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Is there “politics” concerning children’s books? This question may appear oxymoronic, but it isn’t. Can that “politics” be meaningful and add something new and vital to the study of Canadian children’s literature on both the national and the international stages? The politics of children’s books in Canada is not only rich and deep, but varied and complex. In fact, each of the following three studies has a unique focus on the children’s literature of our nation and the “politics” that help define its character. Elizabeth Galway’s *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood* provides perspective on the early sense of nationalism and Canadian identity in post-colonial children’s literature in English. *Home Words*, a collection of essays edited by Mavis Reimer, is focused on how Canadian children’s literature reflects the “politics” of interrelationships between racial and ethnic groups that make up Canada and how that affects their view of Canada as “home.” Finally, Sandra Beckett’s *Crossover Fiction* explores not only the phenomenon of crossover literature and how it has played a most welcome havoc with the boundary between children’s fiction and adult fiction worldwide, but also the “politics” of writing, editing, publishing, and selling a crossover book, not just nationally, but internationally.

The full title of Elizabeth Galway’s book is *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood: Children's Literature and the Construction of the Canadian Identity*. Professor Galway explores children’s literature from 1867 to the first decade of the twentieth century with an unwavering focus on the growing sense of nationhood as it appears in all its guises in children’s novels, poems, stories, and magazines. In the introduction, we are reminded that there were only about three and a half million people and four provinces in Canada in 1867 and that Canada stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific only as of 1873 (11). Commensurate with this new country’s scant population was a small corpus of literature for children, written in English by authors in Britain, America, and Canada. As Galway’s careful study of this literature shows, the sense

of Canadian nationhood in them was young, fragile, and contradictory. Many English-Canadians in post-colonial Canada still perceived Britain as their “motherland,” yet as late as 1903 Britain had the wherewithal to rule in favour of the United States in the Alaska Boundary dispute. This was considered by many Canadians as sacrificing Canadian interests for a better relationship with the United States and consequently made some Canadians rethink their views about their mother country (12). It is nevertheless emblematic of the contents of *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood* that the book cover illustration pictures Canada as a toddler in bib and tartan, holding a bayonet, and standing on a small table between a happy Uncle Sam whose trousers bear the stripes of the American flag, and a matronly Britannia with a stout plumed helmet, and an apron of bold pattern, the Union Jack, both hovering on each side of him with their hands held out protectively, ready to catch or prop him up.

Galway underscores the didactic nature of post-colonial Canadian literature for children in English and its role in reflecting Canadian nationalism. “It is frequently within the ranks of children’s literature that one finds the clearest expressions of Canadian nationalism . . . . Because the adult plays an enormous role in the process of providing reading material for children, the lessons inherent in this literature act as a barometer of the ideology and principles of the society that produces and consumes such works” (6–7). Here is a verse from one of Galway’s examples of didacticism and patriotism, from “The Land of the Maple” by H.H. Godfrey in the August 1897 issue of the magazine *Home and Youth*:

In Canada, dear Canada all dwell in unity,  
The Saxon, Gaul and Celt agree with Scots to keep us free.  
Though we be four, yet are we one if danger chance to be,  
Thus may it be for ever ’neath the spreading maple tree. (91)

As Galway notes, this song embraces national unity, but since that “unity” relies on the Saxon, Gaul, Celt, and Scot, those of other ethnic and racial groups that were already helping to shape the Canadian nation are marginalized (92).

Throughout *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood*, the works of Eger-ton Ryerson Young, R.M. Ballantyne, J. M. Oxley, Ernest Thompson Seton, Jack London, Pauline Johnson, Lucy Maud Montgomery, and Charles G.D. Roberts are highlighted. However, this short list shows how few carried the Canadian flame in the post-colonial period, whether that flame was coloured by nationhood and/or patriotism still imperialistic in character, or fiercely independent. Galway makes her readers aware of stereotypes from the Anglo-Canadian point of view—of Britons, of French-Canadians, of Métis, and of the Aboriginal peoples. For example, in her chapter entitled “Sleeping with the Enemy?: The Figure of the French Canadian” she writes that “‘Le Canadien’ can have many guises, including those of Explorer,

Fur-trader, Woodsman, Hunter, Settler, Habitant, Enemy, and Comrade... which underscore the complicated relationship between Canada's two central ethnic and linguistic groups" (79). In short, the portrayal of the French and of French-Canadians in English children's books could be hostile, friendly, patronizing, or a combination of these. In British author E. Everett-Green's historical novel, published in 1899, *French and English: A Story of the Struggle in America*, the French are often depicted as dangerous and treacherous. A group of English settlers are subject to a series of attacks by Indians at the instigation of the French. But in *The Young Woodsman or Life in the Forests of Canada* written by the English-Canadian J.M. Oxley, the French-Canadian is a congenial figure. The English-Canadian boy, Frank Simpson, is befriended at a lumber camp by Baptiste, the French-Canadian cook (84). However, as Galway notes, Oxley is not writing a historical novel like the British Everett-Green, set in pre-Confederation times, but a novel set in his own time (the 1890s) when the relationship between English-Canadians and French-Canadians was better. And he is writing it from his perspective as an Anglo-Canadian (86).

Galway discusses other stereotypes in children's works in English of the period—of the British as foppish and of Indians as good woodsman who could be bloodthirsty savages, or intelligent gentle people if controlled properly and Christianized. Such figures make us shudder now, but in order to understand the Anglo-Canadian perspective of the period and to get some sense of English-speaking Canadians' pride of place in their new country, and the character of their patriotism, we must also come to grips with the perspective on "others" in books whose didactic purpose was to instill patriotism in the young. There were also writers, of course, who were unhappy with the negative portrayal of "others." In her examination of Pauline Johnson's writing, Galway notes that this famous native writer lamented the stereotyping and generalizing about "Indians" in the work of some Anglo-Canadian writers.

One other "character" is too often stereotyped in children's works of the period: the Canadian landscape. Galway shows how Kipling's famous poem "The Lady of the Snows" left an unfortunate legacy, the commonly held view that Canada is entirely a land of ice and snow. There is even politics about geography: this well-known poem enjoyed by adults and children alike created a physical image of this country for many readers. However, Galway also shows that a work like Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* can characterize a landscape by portraying the struggle for survival in the Yukon. Both men and animals must develop a wiliness in order to survive the rigours of what Atwood so famously described as "the Malevolent north," the Arctic north that in Galway's words "reduces the behaviour of man and beast to its most fundamental level—survival" (156), but ironically also "strips away the falsity, greed, and arrogance of the civilized world" (156).

Because Galway's focus is on the sense of nationhood and its didactic presence in children's books, the intensity of that focus leaves room for further study of the literariness of many of the works she discusses. Are these works good literature? This question may not be the chief concern in Galway's study, but it may be a relevant question in considering another question. How did children who read these works react to their didactic political purpose? A child's reaction to a patriotic message in fact may be shaped as much by the literary strength of a work as the message itself.

The sense of Anglo-Canadian nationhood and identity is at the heart of Elizabeth Galway's study of English-Canadian children's literature in *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood*, but the political sense of identity in *Home Words*, edited by Mavis Reimer, varies and is shaped by the complex idea of "home." This collection of essays examines Canadian children's literature written in the twentieth century, when there was a recognition and growing respect both for aboriginal culture, and the multicultural diversity of Canada. This invaluable book brings to the fore works for children not just by English-Canadians, but by French-Canadian, Aboriginal, and Métis writers, as well as writers of colour. *Home Words* is a "parliament" of studies that does justice to the Canadian mosaic.<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Canadian perspective does not dominate as it necessarily does in Galway's book and as it does in the fine groundbreaking studies of Canadian children's literature by Sheila Egoff, her two editions of *The Republic of Childhood* and a third edition quite dramatically expanded and rewritten together with Judith Saltman.<sup>2</sup>

*Home Words* is the result of a three-year collaborative effort on the part of twelve scholars inside and outside the field of Canadian children's literature. Though the essayists write from different points of view and use different theoretical models, they discuss what "home" and "away" mean and how these two concepts are embodied in children's books, primarily within the period between 1975 and 1995, and how they help in an understanding of Canada as home or not home, whether for a racial or ethnic group or for an individual inside or outside of a group.

In her opening chapter, "Homing and Unhoming," Mavis Reimer looks closely at representative young adult novels by such well-known authors as Janet Lunn, Michael Bedard, Jan Truss, and Tim Wynne-Jones—all of them major works that have won numerous awards. Using Edward Said's literary concepts of "filiation" and "affiliation" from his work *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Reimer demonstrates how the usual pattern of Canadian young adult novels with predominantly Anglophone protagonists is of a child leaving his or her family home, a filiate home, often because of abuse or neglect, and finding a new home that often does not include the original family, an affiliate home (7). She shows how the matter of a child's choice to leave home (although this choice seems more a question of survival physically and

emotionally) is of central importance. She uses Cynthia Sugar's quotation from *Unhomely States* of Dennis Lee's perceptive remark about Canadian children's literature in English to establish this common situation: "If you are a Canadian, home is a place that is not home to you" (14). For example, she examines how the abused Burl Crow in Tim Wynne-Jones's award winning novel, *The Maestro* runs away from "home," seeks shelter in the cottage of Nathaniel Orland Gow (who is based on Glenn Gould), and eventually makes a new home with his devoted English teacher and her husband. She also discusses Janet Lunn's much decorated historical novel *Shadow in Hawthorn Bay*, set in the early nineteenth century, in which Mary Urquhart leaves her "ancestral home in Scotland" to make her way alone to a hostile new land, which happily becomes her new home when she marries the young settler Luke Anderson. Mary's final words in the novel, as Reimer notes, "inaugurate a new age in a new land, the beginning of history in this place. 'It begins here now. We are the old ones here'" (6). Making Upper Canada "home" is at the heart of this important emigration novel.

In their essay, "Les représentations du 'home' dans les romans historiques québécois destinés aux adolescents," Danielle Thaler and Alain Jean-Bart use Rosemary Marangoly George's idea about home as including and excluding to examine the French-Canadian historical novel (31). At the heart of their study is "la triade coloniale fondamentale—le colon, le coureur des bois and le Sauvage" (31). The "home" country, France, can be cruel; a cause for emigration and for making Nouvelle France home. Interestingly, the early historical novels did not make the coureur des bois a central figure. He becomes a more congenial figure later on, as in Suzanne Martel's series *Les Coureurs des bois*, "une sorte de métis culturel" between the Indian and the colonist, as well as a Québécois icon "par incarner l'essence même d'un pays en train de naître"(45).

In "Le home: un espace privilégié en littérature de jeunesse québécoise," Anne Rusnak explores what home means in novels for the young, again published between 1975 and 1995 in French in Québec. Her findings differ from other scholars writing about Anglophone novels in this collection. She shows that home is a privileged place; protagonists in Québécois children's novels follow a cyclical pattern. More often than not, they either leave home, only to return (home, away, home) or they find adventure in the home (away enters home). In her appendices, Anne Rusnak proves conclusively that the predominant pattern in 27 of the 97 novels published in 1992 in French in Quebec followed the pattern home-away-home and that in a full 52 novels of the 97, away enters home. What Rusnak also finds is that the maternal figure is central to home, whether she be a mother, an aunt, or a grandmother; she also states that the traditional French-Canadian family is "un 'matriarcat,'" and that French-Canadian literature for children makes the home central. She also concludes that home defines both the French-Canadian and the

French-Canadian nation: “tous cela nous mène a conclure que, si le home est un espace privilégie en littérature de jeunesse québécoise, c’est parce qu’il représente non seulement l’individu mais aussi la nation” (61).

Andrew O’Malley’s wonderful essay, “Island Homemaking: Catharine Parr Traill’s *Canadian Crusoes* and the Robinsonade Tradition,” links the imperialist/colonialist thrust of Robinsonades (the peopling of an island or remote area, and often the civilizing and Christianizing of the natives) with the domestic, the building of a home (as Robinson Crusoe does when shipwrecked on a remote, uninhabited island) as a sanctuary and retreat. O’Malley shows that the establishment of middle-class domesticity in various Robinsonades is part of the colonizing process.

In Doris Wolf’s and Paul DePasquale’s “Home and Native Land,” we have a look at picture books written for and by Aboriginal peoples. The sheer number of Aboriginal works of fiction since 1967 to the present—300—is noteworthy and attests to a growth in Aboriginal literary culture in Canada. Although adult tales are often dark and deal with the terrible suffering and degradation that Aboriginal communities have suffered, stories for children are characterized by cultural affirmation and messages of hope. “Voice appropriation” is discussed with admirable sensitivity in this essay, as it is in the following essay in the collection written by the well-known pioneer in the study of children’s literature in Canada, Perry Nodelman. Wolf and DePasquale note that many early Indian legends were written down by mainstream authors for mainstream audiences. However, there are now many works of fiction by Aboriginal writers for children, primarily picture books. These books generally lack “the anger and siege mentality” (91) of adult Aboriginal literature and often evoke idyllic worlds. There is also insistence in these stories on what children can learn from older generations, particularly from a matriarchal figure—a grandmother, mother, aunt, or elder. These picture books strengthen intergenerational bonds. These two scholars also point out that picture books written by Aboriginal writers often deal with either the legendary or the present day and shun the nineteenth century that saw the destruction of so much of their culture and community.

What is revealing about “Home and Native Land” and “Island Homemaking” is that it is not only conquest, but the establishment of “home,” the fruit of white middle-class domesticity, that helped to destroy what is unique to Aboriginal culture. For Aboriginal peoples, many of whom were nomadic hunters and gatherers, home *is* the land; their sense of “nation” as home was in part destroyed by European settlement, at the heart of which is the domestic impulse to build permanent structures as homes. According to Wolf and DePasquale, books like Tomson Highway’s *Dragonfly Kites* and Elaine McLeod’s *Lessons from Mother Earth*, “make explicit the traditional reliance of many Aboriginal peoples on a large homeland for their sustenance” (99).

However, these two scholars also take issue with the stereotyping of “Indian” ways and characters prevalent even in Aboriginal literature for children and insist that it is important to read texts that touch on their political and historical implications to circumvent this stereotyping and to further the welfare of Aboriginal peoples, including their land claims.

Perhaps Dennis Lee’s quotation, “If you are a Canadian home is a place that is not home to you,” resonates loudest in Louis Saldhana’s essay, “White Picket Fences: At Home with Multicultural Children’s Literature in Canada?” She speaks for many people of colour when she states, “our residence is largely inconsequential to the Canada space” (131). Even at home in Canada, writers of colour can feel “away” (131). This alienation is present in a text like the beautiful picture book *Crabs for Dinner*, based on Ghanaian food, and *Lights for Gita*, about an Indian girl new to Canada celebrating Divali, a Hindu festive holy day. Saldhana argues that alienation is a two-way process. Not only do writers of colour feel “away” and create works that are “away,” but “mainstream” readers are often left “outside.” On a more hopeful note, Saldhana shows that both *Lights for Gita* and *Crabs for Dinner* present home as a place of *becoming*.

The purpose of delving into the details of so many articles in this collection is to show not only that *Home Words* provides a valuable pioneering examination of this country’s diverse literature for children outside English-Canadian and French-Canadian literatures for children, namely works by Aboriginal and Métis writers, as well as writers of colour, but to show that the critical discourse in these works is charged with a political awareness of “nationhood,” of colonization and its aftermath, of the degree of the sense of belonging or alienation among various racial and ethnic groups in Canada measured by how feeling “at home” or “not at home” is reflected in works for children.

Of the three studies reviewed in this essay, Sandra Beckett’s *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives* provides the most literary perspective on the politics of children’s books. By any measure, Sandra Beckett’s critical work is extraordinary. *Crossover Fiction* is encyclopedic in detail and research, and worldwide in scope. Beckett also possesses the novelist’s gift of making the journey of a novel from the writer’s desk through to publishing houses and bookshops and into the hands of readers in many nations palpable and exciting. Beckett examines literature that has crossed the line between children’s fiction and adult fiction in both directions. Both children and adults read crossover books. She also provides a look at the politics of literary conquest. Beckett discusses works that have crossed over in Britain, France, the United States, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, Russia, Japan, South Africa, and parts of South America. Many are award-winning novels that have been



translated into different languages: *The Golden Compass*, the first of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, that won the Carnegie Medal in Britain; *The Amber Spyglass*, the third in the trilogy, that won the Whitbread; *Life of Pi* by Canadian Yann Martel that won the Booker; *Sophie's World* by Norwegian Jan Gaarder that won the only German literary prize for children's books, the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis (German Youth Literature Prize); or the tales and poems of the Japanese writer Kenji Miyazawa. Beckett also shows that numerous books in languages other than English are loved and popular in their native lands but have not had as much impact in the English-speaking world, like the Polish *Three Fat Men* by Yury Olesha, or the Russian *Scarlet Sails* by Alexander Grin. What emerges from *Crossover Fiction* is that it was J.K. Rowling's seven Harry Potter books that first made the crossover trend popular worldwide. Harry Potter dominates the publishing trade in crossover fiction around the world and is loved by millions of children and adults. Moreover, other crossover novels written or translated into English dominate children's literature globally. Cornelia Funke's worldwide popularity began when her books were translated from German into English.

Beckett's stage is international. Unlike Elizabeth Galway and Mavis Reimer, Sandra Beckett gives Canadian literary works a minor role because fantasy is the predominant crossover genre and few Canadian fantasy writers are crossover writers. However, animal fantasy has a long and rich tradition in Canada and one Canadian writer that Beckett discusses is Kenneth Oppel. This prolific young writer is best known for his bat trilogy *Silvering*, *Sunwing*, and *Firewing*, together with the prequel *Darkwing*, which are widely read and translated into many different languages. Beckett also discusses the works of other Canadian writers whose works she considers crossover fiction: Lucy Maud Montgomery, Yann Martel, Joy Kogawa, Dominique Demers, Jack London, and Beatrice Culloten.

Beckett has based her book on extensive research, but also on conversations and emails with some of the world's best crossover writers—Michel Tournier, Le Clézio, Philip Pullman, and the Afrikaan Marita van der Vyver to name a few. This adds both immediacy and liveliness to her informal style. Beckett also deals with the publishing, marketing, and selling of crossover books. She presents a chilling picture of just how commercialized the book trade in crossover fiction has become in North America, Britain, and Europe and how it has made the fortunes of many authors, publishers, and booksellers. The consolidation of large publishing houses has allowed publishers like Scholastic, Gallimard, and HarperCollins to dominate the world market. Beckett reveals how many critics and watchers of crossover fiction are cynical about this—that the vogue for crossover books that began with Pottermania may have reshaped thinking about the boundaries between children's literature and adult literature, but may have also done harm to the literariness of crossover books.

Beckett addresses some pertinent questions at the end of her study. Why are so many readers reading crossover fiction worldwide? Is it because of the political clout of the big book publishers and the millions they can spend on marketing, games, videos, and other paraphernalia? It may seem in Beckett's work that child readers are often at the mercy of adults who buy for them, who censor their books, and who write for them. Beckett however reveals that word of mouth about a good book is nevertheless the most powerful "marketing," which is what happened with the Potter books and *His Dark Materials*. Beckett also insists on the prominence of storytelling in crossover books, referring to Canadian writer Tim Wynne-Jones who affirms that storytelling will never die (253). In the end, the new prominence of crossover fiction, as Beckett argues, is due to the fact writers are writing good books that people of all ages want to read. Perhaps, the best politics in writing children's fiction, as so many of the writers Beckett examined have stated, is to write the best one can.

The criticism of Canadian children's literature is still a relatively new field. The Anglo-Canadian perspective on the emerging sense of nationhood in post-colonial children's works in *From Nursery Rhymes to Nationhood*, the expanded "parliament" of political perspectives on Canada as home for various racial and ethnic groups and for individuals as reflected in works for the young in the latter part of the twentieth century in *Home Words*, and the small but perhaps promising presence of Canadian literature read by both adults and children on the international stage in *Crossover Fiction* attest to the varied politics of Canadian children's books and show just how rich is our national literature for children.

## Notes

1. Greg Maillet first used the word "parliament" in the sense of a democratic and egalitarian inclusion of stories and picture books by various ethnic and racial groups in Saskatchewan. See Greg Maillet, "A Parliament of Stories: Multiculturalism and the Contemporary Children's Literature of Saskatchewan," in *Windows and Words: A Look at Canadian Children's Literature in English*, Eds. Aida Hudson and Susan-Ann Cooper, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press: 49–60.
2. See Sheila Egoff, *The Republic of Childhood*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967, 1975; Sheila Egoff and Judith Saltman, *The New Republic of Childhood*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990.