

Monica Hughes: Canadian, Eh?

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Many people responded to the proposed topic for this paper with considerable surprise: “the ‘Canadianness’ of Monica Hughes’s work and its relationship to and influence on Canadian science fiction and fantasy for children?! But Monica Hughes isn’t Canadian, is she?” The answer is a resounding yes, albeit Mrs. Hughes was born in Liverpool, England, in 1925; lived in Egypt from infancy to age six; went to school, then university in Scotland for a time; and worked for two years in Zimbabwe before traveling to Canada in 1952. She was en route to Australia but got waylaid by circumstances, the place, and the people, especially one significant person, her husband, Glen, whom she married in 1957, the year she also became a Canadian citizen. In the context of a discussion of the Canadianness of Mrs. Hughes’s work, it is noteworthy that she committed herself to Canada as soon as the five-year residency requirement was met. She obviously found in the “True North” an amenable home.

Now, more than forty years, four children, and almost forty books later, Monica Hughes is the most widely recognized Canadian science fiction writer for children and was the first such writer of international caliber (Saltman 89). In *The New Republic of Childhood*, the single most comprehensive work on Canadian children’s literature to date, *The Keeper of the Isis Light* was proclaimed “a shining touchstone for judging children’s science fiction” worldwide, not just in Canada (Egoff and Saltman 283). This is high praise, especially given Sheila Egoff’s declaration in 1969 that “Science fiction for children is not literature” (390) and her opinion the year after *Keeper* was published that “science fiction for children, unlike that for adults, has no . . . touchstones by which it may be measured and judged” (qtd. in Jones 8). The 2000 Phoenix Award winner clearly met Egoff’s requirements published in *Only Connect* that such a touchstone be “a novel that weds scientific fact and/or sociological speculation with strong literary qualities to give it universal appeal . . . [matching] the best in other genres” (390).

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction identifies Monica Hughes as one of the several immigrants (to Canada from England and the U.S.A.) who “set high artistic and professional standards” for the genre during the formative period of its growth from the end of the sixties through the seventies (Clute 189). She is also the *only* Canadian children’s author to have an entry in the *Encyclopedia* under her own name.¹ The significance of her work is indisputable, as indicated by the evaluation that “the more recent science-fiction scene [for children] in Canada has been the almost single-handed creation of Monica Hughes” (Egoff and Saltman 275).

I had the great pleasure of interviewing Monica Hughes over two days and two enjoyable meals in November 1999.² Our conversation was fluid and ranged broadly as Mrs. Hughes has given many interviews, is comfortable in such settings, and, quite simply, is a good storyteller.³ My particular interest in interviewing her was to illuminate and contextualize her books, notably the science fiction and fantasy. As we conversed, I became increasingly aware of a truly profound Canadian aspect to Monica Hughes’s thought and work, a realization certainly

confirmed through subsequent research.

This Canadianist perspective on Mrs. Hughes's work is not a trumpet of nationalist appropriation, but rather an effort to promote a richer appreciation of her work through situating it in the context that it primarily mirrors and clearly has molded.⁴ That context is all too often ill-defined or downplayed, even by Canadians. My students in Canadian Studies courses at York University in Toronto over the past three decades have quite commonly denied a Canadian identity or culture in the absence of much of significance (at least to them) that is unique to Canada. Canadianness derives not from the unique that in today's globalized world is mostly such trivia as Thrills chewing gum, found only in Canada because no one else seems to want it. Nor does this sense of being truly Canadian come from such cultivated icons as the vaunted Royal Canadian Mounted Police, toques, or poutine; or mannerisms noted by outsiders (forgive me for saying so, but our remarkable politesse); or our speech patterns, eh? Rather, it stems from four key aspects, all decidedly evident in and important to the work of Monica Hughes: first and foremost, a single undeniably unique aspect—the place itself; second, the conditions of life and being in Canada; third, the context of Canadian cultural products; and finally, the Canadian psyche or, as our celebrated countryman and cultural commentator Northrop Frye would have it, the Canadian imagination.⁵

The physical nature of Canada is overwhelming and ungraspable, described in part by our major epic poet, E. J. [Ned] Pratt, as “a great reptilian monster.”⁶ Enormous and awesome, it imprints and asserts demands on all creatures who live on it to such an extent that, as Frye noted, the primal quest marries the search to understand “who am I” with coming to terms with “where is here” (1976). People do not develop a sense of commanding or owning this space; rather they seek to survive in and adapt to it. In the words of Margaret Atwood, “the country is too big for anyone to inhabit completely and in parts unknown to us we move in fear, exiles and invaders” (62). A consideration of distinctive themes in Canadian science fiction reveals that “. . . the Canadian view is that humankind is subordinate to nature” (Runté and Kulyk 43). Canada's very nordicity conspires with a definite historical and continuing strong emphasis on primary industry to promote pragmatism and stoicism in the struggle against the adversity that emanates from Canada the place.

This primacy of place pervades Monica Hughes's work—many of her books are obviously set in the Canadian west (*The Ghost Dance Caper*⁷); the wilds of Canada (*Beckoning Lights*); a post-Holocaust Canada (*Beyond the Dark River*); a Canada threatened by impending environmental disaster (*Ring-Rise, Ring-Set*); or an Edmonton⁸ of the future (*The Tomorrow City*). In other books, places not identifiably Canadian demand adaptation from those who seek to inhabit them. Those who transform themselves or their ways survive, but often at no small cost. Olwen Pendennis is an excellent example. Biologically altered by her robotic Guardian, she loses her overt humanity to the extent that without a mask she is considered monstrous by her beloved. She suffers sorely but ultimately triumphs, moving into psycho-spiritual maturity by accepting the limitations, as well as knowing the fullness, of being human. Similarly, the gillmen in *Crisis on Conshelf Ten* are effectively engineered hybrids, having sacrificed much that is human to gain their ecological niche. The sand-dwellers of *Sandwriter* also have modified their

form and culture to exist in their environment. In *The Tomorrow City*, one of Hughes's numerous strong heroines is blinded in her attempt to undermine the totalitarian rule of the great computer originally designed by her father to save the environment. The tendency of humans to abuse wantonly or even to destroy environments is a concern Monica Hughes addresses, as in *Beyond the Dark River*, and recognizes as important in her own life: "The environment is . . . an abiding passion. I was interested in it before we all knew there was such a great problem. Maybe that's because I've had moments of epiphany in the bush, in central Canada and in the mountains. The idea that we're mucking up the whole thing is terribly sad and makes me angry. Environmental themes . . . sneak into my work all the time" (Wishinsky). This preoccupation with the environment bespeaks the Canadian identification with and through the land, something that Hughes knows about and that clearly matters to her. She recognizes a strong personal impact from various geographic locales, for instance: "Egypt had a huge effect on me. . . . I've got these powerful memories of color, all those lovely strong colors . . . and things that were different, exciting and strange" (1:1). Her first responses to Canada were more unsettling, as indicated by such comments as "the Laurentian shield seemed to me to deny humanity completely" (1982, 9). Later, the Canadian landscape was to challenge her and fire her creativity: "We went to Edmonton and it was so different [from Southern Ontario] . . . what I found a very sparse, very empty country with very little color in it, and I found it very frustrating for the first year, [then] I began to force myself to look at things, to bring home dried grasses for instance and look at the different kinds of grasses and the colors and the shape of the seeds and everything . . . something to replace those maples which . . . are really showy. . . . But there's far more beauty in the bare bones of an aspen. That took a lot of learning" (1:1), in the course of which she "began to wake up to a whole lot of artistic and cultural possibilities" culminating in her writing for children (1:2).

Another matter of consequence pertaining to the land as it relates to Canadianness involves the pattern evident in Canadian literature generally of coming into knowledge of self and identity through confrontation with one's true being in the face of nature. Obviously, that is the journey Olwen commences when she stands on the cliff unmasked before Mark London. She retreats into the wilderness, and there, on the land to which she is so suited and where she alone of all the people in *Keeper* wholly belongs, she is nurtured, finds abiding solace, and commences a journey towards appreciation of her true self. Another Hughes book—one of her realistic works—emerged from her experience with this very pattern in life as in literature. As she has frequently recounted elsewhere,⁹ Mrs. Hughes told me how the inspiration for *Hunter in the Dark* came from her own son who "played hookey from school to go hunting, and all he could say when he came back [and] I said, "Why did you do it?" [was] "I don't know Mom, I had to." What she viewed as a "non-answer" left her to speculate on "what is the imperative of young North Americans to hunt and kill these beautiful creatures" (1:2), a seminal question that directed her writing of the novel. Mike Rankin, the fictional hunter, is substantially different from her own son in that he has a life-threatening disease, yet he is similarly compelled to pursue a trophy deer. At the moment when he should shoot, he identifies with his potential victim and affirms life by refusing to kill. He thereby accepts his own situation, triumphing over his mortality by assuming command of his life and being—for him as for Russ Hughes, the hunt was a *rite de passage* into manhood. Thus, through seeking to appreciate more fully her son's defiant

encounter with nature,¹⁰ Hughes wrote one of her best, most highly regarded, and favorite works.

The second aspect of Canadianness pertains to the conditions of life and being in the world's second largest country. Some of the most significant characteristics of the Canadian condition, and those most relevant to this discussion are multiculturalism; precedence of communal as opposed to individual rights and responsibilities; dynamic dualities that necessitate compromise; and an emphasis on peace and order that permits a certain degree of authoritarianism. Canada's multiculturalism is distinctive in that it officially eschews deracination and encourages celebration of heritage traditions and roots with the result that identity is for all Canadians a journey, which is the very essence of being Canadian. It is an on-going transformative process, commencing for everyone with an immigrant experience. "We are all immigrants here" (the opening words of Margaret Atwood's statement quoted above), translates into the comment by the hero in Gwendolyn MacEwen's speculative fiction, *Noman*, "It's because nobody invited us. . . . We're all foreigners here, we're all illegal immigrants . . ." (1985, qtd. in Kulyk 164). "Otherness" has increasingly become the norm in Canada, so that we must confront the otherness of self as a means to realizing our identity, as Rod McGillis has discussed with respect to another Canadian children's classic, *Shadow in Hawthorn Bay* by Janet Lunn.

All Canadians, then, feel a sense of alienation, of being an outsider to some extent and in various milieus. Certainly Monica Hughes experienced such feelings and has gone on to write about alienation and outsiders of various forms. One reading of the cover blurb on the 1992 Gemini paperback edition of *Sandwriter* is as a romantic rendering of Mrs. Hughes's own experience of immigration: "Sent to live on Roshan, Antia, Princess of Komilant and Kamalant, finds the desert island a hostile and alien place. The barren landscape and unfriendly inhabitants make her feel terribly alone." Hughes sometimes juxtaposes young people of different backgrounds to highlight their alienation and allows its resolution to direct the plot, as in *Beyond the Dark River* wherein a Hutterite boy and an Amerindian girl confront each other, themselves, and the failed technology of our civilization. Similarly, a brother and sister who share "otherness" through the death of their mother and their capacity for psychic communication are the central figures in *Beckoning Lights*, the story of their encounter with aliens who ultimately guide the youngsters toward self-realization.

Mixed background likewise provides the dynamics for plot resolution involving movement toward acceptance of self, as occurs for the half native/half non-native boy in *The Ghost Dance Caper*, and the child with German maternal descent who, in *My Name is Paula Popowich!*, discovers her paternal heritage through running away and finding her Ukrainian-Canadian grandmother. Both these works also reflect the interplay between self and community, which, in Canada, typically gives priority to the community. The demands of groups (be they familial, ethnic, geographic, etc.) and the responsibilities of membership in them tend to take precedence over and frequently silence the individual who must struggle to achieve personal voice. Social responsibility is emphasized over individual wishes or rights, this being but one of the many dynamic dualities necessitating compromise (along with French/English; urban/rural; east/west; industrialized/undeveloped; socialist/conservative, etc.), and elevating it to a national

characteristic, frequently deemed fence-sitting by critics and outsiders. This pattern emerged from the accommodation necessitated by the British assuming control over a primarily French-speaking population following the conquest of Quebec in 1759. It continues to this day, such that the French/English dynamic can (as variously argued by the distinguished Canadian historian Ramsay Cook among others) justifiably be deemed the central determining characteristic of Canada. It is, as I have discussed at length elsewhere,¹¹ the fountainhead of our contemporary multiculturalism, making compromise the means to attain and maintain a hard-won unity and, ultimately, central to Canadianness.

As Runté and Kulyk point out, “Canadians have never really believed that this improbable country could work” (43), which has led them away from speculating about other realities given that this one offers enough food for thought and issues to resolve. Hughes has constructed some other realities, but these are not elaborate worlds described in their intricacies. The Isis Trilogy contrasts sharply in this respect with comparable works by writers from related countries, for instance, *The Earthsea Trilogy* by Ursula LeGuin, who is American or *The Obernewtyn Chronicles* by Isobelle Carmody, who is Australian.

A final Canadian characteristic is the emphasis on peace and order that permits and accepts a certain degree of authoritarian governance, while the perception of overt authoritarianism provokes concern about totalitarian control. This irony of seeking and accepting order maintained through a central authority yet objecting to efforts by that authority to assume control is evident in various of Hughes’s works including *Beyond the Dark River* as previously mentioned; a more recent cyber-novel, *Invitation to the Game*; and a fantasy work, *Castle Tourmandyne*, involving a dollhouse manipulated by a Machiavellian magician.

Such consideration of characteristics of the Canadian condition as they relate to Hughes’s work leads naturally into the discussion of the context of Canadian cultural products, in this case, specifically Canadian science fiction and fantasy, especially that produced for children, and Canadian children’s literature generally. In 1995 the National Library of Canada mounted the “Out of This World” exhibit of Canadian science fiction and fantasy literature, which prompted a particularly valuable and illuminating collection of essays on the subject, *Out of This World: Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature* (Collins et al), and the dedication of that year’s “Read Up On It” kit to works in the same genres for children.¹²

The exhibition and the scholarly collection clearly demonstrate that there is now a reasonable body of Canadian work in these genres, though historically there has been more fantasy than science fiction produced by Canadians. Neither genre is particularly strong in Canadian literature generally and children’s literature in particular, such that as late as 1992 the Canadian literature specialist Elizabeth Waterston could justifiably state “very little science fiction has come from Canadian pens—or word processors” (168). There is, however, a “recent realization that there is indeed a distinct body of Canadian SF, that it differs from what has gone before, and that—in spite of Canadians’ traditional inferiority complex—it is actually pretty good. [and] that it is helping to redefine and thereby revitalize, SF” (Runté and Kulyk 41). This effect derives from the specific nature of Canadian science fiction, described by John Clute in

“Canada: SF in English” as follows: “In the main, Canadian sf in English is more literary, concerned with COMMUNICATION, and less high tech than most US sf” (189). Lorna Toolis expands the comparison: “American stories tend to be very problem-oriented. The viewpoint character is presented with a clearly defined problem and he solves it. American readers have been brought up on television, which packages stories in fifty-four minute-plus-commercials format, complete with happy ending. . . . [In] Canadian literature . . . problems are vaguely perceived, messily resolved, and one is left with the impression that the characters’ lives keep going even after the curtain comes down on this particular scene” (qtd. in Runté and Kulyk 49). Such is the case in *The Isis Trilogy*, especially at the end of *The Isis Pedlar* when Guardian responds to Moira Flynn’s query about his leaving Isis with her troublesome but adventurous father: “To travel through the Galaxy, to learn new languages and customs, to see things that are not in my program . . . who knows what I might be capable of. Oh, to be young again!” (119).

No extended discussion of modern Canadian children’s literature would be complete without consideration of Monica Hughes and her many works. In *Children’s Literature in Canada*, Waterston actually reads *The Keeper of the Isis Light* as “revelatory of themes in the whole sequence of Canadian books for young people.” Beyond the red hair of its heroine (mirroring that of Prince Edward Island’s Anne, the most famous Canadian child ever), Waterston considers the book to have particular feminist import and “a peculiarly Canadian relevance . . . [as] an allegory of the encounter between beings adapted to the New World and a race of newcomers ill fitted to survive there” (171-72).

Hughes and her works figure strongly in discussions of Canadian sci-fi and fantasy, usually dominating those on works for children. Four of her books are included among the English list of “Noteworthy Science Fiction and Fantasy Books” in the *Out of This World* kit, whereas no other author is listed more than once. Her books are popular and sell in considerable numbers, even the early titles, many of which have been reprinted as paperbacks in recent years. As of 1999, she had twenty-six titles and twenty-seven entries (one in both French and English) listed in *Canadian Books in Print*. Evidently Mrs. Hughes’s works have a certain timeless resonance for young Canadians, both Anglophone and Francophone, which is especially noteworthy since Canadian children’s books are rarely simultaneously published in both official languages and seldom translated from one to the other.¹³ This appeal is partly attributable to their typically Canadian focus—one that Mrs. Hughes helped establish—away from technological gadgetry and scientific detail that tend to date science fiction.¹⁴ Yet, there is more to it, for not all (28) of Hughes’s many works have traveled well abroad. A number were originally published in Britain or simultaneously in British and Canadian (sometimes also American) editions, a situation that has misled many in the children’s book world to believe Monica Hughes to be a British writer. Most of her best works are available in at least one non-English edition. For instance, *Hunter in the Dark* is available in six and *Log Jam* in seven, neither of which is sci-fi and have, rather, popular “appeal to the Euro psyche for the sense of wide open unspoiled places” (Hughes, personal communication 2001). There definitely is an amorphous aspect to Hughes’s works indelibly marking them as Canadian, that is, the imprint of and resonance with the Canadian psyche which in some instances necessarily restricts their accessibility to foreigners.

A journey through the Canadian imagination involves exposure to intense Calvinist influences, represented in strong feelings of guilt and responsibility played out in situations, within individuals and among groups as the struggle between good and evil. Suffering is the inevitable outcome, but leads to positive results in that those who suffer and survive are, or are considered to be, the better for it. Continued exploration of the Canadian way of thinking demands experience of insignificance or at least humility in the face of natural forces. In the confrontation of human versus machine, humanity or humanness must prevail, so humankind will abide though not triumph. Progress is constantly juxtaposed to tradition and frequently tempered as a result. Overall, there is a femaleness to this psychic space, a non-aggressive, receptive and giving aspect that is caring, protective, and familial—characteristics frequently contrasted with the intensely masculine traits of our southern neighbor. Finally, a feeling of “not being done yet,” of still becoming, fuels a nagging sense of inferiority while fostering a pervasive quest for self-realization and fulfillment. To be Canadian is to be in a continuum, connected to heritage roots elsewhere, moving steadfastly onwards, changing and being changed as circumstances require, towards an indefinite goal.

There can be little doubt that such thoughts infuse Monica Hughes’s works. *The Story Box* is just one of her many books in which the main character must struggle with him/herself to do what is right and thereby challenge the forces of evil to the benefit of that which is good. Specifically, Colin defies the insularity of Merton Town to help Jennifer, a shipwrecked foreigner whose predilection for storytelling frees Colin’s younger sister, Etta, to dream. Through his actions, Colin ultimately looses the forbidden imagination, and creatively leads the small party to freedom—unknown and uncertain—but obviously for their good. Hughes freely indicated in our conversations that she sees her writing as a sort of modern myth, offering to young people a potential guide for living.¹⁵ It is mythic ideas pertinent to her work that Raymond Jones explores in his insightful article, “Re-Visioning *Frankenstein: The Keeper of the Isis Light* as Theodicy.” He notes the profoundly Calvinist aspect and Canadian focus on survival of this “most stimulating and satisfying” work that “offers the truth that suffering is an inevitable part of life and the hope that suffering humanizes and brings psychological or spiritual rewards” (17).

Similar connections are evidently possible between the other aspects of the Canadian psyche mentioned above and one (or more typically, many) of Hughes’s works. Femaleness—identified with caring and intuiting—surfaces in her portraits of the native people and their interrelationship with the land in *Log Jam*, for instance, as well as in the prominence of female role models in her works—Olwen herself, Moira Flynn in the last work of the trilogy, Antia in *Sandwriter*, and the list could go on.

Monica Hughes’s writings clearly help “map the Canadian imagination,” as Frye claimed the nation’s literature must (1976). In describing her initial efforts to write, Mrs. Hughes tells of first seeking something she really knew about for her subject, with that eventually leading to her asking a question that she could not answer, which drove her to write a response in terms of this, her phenomenal, reality. It is a pattern she has pursued with success. What she truly knows is the Canadianness she has imbibed and made her own through more than four decades of living it.

She is not *entirely* Canadian even yet, for such Anglicisms as “Maths” (the dreaded subject her hero must study in *The Ghost Dance Caper*) as opposed to “Mathematics” (familiar to her North American audience) surface on occasion. But, such occurrences may in truth simply reinforce her Canadianness by indicating her retention of a connection to her heritage, that is itself a Canadian characteristic. When she is true to what she knows or what really matters to her, she is at her best. One special instance of her writing a matter of consequence into a fine book is *Blaine’s Way*, which is a fictionalized account of her husband’s growing up written for him.¹⁶

In giving voice to Canadianness, in letting that come through as in *The Isis Trilogy* and *Hunter in the Dark*, Monica Hughes has created outstanding works. Where she manufactures symbols or manipulates plots too directly, her work falls short of its potential. It is a mixed blessing that Mrs. Hughes writes easily and quickly (“2000 words in a sitting, a chapter in two days, three to six months for a book, often two books a year” [1:2]). In this manner she has produced abundant works for many children to enjoy, but it is those works with which she has struggled (in true Canadian fashion), those that were the hardest to pull together (again, the hard-won unity that is so Canadian) that are clearly the best, such as the exceptional one honored with the Phoenix award. These works are typically character-driven, not those with carefully orchestrated plots but rather those that rise unbidden from her unconscious, insisting upon being told. The true quality of Hughes’s *oeuvre* goes beyond the obvious and invariably speaks from and to the degree to which the author herself has embraced the culture—most specifically the mythos—of her adopted land.

Notes

¹ See J. R. Clute, “Monica Hughes,” 594.

² These tape-recorded interviews extended over almost five hours on November 16 and November 20, 1999. The tapes are part of an on-going project on “Writing for Children in Canada” and are included in the Carpenter collection of the Ontario Folklore-Folklife Archive at York University. The citations here are identified by interview number followed by the tape number, 1:2 therefore being the second tape of the first interview.

³ One relatively recent interview is included in *Northern Dreamers*, an important book in the context of this discussion as it comprises twenty interviews with famous Canadian science fiction, fantasy, and horror writers.

⁴ It is important to note that while Mrs. Hughes wrote avocationally from an early age, she remained unpublished for more than two decades after she came to Canada and four years subsequent to 1971 when she made a commitment to writing professionally, determined “to write good children’s fiction, not junk” (1:1).

⁵ Frye produced several works dedicated to what he termed “mapping” the Canadian imagination, most significant of which here are *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* and a documentary for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Journey Without Arrival*.

⁶ In “Towards the Last Spike” (lines 905 ff), a poem about the building of the transcontinental railway which, according to Cornelius Van Horne who supervised its construction, would have made a Canadian out of the German emperor (as recounted by William Kilbourn in his introduction to *Canada: A Guide to The Peaceable Kingdom*).

⁷ For ease of reading throughout this article, I offer a single example, rather than listing all of Hughes’s books, pertinent to each point made.

⁸ Mrs. Hughes’s home of thirty-five years, which she considers a “lovely city to live in but cannot think of it as [her] spiritual home” that being “mostly in London” but other places in Britain as well such as Canterbury, Stonehenge, the Welsh borders, and the North Coast of Devonshire where her grandparents lived. She feels “an intimate connection . . . sort of comfortable family relationships with [England’s] past that [she] doesn’t feel with anywhere else even if [some] are only places [she] has visited in books” (1:1).

⁹ Including the Toronto Children’s Literature Roundtable session on November 14, 1999, that focused on her work.

¹⁰ Mrs. Hughes expanded on this situation as follows: “I thought, well, there’s no way out of it, I’m going to have to write it out, so I had to invent a substitute for my son who could talk to me, who understood what he was doing even partly and then . . . find the past history of [the] character and develop them to the point where they’re real enough to talk back to you and maybe even make their own minds up. . . . And that’s what I did with Mike Rankin, asked him the challenging question, ‘What are you doing in the Swan Hills hunting a trophy deer? Why?’ ‘Because I have to’ and then I had to go into the have-to’s in a different way than I did with my son, find out why he was there, what it was about, and then he wrote the book, he made the decisions.” The personal significance of her “conversation” with Mike Rankin is evident from her reaction to the novel’s ending: “I found it incredibly comforting the degree of courage that he had found in the bush. It wasn’t just courage I’d invested him with or anything, but that he’d found for himself to go on and face whatever life was going to bring. It was amazing” (1:2).

¹¹ In various publications, the most relevant of which here is “Folklore as a Tool of Multiculturalism,” (1992).

¹² These kits are produced annually by the National Library of Canada and distributed free to teachers, librarians, parents, and group leaders to encourage reading. Based on a different theme every year, the bilingual kits are mailed out in September and typically contain the following: reading lists of Canadian works in the theme area as well as a list of award-winning Canadian titles in both English and French; a poster and class set of 32 bookmarks; a request card to order additional free kits and bookmarks; and tips and suggestions on ways to promote reading and learning among young people. The kits are available through www.nlc-bnc.ca.

¹³ A clear indication of Hughes’s significance in Canadian children’s literature is the fact that several of her books are available in French-Canadian editions including translations of *Beckoning Lights*, *Little Fingerling*, and *Hunter in the Dark*.

¹⁴ In our interviews, Mrs. Hughes recounted how she ensures that basic scientific facts are correct and her creations are scientifically grounded, citing her extensive research into the requirements for life underwater in the course of writing *Crisis on Conshelf Ten*. She also wryly recalled an extended, carefully researched “scientific” description that was wholly excised by the editor of another work.

¹⁵ Monica Hughes is not unaware of the cultural connections to her work and of children’s literature generally, a subject she has written on in “Perceptions of Society Through Children’s Literature” (1991) and “The Writer’s Quest” (1982).

¹⁶ Glen Hughes himself once desired to write, and it was through a course in creative writing that the Hugheses met, though he never pursued writing as a vocation (1:1).

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