

tifs du roman. Les personnages masculins, eux, sont relégués au second plan: adjuvants des femmes fortes ou excentriques inoffensifs. . .

Si ce récit ne se distingue pas par la finesse ou l'économie des moyens, il n'est cependant pas dépourvu d'intérêt aux points de vue social et psychologique: les personnages sont bien incarnés; les atmosphères sont suggestives; le microcosme de l'immeuble est cohérent. La plus grande qualité de ce texte réside cependant dans l'impact global qu'exercera sans doute le personnage de Gloria sur l'imaginaire des jeunes lecteurs. C'est une jeune fille tout à fait ordinaire, orpheline évidemment, héroïne évidemment, à l'aise matériellement, débrouillarde et douée d'un bon sens de l'humour, et qui, rêve suprême pour des adolescents, mène déjà une existence tout à fait autonome. Posséder son propre appartement, organiser son horaire à sa guise, recevoir des ami(e)s comme bon vous semble, ne pas avoir de comptes à rendre à personne d'autre que soi-même--et comble du bonheur--être sur le point de tomber en amour, vous tenez là le modèle auquel on ne peut que s'identifier. Et lire n'est-il pas, après tout, vivre une expérience désirable?

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THE POWER OF STORY

Who is Frances Rain? Margaret Buffie. Kids Can Press, 1987. 192 pp., \$4.95 paper. ISBN 0-919964-834; **The last story, the first story.** Richard Thompson. Annick Press, 1988. 126 pp., \$8.95, \$5.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-025-1, 1-55037-024-3.

These two novels have more than an exotic Canadian location in common. In each a young girl must learn, through the healing power of story and through an experience with the other-worldly, to accept the loss of a father and to find new strength in herself. In her struggle to come to terms with her own past, each girl also unearths a deeper social or familial history of maternal love, strength and sacrifice.

The heroine of Margaret Buffie's *Who is Frances Rain?* is fifteen-year-old Lizzie, the eldest child of a newly and unhappily reconstituted family. Her father abandoned the family two years before the action of the novel and her mother, a driven and tense lawyer, has remarried--unexpectedly and seemingly inappropriately--a potter with a yen for "baking after-school cookies and tuna casseroles." Toothy Tim (the nickname with which the children skewer their new stepfather) has forced a family vacation at Lizzie's grandmother's

cottage at Rain Lake in Northern Manitoba. While there, Lizzie deals with her own unarticulated sense of abandonment by excavating a ruined cabin site on the nearby Rain Island. There she discovers an old pair of wire-rimmed child's spectacles which mysteriously allow her to see the past, to witness the terrible loneliness of an eccentric turn-of-the-century female prospector, Frances Rain, and to situate herself within her own family of very different and very strong women. While the story is moving--the lesson that Lizzie must learn about how pain can be passed from one generation to the next is a difficult one--the first-person, "hard-boiled" narration is not always convincing; it is not clear why Lizzie is writing this story or who she is addressing in her "Prologue," and her continued references to *Alice in Wonderland* occasionally seem contrived.

The intertextual references throughout Richard Thompson's *The last story, the first story*, however, are seamless. This novel about the seductive, sometimes dangerous, but always potentially healing source and power of storytelling draws from George MacDonald's *The princess and the goblin*, J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, Mark Twain's *The adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck everlasting*, as well as from native tales and Greek mythology to enact on a textual level what takes place on the narrative level. Eleven-year-old Summer, the child of a new and idealistic generation of British Columbia homesteaders, is haunted by but unable to talk about the recent accidental death of her father and she longs for the comfort of complete forgetfulness. Her discovery of a leather thong--studded with "small bones, pieces of carved wood, feathers, small polished stones, shells, shapes made of clay, shards of metal"--tangled in the roots of a downed spruce tree is the event which occasions her adventure in the land of the "Children of the Known." These "lost children," who never grow old and never die, have evolved an oral, storytelling culture--the thong is their storytelling belt, their always shifting communal memory; each of the talismans threaded onto it represents a life-story which is, however, told only until it is replaced with another. The immortality of the lost children is predicated upon a recurring and ritual loss of memory and identity. Summer is tempted by this possibility for appeasing her pain, but she chooses instead to return to memory and the novel ends with a storytelling moment, a healing recreation of the happiness she and her father once shared.

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