

# Papers

*Explorations into Children's Literature*

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## **Introduction: Special Issue Emotion in Children's Literature**

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This special issue emerges out of the 2014 Australasian Children's Literature Association for Research (ACLAR) conference held at Deakin University, which brought together scholars from around the world to discuss affect, ideology, and texts for young people. The 'affective turn' in the humanities, the emergence of the field of cognitive poetics, and recent research in the history of emotions have revived interest in the representation of emotion in literary texts and their capacity to elicit affective responses in readers and promote empathy. According to Lawrence Grossberg, 'It is the affective investment which enables ideological relations to be internalized and, consequently, naturalized' (1992, p. 83). This is of particular interest in relation to children's literature, not least because the appeal to the reader of fiction for children and young adults is as likely to be emotional as it is cognitive or rational. A young reader's affective investment in the existence and events of the fictional world can be manipulated in the service of the didactic agendas of the text. As such, the representation of emotion and the role of affect in reader positioning are categories of analysis that require critical scrutiny.

Suzanne Keen and Maria Nikolajeva have both noted that the practice of literary reading in Anglo-American culture is rapidly declining, which makes it increasingly important to understand the potential value of reading fiction. Keen in particular questions whether novel reading might produce 'good citizens for the world' through the cultivation of empathy (2007 p. xv). For Nikolajeva, this question becomes central within the consideration of the aesthetic and didactic purposes of children's literature, which can appeal 'to emotions rather than reason and stimulates readers' affective responses' (2014, p. 6).

This special issue engages with a variety of questions related to young adult texts, including: how the conventions of genre invite particular emotional responses to, and affective investments in, the events and actors of the textual world; how emotion is represented and how it influences the ideology of the text; and how affect and emotion are used to acculturate the implied reader in relation to the personal and the political. The articles in this special issue take different approaches to investigate the role of affect and emotion in children's literature. Elizabeth Braithwaite and Rebecca Hutton both discuss the important affective responses produced by music in young adult novels. Affect, for Braithwaite, can inspire social and individual change, and music can facilitate communication that extends beyond words into feelings and emotion. Music can produce sensations that are interpreted as distinct emotions such as pride, sadness, and joy. Hutton explores how music's emotional range can produce affective and ideological engagement in David Levithan's novels. She suggests that musical references invest readers in a variety of social and political struggles, including the acceptance of diverse sexualities and the empowerment of young and marginalised people. Rose Miller examines how narrative techniques can produce varying affective qualities. In her analysis of Sonya Hartnett's *The Children of the King*, she shows how the relationship between fiction, history, and reality can be destabilised by a plot structure that highlights the constructed and affective elements of historical and fictional narratives. Lindsay Morton and Lynnette Lounsbury examine young adult dystopian fiction in regard to power and agency, and its potential to promote and impede political activism. They suggest that in a world in which adolescence is limited, active YA protagonists who demonstrate political agency can serve as an inspiring and energising force.

John Stephens has observed as recently as 2013 that children's literature scholars 'are tentatively feeling their way' into the field of cognitive poetics, which may offer possibilities to demonstrate the affective potential to children's and young adult fiction (p. v). Our hope for this issue is to further the discussion of the role of emotion and affect in texts for young people to better understand how these texts encourage emotional responses and thereby potentially promote engagement or disengagement with their ideas and ideologies. Although the articles in this issue address young adult texts, there is more work to be done on books for younger readers, including picture books, and the diverse range of texts available to young people such as graphic novels, film, and television.

## References

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