

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Imagined Canadas

The Spirit of Canada: Canada's Story in Legends, Fiction, Poems and Songs. Ed. Barbara Hehner. Malcolm Lester, 1999. 308 pp. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN 1-894121-14-7.

The Spirit of Canada is Barbara Hehner's follow-up to her successful volume of Canadian history for children, *The Story of Canada* — and, unlike the typical Hollywood film scenario, the sequel more than lives up to its predecessor. As the subtitle indicates, *The Spirit of Canada* turns its attention to the way in which Canada has been narrated, imagined by various people from the earliest legends to the most recent tellings, all beautifully illustrated by fifteen children's artists like Harvey Chan, Kim Fernandes, and George Littlechild. Choosing a number of illustrators rather than one uniform illustration style has unquestionably enriched an already diverse, rich volume.

As the jacket copy points out, this collection does seek to send a signal of inclusiveness, unlike the volumes of Canadian tales that were available to me as a child over three decades ago. And this it does, bringing into one volume Samuel Hearne to Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Roch Carrier to Uma Parameswaran. What the jacket copy does not note, however, is another facet of this diversity which the volume handles particularly well: the balancing of historical and legendary accounts of this nation that come from different ideological as well as cultural perspectives. So, for example, the pro-Confederation account of "The First of July, 1867" by historian Donald Creighton is immediately followed by a traditional Newfoundland anti-Confederation song ("Come near at your peril, Canadian Wolf!") and then by Kim Morrissey's found poem drawn from Louis Riel's address to the jury. Similarly, and more poignantly, Gordon Lightfoot's paean to the CPR, "Canadian Railroad Trilogy," is followed by Paul Yee's chilling ghost story "Spirits of the Railway," in which a young immigrant from China discovers the ghost of his father who was killed in an accident while working to build the CPR.

The volume also contains a wealth of information for young and old readers alike: the notes on the history of Canada's national anthem, for instance, trace the development of the song from its 1880 composition by Calixa Lavallée and Adolph-Basile Routhier to its 1967 emendations. Details about getting by and scraping out a living during the Depression, as in David Tipe's account of children "Picking Coke" in Cabbagetown, or Dan Ferguson's song about prairie children trap-

ping gophers and selling their tails (at a time when there was a bounty on gophers because they ate grain) will give young readers an insight into some experiences of children who lived through the “dirty thirties.” As older readers will know, such narratives of Canada’s “lost years” generally focus on the plights of adults.

There are, of course, moments where a reader could use more information (for example, the date of Stella Whelan’s “The Ballad of Mary March”), but these are quibbles compared with the wealth of information and imagination that *The Spirit of Canada* will bring to its readers.

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Up-to-date Adventures

A Nose for Adventure. Richard Scrimger. Tundra, 2000. 184 pp. \$8.99 paper. ISBN 0-88776-499-1. *Cat’s Eye Corner.* Terry Griggs. Raincoast, 2000. 168 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 1-55192-350-5. *The Great Laundry Adventure.* Margie Rutledge. Illus. Maxine Cowan. Napoleon, 1999. 176 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-929141-67-9.

Adventure novels have come a long way since Jim Hawkins set off for Treasure Island in Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1883 novel. Where the heroes of the past tended to slough off family obligations in pursuit of pirate gold, the protagonists of three recent adventure novels return home not with Flint’s buried contraband but rather with a renewed understanding and appreciation of their fathers and grandfathers.

In Richard Scrimger’s *A Nose for Adventure*, Alan Dingwall is reunited with Norbert, the alien from Jupiter whose residence in Alan’s nose is chronicled in Scrimger’s earlier novel *The Nose from Jupiter*. Having returned from an unsuccessful visit with k.d. lang (who dismissed the little voice emerging from her nose as a symptom of incipient schizophrenia), Norbert helps Alan bust a ring of antiquities dealers in a suspenseful if somewhat predictable series of chases and kidnappings. The twists and turns of the plot take second place here to Alan’s friendship with Frieda, a tough-talking New Yorker whose sharp eyes and brittle courage make her an ideal counterpart to Alan, a reluctant adventurer whose constant polite apologies mark him as a Canadian visitor to the Big Apple. Alan has been sent to New York to spend time with his father, but when Dad fails to meet his plane at the airport, Alan teams up with fourteen-year-old Frieda. Like Alan, Frieda is stranded without a ride — her mother is too engrossed in her Tutankhamen Society meeting to fetch her daughter from the airport. The two children set off together on a trek across the city, trying to evade Skinny and Slouchy, two sinister airport workers who dog their steps in pursuit of an ancient Egyptian artefact that Frieda has unwittingly smuggled across the border in her wheelchair.

The growing friendship between the children is nurtured by their shared sense of parental rejection: while Alan wonders uneasily about his father’s appar-