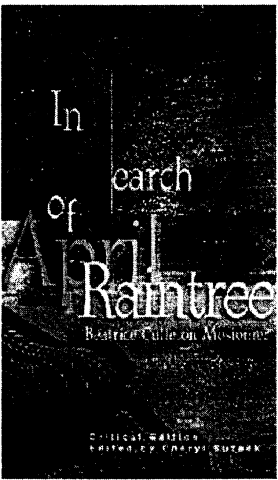


## The History of Canadian Young Adult Literature

The development of Young Adult literature in Canada is a relatively recent phenomenon. In fact, Betty Fitzpatrick in her article "Young Adult Literature" notes that until the second half of the nineteenth century, there was no Canadian Children's literature created by Canadian born writers. Canadian books were published in London or the United States. Even Mordecai Richler's The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, which was not published until 1959, was published by the British publisher André Deutsch. Between 1921 and 1950, there were only nine or ten children's books published per year.



Numbers slowly increased until the late 1960s and early 1970s when about fifty or sixty books were being published annually.

Even still, as late as the 1970s, there was not any significant development in Canadian YA literature. It wasn't until the Canadian children's publishers such as Groundwood Books, Kids Can Press, Annick Press, Women's

Press, Tundra Books, and James Lorimer, which had emerged in the 60s and 70s as supporters of nationalistic children's literature, began to diversify and expand into new markets and themes that young adult literature in Canada really began to grow.

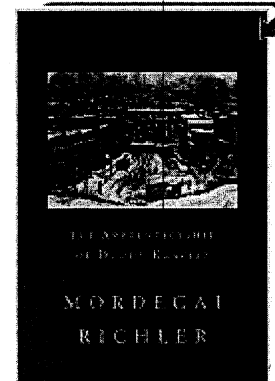
The 1980s were the period where much development took place, including the publication of many of the first YA novels. These first novels included: Fly Away Paul by Peter Davies, Hold Fast by Kevin Major, Up to Low by Brian Doyle, and In Search of April Raintree by Bernice Culleton. Betty Fitzpatrick notes that the themes of Canadian YA fiction in the 1980s and 1990s were similar to American YA Fiction and included things like homosexuality, rape and abortion. However, unlike much of the YA fiction coming out of the States, Canadian young adult literature emphasized region. Novels were as much about place and region as they were about coming of age.

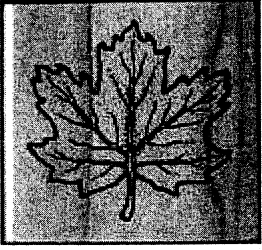
The 1990s were a decade of continued growth for YA fiction. It was during this time that First Nations authors found a voice in Canadian literature for young adults. It was a period when Canadian writers branched out, exploring different themes such as realistic fiction in the urban setting, cultural diversity and the immigrant

experience, and familial dysfunction and social conflict. Yet throughout these novels the Canadian experience and the Canadian setting holds precedence over the other elements of the book – often times even overshadowing character development.

Interestingly enough, there are some conflicting opinions about how Canadian authors treat controversial subjects as opposed to American authors. Betty Fitzpatrick notes that while Canadian authors are not afraid to broach these subjects, unlike American novels about bleak topics, Canadian books tend to have hope at the end. Perhaps this tendency to end a book with hope is connected to the continuing Canadian tendency to believe that no matter what the circumstances, or situation, survival, growth and positive change is possible.

In opposition to Fitzpatrick's opinion on the way Canadian YA novels tend to end is Judith Saltman in her essay "Canadian Literature





## The History of Canadian Young Adult Literature Continued

At the Millennium” from the book Windows and Words: A Look At Canadian Children’s Literature in English. She states that a lightness of spirit is rare and that most Canadian YA novels are heavy and even painfully sombre.

This conflict of opinions was interesting because I believe the general trend in YA fiction is to end hopefully, which contradicts Saltman’s view point; however, this contradiction, even over something as small as the way in which Canadian YA novels end, emphasizes the inherent un-definability of Canadian YA literature and the way that it continues to change, constantly stymieing critics who want to give it a label. I think that Canadian YA literature will continue to evade any standard label, something that adds to its growing appeal for young people.

