

Three Diverse Fantasies for Young Adults

Of Two Minds. Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman. Bain & Cox, 1994. 154 pp. \$11.95 paper. ISBN 0-921368-44-5; *The Hunter's Moon*. O.R. Melling. HarperCollins, 1993. 156 pp. \$19.95, \$5.99 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-00-224008-4, 0-00-647936-7. *Fools Errant: A Fantasy Picaresque*. Matt Hughes. Maxwell Macmillan, 1994. 214 pp. \$14.95, \$9.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-02-954248-0, 0-02-954253-7.

Carol Matas and Perry Nodelman are well-established, award-winning authors whose experience and skill has undoubtedly contributed to meeting the challenges of joint authorship. *Of Two Minds* flows seamlessly and it has two equally strong protagonists. Princess Lenora of Gepeth can make things real simply by imagining them. Prince Corin of Andilla can read minds. Their parents, hoping to bring the two kingdoms closer together, arrange for their marriage. Just as Lenora and Corin are to exchange vows they are whisked away to a strange land ruled by a despot named Hevak whom they manage to overcome by working together. Lenora and Corin's supernatural powers, shared by all in their kingdoms, seem not as compelling as those which differentiate and accentuate Cora Taylor's Julie (*Julie*) or Janet Lunn's Mary (*Shadow in Hawthorn Bay*) within their families and communities. While *Of Two Minds* clearly communicates the dangers associated with the abuse of institutional and especially individual power, readers are likely to enjoy more the humour and adventure which pervade this light epic fantasy for young teens.

The Hunter's Moon was a runner up for CLA's Young Adult Canadian Book Award in 1994 and won the Ruth Schwartz Award in 1993. Sixteen-year-old cousins and life-long friends, Gwenhyvar (Canadian) and Findabhair (Irish) share an interest in the fairy folk and set out one summer to explore the Irish countryside together. Findabhair is captured by the fairies and Gwen must rescue her before she becomes a permanent part of that world on the night of the Hunter's Moon. In this work of enchanted realism, both contemporary Ireland and the parallel timeless fairy world are richly described, making the sense of place one of its strongest elements. Melling also uses the device of the quest effectively as Gwen encounters captivating trials and adventures that test and extend her abilities. The river of magic which flows below and occasionally through Irish life is a fine allegory for the way the traditions and customs of cultures of origin, often more than a generation removed, inform and permeate the lives of Canadians.

While *The Hunter's Moon* seems suited to the eleven- to fourteen-year-olds, Matt Hughes' first novel is written for a more sophisticated and older audience (fifteen years to adult). *Fools Errant* is a picaresque epic fantasy set in the distant future. Filidor, nephew and heir of the Archon (ruler) of the regions of Earth still inhabited by human beings, reluctantly agrees to go with the mysterious and wise dwarf Gaskarth who is charged with the task of bringing him to the Archon. The two, apparently always one step behind the Archon, encounter diverse human cultures along their way which Hughes (reminiscent of Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726) uses to satirize aspects of human behaviour. So, for example, the Ektopians are so environmentally conscious that they will not

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