

Editorial: Responses

"Reader response theory" constitutes one current critical approach to the study of literature. Critics are turning to the question of how we create our own version of a book as we read. Each book is viewed as a site for further creation, since each of us projects on to the story our own imaginative variations. Fantasy impels us into our own wish-fulfilling fantasies; character is transformed as we draw our own portraits of the fictional people presented to us; style emerges as we highlight elements of rhythm and tone which are meaningful and empowering to us.

This particular brand of criticism suggests a new concern when the responding reader is a child. The child's response to a "problem novel" of adolescence, for instance, differs from that of the adult who has already lived through comparable problems and responds to them retrospectively. The "Notes" section of this issue of *CCL* contains comments on occultism and feminism – two topics to which the child's response may be significantly affected by inappropriate choice of books. Another way that a child's response to inadequate literature may carry over into life is emphasized in Lucie Frechette's article on the weakness of children's books in portraying handicapped persons. More positively, childhood response to books may enhance creativity, as Rea Wilmshurst's analysis of L.M. Montgomery's early reading shows.

An entertaining stimulus for re-thinking the question of child response is *Children's choices of Canadian books* (Ottawa: Citizen's Committee on Children's Books, 1979, 1981, 1984). In a ranked listing and also in random quotations, children express their responses. "It had funny parts, sad parts and no boring parts. That makes it a good book", says one. Another, "It was everyday life which when written is very funny". "Bogey-men are scary and neat"; "Animals take the place of humans. I prefer humans"; "Boys might like this book because I don't and I'm a girl!"; and finally, "I like to read thick books".

Would *CCL* readers please report their response to a "thick" part of this issue? Our annual bibliography listing all books published in Canada in English and French in a single year is difficult to assemble and occupies an increasing amount of *CCL*'s restricted space. Is it valuable to you?