



Frame of Reference

David Beagley, general editor

Piratical Play, Islands, Monsters and Walls

Pirates have changed a lot over the years! From the fearsome marauders of the Caribbean and the Spanish Main and the unscrupulous duplicity of Long John Silver, they have become, variously, objects of fun, of longing and of vivid imagination. You cannot just blame Johnny Depp; Captain Pugwash was a comic caricature from the 1950s to the 1990s through 21 books and 3 television series, and Errol Flynn certainly set hearts a' racing in the 1930s with his deeds of derring do!

Pirates are always, however, something that we are *not* and, therefore, attract a child's longing for adventure and escape. Tom Sawyer, Jim Hawkins, Peter Pan (with varying degrees of success) all sail off to battle or to be pirates, and the children of Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* manage to make the adventure last a whole summer.

Amy Elliot's article in **Alice's Academy**, "Girls on the High Seas: Piratical Play in Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons*" explores not only the nature of those children's play at pirating, but also the usurping of traditional gender roles through the story. As she explains, the tension between the 19th century Empire building boys' identity and the 20th century freeing of women's restraints plays out in the boats on Windermere. Susan Walker and Nancy Blackett make an interesting counterpoint.

There are eighteen islands on Windermere. Now, I realise that Ransome never actually says that the story is on Windermere, but it is generally accepted that the lake itself is Windemere, while the surrounding land is more Coniston. Anyway, islands in general are the focus of Ben Screech's **Jabberwocky** piece "Islands in fiction for young people: a brief introduction", part of a larger project he is undertaking. Pirates pop up again, but it is the expression of Otherness inherent in island stories that so often turns them into places of imprisonment rather than idyllic scenes of freedom and growth - *Lord of the Flies* rather than *Utopia*.

Monsters and Graveyards mean that Neil Gaiman's work features in both our **Emerging Voices** articles. Kevin Sun's "Real Dragons: Monster Symbolism in Maurice Sendak's *Outside Over There*, Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, and Patrick Ness' *A Monster Calls*" looks at how literary monsters are used as literary tools to help children face the realities of their own fears - "didactic stories done right, showing how children can defeat real dragons". Jane Worme's "Centuries of the Narratological Construction of Gender: *Seven Little Australians* and *The Graveyard Book*" shows how texts a century apart still can present a similarly gendered narratological construct - the sacrifice of a woman to save a man.

In **Picture Window**, Jordana Hall takes us through the narrative and illustrative representations of Peter Sis's personal history in his graphic memoir *The Wall*. With echoes of *Maus* in its honesty and powerful depiction of a life most readers will, hopefully, never experience, *The Wall* presents Sis's child- and early adult-hood in Czechoslovakia behind the Iron Curtain, from the inside looking out as the Swinging Sixties unrolled in the West. Hall examines Sis's use of symbolism in his artwork, especially that of maps and geography, to give his experiences a point of relation for his young modern audience.

Found Poetry is still a controversial literary form. As Peter Sieruta disparagingly wrote about the verse novel (a related format):

Arranging words
prettily
on a page
does not necessarily
turn prose
into
poetry

(Sieruta, Peter D. (2005). Things That Tick Me Off! *Horn Book Magazine*. 81(2) 223-230.)



On the other hand, as Jeff Spanke and Rachel Haywood show, in their "From *The Outsiders*, Looking In: Using Found Poetry to Explore Genre Conventions in Young Adult Literature" in **The Tortoise's Tale**, Found Poetry offers a structure and mechanism to enable a closer reader-response through active engagement with the essential elements of a text - the words themselves. By exploring practical examples from a class exercise, they consider how particular emphases can be drawn from a studied text through the simple collage-like process of Found Poetry.

So, pirates, monsters, graveyards, islands, walls and poetry, a mix of themes to make you look at stories and think. After all, that is what *The Looking Glass* is all about!

David Beagley

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