Introduction - Whose literature is it? Who decides?

David Beagley

The ugly head of censorship rears again, this time in New Zealand.

Ted Dawe's *Into the River* won the 2013 New Zealand Post Young Adult Book of the Year and the Margaret Mahy Book of the Year Award (supreme award of winners in all categories); the YA novel is aimed at the difficult-to-reach teen male audience and includes confronting sexual content, drug use and explicit language - in itself, not unusual in current YA publishing. But outcry from the conservative lobby group Family First had initially resulted in it being given an R14 restricted rating by the Film and Literature Board of Review, though that was recently lifted by the deputy chief censor in August 2015. Family First then appealed through the courts, which has now seen it banished from all sale or supply in New Zealand. This interim ban will be reviewed next month to determine a permanent classification.

In the meantime, bookshops, libraries, schools and even individuals, who distribute or exhibit the book will face fines of up to NZ$10,000. Yet books such as the 50 Shades of Grey series are freely available in those shops, libraries and individual's bookshelves! Why does having the term "children's" or "YA" attached to a title mean that it must be treated differently as an item of literature?

This question plays out regularly in societies, communities, jurisdictions around the world. A few years ago in Australia it was Sonya Hartnett's *Sleeping Dogs* and John Marsden's *Dear Miffy*. In 2000 it was Johnny Valentine's *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dad*. In British Columbia. In the United States, it could be any town, any school system and any lobby group with *Harry Potter*, *Rainbow Boys*, *The Hunger Games*, *Of Mice and Men* etc. etc. etc. Well meaning adults cannot bring themselves to accept that young readers may actually be able to decide about these things themselves!

This theme is picked up in the two books reviewed this issue in *Curiouser and Curiouser*. Claudia Mills' *Ethics and Children's Literature* (Ashgate) and Janet Evans' *Challenging and Controversial Picturebooks* (Routledge) both consider the tension between the desire of adults to protect younger readers and the need to allow them agency in their thinking and choosing.

In *Emerging Voices*, two of the three articles pick up the related theme of the depiction and control by adults of the child figure. Two better known children could hardly be found in 19th century English literature: our eponymous Alice from Carroll's world of Wonderland, and Nell from Dicken's *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Emily Aguilo-Perez, in “Appearing Otherwise: Alice is Now The Woman in Wonderland”, compares the representation of Alice in two recent movie versions by Nick Willing (2009) and Tim Burton (2010), arguing that the adult Alice in these versions says more to us of modern pop culture than any understanding they might give of Carroll's child. Jack Tan explores Dicken's careful and deliberate crafting of the figure of Nell in "Charles Dickens's Idealized Portraits: Rewriting the child in Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop" and how autobiographical elements were strongly at play in his choices.

Our third *Emerging Voices* article, "Australia's forgotten fairy tale: Alan Marshall's *Whispering in the Wind*" by Danielle Wood, wonders why this rollicking amalgam of European tradition, Australian culture and scenery, and sly humour from a major writer has been largely forgotten.

Rida Blaik Hourani's study, reported in "Folktales, Children's Literature and National Identity in the United Arab Emirates" in *The Tortoise's Tale* also follows the folk and fairy tale genre, questioning how such tales might be used to teach literacy and behavioural elements in a specific cultural setting, while the focus in Chea Parton's "Breaking the Binary: Using Kohlberg and Lesko to Examine Adolescence in Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*" is a similar development of reader social understandings, this time by YA readers of their socially constructed adolescent lives through the clichéd representations provided in so many YA novels.

It would be very tempting to conclude that children's and YA literature would be so much easier if only adults would keep out of the way!

David Beagley
General Editor - *The Looking Glass*
Another philosopher who influenced the development of children's literature was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that children should be allowed to develop naturally and joyously. His idea of appealing to children's natural interests took hold among writers for children. Popular examples included Thomas Day's The History of Sandford and Merton, four volumes that embody Rousseau's theories. According to Hans-Heino Ewers in The International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature, "It can be argued that from this time, the history of European children's literature was largely written in Germany."

There are some who complain that literary theory is impossibly esoteric - who suspect it as an arcane, elitist enclave somewhat akin to nuclear physics. It is true that a 'literary education' does not exactly encourage analytical thought; but literary theory is in fact no more difficult than many theoretical enquiries, and a good deal easier than some. Introduction: What is Literature? The term 'Literature' can be defined as, A concept which primarily serves to define original pieces of writing, composed in a certain. Literature is conventionally perceived as the penned-down and published (or orally delivered) creative work of an artistic and inventive mind. What Compels Us to Read Literature? Literature, by representing a language, creed, culture or tradition, acquaints us with the world that we live in, and sometimes, it even escorts us to strange, unknown universes that lie deep within the uncharted realm of the fantastic. And those of us, who have an affinity with the more imaginative works, escape into a world of fantasy at the turn of a few pages. We may often find ourselves in genuine empathy with the characters of a fictional plot-line.