

little consequence, quite often represent basic cultural assumptions that influence ideological perspectives. *The Siren in the Night* also describes the nature of tribalism and ethnic loyalty. The author uses the native word “parapo” to present the concept of ethnic affinity. Kolawole, in making crucial appointments, is often reminded of the reality of tribalism noting that the concept of “one Nigeria” was invoked for wartime convenience only, that “collective will” or a “national consensus” had been only a transient phenomenon. “For the first time, North and West banded together in a self-preserving allegiance. Not even self-government in 1957 and independence in 1960 had engendered such unity of purpose.” After the war, however “parapo had returned to power unopposed” (96, 97).

Although the claim cannot be made by this reader that *The Siren in the Night* is a novel so engaging that the reader cannot put it down, the work speaks well for Eddie Iroh’s ability to communicate the moods and motivations of a diverse Nigerian nation. The work is, more accurately, one to which the reader will perhaps return time after time in order to comprehend fully the commendably meticulous presentation of Eddie Iroh and to appreciate the illumination that it lends to our understanding of Nigeria.

— Robbie Jean Walker
Auburn University at Montgomery

Hadley Irwin. *I Be Somebody*. (New York: Atheneum, 1984) 170 pp., \$11.95.

At the turn of this century, a group of American blacks from the midwest migrated to Canada to become homesteaders in the remote town of Athabasca, Alberta. Hadley Irwin’s latest novel for young people focuses on this little-known chapter of American history. The movement of entire towns of blacks north in search of freedom provides Hadley Irwin an ideal setting for a young boy’s search for identity. Rap Davis’ growth toward maturity, his determination to “be somebody” parallels the growth and determination of a people to be somebody.

The ten-year-old protagonist from Clearview, Oklahoma, may be known by the undistinguished nickname of “Rap Davis” *now*: Cassie, who is so smart it is sometimes hard to like her, might say *now*, “Rap Davis! You so dumb!” And Lacey, Rap’s more wily friend, might trick him every time *now*. But some day, Rap knows, he will be called by his real name. He will be Mr. A.J. Davis, or even His Honor Anson J. Davis. He’ll be somebody. With dreams of a future, Rap is inevitably stirred by

town talk of Athabasca as a new beginning. Though he does not understand the meaning of “Athabasca”—not even that it is a place—the word itself becomes the name of his dreams: “The word, whispered, became a poem, a song, a chant, making magic” in Rap’s mind.

Fortunately, Hadley Irwin does not succumb to the temptation to suggest that movement, escape, solves all problems. Rap’s Aunt Spicey realizes that it “ain’t *where* that makes somebody. It’s *who*.” For Clearview’s adults, many of them former slaves, Athabasca symbolizes the place and time where “freedom won’t be a dream no more. It’ll be real.” For Rap, Athabasca means growing up. As adults must recognize that life might not be better somewhere else, Rap must do some of that growing up at home before he can become “Mr. A.J. Davis, Athabasca, Canada.”

Hadley Irwin’s Rap is not just a dreamer. He is a boy all of us recognize and many of us have been—dealing with school’s difficulties, itching to wander off to private places and special people, learning to think, to pay for mistakes, to deal with death. Rap weathers each of these steps toward maturity at home, in Clearview; but it is the trip to Athabasca, on a train “wider than Aunt Spicey’s house and longer than the Pentecostal Church,” that provides his ultimate awakening. It is at the stops along the way that Rap discovers his place in the white world from which the all-black town of Clearview has sheltered him: train stations have special sections for “coloreds,” “coloreds aren’t wanted” in Canada, “coon hunters” aren’t necessarily hunting racoons, some people are nobody.

Rap survives his initiation into both maturity and the white world. On the train he learns about himself and his world, he is forced into independence by Aunt Spicey’s death, and he finds his identity with the revelation that the mysterious Jesse Creek is his father. He emerges in Hadley Irwin’s book with a sense of place, roots, family, and self. He might stay in Athabasca, or he might return eventually to Clearview: either way, the reader is certain that A.J. Davis will be at home, will be somebody.

Despite some minor flaws in narrative technique, the novel lingers in the mind. *I Be Somebody* has as its setting the migration of a people, but it is clearly Rap’s story from beginning to end. A moving tale of initiation and ethnic awakening, the novel offers young readers a portrayal of the frustrations and hopes of youth, and it offers mystery and anticipation, sorrow and laughter. The story is historically authentic; more important, it is authentic as a portrayal of experience—for the young black youth in search of ethnic identity, for all youths in search of themselves, and for all readers (adults as well as children) who remember growing up.

— Linda P. Young
California State University, Sacramento