



Reviews



Canadian Children's Shoe Stories and Their Antecedents: Fortune's Footwear

—Leslie McGrath

Few literary symbols offer the richness of the shoe as an emblem of mobility, the ability to be moved and to move. Shoes are the first grown-up part of work attire that ordinary young readers own. They need shoes for many tasks in the parts of the world to which much Canadian literature relates. Elegant and dainty shoes, like fine clothes, offer hints of nobility and belong to a privileged class. As L. M. Montgomery's Anne Shirley comments, "You couldn't imagine a fairy wearing boots, could you? Especially with copper toes?" (268). Coarse shoes or clogs indicate that the wearer is a worker

or a contributor to the family's upkeep but also that, although the family may be poor, it at least can afford shoes. It seems likely, then, that most Canadian children open a shoe story or listen to a shoe tale with at least a practical sense of the importance of shoes.

Canadian children's literature focuses on life in a "geographic landscape and a child's experience in it," according to Patricia Vickery in her response to the survey conducted by Perry Nodelman on "What's Canadian about Canadian Children's Literature?" (28). Young readers learn of parts of Canada they have never

visited through stories about children who live there and, on another level, identify more closely with the children who share their own experiences. For this reason, a story that employs a common symbol such as shoes may elicit additional sympathy and understanding between readers and literary characters while providing information about a region and its activities. Yet, at the same time, the shoe is associated with the imaginative elements of fairy stories and nursery rhymes, so that even a prosaic fictional story about shoes resonates with possible associations with earlier literary and oral traditions.

This article surveys some notable Canadian shoe stories that are traced from their antecedents. By placing these titles within a historical context, I hope to demonstrate the pattern that emerges of largely traditional tales, usually taken from borrowed European sources, often retold through new regional and cultural voices that add a Canadian emphasis.

The earliest shoe stories are not specific to children's literature. One version of Cinderella comes from Ancient Egypt as the tale of the courtesan Rhodope. An eagle steals Rhodope's tiny gilded sandal and drops it before the Pharaoh, who is so intrigued that he cannot rest until he has followed the shoe to its owner. Numbers of young women try to wear the sandal, but only Rhodope's foot is small and dainty enough, and she becomes Pharaoh's wife.¹

The earliest dated version of Cinderella comes from the ninth century and is described by literary

historians Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Pritchard as part of the oral tradition of storytelling in the south of China (119). According to a retelling by Ai-Ling Louie entitled *Yeh-Shen*, a chieftain named Wu-the-Cave has a beautiful daughter, Yeh-Shen, whose pet carp is killed by her cruel stepmother. The fish is enchanted, and its bones grant Yeh-Shen her every wish, including a pair of golden slippers. After Yeh-Shen loses one slipper at a festival, it comes to the hands of a mighty king, who is "entranced by the tiny thing, which was shaped of the most precious of metals, yet which made no sound when touched to stone." The King finds Yeh-Shen and has her try on the slipper, then whisks her away to his kingdom as a bride.²

Following print versions in Italy and France and a related sixteenth-century play by Thomas Dekker entitled *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, a children's version of Cinderella appeared in English, with the famous glass slipper, in a translation of Charles Perrault's tales published in 1729. The folklorists Peter and Iona Opie speculate about a possible alteration made by Perrault from *vair* (fur) to *verre* (glass), which suggests that he considered the daintiness and fragility of glass more appealing than plain slippers; glass suggests a brittleness that only the most singular lightness of foot and body can preserve, impossible in the real world (121). The Brothers Grimm wrote a version of Cinderella in which her slippers are "small and dainty" and "of pure gold" (1: 97). The gadget-minded Victorians enjoyed new

inventions. Fond of overt morality as well as exact science in stories, they found a good compromise for the impossibly delicate glass slipper: Sir Henry Cole's Cinderella of 1846 wears "a beautiful pair of *elastic* glass slippers" (Summerly 15; emphasis added).³ In Walter Crane's socialist retelling of Cinderella, the slipper is textually almost irrelevant, because it is her condition of being a worker that wins Cinderella her Prince, although the Prince's coat of arms, pages' livery, and decor are covered with shoe motifs, and quantities of shoes are thrown after the royal wedding coach (8).

Canadian authors and illustrators have explored various aspects of the traditional tale, many of their notable retellings being humorous, including Robert Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess*, which places emphasis on the rejection of snobbish male vanity by a liberated heroine and, like Crane's version, on the interaction between the characters. Other Canadian authors choose to retain the symbolic slipper, emphasizing the origins of the story but adding unusual elements of creation and characterization. For example, *Cinderella: Retold in Story and Collage*, a witty picture book by author-illustrator Alan Suddon, with parallel French text translated by Claude Aubry, offers a remarkable combination of images and text in which readers are drawn into the creative collage process (see fig. 1). The two stepsisters, one fat and one thin, primp for the ball, with the thin one taking an hour to glue her wig on properly. In a departure from the chopping of

heels and toes that takes place in the Brothers Grimm version, Suddon's stepsisters try *temporary* measures to adjust their foot sizes to the slipper, one with an ice-water soak, the other with a clamp. Suddon's Carrollian delight in puns enlivens the story, both in the art, culled from contemporary adult periodicals, and the text. When the heralds announce in legalese, "KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS," Cinderella puzzles, "What presents?" until later, having been given five electric kettles as wedding gifts, she reflects that *these* must be the "presents."

A Canadian retelling that achieved fame as a picture book, based on her original story from the animated film *The Tender Tale of Cinderella Penguin*, is Janet Perlman's *Cinderella Penguin, or, The Little Glass Flipper*, a Children's Choice Award winner. The heroine of the tale has slightly less splayed feet than her stepsisters. They try to lock her in the basement, but despite their machinations the missing little glass flipper is *flipped* onto her foot. The narrative is brisk. It is Perlman's visual puns that enrich the text: small paintings on the wall include a spoof of Jan Van Eyck's Arnolfini "wedding" portrait, in which the bride and groom are portrayed as penguins, and a recasting of a well-known sixteenth-century French tapestry of a unicorn with a unicorn penguin. The six Disneyesque "mice" that are changed into "horses" are penguins, but after their transformation they develop front flippers to run on all fours.

The most famous example of a story of an animal in shoes undoubtedly is “Puss in Boots,” versions of which appear in Perrault and Grimm. The wily cat, Puss, uses shoes to symbolize a bargain: by demanding boots, he becomes the actual master, with his owner merely his protege. The boots make him a fitting representative of his master in courtly circles, although they serve him less well for catlike activities, such as climbing slippery roofs. By contrast, as will later be seen, Canadian stories of animals in shoes emphasize the practical function of their footwear. Perrault’s collection of fairy tales *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* also includes the story of Hop o’ My Thumb, a minute boy who steals seven-league boots from a wicked ogre. Borrowed from Italian legends of the fifteenth century,⁴ these boots reappear in legends of Jack the Giant-Killer. One of the most eccentric developments in children’s literature is the gradual transformation of these boots into those of the socially downscale Spring-Heeled Jack, an exotic villain of penny dreadfuls (cheap serialized stories for boys published in nineteenth-century Britain) whose shoes, soled with springs, enable him to leap away quickly from the scenes of his crimes. This popular figure, said to be the ancestor of Batman, Superman, and other flying heroes of 1930s comics (Carpenter and Prichard 494), was one cause of an outraged movement for higher-toned literature for working-class boys. Canada’s first comic book female superhero, the eponymous character in Adrian Dingle’s *Nelvana of*

the Northern Lights, who wears green knee boots and flies along the Northern Lights, seems loosely based on elements of folk tales of Kugluktuk, Nunavut, rather than on Spring-Heeled Jack.

From the late 1700s to the mid-1800s, “moral stories” were a major component of children’s fiction. In this type of prose, no child ever escaped the consequences of any mischief, and even magic is turned to producing “good works.” Mrs. Ewing (whom we often claim as a Canadian author following her four-year residence in New Brunswick) wrote “Timothy’s Shoes” for *Aunt Judy’s Magazine* in 1871 and was reprinted in her collection *Lob Lie-by-the-Fire*.⁵ The shoes of the title, given by a fairy godmother to a young woman just starting a family, are “a small pair of strong leather shoes, copper tipped and heeled. ‘They’ll never wear out, my dear . . . rely upon it, you will find them “a mother’s blessing”” (96). As the years pass and nine children in turn wear the shoes, the mother does indeed learn their full value. The shoes prevent the wearer from going wrong, doing wrong, or being done wrong. When the youngest child outgrows the boots, they simply patter away to serve another family. Paulette Bourgeois celebrates hand-me-down footwear in *Big Sarah’s Little Boots*, a picture book in which a little girl regrets her outgrown rain boots until her little brother’s pleasure in them helps her to enjoy her new, bigger and louder boots.⁶ The new boots illustrate enlarged powers, generosity, and greater understanding, requiring no magical underpinnings.



Figure 1: The image by Alan Suddon is taken from *Cinderella* and reproduced by permission of Oberon Press.



Figure 2: *The Moccasins*, by Earl Einarson. Illus. Julie Flett. Penticton: Theytus, 2005.
Reproduced by permission from the publisher and illustrator.

The classic fairy tale recorded by the Brothers Grimm, “The Elves,” now usually called “The Elves and the Shoemaker,” appeared in English in 1823. In this tale, a worthy shoemaker becomes poor. Although he has nothing in the world except leather for one pair of shoes, he lays himself down after prayers and sleeps soundly, because his conscience is clear. The next morning, he finds the leather beautifully sewn into shoes that he is able to sell at a fine profit, buying leather to make more shoes. The same thing happens on subsequent days, and the shoemaker begins to prosper. Anxious to learn about his benefactor, he and his wife hide one night and spy two little naked elves who emerge from the shadows and sew the shoes. Out of gratitude, the shoemaker makes shoes for them and his wife sews clothing for them. On finding these gifts, the elves dance with joy and abandon their trade: “Now we look so fine and dandy, no more need to work and be so handy!” (1: 165).

The fairy shoemakers are elves or leprechauns who were originally shown working on a single shoe.⁷ They are generally associated with luck and charms. A gift of clothing or shoes to a leprechaun (or an elf, a brownie, or a fairy) ends his service (Halliwell 189). Many children are familiar with this legend through J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, in which Harry helps free the house elf Dobby from servitude by tricking Lucius Malfoy, Dobby’s cruel master, into giving Dobby a sock (248). In our most

famous Canadian brownie story, children enter into servitude by choosing to become helpful. This is Ewing’s 1870 story “The Brownies,” in which the Brownie Movement later found its inspiration.⁸ Here, two lazy boys, Tommy and Johnnie, wish to find their own brownie to do all the housework. To Tommy’s chagrin, as he chants the Wise Old Owl’s verse (“Twist me and turn me and show me the Elf, / I looked in the water and there saw”) while looking into a pool he discovers that he and his brother are the brownies, inspiring them to begin helping (as invisibly as possible) in their own home (*Brownies* 22).

The instructive enchanted boots of Hans Christian Andersen’s tale “The Magic Galoshes,” translated into English in 1846, teach stern lessons to people who envy their neighbours. In this original story, fairies naively provide a magic pair of boots to create happiness: merely to put them on allows wearers to become anyone or be anywhere they wish. As opportunistic or absent-minded people help themselves to the boots in turn, they find themselves living a dream—or, rather, a nightmare. Like Midas, they discover the wisdom of being merely themselves in their own time. When the last shuddering victim escapes from the dreadful galoshes, they are claimed by the fairy “Sorrow,” who feels they most fittingly belong to her (*Complete* 107).⁹ A later English version, J. A. Bentham’s *Shoes*, tells of a spoiled little girl punished by being turned into the girls whose shoes she borrows, each of whom turns out to

be less fortunate than she. In Gilles Tibo's contemporary Canadian tale *Noémie: les souliers magiques*, Noémie's magic running shoes bestow special athletic powers on her but become the bane of her life. Tormented, driven, and dragged endlessly by her magic training shoes, Noémie is finally rid of them when she is offered a special present by her grandmother: a new pair of runners! Much to her grandmother's surprise, her super-athlete Noémie wishes instead not just for slippers, but for *lazy* slippers: "Des pantoufles qui n'ont l'air de rien. Des pantoufles qui refusent de bouger . . . des pantoufles absolument inutiles . . . sans aucune ambition, qui rêvent de se rendre, le plus lentement possible, dans le salon pour regarder la télévision près des pantoufles de leur grand-mère" (160).

Some stories defy categorization, although their inspiration may be found in Andersen's pairings of unlikely anthropomorphic objects. In a vein of pure fantasy, inspired by the beauty of objects, Louise Jalbert's *The Diverting Tale of the Radish and the Shoe* is unique. "The idea of the Radish and the Shoe came to me in a dream," writes Jalbert on the book jacket. "I dreamed of a shoe . . . who was carrying a radish, and the two of them were having a fine time together." The Radish and Shoe live together in a book, but they are unable to engage the letters in the book into their play—until disaster happens and a pair of scissors attacks the book. Shoe, Radish, and letters are nearly destroyed, but, as they all pitch in to repair their home, they find

even the mending and the tape add beauty to their book. The watercolour illustrations are sophisticated, yet accessible. This is not a child's shoe but a beautiful blue stiletto with a yellow bow: an elegant, graceful object joyfully embraced by the stem of a large yet delicate radish. The artist's intention was to tap children's "boundless imagination," according to the book jacket, sharing "the joy of creating, of bringing beauty out of dullness or disaster." Decidedly offbeat, the book nevertheless offers aesthetic enjoyment to young readers through the simple, elegant, and exuberant objects depicted playing together, and apart from the symbolism some attribute to the stiletto in general, the story is rather an anthropomorphic fantasy than an exploration of sexual fetishism.¹⁰

The mythic creator of the winged sandals of classical mythology was Vulcan, the smith and, less familiarly, the shoemaker of the gods who "made for them golden shoes with which they trod the air or water, and moved from place to place with the speed of wind, or even of thought" (Bulfinch 4). The story of Perseus, in which Athena gives Perseus her shield and Hermes gives him "golden sandals, from the heels of which grew living wings" is known to children through Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* (16).¹¹ The concept of shoes providing wings to the feet is repeatedly alluded to later by authors of skating stories, in which characters glide and fly like birds. Sport stories preceded modern career novels. One of the most famous is *Hans Brinker, or, the Silver Skates*



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by Mary Mapes Dodge. In this story, the chance to win the racing prize is unselfishly given up by the hero, Hans, to his benefactor, Peter, who is likened to “Mercury” on skates (284). Hans’s little sister, Gretel, wins the girls’ race, however, and the coincidentally happy resolution to a sad mystery is provided by the beautiful velvet case for the skates. The most notable Canadian skating tale is Lyn Cook’s *The Bells on Finland Street*.¹² This is the story of a young Finnish-Canadian girl living in Sudbury’s multi-ethnic mining community. Elin is shy about her family’s poverty but takes a job to earn a pair of figure skates and to pay for lessons, after seeing her skating friends fly as gracefully as “swallows” and “sea gulls” (13). An accident at the mine leaves her father unable to work; Elin gives up her savings to help with household expenses. A visit from her Finnish grandfather brings skates and lessons as well as renewed pride in her family’s heritage. Her skates are identical to those of her classmates, but, clad in her vibrant folk costume and equipped with the strength and skill of her forebears, Elin is destined to become a champion for Canada.

The skating story has been adapted to great effect by William Roy Brownridge in *The Moccasin Goalie*, first in a series of three books about a disabled boy who cannot wear skates but loves to play hockey. Danny does not make the local team but is called on one day in an emergency to serve as goalie. He does this by tending goal wearing his moccasins and helps his team win in a tough game. Incidentally, Danny teaches his coach about accepting differences, winning places on the team for himself and for his previously disqualified friends, one a girl, the other a boy thought too small to play.

Canadian animal stories featuring professional shoes tend rather to morals and humour than to fairy-tale magic. Stephen Muir’s *Albert’s Old Shoes*, illustrated by Mary Jane Muir, is a pleasant tale of manners in which the characters are pigs that are aware of the importance of

their clothes.¹³ Deeply embarrassed by his old shoes, Albert dreams of an elegant pair of striped runners to the point of being brusque and ungrateful to his mother when she surprises him with a bedspread rather than running shoes. Although Albert apologizes immediately, he is “angry with his mom and angry with his shoes and angry with the whole world” (18). Albert’s anger drives him to kick the soccer ball as never before, making it sail over the school and prompting an awed offer to join the after-school team. That afternoon, Albert is given new running shoes and proudly prances out to meet his friends, only to find that they are now wearing old, scuffed brown shoes, hoping to copy his triumph.

Carole Tremblay’s *Théodore le mille-pattes*, with illustrations by Céline Malépart, is another imaginative association of animals and shoes. The eponymous hero is an enormously talented tap dancer whose skills are enhanced by having a thousand feet—until, just before the big performance of his career, one shoe goes missing. The millipede is distressed that his act will be ruined, but a detective bee saves the day, tracking footprints to find a worm that has wedged himself into the missing shoe.¹⁴

Red shoes, with their supposedly demonic colouring, have a particular role in children’s books.¹⁵ The witch in the Grimms’ “Snow White” is forced to dance in red-hot shoes until she dies, but the best-known story about shoes of the unlucky hue is Andersen’s “The Red Shoes,” which was translated into English in 1846. In

the original story, the shoemaker’s wife gives a poor little girl some red cloth shoes, and, having no others, the child wears them to her mother’s funeral. Later, when told to have shoes made for confirmation, the child takes advantage of her guardian’s dim eyesight and orders not proper black shoes but *red* shoes, which she wears to church. The devil in disguise puts a curse on the shoes. Karen wears the red shoes to a ball rather than attend her guardian’s deathbed and is then forced to dance endlessly, unable to take the red shoes off, until she begs the executioner to rid her of them. He cuts off her feet, freeing Karen to repent. Karen dies of a broken heart but is carried up to heaven, “and in Heaven there was no one who asked about the red shoes” (*Fairy* 6).¹⁶ This tale has inspired numerous retellings, including a ballet in which Karen’s vanity and selfishness are changed to a need to follow the artistic life of a ballerina (a reworking of the 1948 British film *The Red Shoes*, starring Moira Shearer). This ballet, also entitled *The Red Shoes*, is scheduled to open at the Royal Plymouth Theatre in November 2016 (Furness).

A light, amusing twist on red shoes is made by Caroline Merola in *Victorine la sorcière*, part three of the Monde de Margaret series, in which a knock on the head causes Margaret to lose consciousness and dream about the red suede shoes she covets, here transformed from the fashion statements owned by a spoiled (but envied) classmate into tools of oppression used by an evil witch. Like the classic MGM film *The Wizard of Oz*,

an adaptation of L. Frank Baum's novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Margaret's vision includes a variety of everyday objects transformed, but, of these, the red shoes are the most telling.¹⁷ The merest reference to red shoes can add an amusing nuance to stories. Munsch's *David's Father*, a picture book in which a boy introduces his scary-looking giant father to a new neighbour, ends with a gag line: "'You think he is scary?' said David. 'Wait till you meet my grandmother.'" The visual punchline, standing behind them, is a hairy, giant gorilla leg—ending in a vast, shiny, high-heeled red shoe.

An intriguing interpretation of the nature of red shoes is central to Danielle Marcotte's *Les sabots rouges*, in which a little girl whose mother has died wishes above all for a pair of red shoes after reading a story about magic red clogs that can take one anywhere: "Ces sabots rouges, n'était-ce pas ce qu'elle attendait? Des sabots magiques. Qui lui permettraient de se poser là où elle le voudrait. Même au paradis! Des sabots grâce auxquels elle pourrait revoir sa mère" (22). The unhealthy desire to escape reality and to recapture lost hopes is transformed as the heroine, Morgane, realizes her father's clumsy but loving attempts to fulfill her wishes are more satisfying than her dream life, and in a pleasant twist, some red clogs *do* arrive—decorated with painted angel wings. They are no longer the unwholesome accompaniment to daydreams but are now simply useful footwear for walks with her father and a long-desired puppy. There is no magic about

the appearance of the clogs; the tactful grandmother is the source of the gift. This book was a finalist for the Governor General's Award, Canada's most prestigious annual literary award, for the category of Children's Fiction—French in 2005. Red shoes, however briefly mentioned, may also figure as auspicious symbols in children's cultural dress—for example, Ukrainian dancing boots and Japanese clogs.

The moral tale, referenced earlier as a genre of story in which no child escapes the consequences of wrongdoing, abounded in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, and the practical nature of the shoe tale lent itself to many stories about the virtues esteemed by middle-class readers. One example is a tale published anonymously in 1765 and attributed variously to John Newbery and Oliver Goldsmith, *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*. Little Margery Meanwell, left a poor orphan without even two shoes, is helped by kindly souls who give her a complete pair of shoes, and her consequent delight inspires her nickname. Margery becomes a schoolmistress, her work and her virtue earning her a fine place in society.¹⁸ Another famous example is Maria Edgeworth's 1796 story "Rosamond and the Purple Jar," in which a seven-year-old spends her money on an exotic purple jar instead of the shoes she needs. Managing a personal budget properly was considered a necessary accomplishment for young ladies, and Rosamond's failure to provide for necessities is punished through the natural consequences of her

shameful, ragged appearance and missed outings. The jar proves to be plain glass, deceptively filled with coloured water. As Edgeworth explains, mentioning theories of Locke and Rousseau, “all poetical allusions . . . have been avoided in this book [which contains] only such situations described as children can easily imagine, and which may consequently interest their feelings” (1: ix).

The first modern English career novel for children, a best-seller by Noel Streatfeild, employs the simple title *Ballet Shoes*. Streatfeild’s subsequent novels followed suit: *Tennis Shoes*, *The Circus Is Coming* (later retitled *Circus Shoes*), *Theatre Shoes*, *Party Shoes*, and five more.¹⁹ Children reading these stories know at once that they are learning a trade, one identified by professional gear, and realize that it is seldom the genius of a character that drives the story. Rather, wearing appropriate equipment, practising hard, and learning discipline within a professional culture enable the characters to earn success. Good career novels do not dwell on the perceived quality of shoes or other equipment but rather show them as tools. Virtue, deportment, perseverance, and strength are the hero’s main requisites for success in each story, and characters who possess such qualities win, earn, or are given the necessary footwear for success—a popular theme in Canadian stories.

Irene Morck’s *Tiger’s New Cowboy Boots*, illustrated by Georgia Graham, is a fine example of a children’s story about professional footwear. Young

Tiger has helped on other cattle drives, but always is wearing running shoes, like any urban young person. His first pair of cowboy boots are so elegant that he fears damaging them and tries to avoid spoiling their shine, but the needs of the cattle force him to get wet and dirty, like his friend Jessica and the other cowpokes. At the end of the drive, Tiger finds he is not sad about the boots. Instead, he is proud that they look just like those of the other cowpokes. This is an identifiably “Canadian” tale from its many regional references to animals and cowboys (Pantaleo 44), and the choice of worn cowboy workboots over the vanity of fancy costume boots is a satisfying aspect of the theme.²⁰ Appearance is not the only message footwear can send. In a fleeting reference, William Kurelek’s autobiographical *Lumberjack* tells of his heavy lumberjack boots, worn at home after he spent an entire summer logging in Northern Ontario: “Inside and outside, I stomped around in those boots, noisily reminding everyone that they had been wrong about me, that I had made it on my own.”

As a fictional character, the shoemaker, practitioner of what sixteenth-century English playwright Thomas Dekker called “The Gentle Craft” (Smallwood and Wells 1), figures far more often as hero, even as enchanted hero, than as villain.²¹ In juvenile hagiographies, the patron saints of cobblers are St. Crispin and St. Crispian, noble brothers who abandoned their wealthy home to preach and teach, earning a living through

shoemaking.²² The humble trade of the shoemaker was exploited by Hannah More in *The Two Shoemakers*, a Cheap Repository tract chapbook published in 1795, and its sequel, *The Apprentice Turned Master*, which appeared in 1796. Predictably, a ne'er-do-well apprentice is contrasted with a hard-working, industrious, and eventually philanthropic one.

Among the disadvantaged, the importance of a gift of footwear, bought or made, is movingly reflected in Jim McGugan's picture book *Josepha*, illustrated by Murray Kimber. McGugan captures the hardship of life for an immigrant boy in the prairies in 1900 through his portrayal of outsized, nearly inarticulate, barefoot fourteen-year-old Josepha, who is mocked by his classmates for sitting in the primary row as slowly he learns English. Yet no one dares bully the small children with Josepha there, and Josepha knows what their few possessions mean to them. Josepha must abandon school when he is offered employment, but he presents his friend, the narrator, with his whittling knife. The boy knows what he has to do: he gives Josepha his own best treasure, his boots. The winner of both the Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Award and the Governor General's Award for Children's Fiction—Illustration, this tense, textually spare picture book is rendered more powerful by its striking cover image of Josepha, cradling the boots. The gift of shoes to the deprived expresses the care of the giver for the emotional and physical well-being of the recipient.

Another Canadian story uses the gift of handmade shoes as a focal point. Connie Colker Steiner's *Shoes for Amélie*, illustrated by Denis Rodier, tells of a refugee child in France during the Second World War and the boy who befriends her. The boy, Lucien, comes from a family of farmers from Chambon-sur-Lignon. The farmers bravely hide refugees from the Nazis, including Jewish city girl Amélie, who finds farm life strange. Seeing the fear and sadness in her face, Lucien wishes to make her a gift. His grandfather helps Lucien to make her a pair of sabots, to which he adds beautiful decorations, but sadly, Amélie is taken to a new, unknown location before Lucien can present them to her. Lucien continues to work on the beautiful shoes, hoping one day Amélie will return to visit him.

Indigenous authors in Canada have explored the creation of shoes as symbols of identity. Bernelda Wheeler's *Where Did You Get Your Moccasins?* tells the story of how moccasins are made, explained by an Indigenous boy to his classmates. His new beaded moccasins are beautiful and Jody proudly explains how his father hunted the deer and his Kookum (grandmother) prepared the skin and sewed the moccasins, decorating them with store-bought beads.

Esther Sanderson, who is from northern Manitoba, uses shoes to express the duality of being a Canadian and a First Nations person in *Two Pairs of Shoes*. On her eighth birthday, Maggie, who is Ojibwa, is given a fine pair of patent-leather dress shoes, but even more

beautiful are the beaded moccasins her grandmother gives her as well, saying that “today is a special day for you, for you have gotten two pairs of shoes. From now on you must remember when and how to wear each pair.” Most children are familiar with the different behaviour expected when everyday clothes are exchanged for more formal attire. This story, brief but touching, adds a new dimension. Maggie is being taught the importance of maintaining all aspects of her identity. The theme is also touched on by Lorraine Adams and Lynn Bruvold in *New Slippers*, in which two Indigenous girls are given fine decorated slippers by their grandmother. Earl Einarson’s *The Moccasins*, illustrated by Julie Flett, explores a different dimension of identity: Earl, a member of the Ktunaxa nation, is given a beautiful pair of beaded moccasins by his foster mother, who tells him that being an Indigenous person in Canada is a fine thing and that he should be proud to wear the distinctive shoes of his nation (see fig. 2). The moccasins make him feel warm and loved, and he wears them continually. When the moccasins are outgrown, they are put away carefully. Earl marries eventually and becomes a father, and his foster mother brings a gift: the box containing the moccasins and a reminder of the importance of a child’s birthright of cultural identity. The moccasins may be worn and outgrown, but they remain a family treasure.

In stories celebrating heritage, shoes do more than complete the costume. For the heroine in Monica

Hughes’s *My Name Is Paula Popowich!*, a gift of national Ukrainian dress and dancing lessons helps Paula come to terms with the loss of her father, who, she discovers, was Ukrainian. Paula learns that her own identity as Ukrainian Canadian matters more to her than memories, and, although the first lesson is exhausting, Paula perseveres: “If it hadn’t been for the red boots I think I’d have given up” (131). In Chieri Uegaki’s *Suki’s Kimono*, illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch, Suki’s distinctive Japanese dress, a gift from her grandmother, includes shiny red geta, wooden clogs that make a conspicuous “clip-clop” sound as she walks. The giggles of her Canadian classmates die away as Suki performs a graceful dance for them in her elegant kimono and geta, earning their admiration and applause. Unlike the red shoes associated with fairy tales, these carry associations of luck and love.

Conclusion

Some Canadian authors employ regional settings and local cultural references to their realistic shoe stories; others broaden their tales to historical world settings or to imaginative realms. One animates the shoe itself; others use the distinctiveness of particular shoes as a symbol of belonging to a tribe or a nation, to be worn with comfort and pride. Their treatments are a blend of old-world literature with a new-world emphasis on self-discovery, independence, and self-definition, of characters in motion. The dominant theme of Canadian

shoe stories remains the practical and professional shoe that aids actual mobility. As Catharine Parr Traill once remarked, this is a “matter of fact” country (153); here, moccasins, cowboy boots, and skates make a larger mark than glass slippers. In Ewing’s “Timothy’s Shoes,” a rare example of magic shoes that actually do good, the shoes do not provide Timothy with easy wealth but turn him into an efficient worker. Similarly, Canadian authors tend to deflate sentiment in fairy-tale stories with welcome touches of humour. Our Cinderellas can be literalists, may prefer paper-bag dresses to wearing finery in bad company, or have flapping penguin feet; our Canadian stories of sinister red shoes may abound in early misunderstandings but end happily. From

Montgomery’s Anne Shirley, whose well-fitting, pretty new slippers allow her to portray a convincingly light-footed fairy in the school play, to Tiger with his broken-in cowboy boots, to Suki in her bright geta, to orphaned Earl, whose beautiful moccasins give him pride in his heritage, Canadian characters celebrate being well-shod primarily as a means of acquiring proficiency, confidence, and a sense of identity. Imagination also has its place, but, in Canadian stories, “magic” and “enchanted” shoes typically are rejected or outgrown as their young owners grow wise. Canadian authors of shoe stories show a wide appreciation of traditional themes but an equal zest for placing these in their own unique frames of reference.

Notes

¹ According to Carpenter and Pritchard, “The earliest appearance of a story resembling Cinderella was in the 9th c. A.D. in a Chinese collection of tales and folk lore, the *Yu Yang Ts Tsu*, whose author said he had collected the story orally from family servants” (119). A modern and unsigned retelling is “Rhodopis and Her Gilded Sandals, the First Cinderella Story” in *Through Fairy Halls of My Bookhouse*, edited by Olive Beaupré Miller (262–67). Other ancient cultures sealed bargains through giving shoes; in the Hebrew Bible, Boaz accepts responsibility for marrying Ruth by pledging his shoe with his kinsman (*King James Version*, Ruth 4:1–9).

² Another early story is “The Soul of the Great Bell,” by Lafcadio Hearn, a Chinese legend published in 1887, collected in Elizabeth Sechrist’s *Thirteen Ghostly Yarns*. In this tale, the father of a surpassingly beautiful maiden named Ko-ngai is sentenced to death unless he can cast a great silver and gold bell for the emperor. The casting fails twice, and an oracle warns that only when the blood of a maiden is mixed with the metal in the cauldron will the bell be cast successfully. As her father makes the third and final cast, Ko-ngai leaps into the cauldron, crying, “For thy sake, o my father!” (32). Ko-ngai’s horrified nurse tries to stop her, but only catches one

beautiful, dainty shoe. The bell is cast, and although no lovelier sound than its note is heard in China, between each ring there is a little sobbing echo. Mothers in China, we are told, tell their children that this is Ko-ngai, crying for her shoe (34).

³ Hans Christian Andersen has his Troll-King of “The Hill of The Elves” exchange boots with his bride as a wedding pledge, because to trolls, “that is more refined than exchanging rings” (*Fairy* 288)—and, presumably, all trolls have huge feet.

⁴ *Historia di Lionbruno*, attributed to Cirino of Ancona and published in Venice in 1476, is to date considered the first tale of the seven-league boots in print, according to Jill Shefrin in her exhibit catalogue *Box of Delights* (7).

⁵ A similar version of the tale, which Ewing stated she had not read, is Giles Chauncey’s *The Magic Shoes*, in which a self-willed boy is given a free pair of shoes by a cobbler who is really a magician. The shoes will not let him be naughty or play hooky and won’t let him leave his desk until his lessons are learned. The tale ends with a sermon: “Let the truth be your magic shoes. If it compels you at first, it will guide you after a while, and finally it will become love in your heart. Then the magic shoes will help you in everything you do, and make your whole life happy” (48).

⁶ Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* contains a reference to ill-fitting borrowed shoes: when Anne, who has for most of her life been dressed in clothes from the poor barrel and in dowdy second-hand items, is given not only a pretty dress but a dainty pair of kid slippers with “beaded toes and satin bows” to wear just before playing a fairy in a recital, Diana Barry declares, “I call it providential. You won’t have to borrow Ruby’s slippers now, and that’s a blessing, for they are two sizes too big for you, and it would be dreadful to hear a fairy

shuffling. Josie Pye would be delighted” (281).

⁷ Their name is said to come from “leithbhrogan,” makers of single shoes, and their work is described in William Allingham’s poem “The Lepracaun [*sic*], or, Fairy Shoemaker” in his collection *Rhymes for the Young*. In many superstitions, luck is transferred to shoes, symbols of leprechauns or elves. Well-wishing by throwing shoes after a newlywed couple has become a time-honoured custom.

⁸ Lord Baden-Powell took the name “Brownies” from this story for junior Girl Guides in 1918 (Carpenter and Prichard 86).

⁹ Worn-out shoes offer telltale clues about clandestine activities, as opposed to mysterious identities. The Brothers Grimm wrote an early version of “Twelve Dancing Princesses” entitled “The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes” in the 1823 English edition of their tales, in which the shoes of a king’s beautiful daughters appear mysteriously worn out each morning, although the girls have been locked in their room all night. The poor soldier who resists the drugs they give him and spies on their secret ball solves the riddle and wins one of the princesses for a bride. Sensibly, as befits a shoe story, he chooses the eldest for a wife (2: 114).

¹⁰ For a discussion of *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* and the symbolism of shoes, see Crain.

¹¹ In addition, in his retelling of Jason and the Argonauts, Kingsley describes the hero losing a sandal while unknowingly carrying the goddess Hera across a raging river. As he enters the next town, he is greeted by an old man who asks:

“Do you not know the oracle, my son, that you go so boldly through the town with but one sandal on?”

"I am a stranger here and know of no oracle, but what of my one sandal? I lost the other in Anauros, while I was struggling with the flood."

Then the old man looked back to his companions; and one sighed, and another smiled; at last he said—"I will tell you, lest you rush upon your ruin unawares. The Oracle in Delphi has said that a man wearing one sandal should take the Kingdom of Pelias, and keep it for himself. Therefore beware. . . ."

Then Jason laughed a great laugh, like a war-horse in his pride—"Good news, father, both for you and for me. For that very end I came into the town." (73)

Few other male characters in children's literature lose single shoes; these tales tend rather to offer the lost shoe as a clue, as in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Deerslayer*, in which Natty Bumppo's faithful companion, Chingachgook, is alerted to an ambush attempt and given a trail to follow by an invader's lost moccasin (271). More recently, Quentin Blake's *Mister Magnolia* gives a humorous twist to single-boot status.

¹² Sportswriter Scott Young turned to writing hockey stories in the 1950s. The best known of these, *Scrubs on Skates*, fed the aspirations of countless young hockey enthusiasts but makes little reference to the skates and is so technical in language that its appeal is limited to hockey fans.

¹³ The "Learned Pig" that appeared able to read numbers and letters was a phenomenon frequently celebrated in eighteenth-century chapbooks; see Bentley 17.

¹⁴ The footprint in stories is a discussion in itself, whether in tales of hunting, woodcraft, or detection. The most celebrated literary footprint is Friday's in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, but there are

many instances of prints of shod feet as clues. One chilling story is Kipling's tale "The King's Ankus," from the *Second Jungle Book*, in which Mowgli and Bagheera, each following the prints of murdering bandits, discover crimes committed for greed when thieves fall out (238).

¹⁵ In classical times, red shoes were marks of distinction. "Spartan soldiers of ancient Greece wore bright red leather boots and red tunics to conceal blood flowing from wounds. . . . [W]hen red boots became the fashion among Spartan youths, officials quickly stepped in. Only soldiers going to war, they said, were allowed to wear red boots" (Lawlor 20).

¹⁶ A sad fate also awaits Andersen's "Girl Who Trod on a Loaf," who, to keep her shoes dry and clean, threw bread down for a stepping stone across a bog. As a punishment for her pride and ingratitude, Inger is sucked down into a hellish life in the swamp, only to be released many years later by the prayers and tears of others, who repent their own ingratitude for God's gifts (*Fairy* 147).

¹⁷ L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, sometimes called the first American fairy tale, features slippers that can transport the wearer anywhere she wants to go. The slippers rescue the heroine, Dorothy, who is stranded in the land of "Oz." Baum called these "silver" slippers, but Metro Goldwyn Mayer portrayed them in the film adaptation as glittering "ruby" slippers (actually decorated with sequins) better suited to technicolour (Lawlor 80) and possibly more evocative of enchantment.

¹⁸ Other shoe names are found in Norwegian fairy tales in which the youngest, generally the hero, is always nicknamed "Boots." As the youngest son, he is the poorest and has nothing much but his boots to help him to win fame and fortune. George Dasent's notes in his

translation *Popular Tales from the Norse* that Boots “is Cinderella’s brother in fact; and just as she had all the dirty work put upon her by her sisters, he meets with the same fate from his brothers. . . . But he has in him that deep strength of character and natural power upon which the good powers always smile” (lxxx).

¹⁹ The remaining titles are *Movie Shoes*, *Family Shoes*, *Dancing Shoes*, and *Traveling Shoes*.

²⁰ This is the central focus of P. L. Travers’s *Two Pairs of Shoes*, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon, retellings of two traditional stories from Baghdad. In the first, a greedy merchant is punished endlessly for wearing shabby old shoes, and in the second, an advisor to the king gazes every day on the old, worn shoes he first wore to the palace, to remind himself of his humble origin.

²¹ Two examples are “The Two Travelers,” in which a wicked cobbler has his eyes pecked out by crows (Grimm and Grimm 2: 25), and “From Cobbler to Physician,” part of the fables of Phaedrus, in which a bungling shoemaker impersonates a physician but is exposed by a simple test (Perry 209).

²² Condemned to death by the emperor, they were thrown into a vat of boiling tar, among other forms of torment, but emerged unscathed. (The prefect who tried to carry out the sentence is said to have jumped into the vat himself in frustration.) Eventually, the brothers were beheaded. Their festival, held on 25 October, was celebrated in solemn processions and merrymaking by shoemakers’ guilds, and it gained greatly in importance after the Battle of Agincourt was won on that date (or, at least, after Shakespeare’s *Henry V* was written).

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