

Papers

Explorations into Children's Literature

Volume 14, No 1, 2004

ISSN 1034-9243

Editor: Clare Bradford

Assistant Editor: Robin Pope

Referees:

Belle Alderman, Canberra, A.C.T.

Kerry Mallan, Brisbane, Qld

Robyn McCallum, Sydney, N.S.W.

Alice Mills, Ballarat, Vic.

John Murray, Sydney, N.S.W.

Elizabeth Parsons, Vic

Sharyn Pearce, Brisbane, Qld.

Richard Rossiter, Perth, W.A.

Leonie Rutherford, Armidale, N.S.W.

Heather Scutter, Melbourne, Vic.

John Stephens, Sydney, N.S.W.

Elizabeth Strain, Melbourne, Vic.

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 \$49 (incl. postage), all other countries – \$53.50 (incl. postage). Cheques should be made payable to Deakin University and should be in Australian currency.

All claims concerning duplicate or missing copies must be made within 30 days of the last day of an issue's publication month.

Contributions to *Papers* are welcomed. Please submit typed double-spaced manuscript, together with a stamped, self-addressed envelope if it is to be returned.

© *Papers* 2004. Permission to reprint should be made to the Editor. Article copyrights remain with the individual authors. Illustration material is fully copyright and remains with the original owner. While permission has been sought to reproduce this material, we have been unable to locate some sources and to these we apologise if they are not correctly credited.

The cover image is by H. Sands, from *Bunyip Told Me* by W.M. Fleming, London and Toronto, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1934, p.67.

EDITORIAL

In this issue of *Papers* we express our gratitude to Heather Scutter, whose research interests are now leading her away from children's literature toward nineteenth-century studies and who has withdrawn from duty as a referee for *Papers*. Heather has been a valued member of our editorial board since 1996, when Robin Pope and I took over *Papers* from its former publishers, *Magpies Magazine*. During the last eight years Heather has refereed many submissions to the journal, providing feedback and suggestions which have greatly assisted us in selecting essays and in working with authors to enhance content and expression. While the work of acting as a referee for a journal such as *Papers* is generally an invisible, unrecognised contribution to scholarship (and carries no financial reward), it is of great importance to the development of research and inquiry. Scholarship in children's literature is undergoing a phase of growth and development in Australia and elsewhere at the present time, evident in increasing numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate students and a higher profile for children's literature scholars and courses within universities, and Heather's considered and always forthright comments have materially assisted us in achieving our goal of publishing lively, accessible scholarly work which supports research by suggesting new directions in reading and theorising children's literature. Replacing Heather on the editorial board is Elizabeth Parsons, from the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University. We welcome Elizabeth and thank her for her commitment to *Papers*.

In 'What is a South African Folktale? Reshaping Traditional Tales through Translation and Adaptation', Judith Inggs addresses a topic of high importance not just to studies of South African children's literature but to the field of children's literature more broadly, which has throughout its history relied in large part on retellings, translations and revisionings of ancient narratives. In the colonial and postcolonial contexts in which English versions of South African folk tales have been published, the language and values of the dominant culture have, as Inggs demonstrates very clearly in her discussion of symptomatic narratives, transformed folktales from Xhosa, Sotho and Zulu traditions into completely different cultural products. A crucial question posed by Inggs concerns the extent to which such narratives can be described as 'South African', given that their discursive and narrative features, and (crucially) their informing ideologies, are those of the dominant culture. Just as many features of African narratives have been regarded as 'unsuitable for children' (that is, white children), so Jennifer Jones, in her essay 'Deemed Unsuitable for Children: The Editing of Oodgeroo's *Stradbroke Dreamtime*', shows how Oodgeroo's narrative strategies and her representations of the lived experience of Aboriginal people were subjected to wholesale editorial intervention in order to transform them into 'suitable' material for (white) readers. *Stradbroke Dreamtime* has since its publication been regarded as a key Australian text for

children, and Jones's close analysis of the alterations to Oodgeroo's text affords a timely corrective to any notion that the book as it has been read by many Australians is unequivocally 'by' Oodgeroo.

John Stephens' essay, 'Mimesis and the Competing Aesthetics of Kinesis and Stasis' interrogates an assumption common in critical writing on picture books: that representations of bodies and bodily postures are mimetic of characters' actions and modes of behaviour in the actual world; and that they position readers to respond in predetermined ways to bodily displays coded, for instance, as melancholy or as joy. Stephens argues that the emphasis on kinesis as a vehicle for signifying meaning in picture books overlooks the representational force of stasis and draws on Allen Say's *Grandfather's Journey* and Robert Ingpen's *The Afternoon Treehouse* to identify some of the strategies by which Say and Ingpen interrogate traditions of mimesis and privilege stasis as a mode of signification.

The other essays in this issue, Wendy Michaels' 'The Realistic Turn: Trends in Recent Australian Young Adult Fiction', Catherine Sly's 'Re-membering the Self: Psychoanalytic Theory and Subjectivity in Adolescent Fiction', and Richard Rossiter's 'Fragile Selves: Constructing Identity in Novels by Margaret Clark, Nette Hilton and Isobel Carmody' (republished here from Robin Pope's edited collection *Children's Literature Matters*), canvass notions of identity-formation, realism, and representation. Michaels argues that what she calls the 'new realism' novels of the last few years depart from the 'dirty realism' prominent in

the last few decades, not merely by constructing narrative resolutions which incorporate moments of transformation or insight, but by differences in narrative strategies. She sees these strategies, which include multiple first-person narration, metafictional devices, the deployment of intertextual references, and interrogation of relationships between artistic works and life in the world, as constructing views of selfhood which signal a shift from the unitary and fixed identities common in John Marsden's texts and toward a more dynamic and agential view. Catherine Sly, examining Fleur Beale's *I Am NOT Esther*, Claire Carmichael's *Incognito* and Lian Hearn's *Across the Nightingale Floor*, draws on Lacanian theory to investigate notions of subjectivity in texts whose narratives all involve the displacement of protagonists from worlds familiar and known, to strange social and cultural contexts. If Sly's reading of these texts suggests, like Michaels' essay, that recent YA texts are taking on board poststructuralist and postmodern views of selfhood rather than traditional humanist versions of the self, Richard Rossiter's essay, focusing on Margaret Clark's *Back on Track: Diary of a Street Kid*, Nette Hilton's *Hothouse Flowers* and Isobel Carmody's *Greylands* takes a more sceptical view of constructions of selfhood in these YA texts, arguing that new realism in Australian children's literature incorporates elements of both humanist and postmodern perspectives of human subjects. As always, there is no last word on subjectivity but only a continuing dialogue.

Clare Bradford