

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

attributions, and generous with advice. But one has to doubt their introductory claim that "The reservoir of Canadian stories appears unlimited." If they were not perverse in their choices, they must have come close to the bottom of the barrel for *Share a Tale*.

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UN VOYAGE INITIATIQUE

Roux le fou. Gérald Gagnon. Montréal, Boréal, 1993. 159 pp. broché, ISBN 2-89052-568-6.

Jadis, pour être admis au rang des adultes et des héros, le jeune homme devait affronter victorieusement un certain nombre d'épreuves initiatiques rituelles. La littérature épique et le roman d'aventures ont conservé cette tradition avec le voyage dangeureux en terre inconnue, la tempête, la rivière, le passeur, l'île, le château mystérieux, la "dame", le trésor, les signes, le dragon, le triomphe du héros. Ce sont ces ingrédients, ramenés à des proportions conformes à la petitesse de l'homme moderne, que mêle habilement, avec un bon brin d'humour et dans un cadre bien québécois, Gérald Gagnon dans son roman *Roux le fou*.

Le héros-narrateur présente son récit au passé. Robert, dix-huit ans, vient de terminer ses études. Pour se donner le temps de penser à son avenir, il entreprend un voyage en canot. Le hasard d'une halte le met en face de Roux le fou et de la jeune Sylvie. Il montre une belle patience à l'égard de Roux le fou. Sylvie fait quelques allusions à un village mystérieux. Cependant cette rencontre pourrait rester sans suite. Mais quand Robert reprend son voyage, une tempête détruit son canot. Obligé de rester dans ce coin perdu, il est secouru et logé dans une grotte par Sylvie. Il découvre alors le village, Saint-Inconnu, fondé par des Canadiens français fuyant la répression de 1837-1838. Dépourvu d'argent, Robert entre comme manoeuvre dans l'atelier d'ébénisterie du père de Sylvie. Il se fait remarquer par la qualité de son travail, ses belles manières, sa gentillesse à l'égard de Roux le fou qu'il protège et s'attache à lui. Il est promu apprenti. Il se lie d'amitié avec le curé. Il s'intègre à la vie du village qu'il commence à comprendre. Il entrevoit les mystères de Saint-Inconnu: le rôle du noble Écossais Harold Macpherson, l'ancêtre de Roux le fou, la tombe du patriote inconnu, la disparition de la cloche des réfugiés. Il prend part à la fête du village. Il interprète les hiéroglyphes de la grotte, trouve la cloche. Il fait libérer Roux le fou, victime d'une conspiration et menacé définitivement à Saint-Inconnu.

Récit initiatique et utopique, *Roux le fou* enseigne certaines valeurs traditionnelles: le respect de soi et d'autrui, l'amour du travail soigné, la reconnaissance des bienfaits reçus, le pardon des offenses, la justice, la modestie,