



English Studies in Latin America

Special Issue – Children’s Literature, Directors’ Note

Author: Andrea Casals and Allison Ramay

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Special Issue – Children’s Literature

Directors’ Note

Andrea Casals and Allison Ramay

Because it all started when we were little... those of us who have grown to love reading, probably remember a book in our childhood or youth that marked our journey into “booker land”. This special issue on children’s and young adult’s literature is homage to Professor Roberto Cabrera who devoted his brief career to promoting children’s literacy and children’s literature throughout the country.

Roberto earned his postgraduate degrees at U. Católica with a dissertation on children’s literature. As the expert he was, Roberto contributed with *Fundación la Fuente*, public libraries throughout the country and also published articles in *Revista Había Una Vez*. Within the broad realm of children’s and young adults’ literature, Roberto loved the innovative formats that books for children and young adults have experimented with in the past decades. Roberto highlighted the role of picture books—or rather technically speaking, “highly illustrated picture books”—as a first hand encounter with visual arts; in fact, Roberto called these books a “portable gallery”. Roberto also exhibited awareness of the difficulties picture books have come across in librarians’ and academics’ never ending need to classify books into genres. At the same time, he pointed at the need to establish a new reading pact with the text—meaning text in its broad postmodern sense—that lets the eye wander back and

forth from the picture to the words in the meaning making process¹. Likewise, as a contemporary art form, Roberto observed how picture books have also flirted with the film industry, not only because some of them have been taken into the big screen, but also because many authors have incorporated cinematographic devices as a means of expression, relying on the readers' acquaintance decoding film². In another article published by *Había Una Vez*, Roberto referred to object books as “the reading game”, where the “reader” is rather an active player with the story. In this article, once again, Roberto shows awareness and preference for innovative books that challenge our understanding of the “reading” experience³.

Friends' and colleagues' testimonies say he was an enthusiastic promoter of children's literacy, meaning the reading experience in its broadest sense. Roberto collaborated enthusiastically with Fundación la Fuente in this task, in addition to teaching children's and young adults literature at U. Diego Portales and U. Católica. In the Nonfiction section of this issue we have included a column by Carolina Ojeda from Fundación la Fuente sharing Roberto's contribution to their mission.

In the Non-Fiction Section of this issue we have included a column by Carolina Ojeda from Fundación la Fuente who reflects on Roberto's contribution to their mission. We have also included a critical text written by Roberto that he did not publish during his life and that, we believe, illustrates his passion and talent for reflecting on the nature and significance of picture books.

In the Articles Section of this issue of *White Rabbit* you will find a dynamic group of texts all of which reflect on the role of children's literature in creating our social imaginaries. Professor Jean Webb from the University of Worcester and Director of the International Forum for Research in Children's Literature, understands children's literature as politically impacting. She looks at two novels by Michael Morpurgo and traces the ways in which his texts, and their pretexts, demand readers to consider the ironies of war (“the banner of humanitarian values and democracy, of human rights” that justifies war in Afghanistan) and the treatment of children in war. Webb masterfully shows how adaptations of

¹ <http://www.revistahabiaunavez.cl/2014/08/una-galeria-portatil-el-libro-album-como-forma-primaria-de-acceso-al-arte/>

² http://issuu.com/habiaunavezlibros/docs/huv13ok_issu_ce882e87449017 (p. 81)

³ http://issuu.com/habiaunavezlibros/docs/huv_10def_p9 (p. 107-8)

Morpurgo's writing (a film, play and radio drama) have also had a role in "righting injustice" in a broader public sphere. She shows how children's literature has become an established and internationally-relevant field of study through initiatives such as the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) and associated publications (Children's Literature Association Quarterly and Children Literature). These continue to bring together scholars and readers from many corners of the world that have a common interest in the potential of this literature to critique society and create critical readers.

Valentina Rivera, a recent graduate of Letras inglesas at Universidad Católica (UC) de Chile contributes to this issue with a gendered reading of *Harry Potter* through the character of Hermione Granger. Rivera carefully outlines the dichotomy commonly constructed in children's literature between men and women, boys and girls. She shows how J.K. Rowling's character, Hermione Granger is given agency throughout most of the series and how this character defies traditional gender dichotomies. Valeria Tapia, also a recent graduate from UC, analyzes Jacqueline Wilson's novel *Girls Under Pressure* through the concept of "bibliotherapy", a term developed by Carol Berns. Tapia uniquely applies this term to children's literature and argues that Wilson's novel in particular has the potential to help young readers cope with eating disorders.

In our Fiction Section we have the much awaited second chapter of *Hell or High Water*, a graphic novel whose first chapter appears in Issue 7. We hope you enjoy it and all the texts included in this issue.

Sincerely,

Andrea Casals and Allison Ramay

Co-Directors of *White Rabbit*, ESLA