

anticipation. The pain of separation, hardships, and loss (which small children can understand) is alleviated by the symbols of seed and blossom.

Ann Blades' full page watercolours perform an essential role in creating specifically a sense of time and place. Grey stone houses with rows of shuttered windows; lamplight falling on a round table; Grandmother's brightly striped apron, blue shawl and white cap; Pettranella's high black boots, black stockings, and long dress and coat; the kerchiefs, tall hats, and solemn peasant faces of the immigrants crowded into the customs shed provide both a period and an ethnic flavour. Blades has a recognizable style characterised by reliance on simplified form — the pencil-like parallels of birch trunks, rectangular buildings and boxes, the circles of cart wheels, table, and sunhat, and the wedge of geese. Colour is used emotively with greys and dull browns denoting the old life, pale blues and bright greens the new. The total effect of colour and form is one of liveliness and of wide-ranging emotion as the child responds to her various environments. Both *Pettranella* and *Michi's New Year* are admirable picture-storybooks because they reflect creative cooperation on the part of author, illustrator and publisher, evidence of the high standard that Canadians are now achieving in this genre.

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## NATIONAL SYMBOLS WITH FLAT FEET

*The Canada goose*, Judith Drynan. Illus. Laurie McGaw. Horizon Publishing, 1980. 33 pp. \$10.95 cloth. ISBN 0-919157-17-3.

This little allegory was apparently based on an operetta of the same title with a text also by Judith Drynan, and its musical origins are evident both in the predominance of dialogue and in the songs scattered through the text. Some of these lyrics are more successful than others:

The Canada Goose!  
The Canada Goose!  
Touch his feathers and you won't come loose.  
You can come along.  
You can sing the song.  
Sing the song of freedom with  
The Canada Goose!

bounces along cheerfully enough, as does the wicked Wizard's gleeful:

Soon I will utter my guttural curse,  
Making your life turn from bad to worse.

But the closing chorus:

Look at me! I'm a Canadian  
Joined to a Canadian, here I stand!  
Look at me! I'm a Canadian!  
Joined to all Canadians across the land!

almost drives one to renounce citizenship. Ca-na-di-an is an intractable word for versification: it's hard to imagine what the composer can have done with those lines, and without the music they certainly make dreary reading. The inclusion of the tunes, or a simple piano score for the songs, would be a valuable addition to the present format of the book.

The story line of *Canada Goose*, like that of many greater operettas, is rather thin. A group of glum, adult Canadians known as the Miseries is accosted by a travelling youth named "The Motto of Canada, From Sea to Sea" (and henceforth called The Motto) who tries to cheer them up. They prefer to look on the black side of things as they are under the curse of The Wizard of Woe, who arrives and chases away The Motto. The Motto conveniently happens upon a symbolic group of the Children of Canada, who deplore the adults' negativism but don't know how to dispell it; fortunately the enormous Canada Goose comes to their aid. Using the folk tale ploy, the Goose (C.G.) has the children get stuck to him and then to each other, forming a long line which is so comical that the Miseries must smile. The Wizard intervenes, but after much laborious discussion C.G. breaks his wand, he loses his evil power, and decides to be glad he's a Canadian too.

While one may sympathize with the message of this book — that we should appreciate the freedom and plenty which Canada affords — the text doesn't manage to transcend the banality and superficial cheeriness which is the inevitable risk with this sort of didacticism. The idea of people sticking to the Goose, as a symbol of national unity, is an amusing one, but not very much is done with it; the bite of the folk tale, where the "sillies" so stuck are really frightened, and the doleful princess struck into helpless hilarity by the sight of them, is missing here. As the characters are allegorical ciphers and have no real personalities, no real emotion can be conveyed. There is neither surprise nor a sense of inevitability about the events of the story; and as allegory depends so heavily upon the significance of the actions which occur, this lack is fatal. The events leading up to the Wizard's defeat appear arbitrary and unnecessarily protracted — not that he ever seemed a serious threat anyway. The text is, moreover, encumbered by far too many "he said's and "they cried's which make for ponderous reading.

The book is partly saved by the illustrations; these radiate the good humour and sense of enjoyment which the text praises but doesn't manage to capture. A swarm of flies circling the Wizard's wand, the mayor's official medal of a face with its tongue stuck out, and the little alligators and bugs at the bottom of the pictures making funny comments in voice balloons are the sort of details which delight and hold the reader, and in the long run probably convey messages more effectively than overt preaching can.

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#### FROM THE FAR EAST, TO PEANUT BUTTER AND HOCKEY

*Letter to Vietnam*, from the film by Eugene Buia based on the experience of Garry Son Hoan. Virgo Press, 1980. 93 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920528-11-2; *Suti, a foster child*, Willy Dirks. Highway Book Shop, 1980. 18 pp. \$1.50 paper. ISBN 0-8854-216-3.

In Toronto, Garry Son Hoan, the eight-year-old refugee in *Letter to Vietnam*, is surprised at the packaging of food: "Here they even put *milk* in boxes." Suti, the Indonesian child of the second book included in this review, wants to join Brownies. (Brownies in Indonesia?) Both books share a common theme, the conflict inherent in a child's experience of two cultures. In *Suti, a foster child*, a little girl on the island of Java moves gradually toward health, schooling and the accoutrements of western development as a adopted foster child of a Canadian family. Garry, on the other hand, is thrown into the conflict headlong when his parents in Vietnam put their three children on a fishing boat to leave the country forever: the parents remain behind.

Because of their subject matter, both books deal implicitly with the conflicting sets of values that individuals caught between two cultures must tolerate. The story of Garry's grief in leaving his parents, and his fear at moving into a totally unknown world, with no clear destination, is leavened by his gradual adjustment to live in Toronto as a Canadian. He discovers peanut butter (it almost chokes him), beavers, MacDonaldis, Santa Claus and hockey. Because the text is written as a series of letters to his mother, Canada is revealed to us in a new perspective with connections and comparisons made to his former life in Saigon. Most haunting is his astonishment at the difference between Vietnam and Canada: he is surprised on arrival not to hear shooting or see guns. His implicit question, as he adjusts to life here, is "why are these two places so different?" Throughout the book there is tremendous tension caused