

Editorial: Excavating in the Archives of Juvenile Literature

If we want to understand who we are and where we have come from, the best site for excavation is in children's literature. It encodes, perpetuates, and reveals cultural values. Before print had to compete with other media, families read together instead of watching television. Children's magazines thrived. This voluminous ephemeral literature is a rich source of social history and much of the writing was excellent—people who later became professional writers (like Sir Charles G.D. Roberts, Ernest Seton, L.M. Montgomery) honed their skills in the periodical market.

Professor Gordon Moyles has been searching out archives throughout Canada, the USA, and the UK for more than a decade in order to retrieve Canada's heritage from these magazines. In this issue, he gives us over 1,000 citations which were written *about* Canada or *by* Canadians. Clearly, these international magazines, published by British and American publishers and circulated world-wide, carried information about Canada all over the English-speaking world.

Through this bibliography, Professor Moyles rewrites the history of early Canadian children's literature. Beyond this, what does this bibliography show? By merely reading the titles, or by looking at his indexes, we can glimpse how Canada was represented. Think of all the Scottish, Irish, British families who read these accounts, seeing Canada as a land of plenty, space, and adventure—a desirable place for emigration. Then, on page 27, we give a mere snippet from one article, with our small gloss. Clearly, our ancestors had “politically-incorrect” attitudes.

To demonstrate what a sharp look at familiar texts can reveal, we offer Gavin White's comments on prejudice in L.M. Montgomery, a writer appearing often in Moyles' lists. Her attitudes were typical for her time, if not enlightened compared to some; White piquantly shows the subtle ways that language encodes racial and religious condescension.

Looking at the raw data that historians use in their research will fascinate students lucky enough to be where they can read some of this original material in libraries, either on microfilm or in occasional archival holdings. My own students tell me that archival work in old newspapers and magazines makes the past come alive for them—they find many ads and short pieces hilarious, but they are often shocked at the attitudes toward gender, race, class, and religion that pervaded most juvenile and popular literature (see page 64).

We can't rewrite the past, but we can look into it, talk about it, and try to avoid replicating what we don't admire. A forthcoming issue of *CCL* on imperialism and post-coloniality will examine contemporary texts. MHR