

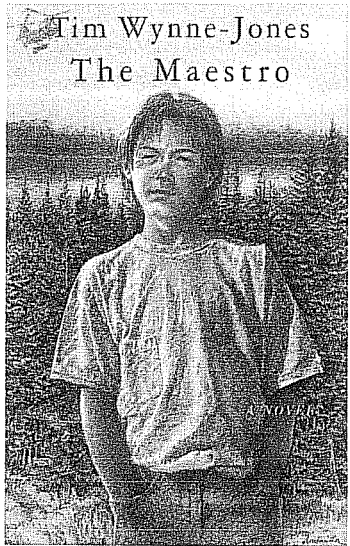
ment merits quite exceptional admiration. Findon has given a peerless demonstration of the uses of scholarship in the creation of children's fiction: she has rebuilt a dream of ancient Ireland in modern Canada, and done it very well.

Owen Dudley Edwards teaches in the Department of History at the University of Edinburgh. His books include *Celtic Nationalism* (with Hugh Macdiarmid et al.), *The Sins of Our Fathers: Roots of Conflict in Northern Ireland*, *The Mind of An Activist: James Connolly*, *P.G. Wodehouse: A Critical and Historical Essay*, *Burke and Hare*, *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes*, *Eamon de Valera*, and *Macaulay*. More recently he edited the *Oxford Sherlock Holmes*, and he is now writing a study of Ireland in the British imagination. His late mother, Sheila O'Sullivan, was an authority on the mythological origins of Yeats' poem.

HUCK FINN MEETS GLENN GOULD: *THE MAESTRO*

The Maestro: A Novel. Tim Wynne-Jones. Groundwood/Douglas & McIntyre, 1995. 223 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-242-2.

"Maestro" derives from the Latin *magister* or master, a teacher of art or more specifically a master composer or conductor. In Tim Wynne-Jones' award-winning novel, "maestro" refers most obviously to Nathaniel Orlando Gow, the musical genius with the eccentricity of a Glenn Gould. Gow tells young Burl Crow, a boy with the survival instincts of a Huck Finn (and a Pap to boot), to call him Maestro, and when Burl asks if that's "like a conductor," he replies: "Oh, more than just a conductor. Master, Teacher" (54). He then teaches Burl to play four cords of "Silence in Heaven," part of the oratorio he is writing. Master and teacher, Gow teaches Burl and Burl masters the four cords. On the other hand, Gow does not teach Burl to play the piano, nor does Burl master the instrument. Gow is a master of the instrument, and Burl teaches him something about himself. Both conduct themselves badly, but both have composure. Each grows his own way, and neither crows about it. They are tricksters both. They create lives from out of the wilderness of their own souls. And this is what *The Maestro* is all about: creation. Or more precisely, creation through performance. To perform well, this is the thing devoutly to be wished. And wishing has to do with desire, and desire is perpetual wishing, never satisfied, never closed. *The Maestro* is like a game, never truly over. Like the Book of Revelation, about which Gow is writing his oratorio, this novel expresses itself in mystery. It thrives on paradox.



I begin by attempting to capture the whirligig effect of the book's richness. But

while this respects the complexity of the writing, it plays unfair with the book's plot. Wynne-Jones has written a beautiful book that is both many-layered and accessible. It tells the story of Burl Crow, fourteen years old and a "fierce dreamer." Burl's life is hard. His father is a braggart who beats his son. His mother loses herself in a fog of pills and alcohol. Burl retreats into his imagination; he stores his inner life with secrets, and desires release from the pain and anxiety of his outer life. Like so many of his fellow characters in Canadian fiction, Burl runs away into the northern woods, into the harsh environment of pines and sumachs and poplars and rocks and cold wilderness lakes. He makes his way to a place named Ghost Lake where he finds an isolated cabin with one inhabitant, the eccentric musical genius, Nathaniel Gow. The two of them forge a rather uneasy and tenuous relationship built upon desire, Burl's desire to escape an intolerable home life and find a father and Gow's desire to find himself. Each imagines he has found what he lacked, but each is mistaken and midway through the book, after a crisis of sorts, Gow decides to return to Toronto, at least for a while.

Gow's leaving precipitates the second half of the narrative which recounts Burl's struggle to stay at the Ghost Lake cabin. Needless to say, the book has its quota of thrills, the most exciting and harrowing of which occur when Burl's brutal father, Cal, finds his son and disturbs the peace and ghostly stillness of the lake and its cabin. *Burl confronts his father and in doing so confronts his demon.* The book comes to an assured, if uneasy, ending in which Burl finds a new set of parents, not perhaps the ones he would have wanted, but an acceptable compromise nonetheless.

"Compromise" is a word that conjures our sense of Canada and Canadians, and this is a redolently Canadian book. Its themes of identity, place and the connection between the two are familiar from Canadian literature and art. And this is fine. But the book offers so much more. Its prose is dense and its themes move into challenging areas for young readers. Not the least elusive of these themes is the book's love affair with story itself. References to romance, to fairytale, to storytelling, and lying abound in the book. As the second part of the book progresses, we see just how a subject is constructed through a combination of happenstance, assumption, craft, desire, and expectation. In short, our subjectivity is a story we construct or others construct for us. In fact, self and other are complicit in this construction of the subject, the self. Both Burl and Gow try to remove themselves from public view, to retreat into selves only they can know, but in doing this they discover that such selves are non-existent. The self is a function of what others see in the self, what others make of the self. We have to forge identities through others. We are public figures whether we want to be or not. Life's a messy business and all we can do is keep cleaning it up.

Roderick McGillis is Professor of English at the University of Calgary. He recently published the book The Nimble Reader; Literary Theory and Children's Literature (Twayne, 1996). He is President of the Children's Literature Association of America.