

Editorial: Women's Voices

The academic and creative writers who contribute to this issue represent women who *are*, who *create*, and who *write about* “women’s voices.” They discuss textual worlds where female characters resist damage by dangerous mothers, by absent mothers, or by female gendering. These characters march through pages from the nineteenth century to the present: we leap from “Jane Eyre” and “Emily St. Aubert” (of Udolpho) to “Anne of Green Gables” and “Emily of New Moon,” and then to “Sara Moone,” of *Adam and Eve and Pinch Me*, which won the Governor General’s Award last year. In addition, Alberta-based Helen Forrester comments on her autobiographical books about her Liverpool childhood. As *CCL*’s writers variously notice, women’s/mothers’ voices (or the absence thereof) are sometimes so powerfully inscribed in narratives that they must be displaced either into “magic and fantasy,” or into tropes like the “female gothic,” or into a silent computer whose files cannot be printed. As Kertzer notes, mothers’ voices can become so powerful that they control our “ability to listen to narrative.” It is liberating—and dangerous—to write or even to talk about them.

One character who recurs throughout this collection is the damaged and love-starved girl, often an orphan. In 1908, Montgomery’s public would not have sanctioned a textual world where an orphan could voice the anger that a real-life Anne would have felt. By the time “Emily” took shape in 1923, Montgomery had discovered other ways of registering female anger in texts, and her audiences, moving out of the brutalities of the Great War into modernism, were more receptive in any case to the presentation of anger, even by females. Thus glossing the evolution of public taste, Jean Little shows how Julie Johnston, a contemporary writer, can finally unleash female anger in a text: but even here it cannot be directed at its source—the real mother—but must instead be displaced into a computer.

Moving to a larger question, we might wonder what made these fictional mothers so dangerous in the first place. Is the first cause located in the weak and silenced position that women previously had in the symbolic patriarchal order? Or is this first cause simply non-gendered human nature? Whatever the cause, Kertzer worries that young people’s fiction often shows that the exercise of power by mothers is destructive. There are other models, of course, ones not dealt with in this issue: Jean Little has frequently created textual worlds where mothers—like her own, who was a widely admired medical doctor—are powerful through understanding, compassion and generosity. But the women examined in this issue are those who suffer profoundly from an anger that originated in female voices who were variously mad, manipulative, demanding, or absent. (M.H.R.)