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ABSTRACT:

This document contains a report delivered at a special meeting held in Tehran on the situation of children's books published in Canada. The report focuses specifically on work with children's literature within the two dominant cultures, French and English, and also discusses literary efforts and publications of native Indians and Eskimos. (JM)

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**CHILDREN'S LITERATURE
IN THE SERVICE OF
INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING
AND PEACEFUL CO-OPERATION**



ORGANIZED BY THE
INSTITUTE FOR THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS
IN COOPERATION WITH UNESCO AND THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO IN IRAN

15-21 MAY 1975, TEHRAN
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Children's Literature in the Service of
International Understanding and Peaceful Co-operation

Tehran, 15-21 May 1975

Sieglinde Stieda - Levasseur

Canada

I deem it a great privilege to be invited to participate in this conference on "CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN THE SERVICE OF INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND PEACEFUL COOPERATION". Although a number of my Canadian colleagues are probably better qualified than I, I shall attempt to introduce you to the situation of children's books in Canada. Throughout much of my paper, I shall be referring to Professor Sheila Egoff, - one of Canada's leading experts on children's literature, - who has had a profound influence on my thoughts on Canadian children's literature for the last ten years.

The international aspect of children's literature has intrigued me for a number of years. Through my own background, I have been involved intimately with at least three distinctive cultures - the German-Baltic Culture by birth; - English-Canadian culture by education; and French-Canadian Culture by marriage.

I have been asked to speak on the situation of children's books published in Canada. Since Canada's vast geography has had a profound influence on our cultural developments, let us look at the map of Canada. You all know the basic geographic facts. In extent it is the world's second largest country. From coast to coast it reaches for almost ten thousand kilometres, through five time zones. From north to south it reaches through forty degrees of latitude. It is a country of

many climates, many landscapes, many races, and we sometimes wonder what we mean when we say that the Eskimo (1) who hunts seals in the Arctic ice, the Indian (2) who nets fish among the rain forest of the West coast, and the European who makes wine from the grapes of Niagara, are all Canadians. There is equal variation in the level of prosperity and one can pass from comfortable affluence to poverty in the space of a few kilometres.

Add to this the historical accident of the manner of settlement of the various parts of the country, and you will understand why the ten provinces vary so much in size, economic strength and cultural tradition that for many purposes they can be regarded as independent countries. Indeed, in matters of educational administration and jurisdiction, the governments of the provinces of Canada are wholly and completely autonomous. The provinces, in turn, have delegated considerable responsibility for operating the schools, to the locally elected - or appointed school boards. In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, there are 35 such school boards. It is for one of these school boards that I have been developing school library services during the past three years.

Although education for children is under the jurisdiction of the provinces, Canada's cultural policies are determined by the federal Department of the Secretary of State. This Department coordinates nine cultural agencies, including the National Film Board of Canada and the National Library of Canada.

(1) - Eskimo: also known as Inuit people

(2) - Indian: also referred to as Native people.

Culturally, Canada is a rich mosaic of various ethnic people. The two dominant cultures, French and English, created the political entity of the Dominion of Canada a little over a hundred years ago. Today, French and English are Canada's official languages. Canada's rich mosaic culture stems not only from the French and English, but also from the Indians and Eskimos, as well as from the various immigrant groups.

Although the oral tradition of Canada's Indian and Eskimo people is long and rich, it is mostly in the last hundred years that these traditions have been recorded in printed form. Before 1800, the few children's books that existed were generally of a religious and didactic nature. Of the 263 works published in Quebec between 1801 and 1810, at least two were destined for children. There was the *Geographie a l'usage des ecoliers du Petit Seminaire de Quebec*, John Neilson, 1804, and *Le grand alphabet francais*, Quebec, Imprime a la Nouvelle imprimerie, 1806. No doubt both these books found their way into the hands of children via such cultural and pedagogical institutions of the day, as *Le Seminaire de Quebec* (founded 1765), *le College de Montreal* (founded 1767), and the *Bibliotheque publique de Quebec* (founded 1779).

The earliest-known CANADIAN picture book in English, *An Illustrated Comic Alphabet* designed by Amelia Frances Howard Gibbon in 1859 (published in 1966 by Oxford University Press) is a transplant of British culture as can be seen in its drawings of Tom Thumb's Alphabet. One of the first children's books with a CANADIAN SETTING was Catherine Parr Traill's *CANADIAN CRUSOE: a tale of the Rice Lake plains*, London,

developperont le gout de la litterature canadienne".

Father Casgrain at the same time received a ten year contract to furnish the Quebec Department of Instruction with a list of the best Canadian authors, as well as to provide the books recommended. Thus, authors such as Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, Patrice Lacombe, Joseph Marmette, Benjamin Sulte, and Louise Legendre, were recommended to the young, even though their writings were not specifically directed at children.

Specific work with children and children's books in public Libraries, was still in its infancy in North America at the turn of the century:

It was in Montreal, the year 1900, at a meeting of the American Library Association, that a CHILDREN'S LIBRARIANS' CLUB was formed with Anne Carroll Moore its president.

That same Anne Carroll Moore was to become a friend of Canada's own promoter of excellence in children's literature, Lillian Smith, the genius of the Toronto Boys' and Girls' House (founded 1922). Whereas the major influence on English-Speaking children's librarians and children's literature in Canada, have come from the Boys' and Girls' House of The Toronto public Library, the influence on French Canadian children's librarians and children's literature, probably stem from the founding of two privately run children's libraries in Montreal. The year 1929 saw the establishment of the Independent Montreal Children's Library, which in turn influenced the establishment of La Bibliotheque des Enfants in Hochelaga district of Montreal in 1973. (or 1936?)

It is interesting to note that in those early days, the English and French speaking children's librarians communicated enough with each other to form the bilingual Canadian Association of children's Librarians/Association canadienne des bibliothecaires pour enfants in 1932. A few years later in 1949, such dynamic women as Lillian Smith from Toronto and Jeanne Sainte-Pierre from Montreal were instrumental in forming Young Canada's Book Week/La Semaine du Livre pour la jeunesse canadienne, which for twenty-four years provided the only national focus in Canada on children's literature.

The influence of these two Canadian pioneers in the promotion of good children's literature, Lillian Smith and Jeanne Saint-Pierre, cannot be stressed enough. Although there were no doubt many other Canadian children's librarians of note, these two have special significance. Lillian Smith, in her long years as director of the Toronto Boys and Girls' House, was the champion of the conviction that children's books are "a portion of universal literature and must be subjected to the same standards of criticism as any other form of literature." Lillian Smith's theme in her book *The Unreluctant Years* of "the importance of the selective function in finding and making known the best in children's literature", was taken up by her followers Sheila Egoff who applied the same critical standards in *The Republic of Childhood*: (1st ed Oxford, 1967; 2nd ed 1975) a study of English Canadian children's literature

In the introduction of the first edition of *The Republic of Childhood*, Sheila Egoff wrote:

" a study of the children's books of any one country

cannot help but reveal a good deal about that country. A study of Canadian children's books therefore, can throw some light on the nation itself."

This basic philosophy that children's books are a mirror of the country in which they are produced, is probably one of the reasons why we have come from around the world to meet here in Tehran. If you read our children's books, you will see "what Canada and Canadians are like, what values we respect, (and) how we look at ourselves today and at our past."

It has been eight years since the first edition of Sheila Egoff's *The Republic of Childhood* appeared. Since then there have been enough developments in Canada, to warrant a second edition, which is rolling off the presses at this very time. Sheila Egoff describes this development succinctly:

"The movement, then, has been an inching forward rather than a leap-frogging. Building on a distinctive tradition of outdoor fiction and tales of our native peoples, we have produced a strong - though narrow, conservative, and unambitious - body of writing firmly rooted in the land that equals the best fiction of this kind from other countries. Up to the present the tradition thus established has been strong enough to resist modern trends - good and bad - that are apparent in children's books from other countries, especially from the United States. We regret that the "tour de force" - the kind of imaginative, introspective departure from the norm that has blossomed forth in other countries - is unknown to

us in Canadian context, but we can hardly, deplore the fact that facile, simplistic, sterile novels with sociological meaning which are dominating without enriching American Children's books, have hardly been tried by Canadian writers. However, while additions to our literature for children over the past eight years and their scope have been unexceptionable on the whole, there have been some notable gains. Eskimo and Indian legends, fantasy, biography, and illustrations are definitely richer. The record is not dramatic but it is substantial....."

While Lillian Smith exerted her influence over children's books in English speaking Canada, the pioneers in French Canada were Jeanne Sainte-Pierre and Alvin Belisle. Mlle Belisle for many years influenced French Canadian children's books through her work with the School Libraries Services of the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec. Mlle Jeanne Sainte-Pierre began her involvement with children's books almost forty years ago when she worked as a volunteer in La Bibliothèque des Enfants in Montreal under Gabrielle Labelle. After 1941, when Mlle Sainte-Pierre became director of this library there was much development in bringing children's books to French Canadian Children. Today, Mlle Sainte-Pierre is just as fervently involved in the promotion of French-Canadian children's books as she was in those early years. Not only is Jeanne Sainte-Pierre a consultant with Lemac's Service-Jeunesse, but is also Vice-President, of Communication - Jenesse.

Communication-Jeunesse, founded in 1970 by the French-Canadian

children's book writer, Paule Daveluy, was born at a critical point in the production of French-Canadian children's books. From 1960 to 1969, book production of Canadian children's books in French dropped drastically from forty-nine to four.

Furthermore, while in 1950 there were a dozen French-Canadian publishers ceating books for children, in 1970 there were only two. I am happy to say that the creation of Communication-Jeunesse has made an impact during the last five years. At least six French-Canadian publishers - Lemeac, Fides, l'Héritage, Tundra, Garneau, Les Presses Laurentides - now have an active programme of publishing French-Canadian Children's books. Communication-Jeunesse, with its very dedicated membership composed of writers, librarians, publishers and booksellers of children's books, has made its impact felt through a number of projects.

Their projects range from the organization of an exhibit of French Canadian Children's books - l'exposition des livres canadien pour la jeunesse en francais which is currently being held at the Institute Culturelle Canadienne in Paris to the publishing of informative reference works for French-Canadian children's literature.

In English Canada, some thirty or forty children's books were published each year between 1952 and 1964, and sixty-one in 1965. "The publications of these years formed the backbone of Canadian children's literature. Within this quarter century children had the stories of Roderick Haig-Brown, Farley Mowat, Catherine Anthony Clark, John Hayes, Christie Harris, James Houston, Donald G. Goodspeed, all of whom produced a body of work for children." As the French-Canadian

scene indicated, the book production of children's books in the seventies declined somewhat in Canada.

Most of my discussion on Canadian children's books so far has centered on those books written in English or French. While there exists a body of Canadian adult literature in other languages such as Polish, Hungarian, and German, practically nothing has been written for the children of Canadian immigrants in their native languages. If anything does exist in this area, it must be very well hidden. There is, however, in existence in Toronto an Association of Ukrainian writers for Children and Youth. Unfortunately, I was unable to contact its president, Olga Mak, in order to determine exactly what this association had produced. In 1972, there did appear, in English, an anthology of tales representing Canada's various ethnic groups, *The lucky coin*.

An exciting development in the production of Canadian children's books has been the fact that the Indian and Eskimo people have begun to produce their own books. A different awareness of the Indian and Eskimo cultures comes by reading the words of their own authors. Authors and artists such as Daphne Beavon, George Chutesi, Alex Grisdale, Ronald Melzack, and Agnes Nanogak give us new insights into a culture that had previously been described by non-native people.

The legends of the Canadian Indians and Eskimo could be of particular interest to this group of children's literature specialists gathered here in Tehran, for the purpose of discussing how children's literature can promote peace and international understanding. Again, listen to the voice of Sheila Egoff:

"Many of the virtues the legends extol are universal: kindness to man and animals, courage and strength in the face of adversity, loyalty to family and tribe, unfailing devotion even unto death. The legends have special value for Canadians because they deal with a physical environment that is familiar to us: the mountains, rivers and animals are ours, along with the frightening wilderness, the endless prairie, the swift-moving rivers, the fruits of earth and sea. Nor is the Indians' relationship with nature beyond our understanding: the struggle between man and his environment is still a dominant one in many parts of Canada."

During the last three years, as I travelled to our schools in the remote outposts of New foundland, I have certainly experienced the powerful forces of nature at first hand. More than once my travel plans with car, snowmobile, boat and bushplane have had to bow to the furies of snow, rain and wind.

This struggle between man and his environment is even more pronounced when we examine the Eskimo legends. "There is a vast pool of Eskimo material still lying undisturbed in the pages of anthropological studies, and probably much more residing untapped in the memories of the older living Eskimos. Neither source is easily reachable. The report literature is fragmented and imbedded within the wider framework of Eskimo thought and culture. From all accounts, the Eskimo are shy about revealing their tales. After all, myth, legend and folktale should be shrouded in mystery, linked as they are to religion, ritual, and taboo. And, naturally enough, the Eskimo storyteller does not stop to explain things to his audience. So writes Sheila Egoff.

Although few in number, these Eskimo legends that we have for children are deep and full of the inner meaning of life. My favourite Eskimo stories are those told by the storyteller James Houston. As in most of his books, in Kiviok's Magic Journey: An Eskimo Legend, Longman, 1973, Houston was the creator of both words and illustrations. For French speaking children there are at least two notable Eskimo books: Yves Theriault's Nauya, le petit Esquimau, Beauchemin, 1963, and Lucile Durand's Koumic le petit Esquimaux, Centre de Psychologie et de pedagogie, 1964.

Canadian children have had excellent retellings of Indian legends by such authors as Robert Ayre, Christie Harris, Kay Hill, and Dorothy Reid. An interesting novel about an Iroquois Indian boy is Claude Aubry's sensitive story of Agouhanna, first published in its English edition by Doubleday in 1972 and by paperjacks in 1973, and more recently in its French edition by McGraw-Hill, 1974. Another well-written Indian story for children which you can read in either French or English is Monique Corriveau's Wapiti.

You may be interested to know that our Indian legends often somewhat resemble the myths in other lands:

"Prometheus stole fire for the Greeks; Raven stole it for the West Coast Indians; Nanabozho for the Ojibway or Chippewas; and Glooscap for the East Coast Indians. The Canadian rabbit lost his tail as did rabbits around the world; and whereas Noah built an ark to escape a flood, the Indians built a raft or canoe."

Yet, "unlike the static, easily grasped personages of Western mythology, Indian heroes are volatile and inconsistent. They indulge in

bewildering transformations, changing rapidly and seemingly at random from demi-god to human to animal."

Tales were not only told by the Indians & Eskimo, but also by the early French and English settlers. Two pioneers who translated Canada's oral literature into a written form, Mari us Barbeau (1883) and Father Henri Raymond Casgrain (1831-1904). Father Casgrain's *Legendes canadiennes Quebec*, 1861, was a collection of three French-Canadian folk-stories. One of the impressive collections of the anthropologist and ethnologist Barbeau, *Les contes du grand-pere sept-heures* (12 vols., 1950-53), was written for children. Eight of these stories were retold in English for children by Michael Hornyansky and published as *The Golden Phoenix and other French-Canadian Fairy Tales*, Oxford, 1958.

A more recent book of folktales is Claude Aubry's *Le violon magique et autres legendes du Canada francais*, 1968, also available in its English translation by Alice Kane as *The Magic Fiddler and Other Legends of French Canada*, Peter Martin, 1968. Because of the fact that Claude Aubry's children's books appear in both of Canada's official languages, he is equally loved and read by French and English speaking children.

The translation of Canadian children's books is an area that has great potential.

As you have seen, the development of Canada's children's book production has been slow. Therefore, it is no surprise that such sophisticated aspects of Canadian children's books as design and illustrations did not come into their own until very recently. Such books are Alan Suddon's *Cinderella, Oberon*, 1969, Elizabeth Cleaver's

The Wind Has Winds, Oxford, 1968, and Sally Go Round the Sun, McClelland & Stewart, 1969, and Theo Dimson's The Sunken City, Oxford, 1959, have set the pace. One publisher who has consistently taken care in designing and illustrating their children's books is Tundra Books of Montreal, recently established under the dynamic leadership of Ebbitt May Cutler. Many of Tundra's children's books have won awards for design and illustration:

1. Lumberjack, by the author/artist William Kurelek, was the winner of the CACL Award and The New York Times award for illustrations.
2. A prairie Boy's by William Kurelek, was winner of the CACL "Gold Medal" for Best Illustrated Book 1974, and the first Canadian book to win The New York Times annual "Best Illustrated Award".
3. A Child in prison Camp by author/artist Takshima, was winner of the CACL "Gold Medal" for "Best Illustrated Book 1972".
4. Mary of Mile 18, by author/artist Ann Blades, was winner of the CACL "Gold Medal" as Book of the Year - 1972, as well as the "Look of Books" Design Award - 1972.
5. A Boy of Tache by Ann Blades was honourable mention for CACL'S "Best Illustrated Book" 1974. Also received the Metropolitan New York printers' Award for Design and printing Quality.
6. Beyond the Sun/Au dela du soleil by Quebec author/artist Jacques de Roussan, was winner of the 1973 CACL "Gold Medal" for Best Illustrated Book.
7. Thomasina and the Trout Tree by the artists Joan Clark and Ingeborg Hiscox, received the "Look of Books Design Award for 1972. 1972.

It is thus with pride that Canada has recently been able to produce children's books of great beauty in both pictures and words. "The appearance in the last few years of new and gifted artists and of several books illustrated, with great beauty and distinction, in colour, may have signalled the beginning of a productive and distinctive Canadian tradition of book illustration. Elizabeth Cleaver, Laszlo Gal, Ann Blades, William Kurelek, and Frank Newfeld...have produced the kind of illustrated books that we hardly dared hoped for ten years ago."

▲ If my above remarks have stimulated you enough to discover the world of Canadian children's books yourself, there are two special events coming up that may interest you:

1. August 11-16, 1975, Canada will host, for the first time, the Loughborough International Seminar on Children's Literature. Canadian children's literature will be its theme. Speakers will include Claude Auby, Elizabeth Cleaver, Ruth Nichols, and Alan Suddon.

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Canada

2. May 10-16, 1976, in Vancouver, British Columbia, there will be the "Pacific Rim Conference on Children's Literature" organized by Sheila Egoff. The aim is to bring together authors, illustrators, editors, publishers and school librarians from across

Canada to learn of developments in the writing, publishing and reading of children's books that are taking place in the Pacific Rim countries.

Contact: Sheila Egoff

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For more information on the developments of children's books in French, Canada, I suggest that you contact:

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One final note. The work with Canadian children and children's books has recently received a great boost in the appointment of the country's first Children's Literature Librarian/Consultant at the National Library of Canada, Miss Irène Aubrey.

A warm thank you goes to the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults for making possible my stay among you.