

Editorial: Past, Present, Future

I don't know if you noticed, but there's a bird on the cover of this issue. It's being released by two girls, one who is black, the other white. And unless I'm very much mistaken, we, as students of Canadian multiculturalism, should all know how to read the symbolic overtones of this image. Together, the two girls represent racial harmony — they both appear happy and equally instrumental in carrying out a symbolic act: releasing a bird that one girl has nursed back to health. The bird's release has layered overtones: it's clearly meant to symbolize a new beginning, a return to a happier element. In the context of the story from which the image is taken, it is the black girl who is most invested in the bird's release — both literally (she nursed it) and figuratively. As a Caribbean immigrant to Canada, she has been grounded by fear and loneliness as she tries to understand her new country (her story is entitled *Courage to Fly*). The white girl's assistance in the release of the bird and the Caribbean girl's smile indicate the happy ending — the Caribbean girl has a white "Canadian" friend. She is on her way to letting go of her fears and adjusting to her new place. She's finding the courage to fly.

Well, such would be the optimistic reading that a cursory glance at the image engenders. However, after reading the papers in this issue, you may see the image differently. You see, four of the six papers in this issue examine texts in the context of the Canadian discourse about multiculturalism. And their findings are disturbing, illuminating, and exciting.

Kerry Mallan's "Uncanny Encounters: Home and Belonging in Canadian Picture Books" looks at three picture-book immigration stories, including *Courage to Fly*, in light of Canada's politics of inclusion, finding that in all cases the female immigrant must acknowledge her "strangeness" as a first step toward belonging and assimilation. I find her conclusion troubling:

The familiar pattern that structures the plots of these stories threatens to collapse the diversity of immigrant experiences (Chinese, Caribbean, Lebanese) into a master narrative of *the* migrant experience, and the characters become "ideal-type" immigrants: they fit in with little fuss.

This pattern appears to be at work in young adult fiction, as well, as Perry Nodelman finds in "A Monochromatic Mosaic: Class, Race, and Culture in Double-Focalized Canadian Novels for Young People," his sequel to "Of Solitudes and Borders" (*CCL*, no. 109-110), wherein he continues his

research into binary narratives, but this time looking at novels that are overtly political. Where Mallan finds that immigrant characters are applauded for absorbing their difference and quietly fitting in, Nodelman finds that YA political novels offer a “conscious or unconscious celebration of tolerance that erases difference.” The celebration of diversity that we think follows from our politics of inclusion and multiculturalism has a little-noticed underside, then: the different pieces of the famous Canadian mosaic really should fit together to form one monoculture. Or so this is the story we’re telling children, young adults, and ourselves.

But what happens to those different pieces that don’t fit? We offer in this issue two major bibliographies that help us answer this question as they examine Canada’s literary history from the point of view of under-represented voices. Looking at one piece of the mosaic, Judith Saltman writes in “The Jewish Experience in Canadian Children’s Literature” about how the celebration of diversity that came with Canada’s politics of multiculturalism has historically benefited the publication and reception of Jewish narratives, as it has benefited those stories that come from the heritages of other “self-identified minority groups”:

Jewish writing for children in Canada is part of the segment of Canadian children’s literature that addresses the construction of a national identity committed to tolerance, respect, and inclusion in a multicultural society. Writing for children and young adults in Canada increasingly portrays ethnocultural diversity, religious pluralism and overt anti-racism.

With her usual pioneering tenacity, Saltman has prepared an annotated bibliography of Jewish Canadian literature for children that I hope spurs further research into, among other issues, the conceptions of home, belonging, and ethnocultural difference that animate the critical writing of Mallan and Nodelman. Certainly, the erasure of Jewishness that Saltman sees as occurring in a mid-1980s narrative suggests that in very recent literary history our comfort with the celebration of diversity, and particularly the insistence on difference, was still shaky.

Paul DePasquale and Doris Wolf can attest to this shakiness, too. Their annotated bibliography of Aboriginal-authored works is the only one of its kind. Because there are “no resources available on Canadian children’s literature specifically by Aboriginal authors,” they take up the task and offer in their introduction a capsule literary history of children’s literature in Canada. It’s depressing to see that mainstream publishers didn’t, on the whole, publish Aboriginal-authored works during the 1970s explosion of children’s literature that coincided with the entrenchment of multiculturalism and the celebration of diversity. DePasquale and Wolf quote Greg Young-Ing on the subject:

In the 1990s, with the exception of Thomas King, a Cherokee author residing primarily in Canada, all books by Aboriginal peoples have been published through small and independent presses. Not one other Aboriginal author has been published by a large Canadian publishing house while over a hundred books *about* Aboriginal peoples have already been published by large Canadian houses in the 1900s.

And lest we think that things have changed a lot, DePasquale and Wolf remind us that small presses continue to produce the majority of Aboriginal-authored narratives on this soil. What mainstream publishers have tended to produce has been the “white-washed” Native-related narrative told by non-Natives. This is the kind of perverse ventriloquism that feeds into the multi-voiced pluralistic mosaic in which, supposedly, we are all included.

We take a detour into the more remote past with Jean Stringam’s work to see another kind of ventriloquism at work in an earlier period in our literary history, as it relates to class rather than race or ethnicity. Stringam’s ongoing research into nineteenth-century British and American periodicals for youth reveals that the middle-class writers who tell the adventure tales seem to slip effortlessly into the perspective of working-class Canadian youths, detailing the sweaty labour and street smarts of their characters. As Stringam reveals, however, middle-class values tend to colour the portrayal of the working class so that any nobility the class gains through the romanticizing lens of the bourgeois writer is quickly compromised by the portrayal of working-class kids as dirty and subhuman as well as stupidly stoic in the face of death. More revealing is the misattribution of protectiveness of women to the working-class male. As Stringam points out, the middle-class fondness for cushioning women against the perils of reality has no place in a working-class economy where families can’t afford to have a blind angel in the house instead of a vigilant home economist. Stringam’s last paper, based on the same research into youth periodicals, argues interestingly that the adventure fiction should be regarded as a repository of late nineteenth-century ideology as well as a treasure trove of folktales that may be part of the oral tradition of our culture.

So, there you have the sweep and reach of this issue, stretching from the nineteenth century through to the twenty-first, investigating early colonial constructions of Canadians and late post-colonial constructions, and leaving in its wake so much for us to contemplate and investigate: the limits and possibilities of diversity, the meanings of tolerance and inclusion in the mythology of multiculturalism, the acceptance of Jewish but not Native tales into mainstream publishing, the political overtones of the sharing of metaphorical space among different peoples.

And this brings me back to our cover image. The Caribbean girl and the white girl share the same space and they seem to do so quite contentedly. But it’s the white girl who takes up more space in the image, who

assumes a more commanding posture, and who is taller. She is also in the left foreground of the image, the place usually occupied by characters with whom we are asked to identify or sympathize, or who are given special significance. She is nearer to us, and seemingly more important to us. But how can this be when the real story is about Meg, the Caribbean girl, and how she must let go of her fears and find the courage to fly in her newly-adopted country? Could it be that the mythology of multiculturalism includes a totalizing narrative of assimilation that recognizes but ultimately denies difference as important? The papers in this issue lead me to ask.

I'm still not finished with this image, because, finally, I have to say good-bye to *CCL*, and, yes, I thought the release of the bird nicely captured this sentimental moment. *CCL* is flying to the University of Winnipeg, as most of you know, after being at the University of Guelph for 30 years, where it was started in 1975 (see Mary Rubio's editorial in this issue). I have been with *CCL* for nearly half that time, and through the years I have seen the increasing sophistication of children's literature scholarship and must, therefore, thank our contributors for that. Your reviews and articles have kept us editors up many a late night, happily planning away because we were so excited by what you had to say. It's been a pleasure working with you.

My deepest thanks go to my colleagues who supported and encouraged my efforts. To Mary Rubio, the most generous human on the planet, Elizabeth Waterston, the fastest editor in the West, and François Paré, the kindest and most professional editor — thanks for taking me on and keeping me. To Daniel Chouinard, thanks for supporting me and for working so hard to bring money into the journal. To Barbara Conolly, thanks for your indefatigable humour; to Gay Christofides, thanks for loaning us your copious talents (you didn't have to); and thanks to Jill Leslie, who could clear-cut a path through the office and any conversation just to get the work done. And, finally, to Ben — thanks for your eagle eye and sharp tongue: they kept things from going blurry and boring.

And now, off we go, with the courage to fly into the future.

Marie C. Davis