

the rain, his face, head, and hands sporting green, red, orange, yellow, and brown marker colours. And in the most recent of these books, *Mmm, Cookies!*, the printed story does not tell the entire story. Here the printed story tells us that Christopher takes the cookie he bakes at school home to his parents. This is all. The last two illustrations, however, elaborate this ending. For one thing, the cookie is huge, far taller than the two parents. For another thing, the parents do not eat the cookie. The final illustration shows us at least fifteen kids, eleven birds, four animals, and two insects eating the cookie. And on the way to the feast we can see a number of birds, and at least one pterodactyl.

The message of these books is, then, excess. They are over the top, and for this reason it is easy to understand why they are popular with young readers. They give them what they want: action and empowerment. They sanction exuberance. What strikes me as less understandable is why these books are so popular with adults. I can only think that adult readers enjoy complicity with childhood innocence in the perhaps mistaken assumption that innocence is bliss.

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Canadian in Michigan?

Bud Not Buddy. Christopher Paul Curtis. Delacorte, 1999. 243 pp. \$24.95. ISBN 0-385-32306-9.

Bud Not Buddy won the American Library Association's prestigious Newbery Award as the best children's novel of 1999. Published by Delacorte Press in New York, the novel is set in the American state of Michigan. Its author, Christopher Paul Curtis, himself grew up in Flint, and retains his American citizenship — if he didn't, he wouldn't qualify for the Newbery. In the light of all that, why might a journal called *Canadian Children's Literature* want to review this novel? The answer is simple. For all his American credentials, Curtis now lives in Windsor, Ontario — just far enough across the river from Detroit to be in Canada.

That *Bud Not Buddy* might be considered a Canadian children's novel raises interesting questions about what might constitute Canadian children's literature. On the face of it, the book's subject — the experiences of an African-American boy coping with the hardships of the Great Depression — seems singularly American. But Canadians, including African-Canadians, suffered in the Depression also — and the children who are their ancestors today are likely to be as distant from, as similar to, and as capable of being interested in Curtis's Bud as contemporary American children are. Still, the claiming of *Bud Not Buddy* as Canadian challenges the possibility that there might be such a thing as a distinct group of texts definable as Canadian and understandable as such.

A closer look at the novel confirms that challenge — but, intriguingly, not

because it seems particularly American. What it seems, in fact, is particularly Dickensian. An orphan and alone, Bud has to deal with hunger, poverty, and the cruelty of mean-minded adults. His life goes from bad to worse, until, in a traditionally tear-jerking happy ending, he finally finds himself in a place where people will love him and look after him — and where those people who love him turn out to be his actual blood relatives, and fairly wealthy to boot. Under the naturalistic veneer of its carefully-perceived 1930s American setting, *Bud Not Buddy* is about as traditional a Victorian melodrama as can be imagined.

For that reason, I think, it's a deeply satisfying book. Curtis clearly knows what works in children's fiction, and what works best, often, is what has been working for some centuries now: stories about orphans who go through hair-raising adventures on their way to happy homes and happy endings. There's nothing particularly Canadian about that. But then there's nothing particularly American about it either — except, perhaps, the chutzpah to revive a plot so creaky and the ingenuity to find a time and place in which to set the story that actually allow the melodrama to seem convincingly plausible. The talent that allows Curtis to create believable characters and suspenseful situations is his alone, and transcends questions of nationality.

It'd be nice to be able to claim a novel as good as *Bud Not Buddy* as a text of Canadian children's literature. In fact, I happily do so. But even in doing so I sense significant differences between this novel and the children's literature produced specifically in and for the community of Canadian children's publishers, editors, librarians and teachers. A lot of that literature is just as satisfying — but, I sense, in different ways. The challenge this Newbery-award-winning Canadian novel by an American citizen creates, for myself and others, is to find ways of enunciating the difference.

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A Wonderful Journey into History

The Mystery of Ireland's Eye. Shane Peacock. Penguin Canada/A Viking Trade Paperback, 1999. \$16.99. ISBN 0-67088541-X.

'Ireland's Eye' way out there, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, there is a ghost town — it was like something from a dream. (25)

Captivated by an unexplainable force, eleven-year-old Dylan Maples knows that he has to take the ocean kayaking trip to Ireland's Eye. After a year's preparation, he has convinced his parents that he is ready to go with them on this dangerous journey.