

## Canadian Anthologies for Young Adult Readers

*Winds through Time: An Anthology of Canadian Historical Young Adult Fiction*. Ed. Ann Walsh. Beach Holme, 1998. 162 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-88878-384-1. *This Land: A Cross-Country Anthology of Canadian Fiction for Young Readers*. Ed. Kit Pearson. Viking, 1998. 320 pp. \$25.00 cloth. ISBN 0-67087-896-0.

Dedicated to W.O. Mitchell, Walsh's anthology attempts to bring Canadian history to life in vignettes that intersect with social studies curricula. With one exception, all the stories are post-confederation and divided between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In terms of setting, the book is more regional than national — nine stories set in British Columbia, one in New Brunswick, one in Saskatchewan, two in Manitoba, two in Ontario. In content, the anthology strikes a more even balance between local interest and national relevance as authors focus upon the World Wars, the internment of the Japanese, the influenza epidemic, and the uncertainties of multiculturalism. The quality of the stories, which are all new publications, is uneven. The majority paint history in convincing and vivid detail, but others have a "written-to-order" feel — as if they are stories written to illustrate history rather than good stories that happen to be historical. The heroine of Holeman's "A Horse for Lisette" is vivid and sympathetic; Findon's "The Scarletina" is a wrenching tale of a mother's arrogant and tragic trust in "medical reform" before vaccines and antibiotics; and the dilemmas of culture and identity faced by Allison in Hatashita-Lee's "Remember, Chrysanthemum" and Waldron's David in "One Candle, Many Lights" will be familiar to many readers. However, I found the young Nellie McClung portrayed in "Higher Ground" uninteresting and unconvincingly precocious and Melanie Roberts in "Polly's Frillery" is a cardboard character at best, while no convincing reason for Polly's time-shift is offered.

Young readers will find the book user-friendly: the stories, though uniformly brief (nine-ten pages), appeal to a range of reading abilities, the type is large and clear, and an appendix offers historical context and background to answer questions that may arise.

Pearson's anthology features maps of Canada and each of the provinces; stories are grouped according to province; Sheila Egoff is hailed as the "first cartographer" of Canadian children's literature; and Hugh MacLennan's assertion that "This land is far more important than we are" precedes the introduction. These geographical images and references stress the physicality of Canada (always a strong element in Canadian literature and self-conception) and ensure each province's representation, but they also reinforce the vision of Canada as a country of competing regions and seem rooted in a traditional political and literary status quo—British Columbia and Ontario represented by four and five stories respectively, while other provinces and "the North" are allotted one or (at most) two selections.

The quality of writing in this anthology is very high. The authors selected include classic figures like Montgomery, Roberts, and Mowat and

modern award winners like Doyle, Lunn, and Wynne-Jones. The selections have an impressive range, featuring male, female and animal protagonists drawn from different backgrounds so that a wide variety of classes, races, geographical, and historical perspectives represent the mosaic of Canada past and present. The stories vary from about ten to twenty-five pages in length. Of twenty-two selections, only eight are self-contained stories (three are the texts of picture books); the others are drawn from novels (which Pearson hopes readers will peruse in their entirety [xi]). The success of this excerpting is uneven. The snippet of *Owls in the Family*, for example, stands alone as a hilarious short story, but the excerpt from *White Jade Tiger* left me rather confused — though I did want to read the complete novel. Still, the high number of excerpts in the anthology probably makes it more attractive to schools and libraries than to general readers who may be slightly annoyed by confronting so many unfinished stories after spending twenty-five dollars.

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### Face-to-Face with Ourselves

*Gifts to Last: Christmas Stories from the Maritimes and Newfoundland.* Selected and introduced by Walter Learning. Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 1996. 212 pp. ISBN 0-86492-206-X .

I had — perversely I admit — expected to experience something distinctive, different, perhaps unique. For somehow the words “Maritime” and “Newfoundland” have about them a promise of peculiarity; and the word “Christmas” conjured up memories of what I thought were experiences unlike those enjoyed and endured by any other children anywhere else in the world. But I was wrong; I admit it and I should have known it. For what this book of twenty Christmas stories illustrate is that the Christmas “spirit” — real or dissembled — is universal: as Walter Learning suggests, we turn the pages, step into different towns with different cultures, experience poverty and plenty, meet all kinds of people we have never known, yet recognize in it all our own Christmas pleasures and pains, “come face to face with ourselves” as children and adults.

This is, of course, what good stories should do, and we are rarely disappointed in this instance; knowing, as we do, the abilities of the many fine writers included here to recreate universality by particularizing its hopes, fears, loves in the lives and relationships of “real” people. It might be Alastair MacLeod’s “To Everything There is a Season,” with its poignant portrayal of that moment when belief in Santa Claus is (happily, in this case) naturally