Canadian Children's Literature: Roots

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From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children's Literature to 1850, eds. Patricia Demers and Gordon Moyles. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982. 304 pp. $8.95 paper. ISBN 0-19-540384-3.

Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life, F.J. Harvey Darton, 3rd ed., revised by Brian Alderson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 398 pp. $24.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-521-24020-4.

Students and teachers of children's literature who formerly have had to forage for themselves, or *worse,* have ignored children's literature before 1850 for want of a convenient anthology, will rejoice in the publication of *From Instruction to Delight.* Now in paperback, at a reasonable price, this anthology by two English professors at the University of Alberta covers "children's literature" from Aelfric's *Colloquy* (c. 1000) to Edward Lear's *Book of Nonsense* (1846), with generous excerpts from some sixty primary sources, each with a brief introductory commentary and numerous illustrations. Eight sections divide the material chronologically (the Middle English entries have a helpful gloss); each section has its own introduction, and a bibliography at the end of the book suggests further reading for each period.

The wording of the title for this anthology suggests the thesis which has shaped the material. Prior to 1744, the year John Newbery published *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book,* "there were, properly speaking, no children's books" (p. xi), since previous works written for children aimed emphatically at *instruction.* Newbery's book helped begin a trend towards *delight* (to complete Horace's dictum), culminating by 1850 in the writers of the "Golden Age" of children's literature — Ruskin and Thackeray, Carroll and MacDonald — whose unabashed aim was to give pleasure to child readers. This anthology covers the oft-neglected ground up to (but not including) these classic children's writers.

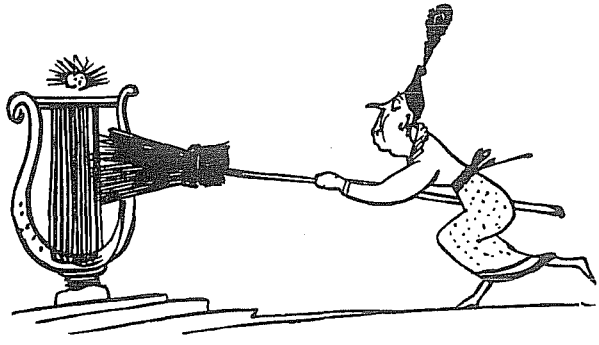
The variety of works anthologized is fascinating. In Aelfric's *Colloquy,* for example, the pupils reply to their master: "We are not concerned with what we talk about, except that it be correct and useful conversation, and not superstitious or foul;" when the master asks if they will accept flogging while learning, they reply: "It is dearer to us to be beaten for the sake of learning than not to know" (p. 5). (This reply may invite various comparisons with modern students!) Next, the eye might fall on Puritan James Janeway's *A Token for Children: Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives, and Joyful Deaths of Several Young Children* (1672), inspired by Janeway's belief that children were "not too little to go to Hell" (p. 43). The "more

subdued moralizing" (77) of Isaac Watts' lyrics punctuates a subsequent trend to chapbooks (small paperbacks) or penny histories: illustrations in this section include facsimiles of "Cock Robin" with pictures (1780s) and riddle books. One can sample further pieces in the anthology: Sunday School moralist Mary Martha Sherwood's "Fatal Effects of Disobedience to Parents" (1818), in which a child, neglected by her ungodly, non-disciplinarian parents, dies from playing with fire; and at the other end of the scale, illustrated excerpts from Edward Lear's *Book of Nonsense:*

> There was a young Lady of Tyre,
> Who swept the loud chords of a lyre;
> At the sound of each sweep, she enraptured the deep,
> And enchanted the city of Tyre. (p. 296) (See Figure 1.)

The anthology combines the presence of such variety with an attractive and orderly layout of chronological sections, commentary and illustrations. For its breadth of attention and clarity of outline, it well deserves to find a place in any historical children's literature course, as a striking fulfilment of its own title.

Although the third edition of Harvey Darton's *Children's Books in England* is not a Canadian book, its historical approach, and importance as a classic in the larger field give it a place in this review, as does its thesis which is similar to Demers' and Moyles': "Children's books were always the scene of a battle between instruction and amusement, between restraint and freedom, between hesitant morality and spontaneous happiness." Harvey Darton, too, chooses 1744 and the publication of Newbery's first children's book as the marked beginning of the trend away from instruction and towards delight (p. 1). Since this book has already seen two editions (1921 and 1958), most noteworthy in this new edition are the various revisions introduced by Brian



Alderson. While Alderson applauds the reliability of the book's judgements and perceptions, its frequent going "astray in matters of detail" (p. xiii) has prevented his use of an adapted photographic reprint of the original. Alderson has therefore corrected inaccurate details, substantially rewritten several passages, added editor's notes and footnotes where helpful as well as over sixty new illustrations, and updated booklists. Among several appendices to the edition, Alderson has included "Some Additional Notes on Victorian and Edwardian Times," with discussion of the new publishing style of the early nineteenth century (e.g., Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) with the advent of machine printing and mechanized transport; the awarding of books as prizes; and the emergence in mid-century of children's literature as a "subject" of investigation. Alderson's various sorts of revisions have made more accurate and up-to-date an important reference work for those interested in children's literature.

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Canadian Labour History for Children

WENDY R. KATZ

One Proud Summer, Marsha Hewitt and Claire Mackay. The Women's Press, 1981. 159 pp. $6.95 paper. ISBN 0-99961-048-7.

Goodbye Sarah, Geoffrey Bilson. Illus. by Ron Berg. Kids Can Press, 1981. 64 pp. $3.95 paper. ISBN 0-919964-38-9.

Children's books with independent and assertive female protagonists no longer sound a surprising note. They have been around for several years now, most probably because of the relatively high proportion of women writers of children's literature and an increasingly popular feminist consciousness. This is not to say that men have not created their share of strong girl characters, but simply to acknowledge the clear female constant in children's literature, its literary criticism, and its teaching. Fictional variations on the theme of growing up female have become a staple of book publishers' lists. But radical feminist literature — literature that focuses not only on women but on labour unions, and on reforms in church and state — now that is a different thing