Editorial: Where We've Come From, Where We Are Now, Where We're Going

—Perry Nodelman

This issue marks a new beginning for *CCL/LCJ.* After a thirty-year association with the University of Guelph, the journal now moves to the University of Winnipeg, with an assurance of ongoing support from the University's Dean of Humanities, Neil Besner, its Vice-President (Academic), Research and Graduate Studies, Alaa Abd-El-Aziz, and the Chairs of its English Department and Modern Languages and Literatures, Mark Fortier and Kenneth Meadwell. A large group of University of Winnipeg faculty involved in the study of texts of children form a new editorial team: me as Editor, Mavis Reimer of the English Department and Anne Rusnak of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures as Associate Editors, and an Editorial Board that includes Andrew O'Malley, Paul dePasquale, and Deborah Schnitzer of the English Department, and Kenneth Meadwell of the department of Modern Languages and Literatures. There is also a new *CCL/LCJ* Adminstrator housed at the University of Winnipeg, the capable Ben MacPhee-Sigurdson, and a revitalized and enthusiastic group of Contributing Editors from across Canada and elsewhere. We have a new office, a new format for the journal, and a renewed commitment to fostering research in all aspects of Canadian and Québécois children's literature and culture in English and in French. Before we leap bravely into what looks to be an exciting future, it seems like a good time to stand back a little and take stock.

In 1975, when John Sorfleet, Mary Rubio, Glenys Stow, and Elizabeth Waterston took the wonderfully brave but, I have to say, somewhat quixotic step of founding *CCL/LCJ*, there wasn't all that much of the kind of literature the journal promised to devote itself to. In the preface to the second edition of her guide to writing for children in Canada, *The Republic of Childhood,* published the same year as *CCL/LCJ* began, Sheila Egoff made the depressing but true observation that, "Although there has been a sharp increase in the production of Canadian literature for

adults, there has been no corresponding increase in books for children" (1-3). Indeed, Egoff could find no more than thirty to forty books that could be identified as Canadian children's literature being published each year from the fifties onward (11). Nevertheless, she identified the founding of *CCL/LCJ*, which would "presumably do for children's writing what *Canadian Literature* has done for its adult counterpart" (2), as a sign of growth about to happen. And in an editorial in the first issue, John Sorfleet echoed the idea that *CCL/LCJ* might help create Canadian children's literature as well as investigate it: "We intend to participate in the continuing growth of Canadian children's literature while providing an essential commentary on its development as a whole" (6).

The idea that a critical journal might play a part in engendering what it studies—a sort of scholarly Dr. Frankenstein in the act of making the monster its research focuses on—might not be so absurd as it first seems. Speaking of the marketplace of literary research and interpretation as a very serious sort of game, Pierre Bourdieu says:

> …the work is indeed made not twice, but a hundred times, by all those who are interested in it, who find a material or symbolic profit in reading it, classifying it, deciphering it, commenting on it, combating it, knowing it, possessing it. Enrichment accompanies ageing when the work manages to enter the game, when it becomes a stake in the game and so incorporates some of the energy produced in the struggle of which it is the object. The struggle, which sends the work into the past, is also what ensures it a form of survival; lifting it from the state of a dead letter, a mere thing subject to ordinary laws of ageing, the struggle at least ensures it has the sad eternity of academic debate. (111)

If it's the sad eternal game of literary criticism that keeps older texts alive and powerful, it's not much of a stretch to suggest that a journal like *CCL/LCJ* may have played a role in the development of a viable and significant new body of Canadian children's literature—that we literary scholars helped to create Canadian children's literature, that merely by talking about it, we encouraged writers and publishers to give us something to talk about. If we did, it was a good thing, a noble thing, a thing of benefit to child readers as well as game-playing academics looking for something tenure-worthy to write an article about, and I hope we will keep on doing it.

Even so, *CCL/LCJ* has not been the only factor in the development of Canadian children's literature in the past thirty years. As Robert Lecker suggests, the Canadian publishing industry generally "had its origins in the post-Massey Commission emphasis on the importance of developing an indigenous publishing culture that could support and disseminate national

value," and a viable children's publishing industry came into being in this country due in large part to government funding agencies, which for many decades supported writers in their writing, publishers in their publishing, and libraries and other institutional purchasers in their purchasing. The significant decline in this sort of funding by all levels of government in recent years has had as negative an impact on Canadian children's literature as they earlier had a positive one. According to Rowland Lorimer, for instance, "In two years, 1997 and 1998, the publishing industry lost half its federal grants—cuts everywhere were the order of the day—and, the only credible political alternative were deeper cuts promised by Preston Manning and put in place by various provincial governments, Ontario and Alberta in particular." Nevertheless, almost a decade later, there still is a publishing industry. There are children's publishers in Canada. Children's books do get published, in much wider quantities than they did before 1975. *CCL/LCJ* came into existence just at the point when there was beginning to be a substantial body of material for it to investigate.

Which might account for why I, of all people, am here, writing, of all things, an editorial. When I started teaching university courses in children's literature at about the same time *CCL/LCJ* was starting, I could never have imagined myself as the *CCL/LCJ* Editor. I blush to admit it, but I was a snob about Canadian children's literature. I thought it was, universally and without exception, awful. I suppose I could be accused of what once used to be a pretty common Canadian syndrome, the idea that we in this cold country of losers—those who ended up as residents of something called Canada as a result of lost battles, those who came here from somewhere else where they weren't doing well enough to stay—are just a bunch of boring second-raters, with our imaginations chilled into inactivity and our brains on hold, and so, not surprisingly, all the good stuff comes from somewhere else. Usually New York. Sometimes London. Anywhere but here.

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In 1975, at any rate, I thought Canadian children's literature was pretty awful. On the basis of my admittedly limited reading in it, it seemed to me as if Canadian publishers operated on the theory that there was no way of competing with the many and, indubitably, better American and British books easily available to Canadian purchasers. In order to be viable in a competitive marketplace, I concluded,

a Canadian book had to be so obviously Canadian that it exuded an invisible aura of maple syrup and earnestness.

I thought that simply because the Canadian books I knew tended to be ever so earnest. Few smiles ever got cracked. The books were most often nostalgic evocations of a less urban past, about life in the deep woods or the frozen north or on the bleak open prairies—anywhere the climate was harsh and the men and boys were brave and humourless and the females in the background. Alternately, they might put the right sort of females up front and centre—in, say, the peaceful and blissfully old-fashioned countryside of places like Avonlea, where temperamental redhead girls could create their own ever-so-minimally wild adventures, smiling a little, perhaps, but ever so earnest also. There was little I knew that represented the contemporary urban and suburban lives of most Canadian children (for Canada has always been largely a country of cities surrounded by vast empty spaces). Presumably, I supposed, life in the centre of Toronto or the suburbs of Winnipeg was not much different from life in their American equivalents, and books set there would have to compete with American ones about young people in Cleveland and Chicago—so maybe that's why such books didn't seem to exist?

There was also little comedy, and almost no fantasy. That seemed logical, too, for how could Canadians be un-selfconscious and un-solemn enough to be funny, and how could an imaginary world be different enough from the imaginary worlds invented by C.S. Lewis or Frank L. Baum to be distinctly and marketably Canadian? There were many versions of tales from Canadian Aboriginal cultures, very distinctly Canadian, therefore, and yet all reshaped into recognizably European story forms by authors of European descent—and there were few if any versions of stories from the European traditions that most Canadians then descended from. In novels, there were lots of distinctly Canadian and distinctly stereotyped savage or noble Indians, all imagined by non-aboriginal authors, and lots of free-spirited and terminally lazy French Canadians, all imagined by earnest English Canadians. (Of Canadian children's literature in French I knew nothing.) As I knew it, Canadian children's literature pre-1975 seriously misrepresented the nature of many Canadian childhoods. I didn't like it. I avoided reading it as much as possible.

I know enough, these days, to see that as a mistake. Articles I've read in *CCL/LCJ* and elsewhere since then reveal that there were at least a few other kinds of texts being written in the years before 1975, and that there are other more interesting ways of understanding even the texts I dismissed so completely. And, indeed, I'm hoping that the new *CCL/LCJ* editorial team will be able to attract reports of research that reveals yet more of what I once knew so little

about, and make me feel even more guilty for dismissing it so easily.

Nevertheless, the first issue of *CCL/LCJ* does seem to confirm some of my old prejudices. It contains an article on the bush adventures of R.M. Ballantyne and reviews of two of Farley Mowat's adventure stories in the same tradition. There are also reviews of Ann Blades's *Mary of Mile 18* and *Boy of Taché*, also set in wild places, and even of some field guides to wildflowers. There are also reviews of the non-aboriginal Doris Anderson's versions of stories of the Haida and of the non-aboriginal Claude Aubry's novel about the Iroquois, *Agouhanna*. There's even a review of a book about a lax Frenchman, Lynn Cook's *Jolly Jean Pierre*.

But there are also signs of different things about to come. There are reviews of Dennis Lee's first two volumes of exuberantly comic poems for city-dwelling children, aggressively and impudently filled with the names of Toronto and other Canadian locations, and of *Adventure in Moon Bay Towers*, a fantasy novel by Marian Engel which the reviewer Sylvia Du Vernet saw as "an overzealous attempt to build too rapidly a body of Canadian children's fiction" (67). I suspect Engel just thought she was writing a book, thank you, not signing on for an institutional building project. But never mind—the building was beginning to happen anyway.

The Lee poems in particular were a good sign. While modelled on traditional children's poems by writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and Mother Goose, they sounded up-to-date. They were urban. They were funny. They were energetic, and anything but earnest. My own first contribution to *CCL/LCJ*, in 1978, was an admiring article about them. I wrote other articles also in those early years, about Lee again, and about texts like Mordecai Richler's *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, which seemed to stand out from the usual Canadian wilderness blandness. But I continued to see those texts as exceptions.

I can identify exactly when my attitude to Canadian children's literature changed. It was 1984—the year Brian Doyle's *Angel Square* was first published. It was nostalgic, for sure—set in Ottawa at the end of Word War II and deeply evocative of its time and place. But the place was urban, and the novel told its inventive and daring story about violence and tolerance in an exuberantly brave style that played imaginative games with both reality and language. Unlike the Lee poems and *Jacob Two-Two*, furthermore, it was unconventional, different from any other text for children (or for that matter, for adults) I'd ever read, even while admirably fulfilling the conventions that identify a text as being intended for children. It was a *tour de force*. On the evidence of Canadian children's literature as I knew it up to then, it was decidedly un-Canadian. But if a Canadian writer could publish a

book this unsettlingly strange and wonderful and get it published in Canada by a Canadian publisher, then a viable and distinctly Canadian children's literature might finally be possible after all.

And so it was. Groundwood, publisher of *Angel Square*, was beginning to publish all kinds of interesting new writing for children and young adults—and it continues to do so even now. It was just one of a growing body of Canadian businesses devoted to publishing books specifically for young people—KidsCan, Annick, Tundra, and Red Deer among them. Some of these books, like *Angel Square*, were feisty and original and distinctive. But the really significant thing, I've come to understand as I've grown older and, inevitably, wiser, is that many of them were not.

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The problem with Canadian children's literature before 1975 as I knew it was not that it lacked distinctive texts—it was just the opposite. Back then, it seemed, all the texts had to be distinctly Canadian in order to be marketable. What was missing was the vast body of undistinctive texts, the perfectly conventional books that neither particularly distress nor excite adult purchasers or child readers, and that sustain a publishing industry that can then have the economic security to permit itself to publish some truly original, truly distinctive books. The bland, the conventional, the ordinary books that satisfy the ordinary and usual demands of the marketplace—these are the medium in which less usual and potentially more interesting books can come into existence. The major achievement of the children's publishing industry that has developed in Canada over the past three decades is that it has managed to publish so many perfectly ordinary, perfectly conventional books about so many perfectly ordinary, perfectly conventional North American (as opposed to distinctly Canadian) children—children who might as well live in Cleveland but who appear in books published (and often set) in Toronto. An amazingly vast body of texts has come into existence—some of them really bad (and still, I fear, earnest and frequently nostalgic for the woods and the wilds), many of them merely adequate, and as a result, I believe, a surprising number of them absolutely terrific.

There has been much, then, for *CCL/LCJ* to investigate—not only what makes the terrific books terrific,

but just as important, what cultural and economic forces make the adequate ones so desirable to so many adults and children, so ideologically powerful and monetarily valuable. Since my *Angel Square* conversion experience, I've been pleased to play my part in investigating these matters—pleased enough to continue reading and thinking about Canadian texts, reporting on my research into them in *CCL/LCJ*, and, now, as Editor, doing what I can to ensure that *CCL/LCJ* continues into the future.

Assuming, of course, there will be one. As Margaret Mackey reveals in her article in this issue, there are lots of reasons to be pessimistic about that. With cutbacks in government funding of both publishers and of the schools who buy most children's books, with the erosion of independent bookstores, with the narrowing output of large publishing firms increasingly in the hands of multinational corporations and increasingly focused on what's most obviously profitable, with the ongoing development of competing media technologies and the decreasing interest of children (boys in particular) in reading book-bound text, there's a good chance that children's publishing will cease to be economically viable. Children's literature might cease to exist, and not just in Canada. It seems like a important moment in which to consider where we are now. Are there signs of impending extinction? Is there anything less depressing happening?

As it happens, I'm in an excellent position to comment on these matters. As Editor of *CCL/LCJ* in 2003, Marie Davis gave me the assignment of reviewing most of the picture books published in Canada in recent years—my review of eighty of those books appears in *CCL/LCJ* 111/112 (Fall–Winter 2003) and of forty more in *CCL/LCJ* 113–114 (Spring–Summer 2004). Then, in 2004, the Canada Council invited me to join the writers Joan Clark and David Bouchard on the jury for one of the awards it administers, the Governor General's Award for Children's Literature for Text in English, and I spent my summer reading the books that publishers submitted to be considered for the award. Together, these two projects acquainted me with a large proportion of the texts for children published in Canada in the recent past. Since I've already written about the picture books, I'll focus here on the books submitted for the award. What might they reveal about the state of Canadian children's literature today?

First, it is still alive, and it's still pretty healthy. Publishers submitted 185 books to be considered for the Governor General's English text award in 2004—and as data available on the Canada Council website reveals, that's a few more than have been submitted in recent years (171 in 2001, 173 in 2002, 179 in 2003). Another 2004 jury considered 75 picture books—a significant decline from 89 in 2003 and 101 in 2002, but still quite a respectable number

of books.

I hasten to add, however, that the numbers are a little inflated. The totals for the different awards sometimes include the same books, since their publishers chose to submit them for both awards.[1] It seems like a goodly amount, especially considering that the Canada Council advises publishers "that the award is for literary and artistic excellence; they should submit only books that they deem to be outstanding in these regards" (2005 Program Information). There must surely be the occasional publisher either brave enough to risk incurring the wrath of their authors by not submitting books they chose to publish without believing them to be outstanding, or, more likely, forgetful enough to not get around to it. The many books submitted for the award are not necessarily all the children's books being published.

But my optimism about the health of the English-language publishing industry pales when I notice that the jury for the French text award in 2004 looked at 179 books and the one for the French illustration award 96. The significantly smaller Francophone community of Canada had access to almost exactly as many Canadian books for children as did the much larger Anglophone group.

That surprises me, mainly due to my unforgivable ignorance as a specialist in Canadian children's literature of Canadian and Québécois children's publishing in French, which led me to expect many fewer books. One of my commitments as *CCL/LCJ* Editor is to try to make all of our readers more aware of the French scene by publishing a lot more about it.

Nevertheless, it's not illogical that there should be proportionately so many fewer Canadian children's books being published in English. For all the distance the Canadian children's publishing industry has come, the major factor it has to deal with is still the easy availability in Canada of books from elsewhere, especially the U.S. There are fewer English books than French ones because English-Canadian children also have access to so many books by Americans that they can (and do) choose to read as mirroring or offering some insight into their own lives. And, indeed, an English-Canadian childhood tends to be a lot more like an American one than is a French-Canadian childhood, located as the latter is not only in a different language but also, as a result of the disconnection caused by language, in a significantly different culture.

As I suggested earlier, it once seemed that English-language publishers dealt with the presence of so many non-Canadian books by focusing mainly on the aggressively Canadian books that could find a niche specifically in the Canadian marketplace. But a few years back, an editor for an important Canadian publisher of texts for children told me that it was no longer economically viable to publish exclusively for the Canadian market. Nowadays the main prod-

ucts of Canadian children's publishers are books so unspecifically Canadian that they can easily take advantage of the lessened trade restrictions of NAFTA and attempt to compete in the larger North American marketplace as a whole. Indeed, just about all the books I read for the award listed the publishers as having two addresses, one in Canada and one in the States. These publishers clearly hoped they had produced something sellable to Americans as well as Canadians.

In order to market beyond the Canadian border, the publishers had to make sure their books weren't distinctly Canadian—for as Canadians know from too many weird conversations with uncomprehending people from south of the border, many Americans are unaware of distinctions between our two countries and couldn't care less about what it feels like to live in Winnipeg or St. John's, except insofar as living in Winnipeg or St. John's is like living in Kalamazoo. (There are, of course, many honourable exceptions—among them Nancy Huse, an American scholar whose comparison of Scholastic Canada's Dear Canada series with its American parent company's Dear America series appears in this issue.) So what besides specifying place names and the occasional poutine or blizzard might be being left out?

Asked about what makes Canadians Canadian, my students inevitably offer comparisons of Canadians to Americans. It seems they tend to share the view of "Joe Canadian" in that beer commercial of a few years back that Canadians are best defined as being not American, and always in the most flattering of ways—nicer, more polite, more charitable, and more tolerant of cultural difference. As Joe says:

> I have a Prime Minister, not a President
> I speak English and French, not American
> . . . .
> I believe in peacekeeping, not policing,
> diversity, not assimilation,
> and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal.

It seems logical, then, to suspect that Canadian publishers would represent views like Joe's in their books at their economic peril.

And, in fact, the Governor General's submissions do overwhelmingly support peacekeeping and diversity (they're relatively unconcerned about the beaver). Many of the books describe culturally diverse groups of theoretically weaker people banding together to defeat theoretically more powerful individuals. Indeed, there's an obsession with bullies in these books. I counted at least thirty of them—about a sixth of the total and almost a third of all the novels submitted—that deal centrally with bad guys, most often white males of European descent, who bully artistic children or Chinese children or bookish

children until the bad guys get their just desserts. It sounds like the Canadian Legion of Un-Superheros triumphing over Captain America. Does George Bush know of this sneaky effort by Canadians to infiltrate and undermine the American vision of might makes right and individual rights above all?

Well, if he did, he'd probably approve of it. These are books for children. Their expression of these theoretically Canadian values aligns them with the most conventional values of children's literature internationally and supports the assumptions about what children like and/or need most commonly held by the teachers and librarians (like, for example, Laura Bush in her pre-First Lady job), who do most of the purchasing of children's books in both the U.S. and Canada. These adult professionals clearly believe that bullies are a big issue in childhood—that, indeed, as the many similarly aggressive villains in these books suggest, a lot of young people like to be bullies and need to be restrained or reformed—at the cost, apparently, of their continuing to share the views of Republican American adults about the right of strong individuals to aggressively pursue their dreams of triumphing over those who prove to be weaker than themselves. That contradiction merely reveals how ideological all of this is, how much adults tend to act on their utopian assumptions about childhood without consideration of their implications. Or it might be that all these supposedly anti-bullying books nevertheless express a more hidden but more powerful message about the inevitability and power of bullying, and the need for young people to develop bullying skills in order to bully bullies (something that did seem to happen a lot in these books).

At any rate, as I did my reading of book after similar book about the downfall of a bully last summer, I found myself evilly imagining a truly unique novel, a story in which the bully's aggressive hatred of some insufferable goody-goodies was perfectly justified, and in which readers would be invited to cheer when he (it would have to be he to make it truly counter-cultural) got away with it. A book like that is unpublishable. The world of children's literature may represent prejudice and aggression—indeed, it almost always does. But it views them from a clear and unquestioned position of disapproval.

So in America, apparently, it's good for adults to be bullies—at least if you do it in the name of "freedom" against weaker nations like Iraq which have stuff you want and which you can therefore safely think of as evil—but bad for children to do so. The underlying message here is that adults have the ability to know better than children what children ought to do or be, and the power to impose that vision of childhood on children even when (or, if Jacqueline Rose's ideas about why adults produce children's literature are just, even because) it contradicts what they allow for themselves. Viewed negatively, children's literature

generally represents an effort by adult writers, publishers, booksellers, librarians, teachers, and parents to impose adult ideas about a safely constrained childhood on children. The Governor General submissions represent that effort in a variety of ways.

As in Sharon McKay's *Esther*, a book exuberantly engaging enough to warrant a short-list nomination but with serious flaws nevertheless. It offers a brutally clear vision of good and evil, with nasty, ungrammatical, and conventionally ugly bad guys and good guys who speak correctly, look gorgeous, and would never purposely hurt a fly. McKay's gorgeous heroine is constantly under attack by a catalogue of villains whose obesity and bad complexions apparently mark them as inevitably hateful.

The submitted novels also often engage readers by offering them a first-person focalized character with views presumed to be childlike or adolescent like their own—someone they can empathize with—and then having that character experience events that lead to a revision of attitude and acceptance of a supposedly more mature viewpoint. In many of the books, furthermore—in, to name a few, Kristin Butcher's *Zee's Way*, Ann Laurel Carter's *Last Chance Bay*, Tanya Lloyd Kyi's *Truth*, Shelley Hrdlitschka's *Kat's Fall*, and Eric Walters's *Overdrive*—there are adult characters, teachers or counsellors or other adult professionals like their authors, who are ineffably wise and there to show the way. A particular egregious version of this sort of adult self-flattery is Troy Wilson's picture book *Perfect Man*, in which a boy believes that his new teacher is actually the missing superhero he adores, in disguise. The boy turns out to be at least symbolically correct, for the teacher inspires him to be a successful writer, his life joyfully transformed by the ever-so-perfect teacher. I'd be surprised if this book didn't find its way into quite a few classroom libraries on both sides of the border.

Also likely to find their way there are a number of books that support popular curricular concerns—for what the curricula of states with large populations mandate is what libraries most urgently need to stock and economically savvy publishers therefore most like to publish. The Governor General's submissions, therefore, include a number of texts of historical fiction that deal with frequently studied periods of history: the Jewish experience of Word War II in Lynne Kositsky's *The Thought of High Windows* and Martha Attema's *Hero*, the experience of immigrants coming to North America in Frieda Wishinsky's *Just Call Me Joe* and Sally Fitz-Gibbon's *Lizzie's Storm*. Wishinky's novel brings a boy from the dangerous pogroms of eastern Europe to a new beginning in New York, Fitzgibbon's (in a series called New Beginnings) a girl from the polite certainties of England to a new beginning on a dust-blown farm in North Dakota. Nor is it surprising that these books published in Canada by Canadian authors don't involve

immigration to Toronto or Manitoba. The Canadian Carol Matas's *Play Ball!* is set in Chicago, the Canadian Marnelle Tokio's *More than You Can Chew* in San Diego, the Canadian Gordon Korman's *Son of the Mob 2* in Los Angeles. There are also a number of historical novels set in places with no specific Canadian relevance: medieval Africa (Karleen Bradford's *Angeline*), Armenia in the 1909 famine (Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch's *Nobody's Child*), Renaissance England (Eileen Kernaghan's *The Alchemist's Daughter*), Renaissance Italy (K.C. Dyer's *Secret of Light*, whose contemporary Canadian heroine travels back in time and, I kid you not, teaches that nasty but fairly talented male chauvinist Leonardo da Vinci the right way to treat women and draw well).

Also clearly useful in educational settings (and unclearly Canadian) are a series of five short novels by Susan Hughes about children working with and learning about *Bunnies in Trouble* and other endangered animals, and a number of books dealing with hot international issues teachers would like their students to know more about. Both Deborah Ellis's *The Heaven Shop* and Allan Stratton's *Chanda's Secrets* are novels about the AIDS epidemic in Africa, and Ellis is also the compiler of *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*. The largest group of novels with a recognizable educational purpose consisted of medicinal tomes about young people learning to deal with (and usually triumphing over) one clearly identifiable problem—texts clearly meant to be prescribed to readers with the equivalent problem, be it an eating disorder (Tokio's *More Than You Can Chew*), a tendency to vandalism (Kristin Butcher's *Zee's Way*), accusations of sexual abuse (Shelley Hrdlitschka's *Kat's Fall*), 'roid rage from overuse of steroids (Tanya Lloyd Kyi's *Truth*), auto theft (Shirley Smith Matheson's *Fastback Beach*), blindness (Sylvia McNicoll's *A Different Kind of Beauty*), teenage parenthood (Sylvia Olsen's *The Girl with a Baby*), homelessness (David Poulsen's *Last Sam's Cage*), or drunk driving (Diane Tullson's *Blue Highway*)—not to mention the usual acne- or lust-related forms of angst found in many of these and other books.

But I suspect that the largest influence of the American marketplace is simply that it is a marketplace—and that success is unlikely within it for any text that diverges from the values and the culture that the marketplace so successfully encourages in its consumers in order to sustain itself. A book that somehow recommended against feeling good abut yourself in ways that might discourage you from buying things to indulge yourself would probably feel un-American enough (or merely undemocratic enough) to be unsuccessful in, I fear, Canada as well as the States. And for all the fuss about ecological thinking and not hitting people or stealing things, I can't say I noticed any books that rocked that particular boat in any obvious way. Youngsters who started recycling

or stopped hitting almost always seemed to end up being rewarded or rewarding themselves with a gift or a purchase.

All in all, in fact, most of the Canadian books I read represent the sort of safe blandness that the American illustrator Barry Moser suggests is typical of books for young people currently being published in the U.S.:

> If a book cannot be expected to make money because of its subject matter, let's say death or racism, then it will, given my own experience, not be published. Nor will books that fly in the ideological face of the ever-increasing religious right. And I suspect—given the current madness regarding myopic, flag-wrapping patriotism and the perceived sin of dissent—neither will books dealing with revolution or standing up to authority. Avoiding the difficult makes book publishing a cowardly business. It does not lead. It does not set the standard. It merely follows the path of least resistance and the one that accrues the most dividends.…Until there is a reversal of core values in the industry, which is to say a return to an industry that recognizes its responsibility to educating the public taste and to publishing things of lasting value—and not to pandering to the lowest intellectual and artistic denominators and the bottom line—the industry will eventually run itself into the mire of mediocrity and schlock.

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I have to acknowledge that Canadian publishers ended up producing a lot of mediocrity and schlock that might as well have been produced in the U.S..

On the other hand, I'm happy to report that there were a number of books that stood out from the generally bland and indistinctly Canadian lot. They did so in two ways.

First, there were a number of books that, rather than trying to compete with U.S. books in the U.S. market, continued to represent the more traditional publishing stratagem of being so distinctly Canadian that there are no American equivalents to compete with them here in Canada. There were, for instance, some representatives of the Dear Canada books, the series of fictional journals from Scholastic Canada about young girls living in significant moments of Canadian history. As I suggested earlier, Nancy Huse discusses the ways in which they do and don't parallel the publishers' American head office series of Dear America journals. One of the Dear Canadas, Gillian Chan's *An Ocean Apart*, is as evocative and as convincing in its refusal of neatly

happy endings as any of the books submitted. There were also books about the Canadian national anthem and the Canadian flag and biographies of Canadian pop stars and Canadian inventors. There was even an attempt to be funny about Canadian history in the *1066 and All That* style, Joanne Stanbridge's *Famous Dead Canadians*—which sadly confirms old prejudices about the dullness of Canadian history by not being very funny. The funniest book submitted was Sylvia Pecota's *Hockey Across Canada*, an unintentionally hilarious picture book which reads like a satire on the Canadian identity. Each spread shows a different child playing hockey in a different Canadian province. Each province is represented by an iconic and usually rural and empty landscape—mountains in B.C., flat farmlands in Manitoba—and the children are desperately multicultural. The First Nations ones even wear their traditional garb as they slap at the puck. My favorite is a spunky redheaded lass in P.E.I. dressed up like Anne of Green Gables with a hockey stick.

A few authors cleverly managed to insert Canadian content into fantasy novels that might well be read by Americans without any need to be aware of it. Duncan Thornton's *The Star-Glass* offers a fantasy world that sounds very much like Canada in the years of the fur trade and operates as an allegory of immigration and multiculturalism. So too, a little more obviously, does O.R. Melling's *The Book of Dreams*, a sort of fantasy casserole involving Norse gods and divine beings and spirits indiscriminately borrowed from various Eastern religions and Canadian Aboriginal traditions, all banding together to help a girl whose background is half-fairy and half-Canadian to save the world for goodness and muticulturalism and the Canadian way. This long novel, written in a style distressingly reminiscent of Harlequin Romances, was the bane of my summer. There were times when I thought it would never end. Even now I'm not sure it ever did.

The second group of distinctive books, less specifically Canadian, were distinctive simply by virtue of their refreshing lack of mediocrity and schlock. They were just good books, period. There was Dennis Lee still being clever, subtle, and refreshingly honest all these years after my early *CCL/LCJ* articles in *So Cool*, a new collection of poems about adolescent angst and sexual desire. There was Robert Munsch still being rambunctious and hilarious in *Smelly Socks*, yet another brilliant picture book about children and chaos. There was Maureen Hull's *Rainy Days with Bear*, an apparently conventional picture book that suddenly changes direction in a charmingly unexpected way, and Ange Zhang's *Red Land Yellow River*, an autobiographical picture book about a visual artist's childhood during the cultural revolution in China with a text as suggestive and accomplished as its pictures. There were not one but two

understated and imaginatively resonant fairy tales by Judd Palmer, *The Wolf King* and *The Sorcerer's Last Word*, each in its own beautifully designed and typeset book. There was the convincingly crow-like crow narrator of Clem Martini's *The Mob*, announced as the first volume of Feather and Bone: The Crow Chronicles, and the convincingly batty but apparently human narrator of Polly Horvath's *The Pepins and Their Problems*, who psychically fathoms and responds to readers' questions and their suggestions for what ought to happen next. There was Martine Leavitt's astonishingly good young adult novel, *Heck Superhero*, which unobtrusively manages to turn the motifs of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* into an evocative story about the life lived on the streets of Calgary by a sad young narrator-protagonist with an attractively unusual imagination and a unique voice. There were engaging novels like Chan's *An Ocean Apart* and Korman's *Son of the Mob 2* and Alan Cumyn's *After Sylvia*, and engaging picture books like Elisa Amado's *Cousins* and Margaret Atwood's *Bashful Bob and Doleful Dorinda*.

Above all, there was the novel David Bouchard, Joan Clark and I chose to win the award. Not surprisingly, each of us championed books that the others had no use for. But from the moment our meeting began, there was never any question about which book we all thought should (and eventually did) win: Kevin Oppel's intricately imagined, stylishly written, and terrifically entertaining *Airborn*, a fantasy set in a Jules Verne-like world of airship travel and pirates and strange new species—a truly distinctive and distinguished novel.

There weren't very many such distinctive books—maybe just fifteen or twenty of the 185. But fifteen or twenty non-mediocre books in just one year is not bad, not bad at all, really, especially when you consider how very intensely non-mediocre so many of them are. And it's fifteen or twenty more than I thought Canadians managed to produce in my own childhood. That makes me happy. It also makes me optimistic about a healthy future for Canadian children's publishing.

And it makes me confident that we here at *CCL/LCJ* will have lots of interesting new things to think about and write about for some time to come. In a forthcoming issue, I'll say a few things about how we're doing that—where we've been and where we are and where we're going in the criticism of Canadian children's literature. Meanwhile, I'd like to thank Mary Rubio, Marie Davis, and the other *CCL/LCJ* editors who've managed to create and sustain a field of Canadian children's literature criticism over the past three decades, and welcome *CCL/LCJ* readers to what I hope will be a stimulating and informative future. The articles you'll find in this issue represent what we hope to accomplish.

We're delighted to lead off with an impassioned

call to arms from Henry Giroux, an American scholar recently appointed to the Global Television Network Chair in Communications at Canada's McMaster University and, as *University Affairs/Affairs universitaires* suggests, "tremendously influential in the field of education and considered by many to rank among the leading intellectuals of the world" (Drolet 19). In "Putting Youth Back into the Future: Reclaiming Education and Hope in Dark Times," Giroux discusses how recent North American trends in culture and education are having an impact on children and young people, and argues for an energetic commitment by university and other teachers to politically informed teaching and to the kind of social concern and involvement that might allow them to help the young people in their charge work to make the world a better place. Giroux's vision represents what we hope for *CCL/LCJ*: the ability to offer a venue for careful informed research on the culture and literature of childhood in Canada and elsewhere that emerges from a keen eye for political, economic, cultural, and artistic contexts, and remains always concerned with the welfare of child readers and, indeed, of people in general.

The other articles in this issue represent that goal in a variety of ways. James Greenlaw reveals how Deborah Ellis's Breadwinner trilogy offers educators opportunities for introducing Canadian students to some significant issues in the lives of children globally. By exploring some significant facts and figures Margaret Mackey makes a case for the extent to which children's reading occurs in the context of economic aspects of publishing and purchasing and a range of other cultural factors. Nora Stovel shows how the texts for children written by the renowned novelist Margaret Laurence both reveal knowledge of the conventions of writing for children and echo the concerns and patterns of her adult writing. Nancy Huse describes her response to the Dear Canada and Dear America series in the light of her own American experience, and Benjamin Lefebvre inaugurates a series of review articles intended to place recently published Canadian texts for children in the context of larger issues in the literature and culture of childhood, by looking at some recent fiction about boys in terms of themes that emerge from work published in *CCL/LCJ* during his last years as the Adminstrator and Assistant Editor of the journal. To affirm our commitment to publish more discourse in French and on French-Canadian and Québécois writing for children, there are two articles, Claude Romney's discussion of the discourse of multiculturalism in the Québecois novel of the 1990's and Francoise Lepage's contribution to the study of the evolution of the historical novel, and an interview of the writer Guy Dessurrault by Jean-Denis Côté.

Where we were wasn't so bad as I once thought. Where we are isn't bad, not bad at all. I have high hopes for where we're going.

Notes

[1] That they do so reveals the oddity of the text award, especially. It has no guidelines other than that it's for a book by a Canadian published by a professional Canadian publisher that contains a text of literature for children—any text, including not only the novels that usually win, but also poetry, non-fiction and the texts of picture books, presumably considered without regard to their illustrations. The illustration award, meanwhile, goes to the illustrator—and while I hope its juries consider the illustrations in terms of how successfully they interact with their accompanying texts, there's no requirement that they do so. The only instructions the Canada Council offers jurors for any of the awards is that "the peer assessment committees examine the eligible books according to literary and artistic merit."

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