
Papers

Explorations into Children's Literature

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The cover image from *Hinepau* by Gavin Bishop published by Ashton Scholastic NZ Ltd 1993. Reproduced with permission.

EDITORIAL

This is a special issue of *Papers* focusing on visual texts for children. Although our call for papers sought articles on 'any kind of visual texts...including picture books, illustrated books, comic books, television and film', we received few submissions not concerned principally with picture books; only one of the four essays in this issue, Anne Hiebert Alton's '*The Hockey Sweater: A Canadian Cross-Cultural Icon*', touches on film, and Alton is interested more in the picture book than the film version of the text she discusses. Given the popularity of film and television with child audiences, it is surprising that discussions of these forms are under-represented in critical work. However, another article in this issue discusses a topic also neglected in children's literature scholarship, that of poetry: Alison Halliday's 'Minding your "Ps and Qs": Poetry, Propaganda, Politics and Pictures' considers two Australian poems in relation to the pictures which have accompanied them in illustrated versions for children.

When words and pictures interact in picture books, illustrated books, comics and films, they construct dialogic relations which draw upon and refer to other complexes of discourse and signification. Three of the four essays in this issue, those by Anne Hiebert Alton, Alison Halliday and Jill Holt, focus on how picture books relate to discourses of nationhood and constructions of national identity. These three essays, dealing respectively with Canadian, Australian and New Zealand texts, consider how picture books (and, in Halliday's essay, illustrated editions of poems) evoke the disparate and sometimes conflicting discourses of history and ideology which surround ideas of nationhood. Kerry Mallan's essay, 'Picture Books as Performative Texts: Or how to do things with words and pictures', examines the operation of performativity in picture books by bringing together three theoretical perspectives: J. L. Austin's speech act theory; Judith Butler's notion of performativity; and reader response theory. The conjunction illuminates the subtle nexus between the aesthetic pleasure derived from a picture book and the ways that book enacts and gives legitimacy to social norms.

Between the writing of Anne Hiebert Alton's article and its publication in this issue of *Papers*, the Royal Canadian Mint issued a new five-dollar note, a copy of which appears on page 8. To make a dreadful pun, the new note constitutes an object lesson about the *currency* of children's literature, because it features the opening lines of *Le Chandail de Hockey / The Hockey Sweater*, the picture book discussed by Alton. The quotation is as follows:

*Les hivers de mon enfance étaient des saisons longues, longues.
Nous vivions en trois lieux: l'école, l'église et la patinoire; mais
la vraie vie était sur la patinoire.*

Roch Carrier

The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places—the school, the church and the skating-rink—but our real life was on the skating-rink.

Mallan notes that children's literature, like other linguistic performances, 'interacts with the conventions of social reality, invokes particular effects, and serves a socialising function. It also induces readers to participate in the imaginative construction of a fictional world.' It is not too much of a stretch to suggest that the use of *The Hockey Sweater* on the Canadian five-dollar note also serves a socialising function in its construction of what Benedict Anderson calls 'an imagined community'; in this case, the idea of the nation. Further, it seems that in visual terms the text is embedded in a combination of visual cues which signify a version of 'Canada'.

The Hockey Sweater originated as a short story by the Québécois author Roch Carrier, was adapted by Carrier and the illustrator Sheldon Cohen as an animated short film in 1980, and was published as a picture book in 1984. In her essay, Alton notes that *The Hockey Sweater* has become a canonical text in Canadian children's literature, both in French-speaking and English-speaking regions of the country. The scene on the five-dollar note is not taken directly from the film or picture book, but shows a winter landscape of snow and ice where outdoor activities take place: a boy goes tobogganing; an adult teaches a child to skate; at the right of the scene, four children play hockey. Normally it would take a Canadian knowledgeable about hockey to recognise the number nine on the sweater worn by one of the boys as the number made famous by Maurice Richard, a celebrated ice hockey player of the 1940s. But the designers of the note can draw on this item of cultural knowledge because it appears as a narrative element in *The Hockey Sweater*.

That an excerpt from a children's text should feature on a nation's currency is a striking instance of the operations of intertextuality and memory as they contribute to constructions of the nation. The five-dollar note assumes a shared experience of viewing and/or reading *The Hockey Sweater*, and in turn will undoubtedly inform readings of the book as new generations of readers encounter first the five-dollar note and then the text. As Alton's essay

shows, Carrier's nostalgic evocation of a Canadian childhood offers a double-edged perspective which shifts between the experience of the child, for whom the worst thing that can happen is to be given the wrong hockey sweater, and the knowledge of the adult narrator, powerfully aware of the tensions informing relations between French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians. The very presence of French and English versions of Carrier's text on the five-dollar note draws attention to historical and contemporary manifestations of these tensions.

Constructions of national identities readily collapse into homogenised representations and even clichés, especially when visual images of 'typical' figures repeatedly appear in popular and literary texts. The figure of the rugged stockman in Australia and of the equally-rugged high country farmer in New Zealand are two instances of such clichés of nationalism, and are alluded to, respectively, in Alison Halliday's discussion of Ted Egan's song 'The Drover's Boy', and Jill Holt's 'Postcolonial Pictures for Children: Gavin Bishop and the Folktale'.

The Canadian five-dollar note calls not on iconic figures but on an iconic landscape of snow and ice, stretching back past dimly-glimpsed trees towards an imagined horizon and evoking the 'True North strong and free' of the Canadian national anthem. Superimposed on this landscape, rather than pictured against the urban background—'l'école, l'église et la patinoire'—in which Carrier's story is set, his words are reconfigured to evoke a version of Canadian identity in which Canadians are defined and define themselves in relation to vast, empty spaces. Like the images of the outback which figure so prominently in Australian myths of nationhood, the vast spaces of the Canadian north are not lived and experienced places, since most of the Canadian population, like that of Australia, inhabits urban settings. Rather, these images of icy landscapes carry out the cultural work of providing an image of a unified Canada defined as territory. Unlike most currency designs, which feature static images, often of famous individuals or institutions, the Canadian five-dollar note emphasises movement, especially of the child

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at front right, who seems to proceed diagonally toward the viewer. The implication of this impression of movement against the background of icy space is that of a national identity (with a gesture towards multiculturalism in the Asian features of the tobogganing boy) characterised by physical action played out against an unproblematic, empty Canadian landscape. The most interesting feature of the use of *The Hockey Sweater* on the Canadian five-dollar note is the dialogic nature of its interplay with other representations, through which disparate strands of significance and symbolism are brought into play: for instance, the Québécois language in which Carrier writes is set against the English translation by Sheila Fischman; the urban setting of *The Hockey Sweater* is juxtaposed against the vast, icy space of the 'true north'; vigorous action plays out against the quiet of a snowy world.

Where Anne Hiebert Alton sees *The Hockey Sweater* as addressing English-French tensions by way of the unifying symbol of the game of hockey, Jill Holt's essay takes a rather more critical view of the interplay of Maori and European traditions on the picture books of Gavin Bishop. Holt examines Bishop's career as an author-illustrator in the context of his shift from the European folktales and styles of illustration of his first picture books in the early 1980s to his advertence to his Maori ancestry and deployment of Maori traditions in *Hinepau* (1993) and succeeding works. Holt argues that in *Hinepau*, *Maui and the Goddess of Fire* (1997) and *The House that Jack Built* (1999), Bishop draws upon metanarratives of Maori society which are likely to be at odds with the world views of young readers, and that this dissonance is likely to create unease rather than promote ideals of a bicultural New Zealand.

In her essay, Alison Halliday considers cultural representation in two poems separated by over a hundred years, Henry Kendall's 'The Last of His Tribe' and Ted Egan's song 'The Drover's Boy'. Kendall's poem has been frequently anthologised and has been accompanied by various illustrations, including those of Percy Trezise and Mary Haginikitas in the 1989 illustrated version. Egan's song, composed and first sung in 1981, was published as a picture book in 1997, with illustrations by Robert Ingpen. Halliday draws on Ruth Wajnryb's study of how silence is used as 'a means of control of (and possibly by) the subject, and also as an indicator of stories that are too horrible to be recalled.' She argues that despite the century dividing the two poems, and despite the eloquence of Ingpen's illustrations for 'The Drover's Boy', both poems engage in strategies of silencing which reinforce white versions of history and memory.

The four essays in this issue show how the dual discourses of picture books construct dialogic relations with other texts, with social and cultural discourses, with history and with memory. As Mallan says, the narrative experience which picture books provide 'distinguishes picture books from other discourses and justifies our continued interest and interrogation.'

Clare Bradford
John Stephens (Guest Editor)

