

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

story of a boy and girl, Aglo and Petal, and their growing friendship with a small woman, Petite Mama (only four feet tall, she too might have been a “small-small”). High up on the hill, near the bottomless lake, Petite Mama grows the best fruit on Spice Island. She also knows of the Nutmeg Princess who appears to very few. In time, Aglo and Petal undergo their own tests and by selflessness earn the ability to communicate with the Princess. Soon the Princess and Petite Mama both disappear leaving the plantation to Aglo and Petal, who make nutmeg “the most precious crop on that little island in the Caribbean.”

Galouchko’s painted illustrations in brilliant unrestrained colours depict magically the fruits, flowers, birds and beasts with their supernatural attributes. *Obeah* is in the air on Spice Island, and its power touches everyone, even attentive readers.

Two Central American stories, *The Sleeping Bread*, a Guatemalan tale, and *Pancho’s Pinata*, a Christmas story of Mexico, are persuasively told in text and visuals by their two authors, one of whom, Stefan Czernecki, doubles as illustrator. The stylized, bordered paintings, colourful, highly designed, and flat, remind one of Spanish and Mexican tiles, both the brightly glazed and the calmer terra cotta ones. Both books use the right-hand pages for paintings, the left for text, and in *Pancho’s Pinata*, each left-hand page is decorated with a small cactus motif. Both are extraordinarily lovely, and both evoke Central American village life in the light of an intense faith.

In *The Sleeping Bread* the villagers’ selfish exile of the ragged blue-eyed beggar, Zafiro, results in the baker’s much loved bread failing to rise. Only Beto, the kindly baker, is able to persuade Zafiro to return, and together they discover why the bread sleeps. New bread is made for San Simon’s festival. In the parade the saint looks out through his mask “and his blue eyes shone.”

From all four of these fine folk tales there radiates a judicious blend of magic and reality. In fact, it would not be far off the mark to use the term magic realism of any of these stories. Miraculous things happen, and powerful powers abound. The common denominator in all folk wisdom is that it has the knack of crossing cultural boundaries. Canadians ought to welcome these beautiful newcomers.

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TYING LANGUAGE TOGETHER

Bineshiinh Dibaajmowin/Bird Talk. Lenore Keeshig-Tobias. Illus. Polly Keeshig-Tobias. Sister Vision Press, 1991. Unpag., \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-920813-89-5; **The Flower Beadwork People.** Sherry Farrell Racette. Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1991. 34 pp., cloth, paper. ISBN 0-920915-23-X, 0-920915-25-6.

Sherry Farrell Racette’s *The Flower Beadwork People* concerns a people who tied language together, literally—Cree with French, Ojibway with Scots. These