it is. Faced with a world that is not as perfect or as simple as it was once perceived to be, these readers are attracted to a humour that eases them into an acceptance of so much that is less than ideal and greyer than once imagined. All of us benefit from being reminded of the need to be reconciled to things as they are. The best of the humourous works reviewed here nudge us in that direction through the laughter that comforts even as it points out the disparity between the real and the ideal.

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Diverse Settings for Junior Readers: Geographical, Historical, Cultural, Emotional, and Imaginary / *Margaret Steffler*

The Olden Days Locket. Penny Chamberlain. Sono Nis, 2002. 198 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55039-128-3.

The Reunion. Jacqueline Pearce. Orca, 2002. 92 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-230-7.

Summer of Adventures. Ann Alma. Sono Nis, 2002. 144 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55039-122-4.

Off Season. Eric Walters. Orca, 2003. 162 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-237-4.

A Taste of Perfection. Laura Langston. Stoddart, 2002. 219 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-6274-4.

The Gold Diggers Club. Karen Rivers. Orca, 2002. 136 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-236-6.

Return of the Grudstone Ghosts. Arthur Slade. Coteau, 2002. 119 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-212-3.

Flight from Big Tangle. Anita Daher. Orca, 2002. 134 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-234-X.

Royal Ransom. Eric Walters. Puffin, 2003. 215 pp. $23.00 cloth. ISBN 0-14-331214-6.

Danger at the Landings. Becky Citra. Orca, 2002. 92 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-232-3.

The Adventures of Tommy Smith. Robert Sutherland. HarperCollins, 2003. 181 pp. $15.99 paper. ISBN 0-00-639243-1.

Dinosaurs on the Beach. Marilyn Helmer. Orca, 2003. 133 pp. $7.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-260-9.

Flood. James Heneghan. Groundwood, 2002. 188 pp. $12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-466-4.

In their recently published *A Guide to Canadian Children's Books in English* (2003), Deirdre Baker and Ken Setterington celebrate the access of contemporary Canadian children to "works set in places familiar to them" (1). These settings, they point out, expose young readers to specifically Canadian perspectives and voices. In discussing their criteria for selection, Baker and Setterington again highlight setting, explaining that they have "looked for the precise, sensual, and accurate evocation of atmosphere, region, and time" — the type of evocation that results in the reader's ability to "smell the air of Northern Ontario, northern Manitoba, or outport Newfoundland" (4). Although "on the map of the real world, Canadian terrain is a northern continental stretch of coastline, farmland, prairies, tundra, and mountains, netted by rivers, darkened by forests, blanked by barrens, and illuminated by the lights of cities, towns, villages, and farmsteads" (Waterston 163), Canadian "space" for writers and readers of children's literature, as Elizabeth Waterston reminds us in *Children's Literature in Canada* (1992), also includes the less concrete "inner world of ideas and emotions, fears, and desires" (5). The thirteen books for junior readers (ages seven to twelve) under review here are indeed set precisely within the geographical and historical "map of the real world," which allows readers to "smell the air" of the region evoked. Through an immersion in these local landscapes of Canada, many of these works succeed in venturing beyond the specifically Canadian settings of today to the historical places of former times, the diverse spaces of other cultures, the inner worlds of emotions and thoughts, and the outer realms of the imaginary.

The first five books discussed in this review are set in my home province of British Columbia, a politically-created space comprised of diverse and extreme geographical landscapes. The settings of these novels range from the streets of Victoria to the farms of the Comox Valley to the mountainous wilderness of the Kootenays, often moving back in time to earlier events set in the locations inhabited by the current characters. Penny Chamberlain's first novel, *The Olden Days Locket*, does just that by incorporating the collapse of the Point Ellice Bridge on 26 May 1896, an event recounted to those of us who grew up in Victoria each time we found ourselves on the Bay Street Bridge crossing the Gorge. Chamberlain's inclusion of characters who were in the streetcar during that disaster places a startlingly concrete and human face on what has always been for me a vague story. Chamberlain also uses Point Ellice House on Pleasant Street in Esquimalt, the home of the O'Reilly family from 1867 to 1975 and now a heritage site, along with the ghost stories associated with it to connect the main character Jess, a volunteer at Point Ellice House, with Rose, a character involved in the bridge disaster and with the O'Reilly family

a century earlier. *The Olden Days Locket* moves back and forth between the lives of Jess and Rose but manages to avoid the confusion that sometimes accompanies such an approach. This novel clearly differentiates between the two time periods even as it identifies parallels in the girls' lives. The need for courage amid loneliness connects Jess with Rose, as elements such as the locket, the red light, and the ghost reveal the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century world of the O'Reilly family. Chamberlain's readers will find much to keep them interested in this story, especially when they reach the diary entries of chapter eleven, in which the lives of the upper middle-class families of Victoria are clearly shown through the voice and thoughts of Cynthia Abbott. Chamberlain tells us in the afterword that she made use of the actual diary entries of the O'Reilly family as well as the extensive collection of everyday items — recipes, receipts, seed catalogues, clothing, furniture and artwork — found in the house today. Rooted in the houses, streets, bridges and history of Victoria, Chamberlain's thoughtful first novel allows present, past, and supernatural to intersect. Most importantly, it sees the past in the present, suggesting in a non-didactic way that our "place" — our homes, streets, and feelings — existed before we did and can speak to us if we are receptive. Many readers will feel the urge to visit Point Ellice House to check things out for themselves.

The Reunion, a first novel by Jacqueline Pearce, moves us "up island" (Vancouver Island) to the community of Paldi in the Cowichan area and to a place and story that were, until recently, unknown to many of us, even to Pearce, who grew up in the nearby town of Duncan. Pearce's presentation of the pre-World War II logging town of Paldi depicts a community in which various cultural groups, mainly those of East Indian and Japanese descent, worked and lived together without the prejudices that pervaded the larger towns on the island and in the province. The story of the disappearance of the Paldi residents of Japanese descent in 1942 is told by Jasminder, the grandmother of Rina, one of the novel's main characters. Like Joy Kogawa's *Naomi's Road* (1986), this story emphasizes the abrupt shock of a community brutally disrupted, but it leaves us in Paldi on Vancouver Island instead of taking us to the internment camps of the interior. Here in Paldi, Jasminder, Rina, Shannon, and the reader feel the aching emptiness of a community and a friendship torn apart by prejudice and misunderstanding. The past and the present are linked by Rina and Shannon's reception of Jasminder's story of her friendship with Mitsu, as well as by the more concrete items of a beaded bracelet and the Paldi reunion that occurs at the end of the book. Less tangible connections include the girlhood friendships in different generations, along with misunderstandings and accusations on both a personal and a political level. Pearce has chosen a setting and story that have been fairly silent for two generations and that need to be remembered and shared. After reading *The Reunion*, readers will understandably wonder if Paldi was a unique community or if this type of place and story can be found in other small communities in the 1942 coastal landscape of British Columbia. Readers may also feel the urge to locate some of the documents, photographs, and sources referred to by Pearce in the writing of this accessible and moving story for junior readers.

The second book in Ann Alma's Summer series, *Summer of Adventures*, also includes stories of Canadians of Japanese descent — this time set in the Kootenays, specifically New Denver. Linking the past and the present through Ken and Anneke's discovery of Hotei, a red hardwood *netsuke* god of wealth and happiness, the story heads in the direction of the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre but becomes lost

in the Kooteney mountains on the way. An acceptable adventure story, Alma's novel attempts to cover too many topics; in addition to the culture, art and history of the Japanese community, the book introduces foster families, adoption, schizophrenia, animals and survival, jumping from one topic to the other fairly quickly and often superficially.

A more satisfying adventure in the B.C. interior is found in Eric Walters's *Off Season*, the sixth book in Walters's basketball series. Here the Monashee and Selkirk Mountains east of the Salmon Arm area are seen through the eyes of outsiders, Kia and Nick, visiting from Mississauga. Nick's cousin Ned lives with his parents in an unnamed national park five hours from Kelowna and three hours from Salmon Arm (perhaps Mount Revelstoke National Park or Glacier National Park). He is home-schooled, interested in bugs, and close to the nerd category from Kia and Nick's more sophisticated and urban point of view. The team spirit and cooperation of the sport of basketball are transferred to the arena of firefighting as the trio faces a forest fire burning close to the fires that raged through the B.C. interior as I read this book in the summer of 2003. Walters manages to include practical information about fighting forest fires as well as warnings about human interference and management in the B.C. forests. Readers will be attracted by the "country-city mouse" aspect of the novel, specifically tailored to the contrast between the urban and isolated ways of living of these young characters from central and western Canada. In the spirit of compromise, each gives valuable gifts and advice to the other. The book's plot is fast moving, but fully developed characters and careful observations of the B.C. interior anchor the story in a world that is believably challenging.

Back on Vancouver Island, Laura Langston's *A Taste of Perfection* is set in Courtenay and the Comox Valley. A female coming-of-age story appealing to older junior readers, Langston's novel will be enjoyed by dog lovers but may not hold the interest of other readers. The awkwardness of the pre-teen years, depicted most convincingly in the painful dilemma of the stage of hairy legs that are not allowed to be shaved, will be familiar to many readers making their way from girlhood to adolescence. Langston's first book for older readers conveys accurate pre-teen language and dialogue, but for some readers will be slow reaching its climax.

Karen Rivers's *The Gold Diggers Club*, a sequel to her earlier book *Waiting to Dive* (2000), takes Carly and her friends to her family's cabin on one of the Gulf Islands, where wintry March weather strands the group, delaying not only the return home but also the search for gold buried by Brother XII, a cult leader of the 1920s and 1930s. The book's style, in which Carly talks directly to the reader, is casually effective and engaging, but it contains the curious error of referring several times to a geometry set's compass as a protractor. Although a minor point, this is the kind of mistake that will distract a young reader. The novel led me to research Brother XII, as I watched myself imitating the activity of Carly and her friends preparing for their school project. I was rewarded with the factual information that the Gulf Island referred to is De Courcy Island, Brother XII was Edward A. Wilson and the cult of 8,000 followers, who often gave their life savings to the group, was the Aquarian Foundation. The rumours and stories of the gold coins in glass jars inside cedar chests seem to be based in some degree of fact. *The Gold Diggers Club* conveys the fascination felt by west coasters for the life and history of the Gulf Islands, where various communities over the years have managed to maintain ways of living that inspire the curiosity and often the envy of those "stranded" on the

mainland or Vancouver Island. An author's note providing some background about Brother XII would enhance the book for young readers, who often demand to know where the facts end and the fiction begins.

These stories growing out of vivid B.C. settings are strongest when they are deeply rooted in the natural regions that so often shape what takes place in the human realm. The young are continually reminded of the physical, cultural, and historical landscapes on which their lives and homes are based. These characters often turn to elements of these landscapes as they seek comfort and understanding in those difficult times that move them away from childhood. Many historical gaps and silences are given space and voice in these B.C. novels, which are read by readers who will definitely remember the history that is so closely attached to the story.

Moving from B.C. to the prairies, we look at Arthur Slade, winner of the Governor General's Award for *Dust* (2001), who has published the first in what is called the "Canadian Chills Series," which proposes to cover various ghostly and haunted settings throughout Canada. *Return of the Grudstone Ghosts*, subtitled "A Moose Jaw Mystery" on the cover, is set in Slade's birthplace and incorporates the tunnels found beneath that city. Narrated with humour and confidence by the main character, Daphne Shea, Slade's novel combines zany and scary. The characters, however, are not fully developed and the events tend to be confusing. The existence of the tunnels themselves is obviously of interest to most readers, many of whom may be inspired by Slade's fiction to explore the history and construction of Moose Jaw itself and the worlds connected to the prairie city through the underground tunnels.

A second prairie novel, Anita Daher's *Flight from Big Tangle*, although not specifically located on the real map by name, is based on the Mallard Fire of 1999 in La Ronge, northern Saskatchewan. This first novel is well paced, building suspense in a world governed by human error and natural tragedy. Kaylee realizes that her dead father is with her in spirit as she faces the very realistically depicted forest fire that threatens her life and the lives of others. This realization gives her the strength to overcome her fear of flying and allows her to release her refusal to acknowledge her father's death. A particularly wrenching scene involves the return to the homes and the community destroyed by fire, an experience that is tragically not fictional for a number of Canadians. Although we do not see it in the novel, Kaylee has a second home in St. Lucia, which gives her two families, two countries, and two cultures. Young readers will relate to Kaylee's emotions of anger, disbelief, and determination, even though they are brought about in her case by extreme conditions unfamiliar to most readers — the isolated region in which she lives and the danger of her parents' jobs as fire-fighting pilots.

Moving farther north, Eric Walters's *Royal Ransom* is a page-turning adventure bringing together guides from a northern Cree village and members of the English royal family. Jamie's grandmother's ludicrous collection of royal memorabilia, reminiscent of the King George/Queen Elizabeth mugs in Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), provides an opportunity for young readers to reflect on the colonization of Canadian Aboriginal communities, leaving room at the same time for them to understand the affection and pride felt by the grandmother for the family connection with British royalty. Farther along in the novel, violent protestors voice adamant, although defensible, anti-royal sentiments, but not until the reader has experienced considerable sympathy for the lack of privacy and freedom available to the young royals. Despite the novel's rather far-fetched subject matter and action, Walters succeeds

in breaking down all types of borders and barriers by choosing young people who would rarely come into contact with one another. The northern wilderness and the intrusive outside world work as catalysts, bringing about the changes demanded by extreme conditions within extreme landscapes. The children push themselves not only to canoe the rivers as planned but also to fly the plane when necessary.

Royal Ransom breaks down borders by examining the globalization of a world connected by the Internet. It is the worldwide web that alerts the protestors to the whereabouts of the young royals. Many of the novels discussed in this review dig into the setting and the past, unearthing historical events, buildings, and cultures that speak to the present landscape, and thus blur the barrier between "then" and "now." Walters and Daher, on the other hand, move up rather than down, eventually putting their characters in planes that they themselves are able to fly as they escape external dangers and their own fears. No more surprising in their situations than driving a car would be for an observant urban child, the flying seems consistent in a world in which advanced communication and travel are taken for granted. Rather than connecting these northern settings with the past, these two authors have chosen to connect the north with the outside world — St. Lucia, England, and beyond. Reaching up and out rather than down and back is an understandable impulse for isolated communities in a transnational and globalized society.

The Ontario books in this collection look back to the historical foundations of the region. *Danger at the Landings*, Becky Citra's third novel in a series about Upper Canada in the 1830s, is a historical novel actually set in the past rather than evoking the past from the space of the present. It stands out among so many other books that insist on the past and present existing simultaneously. Although the novel is attractive in its straightforward treatment of history, which provides the opportunity for a comfortable immersion in its place and time, I missed the interplay and connection between the past and present. The clear and clever intersections of the past and present, if carefully constructed, offer a satisfying relevance of the past that is usually accepted by present-day characters and readers without resistance or question. Readers may resist Citra's novel, which is filled with details about the daily life of nineteenth-century Upper Canada, but for the most part *Danger at the Landings* incorporates enough action and characterization to avoid a didactic tone. For younger junior readers, this book provides an entertaining way to absorb the history of Canada.

The second Ontario novel included in this review is also set in the past, developing characters based on a degree of historical fact. Robert Sutherland's *The Adventures of Tommy Smith* is based on the sinking of the S.S. *Asia* in Georgian Bay in 1882, a piece of history that includes enough historical and factual quirks, as related by Sutherland in the historical note at the end of the book, to interest any reader. The events on the ship in the first part of the novel and later in the Toronto circus are well developed, as the predicament is established and then untangled through moments of mystery and suspense. Name and identity changes and recognitions play a major role. A rather awkward transition from ship to circus involving Tommy Smith's six-month sojourn with an Ojibway couple is mechanical and quick, leaving me to wonder why it was included. Sutherland's novel successfully tells a story about how large companies and businesses are able to cover up their own responsibilities in order to blame those without power or voice. Astute readers will draw their own parallels with events and situations in a more modern Canada.

The final two novels included in this review are set on the east coast. *Dinosaurs on the Beach* by Marilyn Helmer is geared toward younger readers. Josie's love for her grandfather's cottage, "her favourite place in the whole world" (12), and for her grandfather himself breathes life into this novel's subject matter — the search for fossils and bones. Young readers will find the space that attracts them the most in Josie's ambitious plans to be a paleontologist, beachcomber, and writer. Helmer's author's note concentrates on the fossils of Parrosboro and Joggins along the Fundy shore, digging back and down into a past that predates the historical "Canadian" events covered by many of these books.

Finally, James Heneghan's *Flood* stands out among this group of books as an excellent novel to be recommended for all readers. Andy Flynn is eleven years old, but *Flood* appeals to the older set of junior readers and beyond. Rather than a world expanding into the past or other places, Andy's world becomes distressingly small and restricted once he leaves Vancouver and joins his father, Vincent Flynn, in a shabby, cockroach-infested apartment in the Mayo Rooms in the north end of Halifax. The interior landscapes of rooms and buildings are memorably drawn in this novel, often as tawdry spaces barely providing warmth and shelter from the relentlessly wet and dreary city streets. The rooms within the buildings of this novel remain vivid in my mind, along with the emotions experienced by Andy in those rooms. Although the walls of the Mayo Rooms and any opportunities for change seem to be closing in around Andy as he remains fiercely loyal to the father he loves, less concrete and more important barriers are being swept away. Andy's refusal to judge his father's life as "wasted" indicates a compassion and openness from which adult characters such as Aunt Mona are able to benefit. *Flood* is a novel about change — in Andy's case, tremendous change brought about by the flood that swept away his mother and stepfather along with his middle-class life and home in Vancouver. Andy's acceptance, after excruciating suffering and disappointment, "that people could change only themselves, not others" (184) is a lesson that many adult characters and readers need to hear and remember. Vinny Flynn is a highly entertaining, believable, and complex character who reacts to the demands placed on him by his son, but only within the parameters of his own life. The description of Andy's experience of waking in the upstairs bedroom of Aunt Mona's house washes over the reader as it encompasses the safety and caring that simultaneously embrace Andy while deflating Vinny's promise to find the "right place" (132). The reader already knows of course what Andy is only beginning to admit to himself — the inability of Vinny to change in order to become the type of father who can provide basic material needs for his son. Importantly, however, this lack of material provision does not diminish the love between father and son.

This story on its own is ample. Heneghan, however, gives us more, setting off space in the text for the escapades of the *sheehogue*, Irish faeries. Mischievous and amusing but also filled with understanding and wisdom, these little people are the impetus behind the forces that protect Andy and Vinny Flynn. Like Thomas King's Coyote and four Native characters out to fix the world in *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993), the Young Ones of the *sheehogue* squabble among themselves and delight in breaking rules and creating havoc as they go about fixing Andy's life. Adding a layer of magic or even spirituality, the *sheehogue* inspire confidence and reassurance in the reader who will understandably be worried about Andy's safety and well-being.

These thirteen novels for junior readers are all concerned with children finding their place or space in the world, as the social structures of families and friendships undergo changes that cause uncertainty and instability. The majority of these characters, for example, are dealing with an absent parent, often due to such events as death, desertion, illness, and job loss. In order to find a comfortable space, the young characters often turn to a physical and geographical region that seems more stable, reliable, and permanent than the fickle human world. Surprising among this particular collection of books is the preponderance of wilderness settings in a society in which most readers call a city home. Other than the city streets explored in Victoria and Halifax in the first and last books reviewed and the glance at Moose Jaw in Slade's novel, the city homes of the majority of the readers of these books do not make prolonged appearances in the novels. As well, the multicultural elements of contemporary Canadian society play a role in *The Reunion*, *Summer of Adventures*, and *Royal Ransom*, reflecting to some extent the cultural diversity of the reader's social experience and world.

Without a clear portrayal of place, there is no way to probe the physical region in order to locate the historical, emotional, and imaginary realms that radiate the stability and continuity sought by characters and readers who may be experiencing an uncertain period of growth and transition within a very tenuous world. The globalization of that world can make it smaller and more accessible, but there is still a longing for an immersion in the local place that is designated "home." The settings of these particular children's books for junior readers remain central, the place and time being at least as important as the characters and plot and often providing the basis of the force that moves the action forward toward a resolution. Waterston argues that "good children's books can empower children and free them to accept growth and the limits of growth" (11). Such empowerment and freedom are often sought and found in the exploration and transcendence of the specific place and time inhabited by the characters and, by extension, by the reader.

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