

Editorial: *The Information Explosion and Children's Literature*

As we enter the twenty-first century, we marvel at the massive explosion of information resulting from the development of electronic technology during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Computers, faxes, xerox machines, internet databases, E-mail communications — all have become standard tools for us in less than 25 years. We live, sometimes at our peril, in a wired world. As our ancestors entered the twentieth century about one hundred years ago, *they* marvelled at the massive explosion of information which resulted from the development of print technology during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The knowledge in books, newspapers, and magazines had been inaccessible to ordinary people before that. The industrial revolution, the push for universal public education, mass literacy, the development of faster printing techniques and faster distribution systems (notably the railways) — all created the “Golden Age of Print” and transformed their world.

This issue looks back to the formations of modern Canada — the period of Canadian history between 1833 and World War I, when people were rushing to produce writing specifically for children. Elizabeth Waterston writes of the forgotten Diana Bayley, believed to be the first resident of nineteenth-century Canada to write for children in her 1836 book *Henry; or, The Juvenile Traveller*. Elizabeth Galway looks at how many nineteenth-century writers used historical narratives to create a sense of national identity in Canadian children. Cecily Devereux focuses on a 1894 children's novel by Sara Jeannette Duncan, well known in Canadian studies as a journalist and adult novelist, showing how it epitomizes the nineteenth-century proliferation of didactic and imperial writing for young people. Gavin White comments on how our era has problematized the novels written by L.M. Montgomery almost a century ago. He warns that confusions can occur if we have lost touch with customs and modes of expression in an earlier age, or if people have different understandings of the terms we are currently using.

What we can take from these articles is an insight into how earlier Canadians were concerned with a growing sense of nationhood — one which saw the amusement and training of children as linked goals. Children were to be socialized into citizens who would develop and honour the new Canadian nation, largely in light of their British heritage. We are also alerted to the subtleties of our “reading” the language (and specifically subtexts) from these earlier books. Most of all, we are reminded of the power of words and images to represent to child readers the nature of the world in which they live, and what is expected of them. Much has changed between the more reflective nineteenth century “Golden Age of Print” and our speeded-up world of electronic technology, which bombards children with sequences of words and images from books, movies, videos, DVDs, CD-ROMS and television. But one thing is constant — that the way in which children are socialized into adulthood creates the beliefs and values by which they will live their adult lives. Wordsworth's adage that “the child is father of the man” was profound — in ways beyond his specific meaning.

Mary Henley Rubio