

use or damage anything from nature, putting their own existence in severe peril. The Zeelotes are so infused with the work ethic that they have reinstated capital punishment for tardiness. While each of the cultures and associated themes is interesting, it was not clear to me that together they represented an overall view of the weaknesses of contemporary human society or even a collection of some of its most salient shortcomings. Each of the episodes did contribute to one of the strengths of *Fools Errant*, a fast-paced plot full of adventure. In keeping with the traditional picaresque style, Hughes uses rich, complex language, includes lots of humour and ensures that neither the protagonists nor the cultures are as they are first presented. Character is developed well with Gaskarth gradually revealing his true identity while Filidor grows into his during the course of their journey together.

The diversity of theme, form and setting of these three novels speaks to the maturity of fantasy as a genre in Canadian literature.

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### A Gathering of Recent Short Fiction Collections

*Beyond the Rainbow Warrior*. Ed. Michael Morpurgo. Pavilion Books, 1996. 144 pp. \$19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-85793-888-7. *Glory Days and Other Stories*. Gillian Chan. Kids Can Press, 1996. 118 pp. \$4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-319-8. *Laughs: Funny Stories*. Ed. Claire Mackay. Tundra Books, 1997. 199 pp. \$8.95 paper. ISBN 0-88776-393-6. *Laws of Emotion*. Alison Lohans. Thistledown Press, 1993. 208 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 1-895449-07-3. *The Seasons are Horses*. Bernice Friesen. Thistledown Press, 1995. 151 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 1-895449-40-5. *Saying Good-Bye*. Linda Holeman. Lester Publishing, 1995. 169 pp. \$16.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895555-47-7.

Aside from fairy tales, I never owned a book of short stories as a young reader. (And I wore out library cards). The genre was not entirely unfamiliar, of course, because I read short stories in magazines and in school. However such reading failed to impress me with the short story as a reading experience on par with novels and fairy tales. Magazines were encountered in waiting rooms and on planes; those that found their way into our house were expendable in a way that books *never* were — magazines could be read in the bathtub, cut up for collages, even chewed by the dogs without reprisal. And short stories in school were just school readings in textbooks, always accompanied by tiresomely dry discussion questions that somehow took the interest out quite of interesting things.

I'm not sure how typical my experience was, but it need not be repeated. If these six books are at all typical, short story collections for young readers appear not only to have arrived, but to have arrived in a variety of incarnations, offering themselves in the guise of both single-author collections and anthologies which group different authors' stories according to style or theme. Single-author collections introduce young readers to the genre and reading experience of short fiction

and short fiction collections, while thematic and stylistic collections introduce readers not only to the genre and experience, but also to an array of new authors.

*Beyond the Rainbow Warrior* is an illustrated collection of environmentally-themed stories commissioned by Michael Morpurgo to celebrate Greenpeace's twenty-fifth anniversary. Two-and-a-half percent of the proceeds of this book go to Greenpeace; the organization is lauded in the introduction, while a short history and an offer of membership information concludes the book.

Morpurgo has assembled an international all-star team to produce this collection which includes a wide range of styles and tones. My favourite is Anthony Horowitz's upside-down fairy tale in which a knight discovers that the beautiful princess has chained herself to a cave as a protest against the slaughter of dragons. The collection also a cautionary wonder tale by Morpurgo, as well as Margaret Mahy's depiction of a perpetually burning forest which is rescued by two children who look into the past and the future; James Riordan's re-telling of the native legend of the Rainbow warrior; Joan Aiken's slapstick comedy wherein two Irish spinsters defeat the Mafia and defend some Ancient Grasslands; Jamila Gavin's apocalyptic account of life after a nuclear holocaust; Elizabeth Laird's anthropomorphic life of an albatross; Tim Wynne-Jones's story of a protest against the dumping of PCBs; and Paul Jennings' survival tale in which a lost boy is succored by the legendary Wobby Gurgles whose existence he later protects through concealment.

The illustrations compiled by Michael Foreman are carefully matched to the stories. Louise Brierley's earthy reds and browns and still, almost faceless, figures capture draining desert heat and the narrator's boredom in *The Wobby Gurgle* (107). In *A Singer from the Desert*, Peter Sis's medieval-style pictures of a walled town suggest first, in the inset (85), the return of a Dark Age and both the security and vulnerability of the walled city. Later (101), the city becomes the eye on a human-like profile of Earth which looks up to Perdita, the space-station planet, as man's future, although the tiny figures running outwards into the desert suggest an alternative future.

The stories deal with a veritable rainbow of environmental issues of both global and local importance, stressing individual responsibility, choices, and activism which lead to positive results as nature is restored, conserved, regenerated, and/or protected. The majority of the stories are optimistic and rather idealistic about mankind's ability to successfully conserve nature and (somewhat easily) reverse and learn from their mistakes, even when dire consequences occur or are threatened. The green slime produced by the star-dust powder can be eliminated with straw blankets; the planet can recover from nuclear holocaust; and Jess triumphantly overcomes bureaucracy and indifference in her campaign against PCB dumping. Only the stark death of the albatross's mate is final and irreversible. However, the collection's title, Morpurgo's introduction, and *Rainbow Warrior* (the collection's final story) do clearly suggest that every generation needs rainbow warriors — that environmentalism is an ongoing process, not easily concluded, not a fairy tale where "happily ever after" is achieved with certainty and finality.

*Glory Days*, Gillian Chan's second collection of stories, is a sequel to her first popular and successful collection, *Golden Girl* (1994). Chan is a former high-school teacher and school librarian who feels that the short story collection "is more easily accessible and appealing" to young readers than novels.

The five stories in *Glory Days* certainly are accessible — twenty to thirty pages long and at an approachable, though not simplistic, reading level. Each story is told by a different first-person narrator and Chan successfully imbues each narrator with a distinctive voice. The stories interconnect and overlap: the same characters, seen through different eyes, appear and reappear. The narrators — two female and three male — are drawn from a variety of ethnic, family, and class backgrounds, but inhabit the traditional, and perhaps somewhat outdated, North American classifications of high-school students: the "in" crowd, the jocks, the brains, the artsies, the lonely new girl, the basketball star, the manipulative and snobbish rich kid ... These types may, however, be a reflection of Elmwood High's small-town setting, where such classifications are more likely to have survived and to be more sharply delineated than in the large urban high schools.

Overall, the stories deal with the protagonists' struggles to define themselves and find a balance between their own inclinations, ambitions, and expectations and those of their parents, siblings, peers, and employers. Characters are believable and not always likeable. Rachel eventually realizes that her "problems" with her family are partly rooted in self-centredness and jealousy. Art, the arrogant, ultra-rich kid with political aspirations, is convincingly awful, and Chan avoids the obvious, feel-good ending when Art reluctantly volunteers for the Good Samaritan Program. Luisa is a more sympathetic character and her misery over being the lonely, new girl is convincingly portrayed, while her retrospective tale of a near date-rape is nightmarishly compelling and filled with vivid and precise images.

Teachers, classes, and academic activities are peripheral concerns — probably reflecting a truth about many adolescent lives that educators are reluctant to acknowledge. However, the near absence of alcohol, drugs, and sex is surprising and detracts from the collection's realism. Drugs and consensual sex are absent (though I'm sure Art and Ashley are sleeping together) and only Luisa's would-be date-rapist, Mark, consumes alcohol. Of course, not all high-school students use drugs and alcohol or are sexually active. But many do and are — without necessarily being "bad." Furthermore, these elements have a constant presence and are surrounded by controversy, interest, and awareness in high-schools. These omissions may limit the collection's resonance for high-schoolers themselves, though the stories may appeal to younger readers and adults who want well-written stories for adolescents which avoid discussion of drugs, drinking, and sexual activity.

*Laughs* is a collection compiled by Claire Mackay which contains humorous short stories and poems by Canadian children's authors and poets and is billed by Tundra as "the first ever Canadian collection of humour for children!" The contributors list is a veritable *Who's Who* of Canadian children's literature. Classics are represented by Roch Carrier's well-known "Hockey Sweater," and W.O. Mitchell's "The Liar Hunter" in which Jake and the Kid "help" a folklore

specialist dig for tall-tales. An excerpt from L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* is also included — Anne's disastrous tea-party — which does contain some of Anne's most humorous speeches, but also ends on a sad note.

Poetry is provided by David Booth, Loris Lesynski, Dennis Lee, Claire MacKay, Bill Richardson, and Lois Simmie. Booth provides a carnivorous parody of *Mary Had a Little Lamb*; Lee contributes a progressive, heavily alliterative rhyme about a little girl who consumes a fritter stuffed with a sitter; and Simmie features Jimmie Lorris who has swallowed the thesaurus. Lesynski muses on poetry and pyjamas, Richardson features a boy named Curtis who finds an unusual use for his music lessons, and Mackay cleverly explores the meaning of the word "trivia."

The remaining short stories are by Tim Wynne-Jones, Gordon Korman, Max Braithewaite, Richard Scrimger, Martyn Godfrey, Lorne Brown, Ken Roberts, Alice Kane, Sarah Ellis, Jean Little and Brian Doyle. Now, I liked most of the poems and stories in this anthology. Overall, the stories are fun to read. They're ironic, intriguing, silly, imaginative, bizarre, and ridiculous. It's hard to think of something more ridiculous than getting a raisin stuck in your nose, or more bizarre than learning that Jupiter's moons have fountains which produce cocoa. However, Mackay prefaces her collection with an introduction about the nature and importance of laughter and I can't say I really *laughed* very much — really only at "The Hockey Sweater," and the close of "Never Sleep Three in a Bed." So, by the time I reached the end of the book, I felt slightly let down and decided that the title and introduction are somewhat misleading.

The anthology also seems to have some trouble defining its target audience. The poetry is most suitable for quite young children. The majority of the short stories address the elementary school crowd, yet Korman's "A Reasonable Sum" seems more likely to appeal to young adults than to children, and Mitchell's "The Liar Hunter" demands a careful and fairly skilled reader. Perhaps, however, the anthology hopes to appeal to readers of different age groups over time or to families with readers of different ages.

*Laws of Emotion*, published by Thistledown Press, is intriguing in appearance — small, with a smooth, glossy blue cover, and an illustration featuring a floating (or falling) young woman coiled up within a white sheet.

Lohans's stories are largely contemporary and realistic in terms of plot, but also introduce varied elements of romance, adventure, and humour. A large range of subjects touches upon common adolescent experiences like falling in love and owning a car, but also includes less universal stories in which young protagonists confront cancer, strain against physical handicaps and deal with sexuality and pregnancy. The stories' tones also vary. The romance "It Wasn't My Fault ..." and the relationship described in "Sarah and Alexandra" (Alexandra is a car — an ancient Volkswagon bug) are light, bright and humorous, but other stories are steeped in a powerful, intense mixture of confused and often agonized emotion: in "Laws of Emotion," Tammie tries to deal with the fact that her injured boyfriend is never likely to recover from a ski accident; in "Truce," Cathy attempts to move beyond her long-established hatred for Jim and is shocked when the disarming of their intense dislike leads to an equally intense sexual

attraction; and in "Something About That Girl," Stan struggles with self-definition and the need to be recognized as himself, in a small town where it is common knowledge that his brother is a convicted rapist.

The unifying thread in all these tales is found in the collection's title — *Laws of Emotion*. However, the themes of the stories repeatedly suggest that there are no laws which govern emotions, unless those laws are somehow designed to encapsulate the fact that emotions *do not* follow rules of logic, cannot always be controlled or predicted, and are often multiple and contradictory in nature. Lohans' characters generally feel isolated and alone due their various emotional dilemmas. In some cases, this feeling of isolation is justified, but in other scenarios protagonists are clearly blind to the supportive presence and actions of others. The majority of Lohans's principle characters are female and the collection seems most likely to appeal to young women. In fact, Lohans's after word explains that many of the stories came from experiences and desires remembered from her own adolescence. However, Lohans's protagonists are not puppets solely at the mercy of their emotions. No matter how overwhelming and disorienting her protagonist's experiences, they find ways to exert control over and gain insight into themselves. The final story in the collection portrays the birth of a child seventeen-year-old Tara still views with ambivalence. This story is entitled "Beginnings" — fittingly because all the stories in the collection really end with the protagonists beginning new chapters in their lives after enlightening emotional experiences.

*The Seasons are Horses* by Bernice Friesen won the 1996 Vicky Metcalf Short Story Award administered by the Canadian Authors Association. Many of these stories have been published previously in venues that probably do not reach a large number of younger readers — *Prairie Fire*, *Grain*, *NeWest Review*, *Western People*, and *The Dalhousie Review* — but Friesen's realistic and moving work should certainly appeal to adolescent readers who are likely to see themselves reflected in her characters.

All the stories except "The Sun Pushing the Wind" (which deals with Sarah, an outsider, who has come to work in Grassbank for the summer) are first person narratives which provide a rich chorus of young voices supplied by very distinctive characters. The protagonists are all female and between the ages of twelve and sixteen. As in Chan's *Glory Days*, the personalities and family backgrounds of these sharply defined characters are widely varied and fully account for different characters' motivations, actions, and attitudes. The names Friesen bestows upon her characters also makes them memorable — these range from the rather commonplace (Lori and Shawna) to the unusual (Carnation and Starla). Characters' voices are carefully and distinctly developed. You can hear the implied differences in personality, mood, and circumstances between dreamy, smitten Lucy and aggressive, taunting Rosalie. Lucy reflects "The choirless choir loft shadowed over us like a thick sky of clouds, light seeping in through small round lights. When Tony Lamont sang, I sometimes couldn't trust myself with his face, and watched the black slippery toe of my shoe instead" (71), while Rosalie observes: "Susan still don't say anything, probably because she knows us, knows its a trick. She does think she's smart, even cried once — I seen her — when she didn't get a hundred on a math test, the suck" (50).

Occasionally the stories interconnect and characters like Rosalie are seen from different perspectives, but the most powerful linkage between the stories is their common setting in the small, fictional, prairie town of Grassbank, seemingly located in Saskatchewan. As in *Glory Days*, these stories' themes generally focus upon the protagonist's need for definition, understanding, and acceptance from herself as well as from family and peer groups. Friesen's stories, however, are far more taut and intense in mood, the agonies and pleasures, the uncertainties and realizations, the victories and defeats of her characters leap off the page, filled with convincing verisimilitude and raw emotion. Stock adolescent characters are employed — outsiders, cool kids, the misunderstood rebel, the lonely fat girl. However, Friesen's portrayal of the adolescent world is complete and frank, mixing portrayals of sex, drug usage, bush parties, abusive and absent parents, possessive boy-friends, and hypocritical girl-friends along with the more standard depictions of loving parents, loyal friends, cheer-leaders and football players to produce a powerful adolescent world-picture.

*Saying Goodbye* is Linda Holeman's first collection of short fiction. Previously, her stories have appeared in the anthologies *Success Stories for the '90s* (1994) and *The Blue Jean Collection* (1992). "Sweet Bird of Youth" won the *Canadian Living* Annual Writing Contest. Like Gillian Chan, Holeman is a former high school teacher.

The ten stories in *Saying Goodbye* encompass a wide variety of settings, shifting from small towns to big cities, from high school biology labs to fast food restaurants. Again the majority of the stories are first person narratives, and, with the exception of "Sweet Bird of Youth," the protagonists are all female. In the title story, written in an appealingly graceful and understated style, Liza returns to her dead father's boyhood home to confront and order her memories, say a final goodbye to her father, and sprinkle his ashes over the lake. Many of the other stories in the collection also find characters saying goodbye not only to people, but also to ideas, actions, and perceptions pertaining to themselves and others. Carla realizes she has misunderstood the relationship between her teachers; Jessie rejects her boyfriend when she realizes that he is using her; Hayley gives up trying to please her boyfriend by embodying his vision of the perfect girlfriend; Natalie leaves her Ukrainian grandmother behind when the family moves uptown. Most of these goodbyes imply new beginnings as well as endings as characters grow in understanding and perceptions.

Holeman's stories are also family-centred. In "Something Fishy," Rebecca complains that her stable, secure family is "not your typical nineties family. It's not separated, step, half, blended, or unique in any noticeable way" (42). However, the families portrayed in other stories cover all these (and more) possibilities, exploring the defining power family has on the individual, the awkwardness, pain, and abuses as well as the camaraderie, love and understanding that can emerge from such situations. Family politics are observed with interest and incredulity. Natalie, who loves her Baba, is a rather bewildered witness to the hostile manoeuvres of her maternal grandmother, who has no use for "immigrants," and her mother who is caught between two disparate families.

Holeman's characters are memorable and believable, though they are

more diffuse and less sharply delineated than Friesen's. Their motivations and actions are intriguing and thought-provoking, as well as unpredictable, and frequently lead to morally ambivalent dilemmas. "Shasta" in which perfect, popular Hayley becomes a reluctant accomplice to a rape is an uneasy, emotional story and Hayley's actions (or lack thereof) are likely to cause debate amongst readers. The caustic narrator of "Sweet Bird of Youth," who takes steps to protect his younger cousin from suspected sexual abuse, but never speaks of the possibility, is also a memorable character. Overall, Holeman has created an interestingly varied gallery of adolescent characters and experiences which ring true.

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### **All Rumours about a World outside Britain Are False**

*Children's Literature: An Illustrated History.* Ed. Peter Hunt. Oxford University Press, 1995. 387 pp. £22.50 in UK. ISBN 0-19-212320-3.

There has been quite a debate recently about writing the general history of literature, originating from contemporary critical theories, in the first place feminist and postcolonial. While traditional histories have been "histories of texts," today's critics demand "histories of readers" — that is, examination of what has actually been read and enjoyed, which incorporates popular fiction, minor female writers, and other marginal texts.

Paradoxically, the histories of children's literature have always been written with this point of departure, which means that many texts not originally intended for children, but read and enjoyed by them, have been included, such as folktales and the so-called classics, like *Robinson Crusoe*.

Another specific question about the history of children's literature is that while we seldom interrogate the very notion of literature and therefore start histories with the earliest written texts, there is still no agreement among scholars about what children's literature is and when it starts. Quite a few scholars have been recently trying to extend the scope of children's literature to fourteenth century Bibles and tracts.

The new illustrated history of children's literature edited by Peter Hunt is an formidable project, which elegantly addresses these complicated issues. Written by one of the world's leading experts, richly illustrated (as the subtitle suggests), with excellent auxiliary materials (chronology, bibliography, index), it is a welcome contribution to the wide scope of recent publications in the field.

What naturally strikes me as an outsider is its British-American bias. One word in the title, like *English-language* children's literature, would have created a more honest trade description, even though "peripheral" English-language literatures are also treated like Cinderellas: Australian on eleven pages, Canadian on ten, New Zealand on nine. I admire the contributors who have managed to