

Edwards, Gail and Judith Saltman. *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children's Books and Publishing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010. 381 pp. \$39.95 (pbk); \$95 (hc).

*Picturing Canada* is a fascinating study, sure to engage anyone serious about children's books, both general readers and experts alike. This impressive volume traces the evolution of illustrated children's books in Canada from the early 1800s to the present day, surveying the philosophies, literary and aesthetic approaches of authors, illustrators and publishers. In so doing, this work explores the changing meanings of childhood, Canadian cultural identity, publishing and pedagogy over the past two hundred years. Interdisciplinary in scope, it deftly bridges such disparate fields as children's literature, print studies, library sciences and cultural studies. The book is complemented with more than three dozen black and white illustrations, twenty color plates, extensive notes, a nine page chronology, and a bibliography of more than fifty pages that is sure to make any scholar of Canadian children's literature salivate.

This work is clearly the result of painstaking research, both inside and outside library archives – it examines more than 350 children's books, and draws on more than 120 interviews, with librarians, illustrators, writers, publishers, teachers and academics. This major undertaking is a collaborative project, combining the skills of historian Gail Edwards and of library studies scholar Judith Saltman, who specializes in children's literature, who have already published together on related topics in such journals as *Canadian Children's Literature* or *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*. *Picturing Canada* currently has no rival; there is no other comprehensive study of the literary, design and publishing history of Canadian children's illustrated books.

Edwards and Saltman's wide-ranging survey is very well-organized – chronologically and thematically – making it accessible to all readers. It opens with a lucid, thorough, yet succinct, overview of the roles of picture books and children's illustrated books, focusing in particular on their pedagogical value – especially in this case, of fostering Canadian social and cultural identity. Chapters 2-4 focus on early Canadian publishing, while chapters 5-8 focus on the last three decades, the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. For the period until 1950, the authors include children's literature about Canada published both domestically and internationally by both Canadians and non-Canadians; for the period after 1950, their focus narrows to children's illustrated books published by Canadians for Canadian children's audiences, primarily by publishers with a Canadian imprint. In their conclusion, the authors thoughtfully reflect on the changing Canadian cultural identity represented in the literary production they have analyzed.

Arguably, the most intriguing parts of this work are chapters two and three, those examining illustrated children books from the 1890s to the 1950s, since most of this archival material is inaccessible to the general public, and largely derived from special collections. In their analysis, Edwards and Saltman touch on more canonical works, such as Catherine Parr Traill's children's works (1826, 1856), Palmer Cox's *The Brownies* (1887) or Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908); however, their focus is chiefly directed on lesser-known works, (e.g., *Little Grace Scenes of Nova Scotia*, 1846;

C.W. Jeffery's *Uncle Jim's Canadian Nursery Rhymes*, 1908; or Thoreau MacDonald's *A Canadian Child's ABC*, 1931), as well as on major Canadian illustrators such as Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon or Frank Newfeld, and publishing figures such as William Toye. Throughout their examination, we see the image of Canada develop thematically, from an exotic and dangerous "land of ice" (18) "far removed from the abodes of civilized men" (25) in exploration and survival narratives, to a country of "traditions and tales" "romantic past" (37), or from a "dominion" with "vast natural resources and wonderful opportunities" (39) to a full fledged nation, with "great men of history" (53), with its "own traditions" (59), including "aboriginal stories" (61). Illustrations reflecting this evolution broadly follow artistic trends of the times, from romantic, even rococo, prints, to quaint anthropomorphized animals akin to Beatrix Potter, to strong linear modernism and vibrant, textured collages. Also seminal to Edwards & Saltman's work is tracing the development of the Canadian publishing industry, children's readership and librarianship; we observe the struggles of the emerging children's book industry, from its reliance of imports in the nineteenth century, to its near collapse during Second World War, due to labor shortages, paper rations, and limited subsidization.

Chapters five, six and seven, focusing on the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s respectively, showcase a full-fledged Canadian children's publishing industry, largely spurred on by growing nationalist sentiment, conjoined with increased government funding and school curriculum development. Here, Saltman and Edwards review an impressive number of works, mainly organized by publishers. While their earlier survey mainly refers to Oxford University Press's children's division, in these chapters, they spotlight the development of children's branches of other major presses (e.g., Methuen, McLelland and Stewart) and highlight the emergence of presses specializing in illustrated children's books (e.g., Annick Press, Tundra Books, Douglas and McIntyre, Kid's Can Press, Lester Press), including aboriginal presses (e.g., Theytus Books, Pemmican Publishing). Focusing on reception and marketing, Saltman and Edwards also take pause on the development of the Canadian Children's Book Centre, awards, festivals, journals and conferences, as well as the recent advent of the mega-bookstore. In these sections, the examination of individual authors, works, and illustration aesthetics is somewhat cursory, with the exception of prominent titles, such as Dennis Lee's *Alligator Pie* (1974), Robert Munch's *Love You Forever* (1986), or Paul Yee's *Ghost Train* (1996). In all, upon finishing this work, the reader is left wanting deeper analyses, and further illustrations to complement the authors' lively and succinct synopses. Edwards and Saltman's book is a clearly necessary precursor to an even more comprehensive examination of Canadian illustrated books, one which could easily form a lengthy, multi-volume work. In sum, this condensed, highly engaging and thorough introduction to Canadian illustrated books is a harbinger in many respects, and thus is highly recommended for any serious reader or scholar of children's books, as well as for any respectable public or academic library.

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