Home-Work
Sugars, Cynthia

Published by University of Ottawa Press

Sugars, Cynthia.
Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Canadian Literature.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/4460

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=252188
In the first decade of the twentieth century, two texts that were to become classics of Canadian children’s literature were published just five years apart: Ernest Thompson Seton’s *Two Little Savages: Being the Adventures of Two Boys and What They Learned*, in 1903, and L.M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables*, in 1908. The story of the education of Anne, the imaginative orphan, is better known today than the story of Seton’s Yan, a pale and sickly boy who achieves courage and self-respect through independent play in the woods. But in their historical moment, both of these narratives resonated with a new, emancipatory view of the child as a creature with independent desires, interests, and imagination. This was the moment when, in the discourse of European and North American philanthropists and progressive educators, the child was being liberated from the repressions and constraints of nineteenth-century models of discipline. The institutionalization of orphaned and dependent children was condemned as an unnatural and disabling form of care; the Humane Society campaigns of the nineteenth century—at first organized to combat cruelty to animals—were consolidated in the powers of newly formed provincial departments of neglected and dependent children and their local children’s aid societies; the mastery of traditional school subjects was rejected as the primary pedagogical goal by progressive educators, in favour of a more holistic, moral, and practical education of the “whole child.”
Two Little Savages and Anne of Green Gables register this emerging view of the child as an independent being, in narratives about children who are fostered out under terms that their own passions and interests overturn. In Two Little Savages, a boy is sent away to be toughened up through farm work but instead he winds up playing; in Anne of Green Gables, the brother and sister, Matthew and Marilla, place an order for a farm worker but what they receive is a family member. These protagonists embody an irrepressible curiosity and a resistance to rote learning that make them the model objects of the new pedagogy as well as vehicles for criticism of the old. Perhaps nothing so effectively condenses the status and function of these liberated and liberating turn-of-the-century literary cousins as Marilla's observation that her own "secret, unuttered critical thoughts had suddenly taken visible and accusing shape and form in the person of this outspoken mouse of neglected humanity" (Anne 106).

But while the theme of the emancipated child found wide circulation at the turn of the century, many Canadians were more preoccupied with the pragmatic question of how to cultivate a healthy and productive national "stock" in a context of rapidly growing population, urbanization, and industrial production. They critiqued what they called the old "forcing system" of education for its emphasis on rote learning and instead promoted a pedagogy centred on "living practice." It was not through the memorization of tables or the parsing of poems that the child would develop the lifelong disposition, tastes, habits, and skills that would fit him or her for a law-abiding, self-sufficient, active, and useful existence, they argued. Indeed, these outdated pedagogical techniques produced deleterious "nerve influences" in the very human material that would soon be sent out into the world to find useful occupations and make healthy homes. From the inaugural volume of the Canada Educational Monthly and School Chronicle—a journal established in 1879 to disseminate the latest currents of contemporary educational thought—teachers and school inspectors had been worrying about a truant "Arab population springing up in our midst," destined to become the "jail-birds" of the future, and a school regimen that subjected girls to severe mental strains that violated the "laws of nature and inheritance" (McAllister, "Aims" 97; Allen 417). Contributors criticized rigidly classical curricula that, by "neglecting the education of the hand[,] . . . weakened the power of the State" and threatened to produce a nation of "clerical people" ("Education" 629).
Such warnings established the frame of reference in which the imperialist vision of Canada as the great hope of the British Empire was staked on policies and programs for the socialization of the child. Although these projects were divergent and contested, reformers generally agreed that the roots of social problems lay in the home, but were best addressed through the school, the "agent that shaped the homes of the next generation" (Sutherland 173).

At the turn of the century, these projects of socialization often took the form of compromises between romantic educational philosophy and more utilitarian educational schemes to prepare pupils for work in rural and urban Canada. Of particular concern was the dwindling attractiveness of rural life or, as the Ontario Agricultural College Professor, James Wilson Robertson, put it, that "our vast areas of good lands could and should carry happy homes for millions more" and that Canada should not allow its population to be "huddled into big towns where the children cannot play" (qtd. in Sutherland 188). The most wide-ranging project in the early years of the century was the MacDonald-Robertson campaign to redesign public education around the goal of raising a generation of competent and contented rural workers, with an enduring taste for agricultural life. While *Anne of Green Gables* and *Two Little Savages* endorse the turn of the century's emancipatory view of the child, they also expose the complex intersection of this view with such utilitarian projects, centred on the child as the malleable material of the future. The emancipated childhoods of Anne and Yan are "nation-tinged": they tell stories about the development of the nation's human resources, and the development of national culture. Anne makes a home in a settler community into which she ventures as an outsider; Yan achieves courage and self-respect by moving into the bush and becoming an amateur naturalist and make-believe Indian. The narratives are driven by their protagonists' respective desires for family feeling and plant and animal life, the two sides of a natural order of nationhood apparently untouched by history and social conflict. Anne and Yan can thus be read as the passionate pursuers of proper places in the agrarian life of an expanding settler society.

Their drives to belong to the spheres of family and nature—their drives to, in effect, indigenize themselves—are laden with the value of the turn of the century's reconceptualization of the child. The indigenizing subject is not just a child in these narratives, but a child who has only
recently been revalorized as an autonomous being with a rich interior life and an undeniable need for freedom. Just as we are now witnessing calls for educational reforms to prepare children to serve as valuable human capital in a globalized world, the turn-of-the-century reconceptualization of childhood was an earlier moment of educational renovation that sought to remake the child for a particular imagined future. As Harry Hendrick and others have argued, the history of childhood is the history of such “reconstructions” of the child; it is the history of the intimate relationships between successive “scientific” or “expert” knowledges of childhood—always grounded in authoritative claims to know the needs of the child—the dynamics of capital, and national and imperial projects to foster the development of certain kinds of social actors. The “expert” truths pronounced about children’s needs and natures—truths that are inseparable from configurations of power—at least partly shape the space of possibility within which children live at any given moment.\(^5\)

Needless to say, children do not represent themselves in these “expert” knowledges; indeed, for over 200 years they have occupied “the receiving end of a project of knowledge-production in which the positions of subject and object of knowledge are painstakingly distinguished” (Benzaquen 34).

The maintenance of this painstaking distinction in the knowledges of childhood makes it especially interesting to consider the function of literature that claims to enter into the child’s own perspective. As Jacqueline Rose has argued, the desire to collapse the distance between adult and child, to speak directly to or for the child as if the child as such already existed either for or “in” the book, is the foundational impossibility of children’s fiction. If children’s fiction constructs an image of the child, it does so in an attempt to grasp and fix the child who remains outside of and beyond the book; to claim otherwise “is to confuse the adult’s intention to get at the child with the child [the book] portrays” (2; emphasis added). It is just such a confusion that drives the narratives of *Two Little Savages* and *Anne of Green Gables*, in which independent young protagonists are celebrated as representatives of the radical distance and alterity of childhood, even as they voice the very adult imperatives of turn-of-the-century schemes of progressive education.
The theme of the emancipated child was one that would not have escaped the notice of Montgomery and Seton, given their respective connections to formal and informal education. Before writing *Anne of Green Gables*, Montgomery attended one of Canada's more innovative Normal Schools—just as these teacher training institutions were beginning to specialize as professional schools for the dissemination of current pedagogical methods and theories, rather than places for the continuation of high-school subjects. By the turn of the century, Seton's animal stories formed almost the entirety of the nature study curriculum in the schools of Manitoba, where he held the position of the province's officially appointed naturalist (Sutherland 187). In 1902, Seton founded the Woodcraft youth recreation movement—"a man-making scheme with a blue sky background," as he called it (Seton, *Birch Bark* xiii); later on, he was recruited to serve as the Chief Scout of the Boy Scouts of North America, an organization from which he would eventually resign out of a distaste for its militarist ethos (MacDonald 142).

One impetus for the specialization of the Normal School that was under way while Montgomery was being trained as a teacher was the emerging conception of education as a science in its own right, requiring some knowledge of developmental and educational psychology on the part of its practitioners. Subtler methods of "unconscious tuition" were also coming into vogue as techniques of moral training in the school, and these were seen to rely upon "an educating power issuing from the teacher"—a "certain internal character or quality . . . acting as a positive, formative and mighty force" (Huntington 265, 267-68). The emphasis on the force of example as a pedagogical device meant that Normal Schools now carried responsibility for ridding teachers-in-training of any "ill-regulated power" and "eccentric habits" (McAllister, "Teacher" 530, 532). Exemplary character was not just a pedagogical technique, but a criterion for graduation from Normal School with a first-class teacher's licence. A Normal School textbook published in Toronto in 1912 thus advises its readers that after 20 years of school reforms, "[m]uch more is now demanded of teachers": "the growing tendency to devolve upon the school responsibilities which were once recognized as duties of the home has greatly changed the relationship of the teacher to his charge. . . . He has, in fact, become an official of the state" (Salisbury 3). The textbook does not stop at recommending that this state representative "ought to have a wholesome, engag-
ing personality”; it goes on to argue that “[i]rritability, ‘nervousness,’ hypochondria and all the brood of morbid moods which follow in the train of physical abnormality and weakness have no right to cast their shadow over the lives of school children, even though they may be often encountered in the home” (67).

As Irene Gammel and Ann Dutton have observed, the teacher figures in Montgomery’s fiction illustrate an entire “spectrum of pedagogues,” from the “demonic” and tyrannical to the charismatic (106). Already in Anne of Green Gables, there is a sharp contrast between two teachers, which permits Anne’s progress as a student in the Avonlea schoolhouse to be charted as the effect of particular educational reforms. Mr Phillips is Anne’s first teacher, an uninterested pedagogue who has been able to secure his position in the Avonlea schoolhouse only through the nepotism of a well-placed uncle. The certainty of Mr Phillips’ demise and replacement by Miss Stacy, the more respectable and progressive “lady teacher,” is assured not just by his recourse to the outmoded techniques of whipping and humiliation, but also by his habit of “making eyes at Prissy Andrews” (Anne 137).

The feminized sanitization of classroom morality that is implied in Mr Phillips’ replacement with Miss Stacy is echoed in the novel’s explicit gendering of the “lady teacher’s” penchant for positive motivation as opposed to punishment and humiliation. Miss Stacy’s feminized pedagogy in fact reflects a wider connection between the reform of the school and the reform of the family at the end of the nineteenth century. The “unconscious personal influence” (Salisbury 125) recommended by the Normal School textbook as a means of moral training drew on an ethic of “mother-love” that was articulated across the literature of the child in the second half of the nineteenth century. The literature of “disciplinary intimacy”—to borrow Richard Brodhead’s term—sentimentalized the disciplinary relation in the context of the family by advocating an intensification of the emotional bond between authority and its charges (Brodhead 71). This newly intensified bond worked its discipline through the “implantation of moral motivation,” that is to say, by instilling in the child an autonomous compulsion to make the beloved parent’s imperatives his or her own (82).

The reformed school that arose as the tutelary adjunct of middle-class domesticity carried this psychological transaction between mother and child into the classroom. The principle that “[w]hom we love we
would therefore please” was applied not just to the “right-minded child
[who] will put forth effort in a direction which he knows to be pleasing to
his parents,” but also to the school pupil whose “[a]ffection towards a
teacher will go far towards inducing the effort to please” (Salisbury 111).
In *Anne of Green Gables*, this historical movement of “mother-love” from
the home to the school is reversed, however, as “mother-love” is situated as
a form of expertise that must be disseminated starting from the school.
Miss Stacy’s influence thus extends beyond the walls of the classroom, to
reach Anne’s adoptive mother through the agency of Anne herself, once
she has come under the teacher’s influence. Montgomery’s novel marks the
point at which the “lady teacher” comes to embody the moral authority
and preventative outlook of the state in relation to the home, where “all the
brood of morbid moods” might “cast their shadow,” though they have
been purged from the school.

It is something of a truism in the criticism of children’s literature
that the child who has “never belonged to anybody,” or has been separated
from his or her birth parents, makes for a more independent protagonist
with greater “scope for the imagination,” to use Anne’s signature expres-
sion (*Anne* 16, 17). But in the separation of the child from the parents in
both *Anne of Green Gables* and *Two Little Savages* it is also possible to read
the intrusion of the turn of the century’s new professionals of childhood,
or at least their specialized knowledges of children’s natures and develop-
ment. In these two texts, the narrative of the self-inventing child without
ties to a birth family allows expertise to replace blood as the legitimate
form of adult-child relation. Anne, we are told, is the orphaned daughter
of a “lady teacher” and this biographical fact colours her lifelong desire “to
say ‘mother’” as the yearning of a pupil for the “mother-love” of a progres-
sive teacher (51). When, after passing through homes of drunkenness,
immoderate breeding, violence, and exploitation, Anne finally finds adop-
tive parents in the aging brother-and-sister couple, Matthew and Marilla,
it is not simply the narrative of Anne’s education at the Avonlea school-
house that then ensues, but also the narrative of the education of Marilla as
a mother. Marilla, in short, must be taught to exercise the kind of “mother-
love” that the teacher has already turned into a pedagogical technique in
the public school.

Marilla mistakenly “conceive[s] it to be her duty to drill Anne into a
tranquil uniformity of disposition as impossible and alien to her as to a
dancing sunbeam on one of the brook shallows" (228). It is her brother, Matthew, in fact, who voices the alternative logic of disciplinary intimacy, suggesting that Anne is "one of the sort you can do anything with if you only get her to love you" (62). But this logic works both ways, and Anne, as it turns out, can do almost anything with Marilla once she has gotten Marilla to love her. Anne must "earn her keep" in Marilla's household, but she must do so by deploying the strategy that will eventually "mellow" a fairy-tale cruel stepmother into a sentimental mother (394). Anne thus offers Marilla a transformative flow of affection, the power of which is condensed in her kiss, which thrills Marilla with a "sudden sensation of startling sweetness" (117).

At school, Anne is the object rather than the subject of disciplinary intimacy, and her moral and intellectual development begins with her affection for Miss Stacy. This affection inaugurates an effort to please that the text describes as an almost botanical event. In Miss Stacy, Montgomery's narrator explains, Anne finds a "true and helpful friend. Miss Stacy was a bright, sympathetic young woman with the happy gift of winning the affections of her pupils and bringing out the best that was in them mentally and morally. Anne expanded like a flower under this wholesome influence" (243). Anne expands like a flower, but she also expands in the midst of plant life, as Miss Stacy takes her pupils to the nearby woods for field days during which "they study ferns and flowers and birds" (241). Montgomery's ironic strategy reserves commentary on these unorthodox lessons for the village gossip, Rachel Lynde, but it is Anne who reports Rachel's sceptical commentary and transforms it into an argument on behalf of women teachers: "Mrs. Lynde says she never heard of such goings-on and it all comes of having a lady teacher. But I think it must be splendid and I believe I shall find that Miss Stacy is a kindred spirit" (241).

Anne's resemblance to and contiguity with nature under Miss Stacy's care describes the status of the child within an educational scheme that was as closely associated with the special talents of the "lady teacher" as the technique of disciplinary intimacy. The kindergarten scheme of the eighteenth-century educational philosopher, Friedrich Froebel, was based on the child's capacity for independent discovery of the natural laws of the universe through direct sense-perception and voluntary "self-activity." As one of Froebel's turn-of-the-century interpreters wrote, it was by playing "among living things, near to Nature's heart," that the child would "learn
his first baby lessons without any meddlesome middleman" (Wiggin 13–14). Revived by progressive educators, the kindergarten was hailed as a plan that should be “carried out through our educational fabric to the end of the university career” (Mills 18). Montgomery’s text stages the argument for extending kindergarten pedagogy beyond the elementary grades by tracing Anne’s plant-like flourishing under Miss Stacy’s innovative care. The “lady teacher” introduces a holistic curriculum that includes the new subjects of nature study, physical culture, English composition, and dramatic recitation, but more importantly, she presides over the Avonlea schoolhouse with what the narrator describes as a “tactful, careful, broad-minded guidance. She led her class to think and explore and discover for themselves” (232).

As much as the Froebelian kindergarten seemed to provide the ideal setting for the emancipation of the overworked pupil who had been victimized by the “forcing methods” of a classical education (Mills 18), it also provided a perfect complement to the new intellectual prestige of natural science within liberal culture and to the connections between education and evolution that were being drawn by figures such as the second-generation Darwinist, Herbert Spencer. What the subject of free “self-activity” learned in the kindergarten, ideally, was an elementary form of natural science that doubled as a form of moral training: the “scientific truths [of] correct living” as evidenced by the order of nature, the “inevitable consequence, the reaction of organic law upon its transgressor” (Gundry 25, 81). Thus, it is not just in the name of propriety that Miss Stacy, as Anne reports, “took all us girls who are in our teens down to the brook” to talk to them about “it”—that is to say, about the importance of forming habits of self-regulation early on in relation to young men (306). Nature, in Montgomery’s text, is the ideal setting for the inculcation of a sense of the natural order of things.

Anne’s expansion “like a flower” under Miss Stacy’s wholesome influence connects her education to the ideas of progressive educators for whom the kindergarten was the starting point for a natural evolutionary order in education, beginning with the cultivation of the “active instincts of childhood” that were also the instincts of the human race in its stage of infancy (Wiggin 196). For these educators, a normal childhood recapitulated the evolutionary stages of human or “racial” history. The kindergarten’s function was to serve, precisely, as a garden of children—a setting for the
undisturbed evolution of the “nature of childhood” (Hespera 29). By allowing the child to observe and explore through tactile play, the non-interfering teacher or “child gardener” permitted the “harmonious development” of the child’s nature “according to the laws of its being,” without “hurrying forward to another stage before its present stage is completed” (Hespera 29). This was the point at which Froebel’s romantic educational philosophy connected up with an emerging science of normal child development, for what was gently inculcated through child’s play in the kindergarten was nothing other than the newly discovered “nature” of childhood itself. In the kindergarten, the “healthy child” was supposed to discover for him- or herself, and manifest to the observant eye of the teacher, what were now conceived to be the normal developmental stages of “infant-nature” (Von Marenholtz-Burlow 62).

The emphasis on the child’s spontaneity and autonomy in this space for learning how to be a child “without any meddlesome middleman” suggests that the kindergarten was being conceived as another kind of Normal School, in which a process of standardization would be achieved, and the abnormal separated out from the normal, through the subtly directive and constraining effects of the norm. As François Ewald explains, “[rather than being willed by anyone in particular] or “imposed from the outside,” the norm is an essentially self-referential value; its apparent neutrality stems from the fact that it is “derived from those for whom it will serve as a standard” (154–55). A norm does not have to be imposed; its power as a form of regulation and stabilization requires only that it be exhibited and identified as an attribute that is characteristic of the given population. Thus, norms appear to derive spontaneously from those who, having internalized them as typical of their group, voluntarily re-enact them as part of their self-expression. For Ian Hunter, this is precisely the point of connection between the kindergarten playground and the English lesson in the history of liberal modes of governance in education. In the normalizing milieux of the playground and the literature lesson (once the latter was freed from the rote activities of memorization and parsing, and focused on the pupil’s individual communion with the work), the unleashing of the pupil’s originality and imagination became the very basis for the exhibition, assimilation, and subtle correction of behavioural norms. This pedagogy worked through a “double structure” in which, on the one hand, freedom and play were necessary if the child’s self
was to find expression in the school; on the other hand, it was the function of the school to “mould and shape this self in accordance with developmental norms that [were] supposedly those of life or, more scientifically, the psyche” (116).

Anne’s famous need for what she calls “scope for the imagination” thus should be read in the context of a pedagogical strategy that combined freedom and self-expression with correction. This strategy was at the heart of a new approach to the teaching of English literature that was being promoted by progressive educators during the time that Montgomery attended Normal School and followed a course of literary studies at Dalhousie College in Halifax. The new approach was cast as a rejection of parsing and other exercises performed on the text as object, in favour of the student’s far less closely directed, more open-ended engagement with the text as a conduit of feeling, spirit, or the “mental atmosphere which [the author] breathed” (qtd. in Robinson 510). If it was now the teacher's role to “watch and wait for the flashing eye and the glowing cheek that mark the electric contact of soul and soul,” this new method only made English a more practical school subject—like physical culture, nature study, and manual training, directed toward the cultivation of a “vigorous, independent race of scholars” (Robinson 514, 510). In the consensus between idealistic kindergarten enthusiasts and more utilitarian advocates of pre-vocational education, there was no perceived contest between this kind of “applied English” and resolutely practical forms of hand-and-eye training. Reformers were agreed that if the goal of education was to fit children for the work of life through the harmonious development of hand, head, and heart, the “school day [should] be arranged less and less on subjects” and “more and more on occupations, projects and interests” (qtd. in Sutherland 200).12

Seton's Two Little Savages is a text that endeavours to manage those “occupations, projects and interests” in detail. While Anne of Green Gables provides the narrative representation of an adolescent girl’s maturation as the effect of a practical education, Seton’s Two Little Savages is not content to represent. The text does not simply narrativize its protagonist’s immersion in nature, it also endeavours to engage the reader as a subject of forest games. Thus, whereas Anne of Green Gables relies for its effects on the reader’s alternating identifications with the wildly imaginative Anne and a narrator who intervenes to put things into perspective, Two Little Savages uses a more direct form of address to urge the reader to imitate Yan and his
forms of play. Indeed, for long stretches, narrative movement is almost minimal in Seton's voluminous, 552-page text, as forward momentum is subordinated to painstakingly detailed description and the provision of charts, diagrams, game pieces, owl-stuffing instructions, and tepee-cutting patterns. Doubling as a narrative and a do-it-yourself manual for outdoor play, the text strives to enlist the reader's participation in its protagonist's activities. If it was the role of literature within the new education to extend the "free self-activity" of kindergarten play into adolescence and even adulthood, *Two Little Savages* takes this utilitarian understanding of the connection between literature and play to the limit, proposing itself as a practical record of the tactile experiments and experiences of its young protagonist—a record so practical that it can guide the reader through the practice of these same activities.

Yan, as we are told at the beginning of the text, "never got over" the usual "keen interest in Indians and in wild life"; indeed, "as he grew older, he found a yet keener pleasure in storing up the little bits of woodcraft and Indian lore that pleased him as a boy" (19, 20). In town, Yan's attachment to these boyhood pleasures is punished by parents and teachers, but once he is unleashed from their disciplinary regime, he becomes the protagonist of a narrative that is about the forestalling of a certain kind of maturation and the making of a "natural" boy. As Gillian Brown has observed, the boys' play represented in children's fiction of the period tends to affirm Charles Dudley Warner's assertion that "[e]very boy who is good for something is a natural savage" (qtd. in Brown 91). Narratives of boyhood primitivism were informed by the same psychological theories of human development that encouraged turn-of-the-century educators to revive the Froebelian kindergarten as a scene of instinctual play. But they also drew on a more particular elaboration of normal male adolescent development as a recapitulation of the stages of human evolution that situated the adolescent boy at the stage of the "natural savage," driven by hunting, initiation, hero-worship, and gang instincts. Although this was the natural condition of adolescent boyhood, some coaching through its various aspects was required: careful "habit-making was the method, the outdoors was the scene of operations" (MacDonald 133). Other youth movements, for which outdoor, fresh-air life was essential preparation for the defence of the Empire or the vanquishing of the frontier, drew upon the purported virtues of the Zulu warrior or the Indian brave, but did not establish these
figures as adequate models of manhood (MacDonald 137). Seton's Woodcraft League was much more insistent in its appointment of the Indian as an ideal figure of "all round development," but the habits and aptitudes that the League endeavoured to cultivate in its members were modelled on received fantasies of Indianness (Birch Bark xxi).14

The Woodcraft League was a North American recreation movement that was designed to cultivate in youth a passionate curiosity about plant and animal life, as well as the practical skills necessary to survive in nature. "In the beginning," Seton writes in The Birch Bark Roll of Woodcraft, the handbook of the Woodcraft League of America, "Woodcraft was the only science known to man, because he lived in the woods, and there had to master the things of his everyday life" (3). In the modern world—where the practical knowledge and skills that this first scientist of the woods mastered are increasingly transferred to the factory—peoples and nations are losing the essential "power to do," which has been the key to national greatness and prosperity (115). Two Little Savages narrativizes Yan's equipment with this "power to do" once he is sent away to a farm and liberated to play Indian in the woods with his new companion, Sam Raften. But while their practical doings are very often activities such as deer hunting and moccasin-making, what Two Little Savages really stages is an Indianness without Indians. The boys' desire to be authentic Indians is often a source of ironic humour as the narrator underlines the performative element of their camp play and the constant improvisation with makeshift substitutes that is necessary to carry off their games. Even when the text lays out explicit and detailed instructions for sacred fire-making or "Injun medicine men" owl-stuffing, Native people do not figure as teachers or authority figures (401). It is chiefly the old trapper, Caleb, married to a "squaw" in earlier days, who mediates Native knowledge and practices for the boys (371). The feminized Asian, Sin Lee (who would, as one of the boys comments, "make a better squaw than both of them" [372]), also helps them to stitch their wigwam and instructs them in the art of owl-stuffing. It might be possible to argue that the Woodcraft expertise that the boys accumulate is a makeshift product of cross-cultural bricolage, but it is rather more tempting to read the owl-stuffing episode as a metaphor for the process of Indian re-enactment that the text as a whole promotes, one that seems, in the end, to amount to an ethno-cultural taxidermy. Native people appear only very briefly in the narrative—for the space of a single
and even this appearance seems to be strikingly inconsequential: on a long trek, Yan happens upon a camp, has no trouble communicating with its inhabitants, and is soon on his way again after receiving a gift of deer tongue from the chief. Following this transaction, the narrator comments, the Indians “did not take further interest” in Yan, but it would seem to be Yan, rather, who takes no further interest in them (520).

Native characters are thus relegated to the distant background of *Two Little Savages,* as Seton’s narrativization of his “man-making scheme with a blue sky background” self-consciously calls upon a much more familiar store of highly mediated representations of Indianness. But it is not enough to observe the marginalization of historical Native people in Seton’s narrative of boys playing Indian, for there is a further irony to this picture. The program for practical education and “all round development” that Yan and Sam enact in the process of their play actually owes much to the ambitious project of Indian education that was implemented in Canada 20 years earlier, when industrial boarding schools were established with the goal of effecting a radical transformation of Indian character that would equip youths to compete with Euro-Canadians as farmers or skilled workers. The historian J.R. Miller suggests that this project to provide Native youths with a practical education can be viewed as relatively optimistic, in contrast to later schemes. However self-serving the project may seem to us today, policy-makers of the 1880s believed in the possibility of a thorough economic and cultural assimilation of Native people in schools that would be devoted to moral development and vocational training. In contrast, by the time that Seton was writing *Two Little Savages,* the federal minister responsible for Indian Affairs expressed a widely held view when he insisted on the impracticability of ambitious industrial schooling for Native children, as “the Indian cannot go out from school, making his own way and compete with the white man.” because he is without the “physical, mental or moral get-up” (Clifford Sifton, qtd. in Miller 135).

Thus, just when schemes for the practical education of the whole child were being introduced to provincial education systems and the principles of agricultural and industrial education were moving into the mainstream of public education—as they were being discussed in educational journals and promoted in the demonstration schools of the MacDonald-Robertson reform movement in the first decade of the twenti-
enth century—they were being discredited and dismantled at the level of federally administered Indian education. The education of the Native child was being downgraded, at this moment, to unpaid labour in a custodial institution. What practical education was to mean for the Native child separated from his or her parents and enclosed in a residential school was simply the half of every day spent outside of the classroom, performing the routine chores necessary to the upkeep of the institution. Seton’s *Two Little Savages* thus demonstrates the healthful effects of forest games on a Euro-Canadian boy at the very historical moment when, in a movement in the opposite direction, Native children were being gathered up into residential schools that no longer even had the old mandate to develop the potential of the Indian through assimilation. As politically suspect as the “progressivism” of the earlier campaign had been, it was now seen as impractical: the Indian child was beyond the pale of enculturation and, in any case, was not worth the expense.

The migration into the educational mainstream of the practical education that was at first reserved for society’s marginal elements was explicitly recommended by Canadian educators like Thomas Bengough, whose 1902 text, *Learning How to Do and Learning by Doing*, reports on his visits to two American institutions for the “betterment of deficient human material” through industrial and agricultural training (Bengough 61, 4). Virginia’s Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (for the education of Black and Native children and the training of the successful graduate “to work with and for his people” [64]) inspires Bengough to cite the pronouncement that “the finest, soundest and most effective educational methods in use in the United States are to be found in certain schools for negroes and Indians, and in others for young criminals in reformatory prisons” (qtd. in Bengough 61). By generalizing the educational model designed for the purposes of moral rehabilitation and enforced enculturation, public schools might provide pupils with a “practical capacity in common things” that would provide a sounder basis for their entry into the “social and industrial commonwealth” (qtd. in Bengough 61). Seton’s account of his inspiration for the Woodcraft League suggests a similar beginning in ideas about correctional programs for marginal elements and, more specifically, the preventative function of regulated recreational activity. The idea of inculcating a taste for nature and all things “Indian” in youths as a basis for wholesome recreational activity is reported
to have occurred to him when he encountered a gang of young vandals on his property and was prompted to wonder how they might be steered away from lives of criminality (MacDonald 139). It is not surprising, then, that Seton's prefatory comments in *The Birch Bark Roll of Woodcraft* advertise the benefits of Woodcraft in terms of a source of pleasure and recreation that pre-empts the degeneration of the "play instinct" into "wrong methods of amusement" (xvi—xvii).

In *Two Little Savages*, it is only when Yan is allowed to escape into nature to pursue the "tastes which incline him to wildlife" and act on his "inborn impulse to up and away," that his apparently troublesome independence is turned into a capacity for object lessons and practical experiments in the woods (26). In the text's narrative trajectory of progressive liberation, Yan moves from the corporal punishments of his own family, to the warmth and lenience of the Rafテン farm family, to, finally, independent play in the woods. Although there are no parents in sight at the end of this trajectory, its terminal point is the Froebelian program of pedagogical play in which the rules and protocols are established by adults from a distance. Indeed, Yan's notion of play is at times suspiciously close to school work—especially in the eyes of his companions, who are less interested in the mathematical and geometrical problems that Yan calls "White-man's Woodcraft" because they can see that "it looked 'too much like school'" (507). Yan tries to get Sam to help him build a dam by suggesting that they pretend to be beavers ("'Now, wasn't it worth it?' asked Yan, who had had much difficulty in keeping Sam steadily at play that looked so very much like work" [192]). Together, the boys also spontaneously design their own motivational exercises—a set of competitive games and an accompanying reward system, which together operate as an inducement to "play Injun properly" (304).

There may be no parents in sight in Seton's picture of pedagogical play, but the play cannot seem to proceed after a certain point without the frequent visits and assistance of a surrogate-parent, the old trapper Caleb, whom the boys adopt as their make-believe Medicine Man, a consultant on the details of camping and Indian habits (461). Another boyish adult who wants to participate in the make-believe Indian camp but comes close to supervising it instead is the Irishman William RafTen, the "warm-hearted happy-looking" foil to Yan's own father, and a man who is "a good deal of a boy at heart" (108, 254). Through RafTen, Seton's text depicts a
form of fatherhood to match the new pedagogy’s emphasis on the importance of respecting children’s pleasures and investments and building on these as a means of socialization. It is thus Raften who urges the two boys to extend their daytime excursions into the woods to setting up a camp: “That’s what I’d do if I was a boy playin’ Injun; I’d go right in an’ play,” he counsels (251). Raften furthermore establishes the rules of the boys’ camp (“no snakin’ home nights to sleep. Ye can’t hev no matches an’ no gun”), rules that the boys subsequently enforce among themselves (252). Thus, the boys’ play in *Two Little Savages* cannot help but reveal that it is being stage-managed, that play’s games and objects are those with which adults wish children to be preoccupied, for their own good and for the good of a nation that requires citizens equipped with the “power to do.”

---

For Seton, play was the most potent of instincts or “inherited habits of the race, a weapon and a force of invincible power” that dominated the child in his/her formative years and, when properly cultivated in youth, assured the adult a capacity to recreate wholesomely through pleasure “in the things of the imagination and the beauties of nature” (*Birch Bark* xv, xiv). In his prefatory comments to *The Birch Bark Roll of Woodcraft*, Seton carefully distinguishes his model for outdoor recreation from that of other youth organizations (notably the Boy Scouts) by insisting that Woodcraft lays the groundwork for “avocation,” not vocation, that is to say, for the worker’s happily independent pursuit of regenerative, health-sustaining recreational activities in his/her free time. Whereas other organizations attempt to steer children toward particular forms of work or merely aim to be “feeders for the army, . . . adding the color of adventure to reconcile the rank and file to irksome duties,” Woodcraft concerns itself with the harmonious and fully rounded development of the whole person, especially in his/her capacity to find meaning and contentment in “the daily life” (xiii, 115).

This problematization of free time, recreational capacity, and everyday contentment as arenas of life that require some form of government connects Seton’s educational program to an important shift in normative conceptions of subjectivity and citizenship in early twentieth-century Britain and North America. This shift saw the nineteenth-century ideal of
moral character, with its emphasis on work, discipline, self-mastery, and conformity, being displaced by the emergent ideal of personality, organized around the development of individuality and the quest for a unique self (White and Hunt 95). In Two Little Savages, the results of character-building are figured in the person of Yan’s older brother, who is described as “plucky and persevering, but . . . cold and hard”; although “religious, and strictly proper in his life and speech,” he is Yan’s inferior at school, and is capable of bragging that he has “no enthusiasms” (28). In contrast, Yan himself is “full of warmth, enthusiasm, earnestness and energy, but [possesses] a most passionate and ungovernable temper,” which leads him to have “strange, uncertain outbreaks of disrespect for his teachers” (31, 82).

It is partly in the imaginative and independent child’s “outbreaks of disrespect” for the teacher inclined to brutal forms of punishment that Two Little Savages enunciates its critique of character-building, but the text also denounces character-building in the context of the family. Thus, beating, “stern, religious training,” the father’s “unwise command [to Yan] to give up what was his nature,” the mother’s mere affectation of an interest in his pursuits—all of these techniques are shown to produce at best “cold and hard” individuals bereft of enthusiasms and at worst the pale, sickly, and “heart-hungry” version of Yan at 14 that his family sends away to labour on a farm (535, 20). But even the childhood of “personality” into which Yan is liberated from that point on turns out to be governed by adults—not just in the narrow sense that Yan and Sam’s make-believe Indian camp is supervised from a distance, but also in the more general sense that Yan’s trajectory of liberation follows the double structure of the new pedagogy. This pedagogy freed the child to engage in uninhibited play and self-expression in a regulated space, but by this very means, exposed the child’s “infant-nature” to observation and gentle direction. At the end of the summer of wholesome forest games, therefore, Yan comes around to acknowledging his “binding duty” to obey his parents all on his own, as he realizes that he “could not rebel if he would.” Resolving to compromise with his father’s expectation that he “go as errand boy at the first opening,” Yan decides that after another year in farm country he will “go back—he errand boy or anything to make a living, but in his hours of freedom . . . keep a little kingdom of his own,” the “kingdom of the Birds and Beasts and the power to comprehend them” (535).

In fact, the rebellion and the embrace of duty become one and the
same thing, because Yan's revenge against his father will consist in his secret knowledge that his father had unwittingly provided him with the "largest opportunity of his life," by sending him to the country as a punishment (534, 535). Yan's determination to preserve the memory of his woodland life in the future and to refuse to flinch as he pursues his dream of becoming a naturalist—though the "road to it might lie through the cellar of a grocer's shop"—thus nicely coordinates a rebellious independence with obedience to a father's wishes (536). Even the narrator's assurance that Yan is not giving up his determination to become a naturalist is not enough to quell our sense that the ultimate place for woodcraft games is memory, and that freedom—shrunken in future to the hours allotted for recreation—will consist in the nostalgic recollection of these years of play in the "kingdom of the Birds and Beasts."

At the end of *Two Little Savages*, therefore, Yan voluntarily assumes an adult perspective on the childhood pleasures of discovery, observation, and adventure in nature: he assumes the nostalgic investment in these pleasures that has in fact pervaded the narration of the text as a whole. Earlier on, the narrative has already demonstrated the function of the memory of childhood pleasures as an instrument of homo-social national bonding, when a forest adventure culminates in the boys assisting in bringing about the reconciliation of two old-time woodcrafters. "Oh, the magic of the campfire!" Seton's narrator exclaims at the end of this reconciliation: "No unkind feeling long withstands its glow. For men to meet at the same campfire is to come closer, to have a better understanding of each other, and to lay the foundations of a lasting friendship. 'He and I camped together once!' is enough to explain all cordiality between the men most wide apart, and Woodcraft days are days of memories happy, bright and lifelong" (489). The narrator's rapturous comments at the end of this episode build on the text's construction of enthusiastic masculine citizenship as a lasting fascination with the nation's natural order. What they do not acknowledge is the fact that the reconciliation of these "men most wide apart" has been achieved through their vanquishing (with the help of Yan and Sam) of common enemies—the capture of a criminal tramp and the ejection from the community of a set of "dirty paupers" (494). Thus, the circle of campfire affect that binds these lovers of nature also maps a division between the normal and the abnormal, the vigorous citizen and the unsavoury vagrant.
In *Anne of Green Gables*, as in *Two Little Savages*, the child quarantined from the influence of her birth family is a figure of normativity rather than marginality. The double structure of the new pedagogy is enacted in a narrative in which the protagonist's seemingly irrepressible originality and imagination become the very basis for her training as a particular kind of social agent. In the end, the education that allows for the unrepressed flourishing of Anne's "natural" disposition leads her to make the decision to remain at Green Gables as Marilla's faithful caregiver, and to embrace the properly feminine "joys of sincere work[,] worthy aspiration and congenial friendship" in lieu of taking up a scholarship and going away to college (396). In order to allow Anne to become the sort of womanly girl who would make such a sacrificial choice, Montgomery has had to close down the story's extra-generic excursions into the genre of the boy's adventure story, and to orchestrate a scene of heterosexualization in which only a near death-by-drowning in the midst of the performance of a Victorian poem of feminine tragedy is enough to bring Anne around to the "odd, newly awakened" idea that the "half-shy, half-eager expression in Gilbert's hazel eyes was something that was very good to see" (288).16

Prior to this point, Anne's imaginative play has consisted of a number of "queer enterprises," to borrow a term from Gillian Brown, in which Anne is allowed to be free like a boy—that is to say, "free to act without [her] actions having predictable consequences," free like the boy whose pleasures are supposed to represent the "radical distance and difference of childhood" (Brown 98). Anne insists on walking the ridge-pole of a roof in order to defend her honour against a dare; later on, she stops "in ecstasy" while reciting Scott's "Marmion," picturing herself as a heroic soldier (292). Some of her other pastimes might seem closer to Brown's description of girl's play as a rehearsal for a pre-programmed domestic future, but Anne's failures at feminine household practices are quite spectacular, and even her construction of a playhouse with her friend Diana at Idlewild, the girls' romantically named hill-grove retreat, is too coloured by their rapturous intimacy to count as the prefiguration of normal housekeeping.

Hence the extremity of the narrative curve—or, as the chapter is entitled, "The Bend in the Road"—that brings Anne to the place of a dutiful daughter at the end of the story. Anne insists on her free choice of
this narrowed horizon—"you can't prevent me," she tells Marilla, "I'm sixteen and a half [and] obstinate as a mule" (391)—in a way that only underlines the success of an education that has equipped her to internalize norms of conduct as the expressions of her own free will. The ambivalence of this ending is registered in Marilla's "queer sorrowful sense of loss" upon discovering that the "child she had learned to love had vanished somehow and here was this tall, serious-eyed girl of fifteen, with the thoughtful brows and the proudly posed little head, in her place" (324). In Marilla's sense of loss, the novel seems to acknowledge that spontaneous child's play has, after all and in retrospect, been something quite different: a training for normal adulthood.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This essay was written with the support of a postdoctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

NOTES

1. It was in the 1890s that the critique of congregate, institutionalized childcare was first put forward by an emerging cadre of child welfare professionals in Canada. Reflecting developments in educational theory and child psychology, they argued that institutionalization only produced unhealthily submissive and dependent children—"precise, well disciplined inmates," fit only for early exploitation (Rooke and Schnell 202).

2. The Prince Edward Island Children's Aid Society, it is worth noting, was founded in 1901—one year after the publication of Anne of Green Gables. For a novel that mounts its critique of orphan asylums in the rhetoric of the campaign against cruelty to animals, see Marshall Saunders' popular 1901 orphan narrative, Tilda Jane. The most damning evidence that the novel can offer against the asylum is (in Tilda Jane's words) that it "ain't a place for children what likes animiles" (138).

3. On the history of the MacDonald-Robertson movement (1900–1913) and its establishment of a series of demonstration schools to promote the introduction of nature study, manual training, and domestic science, see Sutherland.
4. I am borrowing the term “nation-tinged childhood” from Berlant 45.

5. A nation's politics, as Robert Coles has astutely observed, constitute the parameters of a child's everyday psychology (qtd. in Stephens 3).

6. For a brief history of teacher training in Canada, see Phillips 571–92. Prince Edward Island had been at the forefront of educational reforms in Canada from the mid-nineteenth century (Gammel and Dutton 108). By 1913, it was one of the provinces that had institutionalized the goals of practical, agricultural education: it had implemented bonuses for teachers who developed school gardens and provided agricultural instruction, and introduced a summer school in agricultural education at Prince of Wales College in Charlottetown—where Montgomery earned her first-class teacher's licence in 1894 (Sutherland 188). During her year of teacher training at Prince of Wales College and what was then its affiliated Normal School, Francis Bolger reports, Montgomery “led her year in English drama, English literature, Agriculture and School Management” (139).

7. Even in 1879, in order to obtain a first-class teaching licence, one required a certificate from the Normal School principal testifying that one had paid attention to one's duties and was morally fit to proceed to the qualifying examinations. See “Contributors' Department,” Canada Educational Monthly and School Chronicle.

8. As one historian of moral regulation in nineteenth-century schooling has argued, the alliance that was forged between women teachers and the state called upon a melodrama of sexual danger, which allowed both the publicly funded school and the new female teacher to purchase respectability through claims to an essential womanly instinct for drawing lines of decorum in the classroom. See Theobald.

9. Toronto was in fact the second city in the world to make the kindergarten a part of its regular school system (Phillips 422). The chief exponent of the educational doctrines of Froebel in Canada was James L. Hughes, inspector of public schools in Toronto from 1874 to 1914.

10. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, the details of these stages were articulated by the Child Study movement, which set out to identify the “periods and aspects of child life” against a backdrop of anxieties about national efficiency and race degeneration (qtd. in Hendrick 48). Composed of teachers, middle-class parents, and “scientific” experts such as doctors and psychologists, the Child Study movement applied the techniques of natural history to the study of children and succeeded in diffusing a view of the child as a creature that passed through distinct stages of mental development (Hendrick 48–49).

11. The kindergarten is regularly described in the educational literature by means of circular constructions: “The free activity of childhood is . . . the natural means for developing a child”; “What is our first index to a child's nature?—Evidently, its manifestations . . . we must seek in the child's play” (Von Marenholz-
Burdow 62). This circularity is not so much a logical fallacy as the badge of a “scientific” reasoning that claims that the norms of healthy childhood, rather than being imposed arbitrarily from the outside, are exhibited by the children themselves.

12. Sutherland is citing the report of the 1910 Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education in Canada.

13. The “expert” statement of the theory of recapitulation was provided by the American psychologist, G. Stanley Hall, in his late nineteenth-century essays on child development and especially in his book, Adolescence (1904). Hall’s theory was disseminated in a more popular form in William B. Forbush’s The Boy Problem (1901), which sounded the race degeneration alarm in relation to the urban working-class boy who was held back from instinctual re-enactment of the “Race Life” (qtd. in MacDonald 133). Forbush praised Seton’s Woodcraft movement as an “orderly endeavour to systematize and direct that fever for ‘playing Indian’” so widespread among adolescent boys who “are nearly primitive man [sic]” (qtd. in MacDonald 141).

14. In the “Health” section of The Birch Bark Roll of Woodcraft, the reader is counselled “Don’t Turn Out Your Toes Too Much” and enticed with the heading, “The Keen Eyes of the Indian. Do You Wish to Have Them?” (124).

15. The other interfering adult is of course Seton’s narrator, who intervenes to correct the boys’ exaggerations and miscalculations, and to point the reader to the sketches and diagrams that accompany the narrative.

16. Anne and her friends are “playing Elaine” (288)—staging a dramatization of the plot of Tennyson’s poem, “Lancelot and Elaine” from Idylls of the King, with Anne as Elaine, floating down the river on her gloriously maudlin death-barge—when she finds herself forced to accept the chivalrous assistance of her nemesis, Gilbert Blyth.

17. Montgomery’s use of the word “queer” to mean something like “not of the family” underlines her sense of the imaginative, unconventional aspect of the orphan, a special apartness that her narrators seem to cherish, even as the stories they tell move inexorably toward the rectification of this difference in formulaic conclusions, which turn on surprise discoveries of relatives and unlikely conversions of decidedly un-maternal, “gaunt and grey haired” women into sentimental figures of “mother-love” (Akin to Anne 40).

WORKS CITED


