

In the second half of the book, as Jesse records her experiences in Malaysia, language is one of the many challenges she and the other Canadians encounter. Initially, they are frustrated, but in time they overcome the difficult steps of assimilating. The ultimate test occurs when Jesse falls in love with a Malaysian youth, a devout Muslim and true patriot of Malaysia.

Mature themes and the earnest tone of Jesse's journals are diffused by a generous measure of humour, Jesse's zest for life and the special people she meets in Canada and Malaysia. As she recounts many positive exchanges between individuals, the conversations, exuberant laughter and singing, dancing and sharing food, she discovers how ultimately in spite of all the differences, harmony between people may be achieved.

Rumi, the Eastern poet, says: "Beyond the world of right-doings and wrong-doings, there is a field. I will meet you there." In *My Blue Country*, Jesse and the readers who share in her experiences meet in the "field" of universal harmony.

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Fenians and Feisty Females in Canada West

The Stone Orchard. Susan E. Merritt. Vanwell Publishing, 1996. 192 pp. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55125-030-6.

This is a novel packed with strong female characters. There is "Dutch" Bramwell, a vagrant woman with a secret past and a penchant for fortune-telling; Juba, a former slave and the veteran of many journeys along the secret routes of the famous Underground Railroad; Grandmother Fraser, always calm and practical under pressure; and the heroine herself, fourteen-year-old Maud Fraser, whose world changes so dramatically in the course of the story. The male characters, by contrast, are much less interesting, apart perhaps from the Frasers' hired boy Will, Maud's ally in adventure, and the Fenian captain O'Sullivan. It is the early summer of 1866, and the Fenians (Irish nationalists) are massing in Buffalo ready to raid Canadian territory. Across the Niagara River, in Ridgeway, the family at the Fraser Inn will soon find itself caught up in the action — the battle of Ridgeway, an unequal engagement fought between Canadian militiamen and a Fenian army composed mainly of Irish veterans of the American Civil War.

Maud makes a feisty heroine, tending the wounded from both sides and saving her home from destruction. Whether she is running *towards* the battle in the hope of getting a good view of the fighting, or attacking a drunken Fenian with a crock of pickled eggs, she displays courage and determination. The reader is carried along by the pace of the story and mightily relieved when, at the end of the novel, the Fenians retreat and Maud's personal problems regarding the nature of her little brother's death, her father's apparently hostile

attitude to her and her frustration over her lack of educational opportunities are all happily solved.

There are, however, a number of problems with this book. An English graduate (and from my own university) really should not write sentences such as "'I'm sorry', her grandmother paused." (13). A carriage does not wait patiently (182). There are also some implausibilities and inconsistencies. How can Maud believe that removing the inn sign from her front lawn will make the inn look "just like any other farmhouse" (80) when the place is sufficiently spacious (116) to boast a ballroom large enough to be used for "the occasional village meeting or dance"?

Susan Merritt is already experienced in the writing of history for young people, having published *Her Story: Women from Canada's Past* (1993) and *Her Story II* (1995). She herself lives in Ridgeway and has consulted local as well as more general sources for the background to the novel. However, she has not looked at either of Hereward Senior's two books on the Fenians (1978 and 1991). Moreover, the use of the letters IRA on a Fenian flag in 1866 is perhaps doubtful (see G.A. Hayes-McCoy, *A History of Irish Flags* (1979), 152), and certainly the term was not common currency at that time. A good map would also have been a help. In sum, the story is engaging but the historical atmosphere is somewhat unconvincing.

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No Wondrous Thing

Shadows on a Sword: The Second Book of the Crusades. Karleen Bradford. HarperCollins, 1996. 195 pp. \$14.00 paper. ISBN 0-00-648108-6.

As the First Crusade followed in the wake of the People's Crusade in 1096, so *Shadows on a Sword* follows upon the acclaimed *There Will Be Wolves* (1992), but with a different set of young people traversing the crusaders' path and bloody proving-grounds. The earlier book's cross-grained Ursula and sensitive Bruno, unwilling participants in the disastrous People's Crusade, give way to more traditional adventurers indebted to the Crusades of romance. Theobald, knighted at seventeen, enlists under the banner of Godfrey of Bouillon to take part in the First Crusade's three-year trek to Jerusalem, fitfully succumbs to the battle-joy for which he and his friend Amalric have been trained up, and eventually finds peace in the holy city when he marries Emma, a maidservant who, in boy's disguise, has attached herself to Theo as groom. In this low-keyed narrative of violent pilgrimage, however, romance is engaged only to be stripped of glamour. Godfrey of Bouillon's sword conjures up for Mark Twain in *The Innocents Abroad* stirring visions of the holy wars, but Karleen Bradford makes sure her innocents lose sight of that visionary gleam. Theo's relinquished sword, "propped