

## Editorial: Consuming Entertainment

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My father was always suspicious of children's "entertainment." He thought it would cost him money. And about the television and film variety, he was mostly right. My siblings and I wanted not only to *see* the latest kids' movie, but also to get the tie-in lunchbox, the doll, the cool pencil case. It was in this way that we earned my father's disdain: "You're a consumer," he'd scoff. A consumer.

The metaphor of consumption, thoughtless ingestion, even gorging is common in discussions of children's mass-produced entertainment. At one obvious level, it implies that the entry-point for children's entertainment isn't primarily through their brains. And since we are at a point in our history when most of our culture's stories are told by global media conglomerates with something to sell rather than by parents, teachers, spiritual leaders, or community elders who might have something to *tell*, we should be concerned that the entertainment many children are exposed to constitutes them as consumers rather than creators of culture.

On another level, the metaphor of consumption suggests not the mindless pleasure of being told what to buy and who to be but something more crucial about children's entertainment: its visceral quality. As Jeanette Lynes points out in her interview with Sheree Fitch, one cannot underestimate the addictive pleasure of twisting words round one's tongue and of bouncing to ecstatic rhythms. Further, Anne Alton, in her article on the Calgary International Children's Festival, discusses how the most successful children's performers make their songs and dances interactive, calling on every child to sing and swing their bodies. In this kind of entertainment, the child's body is a stronghold of health and creativity, not the hypnotized agent of Disney Inc. which sings and dances a *Mulan* melody all the way to Wal-Mart and McDonald's.

The aim of this special issue of *CCL* is to look more carefully at how children are constituted in and through popular entertainment and popular discourse. To that end, our articles examine some of the most influential entertainments of recent years, from mainstream, corporate-dominated television programs such as *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, through the more grassroots and publicly-interested theatre and performance of the Calgary Children's Festival, to the powerful and popular storybooks of Sheree Fitch and Paulette Bourgeois. All of our contributors ask us to look again and harder at what makes something popular (Wild on Franklin), what makes something inspiring (Lynes on Fitch); what makes one entertainer a monumental bore and another a modern pied piper (Alton); and at what makes us so sure that children are powerless before the influence of *The Power Rangers* (Reimer). Our profile of Sylvia McNicoll and interview with Welwyn Wilton Katz add to this Entertainment issue by introducing notions about audience and reception as powerful influences on the imaginations of popular writers. Most of the contributors in this issue would contest the claim that the non-corporate children's entertainment out there teaches us to be good little customers; we may have to pay for that theatre performance or storybook, but we won't be asking for a lunchbox that depicts brave moral choice or the power of very small girls. They don't make 'em, Dad.

Marie C. Davis