

tion about the Yukon by Ted Harrison. The exotic, other-worldly aura of the far north and the evocative use of colours by this excellent artist made a fitting conclusion to a most interesting and varied book.

All this praise does not mean that the book was without flaws, however. One or two of the selections struck a jarring note and reminded me that this was after all a commercial rehash of previous efforts. Why was the rather boring selection on John A. MacDonald given such prominence at the beginning? And who decided to include that childish story about Jewish immigrants, or the fairly difficult and rather strange selection on Blacks in Nova Scotia? While the themes reflected in these stories suited the anthology well, the content did not really blend in with the rest of the book.

Canadian childhoods is a good addition to the family bookshelf, an attractive educational tool for a variety of age groups, and a possible gift item for that young relative or friend living abroad.

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RELIGION PURVEYED

Before I go to sleep: Bible stories and poems and prayers for children. Selected and retold by Ann Pilling. Illus. Kady Macdonald Denton. Kids Can Press, 1990, 93 pp., \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 0-921103-45-X; **What is God?** Etan Boritzer. Illus. Robbie Marantz. Firefly Books, 1990. Unpag., \$5.95, paper. ISBN 0-920668-88-7.

The Bible contains many effective narratives, but few were written with children in mind. The Old Testament with Creation, Noah, baby Moses, young David, Daniel, and Jonah provides more material for children than the New Testament. There the story of Jesus's birth has the strongest appeal.

The ages at which children can appreciate these stories will vary. Interest is often enhanced by exposure to the material in various formats. Our daughter asked more often for the story of Daniel after hearing Raffi sing "Daniel in the Lion's Den." A few such simple songs might have been appropriate for the present book. On the other hand, at age three, our daughter was also asking to hear "The Lord's my Shepherd; I'll not want", and "Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee."

Some collections for small children omit the story of Jesus's death and resurrection as being rather heavy. Our four-year old found the narrative fascinating and not overwhelming. Since Pilling includes this, I would put four years as the lower end of readership for this volume. Some literary pieces, such

as George Herbert's "Love bade me welcome..." seem included more for mom and dad, although they cannot hurt and may well help.

Pilling's style adopts a middle way between King James traditionalism and prosaic modernism. Denton's watercolour illustrations enhance the narratives without overwhelming them. The editorial viewpoint is traditional and Christian, with emphasis on giving children a positive and formative introduction to the Bible.

By contrast, Boritzer's book indicates even in the title (*What is God?* rather than *Who is God?*) that it will treat God as impersonal, not personal. Its approach is modernistic in that it begins with a question and looks at a number of answers, including the possibility that no answer exists. It also shows a self-conscious awareness of multiculturalism, peace, and brotherhood, and prefers warm fuzzies to awkward facts about human nature (cf. *Sesame Street*).

Boritzer attempts an overview of the religious question, and gives a survey of various responses to it, Eastern and Western. Even on the factual level there is some room for carping about his accuracy.

Boritzer's survey includes an apparent slap at personal religion as picturing "an old man...in the clouds." Concluding his survey, the author presents the *real* answer to his question: "There are many ways to talk about God. Does that mean that everything that everybody ever says about God is right? Does that mean that God is everything? Yes! God is everything great and small!"

The illustrations by Robbie Marantz are effectively expressionistic, and would probably carry the narrative for younger readers.

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'TWEEN-AGE TREATS

Morris Rumpel and the wings of Icarus. Betty Waterton. Greenwood Books, 1989. 108 pp., \$5.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-099-5; **The tiger catcher's kid.** Sylvia McNicoll. Nelson Canada, 1989. 111 pp., paper. ISBN 0-17-602592-8

According to the prolific American children's author Lee Wyndham, 'tween-age children (aged 8 to 12) comprise the biggest reading group, the "Golden Age" of reading. The interests of boys and girls at this stage are limitless. Here are two books which embody some of those interests – mystery, adventure, animals, humour – presented with vast differences in plot, technique, insight, and style.

Morris Rumpel and the wings of Icarus is one of Betty Waterton's series about the unpredictable antics and adventures of the Rumpel family. The pre-