

## A NEW BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AID FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE SPECIALISTS

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*Twentieth Century Children's Writers*, ed. D. L. Kirkpatrick. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978. 1507 pp. \$50.00 cloth.

This reference work gives detailed information on more than 600 English-language authors of fiction, poetry and drama for children. The format is similar to that of the *Contemporary Writers of the English Language* series put out by the same press. Each entry includes a brief biography, a complete list of the author's works (for adults as well as for children), and a signed critical essay.

A publication of this nature can only be judged by its usefulness, and it must be admitted that an unclassified list of great length has severe limitations as a bibliographical tool for librarians and teachers engaged in book selection. Indexing — by country of origin, expected readers' age-group, form or theme — would doubtless have been a horrendous and expensive task, but a preliminary list of the authors covered appears on pages 3 to 8, and code symbols beside the names there might have been a possible compromise.

This volume will be valuable in Canada, however, because books giving both bibliographical and biographical information about Canadian children's writers are scarce. Irma McDonough's 1975 edition of *Profiles* was a step in the right direction, but the 44 authors it lists are contemporary or near-contemporary, whereas the 40 or so Canadian children's writers in *TCCW* represent a spread of the best-known names from 1900 to the present. (Only 14 of the 44 authors in *Profiles* have found their way into *TCCW*, incidentally, so the two books are useful together.)

On the whole Canada fares well in *TCCW*. Writers of very small output are given space. Thirty-three per cent of authors in McDonough's 1976 *Canadian Books for Children* are included, which is a high percentage considering that McDonough's book aims at completeness and is a book list, not a directory of authors with critical and biographical information. While grateful for the generous Canadian coverage, however, we might vote that *TCCW* fails to include Morley Callaghan, W.O. Mitchell, and Leslie McFarlane ("Franklin Dixon"), each of whom has written children's works as significant as those of several of the authors included.

In comparison, Britain and the United States, where children's literature is a thriving industry, do not seem to fare so well. Many well-known authors are inexplicably missing. A comparison, for example, with Penguin's July 1978 "Puffin" and "Peacock" lists reveals many omissions, with *TCCW* listing only 28 of 80 "Picture Puffins" authors, 25 of 58 in "Young Puffins" (under 8 years),

6 of 11 in "Puffin Easy Readers" 88 of 149 in "Puffin story books for up to twelve" and 4 of 14 in "Peacock books for twelve and over".

A difference in ideas of what constitutes children's reading would doubtless explain some omissions. Indicative of this is the fact that two titles listed by Penguin as "Peacock Books": Rumer Godden's *The Peacock Spring* and Graham Green's *Stamboul Train* are listed in *TCCW* as "publications for adults". This, however, would not explain the omission of, for instance, C. S. Forester's *Hornblower*, which is among the "Puffin Story Books for up to twelve", hardly a borderline category.

The cry of "Whatever happened to . . . ?" will come from all age-groups of users as each finds that its own old favourites have been overlooked. Among the missing are Alice Hegan Rice's *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, Eve Garnett's *Family from One End Street*, and Margaret Sidney's *Five Little Peppers*. The Australian favourite, James Vance Marshall's *Walkabout*, reprinted more than a dozen times since its original publication as *The Children* in 1959, will also be missed.

Since type of story has not been used as a criterion, more questions arise. Why, for instance, include John Christopher's science fiction, but not Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*? Why list Hardie Gramatky's *Little Toot*, for younger children, but not Elizabeth Chapman's *Marmaduke* series? Why did Finnamore's *Teddy Lester* stories and Walpole's *Jeremy* books fail to meet the entrance requirements for school stories? But then, even Hughes' *Tom Brown* failed to gain admission to the Appendix.

There are some other strange omissions from the nineteenth-century authors chosen as "influential" for the Appendix. Dickens, Kingsley, Jefferies and Haggard come to mind. A glance at the entry here for Mark Twain suggests one possible reason for the omissions, for Twain's "publications for adults" take up five pages, while his publications for children occupy less than one-third of a page, and one suspects that the editors quailed at the thought of including many of these prolific Victorian writers. Yet such thoroughness as that displayed in the Twain entry, however justified for the twentieth-century authors, seems unnecessary for these earlier writers whose work is adequately documented elsewhere. The pages that would have been saved by giving only those of their works that are relevant to children's literature could have been used to increase the number of authors.

One way of increasing the usefulness of the Appendix, and of the whole volume, would be to ensure that earlier writers mentioned in the critical essays of the main section are included in the Appendix. A user wanting to follow up Doris Langley Moore's reference to Anstey (in her excellent essay on E. Nesbit) would appreciate finding *Vice Versa* without having to go to another reference book.

Users always appreciate a bibliographic tool that can be used independently, and for this reason the utility of the list of books in translation would have been greatly enhanced if, beside the date of translation (which is given), the name of the publisher had been inserted. It would also have been helpful to include in this list the author mentioned in the separate essay on "Books in Translation". As it is, a user must read all through this essay to find, for example, mention of the highly popular *Tin Tin* and *Asterix* books.

The physical shape and strength of this volume are disappointing. The casing is not nearly strong enough for so heavy a volume. Our careful handling of one copy has already resulted in a split spine and other marks of deterioration. Shelf-life in a busy library will be very short. Even at a slightly higher price, a stronger binding (or even a two-volume set) would probably have given better value.

All these faults of content and construction, however, are really minor ones. The editor and his advisory board must be congratulated on bringing so much information together in one place, and the contributors on producing critical essays that are honest as well as enthusiastic. The volume will be a welcome addition to reference shelves, and an improved second edition should prove even more popular.

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