
Papers

Explorations into Children's Literature

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EDITORIAL

This issue of *Papers* represents a milestone in the journal's history as we say farewell to Robin Pope, and welcome Kerry Mallan to the role of co-editor. Robin has been editing *Papers* since 1995/6, when Deakin took over the journal from the Magpies group, where Alf Mappin established it in 1990. Many authors of the essays we have published during the last ten years have had cause to appreciate Robin's careful and tactful communication, her judicious editing, her wry humour. Many thanks, Robin, and enjoy your freedom from the routines of producing a journal. Kerry, from Queensland University of Technology, has been a Board member since 2003 and brings to the role of editing *Papers* a wealth of experience as an author and editor.

While *Papers* has always leaned toward discussions of Australian texts and topics (and remains, as it was at its inception, the only Australian refereed journal focusing on children's literature), we have very often published essays featuring texts produced elsewhere, as well as many which consider Australian alongside other texts in relation to thematics, narrative strategies, theoretical perspectives or developments across production for children. In this issue we signal our intentions of internationalising the journal more thoroughly by announcing that the following scholars have agreed to join the Editorial Board: Kimberley Reynolds (University of Newcastle, UK); Roderick McGillis (University of Calgary, Canada); Junko Yoshida (Kobe College, Japan); Maria Nikolajeva (Stockholm University, Sweden); and Roberta Trites (Illinois State University, USA). David Buchbinder (Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia), will bring to the Board his expertise on masculinities, sexuality and gender in children's and other texts. We thank Kim, Rod, Junko, Maria, Roberta and David for their willingness to join the Australian contingent on the Board.

In this issue we publish six essays which embody something of the variety and scope of the field of children's literature. In 'Performativity and the Child Who May Not be a Child', John Stephens reflects on the term 'performativity' as it has been used by theorists such as Judith Butler, and on the vexed question of how performativity departs from performance. Stephens goes on to consider the emerging body of contemporary children's texts in which humanity itself is treated as performative, and which feature non-human entities such as robots, clones, and genetically-engineered characters. Such texts raise questions about what it is to be human, since the concept of the posthuman has the potential to draw attention to the role of performativity in shaping human behaviour and subjectivity.

Mia Franck and Rebecka Fokin-Holmberg also engage with theories of performativity in their essay 'Making Magic: (Hetero)sexual (In)visibility in Scandinavian Young Adult Fiction'. By taking the 'girl witch' as their central

trope, Franck and Fokin-Holmberg enquire into ways that sexuality is performed within realistic and fantastic settings. These authors argue that the performative nature of the female characters' witchhood resembles Judith Butler's notion of drag in that, both performances interrogate heteronormative notions of femaleness, but neither is necessarily subversive. A further element of their analysis is how witches are constructed as 'different' within normative notions of girlhood and female desire and friendship. The authors conclude that despite the novels' various attempts to subvert or question heteronormativity lesbianism remains an implied possibility.

Resistance to orthodox ideas about what constitutes acceptable sexuality is further explored through Kathryn James's examination of the monstrous-feminine in her essay 'Over Her Dead Body: Expelling the Monstrous-Feminine in *Touching Earth Lightly*'. James considers how the female subject in Margo Lanagan's novel is situated within Western discourses of death, femininity, and sexuality. Drawing on a number of feminist critics and Michel Foucault's work on sexuality and body politics, the analysis considers how death represents a solution for removing the 'perverse' (sexually unorthodox) body from the sexual economy, thereby reinforcing heteronormativity. James argues that of the two female characters (Chloe and Janey), it is Janey who can be read in Barbara Creed's terms as the 'monstrous-feminine' in that she represents a 'dangerous' sexuality that threatens the phallogocentric order as she is constructed as a 'devourer' and a threat to the males she engages with.

Other kinds of lessons about sex and romance are offered in Sharyn Pearce's essay, 'Sex Education, Hollywood Style: Gender, Sexuality and Identity in *The Girl Next Door*'. Pearce reflects on the role of popular cultural texts—in particular, film—as sites of pedagogy shaping the ideologies and world views of young people. Her discussion then focuses on *The Girl Next Door* in relation to the lessons

it offers regarding gender, sexuality and identity; and also how it addresses the topic of sex education for young people. Pearce comes to a similar conclusion to James regarding the text she considers, that despite the efforts by *The Girl Next Door* to promote reactionary ideological values, it ultimately endorses the patriarchal social order and perpetuates women as sexual objects.

Michelle Gill's essay, 'Just telling it like it is? Representations of Teenage Fatherhood in Contemporary Western Young Adult Fiction', offers insights into how male subjects across a range of novels are represented within discourses of fatherhood and masculinity, which support or challenge privileged notions of what it means to be 'a good father'. By framing her essay within sociological studies of teenage fatherhood, Gill examines constructions of teenage fathers within debates about economic and social disadvantage, compulsory heterosexuality (and its implications for masculine sexual prowess), with the more sympathetic narrative representations of fictional teenage fathers. Her conclusion is that the writers of young adult fiction attempt to challenge socially constructed stereotypes by representing young fathers as struggling to come to terms with their situations.

In the final essay, death, witches, and parenting reappear along with notions of the uncanny, individuation and rebirth in a discussion of Garth Nix's fantasy novels. While Garth Nix's novels have found enthusiastic readers in Australia, the UK and the United States, they have so far received little critical attention. Alice Mills's essay, 'The theme of premature burial in Garth Nix's early novels', goes some way to address this gap, focusing on *The Ragwitch*, *Shade's Children* and *Sabriel*. Mills draws on Jungian and Freudian frameworks to consider the motif of burial in Nix's early works, in a reading which traces the novels' deployment of tropes and strategies of Gothic horror.

Clare Bradford and Kerry Mallan