

detailed, the architecture, clothing, coins, etc. are true to the time and place and work well with Lawson's text. Often reminiscent of Vermeer, especially in their lighting effects and in their plentiful use of gold and yellow, Morin's art successfully conveys a sense of heat, wonder and "the faraway days of cloud-breathing dragons."

Kenneth Radu's most recent book is a collection of short stories, *Snow Over Judea* (*Véhicule*, 1994). He teaches English at John Abbott College in Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Quebec.

TWO COLLECTIONS OF NATIVE STORIES

How We Saw the World. C.J. Taylor. Illus. author. Tundra Books, 1993. 32 pp., \$17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-302-2; **Legends of Vancouver.** E. Pauline Johnson-Tekahionwake. Illus. Laura Wee Lay Laq. Quarry Press, 1991. 141 pp., \$16.95, \$9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55082-024-9, 1-55082-025-7.



Pauline Johnson-Tekahionwake and C.J. Taylor, both of Mohawk descent, share the same goal of fostering understanding of Native cultures and Native worldviews. Their books, however, differ markedly in tone and style, and the differences reveal the extent to which, in eighty years, we have changed our way of writing about our First Nations.

In addition to four books of single tales (the most recent of which is *The Secret of the White Buffalo*), C.J. Taylor has written and illustrated *How We Saw the World*, her first collection. Of the nine stories in this collection, Taylor writes: "They try to explain the mysteries of nature

to us and I hope they will help you to see the world as we see it." Derived from nine First Nations from the Micmac to the Bella Coola, the stories are varied not only in source, but also in subject, mood and tone. They tell of the origins of Niagara Falls and the Pacific coast islands; of horses, butterflies, rabbits, and owls; and of tornadoes. They tell how dogs willingly die to help their human companions, how the first humans learn to cope with severe winters, and how

the great Creator, angered by a constantly interrupting owl, makes that bird one of the strangest in the world. The last story, "How the world will end," warns what will happen if the rhythm of the cosmic dance is disturbed. Overall, the collection depicts a universe of beauty, mystery, and heroism as well as of cruelty and evil—and of humour; a universe in which spirit, nature, and human exist in harmony and in which "all creatures, especially people," must strive to "keep the earth in balance."

In Taylor's harmonious universe, however, the heroes are all male; the spirits and the Great Creator are male; and the dog helpers are male. Although the illustrations show both boys and girls, both female and male villagers, the pronoun "she" appears in only one story, that of the sisters who enjoy playing over a cliff so much that they are transformed into the Niagara Falls. Even when referring to an obviously female animal (such as the mother mallard), Taylor chooses to write "it," not "she."

Ideally, Taylor's crowded pictures should be viewed as large canvasses; nevertheless, the book's larger format and high quality colour reproduction succeed in reinforcing the impression of a universe in which spirits, animals, humans, and landscape interact and inter-flow. In each illustration, dynamic swirling and spiralling patterns of line and colour link the spirit and the material realms. Typically, solid shapes and earth colours define the human world; in contrast, the spirits are transparent figures of white, blue, and violet, with radiating rays of glowing hair. In the background are richly-coloured landscapes of prairie, foothills, southwestern desert, and northwestern coast, with occasional glimpses of an Edenic human community. One of the most successful illustrations (featured also on the cover) focuses on the human-horse bond: set against the man's powerful face, the head of the horse that has been born out of the water merges into the water spirit in a blue-white arc, enclosing and protecting the distant idyllic scene of horses peacefully grazing next to several teepees.

In close-ups, Taylor's human faces are individualized and powerfully expressive, but the bodies are often stiff, awkwardly posed, and unnaturally proportioned. Although the Great Creator's exaggerated hands effectively draw attention to his shaping power, his grotesque, mask-like face and fixed smile occasionally make him seem cold and even mocking.

Two illustrations are potentially frightening to young children. The gargoyle-like fiery Flying Head, with bulging eyes, huge pendulous nose, and fanged mouth, looms over a brave white dog trying to protect his human friend. Although the spirit dog above assures us that the dog's sacrifice will be rewarded, the painfulness of a story in which the companion dog gives up his life with "a wild yelp of pain" is mitigated but not dispelled. In the story of Eagle Man's revenge, the vivid depiction of the villagers dropping one by one into the dark water may make more frightening a narrative in which a boy is abandoned by his parents then rejected by his uncle and his villagers—actions for which we

are given no motive.

With the new interest in the work of Pauline Johnson, a reprint of *Legends of Vancouver*, the first published collection of stories by a Native Canadian writer, is timely—but problematic. Johnson's purpose, like Taylor's, is to make her audience more aware of traditional legends and the values expressed through them, to reassert the dignity of the Native way of life. Johnson's audience, however, is obviously white, nineteenth-century, and British in origin. Even if we agree with the publishers' note at the end of the book that Johnson's language is "time bound" and not intended to be patronizing or derogatory, we are still uneasy, in this day of political correctness, when reading about "savages" whose medicine-men use "witchcraft" and "sorcery," whose beliefs are labelled "ancient poetic superstitions," whose rites are "wild" and "strange," whose tales are told to "Pale-faces," and who use expressions such as "You savvy." The prose at times seems stilted and too ornate, the dialogue too formal and sentimental, the diction archaic. The author's comments sometimes seem patronizing ("the quaint broken English that is never so dulcet as when it slips from an Indian tongue") or naïve ("One of the great secrets of England's success with the savage races has been her consideration, her respect, her almost reverence of native customs, ceremonies, and potentates"). Yet once we move beyond the barriers of the few unsettling comments, we can respond pleasurably to Johnson's descriptive and storytelling skill, for her prose style is rhythmic, evocative, and poetical—more sophisticated than Taylor's—as in this description of the Lions: "Sometimes the slanting rains festoon scarves of mist about their crests, and the peaks fade into shadowy outlines, melting, melting, forever melting into the darkness." The narrative structure, too, is sophisticated: each tale is framed (*à la* Hawthorne) by an anecdote set in Johnson's time, revealing the source of the tale (usually Chief Joe Capilano), providing background, and guiding the interpretation.

Drawn mainly from the Salish culture, from the Squamish bands who lived north of Vancouver, the fifteen stories in *Legends* are primarily etiological, revealing the origins of the Lions (or the Two Sisters), the "fire-flower," Siwash Rock, the Fraser salmon-run, the cathedral trees in Stanley Park, the murmur of the Tulameen River. In the story of the Deluge, Mount Baker plays the part of Ararat. The collection ends with "A Royal Mohawk Chief," an account of the part played by Johnson's father, a Mohawk chief, in inducting Prince Arthur into the Mohawk community.

The themes include the "world-old heroism of vicarious sacrifice"; the devotion of husbands, fathers, and lovers; the evil of greed, especially the greed to rule ("the one barbarous instinct"); and the rewards for "tenderness and self-abnegation, and personal and mental cleanliness." Female as well as male heroism is celebrated: the sisters nurture Peace and Brotherhood, and women are honoured as "future mothers of the tribe."

Laura Wee Lay Laq, a Native artist, has decorated the book with red and black

geometric circle designs (also inspired by Salish culture), one before each story.

The first book in the Canadian Children's Classics series, *Legends of Vancouver* is a valuable sourcebook and sociohistorical document. For young readers or listeners, however, Johnson's language may have to be edited or explained.

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BY THEIR TALES SHALL WE KNOW THEM

Pancho's Pinata. Stefan Czernecki and Timothy Rhodes. Illus. Stefan Czernecki. Hyperion, 1992. 40 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920534-09-8; **The Sleeping Bread.** Stefan Czernecki and Timothy Rhodes. Illus. Stefan Czernecki. Hyperion, 1992. 40 pp., \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-920534-84-8; **The Nutmeg Princess.** Richardo Keens-Douglas. Illus. Annoucuchka Galouchko. Annick Press, 1992. Unpag., \$15.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55037-239-4; **How the East Pond Got Its Flowers.** Althea Trotman. Illus. Sasso. Sister Vision Press, 1991. Unpag., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-920813-85-2.

Four recent books make salutary contributions to better Canadian understanding of Caribbean and Hispanic culture. Two of them, *The Nutmeg Princess* by Richardo Keens-Douglas, a Canadian from Grenada, and *How the East Pond Got Its Flowers* by Althea Trotman, an Antiguan Canadian, are island tales of folk wisdom with roots in ancient African spiritualism. The other two, both written collaboratively by Stefan Czernecki, a Canadian of German origin, and Timothy Rhodes, an Ontarian, are folk tales of Latin America, one Mexican, one Guatemalan. Both of these books are rooted in Hispanic Christian belief.

Tulah, the child protagonist in Trotman's tale, is small for her age, "small-small" when she was born with a caul draped over her face. Being "small-small" means one likely has special power, and being born with a caul reinforces the likelihood. As Mother Silla, the local healer, says to Tulah's mother, "She is going come someting big, small as you see she is," and "Any chile born small-small wid caul over dem face come someting special." This proves to be true as wise Mother Silla instills her power into the small-small Tulah, who is tested in faith as she plants pond flower seeds in the unhopeful mud of East Pond and learns that anything can grow anywhere. And in time Tulah learns that Mother Silla herself had been born with a caul: "We two small-small people."

Set in Antigua in slave times, the story, illustrated in beautiful line drawings by Sasso (a Toronto-Jamaican artist) is a wise tale. For many it will not be an easy read at first as the West Indian English will take some getting used to. But it is worth the effort for the language is beautiful.

Different in treatment, but not so far removed in theme is *The Nutmeg Princess*. Keens-Douglas and Galouchko have produced a gemlike book, the