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Reviews

June Packwood, *The Emerald Cloak*
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Packwood's debut novel *The Emerald Cloak* is an account of the trials and tribulations of an Irish family's immigrant experience in Upper Canada. The novel begins in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland in the mid nineteenth century. The female protagonist Molly O'Connor develops an uncanny propensity for healing the sick after the premature death of her mother from pneumonia in the mining slums of Creggan. The story follows Molly and her extended family on their twelve-year journey from poverty stricken Ireland to their settlement in Upper Canada and their new lives as lumber merchants and herein lies one of the novel's many problems; the narrative is strained by the need to compress twelve years worth of story into 256 pages. Packwood moves far too quickly from one point in time to the next; there is no smooth transition and Packwood frequently relies on hackneyed and meaningless phrases such as "finally the time came" and "three years had passed since..." to propel the story forwards and consequently leaves gaping holes between important events.

The book would be better crafted as a series of short stories thereby dispensing with the need for laboured connections between each new episode. There is little character development and Molly remains at best a two dimensional character. Despite learning of her driving desire to bring hygiene and health care to Quebec and Upper Canada the reader never actually becomes familiar with her. Packwood litters any dialogue with "darlin'" and "to be sure", in an attempt to hammer home to the reader the fact that these characters are undeniably Irish. Packwood's attempts to build a heroic mythology around the Molly character merely grate on the nerves and are often even offensive. Several times Molly is told that she has almost single-handedly been responsible for the safe passage of the *Looshtank* from Liverpool to New Brunswick, her kindly Irish manner soothing the sick and placating the angry. She manages to calm those folk who are "Uttering empty threats *extolling* Canada as a cruel prison master" and graciously acknowledges that "their fate was not due to Canada's actions." Molly walks the slums of Quebec dispensing wisdom and home remedies, often at the expense of her own health and welfare. She makes lifelong friends of every doctor she meets and receives free medical supplies from all of them. When Molly encounters Algonquin people they are cultural stereotypes and would not be out of place in an early twentieth century "Boy's Own Adventure" story. They are either savagely ignorant or supremely noble and have names like "Sweet Water", "Dancing Eagle" and "Black Owl". They are so grateful for the assistance of Molly and her medicinal knowledge that they honour her in a special ceremony during which she is anointed with oils and re-named "Little Sister of the Pines" eventually taking her new place alongside the chief at the head of the tribe along with the rest of her family.

Within the first ten pages the reader is struck by the apparent inability of the proofreader to pick up on glaring spelling mistakes and eye-watering grammatical errors. Ms. Packwood also seems unsure as to the rules concerning apostrophe usage and is excruciatingly over fond of the comma, using seven or eight where one would suffice: "...[he] was willing to put them up, but only with the understanding, that he would be, collecting the weekly rent, in advance, and inspecting the premises himself." At many points in the book the reader will come across such mistakes as

“she looked into his eye’s”, “he took his hand in her’s” or will encounter some indecipherable sentence such as “ she beaconed to her husband”, “unbenounced to her family” and the utterly incomprehensible “Molly...forced the reluctant young man agreement and smiling, spoke to Molly...” Tenses change suddenly and without apparent reason, often in mid sentence. There is frequent confusion between the words “where” and “were”, “were” and “was” and “too” and “to”. Borealis do not offer their own editing service and ask that manuscripts be submitted ready for publishing but one wonders if anyone at Borealis actually read this book at all. It is to Packwood’s credit that she is clearly knowledgeable about immigration in Canada in the nineteenth century and the novel has plenty of facts and figures regarding the numbers of Irish immigrants and mortality rates. It is, however, a serious disappointment that the writing is unskilled and does such a disservice to the serious subject matter.