

more cohesion throughout. Yashinsky's introduction is itself a story wherein he contextualizes the motivation behind the project and the role these written texts play in the history of the oral tradition. Further, he addresses some of the questions that surface when traditionally told stories are converted to print media. He sets the mood and equips the reader for a better appreciation of the written texts and of their less tangible lives, of language and memory, off the page. Why write what is intended to be spoken aloud to a live audience? Why interrupt the generational flow of story by confining one version to the printed page? Yashinsky urges us to "think of this book as a way-station, a temporary shelter for the stories as they move from one voice to the next" (6-7). He encourages readers to put aside the book and retell the stories by candlelight or, better yet, around a cozy campfire.

The contributors' bios and comments reveal further mysteries in both story collections. These end passages are significant for it is here that one learns the original source for each tale. Most of the storytellers cite an oral source, crediting the people and traditions from which the stories come. Others refer to written texts and point out unique aspects of their particular telling of a tale. Each tells the story of how he or she found the tale that is included in the book. Many tell a further story about the oral tradition in their distinct communities or in the communities which nurtured the original tale. Each layer of storytelling works to better frame both collections.

"Storytelling is to awaken the mind," writes contributor Johnny Moses in his bio at the back of *Ghostwise*. "It is a powerful way to teach children because it develops their imagination and different views of the world" (217). From Native Elders to renowned urban performers to rural travellers and mystics, both collections boast a stellar line-up. Their love and respect for the oral tradition equals that of the editor and makes for good reading and even better telling, for children or adults.

---

---

*Kristyn Dummion* earned a Bachelor's Degree in English and drama at McGill University and a Master's Degree in English literature at the University of Guelph. She is currently writing for children and young adult readers.

### The Trouble with Nature

*Kit: The Adventures of a Raccoon*. Shirley Woods. Illus. Celia Godkin. Groundwood/Douglas and McIntyre, 1999. 96 pp. \$18.95, \$7.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-88899-375-7, 0-88899-376-5.

Shortly before sitting down to write this review I went out to feed the chickens. During the night a raccoon had pried apart a gap in the pen and killed and partly eaten a mother hen and her six newly-hatched chicks. As every keeper of poultry knows, raccoons are phenomenally skilled infiltrators of nearly any structure housing hens or young chicks. They are also one of Nature's serial killers, killing (as do many domestic dogs and cats) as readily for sport as for food.

These are some of the problems that confront the writer who chooses an animal protagonist. Narrative engagement requires the reader's sympathy and identification, but the truth is that the natural world is a daily drama of violence and continuous carnage in which the actors are essentially amoral.

Shirley Woods tries to be faithful to the facts of raccoon life and has consulted with knowledgeable and unsentimental naturalists. There is no shrinking from the presence of death in the story and the sensitive reader will shed tears over the catastrophes that take the lives of Kit's two siblings. Preyed upon by horned owls and automobiles, hunted by dogs and men with guns, and trapped, the threats to raccoon existence accumulate in the reader's consciousness. What is inevitably missing, however, is a sense of the raccoon itself as predator. While Woods shows us raccoons catching fish and shellfish and rummaging in garbage cans, any mention of their standard practice of devouring live baby birds and squirrels is understandably avoided. The reader's sympathies will always lie with the furry, but not the scaled or carapaced. Few children's writers will risk trying to show one furry creature eating another, attempting to engage our sympathies with both. To write of both predator and prey as sentient beings shakes loose so many narrative conventions and crutches that most writers and editors balk at the prospect.

Woods deserves credit for avoiding some of the more egregious anthropomorphism and sentimentality to which this genre is susceptible. Even though the more brutal facts of raccoon existence are glossed over, most readers will know a little more about the life cycle of this uncanny creature after reading this book. Celia Godkin's illustrations are very well observed and their subtle shadings work well to convey the entirely nocturnal realm of raccoon experience.

---

---

*Gillian Thomas is a professor of English at Saint Mary's University, author of *A Position to Command Respect: Women and the Eleventh Britannica* (1992) and editor of *Words in Common* (1999)*

### A Legend of the Sechelt People

*Salmon Boy: A Legend of the Sechelt People*. Donna Joe. Illus. Charlie Craigan. Nightwood Editions, 1999. Unpag. \$6.95 paper. ISBN 0-88971-166-6.

One in a series of picture books retelling legends of the Sechelt people, *Salmon Boy* tells the story of a young boy who goes for a swim in the sea beside his village and is captured by a giant chum salmon. The salmon takes the boy to his own country beneath the sea, where the boy lives for a year and observes the way of life of the salmon people. Like many native legends, this one contains teaching and a message. When the boy returns to his own people, he is able to tell them about how the salmon people live off the abundant resources of the land and sea, eating and drying berries in season, making cedar root baskets and clothing, and holding feasts to celebrate the smoking of the salmon, which they will eat in the winter months. The boy's own people thus learn how to avoid hunger and treat the salmon themselves with gratitude and respect.