Toward the end of the nineteenth century, British girls’ print culture was increasingly interested in presenting the colonies as possible venues for better health, employment opportunities, marriage prospects, and motherhood. In particular, Canada was positioned as an especially attractive option for young female emigrants since the reasonably short ocean voyage from Britain compared favourably to much longer trips to Australia or New Zealand. Part of the strategy employed in middle-class girls’ fiction and periodicals was to situate colonial girlhood within an international sisterhood that promoted the ties of imperialism in an effort to reassure girls that life in the colonies would allow them to maintain their purity and virtue. If girls everywhere could be united by the bonds and shared values of sisterhood, potential emigrants and their families could view the colonies as appropriate destinations for young, middle-class women.

This essay focuses on British girls’ periodicals and novels published around the turn of the twentieth century that generate an imagined picture of Canadian girlhood; I also begin to contrast these representations with those produced and published in Canada. The reality is that the majority of Canadian girls’ reading at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries was comprised of material written and published in England. While histories of girls’ print culture produced in England and in Canada show that books and magazines read by girls contained a variety of perspectives on girls and their future roles, these materials offer a significant opportunity to explore how girls were fashioned as imperial and colonial subjects. Kristine Alexander demonstrates in her essay in this forum that the history of girlhood reflects a tradition of girls being “spoken for and about” by adults (134). Yet much like the Guide scrapbooks and journals she examines, in which girls select which Guide ideologies they wish to embrace, girls’ periodicals show how girls
inserted their own perspectives into their magazines through letters to the editor and correspondence sections. This essay extends work that I have begun on British girls’ print culture in *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850–1915*, in which I show that girls’ periodicals carefully developed unique models of girlhood in their pages in attempts to attract readers. In some ways, these attempts to target specific girls resemble Natalie Coulter’s exploration of the “discovery” of the tween market by advertisers. Moreover, her discussion of how childhood is marketed on an international scale has particular resonance with attempts to market the “Canadian girl” to international audiences. The “Canadian girl” not only has a national appeal based on her importance as a future wife and mother, but she also has an international appeal that emerges from the freedoms she enjoys and her supposed connection to the natural world.

British and Canadian representations reflect different attitudes toward and expectations of Canada and Canadian girlhood. In British girls’ print culture, Canadian girlhood is characterized by health, freedom, and heroism. Novels like those by Bessie Marchant include Canadian girls who are offered freedoms that would have been unacceptable in England, often as part of a strategy designed to encourage girls to emigrate. Liberated from the constraints of a British feminine ideal that valorized weakness and inactivity, these Canadian characters were actively involved in establishing and maintaining the home as a place of safety and security.

In contrast, Canadian depictions of girls are often concerned with their future roles, which are typically expected to be maternal. In materials not directly intended for girls but which discuss girls’ roles in Canada’s development, childbearing is emphasized. As Cecily Devereux has noted, in the face of Darwinian fears about degeneration, racial “regeneration could only happen in the settler colonies, and . . . only . . . if sufficient numbers of white women went to the colonies to ‘breed’ this improved race in what were represented as inherently purer spaces” (“New Woman” 179). The imperial girl is encouraged to consider the possibilities of a colonial location like Canada as a place where she would be expected to conform to many British middle-class beliefs, but where she “could discover more about [herself] and the ways in which [she] could serve her country” (Rowbotham 220).

**Girls’ Emigration**

British girls’ periodicals of the last decades of the nineteenth century reflect an increased interest in girls’ emigration. Lisa Chilton notes that the “female imperialist agenda to domesticate the British Empire required the movement of large numbers of single women from Britain to the colonies” (71). This was owing in part to the large numbers of single men
who had already emigrated, leaving behind a surplus of single women. The publication of the censuses of 1851 and 1861 highlighted the declining marriage rate, which some critics, like W. R. Greg, felt could be solved through emigration. Indeed, “although the topic of heterosexual love and marriage was purposely avoided by many of the women who wrote promotional literature . . . , it was clearly . . . a powerful incentive for single women to emigrate” (Chilton 88). Moreover, as Anna Davin explains, “If the British population did not increase fast enough to fill the empty spaces of the empire, others would” (10). Because the birth rate in the colonies was of national and imperial importance, British writers wanted to help ensure that colonial men were producing children with white, rather than Indigenous, women. Middle-class girls’ magazines, including the weekly *Girl’s Own Paper* and monthly magazines like *Atalanta*, *Girl’s Empire*, and *Girl’s Realm*, encouraged girls to consider the opportunities offered by the colonies for better employment and for “freer, more independent lives” (Bush 386; see also Moruzi, “Freedom”).

The many references to Canada in the British periodical press were undoubtedly owing to Canada’s status as a desirable emigration destination. Girls’ magazines typically depict emigration and the colonies favourably. For example, Julia Lawrason’s informational article “Summer in Muskoka: The Free Grant District of Canada,” which appeared in an August 1882 issue of *Girl’s Own Paper*, reinforces the acceptability of Canada as a destination for a holiday and for possible emigration. The youthful aspect of Canada compares favourably with the fading grandeur of Great Britain, which is “the oak that has spread out her roots and branches in so many distant lands, and carried the prestige of her ancient greatness with her—sowing her ‘hearts of oak’ on fruitful ground” (730). Potential emigrants are encouraged to see Britain as old and confined, while Canada is new, vibrant, and spacious, yet still comfortably connected to Britain.

“Summer in Muskoka” is just one of many types of articles promoting emigration to appear in British girls’ magazines. Fictional stories describe the emigration experience and typically conclude with the girl protagonist’s success in the colonial world. These tales of successful girl emigrants offer up a liminal space for the girl. She is, of course, an English girl by birth and breeding, yet the fact of her success means that she embodies the qualities required of the colonial girl as well. For example, in the 1893 “A Girl-Emigrant: A Canadian Story,” published in the *Girl’s Own Paper*, Eleanor decides to emigrate to Canada to start afresh. Without home ties, a British girl can more easily adapt to the needs and expectations of colonial life, which will certainly include hard work, for “a willing girl, who can turn her hand to any simple duty, is highly appreciated, and in many cases well paid for” (447). She can, in a sense, become Canadian by meeting...
the challenges of a new country with good cheer. As the narrator reminds the reader, “Those who emigrate with the desire of doing their duty rarely fail in finding a happy lot in Canada, whether it be a married or a single one” (460). These duties are not explicitly identified beyond the expectation of working hard, yet they likely refer to a woman’s duty to contribute to the health and well-being of the nation and, if married, to bear and raise children as part of the imperial project.

The liminal space between the English girl and the Canadian girl is explored in Bessie Marchant’s *The Loyalty of Hester Hope: A Story of British Columbia*, an adventure fiction novel published in 1914. Hester is Canadian, which she believes to be in her favour when she travels to a remote settlement in British Columbia to be a “lady help” (12). She is replacing Alice, who has lived in Powell Gorge for some years supposedly working as a lady help but in reality as a farm labourer and domestic servant. Hester believes that Canadian girlhood can be identified by health, strength, and commonsense—consistent with the definitions that have appeared in the press—commenting, “What a good thing it is that we are Canadian girls; if we had been English, we should have just stood looking at the thing, wringing our hands in despair, because the task was too much for our feeble strength” (13). Yet Alice, born in England, signals the shifting meaning of Canadian girlhood when she sturdily responds, “I am English, so your theory won’t wash” (13). In contrast to emigration narratives, in which English girls are encouraged to live up to colonial standards of capability and endurance, the clear delineation between English and Canadian girlhood becomes increasingly murky in this novel.

Both girls are demonstrably “Canadian” for their “sturdy
common sense” (21) and their ability to cope with the demands of caring for an ill woman, managing the tobacco farm, and tending the livestock. As Michelle J. Smith explains, “Marchant’s novels function as rehearsals of colonial life in which men may be absent. They regulate appropriate moments in which work that would ordinarily be a marker of unfeminine traits is not only acceptable, but in fact admirable” (85). Despite their different birthplaces, these girls share supposedly Canadian attributes, suggesting a curious fluidity in their national identities. The experience of living in Canada can facilitate the development of attitudes and capabilities necessary to become Canadian. Texts such as these reformulate the English girl as a colonial settler and demonstrate the ambiguous positioning of colonial girlhood as distinct from yet also an extension of English girlhood. A “Canadian” girl differs from an English girl because of the things she is asked to do and her ability to fulfill these demands, regardless of whether she is English or Canadian by birth.

**International Sisterhood**

The positioning of Canadian girlhood is complicated by the international readership of both British and colonial texts aimed at girls and young women, which circulated between London and colonial locations. By the end of the century, girls’ periodicals were increasingly focused on presenting aspects of girlhood that transcend national boundaries in order to appeal to a wide audience. For example, an “international social sisterhood” (Rawson 530) formed the basis of one girls’ periodical, the *Girl's Realm*, which was published between 1898 and 1915. Its editor, Alice Corkran, encouraged contributions from all her readers in an attempt to depict a girlhood that was unconstrained by national boundaries and part of a common experience, especially the shared experience of reading the *Girl's Realm*. At the end of the first volume, she announced special arrangements for “our readers in the Colonies” so that “all daughters of Greater Britain may take effective share in our competitions” (1272), because girls from the colonies had written to Corkran to protest that slow mail routes excluded them from participating. The readers of the *Girl's Realm* saw themselves as part of a community of girls that transcended national borders, united by a shared interest in the girlhood ideals of adventure and heroism that characterized the magazine. Their letters to Corkran attest to their investment in the magazine through their desire to participate in its competitions, and Corkran’s response demonstrates her commitment to the international sisterhood of the magazine. Often colonial girls had little direct experience with England or other colonies. Through their magazines, however, they could see themselves as part of the community but also as uniquely situated within the empire, thereby creating a model of girlhood that is simultaneously transnational, imperial, and colonial.
Many readers of the *Girl's Realm* lived throughout the British Empire and may have had little direct contact with the British feminine ideal except through their reading. In one of her “chats,” Corkran refers to readers “from Johannesburg, from Melbourne, and other districts of Australia, from Canada, from New Orleans, from Jamaica” (1272), likely based on correspondence from readers in those locations. That Corkran would feel it necessary and relevant to mention these readers emphasizes her belief in the international reach of the magazine and the community it created. In this way, notions of the appropriateness and effectiveness of imperialism underpin much of the magazine. Since their physical capabilities could offer them new opportunities in the colonies, where they might eventually marry and have children, girls were encouraged to see themselves as an integral part of the British Empire.

The Answers to Correspondents section of the *Girl's Own Paper* reinforces this global sisterhood further. Girl readers from anywhere in the world could write to and receive responses from the *GOP*. In one such response in 1899, “A Canadian Girl” is informed—presumably in answer to a query about the frequency with which Canadian readers corresponded with the magazine—that “we receive very many letters from Canadian girls” (“Answers” 1899–1900: 96). The editor acknowledges the international readership of the magazine and promotes this community with an invitation to readers to submit requests for international correspondents:

[If] a French girl wishes to exchange letters with an English girl, each writing for the sake of self-improvement, let her send us her request, with name and address. This international scheme may be developed so as to be a great help to girls of different countries who wish to familiarise themselves with other languages than their own. (“Answers” 1897–98: 15)

The magazine facilitates connections between girls of different nationalities as well as encouraging them to develop expertise in multiple languages.

While such correspondence reveals an awareness of the differences between girls living in different nations within the British Empire, the shared experience of reading a British girls’ periodical is essential to the development of the sense of an international sisterhood. Like the *Girl's Realm*, the *Girl's Own Paper* encourages girls to see themselves as part of a shared community of like-minded readers in ways that promote both the financial health of the magazine and the development of an international sisterhood. In a brief description of “Foreign Postage” in January 1880, for example, British readers are encouraged to forward the monthly parts of the *GOP* to “any of the Continental countries, to the United States,
By establishing a postage rate to Canada equal to the domestic rate, the magazine hopes to encourage readers to purchase additional copies and forward them to Canadian friends and family, even though a Toronto edition was already being published. When a Canadian girl receives a monthly part of the *GOP* forwarded from England, she is obviously reading a text intended primarily for British girls and thus reflecting British feminine ideals. Nonetheless, some editors of girls’ periodicals were evidently interested in appealing to their colonial readers, and the inclusion of content for and about them reflects this dual audience. Moreover, by creating a shared reading experience among both British and Canadian girls, the magazine is able to reinforce further the imperial and international connections between girls of different countries.

**The Canadian Girl**

While the above examples demonstrate some of the ways in which British authors depicted girls from Canada and other parts of the Empire, representations of Canadian girls written by Canadian authors tend to differ from the imaginative accounts in emigration narratives and adventure fiction. For example, the extent to which Marchant’s girls’ adventure fiction is truly “fantastic” in every sense of the word becomes obvious only when comparing it to representations of Canadian girlhood by a Canadian author like Agnes Machar, a novelist and historian. Marchant’s vague geography, remote locations, and idealized British-colonial femininity is highlighted through a comparison with Machar’s specific references to Canadian landscapes, urban...
locales, and a distinct Canadian identity in novels such as Marjorie’s Canadian Winter, published in 1891. These differences, of course, speak to different potential readerships. British and Canadian girls yearning for adventure and excitement might turn to a Marchant novel, while Canadian girls seeking stories that reflected their experiences would find some of that detail in a novel like Machar’s.

The porosity of the literary and journalistic marketplace in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries can make it difficult to categorize a text as “Canadian” or “British.” For example, Canadian Jean Graham was women’s editor of Saturday Night and later became the editor of Canadian Home Journal, yet she published her 1909 article, “The Canadian Girl: Her Home and School Life, Her Sports, Occupations and Amusements,” in the British Girl’s Realm. The content of the article reflects both the primarily British readers of the magazine as well as her knowledge of Canadian girlhood. The illustrations included in the seven-page article by Graham depict typical examples of a pastoral Canadian girlhood. The photographs include girls playing ice hockey and tennis, visiting a waterfall, kneeling in the autumn leaves, canoeing, snowshoeing, farming, and being pulled on a sled by dogs. Because of these frequent outdoor pursuits, the Canadian girl, “unaccustomed to coddling or luxury,” is “in possession of a sound constitution, and liberty to exercise lungs and limbs as her vigorous young fancy pleases” (655). Health and liberty are vital to a Canadian girl’s success in Canada, but physical exercise is balanced by regular school attendance, where the Canadian girl “receives an essentially practical education” (655) and is “as ambitious as her brother to stand well in her classes” (656). Graham hastens to reassure readers, however, that, although the Canadian girl “is good-naturedly independent, [she] knows nothing and cares less about votes, and such masculine prerogatives” (659), referring to the increasingly violent suffragette movement in England as well as the female enfranchisement campaigns occurring in Canada.

Graham worries that Canadian girls might be criticized for being less courteous and more brusque than their British counterparts because, if “the Canadian girl is lacking in gentleness and courtesy, the deficiency will lower the social life of the coming Canada” (657). This rhetoric is seemingly nationalist in its focus, yet it clearly has its roots in the imperial feminist movement that positioned women as the “mother of the race” (Devereux, “Writing” 7) after the Second Boer War. Although this maternal feminism does not manifest itself in an explicit call on Canadian girls to bear children (and, of course, this article was not explicitly intended to be read by Canadian girls, since it was published in a British girls’ magazine), Graham refutes any possible criticism of Canadian girls by explaining that they are in demand as nurses

126 Kristine Moruzi
because they possess those qualities of “supreme womanliness—tact, patience, and steadfastness” (658). These qualities, along with specific nursing skills and physical health, will make Canadian girls suitable to take up their maternal duties in time.

Moreover, the Canadian girl is optimistic and hopeful as she anticipates her future in Canada. The heroic colonial girl is capable and brave in the face of the challenges of living in exotic locations and has frequent opportunities to demonstrate her bravery. The real daughter of the Empire is celebrated and supported as she faces new experiences and meets them with courage. Graham reinforces these imperial and national objectives by concluding with an excerpt of the song “I am content with Canada” by Canadian Helena Coleman:

I am content with Canada, and ask
    No fairer land than has been given me,
No greater joy, no more inspiring task,
    Than to upbuild and share her destiny. (660)

Published in 1906, this song, which promotes loyalty to Canada over other nations, may be reflecting “fears of annexation” of Canada by the United States that occasionally appear in Canadian children’s literature (Galway 61). By depicting the Canadian girl as happy with her home and looking forward to helping it become more successful, Graham encourages and reinforces Canadian nationalism.

The Canadian girl appeared in major Canadian periodicals such as The Canadian Magazine of Politics, Science, Art and Literature. The inclusion of an 1893 article by Hector Charlesworth, a Canadian writer, editor, and critic, on the virtues of the Canadian girl reflects and responds to the ongoing discussions of women’s rights in Canada as well as the emergence of the figure of the New Woman. In “The Canadian Girl: An Appreciative Medley,” Charlesworth begins by suggesting a commonality among girls of different eras and nationalities since the Canadian girl is “making sacrifices, dreaming dreams, breaking hearts, throbbing with passion, just as girls have been since the world began” (186). The Canadian girl is presented as part of the history of girlhood stretching back to the beginning of time. The girl is also, in Charlesworth’s terms, a universal figure, beyond the constructs of history, society, and culture, yet these Canadian girls are distinct as well. Charlesworth explains that the most typical characteristic of Canada’s girls is their “temperamental force . . . which is full of promise to the nation” (186–87). His terminology suggests that a Canadian girl’s nature, while potentially somewhat uncontrollable, can be employed in the development of the nation where her “promise” is a likely reference to her reproductive function as a mother. He congratulates Canada’s women for their “practical independence . . . combined with a demure
regard for propriety and form” (187). This independent girl never sacrifices her virtue and modesty, two essential qualities for the imperial project of feminizing the Canadian landscape through marriage and reproduction. Nonetheless, even while she remains virtuous and pure, “she blooms forth as one who has shaken off some of the rusty shackles of social convention, and revels in the delights of sunlight and breeze” (187).

This connection between the Canadian girl and nature is intriguing when we read it against Jean Graham’s “Canadian Girl,” in which all of the images depict girls outdoors. In contrast, Charlesworth discusses the cultural accomplishments of women as writers, actors, and musicians, in part because the intended readership differs. The “natural” Canadian girl is a product to be sold to British and American audiences. In contrast, the highly cultured girl is presented to Canadian audiences that wish to see themselves and their daughters as members of a cultural, colonial elite. Margaret Steffler argues that the “border country” between human habitation and the natural landscape “has long been the province of the child in Canadian literature” (6). The Canadian girl in Canadian texts exists in a liminal space between the civilized and the natural, shifting from one space to the other as required to fulfill the nation’s needs for independence and freedom while also maintaining a British ideal of civilization and culture.5

In Charlesworth’s article, we see many of the same concerns about Canadian girlhood that we see in the British press. Charlesworth writes that “the girls of the smaller cities of Canada are in danger of losing their frank charm through their anxiety to know life and grasp its problems” (187). Charlesworth worries that the small-town girl is being unduly influenced by reading choices that are not morally correct and appropriate, which could have important consequences for the future of Canada. The Canadian girl’s moral development and physical health are both important to Canada’s development as a nation. In part because of her supposed connection with the natural world, the Canadian girl—both in Canada and abroad—is presumed to be healthier than her imperial compatriots. As Devereux notes, “The condition of ‘the race’ was becoming an article of considerable anxiety for Britons throughout the Empire” (“New Woman” 176). By insisting on the health and vitality of Canadian girls, Charlesworth assuages fears about the decline of the empire. He writes that Canadian girls “are vigorous with a glow of health, and elastic with a sap of life. The expressions on their faces show more keenness of perception and general alertness than are characteristic of the English girl, and more health and magnetic glow than are possessed by the American girl” (188). These conceptions of Canadian femininity are designed to contribute to nationalist and imperialist definitions of
Canada at the time and to reassure readers who are concerned about the survival of the empire and of Canada as a nation owing to British concerns about degeneration and Canadian fears that the United States might lure its population south of the border. By distinguishing Canada’s girls from other nations’ girls, including those within the empire, Charlesworth asserts a unique model of Canadian girlhood characterized by health and alertness, which will contribute to Canada’s development.

Charlesworth makes the connection between maternity and nationalism explicit in his concluding observations. He writes that the Canadian girl will prove inspirational to the future: “Her form, long-limbed, lithe and beautiful with health; her soul, strong and warm and human, will inspire the men of the future to noble things” (192–93). Charlesworth concludes that the Canadian girl “will breed noble sons . . . and that is even more important than voting” (193). Motherhood, not enfranchisement, is crucial to Canada’s success because these “mothers of future Canadians” will become part of a “glorious” future (186). One of the key differences between material aimed at girls and material intended for an adult readership lies in its focus on girls’ reproductive functions. Books and periodicals aimed at girls, whether emerging from the British or the Canadian market, rarely address motherhood. Fictional tales typically end with colonial success characterized by a happy home and satisfying work, rather than maternity or even marriage. Of course, part of this rectitude lies in the intended readers of this fiction. Girls, whether in Great Britain or the colonies, were not supposed to read sensational fiction, and consequently the stories intended for them were relatively circumspect when it came to matters of sexuality and reproduction.

Yet the colonies, and Canada in particular, are presented as enviable locations in British texts, well suited to girls who are strong, healthy, and capable. This rhetoric of Canadian girlhood is reinforced in Canadian texts for girls, although these Canadian girls are often more prosaic and less exotic than the imaginary constructs appearing in British-authored texts. Ultimately, however, the Canadian girl is made to understand that her role as a wife and a mother is vital to the success of the empire and the nation. In their print culture, British and colonial girls are encouraged to see themselves as part of an international sisterhood that emphasizes the similarities between the girls of different nations who are united by their shared allegiance to the imperial project. These books and magazines demonstrate British and Canadian girls’ interest in understanding the qualities that identify them all as daughters of the Empire, in which the duty to work, marry, and bear children is presented as an ideal to which all girls should aspire.
Notes

1 The Toronto edition of the Girl’s Own Paper contains the same content as the London edition.

2 This novel also demonstrates Machar’s interest in temperance, with a series of lengthy discussions on the dangers of drink.

3 This Toronto publication was launched in an attempt to challenge quality American periodicals such as Scribner’s and The Atlantic, and its focus was predominantly on Ontario.

4 The Dominion Women’s Enfranchisement Association, for example, held its first convention in 1890. The National Council of Women of Canada was founded in 1893, and its first meeting was attended by fifteen hundred women and chaired by Lady Aberdeen, wife of the Governor General.

5 Steffler draws on the example of Anne Shirley in Anne of Green Gables, in which the lack of a wilderness setting means that distinctions between nature and society blur. This tension “plays a decisive role” in Anne’s development into adulthood, since she “displays the qualities of freedom inherent in nature and the wilderness, and tames or develops those qualities as she confronts aspects of ‘civilization’ and society” (13).

Works Cited


Kristine Moruzi is a Grant Notley Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta. Her book, *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850–1915*, is forthcoming from Ashgate and is based on the doctoral work she completed at the University of Melbourne. In her current research, she is examining representations of girlhood in Canadian children’s literature between 1840 and 1940. This work is also part of a collaborative project funded by the Australian Research Council with Dr. Michelle J. Smith (Melbourne) and Prof. Clare Bradford (Deakin) on colonial femininity between 1840 and 1940.