Half-way through the novel, Esteban's mother disappears during one of her Friday night sprees and the rest of the novel deals with Esteban's vigil and search for her. On Monday, her body is found and Esteban describes his grief at seeing her black coffin lowered into the grave, and his understandable horror at knowing that she has been tortured and murdered. After the overwhelmingly negative representation of this character, the reader cannot help but interpret this senseless crime as the subconscious expression of the author's senseless desire to punish her. Esteban consoles himself with the idea that hell does exist (contrary to his mother's anti-Catholic scepticism) and that its torments await his mother's killer.

The uncanny duplication of the desire to punish the male killer consciously and to punish the bad mother/whore unconsciously is echoed in the last paragraph by Esteban, who by now has been reduced to a ventriloquist's dummy for the author's repressed discourse: "So it was something like that, as if I had been dreaming something really awful, that awful thing that happened to my mama, and at the same time I couldn't remember it, and all that was left was the fear of something I couldn't explain" (96). These telling last words sum up the greatest flaw in Flores Patiño's writing. Despite his evident talent at representing a child's point of view, the author's overbearing fears and desire for revenge thwart the protagonist's unfolding and replace his discourse with harangues that come from elsewhere and lead nowhere.

According to one of the most prominent Mexican newspapers "El Excelsior" "*Esteban el centauro* [Spanish title] is one of those books which will hence forth become a part of our daily life and our dialogue, in the same way that de Saint-Exupéry's *Little Prince* never leaves us." This ludicrous comparison overlooks the fact that no insight is gleaned for the protagonist or the reader by the senseless slaying, and that besides being completely unsuitable as children's literature, *Esteban* expresses little more than raw resentment against the maternal figure which in Mexican terms corresponds to the maligned figure of Malinche, the Mexican Indian mother (traitor) and whore of Hernán Cortés, whose conquest of Mexico was facilitated by Malinche's talent as translator and interpreter. By displacing the indigenous mother with the Anglo-American mother, Flores Patiño has only shifted this culturally entrenched hatred from one alienated feminine figure to another. Woman as difference remains the enemy, the something that Esteban (Flores Patiño) fears and can't explain.

### Latin American Perspectives in Children's Literature: Mythical and Contemporary Struggles in the Work of Luis Garay.

***Jade and Iron: Latin American Tales from Two Cultures.*** Patricia Aldana (ed.). Illus. Luis Garay. Trans. Hugh Hazelton.. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1996. 64 pp. $18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-256-4. ***Pedrito's Day.*** Luis Garay. Stoddart Kids, 1997. 32 pp. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-29992. ***The Long Road.*** Luis Garay. Illus. author. Tundra, 1997. 32 pp. $17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-408-8.

*Jade and Iron: Latin American Tales from Two Cultures* is a collection of indigenous legends and folk-tales, each retold by a different contemporary writer with

illustrations by Luis Garay. The elements of jade and iron represent the meeting of the Aboriginal and European cultures in the formation of Latin America. The African cultural component is briefly mentioned on the jacket flap ["[H]undreds of different cultural entities, drawn from the aboriginal, slave and conquering peoples, co-exist"], but the selection of stories ignores the African presence, in favour of the dichotomy represented in the title. This is a glaring omission given the importance of African heritage and culture in Latin America, and it also mars the Introduction by making it an incomplete and simplistic account of history: "Despite their tragic history, however, both Native and European Latin Americans have created a rich and complex culture." It would be preferable not to speak of culture in such a broad context if no mention is made of other contributors such as Arabic and Asian settlers who were not conquering peoples, yet played significant roles in creating the diverse cultural reality that is only partially represented in this book.

The recommended age level for this book is seven and up, and while most of the stories are suitable reading for this age group, the treatment of gender issues in some of them is highly problematic. This would not be a problem for older readers who can use their critical skills to analyse the underlying cultural assumptions at work in the stories, but such a response cannot be expected from children who first and foremost read for pleasure. Explicit misogyny on the part of the father character determines the plot structure of "The Legend of Manioc," a mythic account of the origin of the root and staple food of indigenous people of southern Brazil. The story represents the birth of a girl baby who is completely rejected by her father by virtue of her sex. Her father "Zatiamaré was so furious that he would not look at her face. He did not even give her a name." He won't speak to his daughter saying "[S]he's no more important to me than the wind." The little girl asks her mother to bury her alive. "That way her father would be happy, and maybe she would be good for something." And indeed she is, for with time she is transformed into the plant that will feed all her people. Manioc's worth, as the food source for her people, is predicated upon her abjection as a worthless being (female child), and this paternal and culturally ingrained contempt for the feminine is hardly a story that we want to pass on to children. To compound this problem even further, the myth structure of such tales encourages passive reception of what sound like universal truths.

Mythic representations of the origins of life-sources such as fire and food make up the majority of the indigenous stories in this collection and, for the most part, they are appropriate for this age group. Many of them are especially interesting for the recurring ecological theme. Human beings are represented as sharing the same interests as other forms of life, and such unreasonable actions as overhunting inevitably lead to disaster. On the other hand, when creatures representing Nature are nurtured, as in the story "Ñucu the Worm," they in turn protect humankind by ensuring an abundant food supply and even by saving the Earth from cosmic cataclysms such as the sky falling.

The editor characterizes the dual structure of the book, which is divided into two parts, by saying that "[T]he Native stories, for the most part, explain in mythical form how the world and the things in the world that are important—

food, fire, volcanoes — came to be. The Latin stories tend to be about people and their relationships with the natural world and each other." While the Native stories do deal with myths of origin, they also explore humankind's relation to Nature, whereas contrary to the editor's description, not one of the European legends explores this theme. Most of the stories in Part II are based on superstitions, and fear of witches and male sorcerers who seduce young girls. (The only character of African origin is a beautiful witch who, despite only helping people, is about to be tried by the Inquisition when she escapes from prison through supernatural means). Again the theme of seducing and kidnapping girls, on which two of the tales are based, does not seem appropriate for young readers and one wonders if the editor assumes that the simple structure of myths and legends automatically makes them suitable for children without giving any consideration to the content.

Introducing children to Latin American culture through indigenous myths and colonial tales is potentially a great idea, but more thought should have been given to the selection of stories. Those selected should present a more inclusive cultural heritage, and be inspirational instead of perpetuating gender and racial biases. However, Luis Garay's artwork is rich and mysterious, as are the majority of tales included in this book.

Luis Garay is also author and illustrator of *Pedrito's Day*, a simple and poignant story of a young boy's daily struggle to survive with his mother and grandmother. His absent father works in an unspecified location referred to simply as the North. It is not clear whether Garay considers the designation to be so overladen with meaning that no further details are required or whether, this being Pedrito's story, the father's exact whereabouts are secondary.

The book's jacket states that Garay "believes young people deserve quality as well as a chance to experience the reality and delights of cultures other than their own." *Pedrito's Day* achieves both these objectives for the art work and the narrative are lyrical and well crafted. The representation of Pedrito's reality does portray both the pleasures and the hardships of the working class in a developing country. The rich environment is effectively evoked through description and drawings that have the sensorial fullness associated with mural paintings. The bustle of the marketplace with all its scents and sounds recreates the sense of community and the diversity of a traditional, peasant market. The text effectively complements the drawings to create an environment filled with sound, colour and smells: "the newly made hats and baskets smelled like a freshly mown meadow." On the other hand, the stark representation of Pedrito's home, with its cracked adobe walls and dirt floor, also tells of the poverty which would be unfamiliar to many North American children.

The protagonist works as a shoe-shine boy and his struggle to save up enough money to buy a bicycle may also be alien for children who are accustomed to receiving such items as birthday gifts or even outside of any special occasion. Pedrito's reasons for wanting a bicycle are also more multifaceted than just the desire for carefree play: he is keenly aware of his share of the family's responsibility and thinks of the bicycle as a mode of transporting his mother's market loads, although he also imagines that he would ride it over bumpy lanes as if it were a stallion. "But best of all, owning a bicycle would

mean that he was big, almost as big as Pedro himself." There is much emphasis throughout the story on the importance of growing up and being big enough to merit having a bicycle. On the first page, we find out that in every one of the letters that Pedrito's father sends from the North, he asks whether his son is big enough yet. It is not clear why it is so important to grow up and be as big as the father, but even when Pedrito becomes temporarily distracted and takes part in a spontaneous soccer game, afterwards he feels "more grown-up than he ever had as he sat with the older boys on the curb." These many unexplained references seem to allude to a subtext perhaps dealing with the sense of frustration that comes from feeling "underdeveloped" or not fully able to forge one's own destiny. This national theme is not mentioned explicitly, but the absent father is a painful reminder of this lack, while his long-distance contribution to the family's economic situation and sense of excision is ambiguously elided with his status as benefactor, as "the big Pedro in the North."

There is a sense of guilt for all these children who know that they should be working even while they are kicking a ball around. This innocent act leads to Pedrito's losing the money for which his aunt had asked him to get change. He is faced with the moral dilemma of deciding whether to tell the truth or make up some story about the money's disappearance. The child's life is portrayed as involving more responsibility and realistic daily hardship than we are accustomed to seeing in children's books and in this sense, too, *Pedrito's Day* opens a window onto another social and cultural reality.

The role of the absent father, who sends letters and money from the North, is also a realistic detail, given that many Mexican and Central American families are separated in order to earn money, but it undermines our sense of the achievement that Pedrito could have enjoyed, had he been able to save the money himself by working within the local economy. The underlying implication that all will be well thanks to Uncle Sam is problematic, and promotes the kind of mythification of the North that many Latin Americans have come to resist or at least to question. The opening lines begin: "[T]here was a Pedro, but he had gone North to work. So now there was only Pedrito — little Pedro — at home with his mama and his *abuela* [grandmother]." They effectively suggest a sense of loss created by this separation, but also suggest a devaluation of the feminine world that little Pedro is reduced to living in, hence the constant desire to grow up and fill that lack left by the absent patriarchal figure.

Pedrito makes the right decision when he tells his aunt the truth about having lost the money and gives it to her from his own hard-earned savings. He is clearly growing up because he faces the situation in the most honourable way possible, and this is reinforced by his mother's admiration of his brave behaviour. The closing words "[N]ow he is big enough" imply that growing up is a complex process of learning to accept responsibility and knowing how to relate to family and community members. Being old enough to have a bicycle means more than having long enough legs or good enough coordination to ride it. Garay manages to imbue this simply told story of challenges, struggle, and the final reward with the idea that Pedrito deserves a bicycle for facing up to his responsibility to replace the lost money instead of lying about the circum-

stances. An unresolvable tension remains between advocating this kind of achievement on the personal and interpersonal level, and obliquely representing the socio-economic problem of the migrant father, who is only able to contribute to his community from the politically complicitous North. Garay goes on to tell the story of the need to escape to the North in order to survive political persecution in *The Long Road*. This book is suitable reading for a slightly older child since it deals with the consequences of civil war: the destruction of home and homeland, exile, and the difficult adaptation to a new home.

Ironically, or perhaps, felicitously, the young boy who is the protagonist longs "to see the busy city, the town beyond the mountain and, most of all, the long and dusty road leading there." While this wish to explore the world beyond the perimeters of his native village refers to a trip to neighbouring areas, the reference to the long and dusty road becomes a potentially positive metaphor for the constant movement and change of life. José gets his wish to take a bus trip across the mountains to spend Christmas with his grandmother, but when he returns to his devastated village, the motif of the journey assumes a broader significance because he must escape the country with his mother. In this story, the absence of the father is explicitly linked to political persecution and disappearance. Upon learning that he must leave everything behind, José's confusion and fear are compared to the "awful empty way" he had felt "when his father had been taken away to prison. They had heard nothing from him since."

The violence wreaked on his village takes place while we witness José's happy visit with his grandmother. The only two illustrations dealing with the war-torn area depict a few burnt-out homes, and a soldier patrol armed with a machine gun whom the refugees must evade in order to cross the border at night. Garay manages to communicate the fear and injustice of war without actually depicting any of the scenes of violence that children might automatically associate with the glorified versions exploited and propagated by television and video games.

The rest of the story deals with the details of flying to the North, going through Immigration, living temporarily in a shelter for refugees, learning to speak English and settling down in a new home where cultural continuity is nevertheless maintained. While Garay's representation of the journey might seem unnecessarily mundane and pragmatic, the simple details of the family's daily struggle will strike children as interesting and help them to imagine the experience of emigration. The strangeness of the new environment is represented in such simple terms as the "bulky unfamiliar jacket" that José must now wear and how "his boots squeaked on the packed snow." The context of José's exile is broadened when at school the children are asked to trace their journeys on a large map, and José realizes that many of them have come from even farther away. While exile is a painful experience for many adults who can rarely accept the arbitrarily imposed journey away from home, Garay presents this story of loss from the adaptable position of the child whose very nature it is to be in the perpetual process of becoming familiar with the world: "Soon a week passed, and then another. The strange faces in the classroom became familiar. José's English improved even more. The cold seemed less bitter. It was almost time for his birthday."

The surprise birthday party, so cherished by all children, is an occasion

to bridge José's past, present and future. The guests are both Hispanic friends from the shelter where the family first lived, and newer friends from school. The "sweet smell, the mix of cake spices and ginger he remembered from Grandmother's, ... the Spanish voices he did not need to strain to understand, ... a piñata full of candies" contrast with the new experience of making a snowman. The gift of a puppy replaces Pinto, the family dog that was abandoned when they fled. The possibility of not only adapting, but of belonging is poignantly expressed when "[F]or the very first time, José felt that the long road that had led him here could be a road to happiness he had not known since an evening long ago in the kitchen of his Uncle Ramón."

*The Long Road* provides us with an opportunity to talk to children about political conflict and exile in realistic and understandable terms, while focusing on the potential that all journeys hold. This book would be valuable to both children who have had to endure the experience of exile, and to those who have never pondered such a reality. Regardless of, or even due to, their differences, children can identify with José's sense of alienation and loss, as well as with the joy of finding friendship and a sense of self that allows for difference.

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## Keepers of Nature, Keepers of Stories

***Keepers of the Night: Native Stories and Nocturnal Activities for Children.*** Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac. Illus. David Kanietakeron Fadden. Fifth House, 1994. 168 pp. $16.95 paper. ISBN 1-895618-39-8. ***Tales Alive.*** Susan Milord (reteller). Illus. Michael Donato. Vermont: Williamson, 1995. 128 pp. $19.95 paper. ISBN 1-913589-79-9.

"In Native North American tradition the family is the center of the community, the meeting place of all of a person's relationships" (*Keepers of the Night* 123). In western society where capitalism dominates, the workplace is the centre of community, and personal life is marginalized, through the rendering of time as a scarce resource. We are in desperate need of visions of how to live that reach beyond the consumer hysteria of mass culture and the frenetic competition of a global economy.

*Keepers of the Night*, the third in the fine Keepers series, offers such a vision. Caduto and Bruchac provide a holistic and interdisciplinary curriculum that includes Native stories, traditions, information about the natural world at night and extensive field-tested activities: the book will be of significant value for teachers and youth group leaders pursuing environmental studies with school-age children. With the exception of the Native stories (in larger print), it acts more as a reference guide for leaders, with comprehensive instructions for night-time activities, detailed information about the natural world (from star