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The Department of English & Comparative Literature and ChLA Honor Bonnie Margay Burke, Graduating Senior from SDSU

By June Cummins

Graduating senior Bonnie Margay Burke has accomplished not one but two outstanding achievements related to literature. Of special importance to the Children's Literature Circle, Bonnie has won the Children's Literature Association's Carol Gay award. The Carol Gay award is given to the undergraduate student who is judged as having written the best paper about children's literature. In addition, Bonnie has been designated the Outstanding Undergraduate Student of the Department of English and Comparative Literature. Bonnie brings great honor to both the Department at large and children's literature in particular.

The Carol Gay Award is quite competitive. Undergraduates are nominated by their professors, and an elected ChLA committee chooses the winner. According to Judith Plotz, Vice President/President Elect of the ChLA, Bonnie competed against nearly 20 other students from all over the country. Bonnie's paper, "Big Pitchers Have Little Ears: Challenging Adult Participation in the Silencing of Children," greatly impressed the committee. Said Plotz, "Bonnie's paper about Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hears a Who* combines moral, humanitarian concern and engagement with close analytical skill. This combination is unusual. Bonnie's paper is admirable in two important senses: its high academic competence and its commitment to the child reader."

Bonnie is grateful to her professor, Mary Galbraith, for her terrific teaching and the class Bonnie took with her, English 501. Explains Bonnie, "The enchanting Professor Mary Galbraith revealed a cathartic means of reconnection with the authentic child self in her

extraordinary Children's Literature class." Bonnie was enthralled with Galbraith's childhood studies approach to children's literature. "It has opened up a whole new realm of possibility for attunement with children, reclaiming childhood losses, and reshaping everything we know about parenting and education. It isn't too late to start listening to the truths children have to tell. A Childhood Studies program would be an excellent fit at the university that fostered the first Women's Studies program," she said.

Studying children's literature at SDSU has influenced Bonnie's plans for the future. Finding Professor Galbraith's class very inspiring, she is determined to continue researching the field of Childhood Studies. She explains, "After dashing off to the Children's Literature Association conference in Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania to accept the Carol Gay Award in June, I will spend the second half of 2002 gathering the financial resources for graduate school. Though there is no university offering a graduate program in Childhood Studies, I might just be contrary and opinionated enough to make it happen anyway."

Bonnie came to San Diego State University after a stint in the corporate world and to the English Department after trying out several other majors, all of which she found unsatisfying. She was glad to return to her first literary love, children's books. "I have been hooked on reading since before I started school. Children's literature saved my life by whisking me off to ideal worlds that made childhood tolerable. My version of childhood happiness was the cellophane crinkle of the

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The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English

Victor Watson, Editor
with Morag Styles, Elizabeth Keyser, and Juliet Partridge
Cambridge University Press, September 2001

Review by Carolyn Richey


One of the recent additions to the SDSU Love Library Reserves is *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English* (Victor Watson, Editor). If you haven't yet explored this extensive volume, you should. In it you'll find critical overviews of not only the canonical works of children's literature with which we're all familiar, but also the unexpected "works" which have held children's interests in more recent years. I am fortunate to be among the contributors (as is Alida Allison) because I was in the right place at the right time. Six years ago at the ALA conference at the Bahia Hotel here in San Diego, I met Elizabeth Keyser at the first of the now regular Children's Literature sessions. She announced that a new "guide" to Children's Literature was being compiled and that Cambridge Press and the editors were looking for people to contribute. As I gave her my name and contact information, I had no idea how many letters, e-mail messages, and manuscript versions would be exchanged and how many years would elapse before its publication in September 2001.

The Cambridge Guide to


Children's Books in English is "not a 'Guide to Children's Literature,'" as Editor Victor Watson admits in the Introduction to the work. Instead, this volume reflects that "a great deal of what children read has little to do with classrooms or with what many adults think of as 'literary.'" Therefore, when you open this "literary guide," you'll find entries on the types of materials to which real children gravitate, such as movies, drama, television, comics, children's annuals, adventure game-books, and a variety of media texts, interspersed among entries on "traditional" children's texts, authors, and illustrators.

To get an idea of the variety of entries you can find in the *Guide*, here's a list of the contributions Alida and I made. (When you explore the volume, be sure to look at the end of each entry for the contributor's initials. AA indicates Alida's entries, and CLR indicates mine.) Alida's contributions to the volume are "I.B. Singer," "Tana Hoban," *Star Trek*, and *Mad Magazine*. My contributions include *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "Mark Twain," *The Addams Fam-*

ily, and *Star Wars*. These eight entries demonstrate both the variety of works for which you can find information and the varied approaches taken by the numerous contributors. Alida's *Star Trek* entry offers a brief history of the science fiction series while my entry on *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* consists of a brief history of Twain's two most famous works and a critical approach to understanding the two texts. The entire volume demonstrates this variety. On the same page as the entry on the movie series *The Addams Family*, you can find entries on the theoretical term "acteme" and the illustrator Adrienne Adams.

I enjoyed producing these varied pieces because I had the opportunity to write about the texts and authors on which much of my critical studies have focused, and I had the opportunity to study the movies that I have loved to watch. And isn't that what we should make of Children's Literature? Shouldn't it be a study of critically acclaimed texts and authors in parallel with those texts (such as *Harry Potter* or *Star Wars*) that have captured the fancy of children and adults in an array of media? 

Bookshelf By Alida Allison

The Children's Literature Program Bookshelf in Love Library grew by another 75 donated books last year. To read about these books and many others, click on the children's literature web site at <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/english/childlit.html>. Categories for books reviewed include Teacher Resources, Scholarly Works, Chapter Books, several categories of Picturebooks, several categories of Fiction, History, and Biography. 



Grad Students to Give Papers At Annual ChLA Conference

Five graduate students in the Department of English and Comparative Literature or the Master of Liberal Arts program at SDSU have had their papers accepted by the Children's Literature Association for the upcoming ChLA conference to be held in Wilkes Barre, PA in June. The students submitted the final papers they wrote for June Cummins's graduate seminar, English 606A, "The Child as Subject and Object."

Here is a list of the students and the titles of their papers:

- ◆ Lynne Bush, "Spy Versus Spy: The Trivializing of Class and Race Differences in Brownwen Hughes' Adaptation of *Harriet the Spy*"
- ◆ April Chisum, "Lessons in Capitalism: The Representation of Childhood Consumer Culture in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*"
- ◆ Stacey Faulk, "*The Princess Diaries*: Undermining Messages to an Unsuspecting Audience"
- ◆ Jessica Markowicz, San Diego, "Harry Potter and Lemony Snicket: The Art of Commerce"
- ◆ Lisa Stahl, San Diego State University Graduate Program, "Harry Potter and the Rhetoric in Support of the War on Terrorism"

In addition to these students, faculty members June Cummins and Cynthia McDaniel will also be presenting papers. Cynthia received her MA at SDSU recently and is now an instructor. Her paper is titled: "Censorship of Children's Literature: An Ethics Approach." And undergraduate Bonnie Margay Burke, the Carol Gay Award winner, will also present her paper. SDSU will be well represented in Wilkes Barre! 📖

Burke from page 1

library wraps."

Today, Bonnie describes herself as "a constant reader, author, poet, editor, bibliophile, word nerd, activist, neat freak, hockey fan, and fictive thing that winks most when widows wince." She credits the English Department at SDSU for exposing her to the transformative powers of literature. "Though my early education taught me complicity and silence, I discovered something precious and wonderful in the department of English and Comparative Literature at SDSU: the faculty was chock full of kindred spirits who had no interest in having their ideas parroted back to them. My favorite professors taught me how to bathe in the text, how to trust intuition, the craft of vision and revision, and how to locate the authentic voice in the story." Bonnie achieved a 4.0 GPA in the English major and a 3.92 overall.

Believing that literature holds the power to change lives, Bonnie contributed her coming-out story to Larry Dane Brimmer's book *Being Different* in the hopes of reaching out lovingly to other queer youth. Bonnie is determined to make an extraordinary difference in the world, even if the only real change she can create is internal. "I believe that writing and listening are creative healing tools. I hope to save a soul here and there by exposing unbearable truths and breaking the silence that fosters oppression and violence. I hope to take the story I was dealt and transform it into something extraordinary by learning to reach a higher level of truth through fiction." Clearly, Bonnie has begun her journey. As Plotz explains, "Bonnie's close attention to literature shows she cherishes the text and the children who read the text." We are fortunate to have had the honor of Bonnie's close attention here at San Diego State. 📖

Michael Joseph Visits San Diego State University

By June Cummins

Each year, the Children's Literature Circle produces a lecture series. Sometimes we bring authors to campus; other times we bring critics. In April of 2002, we hosted children's literature scholar Michael Joseph of Rutgers University. Mr. Joseph is the Rare Book and Jerseyana Catalog Librarian of Rutgers University Libraries and the owner and system administrator of the Children's Literature listserv, commonly called "child_lit." Child_lit has nearly 1700 subscribers from all over the globe.

For the first time, the Children's Literature Circle received partial funding for the lecture series from the Instructionally-Related Activities grant, which is given to various campus organizations to help sponsor programs that enrich students' educations. We were therefore very pleased when over 80 students showed up to hear Mr. Joseph's talk.

Mr. Joseph's lecture was called, "Varieties of Nostalgia: Children's Literature and the End of Time." Student Noelita Robeniol explains, "He talked about the varieties of nostalgia in children's literature and young adult or adolescent literature. He divided his talk into three different sections of nostalgia: popular, concise or superficial, and nostalgia theory." After first addressing the manifestations of nostalgia in popular culture through such venues as the *New York Times* feature called "This Day in History," Mr. Joseph then explored how nostalgia informs the Daniel Clowes graphic novel, *Ghost World* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Student Willow Harrington commented, "I thought his perspective of how popular

culture links each day to the past was very insightful. I have been noticing that this is true ever since it was brought to my attention." Student Joanne Paragas explained that Mr. Joseph used *Ghost World* to show how "nostalgia is used to emphasize the returning back to youth." In *Harry Potter*, summarized student Anna Moffett, "the inaccessibility of home is a variety of nostalgia."

Two co-sponsors helped support Mr. Joseph's visit. The Department of English and Comparative Literature generously contributed funds, and the San Diego State University Library allowed us to use the beautiful Study Room in the Library Addition free of charge. The library staff also graciously supplied technological assistance.

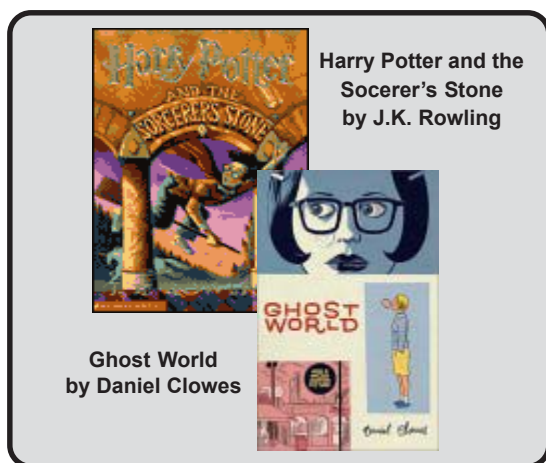
After Mr. Joseph gave his presentation, the children's literature faculty and several friends accompanied him to dinner at The Prado Restaurant in Balboa Park. A good time was had by all! We thank Mr. Joseph for coming to visit us in San Diego and sharing with us his very interesting presentation. 📖



The New MA Specialization in Children's Literature

By Alida Allison

Children's Literature faculty are very pleased that the Master's Degree in Children's Literature has been endorsed by the English and Comparative Literature Department. Once approved by the College of Arts and Letters and Graduate Division (an approximately 2-year process), the specialty in children's literature will become the fifth specialty degree offered by the department, joining current specialties in American, British, and Comparative Literature and the MFA in Creative Writing. Compelling reasons for adding the degree are the favorable job market for children's literature specialists, the fact that several graduate courses have already been offered in children's literature, the many inquiries from around the world asking if SDSU offers such a degree, and the interest and capabilities of the faculty in working with advanced degree students. Once in place, SDSU's MA in Children's Literature will be the first formal program in the western United States. 📖



Harry Potter Redux

By Jerry Griswold

The recent popularity of the Harry Potter books (and now the movie) is a little baffling to me. On the one hand, it is one of the oldest stories in the world (some would say the oldest); and those familiar with variants of this tale would have to admit that others have told it better. On the other hand, especially for those who are not widely read, the Harry Potter stories must have the freshness of an avatar. If J. K. Rowling is ultimately telling the story of the Hero with a Thousand Faces, Harry Potter is No. 1001.

In the first book (originally titled *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*), we learn that Harry, true to form, was the offspring of distinguished parents—the notable wizards, Lily and James Potter. Not swaddled and laid in a manger in Bethlehem or even sent (like Superman) from Krypton to earth in a rocket ship, baby Harry is swaddled in blankets and arrives by aerial motorcycle at the doorstep of middle-class relatives living in contemporary England. Like the royal Oedipus who was raised by shepherds and had a distinguishing scar where his ankles were pierced and tied when he was abandoned, Harry has a conspicuous lightning-bolt-like scar on his forehead that marks his own separation from his late parents.

Harry is raised by his relatives, the Dursleys, who are “Muggles”—that is, ordinary people and the kind Holden Caulfield would call “phonies.” Not the kindly kind of guardians who Superboy finds in Mr. and Mrs. Kent when his own ark of bulrushes arrives in Smallville (U.S.A.), Mr. and Mrs. Dursley belong to the more familiar tribe of surrogate parents who mistreat their adopted or step-child. So, akin to Cinderella, Harry is made to live in a cupboard under the stairs, wear hand-me-down clothes, and eat the crumbs that are left over. Moreover, and again true to form, Rowling's hero has his dark twin and sibling rival, his greasy cousin Dudley who is a bully and makes life even miserable for Harry.

Throughout this time, Rowling writes, “Harry had dreamed and dreamed of some unknown relation coming to take him away.” Eventually, something like that happens and Harry is summoned to school at Hogwarts. Then begins the second phase of the hero's life when he is acknowledged as special: strangers on the street doff their hats to Harry and ask to shake his hands, schoolmates and teachers recognize that he is the famous boy they have heard of, awe and respect follow

in his wake since the pauper is actually a prince and the bespectacled Clark Kent is actually Superman.

If this was a dream, if the book itself was actually a patient's dream journal, a therapist would quickly recognize this as an example of what Freud called the Family Romance—a familiar fantasy that most children have had, a dreamy conviction that they were adopted and that the adults they live with are not their real parents, that their real parents are somehow more important and more attractive and will some day come to retrieve them. Along with the delusions of grandeur that accompany it, the Family Romance is a compensatory fantasy for the child who feels special but unrecognized. Here lies one explanation for the popularity of Rowling's story: its appeal to every science nerd and bookish girl, to every kid who wears glasses, and (in fact) to Everychild since every child feels aggrieved and under-appreciated and special. Worldwide, “Cinderella” is the most popular fairy tale.

But if the Family Romance (a child born of distinguished parents languishes unrecognized in an adoptive family only to receive a summons which brings acknowledgment of their importance) is not regarded as a dream and compensatory fantasy but is written out as a fact, then what we get (as Otto Rank has observed) is the Myth of the Hero. Such is the case with Harry Potter. But such is also the case with Moses, Oedipus, Cyrus, Tristan, Jesus, Cinderella, the Prince and the Pauper, Superman, and legions of others.

Where Rowling's variant differs, however, is in placing this ur-story in a milieu of magic and wizards. Here is *Tom Brown's Schooldays* recast as a game of Dungeons and Dragons. Then there is also the influence of *Star Wars*: at one point, in the face of the Darth-Vader-like character Voldemort, Harry declares, “I'm never going over to the Dark Side.” Still, as borrowed as these fantastical elements may be, they at least save Rowling's book from the shortcomings of other School Stories: the preciousness of the film “Dead Poet's Society,” say, or the contrived grittiness of the television series “Welcome Back, Kotter.”

And certainly another appeal of the Harry Potter books is that they are a series. Longinus said that the pleasure of literature lies in exstasis, its ability to “take

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us away” and—like books about the Hardy Boys or Sweet Valley High or Oz or the Lord of the Rings—a series book allows us to go away for a long time. One happy result, we’re told, is that “children are excited about reading again.” And who can find fault in that?

But my more cynical friends find in the Harry Potter “phenomenon” evidence of the machinations of marketing and believe that, every so often, a product is arbitrarily chosen and sent down the well-traveled road of media publicity and product tie-ins. To them, Harry Potter is only the marketers’ most recent darling. In response, I observe that the machinery can’t work unless there is something there to work with.

In truth, my own objection to the Harry Potter books is a niggling one, and that is that they are so British. When the first book was made available in the U.S., it suffered a title change and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* became *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. That translation was not enough. All the talk about school scarves and “winning points for your house” strikes me as foreign, as does the underlying and British preoccupation with class. But more than that, Rowling’s tone seems distant from our native tradition.

Mark Twain grew tired of reading stories where good boys are rewarded and bad boys receive their just deserts. So, he wrote a story about a Good Boy who helps an old lady across the street (against her wishes) and is soundly beaten by this senior citizen, and he wrote another about a Bad Boy who doesn’t suffer for his crimes but gets elected to the state legislature. In other words, compared to Twain’s prankster Tom Sawyer, Rowling’s Harry Potter (while not quite a prig) does seem a bit solemn and stiff in the British manner.

So, I await the inevitable American rejoinder, the parody that someone must even now be writing of the Harry Potter books. It might begin in a more typical American high school, with football games and dating, cars and MTV. And then, say, Bart Simpson travels to Hogwarts and there is hell to pay. I’d welcome a book like that: an American Harry Potter that was funny and subversive. 

Faculty Achievements

Alida Allison has been appointed English-language Story Consultant for the *Children's Weekly* of China, a mass market magazine for 10-13 year old Chinese boys. This position is a result of her trip two years ago to Beijing, where she met many editors and writers. She is looking for stories of 8,000-10,000 words and is open to suggestions.

June Cummins gave a paper at the MLA 2001 conference in New Orleans in December about the current superstar of children's literature, Harry Potter. Her paper was called "Packaging Potter, Packaging Children: *Harry Potter* and Compulsory Consumerism." The paper was printed in its entirety in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and June was quoted in the *New Jersey Star Register* and the *New Orleans Times Picayune*. Her paper was also mentioned in *USA Today*. A Belgian newspaper called *De Morgen* printed an extensive interview of June on this topic (but she can't read it because it is in Flemish). June has also been active in local news; she appeared on the KPBS radio program, "The Lounge," to talk about Harry Potter and was interviewed by Karla Peterson of the *San Diego Union Tribune* about the Captain Underpants series by Dav Pilkey and about Lemony Snicket. June will be giving a paper about children's literature and commodity culture at the upcoming ChLA conference in Pennsylvania. Her paper is titled "Co[ke] Dependency: Learning to Read As Learning to Buy." Finally, June's article, "'You Should Not Loiter Longer': Christina Rossetti, Beatrix Potter, and Progressive Intertextual Revision," was published in Margaret Mackey's new anthology, *Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit: A Children's Classic at 100* (Scarecrow Press, 2002).

Jerry Griswold has recently been writing about the study of Children's Literature. His "The Future of the

Profession" was published in the May/June issue of *The Lion and the Unicorn* and his "An Apologia of a Scholar" appeared in the first issue of *Anuario de Investigación en Literatura Infantil y Juvenil*. The former was written up in the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* online publication *Academe Today* and the latter is a publication of a Spanish-language organization devoted to Children's Literature and headquartered in Spain, the Asociación Nacional de Investigación de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil, and Griswold serves on the Board of Directors.

Lois Kuznets will be delivering a paper at the Children's Literature Association Conference in June: "The Black Hole of Loss in Zibby Oneal's *A Formal Feeling*." At the same conference she will receive the Anne Deveraux Jordan Award for service to the field of children's literature.

Peter Neumeyer, professor emeritus, has contributed poems and prose recently to *Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by 20th Century American Art* (Abrams), *Stone Bench in an Empty Park* (Orchard), and *21st Century Dog* (Stuart, Tabori, & Chang) and to a book on Volkswagen beetles, which he can't find. His "Afterword" to the *50th Anniversary Retrospective Edition of Charlotte's Web* (2002) is also read on disk by George Plimpton (Random House Listening Library.) Peter continues to write and review books frequently for *The Boston Globe* and *Mothering*, and to be an awards judge for National Parenting Publications Awards. Currently he serves on the Honorary Committee of the newly established Edward Gorey House, on Cape Cod—established to preserve the work and memory of that artist. Primarily these days, though, Peter is drawing, painting, and sculpting. 📖





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