Children’s Literature
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Prepared by: Kathleen Bosse & Sean McMahon

Overview

Children’s Literature is the annual publication of the Modern Language Association Division on Children’s Literature and the Children’s Literature Association. Since 1972, the Johns Hopkins University Press has published the journal, which can be accessed electronically through the Xavier Library. Working together in creating the journal, the MLA and the ChLA desires to encourage serious scholarship and research by publishing theoretically based articles that address key issues in the field.

In addition to literary scholars, its contributors include historians and artists. Each volume of the journal consists of eight to ten articles and five to seven review essays, with the occasional inclusion of a “Varia” section of shorter essays. Each volume includes an introduction which illustrates the theme or context in which the essays were written. Any story directed at children, regardless of its medium, whether it is Aesop’s Fables or the latest season of Glee, is of interest to Children’s Literature. The journal takes a multi-disciplinary approach, using a variety of critical lenses in their analyses.

Recent Trends

In the early issues of Children’s Literature, there was a heavy focus on canonical, British literature analyzed through a historical lens. More recent issues have broadened their scope to include literature from all cultures and eras and a wider variety of literary theories. For example, in Volume 38, 2010, L. Halliday Piel’s article “Loyal Dogs and Meiji Boys: The Controversy Over Japan’s First Children’s Story, Koganemaru (1891)” introduces a debate concerning Koganemaru’s authenticity as Japanese literature. Alongside this shift in content is a shift in the intended textual audience. Studies in recent articles have branched out from a focus on young children’s literature to include adolescent and even young adult literature.

Children’s Literature is also expanding its study to visual mediums of comics, picture books, television and film. This expansion simultaneously calls for new theories of interpretation and analytics. Children’s Literature contributes to the creation of these new theories, such as Joe Sutliff Sanders’ article “Chaperoning Words: Meaning-Making in Comics and Picture Books”, which addresses methods for interpreting and differentiating picture books and comic books. The journal also builds on existing theory and criticism, fleshing out nuances in existing criticisms and undertaking studies that have previously been overlooked.
Representative Article

Due to its recent shifts and expansions in its increasingly diverse content, there is not a clearly typical article that can represent all in *Children’s Literature*. Even so, Naomi Lesley’s “Character Education and the Performance of Citizenship in *Glee*” (Vol. 41, 2013) demonstrates how the journal is shifting and expanding.

Lesley uses a historic lens to place *Glee* in the context of the 2009 recession. She argues that it has caused Americans to redefine success and the American Dream, which leads to reflection on the purpose of school and extracurricular activities. Lesley propels the argument forward using Marxist criticism, stating that *Glee* exaggerates the existing tension between passion and monetary success. She claims that the show manipulates its viewers and encourages them to remain in their current social order and find happiness in living out their passion. Hence, it reinforces the new, passion-driven American Dream as the successor to the traditional American Dream of upward mobility. Lesley makes one final case, using the newer lens of queer theory and gender studies, to demonstrate that *Glee* is not as all-inclusive as it promotes but rather supports a white heterosexual hegemony.

Lesley’s use of the historical lens stays true to *Children’s Literature*’s roots while expanding to include the use of new literary theories. The article tackles a medium, television, and an audience, young adults, that is new ground for the journal, yet maintains as its central concern the message it imparts. Her article is a cross-section of the way in which *Children’s Literature* uses a combination of old and new theories and mediums to achieve their scholastic mission.

Recommendations for Student Researchers

Due to the multidisciplinary approach of *Children’s Literature*, a multitude of majors will find it useful. The articles are obviously valuable to studies of children’s literature but they are helpful for studies of history, as the articles tend to view the text through a historic lens. More recent articles may also prove useful to film and art studies as the journal expands its interest beyond short stories and novels. However, the wide breath of studies provided by Children’s Literature can be overwhelming and difficult to navigate. Therefore, students will gain the most from the journal if they know what to look for.

*Children’s Literature* provides a variety of articles beyond the academic. The latter portion of the journal contains reviews of academic sources. These can be helpful in determining the validity of various sources. Additionally, unlike the academic articles, the reviews tend to be shorter and written in a more conversational tone, making them more accessible. *Children’s Literature* also includes a Vaira portion. These essays further diversify not only the content of the journal, but also its accessibility as its tone falls somewhere between the formal language of the academic articles and the conversational tone of the reviews.