



Matters of History – or History Matters

—Miriam Richter

- Bawtree, Michael. *Joe Howe to the Rescue*. Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus, 2004. 142 pp. \$12.95 pb. ISBN 1-55109-495-9.
- Beveridge, Cathy. *Chaos in Halifax*. Vancouver, B.C.: Ronsdale, 2004. 180 pp. \$9.95 pb. ISBN 1-55380-019-2.
- Cliffe, Susan. *Thread of Deceit*. Toronto, ON: Sumach, 2004. 200 pp. \$10.95 pb. ISBN 1-894549-38-4.
- Duncan, Sandy Frances. *Gold Rush Orphan*. Vancouver, B.C.: Ronsdale, 2004. 278 pp. \$10.95 pb. ISBN 1-55380-012-5.
- Feutl, Rita. *Rescue at Fort Edmonton*. Regina, SK: oteau, 2004. 92 pp. \$8.95 pb. ISBN 1-55050-308-1.
- Fryer, Mary Beacock. *Bold, Brave, and Born to Lead: Major General Isaac Brock and the Canadas*. Toronto, ON: Boardwalk, 2004. 262 pp. \$12.99 pb. ISBN 1-55002-501-5.
- Guest, Jacqueline. *Belle of Batoche*. Victoria, B.C.: Orca, 2004. 137 pp. \$7.95 pb. ISBN 1-55143-297-8.
- Johnston, Julie. *Susanna's Quill*. Toronto, ON: Tundra, 2004. 330 pp. \$24.95 hc. ISBN 0-88776-706-0.
- Laurence, Margaret. *The Olden Days Coat*. Illus. Muriel Wood. Toronto, ON: Tundra, 2004. 32 pp. \$12.99 pb. ISBN 0-88776-704-4.
- McKay, Sharon E. *Esther*. Toronto, ON: Penguin Canada, 2004. 320 pp. \$12.99 pb. ISBN 0-14-331204-9.
- Moore, Christopher. *Champlain*. Toronto, ON: Tundra, 2004. 56 pp. \$24.95 hc. ISBN 0-88776-657-9.
- Pearce, Jacqueline. *Discovering Emily*. Victoria, B.C.: rca, 2004. 97 pp. \$7.95 pb. ISBN 1-55143-295-1.
- Staunton, Ted. *Confederation*. Ill. Graham Pilsworth. The Dreadful Truth Series. Halifax, N.S.: Formac, 2004. 80 pp. \$6.95 pb. ISBN 0-88780-630-9.
- Trottier, Maxine. *Sister to the Wolf*. Toronto, ON:

Kids Can, 2004. 348 pp. \$8.95 pb. ISBN 1-55337-520-3.

Vaughan, Garth. *Tommy's New Block Skates*. Illus. David Preston Smith. Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus, 2004.

Interest in Canadian history, which seems to have been growing rapidly in Canada in recent years, continues its rise. In the realm of Canadian children's literature, this is evidenced by the publication of a large number of historical works for young readers, in free-standing individual titles as well as in series such as *Our Canadian Girl* or *Dear Canada*. The group of books discussed here covers a wide range with regard to the age of the targeted readers, the geographical setting within Canada, historical periods, and subgenres. Most of these books are fictional works, but there are also a number of non-fictional books. Very young readers are introduced to history in picture books. For all reading ages, time-slip novels, a traditional strand of Canadian historical youth fiction, have not lost significance. More conventional historical novels of high quality have been published in 2004, as have historical mysteries. A growing focus on well-known personalities is evident; while the names of famous Canadians are mentioned in many novels, biographies appear to be newly popular. This parallels a general development in the field of historical studies, where the interest in well-known persons has moved to the centre of

38 pp. \$16.95 hc. ISBN 1-55109-499-1.

Wilson, John. *The Flags of War*. Toronto, ON: Kids Can, 2004. 166 pp. \$7.95 pb. ISBN 1-55337-568-8.

attention again after the focus on prosopography in previous decades.

All of the books have in common that they teach their readers something about the past, most importantly, a sense of the significance of history for the present. Often, the protagonist's identity is developed through contact with history. A crucial point of almost all of the novels is the attempt to contribute to their readers' national awareness.

To a German reader, it is fascinating to see how national identity is treated in Canadian youth literature and how pride in one's nation and its achievements can be naturally fostered. This demonstrates a healthy relationship to the nation, which is certainly not the case in German youth fiction. For reasons deeply rooted in traumatic experiences with extreme forms of nationalism in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century, Germans tend to have a much more reserved attitude even to mild forms of patriotism and prefer to take a more international stance. It is striking that elements considered to be part of the image of Canada—such as freedom, social responsibility, cultural diversity, and wilderness, to name but a few—are present throughout the writings.

The elements perceived as typically Canadian by these Canadian authors coincide for the most part with the image of Canada that is prevalent in German minds (and literature). Interestingly, Canada's British roots, which neither constitute a central characteristic of the German image nor seem to be especially significant in today's discourse in Canada, nevertheless are of major concern to writers of historical youth fiction, perhaps as a point of distinction from the USA.

This Britishness represents only one of several central themes or patterns in Canadian historical writing for the young. Ascribing female characters much more independence and self-confidence than they would have had in the period represented is common in these books. Another key theme is cultural and religious tolerance, which is often presented when a central character with modern values is confronted with formerly conventional values, such as, for example, the alleged inferiority of Natives. This mixture, though not always historically accurate, is a good means to demonstrate that in the past attitudes prevailed which contemporary people consider false and which led to negative consequences. Arguably, this teaches young readers to be critical of their own country and its past while demonstrating to older readers that history is an interpretation that is subject to change over the centuries. Another noticeable trend is for authors to use their own family's history as the subject of their books. This often has the effect

of making history less abstract and of underlining the importance of knowing about the past.

Garth Vaughan, *Tommy's New Block Skates*

Tommy's New Block Skates by Garth Vaughan is a picture book targeted at a very young audience. While it relates to no specific event in Canadian history, it gives readers an idea of what everyday life was like in a nineteenth-century Nova Scotia village. There is no indication in the text, however, as to where and when the story is set. If it were not for the back cover and the odd maple leaf in the illustrations, the story could take place anywhere.

This picture-book is thin of plot: little Tommy has set his heart on skating and playing hockey on the frozen village pond and the book demonstrates how skates were made at the time. It is the charming illustrations by David Preston Smith that take the reader into a different time. The reader finds out that life used to be more strenuous, as tools and other items of daily use could not be bought in a store, but rather were handmade on order. Furthermore, the young are introduced to life without cash; the mode of bartering is explained and shown in practice. The reader learns in passing that, in order to fulfill a dream, one has to become active and work for it: Tommy has to help his father make fence posts for the smith in exchange for his skates. Skating and hockey have long been important elements of the Canadian

national consciousness, and this book could foster young readers' pride in their country. Indeed, the author is described as "a strong promoter of Nova Scotia's hockey heritage." This information, however, appears outside the story. In general, the reader is left without hints as to which conclusions to draw from the various situations presented one after another.

Margaret Laurence, *The Olden Days Coat*

Margaret Laurence's time-slip tale, *The Olden Days Coat*, also does not present the reader with a historical event. In contrast to *Tommy's New Block Skates*, the readers do not learn much about everyday life in the past, but, importantly, *The Olden Days Coat* aims at developing a sense of history in them and proves to be very successful in doing so. The significance of this aim and the book's high literary quality can be seen in its inclusion in the *Toronto Public Library's Best 100 Books for Children and Teens* list and in its publication history. The book was re-edited with new illustrations by Muriel Wood two decades after its original publication and is now, six years later, available as a paperback.

For the first time, Sal and her parents will not spend Christmas at home but at her grandmother's, an idea which Sal dislikes thoroughly. She has to accept that one cannot always have one's own way but has to be considerate of other people's feelings, in this case those of her grandmother, who prefers to stay in

her home village after her husband's death. But Sal does not have to do without everything she is used to at Christmas: her mother has brought along Sal's favourite Christmas ornaments to keep up tradition. The ritual of one early present, one Christmas present that may be opened on Christmas Eve, is a family tradition that has been passed on from generation to generation. During her stay in the past, Sal meets her grandmother at exactly her age and finds out that she, too, was allowed to have an "early present." These family customs provide the protagonist with a sense of belonging, as does her being named after her grandmother. One tradition is not only told but established through being shown in the narrative, making its effect all the stronger. The Christmas present Sal receives from her grandmother had been given to Gran for Christmas by her parents when she was exactly Sal's age; the wooden box has become a family heirloom. Protagonist and reader discover simultaneously the importance for a person's identity of traditions and, consequently, of history.

Rita Feutl, *Rescue at Fort Edmonton*

Another novel belonging to the time-slip genre is Rita Feutl's *Rescue at Fort Edmonton*. Twelve-year-old Janey from Toronto has to spend her summer holidays at her grandmother's in Edmonton against her will. Some parallels to *The Olden Days Coat* exist. For instance, the reader develops a sense of

history with the help of a family heirloom—a locket which had belonged to Janey’s great-grandmother, who passed it on to her grandmother, who now gives it to Janey as a welcome present. At the same time, this locket serves as the key for Janey to enter periods of the past. Janey’s way of entering earlier eras of history—tumbling down through the earth without the possibility of stopping her fall—is highly reminiscent of a classic of British children’s literature, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Janey experiences travels into four different time periods in the history of Edmonton, between the middle of the nineteenth century and the 1920s. The individual trips are connected to one another by the people she meets at different ages and their children or grandchildren. Differently from most time-slip novels in which the protagonists cannot influence their trips to the past but are drawn into them, Janey is pulled into history passively only the first time. During this stay Janey is told that she is in the past to “prevent a terrible thing, a disaster” (34). Her task, which turns out to be saving her grandmother’s life in the past as well as in the present, constitutes Janey’s principal motive to return to former periods several times on her own initiative.

Although the reader learns a lot of details about

everyday life in the past and different stages of the town of Edmonton, it is Janey’s development as a person that is in the centre of interest. This is a typical element of time-slip novels, as Martina Seifert has noted. Her task turns her into a person willing to take responsibility for others but, even more importantly, the confrontation with other people in the past and with her own family history helps her find her own identity. Her quest for identity is underlined by her being referred to as “a child who has lost her way” (111) and as a girl “looking for [her] home” (74) in her visits to the past.

Canada is presented as a country of immigrants in the scenes set in the past. Here, then, we encounter another feature which is part of the country’s image—the national as well as the international one. Janey meets a family of German-speaking immigrants—judging by their last name, they seem to be from Switzerland, a father and his son from the USA, and finally her grandfather of Ukrainian origin. But, unlike today’s Canada (at least as it seems from a non-Canadian’s perspective), the newcomers are not treated as equals; Janey, representing the modern attitude, speaks up for them when they are attacked. The fact that it has to be explicitly stated in the author’s notes that “prejudice against non-English-speaking immigrants [was] real” (167) underlines



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the positive change in society through the course of time and clearly indicates Canada's multiculturalism and Canadians' openness towards different ethnic groups. In this respect, Janey is presented as feeling superior to people living in the past, which runs the risk that readers will take this self-satisfied attitude as an example. But towards the end, it becomes clear that this attitude is meant to demonstrate to readers that their living conditions are far better than those of people in former centuries. Prejudice between different Canadian regions, though, is depicted as having worsened during the last century. In Janey's early visits to the past no animosities are apparent. Tensions grow during her later stays and, in the present, common preconceptions about other regions are expressed: Janey, who comes from Toronto, is convinced of the fact that the West is extremely provincial; the adolescents she meets in Edmonton for their part believe that people from the East are arrogant and too "cool" to spend their time with Westerners. Both parties are surprised to learn that these prejudices do not hold true and that, in fact, more similarities than differences exist.

Cathy Beveridge, *Chaos in Halifax*

Like *Rescue at Fort Edmonton*, Cathy Beveridge's *Chaos in Halifax*—another time-slip novel—is connected to both Eastern and Western Canada: Jolene and her twin brother Michael from Calgary

spend a week of their summer vacation in Halifax with their family. During their stay they go back in time to December 1917 and experience the Halifax Explosion.

This bridging between two different Canadian regions seems to constitute a growing concern of Canadian children's writing. Apart from a few exceptions like Eva-Lis Wuorio's *The Canadian Twins*, settings to date have been mainly restricted to one Canadian region. This is especially true with regard to the time-slip novels that were so popular in Canada in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The traditional geographical limitation is due to the principal aim of the genre: time-slip novels usually function to foster a feeling of belonging to one's native region, a function also underlined by their frequent focus on family history. The new linking of different provinces in the settings indicates a growing awareness that in spite of immense regional variety, it is possible to develop the feeling of being part of a larger entity. Furthermore, the book is likely to appeal strongly to readers from Alberta as well as from Nova Scotia, since the setting offers both groups the possibility of involvement in the story: the emphasis on the important sights of both cities underlines this aim.

Another striking aspect of this novel in particular is its being equipped with two protagonists of almost equal importance to the story. This interesting device,

too, extends the target group; although Jolene's part is more extensive than her brother's, young male as well as female readers will find sufficient opportunity to identify with a protagonist.

Jolene, Michael and their grandfather are capable of travelling into the past and of looking into it through "time windows" while they are in the present. which is relatively rare in Canadian time-slip novels for young readers. Like Janey in Edmonton, they learn from history: the example of the friends they make in the early twentieth century teaches them that family bonds are "unbreakable" (42) and to be cherished. So Jolene and Michael, who had craved independence from each other before their trips into the past, now acknowledge how important they are to each other.

It is clear that the message that one learns about self-identity by looking at history reflects Cathy Beveridge's personal motivation for working on this topic. Her ancestors were from Halifax, so the book is an investigation into her own family's history. The award-winning author manages to capture everyday life, as well as the attitudes prevailing during the First World War. A German reader notices in particular that anti-German resentment is a leitmotif in the novel's passages set in the past. In the present scenes, there are no explicit anti-German feelings but there is also no recognition of the historical and political changes that have occurred in Germany. This leaves rather a bitter aftertaste to a German reader: that the

Germany of today is different from that of the early twentieth century is an aspect that ought to have been taken into account in an otherwise carefully researched book.

Sandy Frances Duncan, *Gold Rush Orphan*

Another widely discussed topic of Canadian history, the Klondike gold rush of 1898 is the subject and setting of Sandy Frances Duncan's *Gold Rush Orphan*. This novel presents itself above all as an adventure story. The hardships of the trip are described in detail; survival in the wilderness is the dominant theme of the novel. The Yukon is portrayed as the last frontier on Canadian soil: neither roads nor trails exist, large parts of the country are unmapped, and the gold seekers have to use a machete at times in order to be able to advance in the hinterland. The concept of wilderness emphasized by Duncan not only constitutes a typical part of "inside" Canadian cultural mythology, but also an important part of the "outside" image of Canada.

Duncan's adventurers consider themselves to be pioneers, their pride in this reflecting another major Canadian attribute. Duncan renders the spirit of the Klondike gold rush very well; the characters in the book are torn between the hope to find gold, exhaustion, and doubts about their being able to find gold at all. The readers are given the opportunity to see how much of a mass movement the gold rush

was: people from all over North America as well as from Europe are shown to participate, and the Mounties estimate that 30,000 people are heading to Klondike at the same time as the protagonist Jeremy, a fourteen-year-old orphan. This novel confirms the image of Canada as a country that possesses rich natural resources, another aspect of the national mythology that is not restricted to the population's self-image but also part of the picture to be found in German youth fiction set in Canada.

As was the case with Cathy Beveridge, Sandy Frances Duncan has been motivated by family history: her grandfather was James Fraser, the leader of the gold seeker crew Jeremy joins. It is his journal written during the adventure that Duncan weaves into her story, beginning each chapter with original diary entries. This makes the story more authentic and introduces the readers to historical sources, but it also interrupts the flow of the story, since the characters featured in the novel are not mentioned in the diary.

Jacqueline Guest, *Belle of Batoche*

The narration of a part of family history seems to be *en vogue* with a lot of contemporary Canadian authors for young readers, as manifested not only by the examples of Duncan and Beveridge but also by Jacqueline Guest's *Belle of Batoche*. This trend may be explained as a consequence of the increasing interest

in Canadian history, which has triggered authors to go back in their own family history, not least in order to place themselves and to learn about their own identity. This shows readers how important it is to know about the past in order to know who they are and, perhaps, instill an interest in them to learn more about their own family history. Métis writer Jacqueline Guest uses historical events and family relations as a basis for *Belle of Batoche*, which is her first novel including Métis history. The Métis protagonist Belle experiences the attack by government troops on the village of Batoche in the 1885 Riel Rebellion and matures while she tries to save her family and former competitor Sarah. It is the two girls' rivalry about becoming the ringer of the church bell that occupies the centre of the plot, while historical information about the rebellion is given rather briefly and mainly serves as a setting for the story. Both the title of the book and the protagonist's name allude to the significance of the church bell of Batoche. In the author's notes, readers are explicitly introduced to its history and especially to the fact that the church bell was stolen during this last battle of the Riel Rebellion, presumably so that they can understand the iconic meaning the bell has acquired.

As most inhabitants of Batoche are Métis, the topic of discrimination is not presented as a severe problem, but the author points to it nevertheless through the character of Sarah, whose parents are English and

disapprove of their daughter's playing with the "riff raff" (133). However, after Belle has saved Sarah's and Sarah's brother's lives, this changes immediately and Sarah's feeling and demonstration of superiority disappear instantly. This sudden friendship between the two girls at the end of the novel after their open hostility throughout the story seems somewhat contrived and gives rise to the suspicion that here historical probability has been sacrificed to what is regarded as a politically correct message to modern eyes. The presentation of the injustices committed towards the Métis points in the same direction: the government's curbing the Métis' rights is stated clearly but this is done in a very matter-of-fact way without the reproachful tone that one could have expected in a novel featuring a Métis protagonist. Injustices such as the government's not even seeing the need to react to Métis petitions are presented as facts without condemnation by the narrator. Such dispassion is not often found in other historical novels for Canadian young people dealing with similar issues. For instance, in recent works of youth fiction on the

Acadians' deportation, such as Anne Carter's *The Girl on Evangeline Beach* or Sharon Stewart's *Banished from Our Home*, the violation of the Acadians' rights and the English soldiers' cruelty are harshly criticized. Not in *Belle of Batoche*, though: in spite

of the government's depriving the Métis of their rights, the protagonist never has any doubts about her identity as a Canadian. On the contrary "she thought she was very Canadian because the Métis had begun here in Canada" (5). So the Métis' status as equal members of Canadian multicultural society is underlined in the novel. Again, the official modern policy is projected into the past.

Maxine Trottier, *Sister to the*

Wolf

Like Guest, Maxine Trottier in *Sister to the Wolf* conveys the French situation of the novel by having characters use French words and phrases in their otherwise English dialogue. Her Québécois characters speak of "grandmère," "indiens," "les sauvages," etc. Furthermore, their antiquated English creates a lovely old-fashioned quality that draws the



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reader into a different time. As in *Belle of Batoche*, the relationship between two different ethnic groups is depicted, but in *Sister to the Wolf* this issue is central to the novel. The protagonist Cécile is happy to leave life in Québec behind with her father, who was offered the opportunity to work in Fort Détroit: city life with its constrictions is contrasted to free life in the wilderness. After Cécile sees a white man brand his Indian slave, she buys the Aboriginal man and gives him his freedom. Lesharo decides to stay with them and accompanies father and daughter to Fort Détroit, protecting Cécile more than once. Cécile and her father remain the only persons in Québec who treat Lesharo as an equal. One suspects that a modern attitude has been transferred to the past as in *Belle of Batoche*; in *Sister to the Wolf*, however, the literary rendering of this “message” does not appear contrived, since nobody is converted to the point of view of Cécile and her father. As Trottier points out in her closing notes to the book, there are sources suggesting that some of the earliest settlers of Fort Détroit lived among the Natives.

On the thematic level, Cécile and her father serve as a contrast to the other characters who behave according to the prevailing attitudes of their time: the French inhabitants of Fort Détroit act towards Lesharo and the members of Indian tribes living in the neighbourhood with contempt, not even regarding them as human beings. As it becomes

evident that Cécile and her father do not represent the mainstream, the possible fear that this novel distorts history does not appear to be justified. The injustice in the whites’ treatment of “*les sauvages*” is depicted in a far more accusing way than the curbing of the Métis’ rights in *Belle of Batoche*. The author leaves no doubt that the whites have to be condemned for their haughtiness and cruelty, which she expresses not least by her protagonist’s speaking up against all prejudices and humiliations of “*les indiens*.” Finally, Cécile decides to leave the fort together with Lesharo and her Native friend Marguerite; their warm welcome by two neighbouring Indian tribes contrasts with the whites’ behaviour. The author expresses clearly that the respect the Natives bear towards fellow human beings is undoubtedly to be preferred to the whites’ behaviour. Cécile is torn between two men symbolizing the two ethnic groups, Lesharo and Edmond Saint-Germain, a French lieutenant also different from the mainstream. Her deciding in favour of Lesharo, together with his choice to return to her, has to be interpreted as a symbolic step towards the union of the two ethnic groups, which is meant to serve as an example for Canadian society. The fact that the reader only learns on the last page the year in which the story is set demonstrates the timelessness of this lesson: in order to have two different cultural groups live together, both have to be interested in the other’s beliefs and customs as well as tolerant of the

differences. Tolerance is one of the most outstanding Canadian qualities and one being accorded most importance in school curricula.

For Maxine Trottier, like Guest, Duncan, and Beveridge, family history is included in her work. Her mother's ancestors were among the founding families of Fort Détroit.

Sharon E. McKay, *Esther*

Esther by Sharon E. McKay also tackles a chapter in the history of French Canadians and discusses the topic of discrimination like *Sister to the Wolf*. But whereas Trottier relates experiences of ethnic discrimination, McKay deals with religious intolerance. McKay's novel is based on the true history of the first Jewish girl in New France. Esther, a young Jewish girl, has encountered prejudice and hostility already while living in the Jewish quarter of St. Esprit in southwestern France. After she is sent away by her family this worsens, so she ends up hiding her belief and identity like her biblical namesake. Disguised as a boy, she takes on different jobs to earn her living before boarding a ship bound for New France.

As the larger part of the novel is set in France, the award-winning author presents intriguing insights into life in France in the 1730s and into the French image of New France. So young Canadians are invited to learn about the history of French Canada's mother country and instances in the early history of

Québec; again, the importance of knowing where their country comes from in order to understand its identity today is conveyed to young readers. Social criticism is detailed not only with regard to religious discrimination, but also concerning living conditions: although harsh poverty was the situation for the great majority of the population, nobility displayed an extravagant life style. The New World is characterized as the ideal place, promising freedom and a new and better life; emigrants therefore set off full of hope. Authorities are depicted as creating Utopian conditions: dishonesty and criminal offences are reported to be severely punished and exemplary in Catholic French society's eyes, "Jews are not allowed in New France by order of the king" (5). The author's ironic comment with regard to this prohibition clearly shows that from a modern point of view this is to be condemned. When upon her arrival Esther's identity as a Jewess is detected, the Québec population reveals the same hostility as the European French and, after her refusal to convert to Catholicism, she has to leave the colony with the prospect of severe sentences awaiting her in France.

Esther's personal strength and courage, however, never let the humiliation devastate her. She keeps her Jewish identity, symbolizing to today's readers that it is important to remain true to their religious or ethnic identity against all criticism or attacks. The author does not gloss over Esther's negative experiences

and thus presents an image in accordance with the attitude of the past. To today's readers, the discrimination Esther and other Jews encounter in the novel is unthinkable and irreconcilable with the values of modern Canadian society. Therefore, the novel can be seen as a counterexample, presenting past mistakes in order to learn from them.

John Wilson, *The Flags of War*

Not the relationship between different groups within Canada but rather with the relationship to her only direct neighbour is dealt with in John Wilson's *The Flags of War*. Walt and Nate, a Canadian and an American whose grandfathers were brothers but split up in the War of Independence because of different political ideas, experience the Civil War from different perspectives and finally get to know each other on the battlefield. The very interesting narrative structure—a variation on what Nodelman calls “double-focalization”—accentuates the different positions in the war. This novel, in fact, uses multiple focalization: the three protagonists Walt, Nate, and Sunday—a slave boy who has fled from Nate's father's plantation and befriends Walt in Canada—each are given a plot of their own, which is at times combined



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with one of the other plots when they meet. The plots and the attitudes of the white Canadian, white South Carolinian, and black slave are narrated in short chapters focusing on one of the characters at a time. In the last chapter, all three plots are temporarily united as a logical consequence of the novel's construction; nevertheless, this chance meeting of

all three characters in the same battle appears rather improbable. More surprising is the very abrupt ending, which is somewhat unsatisfactory, as it shows the three arm in arm knowing that this is only temporary and they will soon go separate ways again. On the level of human understanding, in other words, the three individuals display harmony regardless of their origin, while on the political level an understanding cannot be

achieved.

As in the majority of Canadian youth novels about the Civil War—for example, Barbara Smucker's *Underground to Canada* or Barbara Greenwood's *The Last Safe House*—Canada is depicted as the country of freedom and therefore as a safe haven for fugitive slaves, a view which reflects the desire of some Canadians to disassociate themselves from the USA. The Canadian fear of being taken over by

the United States, widespread since the American Revolution, becomes evident in this novel, too, when Canadians report that Americans regard Canada as a “state that has not yet got around to joining the Union” (55). The emphasis on Great Britain’s role in protecting Canada from an American invasion—the English help Canadians to stay free of “our expanding Southern neighbour” (36)—strengthens Canada’s British heritage, as does the book’s prologue in which Walt’s and Nate’s Scottish great-grandfather decides to emigrate to Canada in search of freedom. The emphasis on Canada’s British roots constitutes another point of distinction from the USA. Seen from the outside, with a German reader’s eyes, it is especially interesting to discern these traditional attitudes of the two North American nations towards each other and to watch how these national myths persist in literature. With its emphasis on Canada’s British origin, its love of freedom and its being a country of immigrants, John Wilson’s narrative incorporates three major characteristics of Canada’s national identity.

Susan Cliffe, *Thread of Deceit*

Unlike many historical novels, *Thread of Deceit*, by Susan Cliffe, does not focus on a specific historical event. The milliner Lilly McNabb’s solving a mystery is the foregrounded story, and the reader gains insight in passing into life in villages on the St. Lawrence

in 1835. The novel describes the fashion of the time, and presents the Indians’ role as suspects and scapegoats for anything, but the political tensions in pre-rebellion Upper Canada are only hinted at, so that the readers do not learn much about history. In *Thread of Deceit*, as in all juvenile novels reviewed here, female protagonists do not behave as would be appropriate in their time; the girls are portrayed as far too self-confident for historical accuracy. Some authors, like Sharon E. McKay in *Esther*, make a point of the girls’ breaking with conventions. This trend is evident, too, in Cliffe’s novel. Lilly is particularly confronted with men’s appalled reactions to her behaviour during her inquiries about the crimes, clearly reflecting the non-public role accorded to women. Her friendship with the Algonquin Jack violates social conventions in two ways—with regard to race as well as to gender—and therefore appears rather improbable. Other authors, such as Jacqueline Guest in *Belle of Batoche*, do not refer to the fact that their female protagonists act unconventionally, so their descriptions falsely appear as historically correct. This surely is done to meet modern taste and doubtlessly the authors have to make concessions to the literary demands of protagonists, but it is a highly problematic technique. Historical accuracy is violated and young readers may take these distortions as historical facts.

Michael Bawtree, *Joe Howe to the Rescue*

While in a number of the juvenile novels discussed, historical personages are mentioned by name or briefly take part in the action—William Lyon Mackenzie in *Thread of Deceit*, Louis Riel and Prime Minister Mackenzie in *Belle of Batoche*, Wop May in *Rescue at Fort Edmonton*—biographies of renowned Canadians are apparently being published in increasing number. Calling successful fellow countrymen and women into collective memory may be interpreted as a sign of pride in the nation's achievements.

Joe Howe to the Rescue by Michael Bawtree is set in the year before *Thread of Deceit* and some of the aspects only hinted at briefly in Cliffe's novel turn out to be of great significance in Bawtree's. The author tells the story of Joe Howe's uncovering of the involvement of Halifax magistrates in smuggling goods from the USA—a topical issue of the time—and demonstrates the eminence of newspapers. Joe Howe, "one of the greatest Nova Scotians who ever lived" as he is praised on the back cover, fights for the freedom of the press and intends his weekly newspaper *The Novascotian* to be a medium to inform "ordinary people" (53) about politics. Furthermore, this newspaper is characterized as "famous for speaking up for the people of Nova Scotia, and specially for caring about the poor and the mistreated" (4), an expression of a sense of social welfare that is another

aspect of Canadian identity. A letter Howe publishes signed "The People," in which among other things authorities are accused of demanding unduly high taxes, triggers a scandal. While people all over Nova Scotia are enthusiastic, the magistrates have Howe sued for seditious libel. Defending himself in court, Howe wins this trial against all odds and, as a result, all of the magistrates resign.

Throughout the biography, Howe is portrayed as a man of the highest virtues and values and of personal greatness: concern for others, generosity, loyalty, friendship, honesty, and determination, to name but the most obvious ones. He runs risks for the good cause, invests a great amount of time and energy in it, and is prepared to make personal sacrifices for it. All this sounds too good to be true; undoubtedly, this character is designed to serve as a role model, an example to young readers, which is stressed not least by the young protagonist Jack starting to emulate him very successfully.

Although Howe believes it to be time that Nova Scotia gained more independence from her mother country and new structures of government were instituted, no doubt remains that he wants this to happen within the bounds of the British Empire. This may be taken as a foreshadowing of the British North America Act to come some years later, but Howe's later political role is completely omitted in the book. Readers who are unaware of Howe's part in the

course of Canada's history will not be able to link the protagonist of this novel to the political figure. Howe's praising "the great British Empire" (58) reinforces once again Canada's British roots. Although the country's Britishness does not seem to constitute a major issue in contemporary Canadian discourse about Canada, this presents itself as a leitmotif in historical youth fiction. One possible explanation for this might be that Canada's closer historical relation to Great Britain constitutes one of the most characteristic points of distinction from the United States. The emphasis in the fiction suggests the desire, or need, on the part of Canadians to disassociate themselves from their Southern neighbours. This is clearly the reason for this emphasis in earlier Canadian historical youth fiction on Loyalist refugees to Canada, such as John F. Hayes' *On Loyalist Trails* or Mary Beacock Fryer's *Escape*. Another reason for underlining British heritage in literature might be simply that, as Canadian history and British history were closely entwined, Canadian historical fiction necessarily involves a large amount of Britishness.

Jacqueline Pearce, *Discovering Emily*

Whereas Joe Howe possesses importance as a great son of Nova Scotia, Emily Carr holds a significant place in the cultural consciousness of British Columbia. Regional identity is fostered by relating the lives of local heroes. Readers can

develop close ties with their home region, a feeling of belonging; taking pride in a smaller entity than the nation constitutes the first step towards a feeling of responsibility for their home country and fellow citizens. Emily Carr's life at the age of seven and eight years is described in *Discovering Emily*, a biography by Jacqueline Pearce. The title heralds its intention: readers are led to a first understanding of Emily Carr's art by being introduced to her everyday life in nineteenth century, very British, Victoria. The elements which form distinctive constituents of her painting and her later way of life are presented in this biography, so that readers who know her artistic work will be led to a better understanding of it. Little Emily bears a strong dislike of the too orderly arranged nature in other artists' paintings and prefers the Canadian wilderness, thick woods and sites at the Pacific coast. These, of course, are her favourite motifs as a grown-up painter. Her love of nature is emphasized over and over again. Different from her sisters, Emily revels in being outside and takes every opportunity to leave the house, only one of the ways her desire for freedom is displayed. Her yearning for freedom from social conventions is even greater. She does not behave the way her family or other people expect her to and is therefore deprived of supper more than once.

Here, again, we find the pattern of biographies inviting readers to admire unconventional people

who have the courage to be individuals. Emily speaks her mind, is not interested in the minister's sermons at church nor in praying, and does not intend to become a wife and mother once she is grown up. Being a female artist was highly exceptional at the time. Her style of painting has to be regarded as unconventional, too, as does her interest in the native population and culture. This, another central motif in her painting, is reflected in the book by little Emily's watching a Native family in a canoe. Author and illustrator of the book aim for authenticity: the episodes narrated are based on Emily Carr's own writings, and original family photos serve as models for the illustrations.

Julie Johnston, *Susanna's Quill*

Another famous Canadian—crucial to the cultural memory of all parts of Canada—whose life story is made the topic of youth fiction is Susanna Moodie. Julie Johnston has Susanna tell almost her whole life story, including her childhood and adolescence in England as well as her life in Canada. Moodie grows up in an English country manor where the six girls are taught at home, their father believing in the importance of education for women. All the Strickland girls possess literary skills and publish their poems and prose writings successfully in England. Their ability to earn money is disliked by their mother, who regards it as unsuitable for ladies, the general

attitude of the time. In this respect, the Strickland daughters are unconventional. Susanna, however, is described as breaking more social norms because of her yearning for freedom, not unlike Pearce's Emily Carr. As in *Discover Emily*, the common pattern of venerating unconventional persons is found in *Susanna's Quill*.

At a high point in her career, Susanna decides to leave London behind and emigrate to Canada with her husband Lieutenant Moodie, her sister Catharine and Catharine's husband, Thomas Traill. Readers not only get a good insight into the life of British upper classes at the time, but also the image of Canada prevalent in Great Britain is sketched. It is a very positive image: a bright future is said to await immigrants to Canada. There are lectures given everywhere in England to attract new settlers, land grants are promised to emigrants, and Canada is portrayed as particularly suitable for educated and cultured people. Susanna, therefore, enters her new country with high expectations and receives a severe shock upon her arrival. Their first home is a cow stable, their neighbours swindle them out of large portions of their supplies, and very soon Susanna and her little family suffer poverty. The difference between life in Canada and in England is clearly emphasized, especially the lack of etiquette and culture, although Susanna tries hard to keep up at least parts of the British way of life. Once more, readers are presented

with the importance of traditions and history for a person's identity.

After two years, the Moodies start pioneering on their land grant in Ontario's backwoods, where life becomes even more arduous. Johnston depicts pioneerdom as an extremely hard business, with manifold toils and dangers. She does not romanticize pioneer life as is often the case in literature possibly because she tries to stay close to Moodie's descriptions in *Roughing it in the Bush*. The motifs of wilderness and survival in Canada, however, correspond to literary conventions to whose establishment Moodie has surely contributed.

Susanna and the other British upper-class immigrants in her second neighbourhood may be seen as representing a population that has grown Canadian. They are characterized as being proud of their British roots and making an effort to cultivate some of their traditions on the one hand, but, on the other hand, they have doubtlessly adapted to their new surroundings. And in spite of all the hardships, Susanna even starts to love her new country and appreciate the beauty of its landscape. This love for her country can be detected in her Canadian writings mentioned in this biography, among them a patriotic poem she composes during the 1837 Rebellion. So, although Susanna is sometimes overwhelmed by melancholic moods and regrets at having left her native country, Canada becomes her home.

After having overcome the first hard years, Susanna turns to composing literature regularly again in addition to her tasks as a farmer's wife and a mother, and pursues her aim to write a book on what life really is like in Canada. With this book she wants to warn her "naive countrymen" (196), people who "are made believe that Canada is the paradise of the North" (196). She is portrayed as a strong and active woman who, although often desperate and unhappy, in the end does not let adverse circumstances get her down and never abandons hope. This hopefulness is somewhat different from the sense one gets from reading Moodie's own writings, but this can be put down to Johnston's having to adhere to patterns of writing for young readers.

Christopher Moore, *Champlain*

Another prominent Canadian is Samuel de Champlain. In his biography, *Champlain*, Christopher Moore puts the emphasis on the Frenchman's achievements relating to Canada. The text is enriched by numerous illustrations—some of them historical ones—and excursions in coloured boxes that give additional information about other Frenchmen and such practical issues as how to build a canoe. The main text describes first attempts at settlement in Canada, their failure, and finally their success because of Champlain's initiative. The latter is characterized as an adventurous man, whose passion it is to explore

unknown regions of the country and who pursues his dreams and convictions with great determination. He is celebrated as the founding father of New France to whom the reader is expected to be grateful for having made life in Canada possible. Already at this early stage in the country's history, the characteristic of freedom is mentioned. The author endows Champlain who "had become a Canadian" (43) with a great love for the country which he makes his home. The rather unhistorical designation underlines the author's emphasis on national feelings and seems intended to arouse his readers' awareness of their being Canadian. Like Howe, Champlain is meant to function as an example to the readers. Champlain's intentions, as well as his relationship with the Indians, are depicted only as the best. The presentation of Champlain is rather uncritical, especially when difficulties with the Natives are mentioned and it is they who are made responsible for the problems: "most of the Huron didn't like being told the Christian way was better" (47). It is only towards the end of the book that the author shows some respect for the other side when he emphasizes that the white population owes all its knowledge to the Natives and would not have survived without them and that "the Huron were only one of many First Nations groups that suffered greatly in the exchange" (49). In an appendix to the text, the author points out historic sites in Canada related to Champlain, which might give his readers the impetus

to find out more about history by travelling after having informed themselves through the book.

Mary Beacock Fryer, *Bold, Brave and Born to Lead: Major General Isaac Brock and the Canadas*

Bold, Brave and Born to Lead by Mary Beacock Fryer is a military history linked, as the title suggests, to the life and military career of Isaac Brock. Military history is a very rare topic in historical youth literature, but Fryer proves her skills as a historian and as a writer. She succeeds in turning her account into an informative and readable description and offers a comprehensive survey of the organisation of the armed forces, historical and political events in Europe and North America, and other significant persons in Canadian history. Fryer presents carefully researched facts in an objective way and points to uncertainties or gaps in knowledge, trying to fill them in through general knowledge of the time, but always making clear when there is no evidence for an assumption. Fryer quotes some of Brock's letters, allowing readers to come into contact with historical sources while gaining insights into Brock's ideas in his own words.

As in so many of these books, there is a personal interest on the author's part in her subject. In this case, it is not family history but childhood memories from growing up in Brockville, Ontario that prompted the writing of the book.

As might be expected, Brock's time in Canada takes up the largest part of the book, and in particular, within this part the War of 1812. The book does not end with Brock's death in battle, though, but follows the reaction of his contemporaries and summarizes the continuation of the war. The account concludes with an assessment of Brock's achievements both from past as well as present perspectives. Once again readers are made aware of the significance of history for the present, but also learn that the interpretation of history is subject to change over different periods of time. The constant threat of an American invasion into Canada is emphasized over and over again, even in the early pre-war years. Clearly, this is a current motif in Canadian literature for the young and it can, perhaps, be seen as a reflection of American economic dominance. It is Brock's success in battles in fending off the American invaders, and his death in battle, that are presented as the main reasons for his becoming a national hero. Like Champlain and Howe in Moore's and Bawtree's books, Brock's character is idealized.



The same aspects are stressed in fictional and non-fictional texts for young people: the fear of the USA as well as the distinction from the USA, British roots and the love of freedom as major Canadian characteristics, and the naturalization of the population through the support of Natives.

National heroes, as Fryer points out in her evaluating conclusion, are important for a country: "Canadians need their heroes—and need to know who they are" (222). So the idea of national identity turns out to be significant in non-fictional writings as well as in the novels. The same aspects are stressed in fictional and non-fictional texts for young people: the fear of the

USA as well as the distinction from the USA, British roots and the love of freedom as major Canadian characteristics, and the naturalization of the population through the support of Natives. In *Bold, Brave and Born to Lead*, Tecumseh and his followers join the British and the Canadians, thus confirming not only that the Canadians have the right to regard the country as their own, but also to defend it as their own.

Ted Staunton, *Confederation*

Ted Staunton's *Confederation*, a book in the Dreadful Truth series, is a work completely different from the ones discussed before. Its target group is undoubtedly teenagers who are expected to be "cool" and to find history boring, which is

underlined by the use of very colloquial language. The author tries to prove that the opposite is true by entertaining his readers with revelations of the “sex, drugs, and polkas of Confederation” (6). This attempt is supported by Graham Pilsworth’s cartoon-like illustrations. Staunton assembles anecdotes, unveils details about the private lives of the central historical figures, and shows how the founding fathers went about establishing a nation from colonies, “how they struggled with each other, bribed their friends,” as the back cover puts it. Due to the style of presentation chosen, an in-depth study of history is not possible, but the names of all important personalities are mentioned and an idea of the different events leading up to Confederation, as well as the struggles involved, are provided. Historical persons and events appear to be looked down upon, but this impression could also be due to the German reader’s perspective, as Europeans tend to take their history rather seriously. On the final page, the author invites his readers to think about modern attitudes which go back to the age of Confederation, such as the animosities among the different provinces or feeling endangered by the USA, so, here too, an awareness of the impact history has on the present time is valued.

Other aspects identified in the previous historical writings also appear in this book: the threat of an attack by the United States is dwelt upon, the increase of this threat after the Civil War is emphasized, and

the Fenian invasion is described in detail. The author makes it clear that this threat was one of the principal reasons for confederation. Nevertheless, readers looking for detailed and more complex information will most probably not be satisfied.

Conclusion

All of these Canadian historical books have in common the attempt to awaken an interest in the past in their readers and to show them that history is a fascinating matter. The novels draw a lively picture of everyday life in other time periods, which attempt to draw the young easily into the past and also—especially in time-slip novels—make them appreciate present living conditions. Most novels provide knowledge of the political background and, if they focus on a specific event in history, its context is explained. Additionally, the greater number of the books include historical notes, in which authors name more facts. Not only differences, but also parallels between past and present are shown. Young readers are thus led to realize the continuity of history: relationships remain the same, people have to take comparable decisions, and major elements of Canadian national identity such as the love of freedom, the wilderness of the landscape, and being a country of immigrants are presented as having always been characteristic of the country. By concentrating on individuals,

authors render the consequences of historical events more comprehensible to young readers, whose identification with the protagonists of historical fiction enables them to live the historical period and to develop a feeling for the time they would not gain from reading textbooks. The sense of the

importance of history and its relevance to present-day life are the most vital insights young readers can gain from historical literature. Knowing about their country's or family's past contributes to their identity—on the personal as well as on the national level. History matters.

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