

Editorial: Seeking Childness: The Process and Products of Remembering Childhood

Much has been said and written on remembrances of childhood: they are always with us, evidence that adults are children who survive. It is not uncommon for memories of being young to surface in everyday circumstances, sometimes purposefully, to be recounted quite often as cautionary narratives directed at children. Often, though, these remembrances burst unbidden into consciousness, prompted by sensory or experiential triggers. Through remembering, each of us can (or at least think we can) experience life as we once did, feel again as we felt back then, revisit the long-ago children we were (or believe we were) that ever remain with us, informing our sense of childness. As discussed by Peter Hollindale in *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (1997), childness is "a composite made up of beliefs, values, experience, memories, expectations, approved and disapproved behaviours, observations, hopes and fears which collect and interact with each other to form ideal and empirical answers to the question 'What is a child?'" (76). Hollindale holds childness to be an essential property and defining quality of children's literature. This literature is necessarily a site of negotiation between the two phases of childness, the first being childhood itself and the second empowered adulthood. To write for children of or through memories, then, necessarily demands a self-conscious confrontation with one's childness.

Personal memories are one of the primary stories of childhood through which we all individually and collectively piece together our narratives of knowledge about children and childhood. Most of us believe we know about children by virtue of all having once lived in that state of being human, yet how much do we truly know now of our actual being then, in what Marcel Proust called "les temps perdus"? Where is the voice of our true child selves in our memories? Well we realize personally the slipperiness of memory, for we all selectively forget and retell from the past depending on the audience and our agenda in the present. This knowledge of our filters on memory necessarily prompts questioning of the meaning, value, and ultimately truth of an author's presentation of remembrances. The truth effectively resides in the resonance of the memory with the reader's childness, be that reader child or adult, and it is more often an emotional veracity that one feels rather than a matter involving reason.

This special issue of *Canadian Children's Literature* offers a variety of gazes on the search for childness shared by the writer and the reader of

remembrances of childhood. First, Andrea Schwenke Wylie interrogates the disparities between Bernice Thurman Hunter's life and the one she creates for her character Booky, especially as revealed through illustrations in the novel *That Scatterbrain Booky*. Next, Cornelia Hoogland's study of Emily Carr's artistic creation with pen and paint focuses on the playful interaction between language and perception, which the artist employs in rendering remembrances as if seen through the eyes of the child in the past and told in her voice. Janet McNaughton disclaims the direct use of actual memories but embraces Memory, being in good measure an awareness of childness as a key source for her writing. Jane Goldstein's consideration of the commonalities between the phenomenal realities of Louisa May Alcott and Gene Stratton-Porter and the lives their characters lead suggests that writing from what one knows can access and address childness. Norma Rowen's remembrance of her childhood in England during World War II succeeds in reproducing a rich sense of being in the moment — true to childness — that Alice Munro likewise achieves in her works about childhood such as *Who Do You Think You Are?* by building from the feelings of a circumstance to recreate it. Robert C. Petersen's analysis of Kyoko Mori's novel *Shizuko's Daughter* recognizes the nature of remembering as a series of snapshots focusing on disjointed moments in time, a type of storytelling that has much in common with the narrations of young children. Finally, the impact of memories of the war, remembrances of then and now, war and peace, effectively two realities in one, is related by Teya Rosenberg to the rise of magic realism in post-World War II British children's literature. Evidently, memory is a storehouse writers can plumb for content that they represent variously in children's literature to create a child quality and to address the state of being a child.

Work Cited

Hollindale, Peter. *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*. Gloucestershire, UK: Thimble, 1997.

Carole H. Carpenter is a folklorist and Professor in the Division of Humanities at York University, where she is coordinating the establishment of a Children's Studies program. Her current research concerns childhood in Canada and the role of children's literature in identity formation.