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Editorial / Présentation

What's Canadian about Canadian Children's Literature? II

This issue contains the second half of the special series of articles on Canadian national and cultural identity, collected and presented by Perry Nodelman. It also presents a study by Suzanne Pouliot on "Tête-Bêche," a unique editorial initiative from a prominent Québécois publisher favouring multicultural exchanges between francophone authors from three continents.

Canadianité et littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse II

C'est avec le présent numéro que se termine la série d'articles consacrés à la question complexe de l'identité canadienne. Aux articles que présentaient Perry Nodelman dans le numéro 86 vient s'ajouter la contribution de Suzanne Pouliot sur une initiative québécoise à visée multiculturelle, la collection "Tête-Bêche", qui cherche à favoriser les échanges entre les écrivains de toute la francophonie.

"The Ice Is Its Own Argument": A Canadian Critic Takes a Second Look at ***Bad Boy*** *and Her Own Modest Ambitions*

• *Sue Easun* •

Résumé: *L'auteur recourt à la théorie de Margaret Atwood développée dans* ***Survival*** *afin de renouveler la lecture du roman de Diana Wieler,* ***Bad Boy.*** *Elle compare les résultats de son analyse aux interprétations de ses collègues universitaires Mary J. Harker et Perry Nodelman et conclut que "lorsqu'on examine ce qui constitue une littérature, l'on doit étudier concurremment les auteurs et leurs exégètes".*

Summary: *The author uses Margaret Atwood's theories to see whether she can discover something new in Diana Wieler's* ***Bad Boy,*** *and does. She compares her findings with fellow academics Mary J. Harker and Perry Nodelman, and concludes that "when one considers what constitutes a literature, one must study the critics along with the authors."*

> ... criticism of performances in research, as in art, requires the application of standards or criteria of good performance, and insiders' standards and criteria are not the only ones available. More carefully, criticism is an exercise of taste: intellectual taste in the case of research, artistic taste in the case of works of art. Poets and composers no doubt feel that only they are qualified to judge their own works and those of their fellow artists; they believe the taste of professional critics is flawed and distrust it. [But] we reject their claims ... We do not admit that only a poet can judge poetry. (Wilson 110)

Four years ago, I wrote a short piece called "The 'dark background': a note on violence in Canadian children's literature," which looked at a single novel, Diana Wieler's *Bad Boy*, in the light of *Survival*, Margaret Atwood's commentary on the Canadian penchant for victimization. Since that time, two more articles on *Bad Boy* have appeared, by Mary Harker and Perry Nodelman; and *Survival* has been joined by Atwood's latest take on our literary sensibilities, *Strange Things*. I found myself beginning to wonder what we five — Atwood, Harker, Nodelman, Wieler and myself — might have to say to one another and, more to the point, whether my own critical sensibilities had changed in any significant way. This article is the story of my musings; its purpose is to reconsider the arguments set forth by Harker, Nodelman and myself in light of Atwood's latest critical foray, to extend the analysis to include observations on my own

development as a critic, and to offer my opinion on what characterizes us as Canadian.

Let us begin with Atwood's excursion into what she subtitles the "malevolent North." *Strange Things* consists of four invitational lectures, delivered by Atwood at Oxford University. These lectures in turn form part of a series, which she likens to a "half-way house between the non-specialist public and the ivory tower" (1). Her choice of topic, appropriately enough, is Canadian literature, an area "almost completely *terra incognita*" to a "certain kind of literary Englishperson," (which, she carefully points out, does not include "the Scots, Welsh, or Irish, nor ... the ordinary reader" (2).

Atwood's desire to establish her credentials, both early and emphatically, is completely understandable, and strongly resembles her preface to *Survival*, in which she describes herself as a "writer rather than an academic or an expert" (11). What intrigues me, however, is the manner in which she establishes those credentials. There is no question she knows how to please her audience's palate, and dishes out deference, wit, and acumen with culinary flair. But Atwood's deference is as deceptive as her "amateur enthusiasms" are engaging. Her command of Canadian literature in general and Canadian poetry in particular is extensive, her opinions well-considered. While she may have chosen not to spend her days assisting others in the quest for cultural literacy, it is clear her choice was not made at personal expense.

In *Strange Things*, Atwood explores a number of image-clusters connected with the Canadian North, patterns of belief and imagery and identity which, she claims, have inspired generations of writers: "... popular lore, and popular literature, established early that the North was uncanny, awe-inspiring in an almost religious way, hostile to white men, but alluring; that it would lead you on and do you in; that it would drive you crazy, and, finally, would claim you for its own" (19). The examples she uses to explain these motifs — Gwendolyn MacEwan's *Terror and Erebus*, John Richardson's *Wacousta*, and Marian Engel's *Bear*, to name a few — are brilliantly selected, not only for their aptness in illustrating particular points but as literary leitmotifs across the lectures themselves. None is what I would call "popular literature," however; and certainly none is children's literature. But ... what if one were? What would it seem like from Atwood's perspective?

Diana Wieler's *Bad Boy* is set in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, a place where "winters [were] so long and bleak they bordered on madness [and] hockey was something to devour in the hungriest, emptiest months of the year" (47). Winters in Moose Jaw, then, are as malevolent as any to be found in the Yukon, the North-West Passage, or at Wino Day Lake, except that Moose Jaw sports the thin veneer of civilization: weddings, exams, cruising, parties ... and sportsmanship.

On the surface, *Bad Boy* is a tale of hockey and sexual identity. Given the ages of the two protagonists — sixteen-year-old A.J. and seventeen-year-old Tulsa — either theme has a recognizable readership, and each coats the storyline with a civilized veneer of its own. I first read *Bad Boy* with a view to its treatment of homosexuality. When I reread it several years later in haste, having a mere 48

hours to produce what became "The 'dark background,'" it was because I recalled A.J.'s brawls and turned hopefully to *Survival* for theoretical backing; what emerged was a brief excursion into *Bad Boy's* world of necessary roughness, an exception to Atwood's thesis that "[Canadian] literary characters live their lives as victims rather than heroes" (32). Both times, like Tully, I skated across the surface, content with the pleasure of "an incredible rush" (21). In contrast, my third reading has been purposive and sceptical, with the result that this article is not only more self-conscious, but decidedly less tongue-in-cheek, than its predecessor.

When I first came across "Tweaking the canon," I was convinced Mary J. Harker had written the article that "The dark background" should have been. While Harker touches upon *Bad Boy*'s violent overtones (as I did in "The dark background") and homoerotic subtext, her argument is centred on Wieler's subversion of a literary subgenre known as the "Bad Boy Book"; and indeed, much of her article is devoted to marking parallels between A.J. and Tully and two of the genre's most famous icons: "Young readers today — and possibly the writers of modern Bad Boy stories — have probably never heard of these early Bad Boys, let alone read any of their books — except two, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*" (23).

Nevertheless, Harker's interpretation of *Bad Boy* and mine part ways in at least one important respect. She claims that A.J.'s "naughtiness never seriously threatens society" (24), because his values are fundamentally the same as those of his community. Since she is focussing on textual matters — specifically, Wieler's use of discrepant texts — it is not surprising that she is more interested in how A.J. and Tully express themselves than in what motivates their respective behaviours. As she sees in Wieler an ability to "[temper] the values of her realistic textworld ... like self-evident common sense" (24), so do I see in her a determination to do likewise.

Admittedly, I had been wondering about the validity of my own focus on violence. Since Atwood never actually mentions the word "violence" in *Survival*, I have been fighting the nagging doubt that I had ascribed thoughts and motives both to her and to Wieler that had more to do with my need to make a critical connection than with any conscious design on their part. The timely publication of *Strange Things* assured me that even if Atwood hadn't been thinking about violence then, it was certainly on her mind now.

Harker praises Wieler for her willingness to "subvert male-dominated literary forms" and her skill at appropriating "[the] excluded male voice that lies buried within the [Bad Boys' genre]" (79). Atwood expresses similar sentiments in *Strange Things*. The Canadian North, she notes, is often depicted as active, female, and (sometimes sexually) sinister, regardless of the author's gender, so long as the protagonist is male; as quoted above, she, the North, is "uncanny," "awe-inspiring," "alluring," and, at times, fatal. In short, she is not to be trifled with, for she sets rather than plays by the rules.

At the very least, Wieler's world of Triple A hockey is alluring. It is rife with ritual and laden with libido, though the latter tends toward androgyny.

The discipline is fierce, the expectations high, the risk of failure great. One can die on the ice, in reputation if not in fact. (Though I am reminded of a line in *Strange Things* — "I made it through without the loss of any appendages; which is what people often say when they come back from the Canadian North" [v] — when I think about A.J.'s dream [124].) Nor does it require much imagination to envision a hockey rink as the Great White North contained.

But where Harker the scholar maintains an air of detachment, preferring to centre her comments on Wieler's "feminist expression within a male canonical hegemony" (29), Atwood the writer would have us speculate on what happens to "outrage, treachery, salvation, refuge, or merely harmless play, when women get their paws on [them]" (88). Text, to Harker, demonstrates the author's success at "[going] beyond mere endorsement of the status quo" (24). To Atwood, it is a living breathing "bundle of images and association" (89). And herein lies the major difference between Harker and myself: I have eschewed detachment for the chance, like Atwood, to peek inside the bundle and explore its contents.

Let us then revisit the notion of the Great White North as hockey rink. According to sports gurus Kidd & Macfarlane,

> Hockey is the Canadian metaphor, the rink a symbol of this country's vast stretches of water and wilderness, its extremes of climate, the player a symbol of our struggle to civilize such a land ... Hockey captures the essence of the Canadian experience in the New World. In a land so inescapably and inhospitably cold, hockey is the dance of life, an affirmation that despite the deathly chill of winter, we are alive. (4)

They go on to bewail *The Death of Hockey*, the title of their book, at the hands of the dreaded NHL, which they claim has turned our national dance of life into a conga line of greenbacks due south. In their eyes, the NHL is ruled only by money, and violence has proven to be a particularly lucrative cash cow. As a result, what once symbolized a noble struggle comes across as little more than a bar room brawl.

Is it coincidence, I wonder, that Tully is named after an American city (and conceived in a classic American car)? Or that he is the most joyous of dancers whether at a wedding or in a locker room, on skates or during sex? Does he perhaps serve to remind us of what hockey should be — the exhilaration, the grace, the horseplay—and to reassure us that, despite a stateside coupling or two, the old values have not been completely lost and might be ours again? If so, *Bad Boy* becomes a morality play on several levels, and is certain to have at least one malevolent character.

A.J. seems the obvious choice for the part: where Tully dances, he fights like a man possessed. On ice, he slams the Worm, takes out Fleury, and pummels Terry Frances. Off ice, he punches his Uncle Mike, roughs up Treejack and Lavalle, and comes dangerously close to assaulting his would-be girlfriend Summer. But malevolent? No, if anything A.J. is a victim of malevolence; and so, to a less extent, is Tully, despite his resilience and charm.

Atwood speaks of a creature called the Wendigo, "a giant cannibalistic ice-hearted Algonquin Indian monster" (87). While by no means a staple of Canadian literature, it has made its presence known in countless poems and stories of wilderness denizens gone mad:

> Fear of the Wendigo is two-fold: fear of being eaten by one, and fear of becoming one.... The Wendigo has been seen as the personification of winter, or hunger, or spiritual selfishness, and indeed the three are connected: winter is a time of scarcity, which gives rise to hunger, which gives rise to selfishness .... The Wendigo is what you might turn into if you don't watch out. (67,69)

Now we have it on Wieler's authority that coach Landau is a ballbreaker (95); and indeed, the expressions he uses are definitely designed to emasculate:

> 'All right, gentlemen, you get to play with your pucks today'. (24)
>
> 'Get it up, Brandiosa'. (26)
>
> 'Watch me, Millyard — not your pecker'. (27)
>
> 'He wants to play footsie? Give him the message'. (49)
>
> 'I think it's time you asked Mr Fleury for a date'. (96)

These expressions not only strengthen the previously noted association between hockey and sexual identity but, when viewed as a continuum, suggest a natural progression from playing with, shall we say, one's own equipment to contemplating liberties with that of one's opponent. It is also noteworthy that these expressions are used to kindle increasingly overt demonstrations of aggression. That their suggestiveness would be lost on Tully and Lavalle, who have already played with each other's pucks, is as expected as their overwhelming influence on the sexually impressionable A.J. is inevitable.

Is the above enough to make Landau a Wendigo? No, although his alleged year in the NHL might mark him so in Kidd & Macfarlane's eyes. But there is a Wendigo in the city of Moose Jaw, and his name too begins with L.

Atwood notes that Wendigoes lend themselves best to two kinds of stories: those in which "Wendigoization" is a manifestation of a particular environment (like a ghost in a haunted house); and those in which it becomes "a sliver of [the protagonist's] repressed inner life made visible" (74). While it is possible to read *Bad Boy* as a story of the first kind — a tale of two boys living in an urban fishbowl, who must battle spectres of vengeance and public opinion — such an interpretation inspires neither fear nor repentance. When viewed as a story of the second kind, however, it can almost run a chill up your spine.

Bad Boy is about nothing if not repression. Poor A.J.'s is obvious; he longs for the hugs his mother never gave him, is dismayed to find himself aroused at the sight of his father's girlfriend in a bathrobe, and can't make up his mind whether it's Tully or Summer he really wants. But while Tulsa is far from sexually repressed, he is decidedly less in touch with his inner psyche than his friend: "Sex was never a problem for Tully .... The problem was when the

music stopped .... You looked around, feeling stupid and shy, painfully aware you were standing with a stranger" (142). Then, too, there are his feelings for A.J., which he eludes with a grace reminiscent of a puck control drill (27), at least until the denouement in Treejack's basement. Though he knows himself well enough to recognize his propensity for recklessness, he assiduously avoids looking too closely at the consequences of his actions.

Enter the Wendigo. Atwood reminds us that Wendigoes can only affect those who believe in them; and so Lavalle, in true Wendigo fashion, is simply a touchstone (albeit a monstrous one) for thoughts and feelings that already exist. When he make his first appearance, a sexually suggestive foam fight between A.J. and Tully is already underway. It is Tully who makes the first move, by inviting him into the red Mustang, not the other way around; and while he encourages Tully's self-destructive recklessness, we have already been told that Tully has always been both. Even when he goads A.J. in the end, it is not until the latter has already admitted (if only to himself) some less-than-platonic feelings of his own.

What Lavalle does, then, is force the subliminal to the surface — note the association with water during the initial locker room scene, where he is described as "brushing past Tully so slowly he could have been underwater" (31) — infect each of his victims with words "as soft and insidious as a hypodermic needle" (31), and fade from view as winter takes over, leaving them exposed to the elements. Not surprising that for Tully, he represents the ultimate "high dive": "Another wild leap with his eyes closed and the pool bottom covering up too fast. And he knew without thinking that he picked teams the way he chose lovers, the way he found a party, or lost a friend" (147). For what is a pool, if not a melted ice rink? exhilarating, yes, but without even the scant protection that "skating on thin ice" might offer. And remember too Lavalle's eyes, the colour of cement, the deadliest of pool bottoms.

For A.J., Lavalle's effect is largely second-hand; when he asks Tully whether Lavalle is a friend of his — and one must wonder why he tried to stop himself from asking — he stares "as if he'd been hit" (32). Certainly A.J. has hit before (Uncle Mike, for one), but it isn't until after this incident that he begins to do so with increasing regularity and intensity, and with a decided predilection for wingers (which Tully and Lavalle both are). In fact, it is only when A.J. physically attacks both Lavalle (in the same locker room where the foam fight took place) and Tully (in Treejack's basement) that his recovery can begin. And since being a Wendigo requires first, belief and second, a taste of the forbidden fruit, he is ultimately saved by Tully's refusal to test the limits of their friendship. A period of self-imposed isolation follows, ended by the figurative advent of Summer into his life, for it is not by chance that A.J.'s most intimate moments are consistently associated with feelings of warmth:

> The exhilaration surged through him like liquid heat. (26)
>
> The heat grew inside him so gently, so cautiously ... (51)
>
> Her laughter lit him up. (58)

> The words settled inside him, as warm as hot chocolate. (105)
>
> Panic drove through [him] like a white-hot spear. (115)
>
> The feeling ... crept up and overwhelmed him with its heavy, hypnotic heat. (135)
>
> ... a chant to kindle the tiny fire that had finally leapt into being. (170)
>
> The heat took A.J. by surprise. (186)

Of Tully's recuperation, we are told precious little, not surprising given that he himself prefers to go through life "without thinking." But it is a most unsettling silence, to this reader anyway. Tully has tasted Lavalle, and has made it clear he will taste others. Is he Wendigo? It is doubtful he will be manipulative, as Lavalle was, but is he truly as resilient as A.J. claims he is? I am reminded of Atwood's warning, that "the Wendigo is what you might turn into if you don't watch out" (69). And when has Tully ever learned to "watch out" ...?

In his *Postmodern and the Rule of Literature,* David Simpson notes that an increasing number of academics, literary critics in particular, "are busier writing about themselves than they ever have been before" (25), in an attempt to plant "living speech in the place of dead letters" (65). Which, I suppose, confirms both my academic status and my critical aspirations. Certainly, I was determined to write of my growth as a critic before I'd even heard of Simpson (though, I confess, I am now feeling decidedly more self-conscious about it!). But it seems to me that when one considers what constitutes a literature, one must study the critics along with the authors. Could it be that my interpretation of *Bad Boy* is more Canadian than the book itself, regardless of the fact that its characters reside in Saskatchewan and its author was born in Winnipeg?

I look at Harker, who views Tully and A.J. as "feminized" versions of those paragons of American boyhood, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn respectively. The words "Canadian" and "post-colonial" never appear in her article, yet somehow I'm drawn to one of Atwood's observations in *Strange Things*: "... if you are looking at writing in Canada at all, you can't just footnote the women" (90). And I wonder, if *Bad Boy* had been written and published in the States, would there have been someone like Harker who saw its "indeterminate literary status ... [as] significant" (20)? Similarly, is the only difference between my portrayal of Lavalle as Wendigo and, for example, Christine Jenkins' acerbic commentary on the tendency for fictional gays to meet tragic ends, that my analysis needn't accommodate a corpse? Or is the threat posed by a Wendigo something only a Canadian can sense?

Too, Jenkins mentions at least two novels (Sandra Scoppetone's *Happy Endings Are All Alike* and Frank Mosca's *All American Boys*) with detailed descriptions of violent assaults; given that *Bad Boy* is listed in her bibliography, why wasn't it cited, or, for that matter discussed, anywhere in the article? In short, is the uniqueness that Harker and I have each assigned to Wieler's work a product of our cultural sensibilities, and an unfortunate/unintentional oversight on Jenkins' part? Or is it there, and Harker and I see it more easily because

we share a common heritage? Or (perish the thought) do we see it simply because it is a shared heritage?

As if in response, W.J.T. Mitchell of the University of Chicago notes: "The most important new literature is emerging from the colonies — regions and peoples that have been economically or militarily dominated in the past — while the most provocative new literary criticism is emanating from the imperial centres that once dominated them — the industrial nations of Europe and America." Assuming, at least for the moment, that Canadian literature fits Mitchell's definition of (post) colonial, we are immediately faced with a power discrepancy, not unlike that expressed in my opening quote by Wilson. In both cases, we are obliged to determine who is "inside" the specialty, who is "outside," and what constitutes the specialty itself. Where the specialty is "literature," authors are in and critics out; where the specialty is "literary," the critics are in and the authors out. In our particular case, not only can a Canadian author not be a critic (except in the sense that we are all critics), and vice versa, Canada itself is slated to be valued for its literature rather than its criticism.

Given such a world-view, Atwood's inclusion in this paper immediately becomes suspect, and Jenkins' under-utilized. Stated somewhat more baldly, Canadian children's literature may have acquired a distinctive voice, but we must wait a little longer for the Americans and the Europeans to tell us exactly what it is ... and, by extension, when its distinctiveness is worthy of note. For certain, we cannot trust a writer to tell us.

I for one find such a scenario troubling. How is it that, just when Canadian literature in general and children's literature in particular comes into its own, imperial bias shifts from creative to critical control? Even if, as Wilson claims, "critics of literature ... get whatever authority they can by their reputations and the persuasiveness of what they say, not by their standing in an authoritative critical institution" (109), why is the outside perspective of greater value than that from the inside?

In his "Bad boys and binaries," Perry Nodelman explains why he found "Tweaking the canon" not completely persuasive. While he agrees that it is rare to hear the marginalized voice alongside the mainstream, and that Wieler has "open[ed] the door to different forms of being male" (40), he declares that Tully and A.J. are far from treated equally. Both Wieler and Harker, he says, focus overmuch on A.J.'s rites of passage. Tully ends as he began: happy and incorrigible, albeit a tad less self-indulgent. A.J.'s sufferings affect his sexuality, his self-esteem, *and* his general outlook on life.

I read Nodelman as being more critical of Harker than of Wieler, whom he praises for writing a novel that is "subtle, complex, interesting, and brave enough to tackle hard topics" (40); if she has erred in equating "irresponsible" and "immature" with "gay" — not so surprising, to my mind, since the OED reveals that gay has been synonymous with "lively," "showy," and "licentious" at various points in time — it is error born of a sincere attempt to differentiate between her main characters, confounded by a publishing industry not quite ready for "happily ever after" same-sex relationships. Harker, on the other

hand, is offered no excuse; as the interpreter, it is her responsibility not only to assess Wieler's creative process, but to maintain firm control over any creative urges of her own. In other words, by assuming that "Wieler's purpose [in contesting monologic male discourse] is in itself monological" (34), Harker sets herself up for the same charge: underestimating Tully's potential to be more than A.J.'s foil, and fashioning an argument that has more to do with what Wieler might have done than what she actually did.

Where "Tweaking the canon" once seemed the article I should have written, "Bad boys and binaries" has become the one I wish I had. Not that my encounter with Nodelman has changed my impressions of Tully (possibly because I know someone very much like him), nor moved me, either here or in "The dark background," to change a word of my analysis. Yet its effect is undeniable: broadening my knowledge of cultural discourse, heightening my awareness of (mono)logical fallacy, and challenging me to reconsider my choice of Atwood on the basis of both.

Nodelman conceptualizes *Bad Boy*'s violence in sado-masochistic terms, patiently explaining how behaviours which are encouraged, tolerated or overcome in one (e.g. sexual) arena are often diametrically opposed in another. No Wendigoes haunt his imagination save, perhaps, when he refers to A.J. as a "victim of his own pent-up rage" (38). Then again, he spends very little time discussing Lavalle (whom he nonetheless recognizes as vile, nasty, and despicable). And I think to myself, A.J. and Tully may appear in binary opposition, but something, or someone, must set off the chain of events which brings that opposition to the fore; Nodelman has missed something crucial by overlooking Lavalle's pivotal role. Perhaps if he had turned to Atwood, and I to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (his critical touchstone), my paper might have been more sociological and his more metaphorical. But would he have seen Lavalle more clearly? Would I have missed him completely?

Of course, I have no answers to such questions. Nor, to be honest, do answers seem particularly necessary. As I said earlier in this paper, I was drawn to peek inside "the living breathing bundle of images and association" that authors see in one another's works. With Atwood as my guide, I saw a Wendigo in *Bad Boy*, which I did not see in either *Trying Hard to Hear You* or *All-American Boys*. (But then, why would one expect to see a Wendigo anywhere other than a northern clime?! Or, for that matter, in every northern clime?) I fail to see how such an encounter makes either of us less a critic, or we three less Canadian; or, for that matter, why it might even be under suspicion.

By now, I might assume that you have accepted, if not deciphered, the relevance of the quote with which I open the title of this article, but such an assumption would run counter to much of what I have said above. It is drawn from Gwendolyn MacEwan's verse-drama *Terror and Erebus*. It is spoken by a character called Rasmussen, and I cannot refrain from pointing out that *Bad Boy* too has a character of the same name (though there the similarity ends). And it is cited in passing by Atwood as illustrating "the collapse of science under circumstances in which rationality and objectivity cease to have meaning

because they have become useless" (26). You cannot argue with ice. You cannot understand it, defeat it, or bargain with it. You can only take it or leave it, for it will always outsurvive you.

That *Bad Boy* has little of either rationality or objectivity, except in its crafting, we have already seen. The only cause-and-effect in evidence is that when one is hit (physically or emotionally), one bleeds. There is no knowing why Tully is gay and A.J. straight. We never find out why Alina Brandiosa left (it is not clear which parent had the affair), nor why she has no contact with her son. And we'll never know what Lavalle would have said about his fight with A.J., had Landau not cut him off. The result, to resurrect a previous metaphor, is a morality play, set against a "dark background" and etched in ice. In the end, I contend, it is our ability to live with such ambiguity, and in rare moments transcend it, that makes us and our literature truly Canadian.

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Sue Easun *(easun@fis.utoronto.ca) is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto, and coordinator of the Toronto Centre for the Study of Children's Literature. She can hardly wait to see who will be the fourth to write a* ***CCL*** *article on* ***Bad Boy.***

What's Canadian about Canadian Children's Literature? A Compendium of Answers to the Question

Note de l'Éditeur: Quand j'ai lancé l'appel à contributions pour le présent numéro sur l'identité canadienne, je ne m'attendais pas à ce que les réponses que je recevrais soient si passionnées. Quelques-uns m'ont dit apprécier le projet et vouloir y participer volontiers; d'autres ont avoué trouver l'idée un peu dépassée, voir rejeté carrément mon invitation. Certains doutaient de la pertinence de toute réflexion sur l'identité nationale tandis que d'autres me soupçonnaient de vouloir imposer une vision préconçue ou particulière du Canada. Peu importait l'opinion que l'on exprimait, celle-ci était toujours formulée avec conviction. Je me suis aussi rendu compte que mon choix d'articles ne pouvait représenter ni l'étendue, ni l'intensité des réponses. C'est alors que j'ai eu l'idée de demander à chacun de me consigner par écrit sa réaction à mon appel. Bien des gens l'ont fait. Voici donc leurs répliques. *PN*

Editor's Note: When I sent out the paper call for this issue, I didn't expect the responses to it would be so passionate. Some people told me they loved the idea and looked forward to the issue. But other objected even to the idea of asking such a question. Some found it irrelevant and desperately old-fashioned. Some were deeply suspicious about the value of ever doing any thinking at all about literature in terms of issues of nationality. Some were convinced that the project was a conspiracy to promote one particular view of Canadian identity over others, with upsetting or dangerous political ramifications. But whatever opinion people were expressing, they were expressing it vehemently. I realized that the few articles I would be able to include could not possibly represent the range or the intensity of all these different feelings. That was when I had the idea of asking everyone I could think of if they'd be willing to write a short answer to my question to include in the issue. A lot of people agreed to do so. These are the answers they provided. *PN*

Intuitive Recognition: "Something about Who I Am"

Hazel Hutchins: Among all the children's books, picture books in particular, that I have read over the years — all the books that have made me smile or laugh or nod with understanding, all the books that have made me feel again those achingly simple childhood emotions of sadness, longing and hope — it is only while among the Canadian ones that I have stopped and turned around in surprise and said, "There, there is something about who I am that I have known all along without understanding, until now, how or why or from where it might have come." The best example of this I can think of is Betty Waterton's *Petronella* when the young heroine finds, lining the ox-cart trail in the second spring of her life in the Canadian wilderness and growing from seeds from the old country which she'd thought lost, a host of flowers from her Grandmother's garden.

Writing from Canmore, Alberta, ***Hazel Hutchins*** *is author of nine picture books and six pre-teen novels published in Canada, the US and Great Britain.*

Mary H. Pritchard: One thing I have always considered characteristic of Canadian literature for children is its fascination with the land and its climate, whether in a mystical exploration of native life in the north or in the exuberance of Dennis Lee at play with place names. Only when an American colleague shocked me with the notion that *Anne of Green Gables* could have happened anywhere (I didn't know anyone could fall in love with Anne without falling in love with the Island) did I begin to realize that the Canadian-ness of the literature was perhaps its ability to evoke, or perhaps even to be evoked by, a consonant Canadian-ness in the reader for whom the land is both mythical and symbolic.

Mary H. Pritchard *is Coordinator for Mediated Learning. Faculty of Part-Time & Continuing Education, University of Western Ontario, where she has taught Children's Literature off and on for some 20 years.*

Jan Andrews: I'd like to answer the question by telling a story about something that happened to me. I came to Canada in 1963. At that time, bookstores were few and far between and Canadian literature something I knew so little about I didn't even have the names of any authors at my disposal. I'd been here four or five years, I suppose, when the film *Rachel, Rachel* came to town. Through it, I discovered Margaret Laurence. I read *The Stone Angel.* I read *A Bird in the House, The Fire-Dwellers, The Diviners.* I read the works of Margaret Atwood, Marian Engel, Adele Wiseman, Hugh MacLennan. I read only books by Canadian writers — as many as I could devour. As I read, I began to understand and be part of this country in a whole new way.

So, what is Canadian about Canadian children's literature? *Everything.* It comes out of us and is the stuff of our living. It speaks to us as no other body of literature ever can. If you doubt me, read (or re-read) Monica Hughes' *Keeper of the Isis Light.* As you turn the pages, you'll be with the heroine, Olwen, on some

far and foreign planet, but in that far-off place you'll be immersed in the struggles for survival of a brand new immigrant community; you'll re-experience how there is delight in the land and fear of it; you'll struggle with the tensions inherent in the coming together of peoples with different heritages and roots. You may not even think about it, but you'll be consumed with our past and our present, with the things that have shaped us and still do.

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*Jan Andrews is a storyteller and writer best known for **Very Last First Time, The Auction,** and **Keri** (nominated for a 1996 Governor-General's Award).*

Sense of Place: "The Landscape of our Experiences"

Teya Rosenberg: So far, I have twice tried to teach Brian Doyle's *Angel Square,* once at the University of Alberta and once where I currently teach at Southwest Texas State University. Both times the publishing company said they could not supply the necessary number of copies. I just found out I will not be able to teach Richler's *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* for the same reason. So I would say one identifying factor is that Canadian children's literature is hard to find in sizable press runs.

I chose *Angel Square* both times because it depicts Canadian geography, climate, and culture; as well, it is a good story and one I find very funny. I also chose it for didactic purposes. In Alberta I felt it would be good for the western students who had never been east of Saskatoon to have a glimpse of the cultural tensions and complexities of central Canada. In Texas, I wanted them to read about Canada, period. (Many of my students here have never been north of Dallas). *Angel Square* is Canadian because it talks about Canada, and that is one identifying characteristic of Canadian literature.

Of course, Annie Proulx wrote about the west coast of Newfoundland, but I don't consider *The Shipping News* to be Canadian. In the twentieth century, Canadian literature is by Canadian authors. (But what to say about the issue of recent immigrants? Or what about native writers who belong to tribes that span the border? I don't have answers to those questions.) I chose *Jacob Two-Two* because it is a Canadian classic. I don't, however, see anything in it, in terms of content or style, that is inherently Canadian. It is by a Canadian author, and that makes it Canadian, another identifying characteristic of Canadian children's literature.

To sum up: Canadian children's literature is Canadian because of content and authorship. These criteria are not entirely satisfactory, but I am not sure we can say any more. I have read more than two Canadian children's books, and if there is a distinctive Canadian style or approach, I have yet to discern it.

***Teya Rosenberg** continues to teach children's literature at Southwest Texas State University.*

Margaret Buffie: My initial response was ... "How on earth am I going to answer this question?" I asked everyone I knew. They were no help at all. I knew I didn't want to contrive an answer that sounded deep and terribly thoughtful, and which was not an honest one. As you may have guessed from my books, the Canadian setting is very important to me. In fact, I think of my settings as characters in their own rights — living breathing entities that affect the human characters in the stories and often propel scenes and plot lines. As someone who has painted the landscapes that are in my novels and who has been profoundly affected by them and indeed formed by them — the prairies that surround my hometown of Winnipeg, the two rivers that flow through the city, and the lake in the Canadian Shield that my family has gone to every summer for almost eighty years — I know that I am so much a part of them that it is hard to separate myself from them, both physically and spiritually. I will always be deeply moved by them and I will always draw on them in my writing. They are an unfailing source of inspiration. One of the greatest compliments ever given to me as a writer came from a review written by Peter Carver, who said, "*Who is Frances Rain?* is as distinctively Canadian as the intoxicating allure of silent woods and wind-whipped lakes."

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*Margaret Buffie's most recent novel for Canadian children is **The Dark Garden**.*

Susan Drain: What is Canadian about Canadian children's literature? — a kind of situatedness, by which I mean a sense of place (and not geography alone) together with a sensitive awareness of other places. At its worst, it can be manifest in self-consciousness, awkwardness, or the pushiness of insecurity. At its best, it can be a celebration of the here which does not deny, ignore, envy or invalidate the otherwhere, but holds itself in balance with the other.

Susan Drain's teaching and research interests embrace the Victorians, children's literature, and rhetoric and composition. She is chair of the English Department at Mount Saint Vinent University in Halifax.

Juliana Saxton: Canadian stories offer rich resources for drama because they address the landscape of our experiences, both metaphorically and literally, in a way that stories from other places cannot.

Juliana Saxton is Professor of Theatre/Drama in Education in the Department of Theatre, University of Victoria.

David Bentley: "What's Canadian about Canadian Children's Literature?" To my mind, there are two principal things: the setting and the balance between independence and interdependence. A classic such as *Anne of Green Gables* is rich with the sights and sounds and smells and textures of Prince Edward

Island, and irradiated with the province's maritime setting, seasonal cycles, and social environment. In Canadian children's literature, the children (and many of the adults) are nurtured by nature as well as by the society in which they grow up. They are themselves, but also a part of their environment. Being so, they are simultaneously independent in their thinking and feeling and oriented towards their community — a community that includes not just other people, but all the animate and inanimate life of their place. This has been so from the beginning in the work of Catharine Parr Traill and others, and it continues to be so in contemporary Canadian children's literature. Perhaps it could not be otherwise, given the prominence in our northern country of external nature, self-reliance, and communal support. I certainly would not wish it otherwise.

__David Bentley__ teaches Canadian literature at the University of Western Ontario; his most recent book is __Mimic Fires: Accounts of Early Long Poems on Canada__ (McGill-Queen's, 1994).

Joe Sheridan: If the task of Canadian identity is to learn to be native to this place then our storytellers must face the future and the past as water-witchers. Knowing the land and its underground waters means divining from the present a knowledge of what has been before and what can be in the future. Telling the story of the places that are called Canada and the people who are its metaphors is a homecoming to ancestral places and a future indivisible from the land and its integrity. Like the waters that give it health, land and story are shape shifters renewing their strength from cycles of transformation. From the lapping and blessed lakes of summer to the driving blizzards and ice of January, we ignore to our peril the regenerative function of story and land and their intimate connection.

__Joe Sheridan__ is an Assistant Professor of Education, and also in Environmental Studies and with the Center for Applied Sustainability at York University. His upbringing was in the Thirty Thousand Islands of Georgian Bay near Parry Sound and his education was in Integrated Studies at the University of Waterloo; Folklore and Mythology at UCLA; Reading and Language at Harvard; Media Ecology at New York University and Intercultural Education at the University of Alberta.

Tim Wynne-Jones: I wrote in my erstwhile *Globe & Mail* column on May 2, 1987: "Canadian novels for young people seldom reflect the reality that 75 percent of the population lives in urban centres. Writers in the genre tend to defer to what is probably a more profound reality — that at this late date in the twentieth century, two thirds of this vast country is still wilderness. As Margaret Atwood has pointed out, survival — bodily and culturally — in such a place, is a constant concern of the artist. Writers addressing teen readers seem to find endless inspiration from stranding a youthful protagonist or two in the 'monstrous' wilds ...."

That quote seems to foreshadow *The Maestro*, but in 1987 I had written nothing for the middle or teen reader. For that matter, the quote seems also to foreshadow my story "The Hope Bakery" in *Some of the Kinder Planets*. Which is only to say that this is a country a person can get lost in.

I think many of us are involved in a lengthy mapping process. But rather than using a surveyor's transit and chain, we are charting the country with story and metaphor. Marilyn Halvorson's rolling Alberta parkland, Brian Doyle's Ottawa, Paul Yee's Vancouver, Budge Wilson's Halifax, Michael Kusugak's Hudson's Bay. The map of Canada that we grew up with in the fifties and sixties is different somehow. It is a storied place.

To paraphrase Aidan Chambers, it is not what happens to us that matters so much as the stories we tell about what has happened to us. Canada seems always to be happening to us. It's a very happening place.

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*Two of **Tim Wynne-Jones**'s books for children have been awarded the Governor's General's Award.*

Hilary Thompson:

1. Sense of place (physical) encompasses our emotional response to the landscape or homescape of our birth (L.M.Montgomery's appeal).

2. Sense of place (social and due to climate) includes the need to pull together, to work for the common good. This can give us a sense of morality which can be a burden on our childhood. Our literature often remembers the sombre aspects of our youth (Inuit poetry in *The New Wind Has Wings*, Morley Callaghan's *Luke Baldwin's Vow*, Margaret Laurence's A *Bird in the House)*. The corollary of this sense of sacrifice of self for communal good is the creation of a healthy or unhealthy play between the individual and his / her community (Welwyn Katz's *Out of the Dark*, some of Kevin Major's novels, W.O. Mitchell).

   Northrop Frye calls our fears of outsiders our garrison mentality. I would extend that sense of "us and them" to include human, natural and supernatural forces (Grey Owl, Sir Charles G.D.Roberts, Catharine Parr Traill, even some of Janet Lunn, Catherine Anthony Clarke, Ruth Nichols, even some Mi'kmaw tales).

3. Sense of place (where we come from history and beyond). Any one of us can only belong in Canada when we forget the old home place and make connections with those who were living here before us. Historical novels and time shift fantasies reflect this urge to plant ourselves in this soil (Janet Lunn, Cora J. Taylor, Kim Pearson, Welwyn Wilton Katz's *False Face*). These writers try to explore the sense of who we really are in time and space by defining what place means in a new way.

4. Sense of place (mythic dimension). So much of our Canadianness depends on our journeys — whether as native Canadians like the Mi'kmaq people who would travel around Nova Scotia in the changing seasons — or as Amish people (*The Quilt* and *Amish Adventure* by Barbara Smucker), Loyalists (Barbara Greenwood, Dorothy Perkins, Donna Smyth) or other nationalities and peoples. This connects us to the mythic and heroic levels of legend / folk tales from many different cultures, but is particularly rooted in

the shaman's journey in Inuit and native Indian traditions. The figures we leave behind, and the tricksters, helpers and guides we meet in that "mythic" place are universal yet very much a part of our Canadian experience.

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*Hilary Thompson is an Associate Professor of English and Drama at Acadia University. She is the editor of **Children's Voices in Atlantic Literature and Culture: Essays on Childhood** (CCP, 1995).*

Sarah Ellis: What's Canadian about Canadian children's literature? It's the binder twine in Brian Doyle's *Up to Low*. It's Stephane Poulin's family portrait in *My Mother's Loves*. It's the Elvis impersonator in Thomas King's *A Coyote Columbus Story*; the divali lights reflecting in the snow in Rachna Gilmore's *Lights for Gita*; the little boy in Michael Kusugak's *Baseball Bats for Chirstmas* imagining the world exploding like a deflating seal bladder.

It's something to do with sly humour, it's something to do with language and history and it's a lot to do with enjoying and celebrating the off-centre quirkiness that comes with a country that is constantly inventing itself as it goes along.

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*Sarah Ellis's latest book for children is **Back of Beyond** (Groundwood).*

Joan Payzant: What's Canadian about Canadian Children's Literature? I will reply to this with the most obvious answer: the setting of the story. As a teacher, a teacher librarian, author and publisher, I have seen first-hand the enthusiastic response of children to stories about their immediate surroundings. They identify at once with the protagonists with location as a starting point.... I'd like to know how many British Columbia children (probably grown up now) would name Christie Harris's books as their favourites; or PEI children cite L.M. Montgomery: or Ontario children Farley Mowat's *Owls in the Family* or *The Dog That Wouldn't Be*. In short, the location and its atmosphere make Canadian children's books Canadian.

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*Joan Payzant is a retired teacher-librarian, mother of five grown children, reviewer for **CM: Canadian Materials** since 1976, and author of five Nova Scotia history books and two children's books.*

Judith Saltman: I believe that what makes Canadian children's literature Canadian is its reflection of our history, values, geography, and stories, especially the stories. No people can take themselves seriously, can laminate themselves into their own specific culture until they have storied themselves, and hear their stories told in a public forum. Our stories tell us about ourselves as no other literature can, not just what it is like to be a human being (as all writing reflecting the commonality of childhood does) but what it is like to live

in a specific place with specific traditions, beliefs, and experiences. Our books appear to be marked by a spirit of regionalism, diversity, even a quirky, deadpan, wonderfully Canadian sense of humour (Doyle and Ellis). This often appears quite different from the homogeneity of American children's books. And then there's that ineffable sensibility of home.

***Judith Saltman** teaches children's literature and library services for youth in the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia.*

Angela Rebeiro: Canadian content in children's literature means, for me, that the content is Canadian history, Canadian situations, Canadian perspectives on stories which might have a social or multicultural focus, or where there are city, provincial, or other strong Canadian identifiers such as the story set in Moose Jaw, Come-by-Chance, Baie Comeau or such. The second consideration if I'm buying books with international themes is that the writer is Canadian, and my third consideration is that the publisher is Canadian-owned. The quality of illustrations in children's books are as important for me as the quality of the text, and I find that most Canadian children's books are better illustrated than most American books, for example.

***Angela Rebeiro** is Executive Director of the Playwrights Union of Canada.*

Regionalism: "Alligators and Orphans"

Lorraine Anderson: Canadian children's literature is distinctly regional, especially because of small press publications. Non-fiction is strongest both in quality and quantity — probably the most outstanding aspect of the Canadian children's publishing industry. Overall, there is less reliance on trends, fads and gimmicks.

***Lorraine Anderson** is a bookseller.*

Mary-Alice Downie: When I was growing up, there were Canadian children's books, and very famous ones too — but Anne and Emily were in PEI, Susannah was out in Saskatchewan with the Mounties — places as strange and exotic to a small girl in Ontario as anywhere else in the world. I actually disliked *Jane of Lantern Hill* because part of it was set in Toronto, which seemed peculiar.

Now all that has changed. From the Arctic to the outports, Canadian children find their lives reflected by writers who share and understand the setting, the point of view, the sensibility. And the child more recently arrived from another culture is invited to this literary party too, for writers like Paul Yee, Nazneen Sadiq, W.D. Valgardson and Richardo Keens-Douglas describe their own version of the Canadian community or dip back into the well of memory of their ancestral country.

A wise critic wrote of the necessity of "books in which children feel at home." For the moment, we are well-served.

Mary Alice Downie went to school with Ernest Thompson Seton's great niece and likes retelling the Gaelic folktales of her ancestors.

Jeanette Lynes: "What's Canadian about Canadian Children's Literature?" Could it be its two-sided regionality? On the one hand, an exotic regionality expressed through Anne Shirley's shimmering eastern island; Dennis Lee's alligators in Atikokan; Sheree Fitch's monkeys in the land of the RCMP, but also in a specific kitchen, and so on. But the flip-side of regional expression in Canadian children's literature reveals a more sobering, Darwinian sensibility and an awareness of marginality and marginal positions: the irrevocably dead gopher on the prairie in Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind*; the challenge of how to make a fishing line while lost in Traill's Rice Lake Plains; the problem of how to "get a life" facing Kevin Major's teenagers who hang around the Avalon Mall, listen to Bruce Springstein and experience displacement in an acute, regionally-specific way. This two-sided regionality could be characterized as "alligators and orphans." Perhaps alligators and orphans constitute one aspect of what is Canadian about Canadian children's literature.

Jeanette Lynes teaches Canadian literature and children's literature at Lakehead University.

Margot Louis: Although some children's literature is self-consciously Canadian (Montgomery's *Emily Climbs*, Dennis Lee's verses on Canadian history), the Canadian identity as most commonly formulated is essentially an adult identity: repressed, wry, ironic, polite, beleaguered. None of this translates very readily into children's literature (unlike the American national identity, which is perhaps most appropriate to people between the ages of twelve and seventeen). Consequently, Canadian children's literature tends to be concerned less with national than with regional identity — to focus on the attitudes, atmosphere, and issues dominant in the city or province where the action takes place.

Margot K. Louis teaches in the Department of English at the University of Victoria.

Robert Nicholas Bérard: What is Canadian about the best Canadian children's literature is its rootedness in particular regions or communities. The weakest and most ephemeral works in Canadian children's (or adult) literature often fail precisely in their attempts to represent Canada as a whole, much in the manner of one of Stompin' Tom Connors' efforts to work all ten provinces and two territories into a two-minute song.

On the other hand, Roch Carrier's *The Hockey Sweater* speaks to all Canadians from the rink in the isolated village of Ste-Justine, and we recognize

that the story of the little Italian community of Sydney, Nova Scotia, in Sharon Gibson Palermo's *The Lie that Had to Be* is part of our story. Just as we are Canadians simply by being Cape Bretoners, Newfoundlanders, Yukoners, or Fransaskois, our finest children's literature proclaims its national character by its intensely local sense of place.

Robert Nicholas Bérard is Associate Chair (Teacher Education) at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax.

***Rosemary Ross Johnston*:** I guess that, to most Australian girls, Canadian children's literature would mean Anne, and to a lesser extent Emily, Pat, etc. There are other Canadian children's texts that make their way out here but none have had the ongoing impact of the Anne books. The actual texts are always being reprinted and conspicuously marketed (sometimes in cheap editions, sometimes in expensive editions) in our bookshops — even the lesser known ones such as *Chronicles of Avonlea.* So the Canadian character of children's literature is wrapped up in Anne, who is a survivor in Australia.

However, having said that, it is not so much that Anne herself represents Canada, but that Prince Edward Island does. In other words, the Australian perspective (for girls anyway) of what is Canadian is localized to one highly specific setting, one place which is clearly "significantly Canada" in a way that Anne herself is not so "significantly Canadian." This setting is situated somewhere away in a pastoral past, but because of the perceived isolation of PEI there is some sort of a dream out here that perhaps remnants of this pastoral may still exist.

The sense of rural idyll is mixed more generally with the idea of an immense and cold neighbouring wilderness which hovers around most other Canadian texts that reach Australia. Boys would relate this wilderness to survival stories which are more commonly read in comic form than in actual books (or perhaps watched in movies or on television — the Mounties, the Rockies and so on). I don't think that there is any clear perception of a modern or urban Canada.

So — what's Canadian about Canadian children's literature as perceived in Australia? Not much (beyond *Anne*), I would suspect. National character (whatever that means) is becomingly increasingly global, is it not? The issues of conflicting cultures, of an implicit but never quite articulated fear of being consumed by more powerful neighbours, and of general survival (not so much in a wilderness as in a rapidly changing microcosm of family and peer relationships) have become themes inherent in the children's literature texts of other countries, including Australia; they are themes that seem not so much to supersede national identity and character as to make it irrelevant.

***Rosemary Ross Johnston**, who teaches at the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia, has written about the Anne books.*

Sandra Becket: From my perspective in the French section of a Department of French, Italian and Spanish, Canadian children's literature is French-Canadian children's literature, and the English department deals with the literature in English. Canadians can benefit from the richness of two major literatures, which are often quite different. Unfortunately, however, most Canadians will never know this richness, as most (scholars, teachers, parents, children) are generally familiar with only one or the other. Major authors are, of course, translated, but I know from experience (both as a professor and a parent — my children are in a French school), that there is a border between the two that is not crossed often enough.

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*Sandra Becket is the editor of **Reflections of Change: Children's Literature Since 1945** (Greenwood).*

Monique Lebrun: La littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse a-t-elle une existence spécifique? Oui, au plan *institutionnel*, puisque de nombreux prix, dont le prix du Gouverneur général du Canada, viennent récompenser chaque année une oeuvre de poids dans le domaine. Au Québec, on peut également parler du volet français du prix Christie et du prix Brive-Québec pour la jeunesse. De plus, des institutions comme Communication-Jeunesse tentent de développer chez de jeunes lecteurs le goût pour cette littérature spécifique. Enfin, même dans nos programmes scolaires, déjà pourtant fort chargés, on fait une place à la littérature de jeunesse.

Qu'en est-il maintenant du *contenu* spécifiquement canadien de la littérature de jeunesse? Avec le nivellement culturel des sociétés occidentales, il est à craindre qu'on retrouve dans les livres pour la jeunesse le même type de société, le même type de relations parents-enfants, par exemple. Même les problèmes dits "de jeunes" (par exemple, les gangs de rue, le décrochage scolaire) ne sont pas propres à un seul pays. Cependant, la littérature québécoise pour la jeunesse, pour ne prendre que cet exemple, réussit à se démarquer de la littérature francophone pour la jeunesse par une *langue* très typée culturellement, qui présente des niveaux très variés et prend certaines libertés par rapport à la norme. Selon moi, cette littérature, tout comme celle du reste du Canada, que j'ai l'habitude de lire en traduction, se démarque peu, culturellement, sauf dans la mention de certains milieux (ainsi, j'ai déjà lu des histoires se passant dans de grandes fermes de l'Ouest canadien, ou encore, dans nos forêts s'étendant à perte de vue). Je remarque aussi que la façon de traiter certains thèmes (et non le choix du thème lui-même) nous est particulière. Ainsi, le problème de l'insertion des jeunes immigrants dans nos sociétés d'accueil est vue beaucoup moins comme un conflit ici, au Canada, que dans la littérature de jeunesse française, par exemple.

***Monique Lebrun** est professeure agrégée en didactique de la lecture au département de linguistique, Université du Québec à Montréal, où elle enseigne depuis dix ans. Elle est également membre du jury du prix Christie (section française) depuis trois ans.*

Carol Harvey: Qu'est-ce qu'il y a de canadien dans la littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse? Au fond, pourquoi offrir des livres canadiens à nos enfants? Pourquoi en envoyer en France, où on a déjà l'embarras du choix?

Ce n'est pas que les comptines, contes, romans et poèmes destinés aux jeunes Canadiens francophones soient très différents de ceux publiés dans l'Hexagone. Ils traitent souvent des mêmes questions de l'apprentissage de la vie, ils véhiculent les mêmes idées. Mais inscrite dans les pages de cette littérature se trouve la spécificité canadienne, notre espace, notre réalité quotidienne, notre culture et notre identité. Bref, pour nos jeunes Canadiens, la littérature d'ici fait entendre leur voix de même qu'elle laisse voir leur identité. En même temps, elle élargit les horizons des enfants d'ailleurs.

Cette spécificité est apparente dans bien des livres publiés dans l'Ouest canadien. Spécificité du cadre dans *Le Petit Dinosaure d'Alberta* et la suite, *Théo et Samoa,* de Nadine Mackenzie; expériences quotidiennes de la vie canadienne mise en scène pour les très jeunes lecteurs de *C'est l'Hallowe'en* et *La Tempête de neige,* deux livres de la collection Dominique et ses amis signés Stella Lessard; héritage culturel dans les contes et légendes de *Trésors du passé manitobain,* recueil de Tatiana Arcand qui d'ailleurs offre un portait valorisant des autochtones.

Alors qu'est-ce que je compte offrir aux petits Canadiens et envoyer en France cette année? Un livre manitobain s'impose: *Puulik cherche le vent,* de Richard Alarie, couronné récemment à Paris du prix Saint Exupéry pour le meilleur livre pour enfants de la francophonie. Il donne aux jeunes d'ici et d'ailleurs un aperçu du grand Nord canadien.

***Carol Harvey** est professeure au département de français, Université de Winnipeg.*

Claire L. Malarte-Feldman: Most of the French Canadian books that I have been asked to review for *CCL* in the last few years were targeted at an audience of young adolescents. What comes spontaneously to my mind when I think of these books, is that, for the most part, they vibrate with an energy that is not so easily palpable in the children's books produced in France today. The language is alive with sharp humor and innovative creativity. New words and outdated expressions coexist, reshaping a unique syntax that gives the narratives a true authenticity and affirms their Québecois identity.

***Claire L. Malarte-Feldman** is Associate Professor of French at the University of New Hampshire, where she researches seventeenth century literary fairy tales and their contemporary versions in the field of French children's literature. She is guest editor of a special issue of **The Lion & the Unicorn** devoted to French children's literature to be published in 1997.*

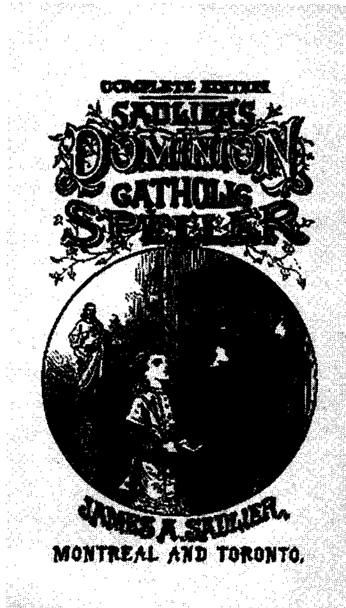
Suzanne Pouliot: Y a-t-il une littérature de jeunesse canadienne? Cette question me hante depuis longtemps. Voici de façon provisoire ma réponse.

Indubitablement, il y a une littérature, destinée aux jeunes, qui parle du Québec, de son territoire, de sa faune, de sa flore, de son histoire d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, de ses rêves et de ses espoirs. Les auteurs renvoient à cet univers référentiel, marqué dans et par la langue et plus particulièrement visible dans les dialogues, en reproduisant le rythme de la parole, les silences, les hésitations et les préoccupations sociales (intégration à la société pluriethnique), et individuelles (recherche identitaire, relations parentales, relations amoureuses, etc.), le vocabulaire, les structures syntaxiques, le ton, voire l'humour. Quant aux descriptions, elles réfèrent généralement à un univers daté, identifié, documenté (un lieu précis, un événement dont on peut retrouver la trace dans les journaux où les médias électroniques, des attraits culturels, au sens anthropologique du terme, comme le hockey). Ce qui démarque la production littéraire franco-québecoise de la littérature anglo-canadienne, me semble-t-il, c'est le territoire symbolique circonscrit. L'imaginaire collectif se nourrit a des sources historiques différentes, se faisant transmetteur des valeurs sociales autres. Les romans traduits de la collection Conquêtes illustrent bien, à mon avis, une autre sensibilité, porteuse d'environnements sociaux tissés à même d'autres fibres sociales, religieuses, culturelles. Lorsque je lis ces romans, je sais qu'ils sont canadiens et qu'ils ne peuvent pas être québécois, tant l'univers auquel ils renvoient est autre, marqué dans la chair du texte. Ils peuvent être également états-uniens. Souvent, hormis les noms de ville, je ne vois pas ce qui les distingue des romans des voisins. En bref, si je sais ce qu'est une littérature de jeunesse, écrite en français, au Canada, je suis, hélas, beaucoup moins en mesure de circonscrire les caractéristiques spécifiques de la littérature canadienne, écrite, éditée, publiée et diffusée en langue anglaise, sinon qu'elle suscite une kyrielle d'émotions qui me font vibrer, pleurer, soupirer, rêver. Mais n'est-ce pas le propre d'une oeuvre littéraire d'émouvoir quelles que soient ses origines géohistoriques?

Suzanne Pouliot enseigne à la faculté d'éducation de l'Université de Sherbrooke.

Claude Romney: La littérature canadienne d'enfance et de jeunesse constitue, selon moi, un excellent moyen de rapprocher jeunes anglophones et francophones au pays. En français comme en anglais, elle présente des caractères distincts de ceux de la culture mère ou dominante (français de l'Hexagone et américaine ou britannique, respectivement). Il est donc souhaitable que les jeunes Canadiens apprennent tôt à apprécier, si possible dans le texte original, sinon en traduction, la littérature produite pour eux dans les deux langues officielles. Ils pourront ainsi mieux se connaître et se rendront compte que leurs deux cultures se complètent au lieu de s'opposer.

Claude Romney is a member of the Department of French, Italian, and Spanish, University of Calgary.



Heterogeneity: "Competing Social Projects"

Patricia Vickery: What is Canadian about Canadian children's literature is its focus on life in a diverse ethnic and geographic landscape and a child's experience in it.

Patricia Vickery is an educator, a poet and as a writer, recipient of the Saskatchewan literary award for children's literature.

Ted McGee: What's Canadian about Canadian Children's Literature? — the competing social projects constitutive of our political culture. Witness the picture on the cover of *Sadlier's Dominion Catholic Speller* (Montreal & Toronto, 1883), a cover both with a patriarchal arrangement of the boy/teacher and the girl/pupil and with a pointed reference to a hot topic dividing Catholics and Protestants of the day: infallibility. The speller had a substantial market in Montreal's Irish, people at ease with the Catholicism of the Québécois but at pains to ensure that their children learned English. Perhaps most important is the absurdity of a Catholic speller: given the irrelevance of spelling to religious identity (whether Catholic or Confucian frock is f-r-o-c-k), *Sadlier's Dominion Catholic Speller* exemplifies the fundamental importance of language itself as the abiding site of the competing social projects of Canadians.

Ted McGee teaches children's literature at St. Jerome's College in Waterloo, Ontario.

Multiculturalism: "A Stonehenge Structure"

Randall Ware: Canadian children's literature welcomes authors and subjects of all races and persuasions into its mainstream by celebrating differences and saluting similarities.

Randall Ware is Coordinator of the Canadian Literature Research Service at the National Library.

Ron Jobe: When I think of the uniqueness of Canada, I think of a concern I have regarding our concept of multiculturalism. It seems to me, what with federal and provincial funding, that multi-culturalism is like a stonehenge structure, with each standing stone representing an identifiable group funded to be visibly unique. As such, we have a circular stonehenge structure — an ever-expanding ring of stone.

We must ask ourselves what gives unity to such a structure. Basically, what is in the middle? What do we share in common? In other words, what does it mean to be Canadian? This is what I try to focus on in all my children's literature courses. We need to realize that the experiences of all Canadian children are not the same, yet there are links which bring them together — love, a sense of belonging, a feeling of personal competence and a reaffirmation of self-worth.

I am concerned that we instill a sense of pride in our youngsters for Canadian writers, illustrators and playwrights. Robert Munsch and Paulette Bourgeois have done wonders in making parents and kids realize you can be successful in North America and still be proud to be a Canadian. It is books like theirs, featuring the daily happenings of young children, which can give a Canadian outlook and sense of values. It is our responsibility to bring the best literature written by Canadians to the attention of children, their parents, and their teachers.

Change is the single most common phenomenon in our country. For those of us living in the West, the majority of our books are written in English, but we have to be aware of the changing nature of our society. Vancouver's Social Planning Department has recently released a survey which indicates that only 43.96% of families spoke English at home compared to 31.56% for Chinese languages, 5.17% Vietnamese, 4.39% Punjabi, 2.6% Spanish, 2.06% Hindi, 1.52% Tagalog and .6% French. Where is the literature that reflects children speaking these languages? How will these children see images of themselves in books? Do we provide images for our First Nations students? Many school districts and public libraries already have travelling heritage language collections, yet in our children's literature courses we need to provide realistic literary experiences for all children living in Canada.

It is time for us to go beyond traditional survival themes, to avoid the exotic and strange approach to culture, and get in touch with the reality of living

in Canada today. The titles we share will give children a perspective about their privince, their country, and themselves.

Ron Jobe teaches in the Department of Language Education at the University of British Columbia.

Jim Gellert: Whether or not some of the literature of Canada's indigenous peoples might appropriately be labelled *Canadian* children's literature, or even *children's* literature at all, is a complex question. It is a question, however, which warrants exploration and debate in any forum addressing the questions surrounding the nature of Canadian children's literature.

Jim Gellert is a professor in the English Department at Lakehead University where he has taught courses in Children's Literature. He is currently serving as Dean of Arts and Science.

Character: "Canadian, Eh?"

Arlene Robinson: When asked to ponder the question as to what is Canadian about Canadian children's literature, my immediate response was , "Oh, that's easy; it's Canadian." Then I began to think, "What makes any literature unique?" To me, literature becomes unique when it gets worked into a culture and suddenly becomes timeless, like Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland.*

I feel that Canadian children's literature has just begun to make its mark on Canadian culture, in part through its definition of heroism and character. Its heroes are created because of their humanistic qualities, rather than their super-human qualities. This is reflected, for example, in the heroism displayed by the MacLean family in their struggles depicted in Joyce Barkhouse's *Pit Pony.* The realism, family values, and acceptance of hardships are supplemented by an appreciation of the simple things in life: food, nature, caring for one another. Jacob, in Mordecai Richler's *Jacob Two-Two and the Dinosaur,* is a hero for his devotion and care for an unwanted creature of nature.

Arlene Robinson is a grade four teacher at Sacred Heart School of Halifax.

Frances Frazer: The literal answer to the question "What's Canadian about Canadian children's literature?" is that much of it involves Canadian characters in Canadian contexts. That is not as simplistic a reply as it may first appear. Two decades ago, young Canadian readers had few indigenous stories beyond native myths and legends and wilderness adventure tales. Now they are well supplied with books that convey a kaleidoscope of Canadian scenes — some comically or dramatically warped but most strongly evocative of Canadian places and times.

More tentatively, I would suggest that a pervasive conservatism sets our children's literature in English off from its counterparts in other English-speaking countries. On the positive side, that conservatism saves Canada's mainstream novels from the enamelled glibness, the superficiality, the clichéd themes, and the trendiness of commercial American fiction, such as Judy Blume's and Paul Zindel's popular products. On the negative side, it tends to tame down our books. The best Australian writers fully exploit their land's exotic flora and fauna, its topographical variety, its rich native mythology (writers such as Patricia Wrightson, Ivan Southall, Colin Thiele, Joan Phipson). British authors such as William Mayne, Alan Garner, Leon Garfield, Joan Aiken, and Jane Gardam touch heights of fantasy or hilarity and depths of dark imagining untried-for or unreached by most Canadian writers. In the USA, Robert Cormier exhibits technical daring (and positively scary cold-bloodedness) unmatched here. The finest Canadian children's literature is often wise, warm, evocative, whimsical or touching or both — and a little subdued.

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*Frances Frazer is a retired professor of English with a particular interest in children's literature. She wrote the chapter on children's literature in the **Literary History of Canada, Vol. 4.***

Donn Kushner: I'll just state what I think Canadian children's literature should be: The story should be able to take place in this country, and probably not in another one. It should be tied in with Canadian history and geography, and should convey a feeling of space and physical and spiritual loneliness. In some way, it should express a love of the country, or at least an emotional attachment to it, positive or negative. The emotion should be deep but not necessarily openly expressed, and driven by uncertainty, diffidence and irony.

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*Donn Kushner is a specialist in microbial physiology, with a special interest in creatures that live in extreme environments such as salt ponds or the Dead Sea, and author of seven children's books, the most recent of which were **A Thief Among Statues** and **The Night Voyagers**.*

Rod McGillis: One of the standard jokes focussed on us Anglophone Canadians is our repeated use of the expression "eh." "So you're off to school, eh." "How about that, eh." "All this froufrou about Canadian identity amounts to a bee in a bonnet, eh." Expressions such as these. I like this because the "eh" is a little word that expresses an inquiry and at the same time asks for confirmation. Canadians are always both asking who they are and asking for confirmation that they really do exist as Canadians, eh. But if at some time we were to receive this confirmation, if we were once and for all to find out who and where we are, we would lose our identity as identity-questers, as nice sort of ditherers.

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*Rod McGillis is a member of the English department at the University of Calgary and author of **The Nimble Reader: Literary Theory and Children's Literature**.*

Glen Campbell: Is there a Canadianness to our children's literature? I think so, to the same extent that there is a distinct Canadian character to our adult literature. Both have the same historical heritage, the same linguistic peculiarities (both English and French), and both deal with many of the same issues and problems. In the same manner, our children's literature is informed by our indigenous folklore, by our landscape and meteorological phenomena, and by our socio-cultural institutions. It reinforces the "Canadian way," persuasion rather than confrontation, compromise rather than conflict, and continues to convey our collective consciousness and sensibility while evolving from local to universal themes.

Glen Campbell is a member of the department of French, Italian, and Spanish, University of Calgary.

Welwyn Wilton Katz: The most importantly Canadian aspect of Canadian children's literature, in my opinion, occurs when the work is written by a Canadian. By this I mean a writer who has grown up in Canada, absorbing largely by osmosis the feelings, beliefs, national pessimisms and optimisms, the contradictory awareness of our geographical largeness and our population's relative smallness, our huge political weaknesses and much smaller strengths on a world scale, our national self-consciousness, our lack of respect for our own culture even while we defend it most vigorously, our lack of a distinctive and universally accessible cultural history, our divided country with its refusal to be a melting pot, combined with a chip-on-the-shoulder attitude that we actually *are* the best country on Earth and very lucky indeed to live here. Writers who are Canadian-bred will bleed their Canadian beliefs and fears and self-importance and smallness and contradictory hugeness into their writing; it can be no other way. It is not that new Canadians cannot write very good children's books, even books set in Canada and about Canadians, but these new Canadians' own early years will have made them what they are, different from Canadian-bred writers, and their books will consequently be less Canadian literature than "about" Canada.

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*Welwyn Wilton Katz's most recent novel is **Out of the Dark** (Groundwood).*

Jeffrey Canton: Is there a Canadianness to our children's literature? Most definitely. Some of it is very subtle. Those little nuances in our speech patterns that come out of our "English" colonial heritage, and that have crept into our daily spoken language in turn, give the language that our authors use a richness and sophistication that our neighbours south of the border often don't have. And we should never underestimate the importance of the influences of Quebec on the national face, language, and art of our children's literature. Quebec illustrators in particular have challenged and inspired artists across the country with their lively sense of colour, style and technique. The language of picture

books is of momentous importance. Canadian authors and publishers have always been aware of the necessity of using a literary language at all levels of writing, and our books for toddlers and for teens explore the excitement of the written word. The sense of place that niggles its way into the best of our picture books reflects back a sense of the colours and shapes and textures of that Canadian landscape. And the sheer range of talents and techniques! Look at the international presence that Canadian illustrators have: Barbara Reid, Ian Wallace, Jan Thornhill, Robin Muller, Elizabeth Cleaver, Michelle Lemieux, Pierre Pratt, to name a very few of the great artists that we have here.

Looking back over the last twenty years, I think we can say that we've given a very Canadian stamp to our children's literature. We've created a literature that talks to kids, not at them; a literature that enables children to grapple with difficult issues without a candy-coating; a literature that encourages a child to explore the ranges of his/her imagination. Books like *Ghost Train* and *Sarah and the People of Sand River* are for me stunning new examples of what makes a book distinctly Canadian — wonderful texts by writers who are interested in exploring the imagination through the written word; imaginative and illuminating illustrations that are at once integral to the text and yet independently soar to new imaginative heights as they explore possibilities of colour, style and technique. Both books tell complex stories that can take a young reader to new and exciting places without patronizing that reader. Both books use illustrations to heighten the imaginative experience of the text. Writers like Sarah Ellis, Tim Wynne-Jones and Brian Doyle write for young adults but their books could have greater adult appeal if they were marketed differently — as, for example, is Budge Wilson. That's very Canadian. Not to write down to children, not to write differently for children, but to create a literature that speaks to our children — in words and in pictures. And that's what we have done.

Jeffrey Canton is Program Coordinator at the Canadian Children's Book Centre in Toronto, Ontario.

No Difference — Or Is There?

Dave Jenkinson: So, hoser, what's Canadian about Canadian children's lit, eh? Probably nothing other than authorship and perhaps publisher. Surface aspects of Canadian geography and history initially cause some of "our" books to appear to be different from those published by other political units on this planet, but ultimately the themes of Canadian children's literature address those universal concerns which transcend time and place.

Dave Jenkinson teaches children's literature in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba.

Barbara Kraus: Children's literature, as the name implies, is primarily intended for children, for their amusement, their entertainment, their reading pleasure. If the pleasure is to be carried over into children's adult lives — which I assume to be part of the goal — then the essence of what makes books enjoyable cannot be anchored in political debate.

I have had the pleasure of reviewing a number of books for *CCL* over the years, and have, not surprisingly, found some to be better than others. The distinction of those I thought to be good, however, was in no way connected to a measurable degree of "Canadianness," nor were those that failed the mark in any way lacking this ephemeral substance.

What makes literature of any kind interesting is, to my mind, (a) a theme that touches the reader and (b) a linguistic packaging that keeps the pages turning — and an appreciable number of Canadian authors is indeed very good at this. What makes them "Canadian," however, is presumably the country in which they were born or have chosen to live. Some authors will delve from this realm of personal experience and make the setting of the story, say, downtown Toronto. Others will set their stories in a post-nuclear Australia, covered in snow and ice. But these factors are as much elements of creative license as the names of the characters or the streets they live on. One thing I have noticed about the Canadian children's literature I have read is an impressive number of strong female characters. As much as I welcome this trend, a trend which some have attributed to Canadian literature in general, in the case of children's literature I strongly suspect that the fact that girls tend to read more than boys may have something to do with it.

My hope for children's literature in Canada is that it continues to grow and to be strong, that the authors who write it continue to find themes and levels of language that will entice young readers and keep the creative pulse in our country beating strong. The name of the game, to my mind is neatly summed up in the words of Ma Bell: reach out and touch someone. Whether the "reacher" and the "touched" can be distinguished in terms of "Canadianness" is really not all that important.

***Barbara Kraus** is a professor of English and French language and translation at the Universities of Kasrlsruhe and Mainz in Germany. Her own research is in the area of Canadian literature.*

John Willinsky: I can't help feeling this is a critical time for moving beyond the old game of trying to name that certain quality, that identifying mark, of our nationhood. Many of the most important children's books are about a world that has no borders as we know them, whatever accidents of birth and life journeys of their authors. While these books are all of a tradition, they are also always something more than that tradition, and it is not a book's Canadianness that we need to celebrate in helping children's literature thrive in and contribute to the life of this nation.

***John Willinsky** was a childhood friend of children's author Pattie Stren, and is the author of books on dictionaries and empires.*

Heather Kirk: What's Canadian about Canadian children's literature?

1. Asking this question.
2. Answering it.
3. Everything? Nothing? Some things? Possible things:
   a. Despite Canada's being an increasingly multicultural society, Canadian children's literature continues to be dominated by white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant, middle-class writers. Despite a few exceptions (e.g., Carol Matas's *Lisa* and *Sworn Enemies* about Jews; Tololwa Mollel's *Orphan Boy* about blacks; Beatrice Culleton's classic *In Search of April Raintree* about Metis), mostly Canadian children's books are by and about WASPS.
   b. Canadian children's literature currently tends to follow trends begun in the United States in the previous decade. For example, as is pointed out in Egoff and Saltman's *The New Republic of Childhood*, the so-called social realism of American YA novels in the 1960s and 1970s reached Canada in the 1970s and 1980s. Of course before World War II, Canadian children's literature followed trends begun in Britain.
   c. Excellent writers of outstanding achievement are virtual unknowns among the general population. When I give talks on children's literature at the local community college, I find that participants only know Robert Munsch. They do not know either senior writers like Brian Doyle, Jean Little and Janet Lunn or middle-aged stars like Camilla Gryski, Kevin Major, and Kit Pearson. And how many people have heard of, say, Roderick Haig-Brown, a deceased great who pioneered aspects of Canadian children's literature?
4. Believing in the truth of this list of things Canadian without doing further research? *That's not Canadian, that's lazy!*

Heather Kirk is a freelance writer and a part-time instructor at Georgian College; she writes articles about Canadian children's literature.

Sheila Egoff: I think the answer to the question lies in that given by Louis Armstrong when asked to define jazz: "Man, if you have to ask, you'll never get to know."

Sheila Egoff is co-author of the standard guide to Canadian children's literature, The New Republic of Childhood.

Children's Literature and Canadian National Identity: A Revisionist Perspective

• *Jerry Diakiw* •

Résumé: *L'auteur rappelle le rôle essentiel que joue l'institution scolaire dans l'affirmation de l'identité et de la culture canadiennes; il plaide en faveur de l'abandon de la vision eurocentrique traditionnelle et d'une plus grande ouverture à la diversité et au pluralisme. À cet égard, l'école primaire devrait non seulement sensibiliser les élèves à la variété des productions régionales mais aussi promouvoir l'égalité, la justice et la tolérance grâce à la diffusion d'une littérature de plus en plus multiculturelle.*

Summary: *Canadian children's literature can play an important role in affirming a Canadian culture and identity. The school has always played and, whether we like it or not, always will play, an important role in promoting a national perspective. This article argues that there are commonplaces of our Canadian culture and identity that are inclusive of Canadians of all racial and ethonocultural origins and from all parts of Canada. The promotion of any national viewpoint is usually directed at the secondary level where Can-Lit and Canadian history become a focus for study. This viewpoint has traditionally been a Eurocentric perspective that has ignored the reality of Canada's current diversity. A focus on the secondary level ignores the fact that most societies have traditionally focussed on inducting their youth into the "tribe" before the age of thirteen. Therefore elementary schools have an important role to play in telling the Canadian story through children's literature, a literature that can not only reveal the splendour of our regional diversity, but one that can promote equity, justice and fairness through the richness of our multicultural literature.*

Many Canadians believe that there is such regional, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in this country that we do not in fact have an overriding culture or identity. But even those who express this belief are quick to distance us Canadians from our American neighbours and from our British and French roots. I would like to argue that there are in fact powerful commonplaces in our culture and identity — shared values that most Canadians can identify with — and that the school is an important place to explore, discuss and debate these commonplaces. I especially want to suggest that, because story and literature are important ways to reveal these commonplaces, there can be a powerful connection between Canadian literature and Canadian cultural identity — a connection educators should take advantage of. Nor is it just a matter of including Canadian literature at the secondary school level. Since it is in the

early years before puberty that who we are really comes into focus, I believe it is imperative that we give young children access to the rich body of Canadian children's literature.

Schools in Canada and elsewhere have always conveyed cultural and political views, and they will continue to do so whether we like it or not. In the past, of course, these views were dominated largely by the white male European perspective of the most dominant powers in society; but as the conviction of so many that there is no over-riding Canadian culture suggests, this is no longer true. The culture and identity we all share is multi-faceted, and not dominated by any one group. The difficult task schools now face, therefore, is determining how to convey our culture and identity in a way that is inclusive of *all* Canadians, so that justice and equity are underlying principles of the curriculum.

How Cultures Have Traditionally Transmitted Their Values

In most culturally homogeneous countries, children grow up hearing and learning the stories that define their culture: myths, legends, folklore, historic tidbits, tales of heroes and villains, miraculous tales and tales of courage and achievement. These shared stories lie at the heart of a culture's identity. Literature, arts and crafts, music, dance, film, and poetry blend together over time to crystallize an image that says, "This is who we are." The shared stories provide a culture with its values and beliefs, its goals and traditions. The myths, legends, folk tales, histories, and experiences of any cultural group bind the individuals together to form a cohesive society which allows people to communicate with each other and to work together with a shared purpose. These common stories become the foundation of public discourse, and they are a source of pride in their community.

The education of children is central to this process. According to E.D. Hirsch Jr., "The weight of human tradition across many cultures supports the view that basic acculturation should largely be completed by age thirteen. At that age Catholics are confirmed, Jews bar or bat mitzvahed, and tribal boys and girls undergo the rites of passage into the tribe" (30). Hirsch traces how Korean children traditionally memorize the five Kyung and the four Su. In Tibet, boys from eight to ten read aloud and learn the scriptures, in Chile the Araucanian Indians use songs to learn the customs and traditions of their tribe. The Bushmen children of South Africa listen to hours of discussion until they know the history of every aspect of their culture.

Hirsch also traces how the education system has been used to convey a national culture in modern nations. Traditionally on any particular day in France, for example, each child in each grade would be reading the same page in the same textbook. In the history of American education, the text book has been a constant source of debate over attempts to control the culture transmitted through the schools.

Hirsch cites an example of the influence of one particular document in defining a culture. In 1783, Hugh Blair, a Scot from the University of Edinburgh

published *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres*, intended as a compendium of what every Scot needed to know if he or she were to read and write well in English. This book had enormous impact on curriculum in school systems throughout the English-speaking world. Widely used in Great Britain, US and Canada between 1783 and 1911, the book went through 130 editions! Blair defined English literary culture for use initially by the Scots, later by colonials like Canadians and Americans; and eventually it became the standard for educating Englishmen and women.

In *Nations & Nationalism* (1983), Ernest Gellner argues that, viewed from a historical perspective, it has been the school and not the home that has been the decisive factor in creating national cultures in modern nations. Literate national cultures, he maintains, are school-transmitted cultures. He asserts that the chief creators of the modern nation have been school teachers; they helped create the modern nation state. They perpetuate it and make it thrive.

The history of Europe has shown that the schools play a major role in the creation of a national culture. Even in the United States with its many disparate groups, the schools have done much to create a national culture through such common shared stories, both real and imagined, as George Washington, Daniel Boone, Tom Sawyer, and Casey at the Bat, as well as through the promotion of strong central shared values and symbols of patriotism.

The history of the evolution of nationalism in country after country indicates clearly that a national culture is an artificial, created construct. Discussing how nation builders use a patchwork of folk materials, old songs, legends, dances, and historical tidbits, selected and re-interpreted by intellectuals to create a national culture, Gellner says, "The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary inventions, any old shred or patch would have served as well.... Nationalism is not what it seems and above all, not what it seems to itself. The culture it claims to defend is often its own invention" (56).

While these readings and discussions have illuminated for me how culture has been transmitted during our recent world history of colonialism and nationalism, they have unsettling implications. Hirsch, for instance, laments what he sees as the disintegration of central core values and a shared common knowledge in recent years. He argues for the need to identify what every American needs to know, and works to promote a return to a narrowly Eurocentric curriculum based on the glories of Greek civilization, the British Empire, and the Bible. While the European civilizations, and in particular, British and French traditions, are an integral part of our identity, they are but one significant facet among many facets.

Yes the school is, and always has been a major purveyor of a national viewpoint. But what kind of a viewpoint do we want to promote for the future? Any examination of the curricula of the past reveals a program of indoctrination into the culture and mores of those in power. The old African proverb is still true: "Until lions have their own historians, tales of bravery and courage will be told about the hunter." Or, as Napoleon put it more bluntly, "History is a set of

lies agreed upon"(cited in Wright 2). History is written by winners (Wright). The winners write the school curriculum and decide what stories will be told and what literature will be read.

As the child of immigrant Ukrainian parents in grade seven and eight in Toronto in the late 1940s, I vividly remember spending hours memorizing the Kings and Queens of England in chronological order. Later in high school I read the required stories and novels of Rudyard Kipling, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen, and the poetry of Tennyson and Wordsworth. I do not recall ever reading any Canadian authors. The children's books in the local library reflected this Anglocentric curriculum. I grew up feeling that I was somehow an outsider in Canada despite the fact that I was born in the country. Nor was I alone: My current research into the life histories of racial minority teachers in Canada reveals time and again that as students these young Canadians did not see themselves reflected in the curriculum of their schools. These experiences illustrate how recently in our history educators perceived the transmission of traditional culture as a major function of schools. It was clear who the winners were.

Revisioning the Traditional Culture

Since Prime Minister Trudeau proclaimed the policy of Multiculturalism in 1971, there has been a remarkable change in our *official* notions about our culture. It is no longer officially English or French-based or Eurocentric. Indeed, Trudeau said, "While we have two official languages we have *no official culture*, no one culture is more official than another" (italics mine). I have long celebrated Trudeau's statement; but the longer I ponder it the more I have difficulty with the words, "we have no official culture...." It seems to imply what many have said for decades, that Canada has no cultural identity at all. The insistence on no official culture has resulted in a backlash against multiculturalism, while multiculturalists struggle to stem the tide of racism and disempowerment.

Education, then, is caught between conflicting demands. As Grossberg suggests, on the one hand,

> there is the discourse of multiculturalism and liberation which calls for a democratic culture based on social difference and which is usually predicated on a theory of identity and representation. On the other side there is a discourse of conservatism based on canonical notions of general education and a desire to impose what it cannot justify — the existence of an illusory common culture. (10)

Simply, there is a lament over the loss of a culture rooted in Western civilization and values, and there is also the cry for equity and a multicultural curriculum. Must there be a dualism? Is there an alternative to these two positions? Amidst the remarkable diversity of this country are there inclusive commonplaces? Can a patchwork quilt of our stories welcome all Canadians?

It is helpful to review some history surrounding some of these issues. We have been inundated the last few years with critical examinations of the

meaning and purpose of multiculturalism and its affects on the curriculum in the school. Popular best selling books like Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*, Bibby's *Mosaic Madness* and Bissoondath's *Selling Illusions* have promoted a return to a traditionalist view. In Henry Giroux's view, they have "argued that multiculturalism posits a serious threat to the school's traditional task of defending and transmitting an authentic national history, a uniform standard of cultural literacy, and a singular national identity for all citizens to embrace" (1).

The heated position of the traditionalists is best demonstrated by Roger Kimbal's provocative statement:

> Implicit in the politicizing mandate of multiculturalism is an attack on the idea of common culture, the idea that despite our many differences, we hold in common an intellectual, artistic, and moral legacy, descending largely from the Greeks and the Bible, supplemented and modified over the centuries by innumerable contributions from diverse hands and peoples. It is this legacy that has given us our science, our political institutions, and the monuments of artistic and cultural achievement that define us as a civilization. Indeed it is this legacy, insofar as we live up to it, that *preserves us from chaos and barbarism.* And it is precisely this legacy that the multiculturalists wish to dispense with. (6; italics mine)

This position is widely held in Canada as well. The notion that our cultural mosaic and regional and ethnic differences can promote "chaos and barbarism" is a form of extremism that is not useful in promoting a constructive dialogue.

An alternative is to think of culture as, in Gates's words, "a conversation among different voices." Is it possible, by identifying a set of commonplaces, to balance the traditionalist objective and yet incorporate a multicultural, inclusive and liberating perspective? Is it possible for diversity to be a source of cultural identity? Is the idea of multiple loyalties and identities possible within the framework of a national culture and identity?

I personally identify with my Ukrainian heritage, my Toronto and Ontario regional roots, with immigrant cultures, as well as feeling an overriding identity with Canada and even a pervading global outlook. Survey data indicate strong regional loyalties and identities in many parts of Canada, far stronger than any regional loyalties in the United States; yet the evidence shows that the stronger the regional loyalty, the stronger the identity with Canada (Lipset).

As individuals we hold a complex set of loyalties and cultural identities, particularly in Canada. We have a strong bond to place — neighbourhood or community; often a strong affinity to our bio-region — the Maritimes or the Prairies, for example; often also a bond to our ethnic and/or our linguistic heritage, and to our religious group; and finally, to our country. For many Canadians there is even a strong feeling of loyalty to, and identity with, the planet. We move in and out of our various "tribes" with ease and comfort. The complexity of our "tribal" relations is in fact quite extraordinary. We are a mass of hierarchical, overlapping, shifting, often contradictory and conflicting loyalties and identities.

Given this complexity, one might ask why national identity and culture are so controversial. Among many academics, nationalism is a concept in disrepute. At one extreme, David Trend declares, "Nationality is a fiction. It is a story people tell themselves about who they are, where they live and how they got there" (225). And in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson demonstrates how nationalism is only a recent phenomenon in human history. He finds its origins in the late eighteenth century, and points out three paradoxes about it. The first is "the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eye of nationalists." The second is "the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept — [the idea] in the modern world that everyone can, should, will 'have' a nationality, as he or she has a gender ...." The third paradox is "the 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence." Anderson comments that, as Gertrude Stein referred to Oakland, one can quickly conclude with respect to nationalism that "there is no there there"(2).

But despite his unwavering scorn for the concept of nationalism, Anderson reflects on the continuing process:

> And many 'old nations,' once thought fully consolidated, find themselves challenged by 'sub'-nationalism within their borders — nationalisms which, naturally, dream of shedding this sub-ness one happy day. The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time. (3)

Why Culture and Identity need to Be Addressed in the Schools

Regardless of how we feel about this debate, nation-ness is with us. Nationalism is clearly not going to go away. It is unlikely we can do much about it. We can, however, make every effort to ensure that the manner in which our nation-ness is promoted in the school is based on democratic principles of justice and equity, concepts which also lie at the core of our Canadian commonplaces.

As a pragmatist educator I am confronted with the problem of observing a gathering of fundamentalist, traditionalist and conservative forces which are erupting across this country and whose views are consistent with those of Roger Kimbal — that the legacy of western civilization and the Bible saves us from "chaos and barbarism." They are fanning a backlash and are profoundly influencing the policy-makers and practitioners to bring back their "common culture," a move which they see as a return to essentially an exclusive Eurocentric Christian society. They view the schools as having a central role in transmitting *their* view of our common culture through a common curriculum.

"Some argue that in an increasingly multicultural society there is a need for a common literacy; others propose that we are moving toward a culture of many literacies" (Trend 227). I propose bridging these two positions — that we work towards a common literacy as long as the common literacy is inclusive of all Canadians.

This sort of bridging of these positions requires a revisioning of our traditional notions of our culture. For example, we have to recognize the temporal character of culture. As Tomlinson points out, "There is no such thing as a single national culture that remains the same year after year. Nations are constantly assimilating, combining and revising their national characters" (as cited in Trend 229). In a speech given by Sheldon Hackney, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts in 1993, he claims, "All ethnic groups have permeable boundaries, and the meaning of any particular identity will change over time ... History has a way of changing who we think we are." Hackney postulates a view of America that I believe is equally true of Canada: "There is an American identity that is different from the identities of any one of the ethnic groups that comprise the American population, that is inclusive of all of them and that is available to everyone who is an American."

Commonplaces of Canadian Culture and Identity

One way in which culture and identity can be addressed from a revisionist stance is by approaching the issue from the perspective of commonplaces of our culture accessible to all. It is important to identify these commonplaces, not because they are finite, correct, or complete enough to end the debate, but simply because they can provide a starting point for further debate and discussion. As Richard Rorty has argued, it is not so important to arrive at the absolute truth as it is to "keep the conversation going" (1982).

While Canadian culture is constantly evolving, I am convinced that it is tied together by a number of commonplaces which most Canadians consciously or unconsciously accept, promote and take pride in, commonplaces which permeate many aspects of our society and reveal some central truths about our country. Elsewhere, I have discussed ten such commonplaces in some detail (Diakiw 1996). Let me list them here:

1. Canada: A wilderness nation, a land of awesome size and grandeur, with savage beauty and incredible obstacles. Despite our largely urban existence our wilderness preoccupies our psyche, our literature, our arts, our mythology.
2. Canada: A country of diverse and distinctive regions with powerful regional identities — Quebec, the Maritimes, the Prairies, for example.
3. Canada: A democratic, multi-faith nation with remarkable freedoms. Equity is enshrined in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but we are nevertheless a nation marked by equity struggles yet unfolding, for First Nations, women, people of colour, and French Canadians.
4. Canada: A nation with a strong sense of social welfare. A social safety net is part of our tradition, a tradition that is the envy of many of our neighbours to the south.
5. Canada: Home of our First Nations. Our Native roots are deeply entwined in our Canadian way.
6. Canada: A nation of immigrants. We cherish our multicultural mo-

saic, our immigrant culture — this immigrant culture has forever attracted adventurers, inventors and entrepreneurs.

7. Canada: A nation state founded initially on the cultures of France and England. They have profoundly contributed to many of our institutions, laws and principles. Most of us respect and support our bilingual society and our distinct Francophone culture centered in Quebec.
8. Canada: A nation of enormous resources with a vibrant, inventive economy. Our identity is in part a product of this economy, one that permits one of the highest standards of living of any nation in the world.
9. Canada: A nation of rich cultural traditions in the arts, sports and popular culture. We have a legacy of distinctive creative and artistic achievement in all the arts, provided by institutions such as the CBC, the NFB, the National Ballet, the Montreal Symphony, the Canadian Opera Company as well as by individuals like Bryan Adams, Alanis Morriset, Celine Dion, and our many comedians.
10. Canada: Peace-keepers for the world and a partner with all nations. Our long history as peace-keepers and mediators, our participation in international organizations, our long involvement with developing nations, and our comparatively open immigration and refugee polices, confirm our global commitment as global citizens and our family ties to virtually every country in the world.

In struggling to identify these commonplaces, I asked myself a series of questions. Do they provide ample latitude to address critical issues in our society? Do they provide for a new multicultural curriculum that provides opportunities for students to become, in Henry Giroux's words, "border crossers"? As Giroux states, "Teachers must be educated to become border crossers, to explore zones of cultural difference by moving in and out of the resources, histories and narratives that provide different students with a sense of identity, place and possibility" (11). And finally, do the commonplaces reveal that there is a Canadian identity that is different from any one of the ethnic or regional identities that comprise the Canadian population, and are also different, for example, from an American identity?

I believe that the answer to all these questions is yes. Canada is a complex nation with multiple characteristics and identities. Its identity is comprised of layer upon layer of physical, regional, linguistic, ethnic, religious and cultural variations. While any one of the commonplaces I listed may also be characteristic of other nations, the layering of them, one over another, creates a unique Canadian culture. But despite this complexity, there is a Canadian culture and identity that emerges from this layering that is different from any one of the regional, cultural or ethnic cultures and identities that exist within Canada. Nevertheless, this national culture and identity is inclusive of all groups and individuals and is accessible to all Canadians. *All* regions and ethnocultural groups can relate to these commonplaces.

Most significantly in terms of literature, these commonplaces are rich with stories that are part of our "community of memory." There are gripping

and fascinating stories that emerge from them, whether through narratives of events or through biographies of remarkable women and men who exemplify them. While there is room for considerable debate and discussion here, these commonplaces are the "stuff" that myths are made of. The big stories of Canada are embedded in them.

The Role of Story and Literature

Story is a powerful and traditional way to provide a common bond for members of a society and to familiarize children with a culture. According to Postman, "Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence ... nations, as well as people, require stories and may die for a lack of a believable one" (122). And Bellah states:

> Communities in the sense that we are using the term, have a history — in an important sense they are constituted by their past — and for this reason we can speak of a real community as a 'community of memory,' one that does not forget its past. In order not to forget the past a community is involved in retelling its story .... These stories of collective history and exemplary individuals are an important part of the tradition that is so central to a community of memory. (153)

It is through stories that our central values and commonplaces are shared. It is through stories that we can preserve and enhance our Native roots, our rich multicultural heritage, while still revealing an understanding of the historic traditions and structures that created the Canadian nation state. Our stories explore and reveal our commonplaces.

In *Survival*, Margaret Atwood argues for the important understanding of how our culture is revealed in our literature:

> I'm talking about Canada as a state of mind, as a space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It's that kind of space in which we find ourselves lost.
>
> What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as the product of who and where we have been. We need such a map desperately, we need to know about here. Because here is where we live. For the members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here, is not a luxury but a necessity. Without that knowledge we will not survive. (19)

Canadian Children's Literature: Toward Understanding Our Culture and Identity

Because our identities, our attitude to people of different races, our sense of self and therefore probably our sense of a national identity or lack of it, is largely fixed by the end of elementary school, children's literature can be a powerful

way of sharing a nation's stories. Fortunately, furthermore, there is now a rich body of Canadian children's literature which can provide our children with knowledge of our culture and identity — "a map, a geography of the mind." Many titles provide rich insight into many of the commonplaces I have identified, and reveal a revisioned Canadian culture consistent with the heritage of our young Canadians from across Canada of all races, religions, and cultures. A loose collection of such titles, if profiled and shared across Canada, could bind all Canadian school children together in the knowledge that in every school from White Horse to St. John's, whether Black, First Nation, Chinese, French Canadian or fourth generation English Canadian, they would all be reading and discussing many of the same Canadian stories, stories in which they can see a reflection of themselves. Through this process they would be inducted into the Canadian "tribe." These central conceptions and the shared stories, tales, histories, and poems would be the starting point for the beginning of our student's understanding of a Canadian culture.

In a country in which educational curricula are controlled by individual provinces, however, no authority exists to set any such canon. But at the secondary school level, at least, an unwritten canon has evolved amongst teachers across Canada. A central core of titles has emerged through word of mouth, through articles and journals, through courses, and through discussions at conferences and meetings. On the Can-Lit discussion group on the internet, for example, scholars and teachers from across Canada share their views about titles and authors they suggest for serious study. No such process has developed at the elementary level, where perhaps the need is greatest. Our students are more familiar with the wonderful children's authors from England, the United States and Australia than they are with our own Canadian authors and illustrators. In the faith that a loose list of shared Canadian materials would be of great value, I would like to offer some suggestions about what it might contain.

- Pre-primer alphabet books such as R.K. Gordon's A *Canadian Child's ABC*, Ann Blades's *By the Sea* (a BC alphabet book), Erica Rutherford's *An Island Alphabet*, about PEI, Elizabeth Cleaver's *ABC*, Ted Harrison's *A Northern Alphabet*, Stephanie Poulin's *Ah! Belle Cité, A Beautiful City, ABC* and *A Halifax ABC*. Through these alphabet books, young children become familiar with many of our Canadian icons.
- Children's stories by some of our finest writers: Margaret Lawrence's *Olden Days Coat*, Gabrielle Roy's *Clip Tail*, Mordecai Richler's *Jacob Two Two and the Hooded Fang*, W. O. Mitchell's *Jake and the Kid*, Farley Mowat's *Owls in the Family*, Ralph Connor's *Glen Garry School Days*, Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, Marshall Saunders' *Beautiful Joe*.
- Richly-illustrated picture story books that have entered into our canon, such as Robert Service's *Cremation of Sam McGee* and *The Shooting of Dan McGrew* illustrated by Ted Harrison, William Kurelek's *Prairie Boy's Winter*, Roch Carrier's *The Hockey Sweater*, and perhaps even Robert Munsch's *Paper Bag Princess*.

- Stories of our multicultural heritage such as Ian Wallace's *Chin Chiang and the Dragon Dance* and *The Sandwich*, Ann Blades's *Mary of Mile 18*, Paul Yee *Curses of the Third Uncle*, Mary Hamilton's *The Tin-lined Trunk*, Sing Lim's *West Coast Chinese Boy*, Kit Pearson's trilogy about war-time guests from England, Laura Langston's *No Such Thing as Far Away*, a story set in Chinatown, Ann Alma's *Skateway to Freedom*, and Marlene Nourbese Philip's *Harriet's Daughter*.
- Historical novels such as Susanne Martel's *The King's Daughter*, set in New France; Barbara Smucker's *Days of Terror*; Barbara Greenwood's *A Question of Loyalty*, Geoffrey Bilson's *Fire over Montreal*, Marsha Hewitt's *One Proud Summer*, James Reaney's *The Boy With An R in his Hand*, Bernice Thurman Hunter's *"Booky"* series, and Janet Lunn's *The Root Cellar*, to name just a few.
- We need to provide opportunities to have children appreciate and celebrate our spiritual and religious diversity through such books as Kathleen Cook-Waldren's *A Wilderness Passover*, the Divali story in Rachna Gilmore's *Lights for Gita*, Kim So Goodtrack's *ABC's of Our Spiritual Connection*, as well as Christmas stories such as Bud Davidge's *Mummer's Song*, about Christmas in Newfoundland.
- The readings should also include stories that capture the majesty and savage grandeur of the country in wilderness survival tales such as Jan Truss's *Jasmin*.
- First Nation stories such as Markoosie's *Harpoon of the Hunter*, Jan Andrews's *The Very Last First Time*, Grey Owl's *The Adventures of Sajo and the Beaver People*, James Houston's *Tikta Liktak: An Eskimo Legend*, and Kevin Major's *Blood Red Ochre*.
- Fairy tales and legends from Eva Martin's *Canadian Fairy Tales*, Maurice Barbeau's *The Golden Phoenix and other Tales from Quebec* and Claude Aubry's *The Magic Fiddler and Other Legends of French Canada*, and First Nation myths and legends, such as William Toye and Elizabeth Cleaver's *How Summer came to Canada* or *The Loon's Necklace* as well as children's literature written and illustrated by Native Canadians, for example, Michael Arvaaluk's *Arctic 123*.
- Poetry selections from anthologies such as Mary Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson's *The New Wind has Wings: Poems from Canada* and David Booth's *Till All the Stars Have Fallen*.
- There are many titles that capture the essence of our many distinctive regions. The Prairies, as one region for example, are portrayed evocatively through such visually splendid titles as Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet's *A Prairie Alphabet*, *A Prairie Year* and *Grampa's Alkali*, David Booth's *Dustbowl*, William Kurelek's *A Prairie Boy's Summer*, Jim McGugan's *Josepha: A Prairie Boy's Story*, Marilynn Reynolds's *Belle's Journey*, a story of the Prairies in the twenties, and of course, the works of W.O. Mitchell. These and many other titles can convey a sense of the Prairies to young people from across Canada. Similar collections could be pulled together for each of the regions

of Canada with the exception of Quebec. It is lamentable that the rich body of children's literature that exists in Quebec is not widely available in English nor is much of the literature in English available to children in Quebec.

- Biographies too, have an important role to play in creating a Canadian identity, not just the traditional figures included in the curriculum such as our adventurous explorers, founding fathers and sports figures, but including women, aboriginal and Black heroes in such sources as: Susan Merritt's *Her Story: Women of Canada's Past*, Jo-ann Archibald et al's *Courageous Spirits: Aboriginal Heroes of our Children*, and Rosemary Sadlier's *Leading the Way: Black Women in Canada*.
- A rich body of recent historical works are available with the lively retellings of historic events by Pierre Berton, the "Adventures of Canadian History" series, Marsha Boulton's *Just a Minute: Glimpses of our Great Canadian Heritage*, and Barbara Greenwood's, *A Pioneer Story*, as well as compelling new historical biographies such as Jean Little's *His Banner Over Me*, the story of one of Canada's early female doctors, and new biographies for children including those of Nellie McClung and Roberta Bondar.
- But the Canadian story is not only about successes and heroic deeds. As Bellah says,

> A genuine community of memory will also tell painful stories of shared suffering that sometimes creates deeper identities than success.... And if the community is completely honest it will remember stories not only of suffering received but of suffering inflicted — dangerous memories, for they call the community to alter ancient evils. The communities of memory that tie us to the past also turn us toward the future as communities of hope. They carry a context of meaning that can allow us to connect our aspirations of a larger whole and see our own efforts as being contributions to a common good. (153)

  Thus, the list should include stories of the Japanese internment, such as Joy Kogawa's *Naomi's Road* and Shizuye Takashima's *A Childhood in Prison Camp*; stories about early slavery and emancipation in Canada, such as Barbara Smucker's *Underground to Canada*; stories about discrimination like Jean Little's *From Anna*, Brian Doyle's *Angel Square*, Paul Yee's *Tales of Gold Mountain* and *Ghost Train*, Ann Walsh's *Shabash* in which a Sikh boy confronts racism, and Michelle Marineau's *Road to Chlifa*, in which Karim emigrates from war-torn Beirut and faces discrimination in Quebec.

While discussion and debate would be necessary to identify a core body of exemplary materials, as it has over time at the secondary level, it is important that they reflect the central commonplaces of Canada's culture. The selection of these stories would be like creating a patchwork quilt. Each patch or story would be an individual creation of merit in its own right, but collectively, they would blend together to create a total image. Together these patches would tell the new emerging Canadian story.

While we do have some outstanding resources to begin, it is not enough. We still need to find new ways to tell tales about our heroes, not textbook biographies but fireside tales — tales about our First Nations, our explorers, our fur traders, our pioneer women, our artists and musicians, our great athletes and scientists; about the settlement of the west, the discovery of our minerals, and the building of our railways, the contributions of our new immigrants; about our international accomplishments, our Nobel Peace Prize winner; and in particular, we need sources about French Canada to bridge the two solitudes.

We need to tell more stories that capture our multicultural heritage — stories about the Jewish fur traders and settlers who were here even before the English; about the Black Canadian men and women who lived in Nova Scotia two hundred years ago in greater numbers than Scots; about the Chinese workers who built the railways; about the English, Scottish, Irish, Ukrainian, Finnish, German, Sikh, and Japanese immigrants, to name just a few who broke ground across this country to make Canada what it is today.

Parekh defines multiculturalism in a way that fits appropriately within the intent of my conception of the commonplaces of our identity:

> Multiculturalism doesn't simply mean numerical plurality of different cultures, but rather a community which is creating, guaranteeing, encouraging spaces within which different communities are able to grow at their own pace. At the same time it means creating a public space in which these communities are able to interact and enrich the existing culture and create a new consensual culture in which they recognize reflections of their own identity. (Cited in Giroux 7)

We know that the school is a major purveyor of a political viewpoint. It always has been, and always will be. If we recognize this influence, we can promote a viewpoint that is reflective of all Canadians and that commits us to a continuing search for equity and a society for the new millennium that is free of racism and inequities. The "big" themes or commonplaces of Canadian culture can assist us in suggesting a core of readings for reading aloud, for study or discussion, for every grade from Kindergarten to grade nine in every school in Canada, that contributes to a truly just, equitable and inclusive society. Through this collective patchwork quilt of shared stories we create "a community of memory," and we reveal our Canadian culture and identity in a way that allows Canadians from all regions, French and English speaking, of diverse racial and ethnocultural backgrounds to "recognize reflections of their own identity" — a way that says, "this is who we are."

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Variations interculturelles

• *Suzanne Pouliot* •

Summary: *In 1990, the Montreal-based publisher Hurtubise HMH launched a new collection entitled "Tête-Bêche," edited by Françoise Ligier. Each book offers two stories, one by a Quebecois author and the other by a francophone writer (from Algeria, Cameroon, France, Morocco ...); but both stories are published "tête-bêche" as a playing card, thus every book can be read from both sides provided the reverse side is turned upside down. Though it may be Quebec's most striking multicultural initiative in children's literature, the results may be somewhat ambivalent since the representation of space and time, the relationship between dialogue and narration, and the perception of national identity remain deeply rooted in each author's cultural and literary tradition.*

Résumé: *En 1990, la maison d'édition Hurtubise HMH a lancé la collection intitulée "Tête-Bêche", sous la direction de Françoise Ligier. Chaque ouvrage propose deux histoires, l'une composée par un auteur québécois et l'autre, par un écrivain francophone (Algérie, Cameroun, France, Maroc ...), mais les deux récits sont publiés tête-bêche, comme une carte à jouer, chaque volume pouvant ainsi être lu dans les deux sens. Quoique cette collection s'avère l'initiative multiculturelle la plus marquée dans la littérature de la jeunesse du Québec, les échanges interculturels ne s'établissent pas sans ambiguïtés, puisque la représentation du temps et de l'espace, la relation entre le dialogue et la narration, et la perception de l'identité nationale restent tributaires de la tradition culturelle et littéraire de chaque auteur.*

Au carrefour de la francophonie, Tête-Bêche ou la pluralité des cultures francophones

En périphérie du champ littéraire, se trouve la littérature de jeunesse avec ses multiples manifestations: contes, fables, légendes, bandes dessinées, romans polygénériques. La littérature qui s'écrit et qui se lit permet ainsi aux jeunes de s'identifier aux personnages qui partagent notamment par le biais du roman "leur expérience personnelle du monde". Compte tenu de l'ampleur éditoriale occupée par cette marge du champ, il nous a paru intéressant d'explorer la représentation interculturelle de l'espace et du temps, d'un point de vue interne, dans un contexte social pluriethnique.

La collection Tête-Bêche, publiée par les éditions Hurtubise HMH, depuis 1990, nous servira de laboratoire d'observation afin de dégager la spécificité identitaire de la littérature de jeunesse québécoise ou du moins ce qui en tient lieu.

Tête-Bêche, collection dirigée par Françoise Ligier, comprend huit livres et seize titres et vise, à l'instar de bien d'autres discours institutionnels, l'efficacité de la lecture. Pour y parvenir, la collection recrute des auteurs réputés et renommés comme Robert Soulières, Marie-Andrée Clermont et Marie Page.

Ces derniers ont publié plusieurs romans, destinés aux jeunes, parus principalement aux Éditions Fides et Pierre Tisseyre dans la collection Faubourg St-Rock et aux Éditions Québec/Amérique. Soulières a obtenu de nombreux prix dont un pour *Le Visiteur du soir* (1980)[1], roman qui a valu à son auteur le Prix Alvine-Bélisle alors que l'album *Seul au monde* (1982)[2] a remporté le Prix Communication-Jeunesse. Par ailleurs, le roman *Casse-tête chinois* (1984)[3] du même auteur s'est vu décerné le Prix du Gouverneur général, en plus de se classer au deuxième rang au palmarès Livromagie (1987) alors qu'*Un été sur le Richelieu* (1985)[4], autre roman policier de Soulières, se méritait le troisième prix, en 1985, au même palmarès.

En 1991, l'auteure Clermont a vu son roman *L'Engrenage* obtenir le troisième prix au palmarès Livromagie, concours de lecture organisé par l'organisme à but non lucratif Communication-Jeunesse. De plus, son travail de traductrice de plus d'une douzaine de romans lui a valu le Certificat d'honneur du International Board of Books for Youth (IBBY), en 1987, pour la traduction de *Jasmine*,[5] traduction de *Jasmin*. Marie-Andrée Clermont est directrice de la collection Deux Solitudes jeunesse, aux Éditions Pierre Tisseyre. Deux romans de Marie Page *Hot dog ou petit pain au chocolat* (Flammarion/Castor Poche) et *le Gratte-Mots* (Héritage/Échos) ont également obtenu des prix.

La particularité de la collection, destinée aux 9 ans et plus, est de présenter deux textes, un inédit et une réédition de la collection *Plus*, publiée chez le même éditeur, placés tête-bêche; chaque livre offre donc deux couvertures. Les deux textes, l'un d'un auteur québécois, l'autre d'un auteur d'un autre pays francophone, (France, Maroc, Cameroun, Algérie, Monaco, Zaïre) partagent un même sujet, un même thème ou une même atmosphère. Le corpus comprend seize auteurs dont cinq auteurs féminins et trois auteurs masculins du Québec et autant d'auteurs féminins et masculins hors Québec. Ainsi, dix histoires sont écrites par des femmes, deux livres sont écrits par deux hommes et quatre par deux femmes et finalement deux livres sont écrits par un homme et une femme.

Ce choix éditorial met ainsi en parallèle des relations interculturelles et souligne les conditions spécifiques de la culture, marquées par le temps et l'espace que l'on pourrait traduire plus métaphoriquement par visages et paysages de l'altérité[6].

Il nous a paru intéressant d'examiner de plus près les représentations spatio-temporelles, telles que transmises par cette collection et d'explorer plus avant ces paramètres, arrières-scènes de nos imaginaires individuels et collectifs, mais aussi représentations spécifiques de lieux et de périodes. En examinant ainsi la place occupée par l'espace et le temps aux plans iconique et discursif, nous pensons pouvoir ainsi déceler, sinon des différences, du moins des aménagements culturels spécifiques, selon le type de récit (conte, légende). Ces

manifestations spécifiques contribuent dans une large mesure à identifier la spécificité de la littérature de jeunesse tant au Québec qu'ailleurs.

Classification spatio-temporelle

Bourneuf et Ouellet ([1972],1975) et Loslier (1994) classifient le temps et l'espace en diverses catégories que nous avons prises en compte pour mieux cerner les manifestations spatio-temporelles[7].

La collection réunit les titres sélectionnés sous huit thèmes différents. Les renseignements utiles sur le lieu principal de l'action sont généralement brefs et succincts en accord avec le thème traité, tout comme d'ailleurs les limites spatiales qu'imposent les auteurs à l'action. Ainsi, le thème de l'amitié, représenté par *Le Geai bleu* (Monique Pariseau) et Le *Mendigot* (Fatima Gallaire), insiste principalement sur le temps contemporain, soit celui du récit "depuis trois jours il entend grincer le portail du jardin", marqué par le présent.

L'avenir est associé à l'intégration du personnage migrant alors que l'espace mentionné renvoie aussi bien à l'espace national "ce village d'Afrique du Nord", qu'aux espaces communautaires, situés sur "une place en pente où s'ouvrent déjà plusieurs échoppes" (Idem, 25), voire "un magasin minuscule et obscur". L'espace domestique avec ses masures closes ou silencieuses occupe l'arrière-scène discursif et iconique. Les différents plans spatiaux, présentés en perspective, correspondent à des plans psychologiques.

Généralement, les paysages peints, réels ou fictifs dans *Le Mendigot,* donnent à voir soit une ville lointaine sous des cieux changeants, soit une ligne d'horizon, baignée dans une atmosphère brumeuse et dans une lumière de crépuscule ou d'aurore. À quelques reprises, Marc, le personnage breton de ce récit, croque à larges traits, le paysage qui l'entoure "le rougeoiement magnifique qui annonce, à l'est, le lever du soleil" ou "la route de poussière" (Gallaire, 17).

Les relations Nord-Sud, marquées par les souvenirs d'enfance, réfèrent au temps des souvenirs et au temps historique. Les *Échos d'enfance* (Kingué) insistent sur l'espace domestique, associé à l'hospitalité: la cuisine et le salon alors que *Portraits de famille* (Beccarelli-Saad) relate différents lieux, investis par les personnages, selon l'époque racontée. Le passé paternel se déroule en France et à Toronto. Le passé familial plus récent à Montréal: "nous habitions un appartement vaste et bien éclairé dans une rue très passante la nuit comme le jour" (p.6), "les pièces de notre appartement avaient chacune leur propre atmosphère, leur équilibre particulier entre l'espoir et la désespérance. Le salon, tout lavande et mauve, dégageait une odeur de Provence au printemps, propice aux débordements de tous genres." (p.15). Les espaces investis par les personnages, selon les périodes de leur vie, rendent sensibles l'écoulement du temps en le rythmant de référents olfactifs.

Parmi les lieux occupés ou traversés par les personnages, se trouvent, par ordre d'apparition, l'espace domestique, soit le vaste appartement occupé par la famille immigrante, puis l'espace communautaire comme le sont les lieux de travail ou d'études: l'université ou le collège; l'espace national nommé

Québec ou Canada, selon les enjeux et les allégeances politiques des personnages, et finalement l'espace étranger: la France. Comme le suggère la narratrice, selon les personnages traités, les souvenirs ne s'enracinent ni de la même façon, ni aux mêmes lieux, d'où l'insistance de la narratrice à qualifier la voix de son père de "chaude et un peu pompeuse, une voix sûre de son effet" (p. 7). Cette voix sert également de repère temporel.

L'inconnu, troisième thème, réunit deux personnages venus du ciel et de la mer. Si les lieux sont identifiés dès le titre, le temps l'est également avec *Le Marquis tombé du ciel* (Delval) qui réfère aussi bien à un temps ancestral, marqué par l'architecture (le château), la tenue vestimentaire du personnage principal (une redingote), et le titre de noblesse (Marquis). Par ailleurs, le temps historique, daté 3 septembre 1993, se lie au temps présent, marqué par des objets à référent technologique comme l'avion à réaction et la montre à quartz. Si l'espace dominant est l'espace communautaire avec la plage dans *L'homme qui venait de la mer* (Soulières), l'espace infranational illustré par l'Université de Montréal et l'hôpital l'est tout comme l'espace domestique (le salon et la chambre) mais, à un degré moindre.

Le texte de Delval renvoie *illico*, dès l'*incipit*, au temps du récit, au temps du conte charpenté: "C'était par une fin d'après-midi brumeuse. Les poires mûres pesaient lourdement aux branches des vieux arbres ..." (p. 5). D'entrée de jeu, cet imparfait souligne avec force le temps qui désigne les choses et les êtres disparus, soulignant ainsi leur absence. Ce procédé discursif ouvre sur l'intemporel et le non-lieu puisque le récit a valeur de fable dont la localisation précise importe peu.

Le secret, autre thème traité, choisit plus volontiers le temps contemporain et celui des souvenirs avec ses images de camp de concentration, présentes dans *L'Enfante* (Drozd) qui assaillent le personnage principal. Les nombreux déplacements, effectués par Monsieur Vannier, coïncident avec les temps forts de ses turbulences intérieures. Les lieux mentionnés réfèrent autant à l'espace domestique (chambre[8] et camp) qu'à l'espace étranger.

Poursuite (Clermont) mentionne principalement trois espaces occupés rapidement par la protagoniste handicapée: l'espace infranational avec l'autoroute Ville-Marie, puis l'espace domestique (la voiture, la cuisine) et en dernier lieu l'espace communautaire, lieux de rendez-vous comme l'hôpital Saint-Luc et le centre sportif. Le temps des rencontres souhaitées, désirées ou réelles est rythmé par les courses automobiles qui se déroulent dans le centre-sud de Montréal. Le bolide symbolise tout à la fois le temps de la poursuite et l'espace des rencontres possibles. Là aussi, le regard sert de passerelle entre les personnages. Il représente soit la détermination du personnage handicapé, soit le "beau chauffeur aux yeux de rêve" (p. 8) ou encore rend fou (p. 8).

L'Enfante (Drozd) explore le passé à travers le prisme déformant des souvenirs douloureux: "Des visages d'enfants blessés ou assassinés, affamés ou morts, porteurs de souffrances. Des visages qui le torturaient. La souffrance, il connaissait. Elle l'avait terrassé dans un camp de concentration, à l'âge de douze ans" (p. 6). Ce va-et-vient entre hier et aujourd'hui se déroule aussi bien dans

des espaces domestiques (la chambre) qu'en référence à des espaces étrangers lointains comme l'Irlande, le Cambodge, la Palestine, la Corée, sur fond ajouré d'amour et de jalousie, sentiments qui rythment la décision suicidaire du protagoniste. L'espace est balayé par les yeux des protagonistes: "Elle accrocha son regard bleu aux yeux gris" (Drozd,8) alors que le protagoniste masculin "avait posé son regard gris et froid sur elle" (p.19). L'horreur des yeux vides d'enfants ou les yeux noirs de fièvre des enfants affamés traduisent le paysage intérieur des personnages principaux.

La peur bleue, thème exploité dans *Patte blanche* (Page), situe l'action en hiver alors qu'il fait tempête dans "cette immense maison perdue en pleine campagne au fin fond d'un rang" (p.13), alors qu'*Une histoire à mourir debout* (Horveno) se déroule dans un village breton sur fond de légendes de korrigans, de farfadets et de diables. Ces personnages mythologiques, réveillés, dit-on, par les vents et les précipitations abondantes, aux rites magiques et initiatiques, servent de révélations dramatiques et occupent l'espace symbolique. *Patte blanche* se fixe pour toute la durée du récit en un seul lieu physique, ce qui a pour effet d'accroître la tension dramatique en concentrant la tension psychologique alors qu'*Une histoire à mourir debout* évolue dans un rayon plus ou moins large en quelques lieux précis.

L'avenir, représenté par *CH.M.250 K* (Vidal) et *TRE 22660.* (LeBlanc), se vit sur une planète peuplée d'êtres automatisés où le temps chronologique est déphasé. L'espace communautaire décrit renvoie à un lieu concentrationnaire où les interdits nombreux génèrent angoisse et souvenirs d'antan. Le récit de Vidal se caractérise par un voyage dans le temps, provoquant quiproquos et amusements dans les espaces communautaires visités tant les anachronismes culturels sont nombreux.

La Maison sur la colline (Desplat-Duc) nommée Kermaroc, située sur un plateau, intrigue les enfants bretons par son délabrement. "Le sentier la contourne et descend sur l'autre versant en sillonnant entre les herbes, les genêts et les orties" (p.9). L'action se déroule, à notre époque, entre l'école, cet espace communautaire, et l'intérieur et l'extérieur de Kermaroc, espace domestique clos alors que *Le Prince d'un soir* (Lajoie) a lieu dans un cadre exclusivement scolaire comme la salle de classe et la scène. Il s'agit de jouer *Le Prince Gringalet,* conte écrit par Babette Cole, référence à l'espace intertextuel. Dans ces deux récits, les auteurs ont choisi l'époque contemporaine pour y présenter des personnages handicapés physiquement ou mentalement, soulignant les différences représentées.

Entre ciel et terre (Muzi), conte de la création, se déroule comme son titre l'indique entre ces deux espaces à une époque mythologique. *La Lumière du matin* (Magini), légende amérindienne recueillie au début du siècle par l'ethnologue Marius Barbeau, raconte les origines de la vie, il y a de ça très longtemps alors que les hommes ignoraient qu'ils étaient des hommes, qu'ils vivaient dans un rêve, de l'autre côté de la mémoire à une époque traversée de mythes. Ces deux récits racontent, selon des modes similaires, l'histoire de la création du monde. Selon Loslier (1994), l'espace mythologique évoqué n'est ni

conquis, ni assimilé, ni dominé, ni acculturé, ni colonisé, ni discriminé.

Selon le type de récit, les auteurs ont cadré une ou des portions d'espace qu'ils ont situées à une certaine distance comme le font d'ailleurs les peintres et les photographes. Pour cela, ils introduisent la lumière comme élément fondamental de la composition.

Autres représentations spatio-temporelles

Outre les catégories recensées, nous avons également identifié le rythme du récit (précipité ou lent selon la place occupée par les dialogues), la place occupée par les souvenirs, leur fréquence, leur durée, et ce à titre de facteur temporel implicite tout comme d'ailleurs les périodes de la vie comme l'enfance ou l'adolescence, voire les saisons[9] ou les parties du jour. La mort naturelle, suivie des funérailles, marque le temps du récit dans *Échos d'enfance.* Nous avons délibérément éliminé de notre analyse le temps d'écriture, tout comme d'ailleurs le temps de réception du récit, le temps de lecture et le temps raconté.

La mémoire, ce réceptacle du passé, s'avère un référent temporel majeur dans *L'Enfante.* On y apprend notamment que l'esprit de Monsieur Vannier, quinquagénaire, dérivait aux confins de ses souvenirs au lieu de se concentrer sur ses recherches" (Drozd, 10), tant il était amoureux de cette gamine, d'où les éclairs malicieux qui passent dans ses prunelles lorsqu'il l'aperçoit. Yeux, regards, prunelles, yeux vides martèlent la vie émotive des personnages qui se fuient et s'attirent. En somme, les traits temporels recensés, en creux du texte ou à sa surface, constituent de puissants descripteurs atmosphériques et dramatiques et se logent aussi bien dans les lieux physiques (architecture) qu'humains identifiés comme le visage, la posture des personnages comme cette "silhouette furtive" (Drozd, 5), le regard lavé par la vieillesse, la coloration des cheveux, la pigmentation cutanée, le degré de pilosité, *etc.*

D'entrée de jeu, l'espace identifié, associé aux émotions vécues (amitié, amour, haine, nostalgie), est maintes fois marqué par les dualités suivantes: ville/campagne, intérieur/extérieur. Selon l'émotion ressentie, la description spatio-temporelle sera plus ou moins importante en détails et en précisions. Parfois, les lieux fréquentés comme le port, la mer, ne sont qu'évoqués.

Chez les auteurs européens, nous avons cru déceler une plus grande propension à faire surgir le passé dans un contexte national et à référer à des lieux de prestige, sanctionnés par l'Histoire: le Prix Nobel, le XVIe arrondissement à Paris, la Place de l'Étoile, etc. Le temps historicisé traverse l'espace narratif, le nourrit, le colore.

Quant à eux, les auteurs québécois, faute sans doute de temps historique étendu, privilégient le temps contemporain, plus propice, semble-t-il, à dévoiler l'intimité affective, lors d'aveux ou de confidences formulés dans un espace domestique comme la chambre, lieu de refuge[10], ou encore de montrer la convivialité comme le sont le salon ou la cuisine, lieux d'hospitalité. Le temps des protagonistes domine la scène narrative et en constitue la trame principale.

Représentations iconiques

Lorsque l'on compare les représentations écrites et les représentations montrées par les illustrations, on constate alors que l'espace est sans doute plus propice aux représentations illustrées que le temps bien qu'il soit aisément possible de l'identifier à partir d'indices visuels comme le sont les moyens de locomotion, la tenue vestimentaire, la coiffure, l'architecture, le maquillage, *etc.*

Lorsque les récits s'adressent principalement à un jeune lectorat, les illustrations sont abondantes et variées et la mise en page aérée. Généralement, l'illustration traduit l'atmosphère dramatique des personnages, placés en contexte. Ainsi, l'espace et le temps, présentés en arrière-scène, servent de prétexte pour illustrer une émotion ressentie par le ou les personnages, d'où l'importance des gros plans ou des plans américains qui mettent l'accent sur certains traits du visage des personnages, placés en situation de communication.

En fait, la composition synthétique des images a pour but de produire de l'effet plutôt que de représenter fidèlement et de façon réaliste le récit. Le trait de crayon, le jeu des ombres, les formes arrondies ou stylisées, selon le médium utilisé (crayon, encre, fusain), la plus ou moins grande abondance de précision apportée aux objets et aux lieux montrés, résument, en noir et blanc, non seulement ce qui est vécu mais aussi l'état psychologique dans lequel se trouvent les personnages, à tel point que certaines scènes illustrées sont représentées en médaillon, question de mieux cerner en gras le propos. On aura compris que cet exercice de représentation est d'autant plus périlleux qu'il se fait en l'absence de couleurs, symboles des émotions.

Selon le lectorat visé, les 8 ou les 11 ans, les illustrations, plus ou moins abondantes, montrent des environnements variés. À titre d'exemple dans *Une histoire à mourir debout,* la maison, la chambre, le village, l'école, le dolmen sont représentés. Ces lieux incarnent différents temps historiques. La préhistoire (le dolmen), l'histoire sociale (le village, l'école), l'histoire individuelle (la chambre, la maison). Cette histoire en imbrique une autre par l'intrusion de légendes selon le procédé de mise en abyme, également utilisé dans *L'homme qui venait de la mer* .

Les textes, comportant de nombreuses actions, centrées sur le temps et ses dérapages comme dans *Le Marquis tombé du ciel,* ou les textes d'anticipation *(CH.M.250 K* ou *TRE 22660)* , sont plus aisément représentés que les textes nostalgiques ou à connotation psychologique qui insistent plus sur le mouvement ou les déplacements des personnages, leur vitalité. Bernier (1990) a montré que ce procédé vise plus à reproduire une séquence du récit qu'un tempérament. Aussi la typologie des personnages est-elle limitée et les caractéristiques servent à déterminer le sexe, l'âge, le statut social.

En outre, les paysages que ces personnages donnent à voir décrivent des lieux qui ont marqué leur enfance ou leur vie d'adulte. Souvent, les visages d'hier, dont "les yeux contiennent toute la bonté du monde" (Gallaire, 32), surgissent au détour d'un événement particulier et mettent ainsi en relief le

patrimoine personnel de ces personnages, fait de rêves écorchés ou comblés, de souvenirs ensoleillés ou meurtris, d'émotions avivées par l'éloignement, sinon l'absence d'êtres chers.

Remarques conclusives

Les représentations observées mettent en relief des univers symboliques spécifiques. Ainsi, les textes rédigés par des auteurs québécois (Clermont, Soulières, Page, Pariseau) contiennent plus de dialogues que les textes étrangers dans lesquels se retrouvent de nombreuses descriptions ainsi que diverses représentations sensuelles et sensorielles, associées aussi bien à l'époque retenue qu'aux lieux mentionnés. Pour les premiers, dans le corpus étudié, il s'agit de marquer le temps de dire, pour les seconds, il s'agit d'ancrer le récit dans un temps historique ou dont les traces historiques sont perceptibles dans les pierres ou les institutions.

Peut-on imputer la différence constatée à cette tradition québécoise d'oralité, qui imprègne les textes pour les jeunes, imputable pour une large part à l'histoire sociale, ou s'agit-il simplement d'un choix éditorial? Ainsi l'oralité, présente dans les dialogues, crée un rythme et révèle une forme d'interactivité, amenuisant ainsi la distance parcourue entre l'enfant lecteur et les personnages auxquels il s'identifie. Par ailleurs, là où les descriptions se font plus abondantes, notamment dans les récits issus de la francophonie, hormis les textes québécois, les illustrations sont également moins nombreuses, modifiant sensiblement le temps de lecture. Les imaginaires dévoilés, d'un côté ou l'autre de l'Atlantique, ne se nourrissent pas aux mêmes sources et ne se révèlent pas de la même façon.

Outre cette différence marquée entre la place occupée par la narration, la description et les dialogues, le relevé traduit le malaise des auteurs à caractériser les lieux et les paysages de l'altérité, faute peut-être de savoir traduire adéquatement des impressions, des atmosphères à partir de territoires peu ou mal connus, sauf lorsqu'ils décrivent les terres de leur enfance. Quant aux personnages de l'altérité, ils n'ont pas de véritables visages. Ce qui est généralement souligné ou relevé, ce sont des voix, des yeux, des rires et des chants.

Quant aux paysages, ils sont associés au territoire domestique comme la maison ou l'appartement et à l'occasion au territoire national comme le pays. C'est dans ces lieux, marqués par le temps que la vie affective des personnages, faite de joies et de souvenirs douloureux, surgit pour épouser dans le silence des dunes ou le clapotis des eaux, les ondulations de la mémoire nostalgique.

L'espace retenu est conforme au programme narratif. Plus les relations entre les personnages sont amicales, affectueuses et intimes, plus les espaces de la domesticité sont représentés. Plus le personnage est distant, plus ce qu'il évoque vient de loin, introduisant ainsi l'espace étranger. Par ailleurs, dès qu'il s'agit de souvenirs, d'un passé entaché d'émotions et de sentiments, thème récurrent chez les auteurs non québécois, plus il est question du temps ancestral

ou du temps des souvenirs et de la nostalgie. Le temps historique est peu présent tout comme le temps mythologique, temps des légendes, que l'on ne retrouve que dans *La Lumière du matin* et *Entre ciel et terre.*

L'exploration des représentations spatio-temporelles de la collection Tête-Bêche révèle des aménagements particuliers selon les cultures d'appartenance, traduit la mise au monde d'univers symboliques par le truchement des visages et des paysages, et illustre, sous le mode thématique, le capital symbolique de la pluriethnicité, composé de différences discursives, textuelles et iconiques. C'est plus particulièrement dans ces interstices spatiotemporels que les spécificités identitaires de la littérature québécoise de jeunesse se logent.

Références

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Bourneuf, R. et R. Ouellet, *L'Univers du roman*, Paris Presses universitaires de France, [1972] 1975, 248 p.

Notes

1 Soulières, R, *Le Visiteur du soir*, Montréal, CLFrance Pierre Tisseyre, 1980 (Conquêtes).147 p. Ill.

2 ——, *Seul au monde*, Conte, Montréal, Éditions Québec/Amérique, 1982. [n.p. 30 p].

3 ——, *Casse-tête chinois*, Montréal, CLFrance Pierre Tisseyre, 1985, 180 p. Ill. de Serge Rousseau.

4 ——, *Un été sur le Richelieu*, Montréal, CLFrance Pierre Tisseyre, 1982 (Conquêtes). 136 p.

5 Truss, Jan, *Jasmine* (traduit par M.-A. Clermont), Montréal, Éditions Pierre Tisseyre, 1987 (Conquêtes).

6 Étymologiquement, le mot visage, de l'ancien français *vis*, réfère au latin *visus* qui selon *Le Petit Robert* (1977) signifiait lors aspect, apparence, proprement vue. Dans cet esprit, le visage renvoie aussi bien au faciès, à la frimousse qu'au teint. Par extension, on retrouve la personne (considérée dans son visage).

Par contre, lorsque l'on veut circoncrire le mot paysage, on retrouve qu'à l'origine, ce mot daté de 1549, voulait dire étendue de pays. Puis, ce sens s'est peu à peu transformé pour devenir la partie d'un pays que la nature présente à un observateur, en référence à vue et à site. Sémantiquement, la vue sert de jonction entre visage et paysage.

7 Loslier, S., *Le Roman: un terrain anthopologique littéraire*, Montréal, Collège Édouard-Montpetit, 1994. 59 p. Se trouvent décrits le temps historique ou social, époque pendant laquelle se déroule un événement; le temps mythologique qui correspond à la genèse d'un groupe; le temps ancestral; le temps présent à connotation mythologique; le temps contemporain et le temps de l'avenir, période d'espoir, de rêve et d'imagination. L'espace regroupe l'espace national, infranational ou communautaire, l'espace domestique et le territoire étranger, cet ailleurs rêvé.

8 "Elle avait dans sa chambre des animaux en peluche, des tableaux qui représentaient la mer, des livres qui traînaient ça et là, et aussi des fleurs dans un vase blanc" (Drozd,5).

9 "Marina aspire avec délice une bonne bouffée d'air printanier" (Clermont, 5).

10 "On interdisait aux enfants d'assister aux veillées funèbres parce que ce n'était pas un endroit gai et qu'ils ne comprenaient pas toujours la mort, mais aussi par superstition. Je me souviens que dans plusieurs familles, tous les miroirs de la maison étaient retournés lorsqu'une personne qu'on connaissait mourait"(Kingué, 45).

11 "Il y avait dans sa chambre des livres, encore des livres, et des photos d'enfants (...)" (Drozd, 1993, 5).

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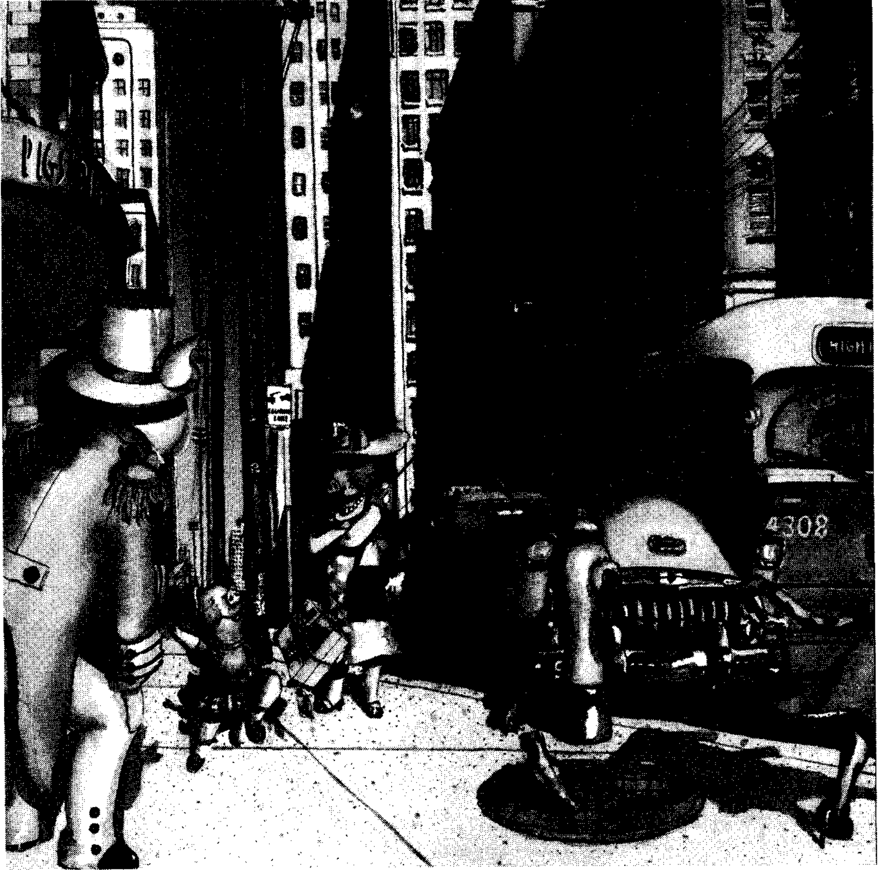

Illustration from ***Gruntle Piggle Takes Off*** *(reviewed on page 63)*

But Where are the Words to Say

Father and Daughter Tales. Josephine Evetts-Secker. Illus. Helen Cann. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1997. 80 pp. $19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-590-12374-2. ***Mother and Daughter Tales.*** Josephine Evetts-Secker. Illus. Helen Cann. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1996. 80 pp. $19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-590-24963-0.

Biwa in her lap, the storyteller sat unmoving on a table top, as her English-speaking friend gave a synopsis of the tale to follow, a tragedy of desire and loss, a whisper of literal meaning to gather in a listening ear. I can recall no specific details, could never pass that story along, but I have an almost visceral memory of the power of that voice, the impassioned flow of Japanese that held audience, that translated the "translation" we'd be given into a meaning grounded in, yet beyond, reference. The power of that story was in language itself, language not merely as a path to meaning, but as a meaning of its own. And the storytellers I've most remembered, the stories I've most loved, have shared something of that. I've listened, breathless, to tellers whose bodies became part of the language which carried and newly bore their agèd tales. I've paused over pages whose words, with simplicity and grace, proved unfailingly the truth of the folk wisdom about the power residual in language. That is my preoccupation, my prejudice, and that is why, despite my admiration for Josephine Evetts-Secker's recent folktale collections, and my delight in Helen Cann's almost always lovely illustrations and decorations, I have certain hesitations about these two volumes.

Evetts-Secker, a practising Jungian analyst and a teacher of English literature, has pulled together an impressive range of familiar and unfamiliar tales from diverse cultures to animate the dynamic relationships between mothers and daughters, and fathers and daughters, in folktales. The idea behind these collections is a fine one: they bring to the forefront relationships elemental in daily life and folklore, relationships coloured by a difficult ambiguity in both and often rendered far too simply in discussions of either, and they allow stories which one might not immediately think of as related to rub elbows. I relish the new ties between old tales, the echoes and unexpected resonances that arise. Sticklers might challenge the implicit definition of folktales — Evetts-Secker has

included retellings of Greek myth ("Demeter and Persephone"), Bible story ("Ruth and Naomi") and literary fairy tale ("Beauty and the Beast") as well as folktales in her collections — but the stories fit nicely into, and are important to the thematic concept of, their respective volumes. The diversity of tales subtly upholds her analytical position — simply put, that a universal meaning threads through vastly different story traditions, a collectivity which unites human passions and relationships so that a Danish heart can find some aspect of itself spoken in a Dinka tale, as a Polish story may bear upon an East Indian one. Evetts-Secker is interested in the power of stories to speak to us and to each other.

The brief notes concluding each volume fit the stories she has retold into categories pertinent to such an inquiry: for instance, "women and nature," "women and housekeeping," "witches and goddesses," "the father and marriage," "feeling and transformation" and "the community of women." In doing this, Evetts-Secker makes that elbow rubbing I love more overt, ensures that readers find her connections, although such finding doesn't preclude the existence of other connections. Perhaps because I am a quiet elbow-rubber, I bridle a bit at these notes: of course, Evetts-Secker cannot provide a thorough reading of the nodes of likeness these stories share, but the very necessary brevity of her notes undercuts the complexity of the similarities she points to by overlooking both the cultural and internal integrity of each tale. Preserving cultural flavour becomes the lot of Cann's illustrations; the stories become exempla, indicators of a sociological or psychological condition, rather than the beautifully crafted gifts of language I sought when I opened the volumes.

Evetts-Secker's retellings, when separated from her notes, are competent but rarely compelling. She tones down certain elements of the tales: one particularly heinous stepmother, for instance, is merely left by her husband at the end, when a devotee of folktales knows she should have been subjected to cruel death — nothing short of a horse-drawn barrel of nails for that one, I'd say. The passion, the intensity of crime and punishment, frustration and love, seem muted in some of these tales, not quite bowdlerized, but defused to fit a scale of conduct foreign to the folk realm. That defusing marks the language of these tales too. Reading them I am aware that it is the story and its theme, not the vehicle of the story, that matter to their teller. These stories *are* matter, solid. No feather, no ether. And it is here that my critical prejudice interferes with my reading of these books. I like much of what Evetts-Secker has done here, and if I'm right about her impetus for collecting these tales, I like why she has done so, although I don't share her Jungian allegiances. But for me the core of a tale lies elsewhere: in the shaping of language that lifts the heart. Given a choice between these books, which I readily admit to enjoying, and any of the recent collections by storytellers and folklorists like Virginia Hamilton, Dan Yashinsky, or the incomparable Alice Kane, I'd put aside Evetts-Secker's collections.

In fairness, I must say that my ten-year-old daughter loves these books: she reads them herself and asks to have them read to her. They are a family experience, even as they chronicle family experience. And so in many respects, these volumes are very successful. Helen Cann's illustrations are beautiful, combining a folksy flavour with culturally specific detail that is most winning.

The borders she has created for the bottom of most pages are marvelous — they catch key elements of each tale and hold them gently for a reader, creating a dialogue of image and tale that adds a needed lyricism to the volumes. Those borders almost do what Evetts-Secker's language doesn't. Almost. *If* there is a universal for me in folk tales, it is the beauty of human voices, of human languages, raising one improbable moment out of the muck of whatever we are. When I finish these books, I am left wondering, where are the words to say the strength of the human heart, to speak our frailties, our nobility, our dailiness. There is much of value and substance in these books, much to delight in and enjoy, but those words, that lift — they are not here.

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Pig Heaven: Growing Up in the Barnyard

Frankie on the Run. Linda Holeman. Illus. Heather Collins. Boardwalk Books, 1995. Unpag. $5.99 paper. ISBN 1-895681-09-X. ***Gruntle Piggle Takes Off.*** Jean Little. Illus. Johnny Wales. Viking, 1996. Unpag. $19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-86340-8.

As long as there have been children and pigs, astute adults have seen the connections between them. Even before Lewis Carroll immortalized the relationship with the startling depiction of a "pig-baby," the similarities were there to be remarked on.

Neither Jean Little nor Linda Holeman flinches when confronting the reader with a thinly-veiled pig-hero/heroine, really meant as a vehicle for any self-respecting child to identify with. Any children's writer worth her salt knows that children's books are about the traumas of growing up, and the pigs in the titles know that theirs is definitely a quest for independence.

But what does a pig and/or child have to look forward to in the big, wide grown-up world? Holeman's book is a kissing cousin to classics like E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web* in some respects, though its take on the human world has no satiric edge. In Holeman's book, Frankie is pure pig in terms of the situation he finds himself in, even though endowed with child-like behaviour and perceptions. Like White's celebrity pig, Wilbur, Frankie is in danger of becoming bacon and finds it hard to believe that Farmer Halley would deceive him so treacherously. Like Wilbur, Frankie escapes to a better world, not through wit, alas, but more through happenstance, and finds himself not at a fair, but at a more benign if less glamourous destination: a petting zoo. Independence Day, it seems, can be best be celebrated if you can "earn your keep" and get a job. Fast friends, à la E.B. White, seem a preferable alternative, to my way of thinking. I hate to think that independence means making your way in the world by becoming a love-object to children, even if the work is easy, and even if Frankie does save his own bacon by doing it. It beats living on the

street with roving bands of mangy cats and wicked dogs, or so the story suggests. I suppose this is the "real world," but I prefer it satirized as White does it, rather than presented "straight up." Still, there is lots of suspense at the chapter breaks, a well-told story, and illustrations full of feeling, reminiscent of the great Garth Williams.

Jean Little gives us less reality and less naturalism in her depiction of a city pig named Gruntle who lives with her parents in a high rise and has only heard stories of swill and manure and of her legendary grampa in the country. When Gruntle "takes off," she finds her roots in the country and makes the journey back home, having learned a few things even her parents don't know.

What is best about this book — and there is a lot to admire — are the inside jokes. For any adult laden with the responsibility of reading to the kids, this book is a treasure. Gruntle's mother tells us, for example, about how she left home and met "the pig of her dreams"; Gruntle keeps her spare change in an appropriate place (a "kiddy bank") and even the names are a chuckle. Mother is Frances Bacon-Piggle, a modern woman who kept her own venerable name; Papa is Crispin Piggle; and their address is (where else?) but "Pigs' Digs," where a doorman named Mr. Ham delivers their mail. The sheep say things like "La di da and poop poop", making them an odd cross between Annie Hall and Toad of Toad Hall.

In transforming herself from a city pig to a "real pig" — in a pastoral setting — Gruntle takes her clothes off and reverts to the nudity so enjoyed by animals on a spree, in the tradition of Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit. Though Grampa has been dismissed by his daughter as a potential bad influence on the youngster Gruntle, she finds more than just mud and manure on her journey. For one thing, she discovers that Grampa cannot read and sets about teaching him his letters. How many adults reading the book for the twentieth time will wish they were in the same position? The role reversal is brilliant.

Although swills and manure are a far cry from the life of an urban only piglet, Gruntle learns that there is more to life than the bubble baths and truffle ice cream she has been accustomed to at home.

But home is the place for piglets — even sophisticated ones who wear sunglasses. The illustrations are genius, with details enough to keep readers laughing and pointing, and with tenderness and comic brilliance and great technique thrown in. Johnny Wales takes the best anthropomorphic tradition of William Steig and marries it to the splendid aerial perceptions of Mitsumasa Anno. His illustrations brought this book a nomination for the Governor General's Award. There's even more than the text supplies. It should be no surprise, then, that Gruntle's apartment building is on the corner of Orwell Road. This is truly a book for all ages to delight in. And Jean Little once again makes these things look so easy.

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Lessons From Ancient Burma

The Wise Washerman. Deborah Froese. Illus. Wang Kui. Hyperion Press, 1996. Unpag. $19.95 cloth. ISBN 1-895340-10-1.

This retelling of a traditional folktale from Burma highlights the value of hard work in a lighthearted way.

The washerman Aung Kyaing is renowned in his village for making dirty clothes "gleam like snowcapped mountains." The villagers think that he uses magic, but Aung Kyaing knows that hard work and perseverence get the clothes clean. His jealous neighbour, the less successful potter Narathu, plots against Aung Kyaing. Narathu visits the king, who longs to possess a white elephant, and convinces him to command Aung Kyaing to wash his grey elephant with his "magic" washwater. Aung Kyaing knows he cannot make a grey elephant white, but he will be banished if he refuses to obey the king. Instead, he devises a clever plan to save himself. He informs the king that he can only wash the elephant in a large clay vessel big enough to hold the animal and the warm soapy water. The only person who can make the vessel is the potter Narathu, who in turn cannot refuse the king's command. When the enormous vessel is finally ready, the elephant's weight cracks the clay dish and the water rushes out. Aung Kyaing explains that without a dish he cannot wash the elephant. The angry king banishes Narathu, and Aung Kyaing returns to his washtubs with more business than ever.

This satisfying story uses such classic elements of the traditional tale as the "impossible task" and the clever protagonist who saves himself by tricking his opponent. Froese's retelling is straightforward and lively, incorporating

plenty of dialogue and giving us the perspectives of both Aung Kyaing and Narathu. The author also hints at aspects of Thingyan, the Water Festival marking the Burmese New Year which is still celebrated today. A note at the end provides more information.

Wang Kui's vivid illustrations, with their energetic, swirling shapes and bright colours, are a perfect match for the text. Young readers will notice the numerous exotic birds that swoop and strut across the pages, and will particularly enjoy spotting the pair of fighting cocks that recurs throughout, perhaps symbolizing the enmity between Narathu and Aung Kyaing. Art and text together provide a taste of ancient Asia in an accessible form.

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Laughing between the Lines

Cold Night, Brittle Light. Richard Thompson. Illus. Henry Fernandes. Orca Books, 1994. 32 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-009-6. ***Bats about Baseball***. Jean Little and Claire Mackay. Illus. Kim LaFave. Penguin, 1995. 32 pp. $17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-85270-8.

Cold Night, Brittle Light is a story in which a great deal happens; it is in fact seven stories framed by the main narrative. This complex structure, which moves between present events and flashbacks to past events, may prove confusing to younger readers. The text is also relatively long. Several of the mini-stories could have been expanded into books of their own. Despite this, the main narrative is compelling enough to make the structure work for older children. They will enjoy the zany humour of grandpa's outrageous tales about Canadian cold temperatures.

The story has a deliberately folksy feel and abounds in phrases such as "right full" and "darned if." Grandpa is a member of a traditional, extended family in which Mom bakes cookies, Dad works out, and Grandma knits. Cultural myths of wise elder storytellers, and of the "great white north," are invoked. This book should be a welcome addition in classrooms, to use with units on climate, to catalyse creative writing and oral narrative — or simply to share and laugh over.

Bats about Baseball, in contrast, is a story in which very little actually happens. Rather than a developed storyline, the book consists of puns and jokes shared between a grandmother and grandson. The book has a breezy, modern feel and the illustrator has risen admirably to the challenge of a story situated between an easy chair and a television set.

The authors have avoided gender stereotypes by casting an older female in the role of baseball fan. Her grandson seeks to distract her from the

game with a series of imaginative ideas of what he could be when he grows up.

This book might be meaningless for readers who are not initiates of baseball culture because it abounds in technical terms. The prose relies heavily on adult interpretation, not only for the baseball words but for those such as *kleptomaniac, ornithologist* and *paleontologist.* The puns cannot be explained until the words have been explained; this book could take an adult and child some time to work through. But those who do will certainly expand their vocabulary. However, some children may not feel it's worth the effort if all they want is an entertaining story.

Both books convey a sense of the fun and complexity of our language, and of the possibilities inherent in it. *Cold Night, Brittle Light* is sure to elicit chuckles. Because *Bats about Baseball* requires more sophistication, it may not work as well.

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Sometimes Pictures Are Better Than Words

I Heard My Mother Call My Name. Nancy Hundal. Illus. Laura Fernandez. HarperCollins, 1994, 1990. Unpag. $6.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-647496-9. ***November Boots.*** Nancy Hundal. Illus. Marilyn Mets. HarperCollins, 1993. Unpag. $16.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-223893-4. ***Moonsnail Song.*** Sheryl McFarlane. Illus. Sheena Lott. Orca, 1994. Unpag. $14.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55143-008-8.

Dreamy, poetic picture books are great bedtime reading for young children. They can work to stretch the youngsters' imaginations, yet soothe them to sleep by giving busy little minds something gentle to think about. *I Heard My Mother Call My Name, November Boots,* and *Moonsnail Song* all make good bedtime reading, but even better bedtime viewing.

The stories of all three books are very simple and direct. *I Heard My Mother Call My Name* is about a child lingering on the front porch at twilight, watching his or her street turn from day to night while mother calls. *November Boots* is about a little boy's frustrated search for puddles in which to try his new boots. Both are told from the child's point of view, in the first person and in the present tense. *Moonsnail Song* is about a young girl who daydreams about the seashore, and what she could find there, as she goes through her day. It is told in the third person by an omniscient narrator, again present tense. There is only a little dialogue in *November Boots,* none in the others, and all three focus on the thoughts of their protagonists.

The language used in all three books is lyrical and evocative of images rather than emotions or situations, and there is no superfluity of words in any of them; every word is precisely placed. In fact, they are so precisely placed that they constitute the major flaw of both Hundal books; adult words and turns of phrase are placed in a child's mouth, where they are unlikely to be. Sentences

like "The clouds are steel gates, clanged down tight to the earth, locking the sun away until spring" in *November Boots* are typical in both it and *I Heard My Mother Call My Name*, and while superbly evocative, are discordant with the speaker. It is hard to imagine a little boy of about eight thinking in that way. *Moonsnail Song* uses equally adult language, but because it is written in the third person, there is no discordancy as the adult speaker is merely articulating a child's thoughts. In *November Boots* and *I Heard My Mother Call My Name*, an adult voice is given to a child speaker. Another flaw in the language of *I Heard My Mother Call My Name* is in the refrain; at the end of every single page the last sentence is "I heard my mother call my name and I know I should go in ...". This gets monotonous, particularly since the refrain does not always tie in with what has just been said, and it seems to be stuck at the page end for the sake of a superficial continuity. If it had been occasionally altered, it could have contributed a sense of urgency perhaps, or of reluctance on the part of the speaker, and would have challenged the young reader to be alert to the changes. As it is, the refrain does not completely fulfil its function of providing coherence and furthering the story.

Moonsnail Song has a flaw in its story line's sequence. There is some confusion about where the protagonist is supposed to be at one point. It seems obvious at the beginning that the little girl is imagining herself at the sea with the help of a seashell (no magic, just the sound one hears when one puts a shell to one's ear), but in the middle, between wiping the supper table and hearing the phone ring, it seems she is really at the seashore finding the shell. There is no change in tense, wording, or voice to indicate that she is remembering or daydreaming. Even the accompanying pictures show her at the beach, although other illustrations in the book make it clear that she is thinking of one place while in another. So, what has been to that point a straightforward story becomes confusing.

The illustrations of all three books are literally frameable art, which is why although the books are good reads, they are even better to look at. The watercolour works of *November Boots* are in muted colours, depicting grey November throughout, and match the words, image for image. The watercolour illustrations of *Moonsnail Song* are in bright light colours evoking sunshine at the sea, or sparkling depths of ocean, and they surround the text or are inset, giving the same sense of the richness of life in the sea as the text does, with layers of pictures to go with layers of words. The illustrations in *I Heard My Mother Call My Name* are sharp, showing the protagonist's heightened perceptions of a twilit neighbourhood, and they too match image to image. All of the illustrations in all three books are worth looking at. And despite some of the flaws in the texts, all three books are worth reading, too.

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Positive Princesses: Images for Today

Carly's Stories. Ken Ainsworth. Illus. Ruth Ohi. Annick Press, 1995. 24 pp. $16.95 lib. binding, $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-381-1, 1-55037-380-3. *The Charlotte Stories*. Teddy Jam. Illus. Harvey Chan. Douglas & McIntyre/Groundwood Books, 1994. 48 pp. $14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-210-6. *Estelle and the Self-Esteem Machine*. Jo Bannatyne-Cugnet. Illus. Leslie Bell. Red Deer College Press, 1993. 32 pp. $14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-097-0. *Jillian Jiggs to the Rescue*. Phoebe Gilman. North Winds Press, 1994. 36 pp. $13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-590-74616-2. *Lights for Gita*. Rachna Gilmore. Illus. Alice Priestley. Second Story Press, 1994. 24 pp. $12.95 cloth, $5.95 paper. ISBN 0-929005-63-5, 0-929005-61-9. *Where is Gah-Ning?* Robert Munsch. Illus. Hélène Desputeaux. Annick Press, 1994. 32 pp. $14.95 lib. binding, $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55037-983-6, 1-55037-982-8.

The following selection of books draws one into the inner world of the child with varying degrees of success and in differing ways. The focus is upon resourceful heroines, their immediate family and siblings, and how they deal with their worries and fears. On the whole, they inhabit a gentle world of loving parents, a comfort zone, and not the harsh world of the dispossessed and poor.

Carly's Stories, by Ken Ainsworth, depicts a pastel world that is soft and comforting. Carly, an adorable blond toddler, mingles fantasy and fact in telling stories of events in her day. In her tales of baby "bores and lions and tigers," one can sense some of the common fears of children. She has a cute way of mispronouncing words and her every remark is responded to with love and attention. Softly-coloured illustrations depict both Carly's stories and her family's positive and helpful response to them as they seek to help her with her fears.

The book convincingly conveys the intimate experience of oral storytelling and encourages storytelling by children and imaginative play in a family. This smiling vignette of family life, prettily framed, is a very loving picture of a father and his daughters, and of a big sister caring for a little one. Carly has a perky charm enhanced by pink pig slippers and a scruffy bunny held by one ear. A fluffy white dog furthers this perfect family palette. However, a little bit of punch, a cross word, a tired parent — all would be welcome additions.

Estelle and the Self-Esteem Machine starts in an interesting and forthright way: "Estelle could not tie her shoelaces," a dilemma that today's velcro generation tends to overlook. Her unhappy and frazzled teacher sends her to the Self-Esteem machine for a new coat of self-confidence. Her fellow sufferers are an unlikely and unattractive collection who include a cheese inspector, chef, businessman and fat lady. Certainly, children will not relate to these categories. The machine, overwhelmed by the fat lady, grinds to a stop but the lineup of needy persons inexorably increases and eventually includes Estelle's teacher. Modern mechanics and technology are called upon and fail. Under Estelle's diligent guidance and with the help of her teacher, they look to the past for an answer. Finally, a weary old man remembers "that people used to build up each other's self-esteem" and that they should learn to reach out to one another.

This is a well-meant story with a message of sharing and helping one another. Indeed, children should feel good about themselves, but the story is too contrived and the humorous terms, as in the name of the teacher, Ms. Guided, have a distinctly adult tone. And self-esteem has become a battered and tarnished term, a worthwhile concept brought low by the well-intentioned, through overuse. The use of a fat lady is jarring and unpleasant. She remains in the final frame, gargantuan and gluttonous and still eating away, in an awkward and unsuitable ending.

Phoebe Gilman, a gifted Canadian author/illustrator, has received the prestigious Vicky Metcalf Award for her body of work. Jillian Jiggs, heroine of *Jillian Jiggs,* and *The Wonderful Pigs of Jillian Jiggs* is continued in *Jillian Jiggs to the Rescue,* a tale told in rollicking verse. Little sister Rebecca is crying and afraid of the dark. She knows she can rely on her big sister for comfort and for creative solutions. Jillian and friends build Rebecca a monster machine to deal with (not deny) her fears. In this adult-free world and in a wonderfully messy playroom filled with boxes, crayons, and string, the kids create a monster machine that is kid-powered and means business. With brave words, our noisy and alive heroes march through the woods to the mantra of "Kalamazoo" and the swinging refrain "Monster, you're meatloaf. Monster, you're through" until they meet the monster. Fearful Rebecca rises to the occasion and wants the monster to play, for he may be lonely or sad. And the monster is revealed to be a pussycat.

The illustrations capture the sense of play, and of Rebecca, small in size, pulling her friends away from the monster and suddenly growing up. There are exuberant and endearing touches with text and illustration nicely matched. Two eyes, far from monstrous, peek out cautiously from under the monster machine. Wonderful action words enliven the text. The playroom is for active play and happily without video games and television. A sense of a Toronto neighbourhood pervades the book, with a neat view of the Toronto skyline included. There is a comforting carryover from previous stories with the pigs of Jillian Jiggs ensconced in the playroom.

In *The Charlotte Stories,* Teddy Jam has created a distinctive heroine who is questioning, quirky, and determined. Charlotte's words and thoughts frame the three illustrated stories included. In "New Boy," "The Birthday Party," and "Charlotte and the Mouse," the focus is on everyday incidents and the small but all-encompassing world of play and relationships.

In an arresting image, we first encounter Charlotte hanging upside down in the park — a good way of approaching a contrary young person. She and her friend Miriam, budding feminists, meet a new boy, a possible enemy, and gradually discover the joys of friendship. It's unusual and refreshing to find a picture book at this level that deals so honestly with boy-girl relationships and the possibility of rejection. In "The Birthday Party," Charlotte doesn't want a party despite her mother's urging. She misbehaves and is disagreeable on the special day. Eventually, she reveals that she had been frightened in school when she accidentally shut herself in the cleaning cupboard. With the exorcism of her unpleasant memories, she is able to rejoin her friends and enjoy a wonderful day.

In "Charlotte and the Mouse" we meet a kinder, gentler Charlotte, who endeavours to save and rescue the mouse that lives in her house. Endearingly, she leaves cheese for the mouse to eat, and each night springs the trap so he won't be caught. The depth of characterization, the flashes of humour and the support of the fine illustration are the hallmarks of this story. The mouse, quivering on the counter, and Charlotte creeping downstairs, are captured perfectly in soft and subdued watercolours.

These are perceptive stories that emphasize individuality. They are also somewhat complex and non-linear. For example, Charlotte's reason for not wanting a birthday party is not explicit but implied in a rather unrelated experience. There are some unlikely and discordant elements such as an unlocked cupboard filled with dangerous cleaning supplies in a school setting and a little boy dressed in full hockey regalia in what appears to be summer. But, in general, this is a lovely, warm book that captures the emotional nuances and difficulties of caring and belonging.

Another strong, determined heroine who never takes no for an answer is Gah-Ning of *Where is Gah-Ning* by Robert Munsch, a delightful story about a girl who desperately wants to visit Kapuskasing down the road from her home. She tries to ride her bicycle, and then to roller blade, and each time her dad comes and pulls her back because in Kapuskasing, beware, people shop like crazy. The library, of course, provides the right answer. A clown is giving out balloons there and Gah-Ning floats her way down the Trans-Canada Highway, merrily holding on to three hundred balloons. "Oh, no!!! yelled the father," jumping into his car to rescue her.

This is a particularly lively read-aloud, enlivened by the usual Munsch madness, and by his practice of carefully polishing his work with audiences of youngsters. Tongue-in-cheek humour, word play, frantic action and the beat of the words "Gah-Ning" and "Kapuskasing" make this a bouncy and high-spirited text.

The illustrations are set on the page in interesting ways and framed in vivid tones, capturing the exuberance of Gah-Ning and the zoom of balloons as they fill the pages to pull the eye up. The curve of trees cleverly delineates Gah-Ning's path and amusing details catch the eye of the reader.

Gah-Ning is a most appealing child and her disobedience is disarming. She is both determined and resourceful. In a surprise ending, one finds that the fantasy is grounded in reality. There is a real Gah-Ning. Robert Munsch relates how he met her through a letter and drawing and decided to tell her story. The concluding note movingly recounts how he was shown the special places in the girl's town and the most important place of all, the grave of her grandmother. The narrative offers a remarkable sense of community as it explores the importance of family respect, Chinese heritage, and youthful high spirits.

Lights for Gita is a sympathetic tale about a little girl dealing with a new life in Canada, a cold and very different country. In the background is a sense of Canadian life with its conscious recognition of the ethnic and cultural differences among people.

Gita misses her family in India but she plans on sharing her favourite holiday, Divali, with some new friends. Her family has planned an evening with fireworks, delicious sweets and diyas (oil lamps) to mark the occasion. A freezing rain prevents her friends from coming over but the lamps are lit and light permeates her home and the pages of the story. With the help of one friend who braves the elements, and the thoughtful and meaningful explanation by her parents about the true meaning of Divali, the evening becomes a special one. The universal lesson of Divali is about the search within oneself for an inner illumination to fill the darkness. The warmth and love of this family provide another type of light.

This is a deceptively simple story that works on many levels. Priestly has used contrast and colour well. There is a subtle blend of Canadian snowsuits and vivid saris to denote the mingling of two cultures. The grey colours of a November landscape emphasize the bright hues of orange and red and the strong patterns within the home. This is a thoughtful design with framing used to enclose the characters and action and to provide a sense of inclusion in Gita's world. Windows serve as a particularly strong element and reflect Gita's looking out upon an unfamiliar landscape, indeed a reflection of the immigrant experience. Flickering flames, a window filled with light, and frost-filled trees are beacons for the eye. In the closing picture, Gita and her friend are outside, smiling and looking to each other, a red scarf tying them together.

This collection of books shares a strong unifying theme of young girls using wit and ingenuity to deal with difficult situations. Set firmly in the present, and told liltingly from a child's perspective, all present positive images to follow. It is the heroines themselves, sturdy and resilient, yet little girls throughout, who determine the success of each work.

The landscape these youngsters inhabit is one of caring, affectionate parents and unusually supportive siblings. These are small interior worlds, nicely presented, which look for simple truths sometimes lost in our mechanical time. Technology, and the world of the machine are seen as unnecessary and artificial constructs when they obtrude. Indeed, electricity falters, the self-esteem machine crumbles and the monster machine is cardboard and crayon. On the whole, these are well-crafted tales; many feature surprise twists and unusual endings. The socko smash and deadpan humour of *The Paper Bag Princess* remains an elusive ideal, but the young reader will welcome and enjoy these attractive and meaningful works.

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Checking for Suspects: An Investigation of Mystery Stories

Trouble on Wheels. Ann Aveling. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1993. 134 pp. $4.50 paper. ISBN 0-590-74598-0. ***Who's Got Gertie? And How Can We Get Her Back!*** Linda Bailey. Kids Can Press Ltd., 1994. 174 pp. $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-217-5. ***Mystery at Lake Placid.*** Roy MacGregor. McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1995. 204 pp. $4.99 paper. ISBN 0-7710-5625-7. ***The Invisible Polly McDoodle.*** Mary Woodbury. Coteau Books, 1994. 147 pp. $4.95 paper. ISBN 1-55050-062-7. ***The Case of the Golden Boy.*** Eric Wilson. HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 1994. 93 pp. $4.99 paper. ISBN 0-00-647939-1. ***Mistaken Identity.*** Norah McClintock. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 1995. 183 pp. $4.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-24627-5. ***The Amazon Influence.*** Marion Woodson. Orca Book Publishers, 1994. 167 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-011-8.

In 1967, Sheila Egoff wrote in *The Republic of Childhood,* "A passably good detective story or mystery story for children has yet to be written by a Canadian." In 1975, she concluded that titles in this genre still generally had boring plots, were badly written and were dismissive of females. In the 1990 *The New Republic of Childhood* she found no reason to alter her view that the genre had nothing of value to offer young readers.

Children like mystery stories. They provide an infinite variety of opportunities to identify with clever people who solve challenging puzzles, overcome obstacles and dangers, outsmart wrongdoers, and earn the admiration and respect of the less clever. Unlike adult detective and mystery writers, children's writers often focus on plot at the expense of style. Books for young readers should, at a minimum, manifest a degree of literary excellence; provide a plot that children can climb right into; offer new ideas in the content; handle important themes with integrity. Will a sampling of recent titles support or contradict Egoff's view?

Five of these novels are for readers about nine to twelve. Linda Bailey's detectives, Stevie and Jesse, appear in their third adventure, *Who's Got Gertie...?* Like many juvenile mysteries Bailey's stretches probability — how many kids actually investigate a murder or kidnapping? — but the story hangs together well as the two engaging young sleuths investigate the disappearance of an elderly neighbour. There's a wacky assortment of supporting players, an interesting plot, good action, a dollop of danger, and satisfyingly unpleasant villains. Bailey's kids demonstrate solid detective skills, identifying clues and pursuing leads until their perseverance pays off. There are traditions of the adult genre in their note-taking ("We'll need a list of clues and suspects.") and the detective's "sixth sense" that keeps Stevie on the trail of an apparently blameless woman until her suspicions are rewarded. Concepts like "inconspicuous" are seamlessly introduced and the reader learns some of the tricks and difficulties of shadowing people. Bailey's snappy, scene-setting first chapter and Stevie's sassy narrative grab reader attention and the story trots right along. Best of all are the laughs as Stevie and Jesse's detective zeal is spurred not just by concern for Gertie, who has volunteered to keep an eye on them this summer for their busy parents, but also by the looming threat of a month interned in the dreaded Happy (they call it "Sappy") Rabbits Summer Day Camp — wearing pink ears and cotton-ball tails! — if they cannot recover their erstwhile babysitter.

Ann Aveling's detective, Hunter Watson, in *Trouble on Wheels*, investigates bicycle vandalism at his school. The author delivers a palatable lesson in deductive reasoning as Hunter examines crime scenes, interviews witnesses, eliminates suspects, and cautions angry students not to leap to conclusions about the guilt of an unpopular classmate. Aveling's writing style is flat. Hunter's first-person narrative is both lackluster and pompous, and character development, admittedly not a priority in a genre where we can get away with good guys and bad guys, is negligible. Hunter is a walking analytical mind who wields unquestioned authority in the schoolyard as he coolly pursues his quarry, and other students are merely his instruments in the investigative process. Even so, Hunter falls jarringly from type when, briefly believing his best friend guilty, he raves and spits accusations. Considering it is a concept central to her theme, the author disappoints when she passes up a perfect opportunity to introduce readers to the term "circumstantial evidence" (27).

Some juvenile mysteries are designed to appeal to a particular recreational interest of readers. Roy MacGregor, a sports columnist, sets his first book, *Mystery at Lake Placid*, about the Screech Owls, in the world of competitive hockey. Travis and his teammates hope to do well at a tournament where scouts are in attendance, but find chances of victory jeopardized when someone sabotages their star centre's equipment. Here the mystery is secondary, manifesting itself only by mid-point of the novel. Although it provides the plot line it is really an excuse for some deftly delivered lessons from life in the context of the game of hockey, its acolytes, and the seductiveness of ambition. MacGregor's initial chapters are deceptively light. We meet the team members as they travel to the tournament in a bus driven by their invaluable and much-loved manager, Mr. Dillinger. The high spirits and farts-and-wedgees humour contrast tellingly with the tone later in the book when an uglier side of life intrudes. This is balanced, fluid writing by an author at ease with language who knows and loves hockey and has the talent to transmit this attraction to the reader. We get a close look at Travis with his problems of fear of the dark and small stature. Other characters are little more than attributes — the "Star Trek" fan, the camera nut, Nish with his fixation on sex. MacGregor's adults are more pointedly drawn. There is purposeful foreshadowing as Brown, the obnoxious hockey parent, tries to bully the team into making his son look good for the scouts. The steadfast Coach Muck voices MacGregor's feelings about the respect "the Game" deserves.

Eric Wilson is established — by word of mouth if not critical acclaim — as Canada's most popular author of juvenile mysteries. This slim volume is his previously unpublished (though reworked in *The Prairie Dog Conspiracy*, 1992) first "Tom Austen" novel about the super smart, super brave boy detective matching wits against black hat baddies who kidnap a wealthy classmate. In the vein of the Hardy Boys stories which Tom studies, we are given improbable action with a hearty helping of violence. Wilson sets a brisk pace and piles on the excitement, but his writing here is pedestrian. Characters are cardboard, though Tom is understandably attractive to children. He is bright, resourceful, and dedicated to justice. He has thrilling adventures and always bounces back. However, motivations are simplistic.

Although the young detectives in Mary Woodbury's *The Invisible Polly McDoodle* observe the behaviour of several neighbourhood residents and conduct an admirably systematic elimination of suspects in their investigation, there is never much doubt who is burgling their housing complex. The introspective Polly, a would-be artist who feels overshadowed and unappreciated in her extroverted family, sees detection as the pathway to respect. As she and her friend Kyle put the clues together, she evolves from a state of resentful powerlessness and, like the Velveteen Rabbit, at last becomes "real." Except for an irritating and seemingly chronic inability to use the word "like" grammatically, Woodbury has a pleasant writing style and tells a story well. Polly comes off as a real person with whom we can sympathize in her struggle for self-assertion. Woodbury perfectly sums up the exhilaration and the terror of those first efforts to tear one's self free of the parent shell when, after finally venting all her furious frustration at her parents and fleeing from the house, Polly wonders "can I say stuff like that and still go home?" If Polly's self-absorbed parents are perhaps a little too harshly drawn, we are looking through Polly's eyes and this is how she sees them. Woodbury lets them become more human as Polly herself develops. The author gives Polly and Kyle some interesting clues to gnaw on, provides hints about observing suspects, and introduces concepts such as *modus operandi* and "surveillance." Like Stevie and Tom, Woodbury's detectives take notes (interestingly none uses a computer) to focus their thinking and clarify findings, but Polly also uses her artistic ability to sketch her observations; ultimately it is this knack that catches the crooks.

Norah McClintock's mystery, *Mistaken Identity*, is aimed at readers a year or two older, and it has overtones of the psychological and romantic thriller genres. Sixteen-year-old Zanny has spent a lonely childhood being moved about the United States (McClintock is the only author who sets her story outside Canada) by her secretive and overprotective father. When he dies in suspicious circumstances she undergoes frightening encounters with strangers from his past who believe she has knowledge of $10M he allegedly stole from a Chicago crime family years earlier. This is a high-tension puzzler in which the teenaged protagonist, with no previous detective experience or relevant skills, finds herself pitted against ruthless men on both sides of the law with only her untried problem-solving abilities and her stubborn determination to see her through as she struggles to unravel the enigma of her father. The title aptly forecasts the nature of the story: a brusque DEA agent of unsettling manner, a kindly man who claims to be her uncle, a handsome young charmer who lends much-needed support in her search: which if any of them is what he appears to be? The reader suffers with Zanny the disorienting effects of being thrown blind and vulnerable into a dangerous game where only the other players know the rules. McClintock creates an atmosphere of suspense and subdued menace, and cranks up the pace to a gripping climax. The writing is commonplace but the structure is strong, especially the opening vignettes which propel major characters towards an ultimate dramatic rendezvous and grab the reader right into the middle of the puzzle. Shame on any librarian who doesn't crack the code before Zanny!

Marion Woodson sets her novel on Gabriola Island where sabotage is creating tension between loggers and environmentalists. When someone begins leaving threatening messages to drive Nick's activist mother from the Island and a boobytrap injures Allison's father, who owns the logging company, the teens realize their hopes of friendship rest on unmasking the troublemaker. A tribal medicine stick sent from the rainforest by Nick's estranged father appears to possess magical power. It becomes a kind of facilitator and focus of mental energy as the teens collect and evaluate evidence, a task complicated by the author's skilful strewing of red herrings. Woodson hooks readers' attention from page one with an encounter between the disputing parties, then transfers it to Nick whose gaze is intently focussed on a girl in the crowd. Using Nick's memory of the first time he saw Allison, the author threads together recent events which are the background for the plot. Woodson writes well, and has a talent for transporting the reader into her setting of dark forest and sun-bright ocean. Her characters are real people whose inner nature determines their actions. The emergent relationship between Nick and Allison is crafted with a sure hand in a fully realized novel that soars beyond the traditional bounds of the genre.

The best mystery writers for any age find a balance between the entertainment value of an intriguing, well-presented puzzle and the opportunity for perceptive readers to arrive at the solution before — but not too long before — the denouement. Faithful to the standard set by Agatha Christie, Marion Woodson maintains internal integrity, placing the villain and the information we need to identify him in the first third of her story, but limns a couple of other likely suspects with confident strokes to keep us guessing. Ann Aveling also offers two possible but innocent suspects, dropping solid clues while artfully deflecting reader attention from culprit. Ron MacGregor gives us the information we need to identify the saboteur before the team does, and Norah McClintock shows her hand to the alert reader by the halfway point. Eric Wilson's novel, despite the scattering of honest clues, relies heavily on coincidence. A loose horse stands still for Tom to mount, a bicycle conveniently appears where it's needed, a crook takes so long to clear his eyes that Tom has time to try three different escape methods and make a phone call. The resolution requires that Tom spot the kidnappers while walking in an evacuated area of the city during a flood where not only are there no police to warn people away but the evacuation has been carried out without a search of the building where Dianne is being held.

The sexes are fairly evenly represented in important roles. Woodson, Bailey and Woodbury use girl/boy detective teams, the girl being the dominant force in the latter tales, while in a plot twist McClintock also briefly employs a team though the heroine is in fact the instigator and resolver of the investigation. It is pleasing to note that juvenile mysteries tend to feature partnerships rather than the traditional superior/subordinate pattern of the adult genre. MacGregor's detectives are boys, but several players on the team, including the ace centre, are girls. Nish's adolescent perceptions of women and sexuality undergo a nifty readjustment when female team members react unexpectedly to his capturing of an adult movie on the hotel tv. Aveling's females serve chiefly to play parts in squirmingly

awful subplots about grade five romance and a teacher's strange behaviour which is revealed at the end to be — gasp! — due to pregnancy, surely as hackneyed a theme as children's literature has to offer. Wilson casts his single female player not only as a victim but also as a silly bit of fluff. Bailey's Stevie is spunky, resourceful, and gutsy in a crisis. Woodbury's Polly resolutely faces obstacles from inhibiting parents to menacing bullies, and effects the thieves' arrest. Zanny, alone and frightened, is susceptible to Nick's attention and the promise of romantic involvement, but she isn't a wimp and doesn't let herself be victimized. In the crunch her courage and her brain save her. Bailey even gives us a female villain.

In the juvenile mystery, parents must be moved aside temporarily so kids can take the stage as decision makers and initiators of action. In these as in most mysteries, traditional authority figures such as police and teachers are reduced to insignificant roles, police because the young detectives need to supplant them and teachers because, as we know from all great children's stories, the real life of childhood is lived in spite of school. However the villains are usually adults. A story where the kids are clever and triumphant and adults are not only outsmart-able but also in the wrong is psychologically pleasing to young readers. A common pattern is to replace the parents with adult substitutes who relate to the children in supportive but less constricting ways. For Polly, there is her artist neighbour Isabel who, unlike Polly's parents, respects her career ambitions, talks to her as an equal, and trusts her with a valuable piece of jewellery which proves a catalyst in Polly's maturing. Coach Muck is a symbolic father to the young hockey players. Their relationship is equalized by mutual dependence in pursuit of common goals. When parents argue about how to deal with the saboteur, Muck turns the decision, and thus the balance of power, back to the young players. Woodson keeps Nick's mother on the scene but mitigates her normal parental influence through the device of a mysterious illness while at the same time she functions as an agent to push Nick into an adult role; he becomes a detective out of concern for her.

A frequent criticism of juvenile mysteries is that writers may build plots around serious crimes while downplaying violent aspects and the real human impact of such events. This is especially true in series where detectives like the Hardy Boys breezily thwart kidnappers and wrestle murderers with seldom a scratch. Stories where carpets fly and tunnels open to fabulous worlds where no known rules apply give broad signals that they deal with the fantastic and make no pretension to touch the child reader's real life, but mysteries where all elements except the crime are equatable with a child's experience do not give these same signals. Authors who serve children well ensure that violence has a believable impact on the lives of characters. Woodbury's children are aware of their mortality. ("This isn't a game. It's dangerous.") Her thieves aren't glamorous, merely bullies who exploit the vulnerable and hurt nice people. Bailey's overall touch is lighter, but the potential for tragedy is well represented when Stevie and Jesse are pushed over a seawall and nearly drowned. Wilson effectively juxtaposes Red's casual dismissal of violence as "part of the game " with Tom's shock at realizing he will murder without remorse. McClintock's sense of proportion is firmly in place as she lines up Zanny, with a normal young

woman's relative powerlessness and inexperience at interpreting others' motives, against a devious government agent and a murderous hoodlum.

These novels showcase the mechanics of detection in a variety of ways guaranteed to hold the attention of most children. There are lots of opportunities to absorb problem-solving strategies which could be applied to everyday lives. Young detectives like Polly and Stevie and Tom are worthy role models in another sense: because juvenile detectives cannot be expected to have the knowledge of adult crime investigators we often learn that they have picked up skills by reading! (In a nice twist McClintock's villain, masquerading as a good guy, explains how he knows so much about searching houses by claiming to read mystery novels.) Well-crafted stories like Woodson's, Bailey's and McClintock's may serve as a springboard to the great literary detective writers like Sayers and James. As long as Canada produces authors like Bailey, Woodson, MacGregor and McClintock, the future of this genre looks pretty bright.

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The Subtle Subversions of L.M. Montgomery

At the Altar: Matrimonial Tales. L.M. Montgomery. Ed. Rea Wilmshurst. McClelland & Stewart, 1994. 248 pp. $24.99 cloth. ISBN 0-7710-6173-0. ***Christmas With Anne and Other Holiday Stories***. L.M. Montgomery. Ed. Rea Wilmshurst. McClelland & Stewart, 1995. 224 pp. $19.99 cloth. ISBN 0-7710-6199-4.

> Since the publication of her journals ... Montgomery seems much more interesting as a person and worthy of attention as a writer. Is it because we now know of the occasional despair that lay behind the sweetness and light of most of her writing?
>
> Afterword to *At the Altar* 221

Rea Wilmshurst has published articles on and co-authored a preliminary bibliography of Montgomery's works. With the publication of *Christmas With Anne and Other Holiday Stories* and *At the Altar: Matrimonial Tales*, Wilmshurst adds to a growing series devoted to the revival of Montgomery's short stories. Along with the other short story collections — all of them containing previously unpublished or generally inaccessible material by Montgomery — *Christmas With Anne* and *At the Altar* will be appreciated not only for the stories themselves, but also for the accompanying illustrations. Of particular interest are the illustrations in *At the Altar*, which are reproduced from the original publications.

The stories in *Christmas With Anne* and *At the Altar* are assembled according to the themes of the holiday season and marriage. Wilmshurst argues in her Afterword to *At the Altar* that Montgomery's stories seem to "fall naturally into certain categories," and so ought to be grouped thematically (220). Wilmshurst's thematic titles, however, could create the erroneous impression that the stories are

merely skilful variations on inflexible subjects. To the contrary, Montgomery's tales are often narrative frameworks for her cynical observations on women's experiences in the male-dominated society of the early twentieth century.

Some of Wilmshurst's comments in her Introduction and Afterword to *At the Altar* problematize a potentially reductive interpretation of Montgomery's "happily ever after" narratives. For all their "apparent simplicity," Wilmshurst argues, the stories are complex (216). Although Montgomery wrote positive stories about women and marriage, Wilmshurst points out that Montgomery found her own marriage to be difficult at times, as is recorded in her journals (Introduction to *At the Altar* vii). And even though many of the spinsters in Montgomery's tales are independent and active women (ix-x), others are subject to the tyranny of parents and relatives (x-xi). On the other hand, Wilmshurst's Introduction to *Christmas With Anne* does not draw attention to Montgomery's subversive subtexts, and instead emphasizes the morals embedded in Montgomery's seasonal tales. In both collections, Wilmshurst underestimates the extent of Montgomery's subtle attacks on the social conventions and stereotypes that limited women's power in Montgomery's day.

Although many of the stories in *At the Altar* are optimistic, Montgomery grounds her narratives in social realism. Women's futures, the tales seem to imply, depend on men — women are limited to either marriage or spinsterhood. In "A Dinner of Herbs," a spinster named Robin Lyle is resented by her sister-in-law, and feels that marriage is an escape from a house where she is made to feel unwelcome (21-2). When asked why she should marry at all "in this day of woman's emancipation," Robin replies, "The trouble is — I'm not emancipated" (24). Similarly, in "Jessamine," spinster Jessamine Stacy lives in her brother's home as an unpaid servant: "Jessamine found herself in the position of maid-of-all-work and kitchen drudge for board and clothes" (34-5).

The stories in *Christmas With Anne*, while they seem less complex than the matrimonial tales, also expose social injustices against women. In "Christmas at Red Butte," the differences between men's and women's economic power are underlined by a young boy's comment that he can support his family because he is a man: "Of course if I was only a girl I couldn't" (19). In "The End of the Young Family Feud," women are commodified when Uncle William declares that his brother "must be prepared to hand over one of his girls to [him] as a token of his forgiveness" (43). And in "Clorinda's Gifts," a girl loses a chance at a job because her aunt wants her as a companion (80-1, 86-7).

Both Montgomery's seasonal and matrimonial tales, then, have more significance as studies in women's experiences of oppression than can be inferred from the innocent-sounding titles of the collections. The stories should therefore not be seen simply as charming little entertainments; Montgomery's criticisms of social convention and her explorations of the often harsh realities of women will make these tales invaluable to Montgomery fans and scholars alike.

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A Grandfather's Gift: A Tale of Generations

The Always Prayer Shawl. Sheldon Oberman. Illus. Ted Lewin. Pennsylvania: Boyds Mills Press, 1994. Unpag. $19.99 cloth. ISBN 1-878093-22-3.

The Always Prayer Shawl makes precious the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Framing ideas about continuity, this story was not only conceived for this volume, but was also produced professionally in a play version by the Winnipeg Jewish Theatre in 1995. The history of the prayer shawl in Oberman's book is also the history of its central character, Adam. We accompany him on a journey from revolutionary Russia to modern day North America, and from young boy to grandfather. A skilled storyteller, Oberman allows for different kinds of readers to enter his story, and at many levels — so that as Adam matures we are able to find our experience as child, parent or elder reflected in the narrative.

At each stage in his life, Adam is confronted by challenges: moving to a new land, a new home and school, or taking on new responsibilities; and in each instance, we discover something about how to cope with change. In their wisdom, the grandfathers distinguish between what's really important in life and what is not — teaching us that "some things change and some things don't." For, amidst all the uncertainties and challenges, there are two constants: the presence of the prayer shawl — symbolizing commitment to Jewish life — and the love of family, mirrored in the experience of the story's three generations. It is these constants that provide Adam with a foundation from which to embrace change, to value his culture and identity; to proclaim loudly "I am always Adam and this is my Always Prayer Shawl."

The thresholds in Adam's life, both as grandson and grandfather, are translated into paintings which capture the immediacy of events and emotions. We want to linger over these brief glimpses into the poignant and intimate moments between the boy and the old man, and are compelled to look for evidence of such moments in our own lives. One such encounter is found at the end of the book when Adam and his grandson sit talking together in the synagogue. The little boy is wrapped in his grandfather Adam's Always Prayer Shawl while "they shut their eyes and feel the warm sun shining on their faces." As such, even the prayer shawl presents an invitation to reflect on our own special objects of importance — that which carries with it family history and memory.

Visually, it is the prayer shawl which first greets us — a fabulous representation that lines the inside of the book as you open its covers. Ted Lewin paints with such delicate and sensitive use of light and shadow, that the soft background allows the audience to focus on the detail in the faces themselves, almost imperceptibly drawing us to the characters. It is truly as if we experience the passing of a lifetime with each turn of the page of this beautifully-illustrated picture book.

If I have any reservation about *The Always Prayer Shawl*, it lies in its absolute focus on boys and their grandfathers. While I know that it was written in celebration of the author's own son's bar mitzvah, it need not omit young women from its circle, given that in much of contemporary Judaism, girls are

invited to wear a "tallit" or prayer shawl, as well. However, I make reference to the issue of inclusion since Oberman's touchstone for writing was his participation in the creation of a ceremony in which *both* mother and father of the bar mitzvah might share in the event. They solved the dilemma of whose prayer shawl their son would wear by agreeing to use *his* grandfather's tallit, but with the fringes of *her* new tallit sewn on! The real-life backdrop to the tale reminds us that we can extend the fictional context by discussing ideas about the cultural recognition of gender difference, and by asking kids to explore their own legacy — the background of their name, family memories, the discovery of their own special objects or treasured relationships. All the more reason why *The Always Prayer Shawl* stands as a book to be shared at home and in the classroom. Ultimately, as the best stories do, this one impels you to tell other stories, allowing children an opportunity to bring their personal histories to their learning and writing.

A Wilderness Passover. Kathleen Cook Waldron. Illus. Leslie Gould. Red Deer/ Northern Lights Books for Children, 1994. Unpag. $15.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88995-112-8.

Cook Waldron's book, *A Wilderness Passover*, opens dramatically on the evening before Passover to what seems to be a traditional beginning to the holiday. But as the morning sun rises, preparations are abruptly halted by Mama's vehement response that there will be "no seder," since they have "no matzah, no parsley, no horseradish, no haroset, no special wine, Nothing!" and besides, "how can we have a seder with just four people?" Suddenly, we find ourselves inside a story that asks us to consider how it is possible to maintain Jewish practice and identity in the face of isolation from family, friends and resources. We follow the children, Susan and Louie, and their Papa as they try to help Mama find ways to celebrate Passover, by searching for alternative forms for making a Seder.

By truly encouraging kids to help with preparations for the Passover holiday, young readers of *A Wilderness Passover* will immediately relate to Susan and Louie. Indeed, this story succeeds in honouring kids' ingenuity and resourcefulness, and their ability to become real partners in family life. It is their point of view and scale that we discover in Leslie Gould's charming paintings of the wilderness they now call home. Her watercolour sketches suggest a wonderful sense of place and colour, providing us with a real feel for this landscape, almost evoking its smells and textures. Ultimately, this book builds to one moment of real sentiment, which I admit to reluctantly. The children's "plan" leads us to a deep sense of community and highlights the power of creating and sharing Passover — wherever and with whomever it may occur.

However, I was a reluctant participant, because it is a story not fully told. Cook Waldon's book has too many loose ends — both in terms of its narrative and in its account of Jewish life. In order to begin to fill in those missing pieces, parents or teachers might pose questions like: why do they only begin to prepare for Passover the night before? If Passover is so important to them, as the story suggests throughout, had they never before considered the implications of making a Seder in a such a remote location? Why did they bring nothing

with them? Are they too poor even to send away for a box of matzah? How might they cope and still celebrate Jewish life? Why do you think the family is separated from their loved ones? More difficult is the portrait of this mother. How do we account for her behaviour? It is not that I am unsympathetic to the mother's sadness. On the contrary, the reader feels her grief keenly; indeed, it is her story I want to know more about. Has she experienced so great a loss? Has she come here against her will? What is wrong with this sensitive woman, a mother who will not or cannot participate with her children, despite their eagerness in repeatedly reaching out to her, both in text and drawings? It is her wilderness of spirit that is disturbing and cannot be wiped away, even when finally, at a beautiful and full Seder table, created around and for her, she is able to find pleasure, and we see that "Mama's eyes shone like the festival candles."

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Christmas and Hanukkah: Festivals for Understanding

The Gift. Joseph Kertes. Illus. Peter Perko. Toronto/Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre/Groundwood Books, 1995. 40 pp. $12.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88899-235-1.

This book seems written for the nine- to eleven-year-old, though both younger and older readers will enjoy it, and even quite young listeners will love the rhythm of its telling and the freshness of its illustrations. Joseph Kertes, a Leacock Medal winner and director of the Humber School for Writers, begins

his story very attractively. Jacob Beck, the youngest child of a Jewish refugee family from post-1956 revolutionary Hungary, recollects from a mature perspective what had been a seminal experience in his new life as a Canadian. He poignantly recounts the pressures of acculturation on a nine- or ten-year-old living in the Bathurst and Bloor Street area of Toronto, a mixed neighbourhood of established families from Britain and newcomers from Eastern Europe. At the time of the story, the Becks have been in Canada for only a few years (this is their fourth Canadian Christmas) and Joseph, together with his older brother, Noah, find their "grey" Jewish home surrounded by a "bright" very intensely Christian culture, one that appears to exclude them, though their Christian immigrant neighbours seem to fit in more readily.

Surprisingly, Peter Perko, a graphic designer who teaches at Humber College, has never undertaken book illustration before. His numerous full-page illustrations are clear and rich in detail, and serve the narrative extremely well by underscoring and drawing forth various elements and emotional content in the story. The text evokes in the non-British Canadian reader familiar memories of school and home, and echoes the recorded experience of many other Jewish new or first generation Canadians, such as the childhood stories of Fredelle Bruser Maynard from the Prairies, or Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*, set in Montreal, and even the American writer Philip Roth's luminous story, "The conversion of the Jews." Unlike those narratives, however, there is something incomplete and not quite right about Kertes' story, evocative, poignant and realistic though it is.

Kertes is careful to show us that Jacob is from a warm and loving family, one that does observe aspects of their Jewish culture. He also shows how successfully Jacob and Noah have absorbed various elements of Canadian secular culture, such as ice hockey and watching television. As with other new Canadian children, they want their parents "to sound like" they were "British-Canadian." However, the impact of a North American Christmas on the sensibilities of a non-Christian child make for a special sense of "otherness" that pervades Jacob's life, as the strength of the new culture dominates the older one. The classroom echoes with Christmas icons, from a desk-top crèche and the ubiquitous English composition topic — "Our Christmas Holidays" — to a picture of Jesus at the Last Supper. The latter is described as hanging on the classroom wall, "beside the portrait of the radiant Queen." (Could that be so? This reviewer, born and raised in downtown Toronto by immigrant parents, attended several public schools in the 1940s and 50s, but the only picture ever hung next to the Queen was that of the Duke of Edinburgh.)

Jacob is given the opportunity to experience the majority culture at the home of his friend, Larry Wilson, when he is invited for lunch on Christmas Day, the central event leading to the climax of Kertes' story. Jacob becomes absorbed in the quest to find a suitable present for Larry, and despite his knowledge of what kinds of presents his Canadian classmates get for Christmas — in the past after the holidays he would even tell them lies about the presents he had been given — he rejects the secular and buys a gift reflecting the same Christian iconography hanging on his classroom wall. This anomaly is acceptable to the

reader, in as much as Jacob's parents have always explained Christmas in terms parallel to their own "important holiday[s] like Yom Kippur and Passover, and a family time," and because it is clear that Jacob has not yet learned the difference between the secular commercial manifestations of Christmas and its religious aspects. The famous animated windows of Simpson's and Eaton's department stores are effectively evoked by Kertes to play a role in Jacob's confusion.

What is difficult for this reviewer to accept, is the total absence of any positive impact from Jacob's religious upbringing on his sensibilities through most of the book. Despite Jacob's close family and evidence that he has received some formal education in Judaism as well as participated in its practices, Kertes holds Jacob back from positively reflecting his Jewish culture until the very end of the narrative, when he "learns" to appreciate his own heritage as a result of Larry's response to his gift. Although this likely was done in order to heighten the climax and sharpen the denouement, it creates stress in the plot and significantly counters the verisimilitude of the story line. For example, Jacob and Noah must know about the rather strict Jewish dietary laws, yet there is no concern at all allowing Jacob to eat meat at the Wilsons' table. The Becks surely gave their sons presents in the first days of Hanukkah and certainly the boys would have learned the significance of the holiday in terms of the Maccabees having rejected the competing culture of their Greek-Seleucid conquerors, including the abrogation of Jewish religious values. Even at the end, Jacob is portrayed as an observer of the celebratory lighting of the Hanukkah candles, rather than as a participant. Further, Kertes at no time has the older Jacob, his narrator, reflect on what he now understands about the events of that bygone childhood time. So the reader is presented with some puzzles. Why doesn't Jacob evince any recollection of his life in Hungary, a very Catholic country with many strong Christmas traditions? Why would the older Jacob not comment on the significance of Hanukkah, which he would certainly understand, even if his younger persona did not, as the successful continuation of Jewish life in the face of severe intolerance and violent pressure to assimilate?

Apart from these not insignificant concerns and caveats, Kertes' story is well written and the book truly benefits from Perko's marvellous illustrations. Their combined skills are especially well presented in the passage where Jacob returns from the Wilsons in the growing darkness, following the near debacle of having his gift rejected by Larry, but recouped by the reality of their firm friendship. Jacob witnesses an unknown young female figure skater in the park near his home "spin and bound, spin and bound as if she were stirring the sprinkling snow." The skater is drawing "sideways figure-eights ... between the straight painted lines of our hockey rink." This evocation of the Greek letter alpha, symbol of infinity, in opposition to the boundaries of the neighbourhood hockey rink, is wonderful and resonates deeply within Jacob. Though he clearly does not understand it on the cognitive level, he responds to the metaphoric image and goes home "straightened up as tall as I could" to the warmth and bright colour of his family's Hanukkah celebration. The same is likely to be true for most young readers of the book, with Jewish children possibly being

concerned about the author's lapses, while non-Jews likely will acquire insight into culture clash and the impact of one value system on another in everyday situations with new and first generation Canadians.

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Seasonal Highs and Lows

Jenny and the Hanukkah Queen. Jean Little. Illus. Suzanne Mogensen. Penguin Books Canada Limited, 1995. 32 pp. $17.99 cloth. ISBN 0-670-85268-6. ***Mouse in the Manger.*** Tim Wynne-Jones. Illus. Elaine Blier. Penguin Books Canada Limited, 1995. 32 pp. $6.99 paper. ISBN 0-14-054971-4. ***Merlin's Castle.*** László Gál. Stoddart Publishing, 1995. 32 pp. $18.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7737-2852-X. ***Woodland Christmas.*** Frances Tyrrell. North Winds Press, 1995. 32 pp. $16.99 cloth. ISBN 0-590-24430-2. ***Follow That Star.*** Kenneth Oppel. Illus. Kim LaFave. Kids Can Press Ltd, 1994. Unpag. $11.95 cloth. ISBN 1-55074-134-9.

Seasonal books can, obviously, celebrate an event. They can also illuminate our traditions, give them some perspective, and create new aspects to those traditions. Such, then, is the challenge for the author and illustrator: to create something new, yet reflect the timeless quality of the celebration; perhaps even to create something that explains the celebration to not only those in the community but also to those in other communities, something that may draw us together in our newfound understanding of each other.

In *Jenny and the Hanukkah Queen*, Jenny's Jewish family responds to the overwhelming presence of Santa Claus during the holiday season by inventing the Hanukkah Queen. This charming book began its life as Michele Landsberg's true family story (as told to Jean Little). The question the book raises is when does a good family story become a good story for everyone? At what point does the weight of the storyteller's voice influence our beliefs? Will Jewish children believe they've missed something if they don't know about the Hanukkah Queen? And will children of other faiths grow up believing that the Hanukkah Queen is, and always has been, a part of the celebration of Hanukkah?

In attempting to provide Jenny with some "new" element to inform her struggle with the concept of Santa Claus, the story comes perilously close to diminishing Jenny's family's own holiday. There are aspects of Hanukkah that are as equally wonderful as anything Christmas can offer, including Santa Claus. Appropriating an image from Christmas leads to a homogenization of cultures, of beliefs, of celebrations. Rather than celebrating our diversity, it just serves to make us all the same.

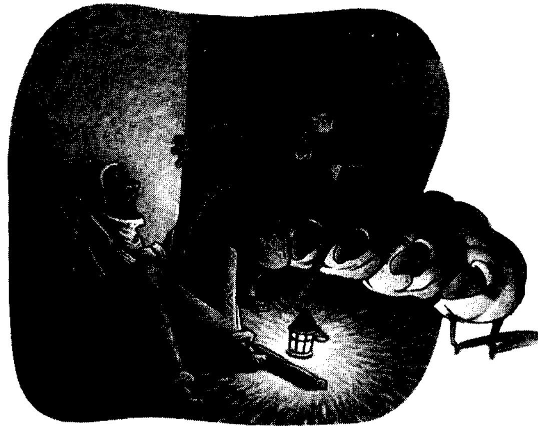
In *Mouse in the Manger*, elements in both the text and the illustrations work to undermine the tension in Mouse's story. The illustrations are reminiscent of old Christmas cards, slightly garish in their use of red, green, and other

bright, bold colours. Somehow, though, this is not comforting, like remembering past Christmases with some measure of fondness; instead, it distances us from the emotion of the story. The circular frames of the illustrations restrain the story, contain the tension: they imply safety and comfort, thus diminishing our belief in Mouse's plight. Short choppy sentences, reminiscent of the text found in primers, further remove any interest. Rather than making it a small, gentle tale, the clipped rhythm of the writing results in extremely flat, static text.

The story of *Merlin's Castle* is problematic from beginning to end. In fact, there are far too many stories going on at once here, and the attempt to place them in the form of a circular tale fails. Here, the circle is broken — Gál's ending doesn't send the reader back to the beginning, thus discouraging the reader from rereading to appreciate the circular nature of the story. As well, the illustrations are oddly flat, creating neither emotional response nor interest.

Finally, many elements of the story are highly distracting: Donatello functions as either an obscure art reference or as a confusing pop culture reference (will readers question the fact that Donatello is a lizard, when he really should be a Ninja Turtle?); and Merlin, whose archetypal presence carries great weight, is reduced to a mere plot device. All of this plot hangs on a very flimsy thread, and the thread frays quickly.

In *Woodland Christmas*, Frances Tyrrell transforms existing tradition, in the form of a well-known Christmas carol, "The Twelve Days of Christmas." In fact, Tyrrell changes not one word: what she does is to take a carol that has no specified setting, and to give it one through the illustrations. The beauty of the woodland setting is recreated through the illustrations, which show us the courtship and wedding of two bears. This is a world of magic and fancy, with skating bears and birds, the shape of the five golden rings reflected in the circular swimming of five playful otters. The illustrations are held in place and time by a frame of frost and snowflakes. In *Mouse in the Manger*, this framing technique distanced the reader from Mouse's story; however, in *Woodland Christmas*, this effect leaves us with the impression of seeing the story through a window, places it in a time and place which is rich in detail without restricting us to what is true about the woodland world. Tyrrell anchors her story in the words of the carol, unchanged, and timeless. The book allows those of us who live in a woodland area to revel in our traditions of Christmas in our own place; it also allows others, in other places, to look through this frosted window, to learn what the woodland is like in winter.



Kenneth Oppel takes perhaps the greatest leap of all in *Follow That Star*. The book takes its inspiration from a familiar Biblical passage. How then, to make this story fresh, to make it different, without having the story pale by comparison to the original? First, Oppel creates a character who immediately captures the reader's interest. Zach is a shepherd devoted to his sheep; although he grumbles, he will not neglect them. Ever practical, he dismisses the possibility of angels, but is revealed to us as a man of faith and imagination from his first sighting of angel mist.

Oppel's tale resonates with timeless, almost archetypal elements: the Good Samaritan, who helps the stranger at the side of the road; the carpenter who helps Zach build a bridge, is perhaps, a hint of the carpenter that Zach will find in Bethlehem; the stranger who helps Zach "sling-shot" his sheep up the hill is most certainly David.

The illustrations, by Kim LaFave, are stunning. Deep blues and purples of the countryside at night are contrasted by the light of the figures: most characters appear gold, as if they are infused with the light, indeed the spirit of that star. Light spills out of lanterns, out of the faces of the sheep, out of the characters themselves. Note that the first time that we see Zach, he doesn't glow like this: only when he comes into contact with the angel mist does his figure become infused with this golden light. And only when he remains in contact with the various angels does he remain in this glow. In the final image of Zach, his face glows with the light of the star as he realizes he must follow it to the stable. This is a subtle yet effective technique.

Follow That Star relies on our knowledge of this age-old tale, on elements already strong in our psyches, such as images of shepherds, of starlight, of angels which inform our understanding of the Christmas story. Like all effective seasonal books should, *Follow That Star* expands on this knowledge, thus creating something new and wondrous out of something old and wondrous.

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Slave Trading and "Amazing Grace"

Amazing Grace: The Story of the Hymn. Linda Granfield. Illus. Janet Wilson. Tundra Books, 1997. 32 pp. $17.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88776-389-8.

Far too often, it seems to me, people turn a poem, piece of music, painting, or other artifact into an icon quite removed from its original historical and cultural context. Not only does this contribute to an over-simplifying and perhaps misrepresenting of the work, but it also speaks of a shallowness in our own culture, I think, a tendency to assume that the past is buried and all present cultural expressions are simply commodities for our use, wherever they might have come from or whatever meaning they might once have held.

So, for example, we find wedding couples requesting music like Wagner's Wedding March (from a tragic opera), Handel's Largo (a funeral procession from an opera), or the hymn "Amazing Grace" with its stern Calvinistic theology of guilt and repentance. Perhaps some couples approach the altar in such a state, but they might wish to ponder the text and the story before choosing it as a wedding song. Tundra Books' new publication for young people, *Amazing Grace: the Story of the Hymn*, provides the opportunity. Here the author and illustrator, who also teamed up to create *In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poem*, provide a very effective and detailed account not only of the hymn's origin in John Newton's 1779 collection (the Olney Hymns), but of its author's life as an eighteenth-century slave trader turned Methodist minister. The careful historicizing work achieved in this entertaining text and in its illustrations offers a model for other such narratives of the past.

Linda Granfield's story of Newton's life is supported beautifully by Janet Wilson's full-colour illustrations of scenes of slavery (in Africa, in the Middle Passage, in America). Dramatized by these illustrations, Granfield's narrative takes the reader in considerable detail and for the most part in engaging prose through the economic, geographical, and historical contexts of Newton's experiences. A huge amount of historical material is conveyed in concise readable form, although on occasion the style slips into a stilted passive construction, as in this reference to the industrial revolution: "Destitution and death were written about, and portrayed in art."

One might also quibble that the narrative and, especially, the publisher's jacket note imply a rather too direct relationship between a storm that the 22-year-old Newton encountered while a novice seaman off Newfoundland in 1748 and the hymn "Amazing Grace," published in 1779 after Newton had spent many years as a slave trader and many more as a Wesleyan minister. The storm may have "changed his life forever" and in some sense prepared for the hymn about grace that "saved a wretch like me," but the intervening years were the years of Newton's slave trading. Nonetheless Granfield skilfully and logically interlinks the details of this complex of historical and personal circumstances and does a fine job of showing how Newton became an influential figure in the anti-slavery movement towards the end of the century.

While some of the vocabulary and concepts of this narrative will be too demanding for the younger members of the recommended age group (nine and

up), this book is especially successful in its thorough and sensitive handling of African slavery. It manages to balance and blend its dual subjects — Newton's hymn and his life and culture — in both an entertaining and informative way, and therefore will be an important resource for a study of cross-cultural influences in the eighteenth century. It is unfortunate, then, that the book's title (while reflecting its genre) may mislead the casual observer about the book's significant content; a quick glance at the inside cover and illustrations, however, draws the reader into this striking account of slave trading and its English history.

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A New Biography of C.S. Lewis

The Man Who Created Narnia: The Story of C.S. Lewis. Michael Coren. Lester Publishing, 1994. 152 pp. $24.95 cloth+jacket. ISBN 1-895555-78-7.

Among brief biographies of Lewis, this is the most readable, most attractively printed, and most abundantly illustrated by photographs, not to mention well-chosen epigraphs. Undoubtedly, it can be read with interest by readers and teachers of children's literature. The question is whether it should.

On the positive side, it offers them a coherent account of Lewis's life and friendships, and well describes the meetings of his circle of Christian authors and friends known as the Inklings. Though too indulgent of his bullying tactics, it succinctly describes debates on religious questions at the Socratic Club. Finally, it offers a moving account of his happy but late and all-too-brief fulfilment as husband and stepfather. From it readers can gain a full understanding of Charles Williams's importance to Lewis as editor, friend and fellow-author, and a less full but sufficient one of Tolkien's, yet learn little of his lifelong friendships with Arthur Greeves and Owen Barfield. Readers can learn how and in large part why the Chronicles of Narnia came to be written, the difference between their orders of publication and of Narnia "history," and usefully compare actual with Narnian history. Coren goes beyond established fact, however, in calling the Narnian mythological sequence that in which the books "were supposed to be read (78). His selection of the first-published, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* for his only detailed account appears inconsistent with his recommended reading order. Had he focussed instead on *The Magician's Nephew*, he would have had to point out its allusions to the Creation and Fall narratives, and to Lewis's childhood bereavement via the hero's miraculous healing of his mother. However expertly done, his summary of each book but the first in a sentence or two leaves an impression of superficiality.

A yet more serious flaw is that writing the Narnia stories is made to seem the central act of Lewis's literary career. In 1944, after publishing his *Abolition of Man*, we are told, he was "too excited to bathe in any glory. His mind was racing now and he was eager to devote his energies to a new project, a new idea, a new set of stories, and a whole new world.... It was time for Narnia" (60). All this is supposition, and in any case before finishing *The Lion, the Witch and*

the Wardrobe (1950) Lewis completed his adult fantasies *That Hideous Strength* (1945) and *The Great Divorce* (1945). In fact, while writing the Narnia stories, he was also writing his spiritual autobiography *Surprised by Joy* (1956) and his monumental history of sixteenth century English literature (1954), not to mention numerous articles, essays and addresses.

Distortions and inaccuracies begin early on, when Coren writes of the boy Lewis's "beloved Bible" (15), a statement unsupported from the juvenilia and family papers. Again, we are told that Lewis was an "unwilling" soldier (30) despite having volunteered, though Irish and so exempt from conscription. After fifty years' acquaintance with Oxford, one is startled to find the city "set in the middle of the Cotswolds" (21). Undoubtedly his father's death in 1929 and the purchase of The Kilns stimulated both Lewis's religious conversion and the finest of his letters to Greeves, posthumously published as *They Stand Together*. Yet it hardly "spurred him on to writer" (37), for he had been a compulsive writer since childhood, had already published two books of verse (one mentioned by Coren), and had been writing *The Allegory of Love* for a year. Though a lover of Wagner, according to Barfield Lewis only ever attended one performance at Covent Garden. Though sometimes seen at student productions, he simply wasn't a "theatre-goer" (47-8). He experienced music through his brother's records, and literature almost wholly through reading.

The Man Who Created Narnia is written with admirable fluency and charm. It suffers, however, from superficial reading of Lewis's works for adults and use of outdated sources. Coren mentions the ridicule of fascism and communism in *The Pilgrim's Regress*, yet ignores the hero's quest for the island, supposed source of the visionary experiences Lewis called "Joy," the mention of which would have added meaning to several episodes in the Narnia stories and to the chapter "And Joy Came In." During that feelingful chapter, Coren fails to mention Joy's collaboration in the novel many critics think Lewis's best for adults, *Till We Have Faces* (1956), or to link its female narrator with the discussion of possessiveness in *The Four Loves*. While mentioning two recent biographies, he repeats Walter Hooper's now widely-disputed claim to have been appointed Lewis's secretary, and to have met him regularly at a pub and at church (118).

A sceptical editor could have made this a more reliable as well as enjoyable book. Was Lewis really among "England's greatest writers" (23)? Did he "concentrate on children's literature" (67) after losing a Socratic Club debate in 1948, or was his incentive the campaign to defeat his bid for the Professorship of Poetry in 1951? Did the inception of the Narnian chronicles ensure that the "world of children's literature would never be the same again" (4)? Can we yet adjudge *A Grief Observed* "one of the most remarkable books of all time" (113) on mourning? Young readers have much to gain from Coren's biography — most notably an urge to read the *Chronicles of Narnia* — but will in time have much to unlearn.

Lionel Adey, and Emeritus Professor of English at the University of Victoria, has published ***C.S. Lewis's "Great War" with Owen Barfield*** *and many articles on Lewis. His* ***C.S. Lewis: Writer, Dreamer and Mentor*** *(Eerdmans) is currently in press.*

Mini-Reviews

The Twelve Tales of Christmas. Margot Sexton. Illus. Janis Jones. Borealis Press, 1994. 54 pp. $25.95 paper. ISBN 0-88887-135-X.

The Twelve Tales of Christmas is a collection of short Christmas stories aimed at readers from seven to ten years old. The stories are amusing, short, and the vocabulary age appropriate.

Sexton has taken some old stories and given them a new touch. "A gift of worth" tells of young Michael who desperately wants to help his Grandmother — especially by shovelling the snow from her driveway — but who always arrives too late. Hefinds the perfect Christmas gift for her, but cannot afford it without making a sacrifice. These stories have a message: that Christmas is more than just presents, the tree, lights and singing from "The little bear who found Christmas." However, at one point Santa and Father Time have a fireside chat over a glass of brandy, perhaps not the most appropriate image for this age of reader.

The illustrations are bright and the format of the book is eye-catching — on the first page of every story the title appears in big, bold print with the text of the story on the left side of the page and an accompanying illustration on the right. On the whole, *The Twelve Tales of Christmas* is a light, fun book, sure to bring a smile to the reader, and invite discussion concerning the content.

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The Amazing Milk Book. Catherine Ross and Susan Wallace. Illus. Linda Hendry. Kids Can Press Ltd., 1991. 80 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 1-55074-020-2.

Another in the series of information books from the publisher which has made a name for itself in this area, *The Amazing Milk Book* is a very enjoyable and enlightening read. Because the subject is approached from so many angles, the information encompasses many disciplines. Physics and chemistry figure strongly as the authors discuss the physical makeup of milk, but readers will also find fascinating information on history, language, cultural traditions, nutrition, zoology, and both modern and more primitive technology, all stemming from the study of milk. Thrown in throughout the text are recipes, crafts and even riddles. Linda Hendry's illustrations help to keep the mood light while still giving helpful visual information. With its well organized chapters, in-

teresting projects, glossary and index , the book is a ready made study unit on milk, but the child reader will enjoy it on his or her own, too.

Do the Doors Open by Magic? And Other Supermarket Questions. Catherine Ripley. Illus. Scot Ritchie. Owl Books , 1995 (Question and Answer Storybook Series). 32 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-895688-40-X. ***Why Is Soap So Slippery? And Other Bathtime Questions.*** Catherine Ripley. Illus. Scot Ritchie. Owl Books, 1995 (Question and Answer Storybook Series). 32 pp. $5.95 paper. ISBN 1-895688-39-6.

These books provide answers to questions that real children might ask in the course of everyday activities. What puts the fizz in soda pop? Why do my fingers get wrinkled in the tub? The answers are incorporated into a storylike format featuring a family shopping at a modern supermarket and a family at bathtime. Each question is posed in language which a child might use and answered in simple, not too technical, language such as might be used by a parent. The illustrations generally serve to add to the understanding of the material and to enhance the light, fun tone of the books. The rubber duck is ongoing scene stealer, making faces here and there. The only illustration which is a little confusing is the one which shows the alimentary and renal systems in the bathtime book. A whole apple is used to symbolize the food going in and an apple core represents the waste, according to the key. The supermarket information is well handled and might even surprise some grownups. How many of us know what is behind the big doors at the supermarket? These books will be great fun to share with kids.

The Backyard Time Detectives. David Suzuki. Illus. Eugenie Fernandes. Stoddart, 1995 (Nature All Around Series). 32 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 0-7737-5740-6.

The third book in a series which includes *Nature in the Home* and *If We Could See Air, The Backyard Time Detectives* begins with a family starting to plant a garden. The kids, at first unenthusiastic, become interested when their parents help them imagine how the land on which their house stands might have looked in times past. An uncovered rock prompts the dad to describe ancient volcanoes, while an arrowhead helps the children imagine native peoples living and hunting on the land. Thinking of how the garden will grow leads thoughts to the future and to hopes that the land will not be spoiled. Illustrator Eugenie Fernandes has used ghostly translucent drawings over the solid present to show the imagined features. This book could serve to help youngsters develop a sense of time and change beyond what they are able to see. The simple language makes this book suitable for pre-school and early primary. A more sophisticated audience would want more detail.

Shark Attacks and Spider Snacks. Roy Condy. Black and white Illustrations. Scholastic, 1996. 62 pp. $5.99 paper. ISBN 0-590-24622-4.

This book is made up of thirty double page spreads, each consisting of a cartoon-style drawing, a catchy alliterative title and a box of text. Each spread deals with a different bit of animal behaviour. Author-illustrator Roy Condy has included

examples of maternal, predatory, mating, feeding, and defensive behaviour as well as interesting descriptions of amazing sizes and structures. This book is entertaining and unintimidating for young readers. The drawback to having such limited text is that there is no room for extended explanations which can better convey the subtleties of the material. As well, the tone is just a bit sensationalistic. The strawberry poison dart frogs (mistakenly called poison arrow frogs and assigned to the Amazon basin instead of Central America) are not so poisonous that they cannot be touched without fatal effects. The snapping turtle is said to attack without hesitation, but there is no explanation that such attacks occur in self defense and only when the animal is out of the water and vulnerable.

How Monkeys Make Chocolate: Foods and Medicines from the Rainforests. Adrian Forsyth. Photos. Owl Books, 1995. 48 pp. $9.95 paper. ISBN 1-895688-32-9.

In *How Monkeys Make Chocolate,* well-known ecologist Adrian Forsyth discusses the interrelationships between the plants and animals of the rainforests. He explains that many of the products and medicines which are so useful to human beings are produced by plants as a way of manipulating animals, including humans, into dispersing seeds or as a way of protecting themselves from being eaten. He tells the stories behind products which are a part of a child's world, such as chocolate, chewing gum, rubber and aspirin. With the example of the Brazil nut, which cannot be grown successfully in a plantation setting, Forsyth shows how dependent each inhabitant of the forest is upon many other plants and animals so that the forest must be saved as a whole and not just species by species. This book should be a high priority purchase for every library.

__Jo Ellen Bogart__ is a nature enthusiast and children's author who has twice accompanied her herpetologist husband on rainforest expeditions. Her seven picture books from Scholastic Canada include __Sarah Saw a Blue Macaw__ and __Gifts__.

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