The Refuge Short Guide

The Refuge by Monica Hughes

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Overview

Twelve-year-old Barbara Courts is upset that her parents are divorcing. Her father has gone for a new job and a girlfriend in Toronto, leaving Barbara and her mother to move from their fine family home in Edmonton's river valley to a simple apartment in a modest neighborhood. From now on, the two of them will have to make do on what Barbara's mother can earn as a freelance writer.

Barbara misses her old friends and is growing out of her designer clothes. It's a long, hot summer with no music and gym lessons, no movies or shopping, and she blames her mother for arguing with her father. One day when delivering a manuscript to the courier for her mother, Barbara follows a jackrabbit down a narrow passage between two warehouses in an industrial park and finds a high fence across the passage. It hides a vacant lot, fenced in on all four sides by warehouses. This patch of ground has gone to bush, with grass, wildflowers and trees.

Barbara adopts this place as her secret garden and names it Campbell's Bush, from a sign on one of the warehouses. The sense of peace she feels there enables her to behave better much of the time; "The transformation is a bit startling," says her mother.

When school starts, Barbara finds no friends at first, and her old friends have forgotten to stay in touch. Worse still, her father has not phoned or written. The secret garden matters more than ever to her. She explores a furniture store to learn about an old loading bay door over the garden, and is relieved to find the old door sealed.

School goes better for Barbara once she joins the gymnastics group training for the provincial games and makes two friends on the team. But she learns that her father will only give her mother custody if she makes no claims on their joint property. Talking to her new friends about their own family divorces reassures Barbara a little, but in art class she meets Stan, who has drawn a rabbit much like the one in her secret garden. Where did he see it? she wonders. Stan becomes a friend as well, and she learns that he needs to have a private place to keep his drawing secret from his father and brothers.

Sharing Campbell's Bush with Stan works out well. He brings a Coleman stove and helps her build a lean-to, to go with the bird feeder and cooler she bought on sale. Barbara runs to Stan when she learns from her mother of a rumor that the industrial park will be torn down and replaced with a new complex. Stan and Barbara ask Terry, a classmate, to ask his dad what the City Planning Department intends for the industrial park.

Terry is delighted to do anything for Stan, whom he idolizes. The rumor may be true, and Terry decides to follow Stan around secretly and guard his back. Meanwhile, Barbara's mother is writing an article on prison reform and shows pictures of the criminals she interviewed to Barbara and Stan.

Barbara's father finally calls her the day before her birthday, to tell her he will be in town the next day to take her for lunch and shopping. But the school gymnastics team has arranged to go to the provincial trials.

Barbara chooses to spend the day with her father and is cut from the team. Upset, she quarrels with Stan. To make things worse, her dad is four hours late, and they have time only for lunch. He drives her home quickly and gives her money in lieu of a present, which she gives to her mother for groceries. The realization that her father makes promises he cannot keep makes Barbara very upset, and she tells her mother she is going for a walk.

At Campbell's Bush she finds the Coleman stove lit and tended by a stranger. Jack Norton is a convicted murderer her mother interviewed, escaped from prison and hiding in what was his own secret place as a troubled teenager. He will not let Barbara leave, and he has a knife from the cooler.

Barbara's mother is frantic when she is out after dark and calls Stan, looking for her. Stan goes to check the secret garden and finds Terry, fallen asleep while spying through a hole in the fence. Stan recognizes the man in the garden with Barbara and sends Terry to tell Barbara's mother where she is and who is with her and to bring the police.

When Barbara finally cries out in fear, Stan leaps the fence and picks up the dropped knife. He kicks over the stove to start a fire to corner the fugitive, and the police arrive to pull down the fence and take Jack Norton into custody.

Barbara promises her mother never to go back into the secret garden, but Stan goes back to find a higher fence blocking the way, though there is a gap at the bottom big enough for a rabbit to wriggle through.

About the Author

Monica Hughes was born Monica Ince in Liverpool, England, on November 3, 1925. Her parents then worked at the University of Liverpool, her father (E. L. Ince, a Welshman) in mathematics and her mother (Phyllis Ince, an Englishwoman) in biology.

A few months after Hughes's birth, her parents left Liverpool so that her father could take up a new position as head of the department of mathematics at the new University of Cairo in Egypt.

Hughes's first memories are of Egypt: their first house in Heliopolis, walks in the desert with the nanny for Hughes and her younger sister, and seeing mirages of palm trees and buildings floating in the sky. Later they lived in an apartment in Cairo, with a spectacular view of the pyramids, which they visited on weekends. (Her parents climbed the Great Pyramid for the view, while the girls played with bottle caps littered in the sand at its base. "So much for history," sighed Hughes in Something about the Author Autobiography Series.) She still remembers little lizards, birds of prey, and the wind-blown sand; these and other memories became elements in her novels Sandwriter and The Promise.

The Ince family returned to England in 1931 so the girls could attend school in a suburb of London, England. Hughes was pleased and excited by the exposure to music and a wider range of books, particularly Norse mythology and the works of E. Nesbit. For a while she wanted to be an archaeologist and Egyptologist, but seeing Boris Karloff in the film The Mummy gave her nightmares for weeks and put an end to that ambition.

When the Ince family moved to Edinburgh in 1936, Hughes found refuge from the plain, cold city and boring school in the nearby Carnegie library. She plunged into the dramas of nineteenth century writers, and the works of Jules Verne. All of her small allowance went toward purchasing hardcover blank books in which she would write exciting titles and "Chapter One."

Then she would sit and dream of being a famous writer. That and a journal kept when she went on vacations was all the writing she did at that time.

When the war began in 1939, Hughes and her sister were sent away to school, first to an isolated hunting lodge in Scotland, and later to a boarding school in Harrogate, not far from the Yorkshire moors where the Bronte sisters had lived. There she was encouraged to write fiction, as well as essays and compositions.

After her father died, Hughes could no longer plan to go to Oxford; Edinburgh University was the best the family could afford. Some of the feelings of being a fatherless teenager were experiences that later went into the writing of her novel The Refuge. At age sixteen she began an honors mathematics degree, though the English lecturers were far more interesting to her.

At eighteen, she volunteered for service in the Women's Royal Navy Service (called Wrens), was sent down to London, and spent two years working with thousands of other Wrens on the secret project of breaking the German code. Every free moment she had, Hughes spent in the gallery of the New Theatre watching ballet.

After the war, Hughes transferred into meteorology, first in Scotland and then Belfast, where she was delighted to find food rationing a thing of the past. When she left the Wrens in 1946, she lived in Chelsea (London) with her mother and sister. For a few years she worked freelance as a dress designer, before taking a friend's advice and traveling to South Africa and Rhodesia (now called Zimbabwe). She lived and worked with that friend's sister and husband for two years, making first-run dresses for a local factory and later working in a bank. Her journey to Africa and back stayed long in her memory, and her experiences filtered into many of the books she would later write, including Sandwriter and The Promise.

Living once again with her mother and sister in an unheated London apartment got her thinking about the sun. Australia seemed to be the place to emigrate, but the waiting list was three years long. Hughes left for Canada instead, in April of 1952, intending to work her way across to the west coast and pick up a ship across the Pacific to Australia. Working in Ottawa, Ontario, in the National Research Council, she began writing stories to combat loneliness. At a writing class at the YMCA she met a woman who became her best friend in Canada, and who introduced Hughes to Glen Hughes, who became her husband in 1957.

The Hugheses lived in Ontario, moving from Cornwall to Toronto and London with Glen's work. Hughes began writing again in the late evening and early morning, while caring for their four children. When the youngest was a week old in 1964, they moved to Edmonton, Alberta, driving on the new Trans Canada Highway across the seemingly endless prairies—a trip that she remembered twelve years later when writing her novel Earthdark.

This began a furiously creative time for Monica Hughes: she painted in oils, embroidered wall hangings, wove tapestries and wrote, but never sold a single short story, article, or novel. Some of the feelings of the character Barbara in Hughes's novel The Refuge clearly had their origins in this time in the author's life in Edmonton, when her family lived in a nice home, the father worked, the mother was creative, and the offspring went to school.

With the death of her mother and sister, and as her children grew older, Monica Hughes had few touchstones to her memories. In 1971 she resolved to spend a year writing for four hours each day. She read armloads of books by the best writers for young people. After some unfruitful efforts, she was inspired by a Jacques Cousteau movie, "The Silent World," to begin her novel Crisis on Conshelf Ten. In 1974 it was accepted by a British publisher, who asked for another story about the lead character.

Since then, Monica Hughes has written over thirty books for young people. Her works have been translated into over a dozen languages. Though she did eventually tour

Australia and New Zealand in 1990 with her husband, she feels firmly settled in Canada with her husband, grown children, and grandchildren. In the spring of 2001, with new projects in hand, she fully intends to write as long as she possibly can.

Setting

This novel is set in the city of Edmonton, Alberta, in Canada: an urban setting which in many respects will feel familiar to readers who dwell in a North American city. In this city, there are so many streets and neighborhoods on both banks of a large river that it takes over an hour to drive from Barbara's former house to the townhouse that she and her mother rent at the beginning of the novel. The change in economic status is nicely emphasized by the house being the same size as all four units of the townhouse and by the new view being not of trees and gardens but Smith's Tool and Die Works.

Social Sensitivity

There are three important considerations regarding the setting of this novel which may not be immediately obvious to readers who have never visited Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The first is that Edmonton is far enough north that twilight lasts a long time.

From four o'clock till pitch black, even in October, is over three hours—a very long time for Barbara to be held captive by an escaped murderer.

The second consideration is that Edmonton can have severe weather changes (including frost, snow, or thunderstorms) in two hours, during any month of the year. When Barbara is confined in the secret garden by Jack Norton, his suggestion to tie her up for the night and leave her there in the morning is life-threatening. Wearing only a skirt and light sweater, she would definitely have to endure thirst and temperatures well below freezing. It is quite likely that the October overcast weather could change to snow or drop to minus fifteen degrees Centigrade/ zero degrees Fahrenheit. In Edmonton, during the winter of 1995, a child was left tied up in a garage by other children and froze to death by morning. All missing persons reports on Edmonton radio and television include a request for listeners to check their yards, garages, and alleys, but the owner of the fenced-in secret garden might not check it till morning.

Readers who live in milder climates may not understand the cold experienced by Terry on guard in the alley or Barbara shivering in the secret garden. But every winter in Edmonton one or more persons gets caught by a cold snap and dies.

The third consideration is that the neighborhood to which Barbara and her mother move is a perfectly decent place to live. The rented townhouse is described as one of a series of neat and tidy homes for people with modest incomes, and it is situated near a fine, large park, a library branch, and a good school near some bungalows and other houses. The townhouse is certainly a nicer place to live than the low-income housing units and low-rent apartments that would be within ten blocks (a distance Barbara travels on her bike at least twice during the story). Barbara's mother is working hard to keep her daughter in a finer household than endured by many single-parent families.

The industrial park is described as old but not abandoned. Barbara is distressed by living across a four-lane road from Smith's Tool and Die Works—perhaps, now that she is close to the industries that never intruded into her former neighborhood, she is afraid of work and death in ways that never troubled her before.

The emotions of the protagonist Barbara are simplistic for most of the novel, especially when compared to other works by the same author. Hughes has shown in The Promise and The Keeper of the Isis Light that she can create complex emotional situations for characters as young as Barbara, who is turning thirteen. Perhaps the author's intent was to write about a young person whose life is temporarily dominated by her parents' divorce; if so, this protagonist will not challenge or inspire young readers in the early

years of the twenty-first century. Divorce is even more common now than in 1986, when the novel was published.

Monica Hughes has been called "Canada's finest writer of science fiction for children" by critic Sarah Ellis in The Horn Book magazine. Ellis goes on to say: There is a gentleness to her books that is rare ... The hairsbreadth escapes, the exotic flora and fauna, ... the villains and the heroes—all are enclosed in one overriding concern, subtle but ever-present: the value of kindness. This theme seems rather a nonrobust one ... But Monica Hughes manages to clothe the homey quality inflesh and blood... to give it strength and resilience.

The Refuge carries the dedication "To my children, who discovered and named their 'Campbell's Bush' a long time ago." Hughes has captured something of the feelings of a child who discovers a forgotten place gone splendidly wild in the heart of a city.

Literary Qualities

The genesis of The Refuge was a request from the publisher, Doubleday, for a novel set in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Hughes had by that time been living in Edmonton for over twenty-three years and had raised her children there. She had a wealth of experiences to draw upon, from bicycle rides into the river valley to an understanding of how long a car ride from the south side over a bridge to the northwest quarter of the city would seem to a twelve or thirteen-year-old girl.

Monica Hughes remembers the very moment that was the beginning of her novel The Refuge: "When my children were very small they came running into the house in great excitement one day," she said in a personal interview. "We've found a secret place behind Campbell's Furniture," they told her. "We're going to call it Campbell's Bush." They wanted to tell her more, but she asked them not to say a word. "Because," she told them, "I know that one day I'll want to write about it, and then it must be my Campbell's Bush and not yours." She made a note about it—just a word or two: Campbell's Bush, secret garden.

A number of years later, when her children were in their late teens, she looked at this "idea note." What had appealed to Hughes was the idea of a secret place, known to only one person—for this novel, the person was the character Barbara. But why was it important? "Perhaps she was hurt or angry and needed a place of her own," Hughes mused. And to introduce conflict, Hughes contemplated what could be the worst thing that could happen to Barbara's secret garden: being invaded by another very unsympathetic person or perhaps being destroyed.

In the end, Hughes decided to let her heroine share the secret garden with Stan because conversations and interactions are important elements in storytelling; she also decided to allow both calamities to take place. This novel differs most of all from Frances Hodgson Burnett's The Secret Garden when Jack Norton enters the garden and when Stan starts the fire to confound Jack. Hughes chose to place the climax of her novel in twin calamities rather than the health and reunion which were the climax of Burnett's novel. In this, The Refuge leaves behind Burnett's 1911 novel and becomes clearly a Young Adult novel written in North America in the latter part of the twentieth century, when crisis fiction for teens became very popular.

At a crucial point in the plot, where Barbara introduces Stan to the secret garden, the girl tells Stan how she has made a pool and built a bird feeder and bird house and brought in an old cooler. Rather than showing us the work and the changes and the process of making Campbell's Bush her own hideaway, the author has simply told us in a quick summary. Not only is this writing technique a quick shortcut (more suited to a short story or novella than a novel) but it confuses the reader's sense of time passing. It's hard to be sure just how many days have passed since Barbara found Campbell's Bush, even with the cues of autumn color in the grass and trees and occasional dates being mentioned. This is a divergence from an author whose natural writing style promotes a strong sense of realism of time and place, even in her fantasy novels.

This novel is in many ways linked thematically with a later novel by Monica Hughes, called The Seven Magpies. Published in 1996, The Refuge includes many of the same plot elements as The Seven Magpies, including adolescent fantasy, an absent and distant father who never writes; a mother pre-occupied with desk work to the point where she has little attention to give her daughter; a youth who is expected to be more aggressive than his nature will allow; a wife and mother who cannot keep her husband from treating a teenager in a manner which is unnecessarily cruel and arguably criminal; a youth in trouble with the law; and rabbits (one of which is caught in a snare, killed, cooked over a campfire and its skin, full of maggots, is buried). In both novels the female protagonist is terrified by being confined one afternoon until dark in an isolated place by a man who will not let her go free, though he intends to do her no physical harm.

Hughes's natural writing style sustains all her novels, giving this novel in particular a natural tone, both simple and straightforward. But fiction written from multiple viewpoints, as in this novel told from Barbara's and Stan's and even Terry's viewpoint by turns, is hard to focus—it is far too easy for the narrative to become diffuse and imprecise, uncharacteristic for Hughes.

When writing her book The Tomorrow City, Hughes developed an awareness of two halves of her mind: the right brain (imaginative, holistic, in touch with one's dreams and subconscious) and the left brain (linear, logical, from which comes language, without which stories cannot be written).

From this understanding came Hughes's ability to construct a story which would be of interest, make sense, and mean something important to the reader.

Monica Hughes finds story ideas everywhere. Thoughts drifting through her head, the question "What would happen if ..., " the curiosity about a passer-by—these provide the tiny seeds for her Ideas file, out of which grows a novel.

Along with her Ideas file, Hughes keeps copies of a series of personal essays written on the origin of most of her books. Many readers write to Hughes through her publisher or Web site, asking "Where do you get your ideas for your stories?" On her Web site, www.ecn.ab.ca/mhughes/, Hughes has posted these essays describing the ideas, thoughts, and analysis that were the origins of many of her novels. She is also generous with printed copies of these essays for readers, teachers, and librarians with questions.

Themes and Characters

The Refuge is told from three viewpoints, which is a challenge for author and reader alike. Rather than experiencing the story from entirely within one character's viewpoint, the reader is led through a "Rashomon" experience, and asked to perceive the narrative (in which some incidents are repeated) first from Barbara's perspective, then Stan's and, to a small extent, Terry's as well.

Terry Parker is an interesting supporting character. Barbara saw him on the first day in her new neighborhood, and at school, but ignored him until Career Day when he mentions an ambition to be like his father, who works in the City Planning Department. When Stan asks Terry to find out if the rumor is true that the industrial park will be torn down and renewed, Terry swells with pride. Secretly, he has idolized Stan, like a figure in A Tale of Two Cities, since the older boy chased off some bullies years earlier. He would do anything for Stan, and whatever Stan is doing in the industrial park, but this is all he is asked.

So Terry sets himself to following Stan and secretly guarding him. Thus, he is on the scene when Stan goes to check if Barbara is in the secret garden after dark.

Though she did not know it, Barbara was really only alone with the escaped murderer Norton for a few minutes at the beginning of her captivity. Terry "guards" her till the convict falls asleep and then brings the police while Stan watches. The fat boy with dreams of being a hero, defending his idol and his idol's lady, becomes a realistic and believable young hero.

Stan Natyshyn is a less clearly depicted character, despite the fact that much of the novel is devoted to his thoughts and experiences. He knows he has no friends and is a disappointment to his father and brothers, as an uncoordinated klutz with more interest in drawing pictures than in developing a confident and capable persona. He is further embarrassed by the art teacher using his full name, Stanislaus, rather than the English nickname Stan. Aside from that, his importance in the novel is in his relationship to Barbara.

Barbara only speaks to Stan to find out where he saw the rabbit, concerned that he may have found her secret garden place.

Then she learns drawing suggestions from him. When Stan tells Barbara that he burned his hand rescuing his drawing book from the burning barrel where his father threw it, Barbara realizes that she has less to complain about in her family than she thought and that nothing as bad ever happened to her. What Stan realizes does not matter— partly because he is becoming an artist and cannot let himself be upset by philistines, but also because, as a character, he is secondary to Barbara in this narrative.

Barbara Coutts is an entirely self-centered young person, which is not unusual.

Her mother knows enough to be patient with Barbara's temper and verbal attacks which blame her for the divorce and their new modest living conditions. Finding the secret garden and making new friends have a good effect on Barbara, but it takes being disappointed by her father for Barbara to realize that she can no longer blame her mother for her own mistakes nor for her father's.

Barbara grows and changes as the novel progresses, with three abrupt changes in her emotions and behavior. First, when she discovers the hidden yard she names Campbell's Bush, she has some hope and excitement and is in some measure less disappointed with the changes in her life. Second, when she goes to lunch with her father and realizes that he is not going to do or be what she needs him to be, that he is a disappointment to her as well as to her mother. She is ashamed of having broken her promise to her gymnastics team and of being so mean to her mother. Third, a few hours later, when Jack Norton tells her to take off her panty hose so he can tie her up, Barbara changes from a girl thinking of things she can do or say to improve her situation into one paralyzed and screaming with fear and rejection.

The first change shows that she is adapting to her new situation, and the second shows perception and maturity appropriate for her years. The third change, however, diminishes her effectiveness and confidence. Perhaps that truly was the best point to call for help and rescue, but she did not know that first Terry and then Stan had been watching and had brought the police.

Her screams alert Stan to intervene, but served mostly to alarm her captor, and could have contributed to Norton's deciding to injure or kill her (as years ago he killed his mother and her lover).

At the end of the story, Barbara has promised her mother never to go back into Campbell's Bush. She has internalized the fear and the lingering shock of her captivity. Stan has made no such promise to his parents, who are not afraid for him though he challenged a murderer and started a grass fire that threatened all three lives.

When he reports to Barbara that the climbable fence has been replaced with chainlink fencing topped with barbed wire, it seems to her as if the secret garden has been locked away from everyone. But there is a small gap where the rabbit can get in, and there are other green places all over the city, she realizes. In her new-found fear and passivity, she finds that comforting.

Topics for Discussion

1. How believable are Barbara's reactions to the news that her parents are divorcing? Is she acting her age?

2. How can you tell that Barbara has been leading a pampered life until her parents' divorce? What are the luxuries to which she is accustomed? How much does she miss these in her new home?

3. How can you tell that Barbara has been isolated from the need to work for a living, until her parents' divorce? What are the practicalities that she begins to observe? Does she resent these practicalities or work with them as well as she can?

4. When does Barbara stop punishing her mother for her parents' divorce? What is the significance of this timing in understanding Barbara's character?

5. Does Edmonton, as shown in this novel, seem like a real place to you as a reader?

Does it seem foreign or familiar?

6. What do you think of the police who appear near the end of the novel? Are they like police in your own community?

7. How realistic does the fugitive Jack Norton seem to you? Is he a simple, background character, or more complicated than he first seems? Do you think the coincidence of the children having seen his picture is too contrived or worth what it adds to the unraveling plot?

8. Why does Stan become less affected emotionally by his family as the novel progresses? Is he withdrawing from the world? Is he becoming less distracted by a lack of confidence in himself?

9. What good has Terry's fantasy life brought to his real life? What is he able to accomplish for himself and others because of his fantasies? Were his fantasies useless?

10. What has Barbara given up from her earlier sense of self? How does she behave as the novel ends? Is this an entirely positive or negative change? In light of the novel's ending rescue scene,evaluate to what degree Barbara has matured in the course of this story.

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Monica Hughes's novel The Refuge was published in 1989 and was clearly written to be contemporary. What changes have occurred since the book was published which make it a period piece, not a novel of the here-and-now? How have attitudes about divorce changed?

2. Are attitudes about divorce different for children than for teenagers? Do Barbara's feelings change merely because she is growing older or because she is more experienced? Compare and contrast how children and adults understand divorce.

3. How are you affected as a reader by a book's setting? In The Refuge, does the author make Edmonton seem like a particular and unique city or like a generic prairie city that could be in any of three Canadian provinces or ten American states? What elements give you strong impressions of what it would be like to live in this city as opposed to any other?

4. Compare The Refuge with The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Barrett. What do the two novels have in common, apart from an enclosed garden, shut away from the rest of the world for years? Contrast the female protagonists, with their young lives of wealth and their changing fortunes. Is Barbara much more mature than Mary, for all that she is older? How are Stan and Colin alike in their weakness, in spite of Stan's health and vigor?

5. What significance can you find in the series of writing assignments done by Barbara's mother? How do these articles relate to the narrative as it proceeds? Does any incident in a novel this brief happen in isolation, unconnected to the rest of the story?

6. How is divorce perceived throughout this novel? As the novel begins, Barbara has one reaction. Later, she learns other opinions from her friends at first one school then the other. Then, too, she learns a very different opinion from Stan's mother's reaction when Stan's hand is burned. What does Barbara come to understand about her own mother, even before her father disappoints her on her birthday?

7. What are the positive aspects to Campbell's Bush, Barbara's secret garden? What are the negative aspects? How could the positive elements be incorporated into Barbara's life? Why does it matter less to her at the end of the novel whether the industrial park, and the garden, will be torn down?

8. Describe some ways in which you find urban renewal important in a city planning department. How can continuity be maintained in a neighborhood as buildings deteriorate? What are some important goals for city planning?

9. Confidence motivates Barbara to perform well in gymnastics and Stan to draw with the talent of an emerging artist. How does confidence inspire Terry? Do the adults in the

story act with confidence, or are they instead motivated by duty, by rote, or by concern for others?

10. What evidence for a theme of social conformity can you find in the novel The Refuge? There is an ascending scale in incidents as the novel progresses. How are various characters behaving as they attempt to conform to social 340 The Refuge norms? Are they successful, and what are the results?

11. Author Monica Hughes was invited to a schoolyard in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, to plant a tree in an enclosed courtyard that was named "The Refuge" in tribute to her novel. If you designed a refuge garden, what would it be like? Draw or model a version of your garden. Where would it be situated? Who would use this place?

Would it be for one person or a group?

What positive elements from Campbell's Bush would you incorporate into your refuge garden? How would you guard against its being as dangerous as Campbell's Bush turned out to be for Barbara?

For Further Reference

Ellis, Sarah. "News from the North." Horn Book (October 1984): 661. Contains a positive analysis of Hughes's merit as an author of imaginative writing for young people.

"Monica Hughes." In Something about the Author Autobiography Series, vol. 11. Detroit Gale, 1992. Insight into the life of this author who has lived on four continents and written over thirty books for young adult readers.

Parker, Douglas H. "The Alien Within."

Canadian Children's Literature, vol. 73 (1994): 69. Review of Hughes's novel The Golden Aquarians, with the comment: "Those who know Hughes' other work will understand that she never allows her readers the facile satisfaction of witnessing a 180 degree turn in her characters' behaviour just to bring things to a 'happier ever after' conclusion."

"Sandwriter." Canberra Times (July 10,1985).

The reviewer states that: "Acclaimed as a powerful writer of popular sciencefiction for young readers, Monica Hughes has triumphed again with this intriguing novel.... Most characters are well depicted, while Antia grows in strength as her purpose in the strange sequence of events becomes clear to her. Hughes shows her considerable skill in powerful, descriptive writing."

Van Luven, Lynne. "And Here's Novel No.

25." The Edmonton Journal (February 23, 1992): C4. Interview with photo of Hughes.

Local writer is famous, and rightly so for her accomplishments; still, she leads a practical, quiet life.

Related Titles/Adaptations

Readers who have enjoyed The Refuge would be interested in a later novel by Hughes, The Seven Magpies. There are several elements in common between these two novels: an absent father, a mother busy working at a desk, and a fugitive from the authorities who catches a rabbit in a snare, cooks and eats it. In both novels, the viewpoint character has her freedom of movement restricted one afternoon till dark by a man who is confused and angry, but who intends her no harm.

Readers would do well to compare this novel to The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Barrett.

Other contemporary authors whose works may be enjoyed by fans of Monica Hughes are Dave Duncan (especially the three Young Adult novels in his series The King's Daggers), Eileen Kernaghan (Dance of the Snow Dragon and The Snow Queen), and Julie Lawson (Cougar Cove).

Related Web Sites

http://www.ecn.ab.ca/mhughes/ The author's personal Web site, with interviews, listings for each of her novels, including Sandwriter, and her home e-mail address.

Includes a series of personal essays on the origins of many of her books.

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