
Papers

Explorations into Children's Literature

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EDITORIAL

The cover of this issue of *Papers* features an image which appears in the First Book of the *Victorian Readers*, originally published in 1928. As Jane McGenniken demonstrates in her essay on Australian mythologies of childhood in the Tasmanian and Victorian Readers, the literary texts selected for these Readers represent Australian children as innocent inhabitants of a young country, a conceit also proposed by Ethel Turner at the beginning of *Seven Little Australians*: 'the land and the people are young-hearted together'. McGenniken argues that these imaginings of an innocent Australian childhood are analogous with mythologies of an innocent nation, which act to divert attention from the (less innocent) histories of imperialism fundamental to the nation's foundation. Another preoccupation of the Readers is the idea of the child as leader, in stories about courageous children like Grace Bussell, who in rescuing the victims of a shipwreck demonstrates the qualities of Australian girlhood by exercising a motherly concern. The Readers constitute an important component of reading material for Australian children from the late 19th century until the 1940s; the online database *AustLit: the Australian Literature Resource* now includes a section on the *Victorian Readers* and the *Victorian School Papers*, at: <http://www.austlit.edu.au/> (go to 'Research Communities', 'Australian Children's Literature' and 'The Victorian Classroom').

Children's literature has a tradition of commenting on and illuminating the social contexts which shape their construction. In her article, 'A Great Ghastly Mistake?': Approaches to Teenage Pregnancy in K. M. Peyton's *Pennington's Heir* and Berlie Doherty's *Dear Nobody*, Madelyn Travis locates her analysis of the focus texts' treatment of teenage pregnancy within their different social and temporal contexts. Despite the twenty years that separate their publications and the different settings of Britain and the United States, Travis argues that the more recent text, *Dear Nobody*, 'is at times conservative and regressive in its treatment of its central theme, while the earlier and less well received *Pennington's Heir* is the more socially progressive text'.

Naarah Sawers' essay, "You molded me like clay": David Almond's Sexualised Monsters', approaches two of Almond's novels, *Skellig* and *Clay*, through the lens of psychoanalytical theory, examining their gendered representations with a focus on the humanoid figures (Skellig and Clay) which feature in these novels. Sawers' close reading of the novels argues that these monstrous masculine figures function to draw male protagonists toward gender models which reinforce traditional versions of masculinity, even as both novels incorporate agential, independent female characters.

Comparative literature is the subject of Maria Nikolajeva's article 'Comparative Children's Literature: What is There to Compare?'. As a field of enquiry, comparative literature studies encompass a wide range of interests including

literary genres, motifs and themes, influences, and typological resemblances. As Nikolajeva points out, ‘the purpose of comparison can be a deeper understanding of literary texts in a broader historical, social and literary context; it can also be an examination of influences and intertexts’. Her article offers a rich array of texts from different cultural contexts highlighting their perhaps inevitable influences and intertextual links. In her conclusion, Nikolajeva offers a certain ambivalence in attempting to answer the question that her title asks, namely, while comparison is an inherent aspect of all literary analysis, comparative studies can open up interesting historical, cultural and literary allusions that may otherwise go unnoticed.

While a fine line might separate lying from storytelling, Alice Curry contends that ‘lying frees the liar from the constraints of truth, moving him or her into the higher realms of deliberately-conceived art and away from the grim realities of unpolished nature’. It is this artful nature of lying that is the subject of her paper, ‘Lying, or Storytelling, as Antidote to Unhappiness in Robin Klein’s *Hating Alison Ashley* and Anne Fine’s *A Pack of Lies* and *Goggle-eyes*’. Despite the moralistic overtones of *A Pack of Lies*, Curry contends that this novel nevertheless details the illicit pleasure of lying and the artistic freedoms it offers the liar. In this way, it becomes a useful framing text for the other novels for exploring how lying can enhance subjectivity. As Curry argues, storytelling creates a liberatory space defined by humour and make-believe that offers a creative solution to the problem of the characters’ unhappiness.

The final essay in this issue is Suzanne O’Sullivan’s ‘Playfulness in Lauren Child’s Picture Books’, which considers notions of play and playfulness articulated by poststructuralist and postmodern theorists, applying these ideas to Child’s picture book oeuvre. O’Sullivan shows how playfulness in Child’s work manifests in her use of forms such as collage; her deployment of visual patterns and images which occur and re-occur across her books; the intertextual play of her narratives; and her positioning of readers as playful participants in a process of making meanings.

Finally, we draw your attention to the information in ‘News & Notices’ about an Australian Research Council funded project which promises to make available to researchers online a large body of early Australian primary texts published from the beginnings of Australian publishing for children and up to 1945. The Australian Children’s Literature Digital Resources Project located in *AustLit: the Australian Literature Resource* expects to digitise around 1000 early texts over the next two years, so making these texts available to researchers in Australia and internationally. This resource will open up scholarly investigation into early texts, many of which are now inaccessible to scholars remote from the major collections held by the National Library of Australia, the State Library of Victoria, Monash University and University of Queensland. The project is an exciting venture which will enhance children’s literature research in Australia and will provide opportunities for comparative studies.