
Papers

Explorations into Children's Literature

Volume 16, No 1, December 2006

ISSN 1034-9243

Editors: Clare Bradford, Deakin University; Kerry Mallan, Queensland University of Technology

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Cover Design: Ben Jackson

Papers is a refereed journal published by the School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, Victoria, 3125. Telephone (03) 9244 6487. Facsimile (03) 9244 6755.

The journal is published twice per year, in May and November.

Subscription rates are \$44.00 per year within Australia (Postage and GST included). Asia-Pacific \$50.00 (incl. postage), all other countries – \$55.00 (incl. postage). Cheques should be made payable to Deakin University and should be in Australian currency.

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EDITORIAL

In this issue of *Papers* we publish essays based on a selection of conference papers at the Seventh International Conference of the Australasian Children's Literature Association for Research (ACLAR) held in Melbourne on 13-14 July, 2006. The cover of this issue replicates Kathryn James's design for the conference programme, with its clever image of the 'undercover child' reading a comic. The theme of the conference emphasised newness: new texts, technologies, readings and readers, and the essays we present here traverse a variety of concepts and texts within this framework.

Kerry Mallan's invigorating plenary address sets the tone for this collection, focusing on the political climate in which researchers in children's literature work and addressing questions about the future of children's literature. Mallan moves between children's texts and their engagement with political and cultural shifts, and the value and potential of scholarship in children's literature. The essays grouped under the heading *The politics of the present* take up questions relating to contemporary politics and children's texts. Dudek considers activist texts challenging the Australian Government's policies regarding refugees, and Pearce and Lampert examine texts featuring Muslim protagonists in a post-9/11 world. Two essays touch on relations between humans and the non-human world: Sawers discusses the concept of animal-human hybridity in children's sci-fi; and Stephens considers relations between humans and the non-human world in environmental texts. Three essays – those of Free, Parsons and Bullen – hinge on questions of agency, as young people navigate familial, class and capitalist systems which seek to control their identities and futures.

Under the heading *New times, new readers* we have included texts dealing with emerging narrative modes and genres such as Magical Realism (Hammer) as well as those taking a new slant on old themes. Bryce discusses how anime remakes ancient texts and motifs; and Giardina focuses on young consumers of ICTs and the cultural anxieties which inform representations of new technologies and readers. Shu Wei discusses the Chinese classical work 'Journey to the West' as a fairytale novel; Chowdhury examines the trope of the child messiah in contemporary fantasy, and Halliday considers whether death in war settings is 'reshaped' for child readers. Li's discussion of the influence of translated texts on Chinese children's literature, Allan's work on postmodern picture books and Davie's reflections on the paratexts of Indigenous-authored texts consider contemporary developments in narration. Finally, the papers gathered under the heading *Bodies of difference* focus on questions of sexuality (Beveridge and McInally); gender (Wortley, Webb, Walsh); disability (Muller) and Indigeneity (Holt, O'Connor, Zeegers) in relation to embodied differences and their representations.

Mallan's plenary paper poses the question: 'the future of children's literature?'. If this issue's sampling of current Australian and international research is any indication of future scholarship, then it would seem that exciting new times await us.

Clare Bradford and Kerry Mallan