Write4Children

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Foreword

Vanessa Harbour and Andrew Melrose

Welcome to the very latest edition of *Write4Children*. Please accept our apologies for the delay in publication but once again life got in the way. We are thankful for your patience and hope you enjoy this edition.

The aim of *Write4Children* is to create a link between writing for children and children's literature as critical study. We believe there is an inextricable link between the two disciplines. We are aware that not everyone shares this view, however we hope this edition does reflect the link. This editions eclectic mix of articles and interest pieces will be of interest to many of you.

Once again we start the Journal with another in our series from inside the industry. Hot Keys published the Costa Award winning book *Maggot Moon* by Sally Gardener and Sara O'Connor, Hot Key's innovative publisher, has written about publishing and how it is developing and coping with new technology. This is followed by a piece by Dr Anthony Eaton, The University of Canberra, entitled 'From Transition to Threshold: Redefining 'Young Adulthood'' which looks at 'young adulthood' with particular reference to publishing. 'Shy, Gentle Kisses and Soft, Sweet Cuddles: the Sex Lives of Lesbian Teenagers Versus Gay Male Teenagers in YA Literature', is the intriguing title of the article by Dr BJ Epstein, from the University of East Anglia. In the article Dr Epstein analyses how teenage lesbians' sex lives are described in texts for young adults, with a focus on three key areas: masturbation, the use of protection, and sexual interactions. This is the perfect precursor to the special edition on diversity that will be published in May – see later for more details. Finally, Melanie Newman, University of Winchester, has developed the paper she gave at the 2012 Great Writing conference in London. The article is entitled 'Oh Mother Tell Your Children: creative writing and the story of the future?' and explores writing about daunting global issues such as climate change.

As mentioned briefly, our next edition is to be a special edition edited by Beth Cox and Alexandra Strick and entitled 'Diversity, Inclusion and Equality' which will deal with disability and accessibility, culture and heritage, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic background and family composition in children's writing and literature. Please refer to the call for papers at the end of the journal for more information.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Write4Children* and, as always, we look forward to receiving your articles and reviews.

Happy New Year – we like years with 'teen' numbers in them.

Vanessa Harbour and Andrew Melrose - Editors

Hot Key Books and publishing

Sara O'Connor

Who are we?

Hot Key Books is a brand new publishing company, focusing on stand-out stories for readers aged 9 to 19. We set up in January as a division of Bonnier Publishing, with Sarah Odedina at the helm. Sarah has been with Bloomsbury and oversaw the publishing all of the Harry Potter books, as well as acquiring books like THE GRAVEYARD BOOK by Neil Gaiman and HOLES by Louis Sachar.

Most of us at Hot Key came from a background in large, traditional publishers, and were looking to do things a little differently. We're all a little entrepreneurial, willing to take risks and try something new. We're driven to provide top-notch author care and to actually talk to readers who love books just as much as we do.

We are very committed to the personal and open approach at Hot Key Books. In the past, a lot of the 'behind the scenes' process of publishing has been locked behind an iron curtain and we've definitely set out to change that. We would never want to be seen as a faceless corporation!

Where are we going?

In general, publishing is evolving. Publishing companies will learn to thrive by connecting more deeply with readers – and helping their authors do the same. Like the fabulous independent bookshop, the technology exists for publishers to get to know specific reader's tastes and recommend directly to them. Please note, I am talking about in a one-to-one way. Of course, the technology exists to turn people into algorithms and auto-generate recommendations – but far, far more effective is a real person (be it a friend, a bookseller or an editor whose name you know) saying, "I read this book, and know you will love it."

I also see lots of new formats and possibilities for ways of reading – the printed book, a digital book (in long form, in pieces, with music and video and animation), pay-per-page, live writing, collaborative writing… In fact, we're launching a project in mid-December where the middle grade author Fleur Hitchcock will write the sequel to her *Sunday Times* Children's Book of the Week *SHRUNK!* one chapter at a time, every week for eighteen weeks, with young readers having the chance to change the story at the end of each chapter.

Why a publisher?

One can't talk about publishing technology without acknowledging that nowadays it is so easy for people to self-publish: straight to ebook with Amazon, print on

demand with Lulu.com – and if you haven't explored Apple's beautiful iBooks Author technology (http://www.apple.com/ibooks-author/), go do it now! Or – maybe after you've finished this article.

iBooks Author is so exciting to us that we've used it ourselves to create a special edition of our hardback release MAGGOT MOON by Sally Gardner – recently shortlisted for the Costa. The iBook edition aims to bring together the pleasure of reading with the story-behind-the-story. It features lots of interactive content including video interviews with Sally, extracts from the audio book, animated page sequences (see what a page looks like to some dyslexics), and much, much more. We meant to take the essence of Sally's message – a story for anyone who wants to ask questions about the world around them – and enhance it digitally. You can get a sneak peek at www.maggotmoon.com.

But while it is easy for writers to self-publish, there are a lot of services that a publisher brings to the table: gorgeous jackets, editorial advice and support, marketing and publicity contacts, plans and materials, a network of other authors, retail contacts, and cash up front. Some publishers are able to offer more than others, so do consider carefully what you are getting for what you are giving up – but we know that what we are offering our authors is the one-to-one attention of a small press with the backing of a huge corporation.

Thinking about submitting?

We are all about sharing our publishing experiences with people, so anyone can get in touch with us on our blog (http://hotkeyblog.wordpress.com), via twitter (https://twitter.com/HotKeyBooks), or email enquiries@hotkeybooks.com.

If you're interested in submitting to us, we accept agented and unagented submissions. All we want is for your manuscript to be amazing, and to be for readers somewhere between 9 and 19. Just email it over to the same email address above.

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From Transition to Threshold: Redefining 'Young Adulthood'

Dr Anthony Eaton
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Abstract:

Nodelman, in *The Hidden Adult* (2008), makes the case that from a philosophical perspective and for the purposes of critical analysis, 'young adult literature' can usefully be considered alongside, or even interchangeably with, 'children's literature'.

Recent years, though, have seen a distinct shift in the conception of 'young adulthood' as it is reflected in the awarding of prizes and in the publication strategies being used in the 'marketing' of 'young adulthood'. The rise of the 'crossover novel' suggests that increasingly sophisticated books, implying increasingly sophisticated and emancipated readerships, are featuring in awards shortlists for 'young adult' literature, and are being actively marketed by publishers as 'young adult' novels.

This paper will consider firstly the broad concept of 'young adulthood' as it is currently viewed by writers, publishers and awards committees, and will then consider, within the Australian context and through close analysis of several recent shortlists and awards, the degree and direction of change in commercial and critical perceptions of 'young adulthood'. Building upon the ideas of Nodelman, Wheatley, Hunt and Scutter, as well as sociologists Wyn and Woodman, this paper will explore the changing portrayal of 'young adulthood' in literature for that demographic.

The Power of Prizes: Selling and Redefining 'Young Adulthood'

In 1994, Australian young adult writer and commentator Nadia Wheatley, in her paper *The Terms they are a-Changin*' considered the etymology of the term 'Young Adult' as distinct from 'teenager' or 'adolescent'. She suggested that:

> …until a society has words for age groups, it cannot have clearly defined concepts of those age groups. Conversely, until a society starts to develop or change its concepts about particular age groups in response to changing economic and historical circumstances, it does not bother to invent words for them. To put this simply, the term *young adult* has developed because

> society is in the process of developing a new way of thinking about these people. And, of course, this new way of thinking is happening because these people themselves – these adolescents or teenagers or young adults – are in a process and time of transition and development. (1994:8)

This would appear to have been prescient statement in the light of the intervening years, which have seen a marked increase in the levels of sophistication and liminality in many of the works being written, marketed, and lauded as 'young adult fiction', both in Australia and worldwide. In the Australian context; books like (and this is in no way intended as an exhaustive list, but a brief overview) Hartnett's *Sleeping Dogs* (1996), *Stripes of the Sidestep Wolf* (1999), *Thursday's Child* (2000), *The Ghost's Child* (2008) and *Butterfly* (2010), Metzenthen's *Johnny Hart's Heroes* (1996) and *Boys of Blood and Bone* (2003), Zusak's *The Messenger* (2002) and *The Book Thief* (2005), McDonald's *Love Like Water* (2007), my own novels *Fireshadow* (2004) and *Into White Silence* (2008), Marchetta's *The Piper's Son* (2010), Crowley's *Graffiti Moon* (2010) and Gardner's *The Dead I Know* (2011) have all adopted, either consciously or unconsciously, a liminal conception of 'young adulthood' in their approach to narrative and character, and also in the way these works have been marketed and positioned by publishers, librarians, parents and key organisations through awards structures, critical response, and market positioning.

Neither is the impact of liminality in young adult literature limited only to novels – picture books such as Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* (2006) and *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008), Matt Ottley's *Requiem for a Beast* (2007), Armin Greder's *The Island* (2007) and Margaret Wild and Anne Spudvilas' *Wolvs in the Sitee* (2008) have all disregarded the binary concept of picture books as being exclusively the domain of 'children's literature' and not in the domain of 'adult literature'. It is also worth noting that Margo Lanagan's short story anthologies *Black Juice* (2004), *Red Spikes* (2006) and *Yellowcake* (2011) similarly rely heavily upon their appeal to neither teenagers nor adults, but upon understandings of narrative, culture and human nature which allow the narratives to speak effectively to both adult and adolescent readerships, often in different voices.

This paper examines one of the possible implications of Wheatley's 1994 proposition, particularly with regard to the way in which young adult fiction has often been considered from a critical discourse perspective as a subset of children's literature or, alternatively, as a kind of 'adult literature-lite'. In challenging the usefulness of this conception of young adult literature, I am also suggesting that much contemporary young adult literature occupies a liminal space which is defined as much by its own requirements as it is by those of the oppositional hierarchies that it proposes to challenge, and that it might be, perhaps, more critically useful to examine young adult fiction in terms of liminality – as a 'threshold' literature than as a 'transitional' literature.

Sociologists Johanna Wyn and Dan Woodman, in their 2006 paper *Generation, Youth and Social Change in Australia*, critique what they consider to be the key flaws in the 'transitional' conception of adolescence and youth – that is the notion that 'youth' is and should be regarded as a time of transition between the two more concrete 'ages' of childhood and 'adulthood', and as being primarily shaped by bio-developmental and psychological norms which remain more-or-less constant from one age-based-generation to the next (2006:495). This position might be likened to critiquing the traditional concept of 'young adult fiction' as a 'transitional' literature shaped by ongoing social constants such as adolescent reading ability, interest in *bildungsroman* narratives, age of protagonists and so forth. Wyn and Woodman argue instead in favour of an approach that considers the notion of 'youth' against the socio-cultural and political forces that have shaped it during a particular time period – a 'generational' approach:

> A sociological framework for conceptualising youth starts with the recognition that the experience of age is shaped by social conditions, including the operation of the state (among other facets such as civil society and globalising processes), and that both individuals and the state actively contribute to its meaning. (2006:497)

In a similar manner to Wheatley, they make the argument that notions of 'youth' are shaped by both societal forces, as well as by the 'youth' themselves – citing a broad range of supportive sociological research in favour of this argument;

> …it is also important to understand the role that young people themselves play in constituting distinctive features of their generation. For most young people today, the state operates invisibly and often incoherently (White & Wyn 2004). Young people are left to negotiate new economies (Ball *et. Al*. 2000) and to make their own decisions – often against the grain of the knowledge that their parents have gained through their own experiences. (2006:500)

This suggestion – that 'young adults' have a degree of agency in the formation of their own social identity, if extended – as I am suggesting can be done – to include agency in terms of their reading and literature choices, might be seen as an argument against the assertion that young adults, like children, can be defined for critical purposes in part by their *lack* of agency in their reading choices on the grounds of their youth and inexperience.

Wyn and Woodman's case for a 'generational' approach to our conception of 'youth' rests upon the notion that changes in social, economic and political circumstances over the course of the last thirty years have led to a reshaping of the 'meaning of youth' – a similar idea to that argued in the literary context by Wheatley in 1994 – and that a key aspect of this reshaping is a new conception and understanding of the meaning of 'adulthood' itself;

> Changes in labour markets, in the relationship between education and employment and in workplace relations, and in the actions of the state, have altered the significance of the traditional 'markers' of adult status in industrialised countries. (2006:500)

My argument rests upon the contention that this shifting of the traditional markers of adulthood has, and continues to, lead to a degree of tension in the critical discourse relating to young adult literature. It is the same tension identified by Peter Hunt in his paper *Reading Children's Literature and Writing for Children* (2010) as support for his opening assertion that 'Writing for children is more difficult than writing for adults' (2010:4):

> Somewhere in the equation is a child, or the idea of a child, or a group of children, or some amorphous mass defined as children, or a specific childhood, or our idea of childhood, or the culture's idea of childhood, or the publisher's idea of childhood. Then there is our relationship with these various childhoods, and our motives and our needs and their needs… (2010:4)

Discussion of the tensions between 'children's' and 'adult' literature is one that has been continuing for decades. In 1984, Rose asserted that 'children's literature is an impossibility' (1984:1) and the debate has swung forward and backward ever since. In this paper, one main thrust of my argument is that YA writing continues to rest upon unstable and shifting foundations. One of the many ways this might be gauged is by some consideration of the changing fictive landscape in relation to the positioning of 'Young Adult' works in the world of literary prizes.

To frame this idea, I would like first to consider the notion proposed by Nodelman in his 2008 book *The Hidden Adult – Defining Children's Literature*. This text, which rests upon his central argument that the inescapable presence of 'the adult' in every level of children's literature, from creation to production to marketing to access, is a crucial and vital aspect of the field, is based upon the assumption that:

> Whether or not child readers do match how adults think about them, the children in the phrase, "children's literature" are most usefully understood as the child readers that writers, responding to the assumptions of adult purchasers, imagine and imply in their works (2008:5).

As a central thesis, and as a means of accessing 'the child' in children's literature, this approach works admirably. More problematic, though, is its application to the – in many ways less clearly defined or definable – field of 'young adult' writing. Nodelman, however, suggests that for critical and analytical purposes;

> …the "young adults" in the phrase "Literature for young adults" are most usefully seen as the adolescent readers that writers, responding to the assumptions of adult purchasers, imagine and

> imply in their works. In both cases, the intended audiences of the texts are defined by their presumed inability to produce such books or make such decisions about purchases of books for themselves – an inability accounted for in both cases by their being younger and therefore less experienced or capable than those who do write these things for them… for this reason literature for young adults… can usefully be considered alongside literature for younger children. (2008:6)

While Nodelman does later make an important addendum to this statement, I'd argue that this particular assertion does not necessarily hold up when considered through the prism of the marketing and practice of much of the contemporary 'young adult' writing landscape.

There is, for example, an increasing cohort of 'young adult' authors who have publically expressed their disregard for any notion of a deliberately constructed 'young adult' in regard to their approach to their writing. This is the position implicit in Markus Zusak's response to the question of audience when interviewed on America's National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* programme in 2005:

> YDSTIE: Now as I understand it, you've written this book for young adults. It's become popular among adults as well. But what audience were you shooting for?
> ZUSAK: I wasn't shooting exactly for an audience. I'm having bigger problems when I'm writing. Do the images work? Does the story work? Does the dialogue work? Are these characters real to me? As far as this categorization of books, the way I see it is that there are really a hundred-odd categories of books plus one, and on the top shelf at home, I've got the books I love, my favourite books, and that's the type of book I want to write. (2005:online)

Zusak, whose 2005 novel *The Book Thief* has become something of a cause célèbre in the Australian writing world, was published in Australia by Picador as adult literary fiction, and in the United States and Great Britain as 'young adult fiction'. In all three countries, and in both the YA and children's marketplaces, it has achieved the rare position of being a bestseller. Interestingly, in Australia and unlike more recent works such as Margo Lanagan's *Tender Morsels*, which have also successfully appealed to similar dual-readerships, no Australian 'YA' edition of *The Book Thief* has ever been released, and yet the book has still earned a status as a highly regarded work of Australian 'young adult' fiction. In a 2010 online poll of the *Top 100 YA Novels of All Time*, conducted by Australian blogger Adele Walsh at her 'Persnickety Snark' blog, 735 people voted and placed 'The Book Thief' at number 7. (Walsh, 2010:Online)

Zusak is not the only 'Young Adult' author declaiming the relevance of consideration of a constructed readership in their works. During a 2004 interview with journalist Jason Steger, Sonya Hartnett asserted that:

> Once I had established that I could write for adults there was a certain freedom in achieving that kind of goal. Now I have transcended all categories I can do what I like. I've been called every sort of writer and now I am every sort of writer. (2004:30)

Hartnett, who is arguably (at least in terms of critical international acclaim and awards) among Australia's most successful 'young adult' writers of recent years, implies that if she has any assumptions about a young adult audience in her works, it is that they don't matter in her understanding of the requirements of her writing. Certainly her more recent 'YA' novels, including her CBCA award winning *The Ghost's Child* (2007), regularly transcend the boundaries of readerships. In 2010, her novel *Butterfly*, with a protagonist on the eve of her fourteenth birthday, was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award - a prize traditionally closed to children's and young adult submissions. Interestingly, in the Miles Franklin Award Trust background comments upon that years' shortlist, the following statement was included;

> The six novels chosen cover an extraordinary range. Their sheer quality, what Miles Franklin would have termed their 'literary merit', makes pigeonholing them impossible. Notions of genre could not contain them. Ideas about specific audience – is this young adult or adult fiction? – proved irrelevant. (2010: Online)

This small acknowledgement of the irrelevance of whether or not particular works were classifiable as 'Young Adult Fiction' (and in addition to *Butterfly,* it is worth noting that the long list for that same year also included Jon Doust's *Boy on a Wire,* and Craig Silvey's *Jasper Jones* – two other novels replete with strong markers of both adult and YA fiction) is indicative of an ongoing shift in the cultural perception of 'young adult literature' in Australia and which is reflected in both the comments of authors such as Hartnett and Zusak and in the creative works being produced, marketed and awarded under the mantle of 'Young Adult Fiction.' I suggest that this shifting terrain somewhat undermines the effectiveness of Nodelman's assertion as to the critical comparability of 'young adult' with 'children's' fiction, and the reasons behind it.

Nodelman does, however, at a later stage in his book, make the important addendum referred to earlier, pointing to the fact that there are fundamental differences between children's and young adult fiction, and he identifies as a key aspect of this the way in which the two separate fields of writing deal with the notion of duality and binary opposition. He suggests that where children's fiction generally rests upon what he describes as "polar oppositions based on conceptions of the ways in which children and adults differ…" (2008: 58), he suggests that young adult literature, while it might begin with this sort of oppositional binary, concerns itself far more with the pulling apart of the binary as a central aspect of both plot and narrative. This, he suggests, is a key area in which young adult and children's fiction are both similar, but also divergent:

> Perhaps young adults' texts are those that begin with the standard polarities of children's fiction but have the potential, at least, to deconstruct them. (2008: 58)

Certainly, this is an appealing and intuitively comfortable way of considering 'young adult' literature, and critically useful in that it allows the field to fall under the umbrella of 'children's literature' for analytical purposes. It is also intuitively comfortable in that it effectively places the field of 'young adult' literature as the midpoint on a continuum which extends from 'children's' to 'adult' literature.

When applying this notion to works that might be described as liminal texts, however, I argue that it is not nearly so effective. Liminal texts function not so much by 'deconstructing' dichotomies, but rather by bringing them together and re-forming their existence in a space where the dichotomy ceases to have relevance. In doing so, they create and exist in a space open to experimentation, boundary and threshold transgression, and which can at the same time both challenge and re-shape (or re-enforce, through opposing) existing social 'norms':

> This [liminality] term, literally "being-on-a-threshold", means a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states registering structural status. Since liminal time is not controlled by the clock it is a time of enchantment when anything *might*, and even should, happen. Another way of putting it would be to say that the liminal in socio-cultural process is similar to the subjunctive mood in verbs – just as mundane socio-cultural activities resemble the indicative mood. Liminality is full of potency and potentiality. It may also be full of experiment and play. There may be play of ideas, a play of words, a play of symbols, a play of metaphors. In it, play's the thing... One might say, without too much exaggeration, that liminal phenomena are at the level of culture what variability is at the level of nature.' (Turner, 1977:33)

In applying the idea of liminality to 'young adult fiction' I am drawing upon the premise that this particular 'field' of literature and creative practice exists both *because of* and *despite* its position as the midpoint on the continuum between children's and adult literature. Young adult fiction concerns itself with the notional boundaries between worlds; most commonly the polarized worlds of adulthood and childhood but, importantly, the central concern of many works of 'Young Adult Fiction' might be argued to be not so much with the *facts* of the individual character's journey (the 'classic' YA *bildungsroman* narrative) but with the *boundaries and thresholds* crossed during the course of that journey, and the impact of those crossings upon both character and society.

This is similar to the idea that Couldry (2003) discusses in relation to media ritual, where he draws upon the ideas of Bourdieu to frame his central argument as to the role of liminal space in the formation of media power:

> Conventionally the emphasis is on the transition that is ritually made… But Bourdieu argues that what matters is not the individual's passage from one state to another, but the social significance of the *line or boundary* that is crossed, the ritual boundary. This boundary, like all cultural boundaries, is an arbitrary one, based upon a particular construction of the world, but the fact that it is crossed in a ritual action reproduces it as significant and thereby helps in its continued legitimation; the crossing makes the boundary seem more real and less arbitrary. (2003: 28)

The concept of the 'young adult' that I am drawing upon, then, can be imagined as an idea delineated by arbitrary (and transgressive) boundaries and works - to a degree - in opposition to the notion suggested by Nodelman. While Nodelman, in acknowledging the 'potential' of young adult fiction to deconstruct the traditional binaries of children's literature, does suggest the *possibility* of young adult literature as liminal fiction, his proposition nevertheless remains rooted in the construction of young adult literature as a quantifiable 'sub-genre' of 'children's literature', with its roots still firmly anchored in the 'standard polarities of children's fiction'. I suggest, instead, that a piece of 'young adult literature' can be more usefully viewed in terms of the thresholds, lines or boundaries that it assumes, challenges, or legitimates in the course of that narrative and that, in critical terms, this is a key point of difference which places young adult literature into a liminal space, very different from that occupied by children's fiction.

There are a number of distinct approaches that might be taken to the application of this idea: a qualitative examination of marketing strategies employed by publishers to shape and brand 'young adulthood', a textual analysis of the portrayal of liminal ideas in the narrative structures of various 'YA' texts, a close reading of the responses of both authors and readers to the construction of 'youth' in lauded works of 'YA fiction', or perhaps a quantitative examination of the role played by awards structures and adult judges in selecting and transgressing the notional boundaries of 'YA' fiction. This paper does not propose to address these approaches in depth, but I am resting my thesis on the possibility that 'young adult literature' does and must exist as an entity in and of itself and, in as much as it is *defined* by features of both children's and adult literature (such as through the portrayal of polarised hierarchical binaries), the fact that in young adult literature those same features are regularly transgressed or unravelled therefore places 'young adult literature' into an altogether different and unique area of critical consideration; no longer part of a continuum of literary discourse, but as an equal and significant 'new literary space.'

In their introduction to the winter 2007 edition of *Discourse,* Boersma and Weintraub adopt the metaphor of the membrane to explore the significance of liminal space and its operation across the threshold of binary, hierarchical oppositions, adopting a cautionary position in regard to the potential for 'numerous reductive misreadings' when seeking

> …a quick fix to the problems of binary models such as inside/outside, man/woman, speech/writing etc. Such readings ultimately lose their effectiveness insofar as they fail to heed the way a third term always mediates the relation between the two, but 'exists' only as a function of this relation of the two presumably oppositional terms. This third term is often thought of as the limit, the border, or the frontier between the two. (2007:6)

While not intending to provide a 'quick fix' for the problem of defining and exploring 'young adulthood', and while certainly hoping to avoid a simplistic and reductive interpretation of the position and role of the concept and its literature to the status of 'intermediary literature', I am suggesting here that liminality is nevertheless a natural critical 'fit' for approaching the area of 'young adult' writing, from both creative and critical perspectives.

The term itself – 'young adult' – implies the fact of its position as a threshold literature: the child on the threshold of adulthood, or even, perhaps, the 'literature' on the threshold of 'adult' sophistication. The linking of the loaded words 'young' and 'adult' both creates a distinct hierarchical opposition, and self-implies its own validity. With this implication comes the linked notion of cultural boundaries between states (in this case childhood and adulthood) which, while arbitrary, nevertheless imply their own legitimacy. (see Couldry, 2003:28)

Viewed through the prism of liminality, then, which locates the text both within and across the boundaries of two binary opposites, the idea of young adult fiction as a subset of either 'children's literature' or 'adult literature' is less convincing. This is because as a liminal text, it is not so much a *product of* the two opposites of 'children' and 'adult' literature, but rather possesses a unique, formed identity in and of itself.

In fact, I would further suggest that 'young adult' literature, situated squarely between the polarized worlds of childhood and adulthood, is ideally suited to consideration as a liminal product, and is more usefully considered in the light of its inherent 'liminality' and in terms of its ability to expose and break down oppositional polarities. This, I believe, is what the Miles Franklin judges are alluding to when they make the statement that "Ideas about specific audience – is this young adult or adult fiction? – proved irrelevant."

Writer Margo Lanagan made a similar point in March, 2010, in a public lecture at the University of Canberra, when she stated, in relation to her novel *Tender Morsels,* that;

> …It's (genre classification) all very woolly, especially when you're dealing with a book like *Tender Morsels*, which sits on the border between young adult and adult. The young adult category becomes almost useless for things that aren't squarely YA, for books on the fringes. Some 12 year-olds are fine about dealing with it, some 50 year-olds are shocked and traumatized by it. Age branding is nonsense; it's all about individuals' tastes and needs in their reading. (2010:unpublished)

There is room within the critical / theoretical consideration of genre for further and closer examination of the sorts of books which are increasingly becoming part of 'young adult' reading culture, and consideration of the possibility that it might be time to critically unpack and consider closely the validity of the traditional relationship between 'children's literature' and 'young adult literature' (and, for that matter, between 'adult' and 'young adult' literature)

In 1994, Wheatley concluded her argument by suggesting that:

> An extraordinary shift in both the biology and the sociology of adolescence is currently happening; we are still too close to measure this, let alone fully understand it. It is out of this social and economic change that the YA novel is developing – just as the novel itself developed out of the social and economic changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (1994:13)

Taking Wheatley's latter assertion – that there was, during the mid 1990's, an 'extraordinary shift' occurring in the sociology of adolescence, and considering it in the light of the development of the 'young adult novel' during the intervening years, suggests to me that this statement has merit. Wheatley's argument is an early identification of the increasing liminality of adolescence – a move towards a view of adolescence as a unique and individual state, rather than as a transitional period delineated by standardized 'markers'.

The conception of 'youth' as a distinct period mapped not by age-specific 'markers' but by consideration of the broader social context within which various generations of 'youth' exist is a useful one, in that it provides some support for the suggestion by Wheatley that 'an extraordinary shift in both the biology and sociology of adolescence is happening', and a troubling one, in that it has also, some argue, led to a degree of critical confusion when considering the role and place of adolescent, or 'young adult' literature. In 1999, Heather Scutter suggested that;

> …this confusion in the use of the buzz term 'young adult' – sometimes a synonym for teenage, sometimes implying a subset somewhere between the senior teenage and the junior adult, and sometimes referring to a new kind of financially dependent adult infantilized by economic rationalism – leads to much critical confusion. (1999: 280)

I suggest that the argument these commentators – scholars and creative practitioners alike - are addressing, from various perspectives, is that of a liminal concept of adolescence; one where the idea of adolescence itself is no longer as useful from a critical perspective when viewed as either a delineated aspect of the continuum between childhood and adulthood, nor as a binary opposite to either. Instead, all are challenging the notion of a linear or hierarchical conception of 'young adulthood' and in doing so are effectively moving the idea of 'young adulthood' from being a transitional one and instead giving it the status of being a liminal space – one effectively defined as much by the characteristics and demands of its own identity as it is by the polarized markers of 'childhood' and 'adulthood'. And as with any re-imagining of a particular demographic or readership, it can be suggested that the literature 'for' this group – that which we refer to as 'young adult fiction' should in some way demonstrate and reflect these changes; that just as 'young adulthood' might more usefully be regarded as operating in a liminal space, so too can 'young adult fiction'. This, I argue, is the 'shift' that Wheatley pointed towards in 1994 – a shift towards a liminal conception of 'young adulthood'.

The Australian novels outlined at the start of this paper, along with clear elements of liminality within many others which have been lauded and awarded worldwide in the field of 'young adult literature', suggest that if we have not reached a point where this 'shift' can be measured, quantified and examined, then we are certainly at a point where we can consider the implications of it at a theoretical and critical level.

In conclusion, I should make clear that I am not proposing any definitive answers here but rather throwing out the suggestion that perhaps there is room, in critical terms, for a significant adjustment in our thinking with regard to the classification and assessment of 'young adult fiction', in awards and otherwise. As the field of 'young adult fiction' moves increasingly away from simple concerns with the 'binary' opposition of childhood and adulthood and speaks to and of a readership that is, at the same time, *both* child and adult and *neither* child nor adult, perhaps now is also a good time for those of us whose work in both the creative and critical fields leads us to consideration of 'YA' fiction to move our thinking accordingly.

Bio
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Write4Children

Shy, Gentle Kisses and Soft, Sweet Cuddles: the Sex Lives of Lesbian Teenagers Versus Gay Male Teenagers in YA Literature

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Abstract

Lesbians[1] have not been featured in young adult literature until quite recently. It is positive that they do now appear in texts for younger readers, but the way in which they and their sex lives are portrayed is problematic. This paper analyzes how teenage lesbians' sex lives are described in texts for young adults, with a focus on three key areas: masturbation, the use of protection, and sexual interactions. The findings suggest that lesbians' sex lives are either purposely ignored or are considered too challenging to be included in young adult literature.

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, there has been something of an explosion of children's and young adult books with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and otherwise queer (LGBTQ) characters (see Epstein 2012 for more on this), so queer children are no longer "left behind", as Hegarty phrases it (2009, p. 315). As Townsend writes, "Premarital sex, drug abuse, homosexuality, running away from home are hardly remarkable any more." (1990, p. 276) While this is an odd statement, in that it seems to equate homosexuality with drug abuse, the larger point is valid. It previously would have been practically unthinkable to include LGBTQ characters in books for children and young adults, but now there are quite a few such texts. Authors writing in English about LGBTQ characters include Nancy Garden, Jacqueline Woodson, Julie Anne Peters, David LaRochelle, David Levithan, Ellen Wittlinger, Aidan Chambers, and Alex Sanchez.

I believe that literature reflects society to a certain extent, so understanding whether and how LGBTQ characters are included and portrayed in books in general and in children's books in particular might reveal how society thinks about LGBTQ people. In this paper, I will focus on how teenage lesbians are portrayed in young adult (YA) literature in regard to their sex lives, using three key areas:

[1] I use "lesbians" and "gay females" interchangeably, simply to vary the word choices.

masturbation, the use of protection, and sexual interactions. My findings suggest – perhaps not surprisingly – that society is still uncomfortable with gay female sexuality.

Basic findings

I consider it very positive that there now are many books with LGBTQ characters, especially books aimed at children and young adults (see Travers and Travers 2008, p. 287, or Cart and Jenkins 2006 for more on this). However, I believe there are a number of problems with these books (as detailed in Epstein 2011 and 2012 forthcoming). What this means is presumably that authors (editors, publishers, the audience, society at large, etc.) view homosexuals and teenage sexuality in general in very frozen ways. In particular, female sexuality seems to be too threatening to be dealt with in any detailed fashion in YA literature.

Students receive different types and levels of sex education in school, so that some barely hear about homosexuality and/or about homosexual sex (see the research carried out by the Guttmacher Institute, which suggests that fewer than 52% of sexual education courses in public middle and secondary schools in the United States include any discussion of sexual orientation, 2000). While few people expect all or even most young adult novels to be educational, it is undoubtedly the case that books do serve to show readers possibilities for living their lives and for their future. One could argue in particular that young people are curious about sex and want information about it, and that literature could portray it to a certain extent, as it portrays many other aspects of their lives. Thus, if teenage lesbians in literature are shown to have unsatisfying sexual lives and/or to not use protection when engaging in sexual behaviors, this could make young readers believe that females cannot enjoy sex, especially when with another female, and that no form of protection is needed. This strikes me as an offensive and perhaps even harmful message to offer, and it is especially damaging if young readers receive no other or very little other information on the subject.

Masturbation

To start with, how teenagers are shown to enjoy sex with themselves is important to analyze. Although spatial and thematic constrictions mean that the history of masturbation cannot be discussed in detail here, it is worth pointing out that the way that masturbation of young people has been viewed over time has changed significantly; in the modern era, Freud realized and accepted that children have autoeroticism (Brenot 1997, p. 46). As Laqueur points out, masturbation then became seen as something natural for young people to do (2003, p. 73). He continues:

> Adolescence, in particular, became the crux, a fraught time between “natural” infantile autoeroticism and its sad holdover into maturity, the period when masturbation went from being a

> sign of “budding sexuality” full of promise to being an indication that its practitioner was unable to have a proper love object and, more generally, to make peace with the demands of society. One’s relation to masturbation tracked precisely one’s willingness to go with the flow of the civilizing process. (2003, pp. 73-4)

In other words, it is acceptable for young people to masturbate, but as they get older, they are to leave masturbation behind in order to have “mature” sex, which apparently means sexual interactions with other people. Regardless of one’s opinion of this particular perspective on masturbation and maturity, the fact is that in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it has become more common to recognize the autoeroticism of young people.

How teenage lesbians are portrayed in regard to masturbation is quite different from how teenage gay males are portrayed. There is no space here to give detailed examples from the latter, but suffice to say that gay males are shown to masturbate in YA novels quite frequently and to do so with no shame or compunction (for examples, see descriptions such as Cohn and Levithan 2008, p. 29, or Moore 2007, pp. 40-1, or Reardon 2008, pp. 55-6). In all the YA books I have read with LGBTQ characters, there have been almost no descriptions of gay teenage females masturbating. In *Gravity* by Leanne Lieberman, there is a mention of the main character, Ellie, putting a pillow between her legs (2008, p. 180), but there are no details beyond that. It would be quite possible to read that scene and to assume Ellie was doing something else, such as getting comfortable while resting in bed. There is no description of what she is thinking about, what actions she might be performing, or how she cleans up or removes any evidence after she is finished, as there is for the teenage boys (references are made to tissues and towels when males masturbate, such as Cohn and Levithan 2008, p. 29). So this might imply that some people (or at least some authors) believe that teenage girls do not masturbate, or that lesbians do not masturbate. It could also suggest that readers might not want to read about it.

As historians on masturbation make clear, masturbation is a particularly complicated subject when it comes to females. Laqueur writes that:

> for girls the process was especially treacherous, because their early rehearsals were for the wrong show. In becoming adult, they had to give up not only masturbation but also the kind of orgasm procured by their infantile efforts. Giving it up meant, in this account, giving up clitoral for vaginal sexuality, fantasies of active masculinity for the reality of passive femininity. (2003, p. 72)

This implies that some thinkers, including Freud, believe masturbation to be practice for the “real” thing, i.e. intercourse. If a female is to be mature, masturbation should have little or no place in her life, as she is to become passive.

Clearly, this is an extremely debatable view and it is especially inappropriate when applied to lesbians, who are unlikely to want or need to be passive partners to males. Nevertheless, the lack of female masturbation in YA literature could reflect the view that masturbation is somehow inappropriate or wrong for teenage girls because it is too active at a point where they should be learning to be passive. As Laqueur comments, “Shame had to be mobilized to make young people, especially girls, behave chastely and modestly.” (2003, p. 231) Shame could involve not showing young females that it is natural and normal to masturbate. If a girl does not see a reflection of her own behaviors in the literature she is reading, she might come to the conclusion that she is doing something wrong or that she herself is wrong in some way.

Protection for Lesbians

Unfortunately, in YA literature, using protection when engaging in sexual activities is rarely mentioned. While I do not think that literature needs to be educational or should take the place of sex ed courses (according to the Guttmacher Institute, over 95% of sexual education in the U.S. discusses STDs and almost that same amount specifically mentions HIV, 2000), it does seem to me that it could reflect reality. And the reality is that there are sexually transmitted diseases out there and those males and females, no matter what their sexual orientation or sexual practices, can be exposed to those infections and diseases. Another aspect of reality is that homosexuality, in particular male homosexuality, is often linked to death (see James, 2009, pp. 89-96), and is viewed as being “fraught with danger” (James, 2009, p. 91), especially because of the connection to AIDS. Hence one might expect to find many mentions of protection from disease and from death in literature featuring homosexuals. The topic is starting to become somewhat more common in texts featuring gay male teenagers, but it is far from the norm. Examples include Alex Sanchez’s work and novels by Robin Reardon; in the former, one character even has an AIDS scare (see Sanchez 2003).

In YA literature that features teenage lesbians, there is not a single mention of girls using dental dams, or plastic wrap, or anything else. This is the case even if they are sleeping with females who have previously slept with males or if they themselves have previously slept with males. While it is rare for women to pass on STDs to other women through sexual activity, it is certainly not impossible, although these books give that impression.

In Lili Wilkinson’s *Pink*, the main character, Ava, has a girlfriend, but now wants a boyfriend. She says:

> I *wanted* a boyfriend. I did. I wanted to be normal and go to the school formal and wear a dress and for him to wear a tux and give me a corsage. But I hadn’t actually considered that I would *kiss* a boy, let alone have *sex* with one. I mean, Chloe and I had done plenty of...stuff, but it seemed *different* with a boy. Dangerous.

> Fooling around with boys led to scary things like STDs and babies. (2009, p. 33)

In the book, Ava questions her sexuality and her way of being a lesbian; in terms of the latter, she views her pink cashmere sweater as a betrayal of the lesbian community and something she can only wear when among straight people so she can pass as straight. Regardless of her limiting and limited view about what it means to be a lesbian and her attempt to perform heterosexuality (cf. Butler, 2006, p. 183 fwd., on performativity), the quote mentioned above is very problematic. It suggests that being gay is not "normal" and that to be normal she has to have a boyfriend. But it also implies that it is not possible to get STDs from lesbian sex. Both of these messages are erroneous.

This is the only text that I have found that has a teenage lesbian (or possibly a teenage bisexual girl) who seems to consider the need for protection, but she does so only in the context of having sex with a male. It may be that authors, editors, or publishers are unaware that gay females might also need protection or it may be that it is not considered relevant or appropriate as a topic in literature.

Lesbian Sex

As for masturbation, descriptions of sex for gay teenage males tend to be quite detailed. The boys often have multiple partners and engage in a range of sexual activities. There are references to lubricant, swear words are employed to describe the sexual interactions, and the sexual encounters generally end with an orgasm (see, for example, Cohn and Levithan 2008, p. 85 and p. 197, and Sanchez 2006, p. 217, and Reardon 2007, p. 79 and pp. 154-5). In YA books, gay males seem to engage in quite a lot of sexual activity with other males. They do not express confusion about what to do, nor do they show hesitancy or shame. Their sexual adventures tend to climax in satisfaction.

In contrast to the way gay teenage males are described having sex with one another, teenage lesbians have fewer partners and fewer sexual interactions with those partners. They also show more uncertainty about the very idea of being physical with one another. *Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden was an early YA novel with lesbian characters. In it, the two main characters, Annie and Liza, spend more time together, but avoid touching, and get very nervous when alone together. Annie says this makes her feel they are doing something "wrong, or dirty" and Liza says she is scared of the physical parts of loving (1982, p. 121). Teen boys do not show or discuss this same fear. They simply express their attraction and then get on with having sex. This concept of shyness and hesitancy is quite common when it comes to young gay females. In Jane Eagland's *Wildthorn*, there is this description:

> Without quite knowing how it's happened, we're kissing. Her lips are dry and warm and I feel shy at first, tentative…and then I

> can't help myself…I melt into her soft, moist mouth, taste honey. My bones are turning to liquid, I feel breathless, dizzy with longing…and, floating into my head, with absolute certainty, comes the knowledge – this, this is who I am, this is what I want. (2009, p. 326)

Although the character does feel more certain by the end of the scene, she starts out feeling hesitant and "tentative". Nancy Garden relies on a similar description in the following scene:

> I remember so much about that first time with Annie that I am numb with it, and breathless. I can feel Annie's hands touching me again, gently, as if she were afraid I might break; I can feel her softness under my hands…I can close my eyes and feel every motion of Annie's body and my own—clumsy and hesitant and shy—but that isn't the important part. (1982, p. 146)

The girls are "clumsy and hesitant and shy" and then there is no more detailed description of what goes on. *Dare Truth or Promise* by Paula Boock uses some of the same words: "Louie was shy, Willa scared they would get caught, and both hesitant at first." (1997, p. 67) The repeated emphasis on teenage lesbians being fearful and tentative could reflect authors' or publishers' or society's views about what is sexually appropriate for young women.

What I term "fading to black" is also widespread in YA lit that features teenage lesbians; by this phrase I mean that a sex scene is set up, but then not followed through in any detail. An example is in *Finding H.F.* by Julia Watts. Laney kisses H.F.:

> It's not a shy, little getting-to-know-you peck either. Her mouth is open, her lips are wet, and the tip of her tongue touches mine.
>
> "I wanted you the second I saw you," she whispers when we pull apart. "You wiry little butch, you."
>
> I have no idea what a wiry butch is—it sounds like some kind of dog to me—but I've got no time to ask questions because Laney is on me like a duck on a june bug, kissing me and sliding her hands all over me. I keep feeling like I ought to be doing things to her, at least at first, but I figure she knows what she's doing and I don't, so I might as well lay back and enjoy the ride. (2001, p. 127)

That is the entire sex scene; there is not much specification, even though it is actually somewhat humorous. While it is true that H.F. is inexperienced and thus the reader would not expect her to know exactly what she is doing, it does not follow that the reader cannot or should not hear what happens to H.F. and what

she learns from the experience. In other words, there is little description, although there could have been more. Eagland also has the "fade to black" portrayal:

> As we climb on to my narrow bed, the springs creak, making us giggle. And we kiss, gently at first, my hands moving over the smooth warm curves of her body, her hands hot on my skin. But then our hands become fierce, urgent, hungry, and soon we are dancing, my love and I, dancing together in a rhythm that's easy, sweet and easy… (2009, pp. 358-9)

The two girls are "dancing" in a "sweet" and "easy" way, but unlike in many of the scenes that feature gay males, readers are not told if anyone is on top or what exactly is happening or if lubricant, towels, or any other items are employed.

Besides fading to black, some books rely on euphemisms, such as the quote mentioned above Lili Wilkinson's *Pink*, where Ava says she and her girlfriend have "done stuff". This avoidance of direct description is generally reflected in the words chosen. As mentioned above, the themes of shyness, hesitancy, and clumsiness are common; this is revealed by the words employed but also by the fact that the reader is not allowed to really experience what is happening in the story, the way the reader of a book featuring gay males often is. Descriptions of teenage lesbian sex also rely on words such as "gentle" (as in Garden's quote above), "slow", and "soft". This scene from Jane Eagland's *Wildthorn* features the latter two words:

> I didn't mean to…but I had only to move my face an inch or two and my mouth found hers. Her soft lips were a surprise and my heartbeat quickened. A slow fuse lit inside me, the heat spreading from the pit of my stomach, until my whole body was suffused with it… (2009, p. 291)

Another quote from Garden uses "soft" and "gentle":

> Without thinking, I put my arm across her shoulders to warm her, and then before either of us knew what was happening, our arms were around each other and Annie's soft and gentle mouth was kissing mine. (1982, p. 92)

Besides these rare and discreet descriptions of females sexually interacting with one another, they are also unlike the descriptions of gay male sex in that the sexual activities generally do not culminate in orgasm, or at least if they do, that is not depicted. This is not to say that all sexual interactions do or should include orgasms, but it is nonetheless worth pondering that gay males have orgasms while gay females do not seem to.

Comparing Gay Male and Lesbian Sex

As discussed above, descriptions of lesbian sex in YA books have a strong tendency to rely on words such as “shy”, “clumsy”, “hesitant”, “soft”, “gentle”, and “sweet”. Other words used are “kiss”, “honey”, “softness”, “hands”, “sliding”, “mouth”, “tongue”, “liquid”, “moist”, “easy” “beautiful”, “longing”, “stuff”, “abnormal”, “wrong”, and “dirty”. A high percentage of these words seem to express feelings of uncertainty and fear and they suggest that sex between women is either something “wrong” and “dirty” or else something “sweet” and “easy”. There is little passion in these words and there is no sense that being physical together is something two females desperately want or need to do. In contrast to this, some of the words employed in depictions of gay male sex in YA books include “fuck”, “naked”, “behind”, “hard”, “muscles”, “curves”, “gasping”, “groaning”, “ass”, “tongue”, “thighs”, “arms”, tighter”, “sticky” “ooze”, “inside”, “faster”, and “come”. This suggests a higher acceptance of and comfort with gay males having sex. The words in scenes featuring gay males relate more to body parts and to actions. The males “gasp” and “groan” and “fuck” and “come”, while the females “long” but are “shy” and “clumsy”. As a point of interest, only one word is used in both sets, and that is “tongue”.

Another difference is that texts for young adults show friends or acquaintances being more confused about what might happen when two females are in bed together than they are in books where the characters are gay males. Although there are scenes of bullying and name-calling in regard to gay males (such as in *Rainbow Boys* (2003, p. 21, p. 35-6, p. 190)), no one questions why two boys might be sexually attracted to one another and what they might do when they are together. In Garden’s book, a classmate teases Liza by asking, “I just wondered…if you could tell me, from a scientific standpoint, of course, just what it is that two girls do in bed…” (1982, p. 218) This is said in a way that implies that what two females do in bed is difficult to imagine or understand. A teacher in the same book says, “Sodom and Gomorrah are all around us…There is ugliness and sin and self-indulgence in this house…And to think…that the president of student council is a—a…” (1982, p. 167) The teacher cannot bring herself to say “lesbian”, even though she can clearly bring herself to reference the Bible and to criticize non-heteronormative practices. The head of school, too, refers to “abnormal sex” (1982, p. 183). In Eagland’s book, the main character is sent away due to her homosexual feelings and behaviors (2009). All of this implies that no one can understand what two girls would do together sexually and also that this is not deserving of respect in any case.

Conclusion

As shown above, teenage lesbians do not seem to masturbate, to know about or consider using protection, or to have much passionate sex. When they do have sexual interactions with one another, the sex is described in very hesitant, often euphemistic terms, with little detail offered to the reader, and other characters might question or criticize it. Meanwhile, in YA texts such as by Levithan, Reardon,

Sanchez, Chambers, and other authors, gay teenage males masturbate regularly, show an awareness in regard to employing protection, even if they are sometimes averse to doing so, and they have a lot of sexual intercourse, which is described frankly in the books. Some of this may reflect stereotypes about promiscuous gay men versus "lesbian bed death" and/or typical stereotypes about male versus female sexuality. Society may be uncomfortable with portraying females, whether homosexual or not, having active, healthy, satisfying sexual lives. It has been, and in many cases still is, acceptable for females in literature to have close, intense friendships and for there to be gentle kisses and cuddles, perhaps as "practice" for later heterosexual relationships, but anything beyond that is considered inappropriate and disturbing. These young adult books seem to represent the ideas that women should not be overtly sexual creatures, and that lesbianism is especially challenging to western society's ideas of sexuality.

I believe that young adult literature shows teens what is possible, provides models for them, and reflects society's views of them and their lives; here, then, such literature suggests that young homosexual women cannot and should not have satisfying sexual relationships. Even in the 21st century, female sexuality, and especially female homosexuality, is still too challenging and upsetting to be included in YA literature. "Gentle", "shy", and "soft" kisses are acceptable, but anything more than that is "wrong" and "abnormal".

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Write4Children

Oh Mother Tell Your Children: creative writing and the story of the future?

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Abstract

For millennia we have told our children stories that help them deal with the world and make decisions about how they will act in relation to our society and our environment. At a time when our actions could affect (if not destroy) the future of every species on our planet, what sort of stories should we be telling? Ursula Le Guin suggests that it is time we came up with a new one (1996:152). Where should we start and how do we write about such daunting global issues as climate change, resource depletion and species extinction without preaching?

I wonder if you can remember the first story you ever read - or perhaps it was told to you - that made a lasting impression? One that might have haunted you ever since, guided your actions or made you stop and think before making a decision?

Karen Armstrong infers that the telling of stories has been as essential to our survival as making weapons. In her *Short History of Myth*, she covers a lot of ground but comes back repeatedly to the reasons we tell stories, saying that early oral stories 'proved to be so crucial to the way that human beings understood themselves and their predicament that they survived, in fragmented form, in the mythologies of later literate cultures.' (Armstrong, 2005:12)

I have a story.

I can't remember if I read it or whether my parents told it to me. It might have been my grandmother. I can remember the story though. It is about a girl who was given a red bicycle for Christmas. Proud and delighted, she rode it out to meet her friends. One of them had been given a blue scooter. When she saw what a gorgeous colour it was, she wished it was hers. After a short while, she persuaded her friend to swap. Another friend had been given roller skates and before long, she found herself coveting these so negotiated a swap with the scooter. Then she met a girl who had been given a bag full of make-up and she wanted that. Another swap ensued. This went on until she saw her best friend with a bag of sweets. They looked particularly yummy. It wasn't long before she owned the sweets instead. Then she ate them.

David Edgar (2005) says that stories foster our ability to consider alternatives and make choices. By helping to place our emotions in a particular set of circumstances, perhaps circumstances that we recognise at least partially, we experience the decisions and consider the potential consequences of our actions. If the story is well told, we live the experience alongside the characters and feel part of the consequences.

The story I recounted just now is hanging around in my head most of the time. Often it fills me with a sense of emptiness and dread. Even when I go out into the garden to say goodnight to the stars, listen to the owls and the foxes and thank whatever or whoever it is that has given us such gifts, the story is present. It makes me feel that we are swapping the wonders of the natural world for things that give us only momentary gratification. Don't take all this for granted, it tells me.

It reminds me of another story, a more famous one. Dr Seuss's *The Lorax (1971)*, is a children's book that has prompted many interpretations, my own being that it is an allegory for what we are doing to the whole of the natural world, not just to trees as some people in the logging industry thought at the time of publication. The story is told by the 'once-ler', an entrepreneur who has chopped down all the 'truffula' trees despite continued protestations from the Lorax, who speaks up for the other inhabitants of the land including the trees.

The story of our place in the world is an evolving one. If telling stories about hunting for food, about exploring, encountering different people and different species and about dealing with conflict, fear and prejudice have been important in the past, what is the storytellers' territory now? How do we explain that we might have made some huge mistakes and that these mistakes may not only be contributing to the extinction of an unimaginable number of species of the Earth but also jeopardising the survival of our own? Even for anyone who remains sceptical about climate change, the issues of resource depletion, environmental degradation and species extinction are hard to ignore. There can be little doubt that all of these problems have grown exponentially in just a few generations.

Yet my story doesn't actually say any of this. It doesn't make any judgements about the girl who eats the sweets. I have sometimes tried to interpret it from a different perspective: one of detachment from worldly goods or one of impermanence. But my first interpretation will not be quieted because it is a sort of sense-making in the world I see around me. I think I was about nine when I heard that story. I will be fifty-five this year and I'm still hearing it.

So when I read about Thomas Berry's notion that we are in between stories, it really made me think. Berry said that the old story no longer serves us but that we have yet to find a new one. His vision of our story was awesome: it took in the whole universe and saw our smallness. To me his approach is a stronger, deeper one than raising awareness or campaigning against careless or even wilful disregard for our environment. Berry was an optimist and I believe that this in itself lays

down a challenge to writers, especially to those of us who categorise our work, rightly or wrongly, as writing for children. In his paper *Transforming Education* (Reason, 2007:1), writer and Professor Peter Reason quotes Berry:

> Two things are needed to guide our judgement and sustain our psychic energies for the challenges ahead: a certain alarm at what is happening at present and a fascination with the future available to us if only we respond creatively to the urgencies of the present. (Berry, 2006:17)

Reason is challenging the way we approach education in Universities but his arguments apply to any phase of education and learning. How should we set about training not to exploit the Earth but to guide towards a more intimate relationship with our environment? So I want to ask some questions of creative writers about those two things cited by Thomas Berry: alarm at what is happening and fascination with the future.

Not many years ago, Bill McKibben (2003) described being an environmentalist as like being in one of those dreams where you are shouting at someone who is standing on a railway track with his back to an oncoming train. You shout as loud as you can but you can't make him hear you. In those days if you were writing fiction involving environmental issues it just wasn't interesting. Publishers didn't feel there was a market for it, couldn't see where it would fit on the bookshop shelves. Now this has changed and in the children's department we have Marcus Sedgwick, Meg Rosoff, Saci Lloyd and others who write with 'a certain alarm about what is happening'. Many of these stories evoke a strong sense of loss. Joanna Macy also likens this shift in awareness to waking up from a dream:

> The most remarkable feature of this historical moment on Earth is not that we are on the way to destroying the world – we've actually been on the way for quite a while. It is that we are beginning to wake up, as from a millennia-long sleep, to a whole new relationship to our world, to ourselves and each other. (Macy, 1998:37)

There is a temptation here to write as if one is looking in from the outside and this is where it would be easy to fall into the trap of becoming didactic. If readers are to engage with an experience that feels authentic, it means living the flaws from inside the characters, acknowledging that we are a part of the problem. It means not only feeling the alarm but knowing that we too are doing the stuff that causes it. In his article, *Rules of Engagement* (2005), Edgar marches into a seldom approached taboo: 'The awful truth is that the response most great writing about wickedness provokes in us is neither "Yes please," nor "No thanks," but "You too?" '

Recently I've been working with a publishing cooperative called Vala, who have just published a book called *If You Sit Very Still* (2012). It is written by Marian Partington, whose sister disappeared without trace until it became clear that she had been one of the victims of notorious murderers, Fred and Rosemary West. Marian talks of her loss, her inner search, her unexpected reactions and her

eventual quest to forgive. Most chillingly, she confronts the truth of looking within herself to try to make some sense of what has happened. 'The extremity of her story demands that we respect this quest, even though we might quarrel with her claim that we cannot fathom the evil of others unless we look deep into the darkness within," says Melissa Benn (2012) reviewing the book in the Guardian.

So one of my questions is: 'Are we brave enough to write about what is inside ourselves and to look deep into our own behaviour in the world?'

The thing is that pointing fingers won't help too much. We are all in this corner together and the last thing we need is a defensive response. We already have one, or at least there is plenty of denial. What we really need is to 'think together' and to use all of our creative talents to do this. To revisit that slightly preachy character, the Lorax, Merle Kennedy asks what if the Once-ler and the Lorax actually engaged in open dialogue (or at least became the vehicles for such in order to identify with actions and consequences):

> How might the story itself provide for a respectful and generous hearing of both the entrepreneurial Once-ler and the environmental Lorax, one in which they are both moved in new directions of thought and action? How, for example, to move beyond the rhetoric of the Lorax and the Once-ler to ask how do these two frames of reference answer ontological questions of 'Who am I?' and Who am I becoming?' for children and adults. (Kennedy, 2004:129)

Stories help us make sense of our times, deal with uncertainty, think about our relationships with each other and with the world in which we live. If in our minds they can help us transcend worlds through culture, travel, imagination, life and death, they can also help us envision the near future, the consequences of today's actions and the way in which our children and their children will live.

At Winchester, we think about this future with our creative writing students on a module called Creative Visions. We explore our relationship with the natural environment and look at global issues such as peak oil, climate change, economy and more. Students are then asked to envision the world in 2050 or beyond as a creative response. What interests me is that most write about what will have gone wrong. Almost all envision dystopia.

And, looking around the shelves in my local bookshop, I find myself asking another of my questions: "Are we writing our way to Dystopia?"

Surely somebody has a vision of a better world?

Wait a minute! Doesn't this lead us into difficult waters for a writer? Isn't there a danger of being becalmed? It has been suggested that 'happiness writes white' and we spend a good deal of time talking to creative writing students about conflict and tension. So what is this new story to be? Will anyone want to read it?

When Ursula Le Guin talks of a new story, she points out that we have been rather preoccupied with the hero. For too long now, we have been telling the 'killer story'. In an intriguingly titled essay, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (Glotfelty and Fromm, 1996:149-154), she refers us to Fisher's theory that the first useful tool was not a weapon but a bag (Fisher:1975:61). This makes a great analogy for the novel. How about putting some really useful things into a bag, a container full of things that could build a world that will sustain us all: humans and other species of the Earth? Even Le Guin admits that this is not easy. But then as she reminds us, 'whoever said that writing a novel was easy anyway?' and if we don't find another story soon, our own will come to an end.

Joseph Meeker also has some ideas about survival and the nature of the hero. He says

> 'Evolution proceeds as an unscrupulous, opportunistic comedy…Its ground rules for participants, including people, are those that also govern literary comedy: organisms must adapt themselves to their circumstances in every possible way, must studiously avoid all-or-nothing choices, must seek alternatives to death, must accept and revel in maximum diversity, must accommodate themselves to the accidental limitations of birth and environment, and must prefer cooperation to competition, yet compete successfully when necessary.' (Meeker, 1997:20)

A tragic hero takes his or herself too seriously, becomes attached single-mindedly to a set of preconceived goals. A comic hero is more likely to play, adapt, survive.

A comic hero is also more likely to be distracted by that fascination that Thomas Berry calls for; to step through the world with child-like wonder. Rachel Carson is best known for her deeply influential book, *Silent Spring* (1963), which took us into the world she envisioned if we continued to use DDT and other toxic chemicals. If she had lived longer, I feel sure she would have realised her ambition to write for children, and in particular to encourage the sense of wonder she thought was so crucial to our relationship with the natural world.

Fifty years on, with so much technological wizardry working its way into our lives, it is easy to see how the magic of nature could be overlooked. Yet, given the opportunity, children's fascination for nature still holds the power to bind them in a spell or two. And the lived experience evoked by good storytelling, written or oral, might easily lure them beyond the screen of their TV, computer, tablet or phone into a place where they can touch, smell, feel and see the wonder for themselves.

To his surprise, deep ecologist Stephan Harding found hope when he was dragged to see *Avatar* by his 8 year old son, Oscar. According to his review (2012) of the movie, he sat through the first part deploring the behaviour of the humans and anticipating little but gratuitous violence. Then an avatar popped out of its body to wander in a place that Stephan found not only beautiful but ecologically sound.

He was transfixed by the people who lived there and their world. ‘The humans were nasty and armed to the teeth,’ he explains, yet he goes on to say: ‘Imaginary the N’iwans are, but their style of consciousness must become a widespread reality in our human world, and fast, if we are to avoid the total collapse of our civilization and our living planet.’ In his review, Harding seems to find both Berry’s alarm at what is happening and his sense of fascination at what a future could hold, all in the most unlikely of settings. Perhaps all we have to do is write it into reality as well as fantasy.

I don’t want to sound as if I think any of this is easy or as if I think creative writers are going to fix the world. Actually I see it all as chaotic, unpredictable and deeply worrying. But I also see it as challenging, inspiring and full of possibility. I am told that the edge of chaos is where new and astounding things begin to happen, old systems break down and new ones emerge.

After all, we find we have some great things to put in Ursula’s bag: a load of chaos, perhaps a vision of a more life-sustaining world, really authentic characters, a comic hero or two, some pretty natty dialogue and a few nuggets of hope.

But is this for children? In case we are in any doubt of a child’s ability to imagine themselves into an adult world, on the cover of *Wild Things* (Dobrin and Kidd, 2004)eco-critic Cheryl Glotfelty points out that there are other incentives: ‘Children’s literature is never innocent, for at serious play are ideologies, discourses, and politics vying to shape the future.’

I just think we have a job to do. According to Karen Armstrong’s incitement (2005:149), ‘If professional religious readers cannot instruct us in mythical lore, our artists and creative writers can perhaps step into this priestly role and bring fresh insight to our lost and damaged world’, we had better get on with it.

Wherever you are, I hope that you will take a few seconds now to write. Just jot down a string of words about a moment, no matter how short, when you have experienced pure wonder in life. Tell that internal editor to shut up and write all that comes into your mind. Breathe in and think, then breathe out and write. Fold the paper up and put it in your pocket. One day – later today, tomorrow, next week or perhaps when you find these words in your pocket and wonder what they are doing there - take a look at them and see if there is a story waiting to be written.

Bio
Melanie Newman is a freelance writer with a special interest in stories exploring the human relationship with the natural world. She teaches creative writing at University of Winchester and currently she is researching a PhD thesis entitled Real

Life and Magic: an inquiry into the expression of deep ecology in children's fiction. Her written work includes fiction and non-fiction for both adults and children.

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Book Reviews:

The Humpback's Wail by Chrissie Gittins
Publisher: Rabbit Hole Publications
ISBN: 978-0954328825

Reviewed by: Jen Morgan – Editorial Assistant for *Writing for Children*

The Humpback's Wail is Chrissie Gittins' fourth collection of poems and is illustrated by Paul Bommer. It is marketed for 6 years and up and while you would have to be a proficient reader to pick up on the word play, less able readers can still get lots of enjoyment from listening to the poems. There is a rich variety of poems in this book from the daft to the thoughtful, many of them dedicated to the school children with which Chrissie Gittins has worked. The poems cover topics such as food, animals, sibling relationships, curly hair, dreams of Tina Turner and imaginary people. There are some great snapshot moments of the world from a child's perspective such as spinning on a roundabout, hiding from mum in a supermarket, and having a holiday in the bath. Historical figures such as Queen Victoria and the extinct dodo are also featured which makes for opportunities to engage in discussion after reading. These poems – where Gittins unites humour with a flavour of history – are some of her strongest, with one of the best being 'The Fragrant Pirate' which is about a pampering pirate that uses lanolin for soothing skin and lavender for soothing sleep. Light-hearted sound-poems like 'Wasp on the Tube' demand to be read out loud, making the speaker 'hummmmmmmmmmmm' along with the winged protagonist. Throughout the poems are enhanced by the fun and clear illustrations provided by Paul Bommer. The final poem in the collection, 'Lullaby', soothes the worries of the day away. And for parents who soothe the worries of the day away with a book at bedtime, why not put the prose to one side for now and use this book of poetry instead?

Lullaby

Forget about your homework,
forget about that fight,
give it up to the cheesy moon
and the meteor showers of night.

Chuck your frustrations out of the window,
punch your pillow with your fright,
then lie in a river of watercress,
tomorrow will be alright.

The Whole Truth, by Kit Pearson

Published by Harper Trophy Canada, 256pps, ISBN 978-1554688524

Reviewed by Stephanie Gauvin

Set in Canada during the Depression in 1932, Kit Pearson's *The Whole Truth* depicts nine-year-old Polly's life as it changes dramatically, and she enters adolescence. Polly and her fifteen-year-old sister Maud leave Winnipeg to live with their grandmother on an island close to Victoria, British Columbia. The girls leave everything they know behind them, moving from a large prairie city to the mountainous small island with their family, who they've never met. Pearson beautifully captures the mind and heart of young Polly as she struggles to adjust to the move, to her sister being away at school and to island life, all while learning to love her new family. Polly is resilient and adaptive and ever honest to herself and the reader. But Polly has a secret that is becoming increasingly difficult to keep, and her family seems to be keeping secrets from her too. As Polly grows up on the island, she learns that the truth really can set you free.

Kit Pearson is a gifted and eloquent writer and what makes her books enduring is her uncanny ability to understand and empathize with the adolescent mind. Author of *A Perfect Gentle Knight* and the award-winning *Guests of War* series, her delicate prose and realistic child protagonists capture the hearts of readers. She taps directly into the core of childhood and addresses all of the fears, anxieties, and joys that occur in the time between the ages of 9 and 12. Her books feel timeless, regardless of the era in which they are set. With *The Whole Truth*, Pearson offers lively characters and a rich depiction of life on the island, which is itself an important stage for Polly's self-discovery, all with the backdrop of the 1930s depression.

Kit Pearson has crafted a story of mystery and childhood. It seems to the reader that Polly would be so much more at ease if everyone just told the truth. The story is a comment on social expectations and about how adults underestimate the heart of a child. It is a story about being part of a family, a family's history and a family's secrets. The island, beautiful and full of rural life, is also a setting that forces Polly to face truths. She struggles to understand the behaviour of the older characters around her, including her grandmother, who is very kind but possibly prejudiced towards 'others'. At the same time, she tries to find her own self-identity. Polly discovers her individuality when dealing with adolescent and human experiences, like nervousness about boys and flirting with vegetarianism, all while dealing with the intense secrets of her family history and trying to discover where she fits in with her new family and life on the island.

Watching Polly bloom is an absolute pleasure. Pearson manages to bring her young protagonist out of her shell and into life without straying from the fundamentals of

her character. I enjoyed Polly's struggle with meat-eating, given her tender hearted feelings towards animals. Her relationship with the headstrong and fiercely opinionated Maud is aptly complicated and gives Pearson a stage to explore Polly's growing autonomy. I love how Pearson surrounds Polly with a cast of warm and loving characters that are far from perfect, but provide the support that Polly was previously missing in her life.

Kit Pearson has written a careful, charming observance of a young child dealing with hardship and the weight of secrets. Bringing reality and respect to the feelings of a child, Pearson teaches us that time does heal, but honesty and forgiveness of others and of oneself will ultimately bring peace. Almost every important character in *The Whole Truth* undergoes some kind of transformation or struggle with the truth, and Pearson's text encourages her readers to try to see them in shades of grey rather than black and white. Although the novel seems aimed at a younger teen readership, the hard-earned but simple lesson Polly learns is of value to readers of any age: people are complex – they can and do change, and that's the truth.

Andrew Melrose, *Here Comes the Bogeyman. Exploring Contemporary Issues in Writing for Children*, London and New York: Routledge. 2012.

978-0-415-61752-9 (hbk)
978-0-415-61753-6 (pbk)
978-0-203-15687-2 (ebk)

Review by Professor Peter Hunt – Emeritus in Children's Literature at Cardiff University

They Do Things Differently There: Academics and Creative Writing

'All criticism is a mode of Autobiography' [*The Picture of Dorian Grey*]

Why write a review? If you've read a lot of them, you might be forgiven for supposing that reviews are mostly there so that the reviewer can show off, and put the writer down. In fact, reviewing is simple: it is to make sure that books get into the right hands – and occasionally to stop them falling into the wrong hands. With *Here Comes the Bogeyman*, for once, I can unequivocally identify the wrong hands: mine. Fortunately for fairness and fair reviewing, I'm in a minority among readers of *Write4Children* – but before I opened *Here Comes the Bogeyman* I hadn't realised just how small a minority I am.

Opening this book for the first time was, for me, was rather like stepping out onto the streets of Mumbai for the first time: in both cases, I encountered a colourful, dynamic, complex, and totally bewildering culture: in both cases, I simply didn't speak the language. Perhaps it shouldn't have been a surprise – I am (I find) merely an old academic with set habits of mind, and I'm just not used to finding Pixie Lott and Baudrillard rubbing shoulders with folksy wisdom about who gets to choose the music on the car stereo on family outings - and creative literary nurturing.

The problem is that I'm a children's literature critic type, somebody who deals with books after they are written – a sort of literary health-visitor. Professor Melrose, famously, is a creative writing type; he looks after books as they are being written – a sort of literary midwife. He – and the readers of *Write4Children* (and I had never despite years of generally pleasurable contact with creative writers, realized it) occupy different intellectual worlds. Fascinating.

Melrose sets to his task with such friendly enthusiasm and aplomb that I can only assume that he knows his audience well and is speaking to it with considerable

skill. For myself, I fell over fell over a word in the second sentence of Chapter 1 – ‘in a *wee* book…’ I have never seen the word ‘wee’ in any critical book, anywhere, and I soon realized that this book must be, without a shadow of a doubt, the most laid back, not to say unbuttoned, book ever to appear under the prestigious Routledge imprint (at least since they stopped publishing the *Routledge Children's Annual* in the 1920s). For someone used to a modicum of formality, the style here takes a little getting used to: the book is not so much written as transcribed – one could be in the middle of a relaxed seminar; the phasing is colloquial; the sentence structures disarmingly (or alarmingly), loose. Oral expressions pepper every page:

‘And I repeat (I am doing a lot of repeating in this book but needs must)…’ (48)

‘I repeat what I wrote around 7,000 words ago (lest you forgot)…’ (38).

‘When I said (above) [there is a lot of ‘above-ing’ that leaves me skittering aimlessly about the text] I was thinking out loud and also of a way of saying it better..’ (48)

‘Let me conclude this section while I catch my breath…’ 65

‘But I cannot help the way I write, well that is not true.’ (83) (do comma splices matter no more?)

‘I know I have been banging on about this…’ (100) (another first for Routledge?)

Of course, Professor Melrose is acutely aware of tone – he claims to write in ‘a scholarly tone (but not fusty)’ - even if I, personally, am astonished (and disagree with him) when he writes: ‘if you read *Write for Children*… it has a far more informal tone than this book. Also, this Part 2 has a much less formal tone than Part 1… And the reason for that is simple; I am trying to gauge my readership, you, my reader. Of course, have absolutely no idea what you look like, sound like, dream about, and so on, but I have seen enough students of writing and critical, cultural and communication ideas to get some sense of who you are as a homogenised body’ (83).

Clearly the target audience is used to this degree of letting it all hang out – but I still worry that this elegantly casual approach can lead from free-form discursiveness into blurring the obvious:

‘developing [developmental?] psychologists see childhood as defined in large part by the state of being a child… I am persuaded by ideas that suggest that cognitive development in children is experience-dependent, and that older children have more experiences than younger children…’ (viii)

Well, yes: and it might also lead into some inadvertent self-praise:

'It is a combination of both elements which makes this book particularly informative.' (viii).

Sorry to bang on, but the low point for me followed the statement that 'Enid Blyton wrote for children in the first person because she thought they didn't like it.' Melrose goes on cheerfully, 'I have no idea where I read this…' (88) At which point I had something of an epiphany: in my world that would be quite unacceptable: if I've bought a book, or even picked it up and read it, I expect the author to have done his/her homework before she/he starts to write. (Just as when 'Zipes (2002)' is (frequently) referenced, and I find in the references 'Zipes (2000a) and Zipes (2000b).)

But this is a different world where such things don't (apparently) matter. One of Professor Melrose's (very convincing) arguments, is that writing about writing for children is a poor cousin of writing about children's literature which is a poor cousin of writing about literature, and that is at least a possible reason why his theorising has been unappreciated. And he has chosen not to ape the rich uncles, but to forge his own style – a style designed for specific readers.

Or to put it another way, his readers – the readers of *Write4Children* will understand him – and they won't be likely to misunderstand the title of the book, as I did. For the key phrase is 'in writing for children' – which (health-visitor as I am) I took to mean 'texts that have been written for children', rather than 'the act of writing.' I misunderstood the main title, too – assuming the book to be about the questionable content of contemporary children's books, not about a very specific bogeyman.

For Melrose's bogeyman is something quite other. It is his single, neglected big idea, which challenges one of most basic critical orthodoxies of children's literature criticism and theory - the idea put forward by Jacqueline Rose and Jack Zipes that children's literature is an 'impossibility'. As Jacqueline Rose puts it: "Children's fiction sets up a world in which the adult comes first (author, make, giver) and the child comes after (reader, product, receiver), but where neither of them enter the space between" [Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan. The Impossibility of Children's Literature*, London: Macmillan, 1994, 2.] Zipes's argument, coming from a different, but equally apocalyptic angle, is that '…the concept of children's literature is … imaginary, referring to what specific groups composed largely of adults construct as their referential system. Within that system children do not own their literature or want to own up to their putative literature.' [Jack Zipes, *Sticks and Stones. The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter*, New York and London, 2001, 40.]

Melrose's central idea, which he introduced succinctly in *Write for Children* [Routledge, 2002, 4-5.] is that the gap between the adult and child *can* be bridged by the nurturing adult: 'You have to try to write the world from a … point of view that an eight-year-old child will recognise. All the intellectualising in the world will not replace that basic need…'

And so the bogeyman of the title is not (as I assumed) something to do with children, but it is a bogeyman for the critical world, one that is now leaping out and biting the ruddy and rosy bottoms of theorists.

The book is in two parts: the first summarises this critical debate, and the second looks at 'critically creative and creatively critical strategies' for writers, based on the theory debate. The book, as Professor Melrose notes, 'is an opportunity to bring the disciplines of the writing and study of children's fiction, the cult and culture of child-related discourse and its components into a cultural, critical and creative context between the covers of a single book.' (4)

So this review might ask – how far is he successful?

In the first part, essentially critical theory for an audience perceived to be not receptive to or tolerant of theory, Professor Melrose, casting himself as a free-swinging common-sensical (and, we are reminded) Scotsman, simultaneously explains critical approaches to the child and the book, and takes on their practitioners. Whether he gets away with it might be debated, and Jacqueline Rose and David Rudd, to take but two, might be diverted by Melrose's implication that what they have to say is pretty simple if only they had said it clearly.

The second part follows from, and builds on, the first. As Melrose says, 'I make no excuses for taking so long in getting to this section of the book. An understanding of the critical discourse and key ideas is an important part of writing, and I urge you to take it seriously' (69). In this part, he revisits ideas from *Write for Children*:, and develops some of them. He looks at target audiences and age-ranges, story structure (including balance, disharmony, inciting incidents, problem, resolution, and outcomes – and perhaps surprisingly under the heading of 'Story Structure', characters, voice, verb forms, dialogue, various points of view and so on. Occasionally I envied the implied prescience of his audience, as when he observes, in relation to 'Subjective Viewpoint' that 'the term subject speaks for itself because it allows the writer to write subjective thoughts'. At moments like that, I am back standing in the street in Mumbai, wondering why I didn't have the courtesy to learn some Hindi.

The book ends with chapters on writing for different age groups, a whole page of 'desirable writing topics' (which presumably could have been extended ad infinitum), social realism and narrative non-fiction, other genres, and poetry for children. This last is only three pages (perhaps reflecting the way children's poetry is treated elsewhere) but Professor Melrose manages to pack in (with a certain addictive insouciance) a good many highly controversial statements as if they were truisms: 'there is little difference between writing poetry for children and adults'; 'in fact everyone can write a poem'; 'ideas are easy'… (120).

The sister volume *Monsters Under the Bed* will (I understand) be reviewed by a writer who comes from the creative writing perspective, and it will be fascinating

to see how our reactions differ. Meanwhile, as a stranger in a strange land, may I humbly wish *Here Comes the Bogeyman* great success in its world, even if, I now discover, I don't actually understand it!

An alternative and second review of

Andrew Melrose, *Here Comes the Bogeyman. Exploring Contemporary Issues in Writing for Children*, London and New York: Routledge. 2012.

978-0-415-61752-9 (hbk)
978-0-415-61753-6 (pbk)
978-0-203-15687-2 (ebk)

Review by Jessica Seymour - a PhD candidate at Southern Cross University in Australia

Professor Andrew Melrose teaches children's writing at the University of Winchester. He writes screenplays, research articles, songs and children's fiction, and was a founding member of the international editorial board of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*. *Here Comes the Bogeyman* is Melrose's fourth book on analysing and producing children's and young adult texts, this time with greater emphasis on the current debates and theories circling children's literature academics around the world. *Bogeyman* is split into two parts; the first is an exploration of the theory and context behind the ongoing debates in children's literature academia, and the second offers a critical/creative approach to writing for young people. Melrose connects the two parts with the simple thought that the best children's literature is a shared experience between adult and child.

In part one, the reader is introduced to the more controversial ideas present in contemporary children's literature theory – namely, that there is no children's literature *specific* theory, that the majority of children's literature is not produced by children, and that child readers are often viewed as passive or submissive by adult academics. Melrose outlines his position in these debates by arguing that children are as active as any other reader and can engage with literature with more sophistication than adults give them credit for.

The first part of *Bogeyman* culminates in the story of Icarus, who was given wings by his father Daedalus but cautioned not to fly too close to the sun or he would fall. This restriction, given by Daedalus in the manner of finger-wagging moraliser, ensures that when Icarus is engaged with the giddy delights of flying for the first time he ignores his father's advice and flies too high. Melrose argues that when grown-ups write stories for children, they're giving them wings. They're giving them the opportunity to experience ideas and narratives in new ways, and this opportunity needs to be explored mutually with minimal tension between the known and unknown. If we as writers respect our audience, rather than treating

them as some faceless, voiceless ‘others’, then children’s literature becomes a shared experience.

Melrose doesn’t go into the nitty-gritty of writing for children in part two, as this was already covered in his previous work *Write for Children* (2002). Instead, Melrose continues his argument that we need to view children’s literature in a new way by driving home the fact that narrative and story is a collective experience, with the child engaging with story on multiple levels during their life. Writers should therefore be careful to speak *to* their audience, rather than *down* to them. With this idea in mind, Melrose discusses the different choices writers make in story structure, point of view and the age group of their target audience.

What *Bogeyman* offers is a detailed and surprisingly optimistic analysis of the themes and issues currently being debated by children’s literature academics around the world. Melrose then demonstrates the creative potential of these debates and how writers can use theory to inform their own work. The reader is left with the image of a child and adult mutually exploring their world together and flying hand-in-hand into the sun.

Translating Expressive Language in Children's Literature: Problems and Solutions
B.J. Epstein
Peter Lang, 2012, ISBN 978-3-0343-0796-3

Reviewed by Pien Wensing – PhD Student, University of Winchester

This book aims to address the challenges of translating children's literature, giving (aspiring) translators tools and strategies to deal with expressive language in the form of neologisms, names, idioms, allusions, wordplay and dialect. In the introduction, Epstein considers some general issues, such as a definition of children's literature and the fact that translating children's literature has only become a topic worthy of investigation in the last thirty years or so. Previously it was assumed children would not be able to deal with the foreignness of translated books, or if books were translated, said translation was not deemed a topic worthy of discussion.

At this point, Epstein starts considering power issues related to children's literature in general and translating children's literature in particular. She chooses to employ postcolonial theory as one of the most useful theories in relation to this, alongside queer theory and disability theory. Although she presents some valid points regarding the control adults have over what children read and indeed, what children's books get translated, the comparison to me is an uneasy one: it bypasses considerations of race, class and economic exploitation inherent in the colonial project. Sure, in some ways a child is the ideological Other, yet with one important difference: the child will grow up to become an adult, whereas for the colonial Other it was impossible to be assimilated into the hegemonic culture. In this respect, queer theory's concept of normativity would be more apt. The link to postcolonial studies works best in the chapter on dialects: it was very interesting to see how, in translations of Huckleberry Finn, the dialect of white characters was standardised whereas the dialect of black characters was retained or emphasised.

In the following chapters, a myriad of examples of expressive language are examined, alongside their successful or not so successful translation into (predominantly) the Nordic languages. Epstein starts each chapter with a theoretical examination of the type of expressive language involved and then analyses excerpts from Roald Dahl, Lemony Snicket, Lewis Carroll and Mark Twain, to name a few, benefitting from access to her own correspondence with translators as well as with Daniel Handler (a.k.a. Lemony Snicket). The analysis of translation examples is the most interesting part of the book: it gives an insight into what forms of expressive language are most complex and what challenges writers present their translators with. Common strategies for the translation involve retention, literal translation, adaptation, replacement, deletion, explanation and compensation, each with their own level of intervention in the

source text. At the end of each chapter, there are discussion points and exercises for students, which expand on the topics discussed in the preceding chapter.
In some ways, perhaps this book should be required reading for any author before their work gets handed to a translator. In the chapter on allusions, Daniel Handler is quoted twice as stating his preference for retention with regard to allusions in his *Series of Unfortunate Events* novels, although it is later stated that he speaks no foreign language. This exemplifies the tension between the author and their precious source text, and the translator who has to make idiomatic expressions, puns and dialects work in the target language. In particular the chapter on dialects shows the limits of translation – for example when the Norwegian translator of Huckleberry Finn apologises for his inability to translate the dialects from the original, due to the constraints of language as well as time. Unlike Mark Twain, he did not study dialects for four years. In conclusion, it is certainly true that translation can be as powerful as writing – as a creative writer we can only hope that our translators take the time and care Epstein's book advocates.

I’m Dougal Trump… And It’s Not My Fault! by Me, D Trump, Jackie Marchant, (London: Macmillian Children’s Books, 2012), 206 pages (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4472-1996-5

Reviewed by Nicky Schmidt – Writer and blogger

Introducing a new comic hero, *“I’m Dougal Trump… And It’s Not My Fault!”* is the debut novel of London-based author, Jackie Marchant. Published by Macmillan Children’s Books, the novel is described by the editor as "Bart Simpson meets Just William", and is a warm-hearted and humourous story which will be enjoyed by children and their parents alike.

With the lines, “*I, Dougal Trump, am dead. Ok, I'm not actually dead, but if I'm not very careful, I soon will be*,” the reader is introduced to the football-loving, accident-prone protagonist of the novel.

Obsessed by an unknown fruit-eating creature living in his shed, which must be kept secret and may kill him; the writing of his will – in the event of his untimely death; and plagued by is bossy older sister *Sibble* (aka Sybil) and parents who clearly Do Not Understand Him, Dougal Trump, living in fear of his life, is a funny and singularly endearing character. He is refreshingly honest, ultimately unswervingly loyal to his friends, and completely normal in a typically frustrating relationship with his sister and parents who all too often visit “unfair” decisions and accusations on him.

“*I am COMPLETELY INNOCENT of all the things they say I’ve done,*” proclaims Dougal on more than one occasion, thereby echoing the call of children over so many years, “It wasn’t my fault!” The scrapes and trouble into which Dougal inadvertently gets himself will have adults reminiscing and children empathising. And this is where the richness of character is brought home – everyone one can relate to Dougal Trump, everyone, at some time, has experienced Dougal Trump moments. Those moments when The Hamster escapes from its cage, is chased by The Cat, which is in turn chased by The Dog, which causes any amount of other damage – and it is all Dougal’s fault.

It is Dougal’s essential kindness and gullibility that cause all the trouble in the first instance, as, following the instructions of a strange note, he finds himself looking after the mysterious creature - a creature with fur and big teeth, which must be fed copious amounts of fruit. And this is a difficult thing to do when Dougal finds himself constantly grounded and has to rely on his best friends, George and Claude.

In this crazy comedy of errors, Jackie Marchant reveals her skill and ability to see and capture frustrating childhood experiences and turn them into laugh-out-loud moments; moments which are enhanced by Mike Lowery’s wonderful, cartoon

style drawings, and the inserted notes - in multiple fonts - from Dougal's friends and family. In a text and messaging-ridden world, it is a delight to rediscover Dougal's handwritten notes. And these elements, together with his well-meaning, if disastrous, good intentions and his sincere protestations of innocence, make the novel thoroughly entertaining.

I'm Dougal Trump…And It's Not My Fault, is the first of a series, the second book, *I'm Dougal Trump…Where's My Tarantula* is scheduled for release in the summer of 2012.

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Write4Children - Special Edition – May 2013
Diversity, Inclusion and Equality:
Disability and accessibility, culture and heritage, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic background and family composition in children's writing and literature.

Call for Papers
Beth Cox and Alexandra Strick will be editing this special edition of *Write4Children* Journal.
Deadline for papers: 1.3.13

We live in a diverse society, yet the books we read don't necessarily reflect this. How are children who don't fit into the norm, represented in the books that they read, and how does this affect the way they are perceived by others? It is well known that reading promotes empathy; how would a more diverse reading experience nurture this? In the age of the tablet and the ebook, are books more accessible to children with additional needs, or are opportunities being missed?

We are inviting submissions for papers on all aspects of diversity: disability and accessibility, culture and heritage, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic background and family composition.

Within the topic of diversity, it is possible to cover a wide breadth of topics. From accessible books, and how e-readers and iPads have made books more widely accessible by many people, to issue books versus books with characters who just happen to be disabled/gay/Romany/adopted etc. The possibilities are endless.

Topics might include, but are by no means limited to:

- How ebooks have improved accessibility
- Do an adequate proportion of books feature disabled characters?
- The representation of modern families in books for children
- How inclusive books can combat bullying
- Where are Romany/Traveller children in literature?
- The perpetuation of negative stereotypes in books
- The representation of refugee children in books
- Is it right that there are books for boys and books for girls?
- How do looked after, adopted and fostered children see themselves in books?
- How do fairy tales challenge or promote stereotypes?
- Should overt representations of LGBT characters be confined to older (ie: YA/teen) books? (Or, put differently: is it appropriate to have overt representations of LGBT characters in books for very young children?)
- Are transgender identities ever suitable material for children's books?

- Where are the big political ideas in pre-teen children's books (ie: challenges to governments, the status quo)?
- Using books to reassure young children experiencing family breakdown
- Is there too much political correctness in children's books?
- Where are the mixed race families?

The editors will be pleased to consider for publication original manuscripts which deal with any of this broad range of themes. Papers should not have been published previously, or been submitted elsewhere simultaneously.

Papers should be submitted by March 1st 2013. If you want to send an initial synopsis, please submit by January 14th 2012 (Submit to beth@withoutexception.co.uk)

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Call For Papers

Ongoing call for papers

Instructions for Authors

1. Articles should be between 2000 and 5000 words. They should be accompanied by an abstract of not more than 200 words, and six keywords for indexing purposes.

2. All papers for the Write4Children must be submitted via an email with attachment to write4children@winchester.ac.uk.

3. Papers should be submitted as one file with, where possible, all tables and figures in the correct place in the text.

4. Footnotes should be avoided. Essential notes should be numbered in the text and grouped together at the end of the article. Diagrams and Figures, if they are considered essential, should be clearly related to the section of the text to which they refer. The original diagrams and figures should be submitted with the top copy.

5. References should be set out in alphabetical order of the author's name in a list at the end of the article. Please use the Harvard Referencing style.

6. Once the refereeing procedures are completed, authors should supply a wordprocessor file (on disc, CD-ROM or by e-mail attachment) containing the final version of their manuscript. Files should be saved in Microsoft Word. Tables and Figures (TIFF or EPS format preferred) should be saved in separate files from the rest of the manuscript.

7. The author of an article accepted for publication will receive page proofs for correction, if there is sufficient time to do so. This stage must not be used as an opportunity to revise the paper, because alterations are extremely costly; extensive changes will be charged to the author and will probably result in the articles being delayed to a later issue. Speedy return of corrected proofs is important.

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