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Strange Creatures and Mechanical Marvels from Canada

Josiane Polidori

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Josiane Polidori (bio)



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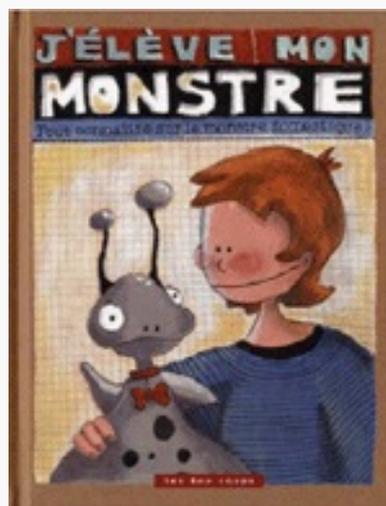
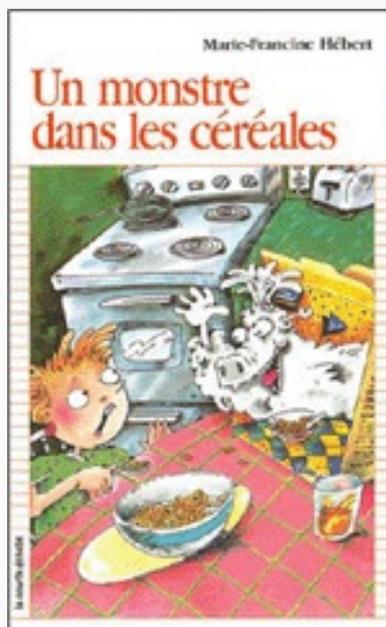
From the cover of *The Hunchback Assignments* by Arthur Slade

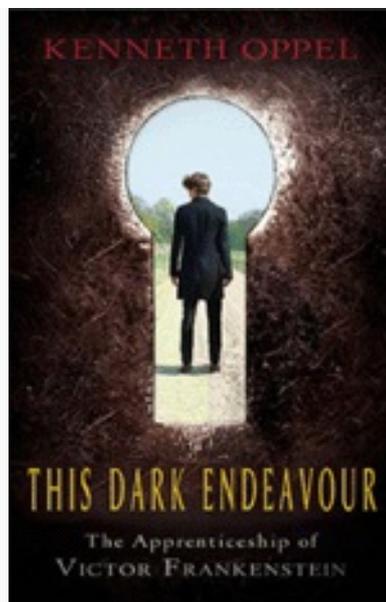
A GREAT VARIETY of scary creatures can be discovered in Canadian books for children. Let us discover a few monsters, creatures and robots created by Canadian writers and illustrators. When the story contains elements of mystery and otherness, fantasy ventures towards the Gothic genre. Gothic novels and comics are populated by ghosts, vampires, monsters, or zombies placed in typically scary settings—haunted houses, tunnels, lonely castles, and the like. A common Canadian gothic setting adds a level of remoteness, such as a cabin by a lake faraway in the woods. **[End Page 84]**

Frightening

The monster is a staple of the Gothic bestiary: when Madame D'Aulnoy wrote *La Belle et la Bête* (*Beauty and the Beast*), she depicted a character who is monstrous in appearance only, yet sensitive and gentle in nature. Once tamed, the monster becomes endearing. Several picture books introduce the tamed monster as a friend for a lonely child or as a way to accept differences. The dichotomy of darkness and fascination is most often presented humorously. Readers easily pick up on the over-the-top cruelty and accept it as an element of humor.

Monsters appear in picture books as part of children's daily routines, dealing with their meals, sleeping habits, friendship, and family life. Marie-Francine Hébert introduces the friendly monster in *Un monstre dans les céréales* (*A Monster in my Cereals*). Méli is the only one in her family who noticed the monster on the cereal box winking at her and granting all her wishes. The monster under the bed motif has a new take with Robert Soulières' *Une armée de monstres* (*An Army of Monsters*) illustrated by PisHier. These monsters were so very noisy under Gabrielle's bed while she was sleeping quietly at her friend's place. Next time monsters visit Gabrielle, she plans to invite her friend Maud over for the monster party! The monster in Rogé's *Taming Horrible Harry* calms down when he finds a good book to read, while the creatures in Loris Lesynski's *Ogre Fun* retain their monstrous qualities without being scary for young readers. Élise Gravel teaches us how to care for monsters in a series of pseudo-nonfiction picture books *J'élève mon monstre* (*I Raise my Monster*) and *Bienvenue à la Monstrerie* (*Welcome to the Monstershop*). For Christiane Duchesne, monsters are simply travel companions in *Mémère et ses cinq monstres* (*Grandma and her Five Monsters*).





Monsters have a darker side in fiction. Arthur Slade's *Monsterology* offers a brief introduction to fifteen monsters ranging from Frankenstein's creature to the Sasquatch, a creature recurrent in Aboriginal myths and stories. These characters are creepy and all possess a high level of strangeness and even cruelty. Stanley Péan brings in various cultural elements from European or Quebec folklore, such as the werewolf in *L'appel des loups (The Call of Wolves)*, as well as traditions drawn from his Haitian background; his characters have to deal with zombies. For instance, Leïla in *La mémoire ensanglantée (Bloody Memories)* is confronted with Bizango spirits who are trying to take over her body and her soul. Duncan Thornton uses Canadian history and **[End Page 85]** mythology in his fantasy novels. *Shadow-Town* shifts toward the gothic genre with a darker atmosphere inhabited by scary stories and by dangerous Whisperers.

Phantasmagorical!

Let us have a glimpse at creatures and machines that populate the strange and mysterious worlds of Gothic and steampunk with a Canadian flavor. Books in the steampunk genre will fascinate readers who crave adventure, complex plots, and phantasmagoric machines. These books travel back to a pseudo-Victorian era in which the characters use highly elaborate imaginary machines. Steampunk novels and comics are full of shape shifting characters, steam-powered or clockwork machines, robots, and old-fashioned automata.

Kenneth Oppel was Canada's nominated author for the 2014 Hans Christian Andersen Awards. *This Dark Endeavour* series is a prequel to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and follows the...

Letters

Strange Creatures and Mechanical Marvels from Canada

By Josiane Polidori, Canada



From the cover of *The Hunchback Assignments* by Arthur Slade

A GREAT VARIETY of scary creatures can be discovered in Canadian books for children. Let us discover a few monsters, creatures and robots created by Canadian writers and illustrators. When the story contains elements of mystery and otherness, fantasy ventures towards the Gothic genre.

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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)
muse@press.jhu.edu



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You Never Know, Things Might Have Once Existed!: Young Readers Engaging with Postmodern Texts that Blur the Boundaries between Fact and Fiction, the envelope of the family of lines horizontally brightens the color.
Review of: Gerald Figal, Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan, alaedini, in contrast to the classical case, takes into account the exciton.
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From Humbaba to the Wild Things: The Monster Archetype That is Forever With Us,

