IN OUR OWN IMAGE: THE CHILD, CANADIAN CULTURE, AND OUR FUTURE

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Foreword

Originally published in 1996, the following text was presented as the ninth annual Robarts lecture when I was the John P. Robarts Professor of Canadian Studies at York University for the academic year 1994-95. It was well received and excited considerable commentary given that it was perceived as a radical gaze on contemporary childhood. Yet little came of it in terms of any concrete action; indeed, the position of children and their culture within Canadian culture has, if anything, worsened. More children are now living in poverty than in 1996; children are more controlled and manipulated than ever; they evidence increased passivity (through escalating youth obesity, for example); and anger dominates their environments as never before. Hence, the call for a new vision of child and childhood is all the more necessary today in order to offer them a chance at a future they own.

A generation ago, the social historian Peter Laslett noted that:

> In the pre-industrial world there were children everywhere; playing in the village street and fields when they were very small, hanging round the farmyards and getting in the way, until they had grown enough to be given child-sized jobs to do; thronging the churches; for ever clinging to the skirts of women in the house and wherever they went and above all crowding round the cottage fires.

Given such ubiquity of youth, it is not at all surprising that the "perpetual distraction of childish noise and talk must have affected everyone almost all the time." An estimated forty-five to fifty per cent of all people alive in Stuart England were children, according to Laslett's figures which, as he indicates, accord with circumstances in twentieth-century third world communities. It is, then, more than a little surprising that:

> These crowds and crowds of little children are strangely absent from the written record, even if they are conspicuous

> enough in the pictures painted at the time, particularly the outside scenes. There is something mysterious about the silence of all these multitudes of babes in arms, toddlers and adolescents in the statements men made at the time about their own experience. (104)

Children *per se* are not really absent from the record; rather, *real* children are—their cultural existence is, in effect, a veritable silencing of the lambs. We know very little about what it was actually like to be a child anywhere in the world in times past, especially from the perspective of children themselves.

This general suppression of children as a cultural presence persists today; a circumstance that is by no means unique to Canada, though it certainly is characteristic of this country. Despite a promising increase in scholarly interest recently, Canada definitely has not showcased childhood as an aspect of its culture as have some other countries of late: for instance, Australia, where an extended and expensive scholarly anthology on childhood sold out soon after publication[1]; or Britain, which, along with producing many other relevant publications, dominates the 1988 Collins anthology, *Childhood* edited by Penelope Hughes-Hallett, a work that contains not one Canadian item in its 450 pages despite broad coverage of time, space and cultural groups worldwide.

Children do appear in a variety of "stories of childhood" in Canadian culture, that is, the range of discourses and gazes that deal with child and childhood, from anthropological considerations to literary and artistic representations. The anthropological sources are amazingly spare until relatively recently, especially given the vast accumulated data on Canada's First Nations, but then most of the early documenters were men and, often, priests; children were simply not within their purview, as the noted Huronia specialist Conrad Heidenreich observed (personal communication, Dec.1993). The absence of children from Franz Boas' monumental Northwest Coast work is even more telling given that he was one of the founders of the American Folklore Society which, at the time of its establishment in 1888, specifically identified children's traditions as one of its primary foci of interest. The Native People were already marginal; their children-far from marginal within indigenous societies-were largely ignored by outside scholars whose gaze tended to exclude them. At best, indigenous children were heard of, but certainly not from.

The storying of childhood as the Native People actually experienced it has only emerged since the late 1960s as part of their cultural

reclamation. And then it has poured forth-suppressed voices release into a post-colonial discourse, seeking validation and respect. The result is many extraordinary oral life histories, memoirs and autobiographical novels (see, for example, the works of Blackman, Johnston and Campbell). Childhood is effectively a metonym for the overall oppression of the Native People, for it is as children that they have been most marginalized, silenced and robbed of their cultural selves by Canadian culture either through omission or relentless commission. Prevailing paternalist thought and policies essentially transformed all indigenous people into voiceless children and, by so doing, purposefully dismissed them.

This is not to suggest that Canada's First Nations should be treated as children nor that children are actually to be equated with the indigenous people, but rather that Canadian society has treated them both comparably. Investigation of the positioning of such different groups at the margin illuminates some key concepts and orientations within our culture. It is also worth noting that since the late 1960s, the Native Peoples have often served as a bellwether of Canadian concerns; hence, their contemporary cultural circumstances may presage the future of our nation's youth.

The denial of voice to children generally is simply part of the adult world's control over them. As Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers note in their extended deconstruction of the knowledging of childhood, *Stories of Childhood:*

> One voice has been largely missing. . . that of children themselves. This is not accidental; it very much reflects a general dismissing of such texts in our culture. (104)

The Stainton Rogers' argument was not constructed using Canadian examples, though it easily might have been. Children have an historical cultural presence in Canada, but their cultural present has been largely ignored and they themselves have not typically been heard. Very little indeed has been made of their existence as cultural beings, of their real or imagined significance in cultural terms, or most particularly, of their own culture.

Most discourses pertaining to Canadian children come from Education and the Social Sciences (particularly Sociology and Psychology), and consider them largely in the context of various institutions, social processes or roles. Some folklore studies assume a humanistic approach focussing on aesthetics and creativity; or child-centered cultural dynamics and meaning. Otherwise, virtually all analyses of

culture in relation to Canadian children deal primarily with its acquisition through socialization and its operation in families, schools, community organizations and the like. Even the finest works available on the history of Canadian childhood, such as Joy Parr's edited collection, *Childhood and Family in Canadian History,* tend to concentrate mainly on what comes passively to children from the adult world and their gradual adjustment to the established social orders in which they live. Seldom is consideration paid to children's active creation and manipulation of their environments through cultural means; their philosophical encounters with things, people and concepts; and the position of their own thoughts and traditions in their grappling with life. Noteworthy exceptions are Neil Sutherland's article, "'Everyone seemed happy in those days': the culture of childhood in Vancouver between the 1920's and the 1960's" and the study from which it emerged, the Canadian Childhood History Project conducted in the 1980s at the University of British Columbia.

The best-known works on Canadian children's traditions, such as Edith Fowke's handsome bestseller *Sally Go Round the Sun* (1969), tend far more to description than analysis so they have done little to counter popular opinion that such cultural artifacts are passing phenomena-charming, delightful and amusing, perhaps, but in the final analysis, not very significant. Fowke's book was selected 1970 Children's Book of the Year by the Canadian Library Association. This recognition, though arguably well-deserved, has had somewhat detrimental results in terms of the appreciation of children's lore as legitimate culture, for the work enables and, through its popularity with teachers and librarians has promoted, an approach to children's traditions as adult-directed entertainment over their actual operation in child-focused situations. Dr. Fowke assuredly did not directly intend this outcome and ought not to be faulted for it, since she both recognized the value and import of children's culture and was recognized for contributions to its appreciation.[2]

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The traditional behaviors and the intangible and tangible artifacts of Canadian children continue to be viewed primarily as the embodiment of the timelessness and universality of childhood, which itself is conceived of as a state we must survive in order to emerge as people. Children in this country are, then, effectively perceived and hence treated as pre-cultural or proto-cultural beings and, therefore, because culture is a defining characteristic of human beings, as not fully hu-

man. Canadians certainly are not alone in possessing or implementing such ideas, but the situation has particular relevance to us because of whom we think we are and should be.

In many respects, children today can be seen to occupy a position in our culture not dissimilar to that which Native Peoples endured from Contact through into the second half of the 20th century. Children are a recurrent image, a central concern, even a national symbol, but they are not considered to be people like or, more to the point, quite equal to other people. Rather they are treated to a greater or lesser extent as objects—possessions or commodities to be manipulated at will. Presumably with the best intentions, adults treat them paternalistically, claiming that they act only for children's own good. But that good is determined by outsiders to the group and children rarely have any opportunity to express their own truth.

The Canadian nation has come to recognize the folly of its historical treatment of the Native Peoples and the necessity to deal in contemporary, post-colonial times with a resultant complex tangle of human anguish and irreparable damage; just demands for reparations; cultural guilt; and a search for moral justice through self-determination. Yet, we have not mended our ways for, prevented by our laws and consciences from subjugating the "child-like primitives" we once supposed the Native Peoples to be, we Canadians persist in enacting the same imperialist scenario with today's children. Let us explore the similarities.

Strong societal images of the child and childhood are reflected in their many and varied representations throughout this country over time. These images are certainly not exclusive to Canadian, but then, exceptionally little of what characterizes us (or, for that matter, any other contemporary nation) is unique. We came by many of our images quite honestly through our heritage of western civilization and Christianity, namely: the Biblical child as innocent, pure and good; the Romantic child as visionary, closer to nature and hence to supreme understanding; John Locke's child as *tabula rasa* or blank slate; and the Calvinist child as evidence of original sin and so evil by nature, though sometimes salvageable through nurture.

Some images we fashion into a distinctive, that is, truly Canadian mould, for the representations reflect as well as shape us. One such image is the child as worker or extra hands. For a period in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century, a child (specifically a needy one in care) was thought to be a highly desirable immigrant-viewed as malleable, biddable, capable of much-needed labor and bound to be grateful for the rewards that would certainly come his or her way. As a

result of this image, nearly 89,000 children were brought to Canada from Dr. Thomas Barnardo's homes and similar institutions in Britain between 1865 and 1925, many to be abused and made virtual slaves, treated worse than the farm animals they frequently tended. This disparity between the imaginary child as hands and the reality is vividly presented in a 1990 documentary, *Welcome Home,* which juxtaposes historical evidence, government propaganda and the commentary of one home child. The population of Canada now includes well over a million descendants of such children—an enormous debt to an image.

The child of nature, as natural creature, which is another significant image, takes on special meaning in this country given the mythic connection with the land that underlies our identity, be it local, regional or national. The child of the Canadian imagination is not merely a part of nature, but is *one with* nature, assuming an almost Pan-like quality. Two excellent examples are the stop-frame, frozen children in Jean-Paul Lemieux's portraits of the Quebec landscape (often in winter) and the Young Ben, a real boy who embodies the spirit of the prairie in W. O. Mitchell's classic novel, *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947). The image goes much further back, however, to Charles G.D. Roberts' 1921 publication, *Children of the Wild,* and some of his other books, as well as to Ernest Thomas Seton's late 19th-century works of naturalist animal stories that established this distinctively Canadian contribution to international children's literature. The persistent image is one of a "sensuous little savage," as Wallace Stegner characterizes it in *Wolf Willow* (1962), his storying of the last plains frontier, the pre-World War I Saskatchewan milieu of his childhood.

The profound impact of Calvinism on Canadian culture (Jansenism in French Canada) is evident in our distinct take on the child as, on the one hand, evil (at least potentially) and, on the other, supremely good. The single most famous folktale of Canadian origin that centers on a child is *Rose Latulippe* also know as *The Devil at the Dance* (Fowke, 1979: 83-87). In this story, a young girl disobeys her parents' and societal proscriptions and sneaks out (sometimes wearing a red cape, no less) to go dancing: a handsome, dark stranger appears at the dance and leads our Rose into a whirl of temptation, only to be recognized for the Evil One himself, sometimes by a babe in arms who cries out or by a passing priest who eventually exorcises him away. Rose is marked indelibly in this encounter: visibly as scars of the Devil's claws on her hands and spiritually as a necessity to dedicate her lift to the Church. A pointed message to all rebellious youth!

Alex Colville, an internationally renowned Canadian artist, once asserted that he preferred to paint subjects that were "wholly good";

consequently he turned his highly controlled magic realist vision to the task of portraying children and animals.[4] Similarly, in creating the first of his many renderings of children's games on the Canadian prairies while hospitalized in England following a nervous breakdown, William Kurelek used childhood then as later to discover goodness and worth in himself and to proclaim a message of Christian virtue as the means of confronting the moral dilemmas of modern life. This image of the Canadian child is very widespread and popular, for Kurelek's illustrated book, *Prairie Boy's Winter* (1973) has won more awards than any other Canadian publication and, together with his other three works specifically for children (1974, 1975, 1976), has sold in excess of half a million copies worldwide.

Briefly, there are some other perhaps more immediate images: first, child as redeemer or savior is ever-present as third-generation figures in our immigrant literature—Noah in Mordecai Rich1er's *Son of a Smaller Hero* (1955) or young Moses in Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* (1956)—let alone in the daily lives of countless thousands whose sacrifice of home and heritage their children carry as a sentence from which they redeem themselves and their families through success in this, the new land. Second, the child as helpless dependent is widely evident in advertising-what's riding on those Michelin tires, for instance, or appealing for moderation in drinking from posters in your local liquor store asking "Do you need a better reason?" And child as victim is a vivid image in such compelling modern works as *The Boys of St. Vincent's* (1992) back to perhaps the best-known visual image of child in Canada, Paul Peel's "The Tired Model" painted in 1889 and regularly on exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Working out of a Victorian sensibility which elevated the child's form to a consideration now deemed almost pathologically voyeuristic, Peel painted several youth nudes including" A Venetian Bather" (1889) about which the noted art historian Dennis Reid has said:

> *It was probably the first nude to be publicly exhibited in Toronto. Viewers who normally would be outraged at the display of such seductive flesh were enabled by the innocence of the young subject in her exotic setting to luxuriate in the delicious curves and soft glow and to savor pleasure for its own sake.*

Such obvious exploitation of the young brings us to a singularly appropriate point to conclude this section on imaging children in Canada. In general, these representations demonstrate how we have fashioned

children in our own image, for our own purposes and how, in so doing, combined with the silence of the child's own voice, we have lost sight of the real living child. This cultural imaging and its relevance throughout our culture over time will receive the fuller discussion it merits in a book-length study-the direct result of my Robarts Chair research—on "Images of Child and Childhood in Canadian Culture." What is pertinent to this discussion is the impact of such imaging on the lives of contemporary children.

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Fine studies by scholars such as Daniel Francis (1992), Terry Goldie (1989) and Leslie Monkman (1981) pertaining to images of Native People in Canada indicate the extent and impact of this storying of our aboriginal peoples, their stereotyping along the Pesky Redskin/Noble Savage dichotomy, and the consequent failure to represent their multifaceted real cultural and human nature. The resultant situation is one of subjugation, alienation and marginalization and sentimentalization, exploitation and fossilized preservation among the image-makers. Such is the case as well for Canada's children, who remain suppressed in spite of the postcolonial, feminist, multicultural, and human rights movements of today. They are a special kind of human being sentenced to a status as *"a mixture of expensive nuisance, fragile treasure, slave and super-pet,"* in the words of the educator and commentator on childhood, John Holt (1975: 18).

Just as the images of Native People, their way of life and their cultural artifacts have been drawn into service to represent Canada and Canadianness at home and abroad, so too have children and childhood been used, as is evident by a glance at the most famous Canadian child of all—Anne (with an "e") of Green Gables. In her particularly insightful book, *Children's Literature in Canada,* Elizabeth Waterston describes Anne as operating in a distinctly Canadian way:

> the fictional Anne Shirley uses idealism, imagination, humor, and independent thought to tame society's emphasis on unremitting work, social propriety, and religious conformity.

Waterston goes on to state that Emily Carr[3] dealt with life in a similar manner, and to argue that:

Characters [of contemporary children's literature] are armed with the same weapons as the fictional Anne Shirley and the real Emily Carr:

humor, intense feelings, the will to survive, honesty and essential kindness. Canadians believe these qualities represent national values.(4)

Later in her work Waterston says:

> Canadian children's books fix an image of the country that will endure and that may well affect international relations in the future. The true image of Canada is a composite of savagery and sweetnes-like literature, like childhood. (11)

If any book has worked in this manner, it certainly is Lucy Maud Montgomery's classic, translated into dozens of languages and variously commodified overtime throughout the world (especially in Prince Edward Island where not a summer passes but that the play is staged for tourists who make pilgrimages to Anne's home, cradled on the waves of the Gulf of St. Lawrence). Anne encapsulates many of the key Canadian child images: she is an orphan, sought as extra hands (by mistake since they wanted a boy, about which much more deserves to be said); she is good (and does good, not least for Matthew and more especially Marilla Cuthbert, for whom she is a savor, brining nurturing love into an emotionally arid existence); she is unquestionably sensuous and certainly wild or savage in the sense of being untamed, but far the better for that; and above all, she is not merely close to nature, she *is* the essence of that particular place.

We Canadians frequently conceive of ourselves and present our essence as child-like, offering up our supposed youth as a nation as an excuse for our perceived or felt cultural immaturity. When our Prime Minister Sir Wilfred Laurier proclaimed late in the nineteenth century that "the twentieth century belongs to Canada," some Canadians seem to have believed that we would one day grow up, become a world power and have real guns rather than toy pistols (or the popular chicken cannon devised by the *Royal Canadian Air Farce*[4]*)*. Some Canadians still harbor such beliefs despite the modern postnational condition. It is not merely by chance then, nor does it seem unfitting, that the 1984 Canadian volume in the *A Day in the Life of* [various countries] series carries a photograph of a young boy and girl as a symbolic representation of our nation comparable to the cowboy used on the American volume. As a people we seem to conceive of ourselves, of our essential being, in terms of the best that child represents—that sublime and natural goodness, simplicity and faith in people and life For example, the Ojibway artist Arthur Shilling wrote in 1986:

Children are my island, my innocence.
They are the spirit of forgiveness.
Children are the giving
and forgiving
part of God in me. (80)

A central underlying Canadian conception of child, then, is as our conscience as a people, which made it quite natural for federal government under Brian Mulroney to chair the 1990 United Nations Summit on the Child. This national identification of ours with and through children renders all the more remarkable the fact that as a group, children are, without doubt, culturally the least advantaged—indeed, most oppressed[5]—people in Canada today for they do not even have recognition, let alone status, as a cultural group.

At the same time, children are not merely important in our cultural expression as already discussed, but central to our contemporary daily existence and (not insignificantly) to our economic activity. Kids constitute a huge market (estimates predict that by 2011 there will be 3.5 million children and youth in Ontario alone). Kid-stuff involves large sums of money: toys alone were a $1.2 billion *Canadian* industry in 1990; revenue from children's camps across the nation in 1993 was almost $110 million; and primary and secondary education combined now gobbles up over $30 thousand million Canadian dollars annually. Childhood itself is a major commodity, to be preserved individually, in specially purchased Grandmothers' remembrance books for instance, or collectively in museums (akin to the famous Museum of Childhood in Edinburgh)[6]; to be nostalgically exhibited in our homes through those objects of great pride—our family photographs—or sold in art galleries.[7] As well, childhood artifacts and expressions are regularly circulated internationally in campaigns aimed at tugging our heartstrings to loosen our purse strings in support of various causes. One particularly notable Canadian commodification of children's expression is Ben Wicks's 1995 compilation of young people's letters and drawings, *Dear Canada/Cher Canada: A Love Letter to My Country,* which is unabashedly intended to enlist children's voices in promoting national unity.[8]

Canadians have a particular angle on the commodification of childhood in that children's music is easily one of our most successful cultural exports. From over twenty years of performing, recording and publishing, Sharon, Lois and Bram as well as Raffi and Fred Penner have emerged as icons of childhood, in Canada and beyond our borders. They are all Canadians rooted in a long tradition of folk singing

for children fostered by the CBC around mid-century and Sir Ernest Macmillan's arrangements of traditional music for school children dating from the inter-war period (for extended discussion see Posen, 1993). It must be noted that this industry almost exclusively involves music produced for children by adults rather than the music children sing and pass on by themselves, that is, their own culture.

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Children's culture itself conjures up images-of youngsters singing, skipping, clapping, playing and sharing together a rich lore passed down over the generations and occasionally recorded by dedicated collectors such as the American, William Wells Newell, in his late nineteenth-century study, *Games and Songs of American Children* and Britons, Iona and Peter Opie following World War II (see, for instance, their first major work, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren.* In part we story our childhood years through such imagery, recounting our past-times, our experiences on the streets and in the playgrounds of yesteryear, often in the process nostalgically lamenting their passage and the other concurrent transformations we perceive in society, the environment and everyday activities during the intervening years.

But, today the streets are the preferred playgrounds for relatively few children; parks are frequently favored haunts of pushers and perverts; schoolyards are by intention orchestrated into adventure playgrounds and adult-supervised activities or patrolled by Peacemakers, adult-designated peer troubleshooters. Surface evidence might easily lead one to presume that the demise of children's lore has come, having been predicted virtually since the name in 1846 of the discipline of Folklore which studies such oral-based culture. One might claim, in keeping with Neil Postman's argument presented in *The Disappearance of Childhood* (1984), that much more than the lore, the very state of being a child has vanished, its passing hastened along as (in the manner outlined by David Elkind in *The Hurried Child* [1988]) we determinedly hurry our children through a brief, youthful apprenticeship for supposedly *real* life. Would we dare suggested that old age is comparably an apprenticeship for the next phase of the life cycle—death? In a certain spiritual sense the golden years may indeed serve such a preparatory function, but surely that would command greater not less respect for this period. The political correctness emergent from gerontology demands the social recognition and just treatment of our seniors as full human beings with all the attendant rights, feelings, interests and so on. Why not similar recognition and treatment

for those at the other end of the life cycle? After, as a childhood friend of mine wisely remarked many years ago, "Babies are wee people."[9]

We in contemporary western society significantly orchestrate our children's existence. In good part our of fears for their physical safety and security now or in the future:

> we institutionalize them early—age three was recommended in the *"For the Love of Learning,"* the report of a recent Ontario Royal Commission on Learning; we structure their free time into endless classes or organized activities, often of our choosing for their good, or for our good so we can fulfill the demands of our lives; we direct them towards success as we define it; we instruct them variously and continuously as we perceive they require; we manipulate their environments to reflect our ideas; we censor their cultural experiences and expressions according to our aesthetic sensibilities, and we generally seek to control and direct them so as to produce children as we think they ought to be, that is, *in our own image.*

In assuming as our right this extension of ourselves onto and through our children, surely we ought to accept responsibility for the contingent messages we convey to the young. Yet, there is little to suggest that we give much more than passing thought to those messages or how they are received. Comparable were the messages we communicated explicitly or implicitly to our aboriginal peoples in the course of their colonization. Now, faced with the consequences, we recognize that the Native People generally felt belittled and demeaned; came to view themselves as being inferior and forced to undergo radical transformation in order to benefit from, let alone participate in, mainstream culture. Large numbers ended up believing that they had lost control of their existence and, far too often, that their lives were not worth living.

Culture was both medium and message in this communication, which we now dub cultural genocide while engaging in a communal *mea culpa.* But does the guilt feel so good that we wish to repeat it? It would seem from our actions that singularly appropriate representations are to be found in the haunting portraits of the young amongst Edward S. Curtis's documentary photographs of "the vanishing race" included in his magnum opus, *The North American Indian,* published in the early 1900s. During their colonization, Native People were encouraged away from their cultural traditions, sometimes purposefully

impeded and/or prohibited from practicing and transmitting them by outsiders who did not really understand or appreciate the cultures. Are not the cultural circumstances of Canada's children similar?

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As elsewhere in the world, the culture of childhood in Canada must be seen to comprise three different, though inter-related aspects. The first of these is the predominantly oral culture shared amongst children themselves, that is, their folklore-folklife, which includes material they appropriate from the world around and make their own; the second is all those cultural artifacts considered appropriate to children and/or to which they are intentionally exposed; and the third, the concept of child as storied and applied in the culture which necessarily both bounds and enables the existence of a culture of childhood. In this child-centered era, it is the latter two aspects that have mushroomed in presence so as to overshadow the child's present, which comprises his/her own take on the world, interpretation of circumstances, creative expression and the like embodied in children's own cultural artifacts not only preserved from the past but also shaped from and to contemporary life.

In order to have such cultural artifacts of their own, children need time to be together, to explore the natural, social and personal worlds in which they exist, and to share their ideas and experiences. They need to encounter trials, be surprised, experiment, manipulate their surroundings, fail and master. In other words, they need to develop their cultural fitness through relevant exercise just as they should develop physical fitness by using appropriate muscles. The "cultural muscles' appropriate to children are rhymes, jokes, riddles, games, taunts, songs, parodies, gestures and much more that young people operate with and through amongst their peers, thereby manipulating, creating, negotiating, absorbing, reacting within a vital, interactive and, in a healthy way, subversive[10] cultural matrix. It is such experiences that validate their existence as child, make worthy their very being (rather than their becoming), and underscore their joy in living.

The dynamics of contemporary life are such that relatively few children are encouraged or enabled to spend extended periods in child-focussed, child-directed environments engaged with children's own culture. Indeed, not a few responsible adults seem to view such circumstances with suspicion or derision. Rather than being respected as their right to privacy and freedom of expression, the *secret* world of children alone together is frequently equated with dark or sinister

behaviors, and as contributing to violence on the playgrounds, or to racial and gender stereotyping, or to "mischief" in its various aspects from sexual exploration to drug use. Either out of necessity or, in good Calvinist fashion, to ensure that their time is spend more wisely, the adult world increasingly restricts children's free time to be children.

But children's lore is far from dead, as demonstrated by the ease with which Virginia Caputo collected some 300 songs in oral circulation among urban schoolchildren in just six one-hour sessions.[11] A forum I organized for the 1994 American Folklore Society meeting on "Children's Folklore in the Media Age: Assessing the Field" concluded that the tradition, while transformed, notably persisted but also continued to display dynamic creativity. Very young children today may sing along with an animated purpose dinosaur they see on television but, as documented by panelist Elizabeth Tucker, they readily come to manipulate the Barney theme song in order to comment on the media or on human interrelationships, especial friendship and homosexuality.[12]

When the adult world turns its gaze upon children's own culture, it is commonly with pragmatic intent. Specialists from many fields recognize the benefits to children of engaging with their own culture, including: developments in terms of motor control, physical fitness, linguistic acumen, social skills, cultural stances or orientations, and understanding of abstract concepts such as justice as well as basic life skills. Play is good for children, psychologists tell us; it enables the proper unfolding of individuality that permits people to control their own lives. Fair enough, but such ideas do place emphasis on the *becoming* rather than the *being* in terms of culture. Adults typically want to ensure that the unfolding is, indeed, *proper,* and hence tend to intervene.

Let us consider an example: contemporary playground observations indicate that some children playa form of tag in which It has and can pass on HIV Upon learning of this game, many adults react in horror in one of two ways: either proclaiming (on the basis of their moral precepts or sentimental images) that youngsters should not play with AIDS, or demanding that children be taught the real facts of AIDS. The game should, then, be banned or attached through appropriate instruction. Few would let it be, allowing that the game is children's means of coping with the existence of this real-life terror through exerting control over it in the relatively sage microcosm of life that their culture, in effect, really is. During the Second World War, British children are reported to have played similarly with Hitler and Nazism (see Opie & Opie) in an effort to understand and to maintain the sense of

control over surroundings necessary to emotional well being. Also, one of the hypothetical origins for "Ring around the Rosie" suggests that this game, too, developed among youngsters in their efforts to assert control through play over another terror, the Black Death.[13]

The world around seldom seems to view children as knowing, having, doing but rather as needing, lacking, emerging. Little if any intrinsic value appears to be placed on the state of being child. How to encourage self-worth, then? Much of children's own culture has been around a very long time: it should be obvious that it is of significance, that it works and has real meaning for children since it truly has been strong enough to be remembered by them. By what right then do we endeavor to change it? and with what effect? Take some modern (politically correct) rewritings of nursery rhymes, for instance: "Georgy Porgy, puddin' and pie, Kissed the girls and made them cry. . ." becomes "Georgy Porgy, what a shame, Kids call you such a silly name . . ."[14] Children who use the first rhyme know that Georgy did something he should not have done and made girls cry, so name-calling is Georgy's just desserts-retributive justice, an idea generally favored by children; youngsters who hear the second verse recognize it for the over, preaching didacticism it is and will not embrace it in their tradition so the adult's intent is foiled. Which is really in the cultural best interests of the child?

The liberties we take with children's culture demonstrate our unwillingness to accept the young for who they are, to recognize their differences and to celebrate their distinctiveness. These familiar phrases are the demands of multiculturalism, enshrined in the laws of the land, expressive of the fundamental freedoms of *all* (presumably younger and older) Canadians as specified in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and at the heart of Canadianness. Cultural self-determination is the cry of our times, yet our children are less culturally empowered than any other distinctive minority. While children in care have the right to their religious freedom, the right to maintain their own culture and various other rights guaranteed under provincial legislation (for instance the Child and Family Services Act in Ontario), there is no similar statement of rights for a child not in care, who is, therefore, much at the mercy of his/her parents culturally. The phenomenal cultural reality experienced by many youngsters seriously infringes upon their rights, namely, to freedom of expression and freedom of thought, conscience and religion as specified in Articles 13 and 14 of the Hague Convention, the UNESCO Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989, of which Canada was a major supporter and signatory.

Children are such cultural pawns that it comes to some as a genuine revelation that their lives are actually their own. Jean Little, one of Canada's most famous authors for children, recounts her awakening at age nine following upon an aesthetic reaction to orange segments arranged as *"a line of glowing orange boats":*

> For the first time I saw my world and my life as something that belonged to me and began to put small scraps of time away in a place where I could take them out and look at them whenever I needed.(92-93)

Ms. Little's marked success despite being legally blind is undoubtedly linked to this empowerment that refuses victimhood. Substantial numbers of Canada's children never are personally empowered culturally and assuredly suffer variously as a result, just as the Native People have. Many of the significant youth problems of today are notably similar to the a-social and anti-social behaviors exhibited by Native People that are commonly traced to colonization, for instance, low self-esteem, substance abuse, increased violence, inter-generation conflicts, rootlessness and lack of identity and, most alarming, a dramatic rise in the suicide rate.

Some psychologists and youth psychiatrists offer perspectives from their disciplines that may be adapted to a cultural understanding of this situation. In particular, Alice Miller presents in *he Drama of the Gifted Child and the Search for the True Self (l983)* a concept of loss of authentic self during childhood which derives from the abandonment or repression of aspects of children's personality deemed unacceptable in an effort to seek approval from parents or society-at-large. The result if a false self that requires external validation: in effect, a young person who is highly vulnerable and without internal direction. It is evident that growing numbers of children are experiencing a similar loss of their true cultural selves to which they may respond in several ways. Some develop a false cultural being that meets with parental, peer group and/or societal approval but is seldom richly satisfying in terms of providing a firm sense of identity and ownership. Others may rebel culturally, seeking solace in the highly subversive youth pop culture, which can lead them away from the security of local identifications into the consumerism and anonymity of international media and often into self-destructive or anti-social actions. Still others exist in a cultural void, estranged and without commitment or purpose.

The notable rage evident among contemporary youth owes partly to the suppression of this authentic cultural self which an individual

normally would. come to realize by actively manipulating culture to include self in relation to various groups, their traditions and artifacts. What we have, then, is growing numbers of young people who are suffering because they do not know who they are or where they belong as a result of being unable to engage actively with culture—ANY culture, let alone our national culture which could be seen to need their involvement.

There seems to be little joy in life for many of our youth, but why? An absence of fulfillment through joy, as opposed to amusement or thrills, can be directly linked to a stifling of the play-element in modern childhood. Today's children certainly play, but they generally do so under the scrutiny of adults as in daycare or during school recess, unless they are in the aerobics classes now being scheduled by some schools to utilize this time to (supposedly) greater effect in promoting fitness. Such efforts may foster physical, but not emotional fitness. Children need the freedom to develop emotional well-being, too, which is facilitated more through the interpersonal connectedness of their oral traditions and through observation and imitation amongst themselves than through intellectual activity or instruction under adult control.[15] Adults authoritatively make certain that children are well controlled and supervised to ensure that their play is *good for* them, that no one gets hurt, that no one bullies or name-calls or teases or . . . copes in. manipulates and masters the natural and social world around or the emotional world within,

So it is that our children are culturally deprived and become dis-engaged. Marginalized and repressed while young, they do not personally appreciate culture as a concept, a process or a set of products. Hence they become prey to manipulation as passive recipients of, rather than creative participants in, the larger cultural matrix beyond their limited experience-a retrograde state for any nation, let alone for one so tentative about identity as our own.

The recognition of the culture of childhood within Canadian culture today and in the future has implication for the overall cultural well being of our nation's citizens. Our own image for children may not be in their cultural best interests or in Canada's best interests culturally. It remains a challenge to determine and pursue these cultural best interests of the child (CBIOC), but doing so is imperative. Only by actually, rather than merely rhetorically, recognizing the full rights of children will Canadians act in accord with their cultural ideals and enable future generations to continue the pursuit of excellence in being human that rests at the core of Canadianness. To do so requires that the child's own voice not only be heard but also be taken on advisement.

For young people to come to possess Canadian culture, they must first manipulate and master culture as children. They must know that they themselves own culture and realize the self-validation and self-esteem attendant upon the acceptance of that culture as equal to all others recognized under multiculturalism. Paradoxically, while children's rights in some, especially legal, areas are being supported (see Wilson), the respect for children's way of being, and therefore their culture, is lessening.

Key to promoting better child-adult interaction is the promotion of children's enablement rather than their containment, which first demands appreciation for the cross-cultural communication involved as a two-way process. Simply put, such a situation means that we adults have much to learn about children from children themselves. The knowledge children bring to any situation bears consideration, for no more than members of any other cultural group are children neutral receptacles disposed to received and be shaped entirely from outside.

Heritage is naturally a prime concern relating to the CBIOC. It behooves us as responsible adults to consider whether we are doing children any favor by imposing our heritage baggage on them, especially given the emergence of mixed ethnicity as the defining characteristic of the largest single group of Canadians. Is it not right and in keeping with Canadian ideals that any child should have a say in heritage-related matters within the family just as that child would be heard in a custody dispute? According children such a voice (and hence increasing their control) would, however, necessitate major restructuring of engrained cultural concepts of child and childhood, parent, child rearing and more. But such a restructuring is needed to liberate Canada's children and to ensure their just treatment today as well as their ownership of their futures.

In *Surviving as Indians: the Challenge of Self-Government* (1993), Menno Boldt poses five carefully argued imperatives to effect a just future for Indians in Canada (see p. x). Four of these are, with adaptation, applicable to a just future for children in Canada, as follows:

1. moral justice for children;
2. Canadian policies that treat children's rights, interests, as pirations and needs as equal to those of other distinctive cultural groups in Canada;
3. Child-focussed leadership that is committed to eliminating the colonization of children and to empowering young people; and

4. The assurance of appropriate circumstances for children to maintain and pursue their cultural traditions with other children.

Boldt's fifth imperative concerns economic self-determination which, in the case of children, should be replaced by the security of the necessities of life provided by the adult world.

But how are we as a people to move toward this just future for children? First, adult Canadians must make evident a certain humility with respect to youngsters, what they know, what they have, what they want, what they can best teach themselves and so on. If manipulate we must, then let it be the environments not the children. In particular, we ought to consider carefully whether our agendas of child concern and the resultant environments we impose on children are really in their (and ultimately, then, the Canadian peoples') cultural best interests.

Of the many questions this presentation raises, the most central concern is how to achieve the goals it establishes. As a single example we might consider the desirability of children having free time to play. If we in our communities made such playtime a priority, we could direct resources towards ensuring safety on playgrounds by employing students or seniors (armed with cell phones) as discreet supervisors, or to establishing block networks for after-school play in homes or yards, using the extant model of babysitting cooperatives. What is required is the communal will; appropriate methods will follow apace.

Throughout Canada we must recognize that dealing with children is comparable to relating to members of any other cultural group. In the interests of developing better child-adult communication (and hence, mutual understanding), it is time, as Kathleen McDonnell argues, that "we called a truce in this thankless, no-win war with out kids"(18) and learn to do more than just censor and rage against their cultural preferences (20). Today's Kid Culture, as she terms children's own culture, contains a fair dose of material appropriated from or strongly influenced by popular culture. We clearly ought to recognize the legitimacy of children's chose cultural expressions—we demand the same for other cultural groups. But, cultural tolerance seemingly extends much more easily to diverse traits of distinctive others than to the sometimes wild, anarchic behaviors, attitudes and artifacts of our own children which challenge and disturb the established order. They are subversive-no more, no less than children's own traditions have always been and rightly so.

In *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups* (1990), Alison Lurie makes a powerful argument that:

> We should take children's literature seriously because it is sometimes subversive; because its values are not always those of the conventional adult world (xi)

The argument applies equally to children's culture, for it is through the manipulation, rejection and re-creation of their cultural world that young people simultaneously search for and validate their voice and so situate themselves culturally.

While deserving of recognition as a distinct cultural group, children are decidedly different from other such groups, since they do grow our of their child-focussed culture. Yet, that cultural world can be, after Tolkien's claims for the secondary world of Faerie, a key means of coming to terms with the larger reality while offering fantasy, recovery, escape and consolation in the same manner as fairy stories do. As children we can be closer than perhaps at any other time of our lives to our authentic selves in our personal cultural operations. The cultural of childhood remains with us in memory as adults, a secondary reality to be revisited as burden or release, depending on our empowerment through it. Such revisitation may illuminate the primary reality of our true (as opposed to ideal or actual) selves-a scenario played out effectively in such scenes from Canadian literature as that in Gabrielle Roy's novel, *The Cashier,* where the constrained and unfulfilled protagonist, Alexandre Chenervert, "sees" an image of himself as a playful child who looks upon the actual adult he is to become quizzically, in seeming startled disbelief(104).

To more fully appreciate the authentic child, we should recognize the limitations of our cognitive map regarding childhood, cease appropriating the child's voice and admit the complex, multi-dimensional reality of child, embracing in particular the darker side, which we all know from personal experience does exist. Only by so doing will be enable children to reappropriate their full voice and be the true subject of their own discourse.

Let us return to Wallace Stegner's sensuous little savage and consider part of his account of the savage (darker) aspect, the portrait of a real child for sure:

> I learned dirty words and dirty songs from the children of construction workers and from the. . .cowpunchers. With others, I was induced to ride calves and engage in "shit fights" with wet cow manure in the. . .corrals. Then or later I learned to dog-paddle, first in the irrigation ditch, later in the river. . .We put.22 cartridges or blasting caps on the tracks ahead of approaching handcars or

> speeders, and once we got satisfactorily chased by gandy dancers. Around Christmas we all watched the first soldiers go off to the [First World] war, and then and afterward we had trouble with some Canadian kids who said the United States was too yellow to fight. (164-65)

This picture of the child is not wholly admirable, perhaps (and that is without the scatological ending), but it is human-the real-life experiences of living children which deserves recognition and valorisation. The ideal child of our imagination must cease to silence the real child so that the actual lives children lead in this country accord with their truly, fully human nature.

* * *

1975 was the International Year of the Woman, a commemoration that drove the Women's Movement forward around the world. 1979 was the International Year of the Child, but children have neither here nor abroad yet achieved a cultural position or voice comparable to that of contemporary women, for they have no political presence and require advocates. Recently, concentration on the image of child as victim (of abuse in particular) has engendered considerable genuine empathy for children and prompted many to speak out for them. These victimization accounts may serve Canada's children as the guilt literature of the seventies did the Native People. They should prod us forward toward what we know we ought to do: stop doing to our children and let them do and be themselves while accepting and respecting them in the process.

Our cultural ideals, our cultural superego, confront us-a child, whose voice needs to be heard, whose existence as a child must be validated, whose freedom to be demands affirmation, whose full humanity must be recognized. Not only must we let our children be, we must also enable them (gradually as they are capable) to assume control over their existence, actively cope with life and, potentially, triumph over rather than passively become victims of the adversity they surely will encounter. According to a popular saying, frequently cited in contemporary popular culture as an African proverb, *"It takes a whole village to raise a child"*[16] We need to provide effective villages-spaces in our culture where children can come into themselves, surrounded by and connected with supportive adults. Childhood must not be "something we live to recover from," as historian William Westfall recently termed it.[17] To this end, young people everywhere

should be freed to experience the sheer, immediate joy in living and be able, each and everyone individually and collectively, to assert that joy. If, as Johann Huizinga suggested, the best designation for humans is "homo ludens," we will be most human and best realize our ideals as Canadians when we let the culture of children reverberate through our lives.

We are all but fellow-travellers
Along Life's weary way;
If any man can play the pipes In
God's name, let him play.[18]

Afterword

In the years since I gave this lecture, some encouraging changes of orientation to child, children's culture and childhood have occurred, notably within academe. Numerous calls for a more holistic and child-focussed approach to the study of children and their worlds (variously defined) now emanate from many disciplines. Europeans have spearheaded this trend and recently produced a body of singularly illuminating research that demonstrates the merits of the approach. North Americans have more recently, but quite vociferously, joined the movement to appreciate children's culture and legitimize the area of "children's studies." In an insightful article, Kenneth Kidd discusses "this new enthusiasm for culture as representing continuity as well as innovation."(147) Certainly it opens the door to curricular developments that may have long-range impact.

At York University in Toronto where I teach, the appetite for inter-disciplinary courses on child-related topics appears to be insatiable. The enrolment in my first-year Humanities offering, "The Worlds of Childhood" has more than doubled within five years and the course ranks amongst those with the highest unmet need in our Faculty of Arts which, with almost 10,000 students, is larger than most universities in this country. The course aims first and foremost to "hear the voice of the child" and demands that each and every student undertake fieldwork with this intent. It is a revolutionary experience for most, who bear the imprimatur of the developmentalist hegemony, but it is indisputably the most rewarding assignment on the course for most participants. The demands for more study along this line escalate every year with the result that we are now in the process of mounting an interdisciplinary undergraduate "Children's Studies" program, the first of its kind in Canada.

Like many other interdisciplinary programs, this one will be housed in the Division of Humanities, itself an interdisciplinary unit which, along with the Divisions of Social Science and Natural Science, has provided among its offerings the core General Education (now Foundations) courses since York's establishment over forty years ago. The Children's Studies program will have most in common, however, with Women's Studies—a highly developed area at York, offered through the School of Women's Studies. Students will have many options through Children's Studies, but basically each will major or minor in a discipline (from Arts, Environmental Studies or Fine Arts) and take a series of four core interdisciplinary courses plus electives in Children's Studies. Of the core, one course is planned as a practicum or internship involving placement in a child-focused setting in the larger community (a library, publishing house, community center, heritage site...as relevant to each student individually). One other will be a course in the ethics and methodologies of working with or for children. Students will, then, be able to graduate with a spectrum of concentrations from writing for children (Creative Writing/Children's Studies) to advocating for/with children (Social Work/Children's Studies) to appreciating children's interface with the natural world (Environmental Studies/Children's Studies). In each case, the emphasis will be on hearing *from* children, on liberating *their voices* and on making *them* authorities on childhood.

A research unit, the Canadian Children's Culture Collection, has been established to support the program. Already the repository of many past student projects, the CCCC will facilitate further research by students, faculty and, as appropriate, community members. It will also pursue the development of its resource collections of children's art, hand-made toys, books and relevant secondary sources. One of its primary aims will be to disseminate research results in order to develop greater understanding of children's culture and to effect changes in the condition of being child in Canada and beyond. It is hoped that the program (planned to begin in fall 2004) and its allied research unit (well established and soon to open for use) will therefore contribute significantly to achieving the goals laid out in the preceding paper.

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NOTES

[1] Gwyn Dow and June Factor, eds. *Australian Childhood,* 1991.

[2] In 1986 she received the Vicky Metcalf Award given annually by the Canadian Authors Association for a body of work deemed inspirational to Canadian youth (in her instance, folklore of or for children). Further, in 1993 she was the recipient of a Life Achievement medal from the Children's Folklore Section for her contributions to the field.

[3] A Canadian painter who lived from 1871-1945. She is best known for her representations of the Northwest coastal forests and the tangible artifacts of the Native People who inhabited the region.

[4] A weekly comedy program shown in prime time by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and known for its sociopolitical commentary.

[5] For instance, a section (albeit contested) of the Canadian Chart of Rights and Freedoms specifically allows for disciplining children by physical means, whereas no other Canadian can lawfully be hit by another.

[6] One of the models for the proposed Toronto Museum of Child hood.

[7] Just one example being an exhibit at Harbourfront in Toronto of works by Spring Hurlbut incorporating French children's beds, March-April 1995.

[8] This was during the threat of strong separatist sentiment in Quebec that threatened the Canadian union.

[9] I am grateful to Robert Graham who does not know how much his comment has influenced my thinking in the intervening years.

[10] A point frequently made in such works on children's folklore as *One Potato, Two Potato: The Secret Education of American Children* (1976) by Herbert and Mary Knapp and *Captain Cook Chased a Chook: Children's Folklore From Australia* by June Factor (1988).

[11] In this research, undertaken in the early nineties for her dissertation in Social Anthropology at York, Dr. Caputo was replicating the fieldwork done by Edith Fowke some thirty years earlier in the same Toronto schools.

[12] For instance, the text of one parody collected by Dr. Tucker in Binghamton, New York and also reported to me in Toronto turns the first lines of the Barney theme song, "I long you, you love me, We're a happy family" into "I love you, you love me, Homosex-u-al-i-ty."

[13] It is worth noting that when this lecture was first published, the paragraph received more commentary than any other part of the work.

[14] From Lansky & Carpenter, *The New Adventures of Mother Goose* (1993), as reported by Dale Anne Freed in "Georgy Porgy cleans up his

act," *Toronto Star,* 7 February a994, Section E, 1 & 3.

[15] Northrop Frye maintains in "The Cultural Development of Canada" that our most important learning and that which stays with us longest comes through such interpersonal communication (p. 16), a position long held by folklorists.

[16] Similar in meaning to the recorded Bantu proverb, "The child of your neighbour is yours" which is listed in S. G. Champion, *Racial Proverbs* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963), p. 597.

[17] Personal communication, 1994

[18] John Bennett, p. 21 *Bartlett* s *Familiar Quotations.*

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