



Macquarie University ResearchOnline

This is the published version of:

Stephens, J. (2012). Editorial. *International research in children's literature*, 5(1), v-viii.

Access to the published version:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2012.0039>

Copyright:

Copyright the Publisher. Version archived for private and non-commercial use with the permission of the author/s and according to publisher conditions. For further rights please contact the publisher.



Macquarie University ResearchOnline

This is the published version of:

Stephens, J. (2012). Editorial. *International research in children's literature*, 5(1), v-viii.

Access to the published version:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2012.0039>

Copyright:

Copyright the Publisher. Version archived for private and non-commercial use with the permission of the author/s and according to publisher conditions. For further rights please contact the publisher.



Macquarie University ResearchOnline

This is the published version of:

Stephens, J. (2012). Editorial. *International research in children's literature*, 5(1), v-viii.

Access to the published version:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/ircl.2012.0039>

Copyright:

Copyright the Publisher. Version archived for private and non-commercial use with the permission of the author/s and according to publisher conditions. For further rights please contact the publisher.

Editorial

This issue of *International Research in Children's Literature* brings together a group of articles which in various ways consider how young people are conceptualised and represented as social subjects. A recurring theme is the matter of social reproduction, that is, the social process through which bodies, social relations and social formations are constituted and reproduced. Such processes are perhaps most commonly depicted in literature and film as more threatening than benign, perceived as forces for enculturation which strive to position young people as powerless and act as agents for socio economic forces such as globalisation and neoliberal capitalism. Although the most profound impact of such forces is no doubt on the everyday lives of children, as Mavis Reimer explores here in her study of neorealist films about street children in various parts of the world, fantasy literature also has a great capacity to project such issues as metaphorical narratives. The operations of power may thus be depicted on a larger scale as the source of controlling discourses, economic inequalities and curtailment of freedom. For the poor, the underprivileged or underclasses, the capitalist expectation of perpetual expansion and opportunities for mobility – as imagined in *Slumdog Millionaire*, for example – seems more illusory than ever, and poverty and deprivation are a permanent way of life, not a condition that can be escaped. As Mavis Reimer points out, the 'feel good' impact of *Slumdog* contrasts sharply with the large number of comparable films that focus rather on the apparent intractability of the problem of the world's homeless children. Such projects may be informed by humanitarian and progressive political motivations, but audiences from more affluent social echelons might prefer to experience a more ameliorative scene. In this context it seems significant, as Dominic Cheetham argues in this volume, that the poor working-class 'street arabs' who appear in some of Arthur Conan-Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories have been transformed, in recent popular culture adaptations, into middle class children whose welfare is more assured. They don't make us uncomfortable.

Our featured article in this issue is Mavis Reimer's 'On Location: The Home and the Street in Recent Films about Street Children'. This important study ranges widely over some issues crucial for our field – issues which turn on the argument that it is increasingly impossible 'to conceptualise childhood as a protected time and place of play' when millions of the world's children experience life quite otherwise. The seven films which make up the primary corpus of the article challenge our understanding in many ways. As well as drawing attention to crucial social conditions of childhoods, including experience of abuse, abandonment and sexualisation, the article shows how the techniques of the films – the use of Neorealist principles of filming, the interrogation of

traditional narrative forms, the constructedness of profilmic space, the staging of ‘the real’ – can produce a conflicted representation.

Whereas the street child may become the normative subject of global capitalism, relations of insecurity have emerged in different times and places in the ‘developed’ West, and these conditions contextualize oppositions between notions of the rights of children and the processes of social reproduction. In her study of the ‘problem’ male child in fiction, Anastasia Gremm discusses how writers have explored the different, but comparable, ways the Fascist State and the Modern Democratic State have institutionalized social inequity. Action taken ostensibly to uphold the well-being of the child is shown rather as an instrument of social reproduction which preserves the current social hierarchy and serves the desires and expectations of adults rather than children. Notions of the security of society hinge on processes of surveillance by social welfare systems. Surveillance takes even more sinister forms in Suzanne Collins’ dystopian trilogy, *The Hunger Games*. As Vivienne Muller here argues, deep insecurity about the direction a society is taking seems to underlie this series. The imaginary country of Panem (a segment of a fragmented USA) is controlled by a twofold surveillance: on the one hand, the constructed fear of civil unrest is used to frame and legitimate a suspension of law and civil rights; and on the other, the mediated games – a mixture of reality TV, gladiatorial combat, and computer game – figure how it is almost impossible in a media-dependent world to discern the boundary between the virtual and the real, and between ethical behaviour and entertainment. Expansion of surveillance systems in the decade since 2011 have prompted many children’s writers to engage with potential (or actual) conflicts between surveillance and civil rights, and with the generation of large-scale fear to increase social control at the expense of ethical accountability. When surveillance becomes a theme within narrative representation, as in reality TV or *The Hunger Games*, the resulting scopophilia or voyeurism functions to naturalise the hierarchical power relations between those who watch and those who are observed, and hence between those who determine what can be seen and those who are enabled to see. The presupposition that such a gaze sees into the inner self of the observed (a process now often referred to as ‘pornography of the self’) also presumes that the hierarchy of relations produces ‘an obedient, alienated subject whose gaze is increasingly realized in and through consumption’ (Feldman 185).

The theme of surveillance is inextricably imbricated with processes of representation. The complex of filmic strategies Mavis Reimer details are crucial if representation is to avoid voyeurism, a pornography of poverty, or an overbearing politics of visibility. Further, audience awareness of such strategies is essential to enable critical analysis. Two articles in this volume – by Roberta Seelinger Trites and Mary-Anne Shonoda – are concerned with the emerging field of cognitive approaches to meaning-making, and as more children’s literature scholars take this up we can expect many new insights into how the human mind produces and consumes narratives, and how narrative represents

the engagements of one mind with another. As Roberta Seelinger Trites points out at the beginning of her article, ‘The study of children’s and adolescent literature shares with cognitive narratology a focus on the intersection between physical embodiment and cultural construction’.

Both of the ‘cognitive’ articles have a key focus on metaphor, whether these are the metaphors critics use to describe adolescent growth (Trites) or how a structural homology between metaphor and intertextuality may explain how intertextuality enables readers to forge connections between primary text and intertext (Shonoda): interpretation of both metaphor and intertextuality involves the negotiation of networks of words, semantic relations and/or concepts. The outcome is expression ‘as a whole cognitively richer than a literal phrase that conveys the same general meaning’. Theory of ‘scripts’ (Trites) has significant potential to enable critical readers to unpack cognitive processes underlying narrative. Because, as Trites says, the human brain knows how to transform basic units of understanding into story scripts that are tied to concepts, we can unpack sequentially standardised events to determine what is being affirmed and what restructured. Thus, readers can develop enhanced awareness of how their co-creation of a text engages with cultural narratives, metaphors and semiotic phenomena more generally.

While it does not draw upon the language of cognitive narratology, the final article in this issue, Yael Darr’s study of Holocaust narratives as picture books for the third generation, traverses some similar ground in its consideration of representations of positive social reproduction. She identifies a new variation in the process of transmitting a legacy of memory from one generation to another, a script in which a grandparent who is a Holocaust survivor discloses her or his experiences to a curious grandchild. A locked drawer may function as a metaphor for withheld memories, waiting to be unlocked and brought forth, whereupon the act of recollecting and narrating and the intersubjective dialogue this entails become the core elements in the newly created script. The article is an inspiring conclusion to these meditations on the different ways in which the process of constituting and reproducing social relations and social formations may be understood.

While issue 5.1 was originally planned as a general issue, it has transpired that five of the articles included here were developed from papers presented at the 20th IRSCS Congress, 2011. These are the articles by: Mavis Reimer, Dominic Cheetham, Anastasia Gremm, Vivienne Muller, and Mary-Anne Shonoda.

As Editor, I wish to record special thanks to Victoria Flanagan who gave up some precious time to assist me with this issue by corresponding with readers of many of the articles that had been submitted. Thank you Victoria. As always, we are ever grateful to those readers for the constructive advice we can pass on to contributors.

John Stephens

WORKS CITED

- Feldman, Shelley. 'Surveillance and Securitization: The New Politics of Social Reproduction'. *Accumulating Insecurity: Violence and Dispossession in the Making of Everyday Life*. Eds. Shelley Feldman, Charles Geisler and Gayatri A. Menon. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2011. 185–211.