

noted in a interview, "The most important basic transportation in the New World." Canoes were made from a variety of ways, but they shared three things in common: they were constructed from available resources, they were designed to meet the conditions of the waters on which they were used, and they were all propelled by someone who was facing in the direction he or she was going (unlike the rowboat where the rower looked at where he'd been). Dealing with a variety of cultures from Panama northward, the authors consider three types of canoes: dugouts, skin-covered boats, and bark canoes. The majority of the book considers the Native peoples, although later sections discuss the British and the French, and the last chapter is about "The Modern Canoe." Although both Roberts and Shackleton have lamented the fact that they had to leave canoe-loads of material out of the book, their volume is incredibly rich in what it does include: discussions of the construction and uses of canoes; excerpts from early explorers; and dozens of illustrations, many of which are reproductions of early engravings and full-color eighteenth and nineteenth century paintings. Oh, yes — as the authors proudly and humorously note, there is also the first bibliography illustrated in full color. *The canoe* is Macmillan's entry in the 1983 Coffee Table Book sweepstakes; but it's much more than that: it's a lively, colorful, and very knowledgeable and thorough labor of love, and one which would be a valuable addition to the shelves of any high school library.

Jon C. Stott

COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS:

A REVIEW OF 5 NATIVE PEOPLES' FOLKLORE COLLECTIONS

Legends of the river people, Norman Lerman and Betty Keller. November House, 1976. 127 pp. \$6.95 paper ISBN 0-88894-115-3; ***Tales of the Mohawks***, Alma Greene/Forbidden Voice. J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Ltd., 1975. 186 pp. paper. ISBN 0-460-95086-X; ***Indian tales of the northwest***, Patricia F. Mason. CommCept Publishing Ltd., 1976. 102 pp. \$5.95 paper. No ISBN; ***Tales of the Labrador Indians***, Harold Horwood. Harry Cuff Publications, Ltd., 1981. 50 pp. \$4.00 paper. ISBN 0-919095-15-1; ***Song of the forest***, Isabel Barclay. Oberon Press, 1977. unpaginated. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88750-228-8.

With the increasing interest in Canadian Native Peoples' literature, there has been a steady growth in the publication of Indian folklore, myths, legends, and tales. Some books have been very good; some very bad; most mediocre. Still, even the worst may provide some insights into the beliefs and psyche of the different tribes. All too often, though, the telling of the tales is not done by Native Peoples but by whites who have refined both tales and accompanying English in their attempt to cater to white audiences and, thus, have blurred

the original vision and spirit upon which the stories are based. In this survey of five books, I have tried to isolate what is good and bad about each.

Legends of the River People, compiled by Norman Lerman and edited by Betty Keller, is an anthology of stories of the Chilliwack Indians of British Columbia. Originally, the late anthropologist Lerman had gathered some hundred authentic tales, variants, and fragments for posterity. Betty Keller has selected thirty of these stories and interwoven them in a framework of a five-day-long tribal reunion, somewhat like Chaucer's *Canterbury tales* or Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in which tales are told by different Native elders and in which inherent interruptions, such as questions from youngsters, frequently occur to give the book an authentic flavour. And therein lies the problem.

This approach in retelling a number of stories unrelated in theme and plot is unsuccessful. Moreover, the technique is disruptive, distracting, and disconcerting. The reader has difficulty getting into the tales, which are the essence of the book, when he is constantly jarred by banal interruptions. Unlike the shifts in focus and narration in, say, Conrad's *Heart of darkness*, these shifts in *Legends of the River People* are unnecessary. For example, the telling of the archetypal flood story by Si-la Harry and his wife is spotted with "He paused, then said" and "She paused to listen to her husband again, and then went on." Instead of effectively tying diverse legends in a continuous narrative, the authors may have betrayed themselves to literary pretension. In short, the book would have been better as a collection of tales, classified by genre or theme.

It is too bad that the technique mars the readability of the book, for some of the stories are worth having been read. The anticlimactic conclusion, a popular characteristic in Indian tales, is preserved in story of the spirit-transformer, Kels, who having changed the grandsons to stone complies with the wishes of the grandfather and changes him to stone. The archetypal tricksters Raven and Mink provide lively humour in their misadventures amongst the people and animals. There is the poignant story, not unlike Orpheus and Eurydice, in which an Indian brave, Muquastayise, wrongly kills his wife and goes to the land of ghosts to fetch her, only to lose her when he could not control his passion before his wife is fully among the living again.

The bonus in *Legends of the River People* is the "Reader's Notes," provided by Betty Keller. These fourteen pages of brief explanations of Native customs, history, and concepts are quite informative for readers who know little of the River People. For instance, the reader learns something about the *Sxwaxwwe*, the lower Fraser People's mask; the burning tree; the use of fire and water for purification; and funeral rites in burying relatives in a family grave box. These short notes clarify customs not readily ascertained by the reader.

Tales of the Mohawks, written by Alma Greene and illustrated by R.G. Miller, two members of the Six Nations Indian Reserve, is a collection of tales, customs, and anecdotes of the Mohawk (Canienga) Nation. R.G. Miller provides a number of stylized and naturalistic pencil illustrations which accompany the various

stories. Alma Greene, "Forbidden Voice" in Mohawk, organizes her stories in 13 chapters, with each chapter having three to seven tales of varying lengths.

There is much to praise and much to criticize in this book. Alma Greene's text is awfully preachy. The old traditional Mohawk way is always better than the white man's. In a number of stories, Greene stresses that, when a Native person becomes ill, he should consult a tribal medicine man for a herbal cure. If he goes to white physicians, he may endanger not only his life and limb, but also his spirit. Even a white man may benefit from the spiritual medicine of the Mohawk. A white farmer falls from the roof of a barn and a Mohawk medicine man gives him Gah-no-da and heals the internal injuries in a short time. Implicitly, Greene condemns the white society for its lack of faith in Native remedies and for seducing the Mohawk to the white ways. Secondly, Greene's book is depressing. There are too many tales of dying, and of graves. She tells of John, a Mohawk husband who cannot bear to perform the tribal rites of giving away his dead wife's possessions and prefers to pine away for her ghost. Thirdly, the latter half of *Tales of the Mohawks* seems to be overly influenced by European fairy tales. For example, the story of Jerry and his Cat Rag Band is a variant of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. There are the stories of Hallowe'en, Gilbert the Ghost, and the haunted houses — all smack of regarbing European stories in Native dress. And finally, Greene's style lacks vitality. Perhaps this is her intention, but the drabness of her prose makes the telling monotonous:

A man, his wife and their two-month-old baby moved into a small house in the country. In this particular community, the houses were from one-half to one mile apart. The house had two rooms downstairs and one large room upstairs, and someone had removed the stairs. It was late when the family moved in, so they put up a bed in the front room for the night. So it would be possible for them to go upstairs, the man would begin making a stairway the next day. (from "The Haunted House," p. 147)

Still, *Tales of the Mohawks* does give some glimpses into the Mohawk world. Greene affirms that the Mohawk depend greatly on the communion of their present day world with the world of nature and with the world of the spirit. The old customs and beliefs may be trampled by the white man's civilization and inventions, but they should be neither denied nor forgotten. This Alma Greene makes clear. In almost every story, she reaffirms how trust and faith in the customs and traditions will make the Mohawk strong or will provide deliverance. Secondly, Greene ventures into stories about life after the coming of the white man. While most Native Peoples' literature focuses on the myths, unadulterated by European ethos and themes, in a timeless, surrealistic world, Greene's book takes into account the entrenchment of the white society. Thirdly, unlike other tribal myths that stress Raven, Coyote, and other totem-animals, *Tales of the Mohawk* opens the door to other Mohawk lore, the Little People, the witches, and the fortune-tellers. Like their European counterparts, the Mohawk Little People help redress wrongs perpetrated on the innocent and

the helpless. Most significant, though, in her contribution to the understanding of the Six Nation Indians, are Greene's anecdotes on Mohawk customs. These anecdotes, scattered throughout the text, provide greater insight than many of her tales.

Indian tales of the northwest, published by CommCept Publishing Limited, is an aggregate of 23 stories from the various tribes of the Northwest Indians of British Columbia. Its illustrator, Joey Morgan, has provided several interestingly stylized-naturalistic composite pencil sketches that have the flavour of Native artists but are visually geared to the non-Native. Its writer, Patricia F. Mason, has revised and abridged the stories, compiled by various anthropologists, notably Franz Boas, so that they may be suitable for children. Its ethnic consultant, David L. Rosen, has assured the reader that these tales "still reflect the spirit in which the oral traditions were intended."

One problem with this collection is its organization. Instead of classifying the stories under the headings of genre or theme this anthology prefers the consistency of ethnic or tribal groupings. Thus, we have Interior Salish-Lillooet, Athapaskan-Chilcotin, Haida, Wakashan-Nootka and so on. Admittedly, there seems to be some pattern to the animal tales and some thought in the selection of stories, but there is the pell-mell of thematic structure. For instance, the first story is an interior Salish-Lillooet tale, "The Origin of Light and Fire"; the fifth and sixth are Athapaskan-Chilcotin, "Raven Brings Daylight to the People" and "Raven Brings Fire to the People"; and the seventeenth is a Wakashan-Nootka tale, "The Origin of Fire." Would it not be better to group these myths together so that the reader might compare the variation and parallels? Furthermore, although the writer has competently rewritten the works, she has not captured the Native flavour. In short, the stories are sanitized for the non-Native children.

Besides the variants in the animal myths, there are adventure tales and love romances that rival European tales. For instance, the Athapaskan-Carrier "The Orphan Boy Who Became a Hero," which has the classic theme of poor-boy-makes-good, is really three consecutive stories rolled into one. The orphan not only struggles to be accepted by the tribe, not only gains wife and fame by destroying various monsters, but also dies tragically in his last battle, somewhat like Beowulf.

The beauty of this collection, though, is that most of the 23 stories are short, about two and a half pages in length. They can be read to children with ease.

Tales of the Labrador Indians, compiled and edited by Harold Horwood, tries to correct some of the problems inherent in retelling orally-transmitted tales into written form. Horwood records these ten folktales, retold by perfectly bilingual Nascaupi Indians. After each story, Horwood gives a brief commentary. John Maunder provides relevant illustrations.

On the surface, these ten tales are but variants on the universal themes of creation, discovery and transformation. "The Sun in the Snare" explains how

Jacopish (the name meaning Man in the Moon) unwittingly ensnares the sun and having discovered this, releases it and never sets traps on the sun's path again. This, Horwood comments, is an explanation of the eclipse of the sun. "The Legend of Winter" is a quest in which a young man searches for his father, who is King Winter, and defeats him, and thus "saves the people from death by cold." Several archetypal myths are combined in this retelling: the myth of impregnation of a virgin by the wind or spirit, the search for the father, the battle between summer and winter, and the echo of the Oedipus myth. All the stories are bare-bone retellings, but here they work: unembellished, these folk tales reflect the stark beauty of unrefined, untampered with literature of the oral tradition. They have a grittiness and naiveté that is acceptable. Moreover, Horwood's commentaries put the Nascaupi stories in context of the world family of archetypes and universal themes.

Finally, *Song of the forest* by Isabel Barclay is a collection of stories about the birds and animals before the appearance of the Indian people. Taken from the Native Peoples of the Prairie and the Pacific Northwest, these eleven stories are charming, short, and unpretentious. The accompanying illustrations are taken from a seventeenth century manuscript entitled *Les raretés des Indes* by Louis Nicolas, a young Jesuit.

Although the price (\$6.95) seems disproportionate to the number of pages (40 pp.), *Song of the forest* is an enchanting little book for children. The stories are retold simply enough that children can read them on their own. Although the original stories were episodic and unrelated, Barclay creates a continuous narrative. She begins with "How the World Was Made" and concludes with "Song of the Forest," the story of the little tree fungus. Although all the animals have human qualities, they retain their individual traits as Water Beetle, Deer, Hawk, Coyote, or Raven. In keeping with the theme of how things came to be, Barclay not only recounts how the animals got their special traits, but also defines the true nature of the individual beast or bird. For example, in "How the Animals Got Their Names," the author provides a touching yet humorous story how each animal decided on its name and how squirrel cried so hard that he washed off all the colour under his eyes because he was given the name Squirrel.

Perhaps the greatest worth of *Song of the forest* is that it is simple. It does not pretend to be scholarly myth-making or recounting. And because of this, the book transcends the ethnic barriers and eludes scholarly pedantry.

Upon having reviewed these five books, I find two things very obvious. At a time when the lore of Native Peoples is fashionable, we should expect varying degrees of literary quality from both Native and non-Native writers. Secondly, all too often, a compiler's excuse for a paltry, inadequate, and uninformative introduction is that the reader should just read and enjoy the stories alone. Let the literary buyer beware.

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