What's Canadian about Canadian Children's Literature? A Compendium of Answers to the Question

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Abstract

Note de l'Editeur: Quand j’ai lancé l’appel à contributions pour le présent numéro sur l’identité canadienne, je ne m’attendais pas à ce que les réponses que je recevais soient si passionnées. Quelques-uns m’ont dit apprécier le projet et vouloir y participer volontiers; d’autres ont avoué trouver l’idée un peu dépassée, voir rejeté carrément mon invitation. Certains doutaient de la pertinence de toute réflexion sur l’identité nationale tandis que d’autres me soupçonnaient de vouloir imposer une vision préconçue ou particulière du Canada. Peu important que l’on exprimait, celle-ci était toujours formulée avec conviction. Je me suis aussi rendu compte que mon choix d’articles ne pouvait représenter ni l’étendue, ni l’intensité des réponses. C’est alors que j’ai eu l’idée de demander à chacun de me consigner par écrit sa réaction à mon appel. Bien des gens l’ont fait. Voici donc leurs répliques.

Editor’s Note: When I sent out the paper call for this issue, I didn’t expect the responses to it would be so passionate. Some people told me they loved the idea and looked forward to the issue. But other objected even to the idea of asking such a question. Some found it irrelevant and desperately old-fashioned. Some were deeply suspicious about the value of ever doing any thinking at all about literature in terms of issues of nationality. Some were convinced that the project was a conspiracy to promote one particular view of Canadian identity over others, with upsetting or dangerous political ramifications. But whatever opinion people were expressing, they were expressing it vehemently. I realized that the few articles I would be able to include could not possibly represent the range or the intensity of all these different feelings. That was when I had the idea of asking everyone I could think of if they’d be willing to write a short answer to my question to include in the issue. A lot of people agreed to do so. These are the answers they provided.

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Children's literature in English, literature for children up to early adolescence, has been written since the mid-19th century. It was originally a literature in which portrayals of life in the new country - confrontations with and adaptations to the landscape and the native peoples, colonizing the territories and then creating and developing a nation - were in search of appropriate vehicles of expression. During the 19th and early 20th centuries the vehicles were generally those fashionable in Great Britain. At the turn of the century the animal story, the first distinctively Canadian ge