EDITORIAL

In this issue of *Papers*, we break a tradition by publishing a work of fiction for the first time in the journal's history—Xavier Herbert's short story for children, 'The Ape Men of Mobongu', which appeared in a Sydney magazine, *The Boys' Weekly*, in 1927, but which has not been republished until now. The discovery of the story in *The Boys' Weekly* was one of those serendipitous events which sometimes occur during bibliographic research, and it was made by Russell McDougall, who published the definitive collection of Xavier Herbert's short stories in 1990. As McDougall says, the discovery of 'The Ape Men of Mobongu' is 'a remarkable find' for several reasons, including the fact that it is one of only two stories which Herbert is known to have written for children, and one of which he set in Melanesia.

Research in Australian children's literature generally focuses on modern and contemporary texts, with scant attention paid to texts produced in the first five decades of the twentieth century. McDougall's introduction to 'The Ape Men' suggests a reading of the story which is suggestive for its connections with other Australian texts, especially the Boys' Own stories of authors such as Alexander Macdonald, Donald Barr, Ion Idriess and Allan Aldous. From the 1920s through to the 1940s these and other writers produced narratives whose constructions of race and masculinities were widely read by adolescent and adult audiences.

Constructions of the masculine and specifically representations of fathers in contemporary Australian children's literature are the topic of Donna Gibbs and Wendy Michaels' essay 'Fictional Fathers: Gender Representation in Children's Fiction', which considers six novels shortlisted in the 'Books for Older Readers' category of the Children's Book Council awards in 2001. This essay supports other discussions of representations of fatherhood in Australian children's literature, such as Beverley Pennell's 1999 essay "'You're a failure as a parent, Joe Edwards!': Reconfiguring the Male Parent in Australian Realist Fictions 1966 and 1986", published in *Papers* 9.1. Gibbs and Michaels argue that in their sample of texts fathers are represented as inept parents, and sometimes as individuals of questionable morality, a finding which raises interesting questions about how this pattern of representation relates to the production and reception of Australian texts for young people.

Kathryn James's essay, 'Crossing the Boundaries: Scatology, Taboo and the Carnivalesque in the Picture Book', focuses on carnivalesque texts which 'deal specifically with the body in a physiological sense: with birth, death, excretory functions, sexuality and sexual practices.' James considers such texts in the light both of Bakhtin's formulation of the carnivalesque and of Kristeva's theory of the abject, examining the extent to which they transgress cultural norms concerning representations of human bodies in children's
literature. Questions of transgression are, as James note3, particularly pertinent to a field of cultural production which is highly controlled and always subject to the socialising agendas of adults.

Anna Beth McCormack’s essay, “‘A song in search of a voice that is silent’: Feminist Readings of When She Hollers and Touching Earth Lightly”, won the ACLAR Award for the best postgraduate essay at this year’s ACLAR conference in Brisbane. McCormack notes the scarcity of novels which deal with sexual abuse of children, a telling absence given that much fiction for adolescents and young adults canvasses topics such as youth suicide and dysfunctional relations between parents and children. Her discussion of When She Hollers and Touching Earth Lightly shows how feminist theory throws light on some of the tensions apparent in representations of sexual abuse in fiction for adolescents.

Clare Bradford