

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.

*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."

*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 elsewhere, 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 Vincent 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.

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'kmaq 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.

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.

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.

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 Springsteen 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.

*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 œuvre 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 vu 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 Dinosauré 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 portrait 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 Québécois 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.*

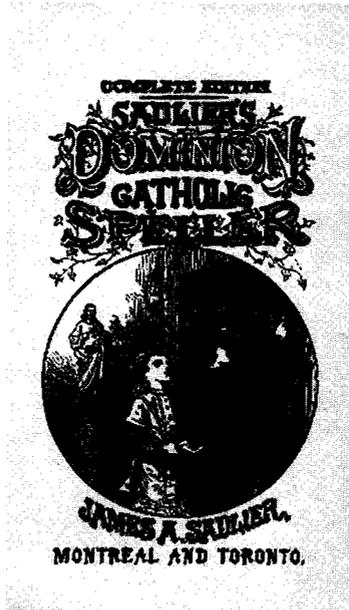
Suzanne Pouliot: Y a-t-il une littérature de jeunesse canadienne? Cette question me hante depuis longtemps. Voici de façon provisoire ma réponse.

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 attrait culturels, au sens anthropologique du terme, comme le hockey). Ce qui démarque la production littéraire franco-québécoise de la littérature anglo-canadienne, me semble-t-il, c'est le territoire symbolique circonscrit. L'imaginaire collectif se nourrit à 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 province, 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.

*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.

*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.

*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.

*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 Kaslsruhe 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**.*