fable: each tale is quite economical (if not as compact as Aesop's), features a limited cast of simply-typed characters, and skates its way rather deliberately to a portable moral.

I asked Treva, a former children's librarian who played basketball at university and who now plays soccer in a women's league, to read one. When she finished, she summarized: "In a word — predictable." And, then, after a pause: "Could be worse...." This reaction might be prompted by a great deal of sports writing. Games come with a predictable narrative: same time, same space, same rules, same objectives. If one hockey game is like the next hockey game is like the next hockey game, the hockey writer has to be especially adept in revealing the genius and surprise and nuance of any given game, season, or team.

As I read these books, I kept finding not the surprise but the trace of writer's guidelines for future volumes in the series. It would advise writers to start each book with the opening game of the season; place players in grades eight or nine; incorporate both a big and a small triumph; include meaningful issues — broken families, race, gender, athletic asthma, puberty ("I don't want to go shopping for bras," Alecia tells her mother, "spitting out the last word"); end with a lesson: after the boys in *Hockey Heroes* discover that their coach is a reformed NHL goon who almost killed an opponent, Coach Franklin pontificates, "I think maybe we're on our way to become a real team today, all of us." Look forward to next season.

Still, they could be worse. Formulaic they may be, but I wasn't tempted to immediately set them down. These stories have enough suspense and enough narration to keep even an adult reader interested. And I like the way they give some vague sense of Canadian locale: Vancouver in *Alecia's Challenge*; Winnipeg (even the Goldeyes) in *Shut-Out*; southern Alberta in *Rookie Season*. The grasp of game-specific terms is shaky (there are almost never "centres" in soccer), as is the representation of a thirteen-year-old's conversation and vocabulary. But, if these are the twenty-first-century replacement for *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*, then we could do worse.

If you have a daughter playing hockey or a nephew playing soccer, they will like reading the books about their own sport. They may not find them fabulous, but they will enjoy the fabular.

Laurie Ricou *has coached girls' soccer since 1979.*

Where's the Delight in Instruction?

Canadian Children's Books: A Critical Guide to Authors and Illustrators. Raymond E. Jones and Jon C. Stott. Oxford UP, 2000. 538 pp. $29.95 paper. ISBN 0-19541-222-2. ***From Reader to Writer: Teaching Writing Through Classic Children's Books***. Sarah Ellis. Groundwood, 2001. 176 pp. $18.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-440-0. ***The Gift of Reading***. David Bouchard with Wendy Sutton. Orca, 2001. 158 pp. $19.95 paper. ISBN 1-55143-214-5.

Stories are interesting. Analysis is interesting. Description can be interesting. Instruction is not interesting. These thoughts kept running through my mind as I

read *Canadian Children's Books*, *From Reader to Writer*, and *The Gift of Reading*. Though the three books reviewed here have little in common with each other, many of the memorable stories each author tells stick in my mind. Descriptions sometimes stick. Instructions do not stick.

Canadian Children's Books is not a book of instruction. It's a reference book, and a very useful one, a guide to 133 of the authors and illustrators who have contributed to the making of Canadian children's literature (I'll not play a game of who's here and who's not; it's a good collection). Each entry contains a biographical profile (dates, residences, education, career, and awards), a list of works (for children and "others"), and of works about the subject. This preliminary material is just listed for quick reference. It's followed by a longish essay of two to three pages per entry. The authors, Raymond E. Jones and Jon C. Stott, describe each essay as providing "an overview of the individual's career; an introduction to major themes, character types, and techniques, and a more detailed look at major works" (xi). What that means is that the essays are primarily formalist and descriptive but enriched by glimpses of the analytical insights of the knowledgeable and sensitive authors, both of whom have worked in the study of Canadian children's literature for a long time. So author Sarah Ellis (whose book I'll discuss next) is introduced with a reference to a remark she made to an interviewer about being "endlessly fascinated with the subject of family" (112). That's a helpful hint for someone interested in studying her work and pursuing some of its motivating features.

Canadian Children's Books offers a good start on a canonical list of Canadian authors and illustrators. I know it will be a book I will use a lot, and one to which I'll happily direct students in my children's literature classes. Until now it has been difficult for students (unused to negotiating research tools) to access information about Canadian children's literature. I've usually sent them to *Modern Canadian Children's Books* by Judith Saltman (Oxford, 1987) — and I'll confess I was a little sorry not to see it listed in the otherwise very good appendix of "some sources for further study." One other comment: there are minor proofreading errors, some of which I'm sure the authors have already caught, so I'll only say that for the next edition, I'd like to see the listing for Bernice — not Bernie — Thurman Hunter.

From Reader to Writer is my favourite of the three books reviewed here. It's by Sarah Ellis, gifted author and critic. She is, as I'd known, an eager and attentive reader, always tuned to the memorable story. In this eloquent book, Ellis gathers anecdotes about the lives of authors as young writers. Here is C.S. Lewis as a lonely young boy creating communities of his own and the boy Lewis Carroll doing magic tricks for his family. Jean Little as a five-year-old is entranced with retellings of her life story. Beatrix Potter writes letters to amuse a sick child and creates the character of Peter Rabbit. Some of the stories Ellis tells are well known; others aren't. Each story is a catalyst for a creative-writing exercise. Ellis includes a "read-aloud" excerpt from each author's work, a peek at his or her favourite books, and a list of similar books that might be of interest. All of this is wonderful: memorable stories, informed analysis, but....

Someone must have told Ellis that teachers need more direct instruction. I don't know who in the world of educational publishing decides this, but direct instruction now appears like a nervous tic in an alarming number of books marketed to teachers. Cordoned off from the stories told in Ellis's eloquent prose are "teacher tips." And just in case a teacher misses them, they're marked not with an asterisk or a star but a nauseatingly cute apple sitting in what looks like a halo. It must be a

symbol in someone's computer program — an alternative to the happy face. The "teacher tips" are followed by annoyingly patronizing sound bites. At the end of the Susan Cooper section, for example, the reader is given the inane comment that "Susan Cooper's language flows beautifully. She is a pleasure to read aloud and appeals to grades six to nine" (81). Instruction is really, really not interesting.

The third book, *The Gift of Reading*, looks like a book of instruction. In fact, that banner headline at the top of the cover, above the photograph of author David Bouchard and above the title, reads "A Guide for Educators and Parents." Despite looking like yet another guide — on how to create literate children and make the world a better place — Bouchard's stories are very moving. The irony is that they are often sad stories of how schooled strategies for literacy instruction fail. His initial description of his own reading history (school success but no literate behaviour — and probably a slight memory-related handicap) is a telling commentary on the failure of instruction. Bouchard's story of his son's failures at school is even more telling: school remediation focused on his son's weaknesses instead of his strengths and put him off school completely. These stories along with other anecdotal moments are the highlights of the book. The teacher tips and the lists of instructions (about turning off the television and organizing reading time) are not memorable. I found it difficult to concentrate, so I had to keep reminding myself that this book does offer a one-stop shopping approach to all the literature-based literacy strategies that have been accumulating successfully over the years. The fine introduction by David Booth (who has, of course, been a champion of literacy education through literature for decades) reminds me of the need to keep telling stories about the value of stories.

Still, there is something discordant in the relations between instructions and stories in the book. Because *The Gift of Reading* is set up as an instruction book, it ought to have one of the principle keys to any resource guide: an index. This book doesn't have one, so it is awkward to use. There is no way to cross-reference books. Which might be just as well, because there are proofreading errors here too. Michele Landsberg's name is not spelled correctly (Michele has one 'l' in her name, not two), and I suspect that he intends to refer readers to her *Guide to Children's Books*, though that is not the title he gives. Proofreading errors are relatively easy to fix. The tension between instruction and storytelling is not.

Bouchard eloquently tells us in his stories that there are no simple solutions to the complex problems of literacy education. With his colleague Wendy Sutton (with whom he wrote the book), he offers moving vignettes about successes and failures. As both authors have dedicated their careers to teaching children to be literate, their stories are unmistakably real and powerful. But their memorable stories are awkwardly blurred through the Vaseline lens of off-putting, patronizing, instructional prose. Stories tell the story. Instructions don't.

A final instruction to educational publishers: trust the intelligence and integrity of readers.

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