. The author never strains for the ultimate answer to the traumas of life, but each tale carries a sense that despite pain, ugliness, death, and stupidity, there is something noble in the human soul to discover, and that the hunt for discovery makes life worthwhile. In a collection containing 12 memorable stories, each written with excellence, several stand out. When the young female protagonist in "The Metaphor" learns respect for her teacher and yet betrays her years later, she discovers true grief. The piece is full of extended metaphors, initially describing the mother, but ending with a moving salute to the teacher. In the tale "My War," a young girl falls in love with the excitement and adventure of World War II Halifax with a port full of ships and a town full of sailors. She cannot understand why her father, who served in World War I, refuses to speak of his experiences. Only when she witnesses the violent death of a child when its family is caught in a burning building does she understand that shock and horror can induce a silence that can last a lifetime. While other tales in the collection have more upbeat resolutions, each is written true to the human experience.

True experience is also what Diane Swanson's non-fiction book *Tunnels!* is all about, with ten short tales about various kinds of tunnels and the lore of their construction and use, taken from structures located worldwide, ancient as well as

modern. Primarily, adult males in the prime of life produce the action, with extremely few females dotting the pages. Each chapter opens *in media res* with a close-up shot of a particular person or group, thus setting up a personal dimension so necessary in non-fiction. The camera then moves back in wide angle, so to speak, as the author gives the reader the necessary background information. In some, the story is picked up later on; in others, it is not. Swanson's inclusion of a diagram of each tunnel to illustrate the story is highly effective.

Nothing about the first pages of *Tunnels!*, however, indicates that the book is non-fiction. The series title, "True Stories from the Edge," doesn't really promise non-fiction either, since adventure fiction often advertises its stories as "true." Sections of each tale are headed with bolded subtitles intended to engage the reader's interest and draw him or her along in the text. While I recognize this as the format for all non-fiction, and certainly the device orders the author's materials and outlines the pattern in which ideas will be presented, is it a convenience for the author and the teacher only? I wonder if youth actually read them. As a young reader, I learned to skip over all bolded print including subtitles; I didn't consider them informative or useful in anyway.

In some ways, the contents page is misleading. "A Note from the Author" has its page number in a lower-case Roman numeral, which tells the young adult reader that it isn't a story. As an adult reader, I enjoyed the details of the author's personal experiences in exploring tunnels, but I am not certain that young adult readers would identify with Swanson and want to read the book. The next item on the contents page, "Tales from Below," has a regular page number, so the young adult reader would quite logically expect it to be the first story. It's not. Instead, we have the author's general introduction that outlines the variety of tunnels to be discussed. If the young adult reader believes it to be the first of the stories, then she or he could easily quit at this point, judging the book a less than exciting narrative, contrary to what the cover promises. This would be unfortunate, because the collection makes truly an excellent, entertaining, informative read.

Information is simply bursting from Burt Konzak's slim volume, *Samurai Spirit: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Life*. Each chapter begins with a saying or a proverb from a famous classic Japanese author. Throughout, boxes contain information on various topics, from the history of the samurai, the martial arts, the youngest thirteenth-century emperor, and Buddha to the art of tea and the practice of carrying on ideals in an imperfect world. The brief adventure tale could be an old Japanese folktale or legend or it could be a contemporary story. Konzak sprinkles them both with anecdotes of similar battles in contemporary settings as the authorial first-person narrator interpolates his own stories of the samurai spirit among stories of teens who also battle against fear, injustice, and self-doubt in contemporary America.

Typically, a young man lacks the skills and discipline to defend himself against evil actions and must quickly learn them in order to survive or to protect what he values. In other stories, the young man has exceptional skills but must exercise discipline in schooling his emotions so as not to impair his good judgement with revenge. Konzak shows particular care in introducing important life skills to a contemporary teen audience, skills they may have been inclined to dismiss as ancient exoticism. As I read through the stories, I began to feel annoyed by the author's summary of the main point, much like the moral attached to Aesop's fables. As an adult reader, I appreciated the ambiguities of the tales as written. Again, as I read the book, I tried to think as a teenager with limited experience of other cultures and

time periods. This time I appreciated how a young adult reader might prefer guidance in applying values from a foreign culture to his or her own life.

What Konzak has laboured to produce — a direct connection between today's youth and a valued past culture — seems to be in short supply in two volumes of stories edited by Susan Musgrave. These sketches are taken from the lives of individual women, remembered from their teenage years, and written with passion. The first volume, *Nerves Out Loud*, addresses this question: *What pivotal moment (or series of events) changed your life for all time?* The very drama of the question begs for stories about climactic events, and the stories are, therefore, inescapably about a time of excess in some way. There is a difference between the complication/resolution structure of a short story and the this-is-what-happened-to-me of autobiography. Both are mediated with artistry in the telling, yes, but there is less of an obligation to figure things out in the autobiographical sketch. Adults are more willing to accept a that's-the-way-it-was-and-you-figure-it-out sort of ending; autobiography tends to short-change the resolution part of the equation. Many teens don't want that. They want answers. They tend to look for solutions. In fact, several authors themselves mention their own largely unsuccessful search through magazines and books reflecting societal mores for autobiographical storytelling strategies that actually work.

These seven mature women authors who reminisce about their own teenage years in the 1960s sex and drugs scene and try to sell it as young adult short fiction are liable to be seen by their envisioned young adult audience as stuck in a time warp. Better to admit that turn-of-the-twenty-first-century cultural ideology is a long way from the 1960s and write from the wisdom of having learned from, survived through, the 60s and 70s, rather than reproducing them. Critics often complain about self-indulgence in women's writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, which is not to say that self-indulgence hasn't been an earmark of much male writing over the millennia. Still, it doesn't make it good writing for teens. When the focus of these authors turns away from the mystic "I" of their audience to the authors themselves obsessing over their own mystic "I," an abyss forms. The young adult audience is notoriously merciless about such things. Besides, teens tend to be grossed out by their own parents' sexuality, much less their grandmother's. Sorry, ladies; if you want to write this stuff for teens, you've got to siphon it through the me-me-me of teenage angst, or you'll have to plan on selling it to adults, the rest of us 1960s survivors.

The more recent volume, *You Be Me: Friendships in the Lives of Teen Girls*, unfolds as a more gentle collection because of the less dramatic prompt that instigates its inception: *Investigate the importance of friendship during your teen years.* The seven tales include some very welcome international perspectives with settings and authorial voices reflecting teenage years in England, Australia, and Singapore, as well as urban Canada. Since the sketches tend to be more slice-of-life than short story, resolutions are scarce and often the narrators seem too close and ever-present. Each tends to meander off into the mists with "and then I went away to university and who knows what will happen next," and other fairly limp cliffhangers. While these stories demonstrate much skill in writing, as do those in the first volume, the thematic content still continues to focus a lot of drugs/alcohol, sex, and fallible mothers.

At what point do repeated themes in books for teens begin to appear normative to the reader? At what point do teens who read the tales (teens who are usually

trying to figure themselves out) come to believe that certain actions, themes in the sketches, are actually how the world works, and not an indication of specific problems, even obsessions, of an author? Some simple editing to eliminate the intrusive narrators and reforming of the tales into historical fiction would go a long way in turning adult nostalgia into young adult literature.

Jean Stringam is an assistant professor in the children's literature division of the English department at Southwest Missouri State University. Her publications focus on nineteenth-century Canadian periodical short fiction.

Finding Meaning in Unfamiliar Worlds / Hilary Turner

The Maze. Monica Hughes. HarperCollins, 2002. 183 pp. \$15.99 paper. ISBN 0-00-639213-X.

Jonathan Dreamed of Dragons, Book II: The Return of Ozon. Gordon A. Francis. ESP, 2001. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-9685004-7-1.

The Dollmage. Martine Leavitt. Red Deer, 2001. 159 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88995-233-7.

The Phantom Queen. Ven Beemudré. Coteau, 2002. 292 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-200-X.

Fire Drake. Ann Ewan. ThistleDown, 2002. 516 pp. Price unlisted. Paper. ISBN 1-894345-45-2.

Using the conventional distinction between “domestic” and “high” fantasy, it is possible to divide these five books into two discrete categories. In the first, journeys take place between our world and another, and the central characters are ordinary people just like us; their familiarity enables them to function as substitutes and guides for the reader. The experiences of these characters in the alien setting serve primarily to teach them valuable lessons about life in this world. The journey is usually a secret journey, often symbolic of a voyage of discovery within the self, or an analogue of growing up. Monica Hughes in *The Maze* and Gordon A. Francis in *Jonathan Dreamed of Dragons: The Return of Ozon* have produced examples of this type. The second category, which to my mind demands more artistry and control, is the fantasy novel that creates a consistent and self-contained world, ostensibly unrelated to the one that the reader inhabits. In books of this sort, the centre of interest is the fantasy world itself: its history, its culture, its depth and intricacy, and all the governing assumptions, properties, and rules that Perry Nodelman has called “metaphysical” (175). If these happen to be reminiscent of their counterparts in our world and if they constitute an implicit comment or critique, so much the better. The reader is not pressed — but merely permitted — to transfer moral insights