

disguised versions of their listeners in order to offer advice. Finally, Jennifer, the advocate of imagination, appears primarily through the eyes of an uncomprehending Colin, so her ideas and character lack substance. In fact, Hughes conducts the argument against dictatorial empiricism not so much by making stories attractive as by making their opponents repulsive. Colin's betrothed, for example, is manipulative, scheming, and vengeful: repeatedly she implicitly threatens Colin by reminding him that her grandfather is a ruling elder. Hughes is even more heavy-handed with that grandfather, making him a callous patriarch who sneers at Jennifer's matrilineal culture, and a diabolical tyrant with cold, dry hands like those of a snake's skin and a voice that hisses the order for Colin to burn Jennifer's books.

*The Story Box* is an enjoyable adventure, but its failure to suggest that heroes can do more than run away from social injustice makes it a somewhat hollow attack on narrow-minded pragmatism.

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### Dancing with the Past

***Bone Dance***. Martha Brooks. Douglas and McIntyre, 1997. 179 pp. \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-296-3.

The reader enters *Bone Dance* through two epigraphs provided by Martha Brooks. The first epigraph is a quotation from Chief Seattle's address to the president of the United States in 1855, and the second is taken from Sharon Butala's *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature*. Brooks attempts to depict the spiritual power of the land of Manitoba in her novel, as anticipated by the quotation from Butala's book. In addition, she stresses the interconnectedness of the earth and its inhabitants, a concept highlighted in the words from Chief Seattle's address. The two quotations together suggest the connection of the land of the past with the land of the present.

The spiritual qualities of the landscape as depicted by Brooks are a little disappointing, particularly after hopes are raised by these epigraphs. Lonny, the young male character, is haunted by his childhood desecration of a burial site, which he associates with the subsequent death of his mother. Brooks conveys Lonny's pain and guilt for this irreverent event, and its supposed punishment, with the intensity and regret of the adolescent looking back at a thoughtless action. The reader is immediately sympathetic. Less successful, however, is the treatment of the manifestation of Lonny's guilt in the "damn spirits" that haunt him. In an attempt to avoid identifying or limiting the spirits in any way, the author treats them vaguely, thus remain-

ing true to the mysterious and fleeting qualities of the ghosts, but perhaps sacrificing clarity in doing so.

Alex, who dreams about her dead grandfather, is similarly affected by the spirits of those who have died. One of the most memorable and moving moments takes place early in the novel in the city when Alex and her friends "[throw] back their heads and ... howl[ed]. Like feral creatures." It is at this moment that Alex knows that her grandfather has died. She watches as "her own breath rose in front of her astonished eyes, took form and floated like a spirit hand on the crystal air." When Alex's father, whom she has never known, dies and gives her the land formerly belonging to Lonny's stepfather, the reader expects the father-daughter relationship to establish itself through the sharing of the land and its spiritual power. This, however, is not the case. Alex seems to learn more about her father from the inside of the cabin — "a thin trail of her father's life was scattered throughout the cabin" — than from the outside. Although there are many perceptive and effective descriptions of the Manitoba landscape, some of which are extremely evocative, the land itself does not play the integral role expected by the reader.

The relationships between Lonny and Alex and the older generations are very well developed and will have quite an impact on the adolescent reader. It is appropriate that the book is dedicated to the author's daughter and the author's daughter's grandfather. This is the relationship that seems to inspire and move the story forward. Alex's love for her grandfather is very believable and poignant in its intensity. Lonny's relationship with his stepfather, Pop, is based on a remarkable complexity that enriches their lives together. Alex's relationship with her mother also rings true. The two adolescents are drawn together by the dead parents, who, to some extent, are rooted in the land they leave behind, but it is here that the novel begins to lose some of its vibrant and sincere tone. What is certain, however, is that Martha Brooks will touch her readers with the spiritual connections between the younger and older generations, between the recent past and the present, between then and now.

### Sharing a Dream of Peace and Harmony

*Echoes from the Square.* Elizabeth Wellburn. Illus. Deryk Houston. Rubicon Publishing Inc., 1998. 32 pp. \$18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-921156-99-5.

In 1992 Vedran Smailovic played his cello for 22 days in a Sarajevo street amidst the devastation and upheaval of war in order to mourn and honour 22 people killed in that violence. Elizabeth Wellburn, moved by this heroic gesture, researched the event, becoming friends with Smailovic in the process. Wellburn then responded imaginatively to Smailovic's act as she explored its effect on her fictional character, Alen, a young musician growing up in the confusion and terror of war-torn Sarajevo. The story of Smailovic's heroic and compassionate act offers to the reader and to Alen a demonstra-