

compassion and human understanding. Willie in *Who Wants to Be Alone?* maintains in his theme song that our survival may depend upon "our struggle for truth." This struggle is evident in the two books under discussion and, indeed, in most of Craig's work.

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## Légendes Du Canada Français

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*The Magic Fiddler and Other Legends of French Canada.* Claude Aubry. Graphics by Saul Field. Translated from the French by Alice E. Kane. Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1974. 116 pp. \$2.95 paperback reprint.

*Storm Oak.* Andrée Maillet. Illustrated by Kathryn Cole. Translated from the French by F.C.L. Muller. Scholastic-Tab Publications Ltd. 1972. 64 pp. \$.75 paper.

In his preface to his retelling of ten legends of French Canada, Claude Aubry gracefully acknowledges the inspiration he found in Saul Field's original portfolio of embossed colour engravings, *Legends of French Canada*. Reproduced in five colours, these provided the illustrations for the 1968 cloth edition, published simultaneously in French and English with the aid of a grant from the Canada Council. A highly attractive piece of Canadian book production, the original edition's design was distinguished, and Aubry's text combined with Field's graphics to evoke a complex response to the tales. This paperback reprint of the English version presents Field's work in black-and-white reductions which are feeble shrunken ghosts of the earlier reproductions. Deprived of their subtleties of colour and texture, we search in vain for those "richly symbolic and lively" qualities to which Aubry pays tribute.

Nonetheless, this cheaper edition is welcome, since, fortunately, Aubry's versions of the legends are quite colourful enough to do very well on their own, thanks to the power of the material itself and, more particularly, to the charm and interest of the attitude he adopts to that material. As Marius Barbeau stressed in his introduction, a legend yields itself readily to the imaginative shaping of the artist. Aubry has put his own stamp on this traditional material through the special quality of his narrating voice, which speaks to us in the wry, affectionate and urbane tones of what he terms a contemporary "honnête homme". Such an approach gives a sophistication to this collection that may not please everyone, but is to me a happy departure from the time-worn device of inventing some stereotyped village ancient to serve as narrator.

With the exception of the familiar story *The Witch Canoe*, which he does choose to present through its traditional narrator, Joe La Bosse, Aubry asks us to focus both upon the old stories and on his own twentieth century spirit's response to them. He accomplishes this at times by framing a generally conventional narrative, sometimes his own, sometimes quoted from Barbeau, de Gaspé or Frechette, with an ironic introduction and final comment. This technique works especially well in *Loup-Garou* and *The Caughnawaga Bell*, where he is dealing with two concepts equally unreal to his modern "honnête homme", the possibility of werewolves and of total fanatical faith. In *La Corriveau*, however, the material cuts closer to the modern bone, and the image he conjures up of the ghostly scapegoat raging in her iron cage proves too potent and disturbing to be controlled by this device. His introduction seems a bit flip, his final question faltering.

Another powerful tale, *Rose Latulippe*, shows a similar uneasiness, especially when Field's dramatic illustration cannot do its work. But these lapses are more than outweighed by Aubry's masterly presentations of *The Magic Fiddler* and *The Legend of the Percé Rock*, both of which make their final impact through a striking image. In the first, the rollicking energy of the main part of the tale gives way to the motionless figure of the blacksmith, his lost daughter's white tuque fluttering forlornly above him, and his fiddle a heap of ashes at his feet, while in *The Legend of the Percé Rock*, Aubry's gently mockery of sentimentality ends with a vision of the drowned Blanche that is unaffectedly moving.

On the whole, Alice E. Kane's translation serves the author well, especially in the tricky problem of catching the overall tone of the narration. Dialogue, though, is stiff, (painfully so in *The Witch Canoe*), and she sometimes flattens her original: "...he had been unable to devise any plan by which he could insinuate his presence among the villagers ...." lacks the vigour of "Il lui fallait découvrir un joint, une faille pour s'introduire dans le patelin et imposer sa présence." And while simple mistranslations are very rare, and never serious, they too tend towards the flat, as when "l'étranger ... puis se dirigea à grands pas ...." dwindles down to "The stranger took a step ...."

Andrée Maillet's *Storm Oak* is a pretty little book, generously illustrated and provided with a glossary, for the vocabulary is adult. This explains "clad" to the young readers, but leaves them on their own with "diplomatic". Indeed, inconsistency marks the book as a whole. It has for its heroine a bored blonde Spanish princess longing for a lover, who diverts herself by playing her mandolin by her parents' tombs, lays on a dinner featuring marinated adders' tongues worthy of any false enchantress, and is capable, when pressed, of covering twelve leagues in a night and climbing an enormous tree at the end of her hike. The hero, Almafloris, is "the last of the knights errant", trusts to gold for the rivets of his armour, falls asleep after dinner, and on the rare occasions when he gives tongue at all, has a fine line of fustian. The elements are here, one feels, for a burlesque, and in the translation at least, many passages read like parody. Descriptions abound of food and drink, and,

above all, of finery, male and female. No popular Regency romance ever dwelt more lovingly on dress.

But amidst all this froth, we have too the portentous-sounding Storm Oak, a wood of myths, and a jealous female ghost who dies of love and is bent on having the heroine do the same. The result is fantasy in a muddle, complicated by the presence of seven knights doomed to be cultures for seven years, and a nest of gigantic helpful wasps, whose queen tells the princess a tedious *pourquoi* tale, to no great purpose.

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## Canadian Children's Drama

EUGENE BENSON

*Inook and the Sun*, H. Beissel. Playwrights Co-op. (344 Dupont St., Toronto, M5R IV9), 1974. 76 pp. \$3.20, plus .25 postage.

*Waterfall*, Book and Lyrics by Larry Fineberg, Music by W. W. Skolnick. Playwrights Co-op, 1974. 32 pp. \$1.95 plus .25 postage.

*Boy Who Has a Horse*, Bonnie Le May. Playwrights Co-op, 1974. 31 pp. \$1.50 plus .25 postage.

*The Song of the Serpent*, Betty Lambert. Playwrights Co-op, 1973. 49 pp. \$2.25 plus .25 postage.

*Cyclone Jack*, Carol Bolt, Musical Score by Paul Vigna. Playwrights Co-op, 1972. 27 pp. \$1.50 plus .25 postage.

*Inook and the Sun* is the best of five Canadian plays listed above and it is against the excellence which it establishes that the other plays for children can be evaluated.

*Inook*, like all children's classics (*Gulliver's Travels*, *Alice in Wonderland*), appeals alike to adult and child. Beautifully written, it does not seek to condescend to what we imagine children's taste to be but seeks rather to elevate a child's taste and imaginative stretch. Beissel himself writes in the Introduction: "*Inook* is not primarily written for children, though it is easy to see why it should have a special appeal to them. The play is intended to offer something to all ages, each according to his state of consciousness." The play, precisely because it is so beautifully written and so superbly crafted, succeeds in having this