
Papers

Explorations into Children's Literature

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EDITORIAL

In the way that submissions to journals sometimes observe a strange synchronicity, this issue commences with three essays focusing on film. Relatively little work has been carried out on the ideologies of films designed specifically for children or of that large body of films regarded as family viewing, and which cater both to child viewers and also to the adults who accompany them. The three 'film' essays we present here apply a variety of theoretical and methodological frames to films which in the main fit within the second of these categories—family films.

Maria Takolander and David McCooley begin their consideration of *Shrek* with a reflection on the discourses of post-feminism which announce the redundancy of the feminist enterprise in a brave new world where girls and women have allegedly gone as far as they can go in achieving equality of opportunities and access to power. This essay situates *Shrek* within rhetorics of a new post-feminist 'humanism' in which, or so the story goes, the dour and humourless feminists of earlier decades take it easy in a world where they are now 'relaxed and comfortable'—and, Takolander and McCooley believe—where the new humanism is merely the smiling face of masculinism. Despite the fact that *Shrek* has enjoyed enormous commercial success since its release four years ago, it has received little critical attention, so that Takolander and McCooley's essay broaches a number of suggestions for scrutinising this film and the largely rhapsodic reception it has enjoyed.

In their essay 'Food Poisoning: Surplus and Suffering in Contemporary Children's Film', Naarah Sawers and Elizabeth Parsons consider four films—*The Lion King*, *Stuart Little*, *Shark Tale* and *The Incredibles*—in relation to representations of hunger and especially of bodies marked by hunger. Sawers and Parsons argue that the interplay of food and power in these films construct regimes of power which inexorably privilege white, masculine and middle-class bodies. The third essay on film, Helen Addison-Smith's 'E.T. Go Home: Indigeneity, Multiculturalism and "Homeland" in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema', brings into play postcolonial and critical race theories to consider representations of 'good' and 'bad' aliens in science fiction films. Readings of films involving alien invasions have often seen the threatening and destabilising incursion of aliens in terms of white American fear of its others. But such readings do not take into account the fact that in many science fiction films—notably *E.T.*—aliens are benign and friendly; they are trapped in human societies; and they desire above all to return to their homelands. Addison-Smith proposes that a key to understanding such good aliens is the idea of the 'Indian', a figure widely used in the United States to encode ideas about home, belonging and identity, often through the deployment of New Age discourses.

The other four essays which feature in this issue range across Australian, British and American texts from the Victorian period to contemporary production. John Murray's discussion of Berlie Doherty's *Dear Nobody* considers this novel in the light of narrative theory, pointing out that during the decade between the book's production and now, writers such as John Stephens, Mike Cadden and Andrea Schwenke Wyile, drawing on narrative theory and discourse analysis, have modelled modes of theorised investigation which allow for a more nuanced approach to subject positioning and narrative complexity than was usual in the early nineties, when discussions of texts relied, in the main, on studies of themes and content. Murray's essay both demonstrates how narrative theory enables fruitful re-readings of older texts, and that *Dear Nobody* (which is still widely read by Young Adult audiences) is a more complex and dialogic text than its first reviews recognised.

In her essay 'Examination, Surveillance and Confession in Victorian and Late 20th Century Texts', Diana Hodge draws on Foucault's theories about how subjectivities are constructed through discourses, discipline and punishment in to compare a group of Victorian texts with several late twentieth-century Young Adult novels. Hodge's analysis of discourses of surveillance and confession in Victorian contemporary texts points to the cultural valency of ideas such as that 'confession is good for the soul', which informs texts as widely separated in time as Frederic Farrar's 1858 novel *Eric; or, Little by Little*, and John Marsden's *Dear Miffy*.

The prominence of Philip Pullman's 'His Dark Materials' trilogy has prompted energetic debate around Pullman's

treatment of organised religion and questions of morality and ethics, to which Pullman's own sharp criticism of C.S. Lewis's advocacy of Christian symbolism and values in the Narnia books has broadened discussions beyond the 'Dark Materials' texts. The currency of these debates is demonstrated by the fact that a Google search based on the terms 'Philip Pullman' and 'religion' yields more than 50,000 entries, including blogs canvassing questions such as 'Did Philip Pullman really kill God?'. Beppie Keane takes a new angle on Pullman's treatment of religion by drawing on George Bataille's notion of hypermorality, which proposes a view of morality based on rationality and enabling a critique of those moral codes which claim the authority of institutionalised religions.

The final essay in this issue, Trish Lunt's 'Situating Childhood: A Reading of Spatiality in Aboriginal Picture Books', considers three recent picture books by Aboriginal authors, Bob Randall and Kunyi June-Anne McInerney's *Tracker Tjuringji*, and Elaine Russell's *A is for Aunty* and *The Shack that Dad Built*, arguing that they represent Australian childhoods in ways which refer to and mobilise Aboriginal conceptualisations of embodied space. In some senses this essay affords a response to Helen Addison-Smith's discussion of how indigeneity is figured through the trope of the alien. Whereas the mass market films which Addison-Smith discusses peddle notions of indigeneity framed by New Age discourses and geared to a global market, Lunt's analysis shows that the Aboriginal picture books on which she focuses insist on local, specific formulations of place which are shaped by colonialism but which reappropriate Aboriginal spaces.

Clare Bradford