

surprised to discover that such a life is all he really wants.

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LIKE ROLLING OFF A LOG?

Speak to the Earth. William Bell. Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1994. 204 pp., \$11.95 paper. ISBN 0-385-25487-3.

William Bell's *Speak to the Earth* is both a fictionalizing of the controversy over clear-cutting the old growth rainforest in Clayoquot Sound, B.C., and the story of fifteen-year-old Bryan Troupe, who is caught up in the issue against his will. His widowed mother Iris, who is an environmental activist; his uncle Jimmy, a logger; his conservationist girlfriend Ellen, whose parents work in forest industry management; his half-native friend Elias, whose brother Zeke is an increasingly reluctant RCMP officer; his elderly Native friend Walter, who can speak to the earth—these are the people complicating Bryan's life. Feeling unsure of his own position, and therefore increasingly isolated from his family and friends, Bryan reacts egocentrically, wishing that he could be left alone and that things wouldn't change. But of course he can't, and they do. Growing increasingly disillusioned with industry, law, and government, Bryan finally takes a stand.

The novel is an uneasy mix of young adult rite-of-passage fiction, and political issue (not to say propaganda) fiction. Both are sub-genres, and adding them together does not necessarily make a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Does the novel exist to tell Bryan's story, or to fictionalize the Clayoquot Sound issue? Theoretically, it can do both, but this is a tall order; if the sub-genres are not to assert themselves formulaically, the author must be interested enough in a range of people that he/she can embody them and enact their disparate views convincingly.

In *Speak to the Earth* no adequate range of characters is developed; this is a *partis* novel. Consequently the sub-genres compete with each other for our attention, and neither wins. The depth of Bryan's passage to responsible maturity is not developed with anything like the authenticity of Michael's similar passage in Kevin Major's *Hold Fast* because Bell must spend too much time on the clear-cutting issue. Yet it is treated superficially as well. What hints of character development there are beyond Bryan rest consistently on the side of the environmentalists. Bell makes gestures in the other direction by having Jimmy initially confront Iris and defend the position of unemployed loggers, but Jimmy is uncomfortable all along, and after quitting his MFI work, acknowledges that there are better ways of logging than clear-cutting. Ellen's parents (a manager of MFI and a lawyer) are never introduced except in stony silence as they cart her away to her aunt's. Elias Wilson's brother Zeke, the RCMP officer, finds it harder and harder to do his duty and arrest activists, and finally won't. The judge who becomes the butt of Iris's sarcastic wit when she is in the dock, is a stereotype, and Premier Harrington is a goon.

Bell isn't finally able to deliver on the tall order he sets himself in *Speak to the Earth*; yet if he doesn't succeed in melding his sub-genres adequately, there are many scenes within each which display a deft control of the conventions.

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BARREL BOTTOM

Share a Tale: Canadian Stories to Tell to Children and Young Adults. Irene Aubrey and Louise McDiarmid. Canadian Library Association, 1995. 222 pp., \$29.95 paper. ISBN 0-88802-270-0.

Once upon a time, three librarians set out to collect and anthologize Canadian stories for this country's community storytellers, parents, aunts and uncles, older siblings — in short, the millions continually besought to "tell a story." In 1979 the Canadian Library Association published their *Storytellers' Rendez-vous*, a fine collection of verses and tales written or adapted by accomplished writers like Farley Mowat, Marius Barbeau, and Dennis Lee. Although aimed at tellers, the book is also treasure trove for young and not-so-young readers.

Its sequels, *Storytellers' Encore* (1984) by the same anthologists and *Share a Tale* (1995) compiled by Aubrey and McDiarmid, are less easily assessed. *Encore* contains 53 items, many of them rather feeble stories. The few shining exceptions include Basil Johnston's version of an Ojibwa legend about bats and Carole Spray's rendition of a schoolyard ghost story featuring an indomitable baby. The current book, *Share a Tale*, is considerably larger than *Encore* and contains an even larger proportion of material from amateur wordsmiths.

True, the editors' declared intention is to provide raw material for oral presentations. But the presenters who undertake some of this volume's offerings must first overcome built-in problems — and readers may find themselves guffawing where they almost certainly weren't meant to. For example, N. de Bertrand Lugrin concludes a dramatic paragraph on a bear's attack on a pig with this surprising irrelevancy: "The acorns were thick all over the grass then, and pigs thrived upon them." Elsewhere, words' connotations collide, as in Grant MacEwan's description of love at first sight: "a restrained attraction seemed to tear at her heart." Sometimes the storyteller forgets to tell us a crucial fact until lamentably late in his tale. Hazel T. Procter quotes a miner's account of being grazed by a fall of frozen muck that scraped his shoulder and smashed his lantern. The miner was frightened but apparently escaped from his dark tunnel fairly easily. Only in his penultimate sentence does he reveal that the muck amounted to several tons. In such company, the few stories by eloquent writers like Marjorie Pickthall are both relief and tacit reproaches.

The editors are admirably trans-Canadian in their coverage, scrupulous in their