

Editorial: *As the Twig Is Bent, So Grows the Tree*

In summer 1997 a professor from India came to the University of Guelph during her research semester to gain an overview of Canadian literature. She wanted to introduce English Canadian books into her teaching repertoire, so each of our Canadianists recommended essential novels and critical books to her. Soon her office desk was piled so high that it looked as if she would need a year to survey them all. Faced with the daunting task of taking the measure of an entire culture through its literature, and doing so in a matter of mere weeks, she asked to start by skimming through the 80-some issues of *CCL* published since 1975. That might seem surprising, since her objective was to learn about *adult* Canadian literature, not about *children's* literature. As she observed, however, one very quick way to access the attitudes, beliefs, and preoccupations of a culture is to survey the books produced for its young people.

In Canada's case, this is particularly appropriate, given that the period of Canadian nationalism in the 1960s and early 1970s affected the production of children's and adult books alike, producing a self-conscious flowering of both. In fact, when *CCL's* founding editors (John Robert Sorfleet, Elizabeth Waterston, Glenys Stow and I) first mooted the idea of a serious critical journal devoted to children's literature in Canada, we noted that many emerging Canadian literary figures were also producing books for children: these writers understood very well that cultural "rooting" takes place in childhood.

In 1975, when the first issue of *CCL* rolled off the press, Canada had a negligible children's book industry, except for our one internationally celebrated writer, L.M. Montgomery, whose books had been read round the world for 70 years, with some still best-sellers. The nationalism — and the funding programs — which fuelled our adult literature in that heady period also propelled the children's book industry.

Today, Canadian children's literature is well established. Its authors are widely translated and read internationally. *CCL* has followed this development, commenting on it and encouraging it. There are major libraries in some 20 foreign countries that subscribe to *CCL*, and thus have a window on Canadian culture through its children's books.

This issue of *CCL* draws on some of the international scholars who write and think about the artistic structures and ideological frameworks which underlie a culture's output for its young readers. Australian critic Rosemary Johnston, writing on L.M. Montgomery, introduces Mieke Bal's concept of "deep structures" to show how religion provides the matrix of Montgomery's narrative shapes and her imagery. Using radically different subject matter from roughly the same time period, South African scholar Elwyn Jenkins (who likewise came to Canada during a sabbatical, but to survey Canadian *children's* literature) dissects ideological positions of nineteenth century British imperial-

ism: he looks at how such simple matters as naming reveal and perpetuate attitudes about the indigenes in boys' adventure novels. The books he writes about were, of course, read all over the British empire, and are found, for instance, in the early Mechanics' Libraries in Canada. Re-reading these books today, we can easily spot pernicious and prejudiced views which our century inherited and naturalized. Also in this issue, Jennifer Litster, a young scholar from Scotland who is writing a PhD thesis on Montgomery, discusses at length the recent *The Annotated "Anne of Green Gables."* We know that the 1908 *Anne of Green Gables* went round the world, prompting Montgomery to write in her journal about a fan letter from India on April 28, 1934:

Had a very interesting letter today from a Mohammedan girl in Hyderabad, India, who has read and loved my books. She writes in excellent English with quite a modern outlook but the names of herself and her sisters sound like something out of the Arabian nights. Her father is evidently very liberal in his views for he does not make her wear the veil at home and she has been allowed to take the matric exams to Cambridge University. So even in India the day is breaking for women.

Culture is a living organism, and it is transmitted, perpetuated, and critiqued through its texts for children. We might ask, for instance, what role Montgomery's novels — which encourage female assertiveness — played in the formation of values of young girls in Hyderabad, India. Juvenile literature brings pleasure to its readers, and it also tells us — and others — who we are, or perhaps who we want to be.

Mary Rubio