

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE SATURDAY, JUNE 4, 2005  
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE LOOKS AT MASCULINITY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

WINNIPEG—From June 9 - 12, 2005, the Children's Literature Association will hold its annual conference in which academics from around the world will meet to discuss their work, current issues surrounding children's literature and culture, and to celebrate the successes of their colleagues. Over 200 delegates and speakers from more than 10 countries, including Australia, South Africa, Greece, and India will be in attendance at the Forks, where the conference is being held.

Four concurrent sessions of three papers will be running simultaneously throughout the conference. One such session that runs from 1:30-3:00 on Saturday, June 11 is entitled "Fiction and Masculinity" and features the work of Dr. Kathryn Graham (Virginia Tech University), who was unavailable for comment, Ph. D. student Erica Hateley (Monash University), and Dr. Ellen Donovan (Middle Tennessee State University).

Hateley first encountered the study of children's literature while doing her undergraduate degree. After her undergraduate degree, Hateley did not pursue the study of children's literature, but instead moved on to contemporary British literature and Shakespeare in popular culture, which led to her present interest in the "appropriation of Shakespeare for children," which she is pursuing for her doctoral research. Donovan started looking at children's literature while working on her dissertation and was encouraged to pursue the study of children's literature as a career by a colleague when she had a temporary teaching appointment at MTSU, where she is currently a professor. As with many children's literature scholars, Donovan's interest also has a very practical side, as she is the mother of two boys and her experience reading to them led to her interest in "the ways that authors structure[] reading experiences for children."

When asked about the impact of studying children's literature, Hateley replies that "children's literary studies is one of the most pragmatic areas of literary studies today [because] it bears such an immediate and specific relationship with the 'real world.'" Like Hateley, Donovan also emphasizes the importance of studying children's literature.

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Donovan explains that she wants to encourage "future teachers (and many others who won't be teachers) to take children's/young adult literature seriously as an artistic form and to take seriously the aesthetic experiences of children and teens." Ultimately, Hateley wants to "contribute to a world-view where children are offered multiple possibilities for their identity, not a limiting 'Leave it to Beaver' world."

Hateley claims that gender and sexuality are “two of the issues which manifest continually in children’s literature.” Hateley points out that while “books written for children are often invested in ideals [such as] ideal child readers, ideal worlds, and ideal morals,” the “ideal” is normalized “according to the author and publisher’s world-view.” Donovan also alludes to the influence of publishers when she remarks that “much popular and consumer culture is really gender driven,” which has led her to pursue questions like “what models of gendered behavior are offered to boy readers?” Hateley worries that these books, which propagate stereotypical gender roles and sexualities, will have impact on children’s development and that these books may limit children’s “understanding of alternatives” to the social norms that are reproduced within them.

This session will be of interest to a wide variety of people, particularly those who are concerned with the roles and effects of gender and sexuality in both children’s literature and in general, as both are hotly debated issues in our society.

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