

about them as individuals in their own right. Morley Callaghan may infuriate me, in *Luke Baldwin's Vow*, by underlining three or four times the significance of what his characters say and do. But at least I believe in them and in what they say and do in the first place. And Long John Silver, though living in an almost totally amoral and even more totally incredible world of romance, does more to convince me of the complexity and ambiguity of moral judgments (though not, I admit, of the *need* for judgments) than anyone aboard the Scotian.

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## Native Tales

CARRIE FREDERICKS

*indian legends of canada.* Claude Mélançon. Translated from the French by David Ellis. Gage Publishing Company Limited, Toronto, 1974. 163 pp. \$4.95 paper.

Claude Mélançon, author of *indian legends of canada*, was a self-educated French-Canadian naturalist born in Montreal in 1895. He died in 1973. He enjoyed a successful career with the Canadian National Railways, where he was French publicity director, and in his spare time studied the natural life of his province, which he had loved since childhood. He published books on native birds, fish and animals and toward the end of his life turned his attention toward the native people. He was a methodical, thorough researcher who built up an impressive library in his areas of interest and whose scholarship was recognized by several honorary degrees, membership in the Royal Society of Canada and decoration by the Order of Canada.

Mélançon notes in his Introduction to *Indian legends* that he has not attempted a complete collection of native tales, as these would run to many volumes, but has rather selected the major myths and legends of Canada's Amerindians and arranged them according to geographic groupings, thus giving the book a three-part structure: The Atlantic Coast and Eastern Woodlands, The Prairies, and The Pacific Coast. Each part is preceded by a note on the lifestyle of the inhabitants of that region. The English edition of the book also contains a glossary of Indian terms employed therein and a map showing the twelve major linguistic groups living in what is now Canada at the time of the first European contacts. These were added by the translator, David Ellis. Mélançon tells the stories in a simple, clear, straightforward way which attempts to retain, he tells us in the Introduction, the style of the original, while employing only phrases and images that will be intelligible to a contemporary audience. The stories were tediously reconstructed from their many extant versions, yet achieve a freshness that accurately reflects the imagination of Canada's first people whose outlook was animistic and who saw the elements as supernatural beings and the sun, moon, earth and rivers as spirits. Many of the tales Mélançon has selected have an archetypal quality allying them to the great mythologies of civilisation (creation, flood, fire) but others are more particular to the Canadian experience (why leaves turn red in the fall, why the beaver has a flat tail, why the north wind rules for half the year). In the last few years, and particularly since our centennial, Canadian writers and publishers have shown a strong interest in the traditions and culture of Canada's native people who had such a strong relationship to this land and whose rituals and stories reflected it so powerfully. The recognition of this cultural tradition

by contemporary Canadians may well be important to our sense of identity as a people, our pride in place and our ability to recreate our experience imaginatively, as Atwood, Laurence and Purdy, among others, suggest in their fiction and poetry. Mélançon's book is a good place to start this cultural quest. Its appeal is to people ten years old and up, although it could be used for bedtime reading to younger children and also makes interesting light reading for adults uninitiated into the subject.

David Ellis's translation is faithful to the original, smooth and readable. My major criticism of the book is of its poor visual and general aesthetic appeal. While it does contain very interesting pictures of Indian dress, implements and art, courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum, these are unfortunately reproduced in black and white, diminishing the richness and beauty of the subjects. Even the cover is not as attractive as it might be, with a dull white background which does not show the sketch of the Nootka eagle mask to advantage. Mélançon's tales deserve better visual enhancement than the publishers give them.

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