

Editorial: Negotiating masculinity in children's fiction

The depiction of boys in children's fiction has had less scrutiny than that of girls and women. This issue sets out to redress the balance. Of course, the concern with proper behaviour for boys is not new: late-nineteenth-century writers were preoccupied with showing "manliness" in their heroes. Now, 100 years later, critics are re-examining the underlying attitudes towards masculinity that inscribe our current texts for young people.

Roderick McGillis cites recent adult bestsellers which lament "lost masculine virtues," and then he looks at portrayals of masculinity in some recent Canadian books for younger readers. Too often, he finds, the male hero must prove maleness through aggressiveness and violence. He praises an alternate model in Brian Doyle's fiction where "questions of authority and dominance have no place." In interviews conducted by Mary Harker and Kristyn Dunnion, Doyle explains that he likes to choose male narrators who are still young enough to have the "clear vision" that "kids" of ten have and which is lost during the teenage years, a time when these same young people often turn into "idiots."

Mary J. Harker looks at another writer, Diana Weiler, whose novel *Bad Boy* (1989) identifies the codes of traditional masculinity in the twin practices of "aggressive competitiveness" and "heterosexual machismo"; Prof. Harker then shows how Weiler subverts these by introducing a subtle discourse of homosexual eroticism to counter the discourse of heterosexuality. Weiler thereby decenters and destabilizes the power of the heterosexual male hegemony.

Gary Paterson, like Mary J. Harker, looks at the intersection of genre and social codes. Turning to Mordecai Richler's story about "Jacob Two-Two" and the "Hooded Fang," Paterson notes the way in which Richler's novel parodies the "bad boy" and "good girl" traditions of the nineteenth century—traditions which had presented the stereotypical gender behaviour for each sex. "Good" boys were expected to be "manly," with all the elaborate behavioural codes that required. But these earlier values are now in question, as the essays and reviews (see especially Heidi Petersen's reviews on p. 71) in this issue demonstrate.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Editors' note: *CCL* would like to congratulate Lynn Kettler Penrod on her new position as President of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Dr. Penrod's most recent contribution to *CCL*, in issue 75, examined how selected recent Québécois fiction characterized female heroes.