



## **Exploring (Un)Common Ground Ten Years after 9/11** —Heather Snell and Doris Wolf

A flurry of events, ceremonies, and remembrance programs marked the tenth anniversary this September of the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. In the United States, thousands of New Yorkers joined hands in Lower Manhattan; the New York City Fire Museum held a memorial service; an official observance took place at the World Trade Center memorial site; the crash of Flight 93 was commemorated in Shanksville, Pennsylvania; and President Barack Obama remembered casualties at the Washington National Cathedral's Concert of Hope in a speech during which he remarked on the unchanging character of the United States and the durability of democracy. Other world leaders, including President Benigno Aquino of the Philippines and President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea, expressed their condolences and stressed the importance of cross-cultural dialogue and anti-terrorist initiatives. Schoolchildren held a vigil in Amritsar,

India, and in Puri, India, sand artist Sudarshan Pattnaik created an impressive sand sculpture of the World Trade Center. A firefighter in Christchurch, New Zealand, stood in a bucket suspended over a memorial constructed out of the same steel that once supported the World Trade Center; and a tribute in Gander, Newfoundland, to which thirty-eight planes were diverted after the attacks, served as a reminder of Canada's hospitable role in the aftermath of 9/11. Meanwhile, a memorial service held by the Ontario Paramedic Pipes and Drums band in Toronto and a Concert of Hope held at the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa served as reminders of Canada's willingness to identify and sympathize with its closest neighbour, the United States.

Indeed, the remembrance of 9/11 in Canada has sparked a regeneration of iconography around transnational identification. For example, the CTV News tenth-anniversary photo gallery, entitled "Canada



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Reacts to the 9-11 Attacks,” opens with the image of the American and Canadian flags flying side by side at a ceremony that took place in Ottawa on 14 September 2001 and includes, among others, images of Canadians standing outside of a Toronto store selling televisions, the reflection of 9/11 news coverage on their bodies; Red Cross volunteers at Exhibition Park in Halifax preparing beds for airline passengers whose flights were diverted as a result of the attacks; and a notice of the closing of the United States Consulate in Quebec City to the public on 11 September 2011.

These peaceable images of cross-border empathy are nevertheless subtly interrupted by an image, also included in the CTV gallery, of three thousand demonstrators at the Vancouver Art Gallery protesting the impending “War against Terror” on 23 September 2001. One demonstrator’s placard—which reads “Don’t follow the terrorist script!”—disrupts what is otherwise a reassuring flow of images that underscores the proximity of the United States to Canada and the status of 9/11 as a global, and therefore intensely transnational, tragedy. The inclusion of this image in the CTV gallery might be said to expose, whether consciously or not, what critic Jill Bennett has called “the limits of empathy” (178). Without a doubt, the majority of images in the gallery focus on the immediacy and proximity of 9/11—its happening in a space and time not far removed from Canada and its forceful disruption of the ordinary lives of Canadians—to highlight solidarity as opposed to dissent. At the same time, as the early demonstration in Vancouver and the use of Canada as a refuge by some American soldiers who defected from the United States-led “War against Terror” in the wake of 9/11 attest, there are limits to transnational identification.

How the rapid politicization of 9/11 has impacted transnational identification can also be witnessed in the disparate ways in which young people have been integrated into post-9/11 discourses around nationalism and multiculturalism in Canada and the United States. One Canadian example that made national headlines is the Toronto District School Board's curriculum on the terrorist attacks on the United States. In "How Do You Teach 9/11 to School Children," published in Canada's *National Post* on 11 September 2011, columnist Matt Gurney heavily criticized the school board, which serves one of Canada's most multicultural populations, for shifting attention away from the attacks to issues of discrimination more broadly: the school board's curriculum takes as its framework human rights and the protections of those rights, namely Canada's multicultural ideology and Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and emphasizes such issues as the increased Islamophobia faced by individuals who identify as Muslim and the cultural suppression of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis persons in Canadian society. Gurney insists on the need to include the details of 9/11 in school curricula on 9/11, even at the risk of labelling a specific group of people as perpetrators: "No one wants to see schools turned into propaganda machines. But 9/11 happened, and children deserve to know about it." What Gurney does not seem to recognize is that the elision of the specific historical, social, political, and cultural effects of 9/11 on certain

individuals and cultures is as political—even, to use his own word, propagandistic—as their inclusion is. Gurney's argument nevertheless does make evident the attractiveness in Canada of a discourse in which the homogeneous "we" of official multiculturalism takes precedence over detailed engagement with the politics of 9/11. Correlatively, a denunciation of post-9/11 racism goes hand in hand with a righteous reaffirmation of Canadian multicultural policy.

The situation appears to be very different in the United States. Here, the events of 9/11 have been seen to challenge the ideals of multiculturalism, ideals that have played such a large role in children's literature, culture, and politics since the 1970s in many parts of the world. In *Children's Fiction about 9/11: Ethnic, Heroic and National Identities*, Jo Lampert outlines this situation:

this taken-for-granted discourse of the multicultural world is complicated by 9/11. The "new" world in which there exists an "axis of evil" has implications for ethnicity and culture. The many hopeful claims of globalization which were significant to much cultural theory . . . now appear to be in question since 9/11 in a world that seems to be finding a new agenda and where theories of cultural hybridization sit uncomfortably alongside nationalism and ideas about goodness and evil. (30)

Although some of the children's texts about 9/11 that Lampert addresses in her study are from Canada, Australia, and Britain, most are American, and even those that are not often represent views of the world that she calls focally American, that is, books that use social and political registers that resonate in familiar "American" ways (4). One example of a familiar American way that has surfaced in 9/11 rhetoric is the American claim of "terrorism as its own after 2001, no matter what other terrorisms took place in other parts of the globe. In this way, America suddenly colonized a much bigger issue" (4). Another has been an "us and them" point of view delineated along racial and ethnic lines. Borrowing from David Palumbo-Liu's work, Lampert stresses that it became very difficult to argue for an emancipatory multiculturalism in the face of Bush's claim that the War against Terror was a "clash of civilizations" (29).

Through a variety of narrative strategies, many post-9/11 children's texts tend to downplay details about the attacks. For example, in "Retelling 9/11: How Picture Books Re-Envision National Crises," Paula T. Connolly argues that Andrea Patel's *On That Day: A Book of Hope for Children* "ignores political context and positions the young reader as a symbol of redemptive innocence and an outlandishly powerful Romantic Child who can repair the world and ultimately end terrorism" (290–91). Another narrative technique Connolly finds in post-9/11 texts for young

people is juxtaposing 9/11 with an event of the past in order to "shift attention away from the more-present crisis by placing it within a longer chronological context" (291). She reads Mary Pope Osborne's *New York's Bravest*, based on the nineteenth-century firefighter Mose Humphreys, within this context, as well as Mordicai Gerstein's *The Man Who Walked between the Towers*. In our reading, Gerstein's text can usefully be read as employing all the strategies described above, perhaps most notably the use of the figure of the Romantic Child: *The Man Who Walked between the Towers* avoids any mention of the attacks, stating on the penultimate page only that "[n]ow the towers are gone." The picture book instead focuses on the true story of a past event: on 7 August 1974, twenty-five-year-old street performer Philippe Petit walked, danced, and performed tricks on a tightrope he strung between the twin towers. Not only does Philippe become a performer for children—his sentence for what is an illegal act is to put on a show in a vaguely named "park" for the children of a vaguely named "city"—but the book constructs him as a child repeatedly by associating him both textually and especially visually with play, youthful enthusiasm, and the adolescent body. Ultimately, in Gerstein's version of the story, Philippe becomes a boy visionary who is frequently pictured looking away from the reader toward the horizon and whose inspired and inspiring performance will stand many years later as a powerful

commemoration of the now absent twin towers. Seeing what Philippe sees, the child reader is positioned as the Romantic Child who may now imaginatively recreate a simpler, innocent time before the terror attacks whenever he or she looks toward the horizon where the towers once stood: “But in memory, as if imprinted in the sky, the towers are still there.”

Other texts, such as Marvel’s post-9/11 graphic, “reality-based stories,” collected in two volumes under the title *The Call of Duty*, do not detract from some of the specificities of 9/11 nor allow the event to be swallowed by the past; the stories do, however, encourage readers to identify narrowly with public service workers—the “true” heroes in a post-9/11 world. Don Brown’s recently published picture book *America Is under Attack* likewise places considerable emphasis on the firefighters and policemen, not to mention the “ordinary” citizens, who risked their lives to save those of others. Brown’s book hardly shies away from the violence of the attacks, featuring as it does illustrations that show the first plane approaching then “slamming into” the North Tower. This first scene and others throughout the book nevertheless represent the event as viewed from the perspective of rescue workers and other heroic individuals on the ground or in the air. In this way the graphically depicted scenes of violence invite young readers not only to bear witness to 9/11, but also to identify with its heroes. The unprecedented death and destruction wrought by

the first, second, third, and fourth planes, moreover, is explicitly brought home near the end of the book: “In 102 minutes hijackers had destroyed the World Trade Center, crippled the Pentagon, and doomed four jet liners. 2,973 people were dead, more than the number of Americans killed at Pearl Harbor or D-Day. It was the largest loss of life on American soil as a result of a hostile attack.” As with many other books about 9/11 that target a young readership, Brown’s book explicates the susceptibility of the United States to terrorism and therefore the need for ordinary citizens to become extraordinary—or “true”—heroes. As Connolly stresses in her article, the privileging of personal identity and agency that can be seen in a number of post-9/11 texts for young people contributes to the development of “a fictionalized hegemony that is inaccurate to the actuality of many children’s lives” (290). Today this fictionalized hegemony tends to take the form of narratives that describe a world now haunted by the spectre of terror and in which young people apparently need to cultivate their own agency. Children’s literature scholar Kristine Miller remarks on the “proliferation of fantastic and magical children’s literature” produced since 9/11, arguing that, in “this uncertain and fearful climate, young readers need and seek a protected imaginative space within which to build personal identity, a magical space where characters can transform the anonymity of terror into the sense of a heroic self” (282). While we doubt that



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the needs and desires of young readers can be pinned down so easily, Miller's point that post-9/11 texts for young people stress individual empowerment—at the expense of encouraging them to work toward positive social change—is well taken.

Ellen Hopkins's *Impulse*, a novel in verse marketed to young adults, provides one example of a post-9/11 text that points to the need for social change as opposed to individual acts of heroism. Although it does not focus on 9/11, the young protagonists it features launch cogent critiques of post-9/11 politics when asked by their teacher, Mr. Hidalgo, to write an essay on the Patriot Act. Tony, Vanessa, and Connor, three traumatized teens who connect with one another in the confines of a treatment centre, remain critical of laws such as the Patriot Act that have been created in response to 9/11 and that, in their view, further marginalize already marginalized people in the United States. Tony questions the culture of fear and voyeurism that has developed since the attacks, while Vanessa, the daughter of a patriot who would “send every/ ‘damn towelhead’ / back to where they came from, / with a stop at Guantanamo / for a little debriefing” (233), wonders who will get to decide which identities pose the greatest threat in a post-9/11 world order. Both Tony's and Vanessa's critiques of the Patriot Act arise from and are inextricably connected to their unique past experiences: Tony has a history of childhood sexual abuse, his violent response to which landed him in a juvenile detention centre for six years, and Vanessa began self-mutilating after her mother's suicide, for which she feels responsible. The trauma they have undergone has led to their being committed to a psychiatric hospital ironically named “Aspen Springs.” It is Connor, however, an extremely privileged young man

incarcerated with them, who most explicitly articulates the connection between his, Tony's, and Vanessa's situations and the larger inequities that have resulted from the instantiation of the Patriot Act in the wake of 9/11. His challenge to Mr. Hidalgo targets the social injustices linking institutionalized teens to those who are arrested and detained merely on the suspicion that they might be "terrorists": "Excuse me, sir, but can / you tell us, please, how / the Patriot Act affects / the rights of minors? / I mean, we were basically / locked up here without / a hint of 'due process.' / How is that any different than treading all over / the due process of / a so-called adult?" (220). Connor's emphasis on the "so-called adult" highlights the arbitrariness of the boundary erected between children and adults and suggests that such boundaries also structure relations between America and its internal "others." "[T]rue freedom," he concludes, "comes without the protection / of laws that also enslave us / by defining us—female, / male; Christian, Islamic; / good, evil" (226). Rather than encouraging young readers to reconstruct their personal identities in relation to 9/11's "true heroes," Hopkins's novel invites them to be critical of the ways in which racial, ethnic, and cultural categories, as well as the laws that uphold them, weaken the democracy that the United States proclaims to exemplify.

In this issue of *Jeunesse*, contributors explore a variety of fictional spaces, all of them impacted by cultural, social, and political discourses that differ

in the agency they offer to or withhold from young people. Debra Dudek's article, "Disturbing Thoughts: Representations of Compassion in Two Picture Books Entitled *The Island*," engages discourses of nationalism in Australia in its discussion of two picture books, both uncannily titled *The Island*, that juxtapose the compassionate actions of one individual and the xenophobia of a larger community determined to erase any and all manifestations of difference. In contrast to many post-9/11 picture books for children, the post-9/11 treatments of social injustice of Armin Greder, John Hefferman, and illustrator Peter Sheehan suggest that individual empowerment should be accompanied by a desire to act ethically in a world striated by uneven relations of power. Dudek places the books within a larger political context, suggesting that they draw attention, however indirectly, to the plight of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers on an island that many persist in viewing as isolated, insulated, and exotic.

In "Childhood, Identity Politics, and Linguistic Negotiation in the Traditional Chinese Translation of the Picture Book *The Gruffalo* in Taiwan," Chen-Wei Yu turns to a text published in 1999 to reflect on the dynamics of translation across linguistic and cultural borders. Rather than read the persistence of Western elements in the traditional Chinese translation of Julia Donaldson's and Axel Scheffler's *The Gruffalo* as being irreconcilable with Eastern values, Yu suggests that these

elements point to the inescapability of cultural hybridity while also serving to promote a desired identity formation in contemporary Taiwanese society. The fact that Donaldson's and Schaeffer's text is a retelling of an Eastern folktale only further enhances the sense that *The Gruffalo* has travelled far and frequently across a number of borders, including those that separate the oral and the written on the one hand, and East and West on the other. Yu positions the text in relation to overlapping histories of colonialism in Taiwan, arguing that *The Gruffalo* in its translated form exemplifies linguistic negotiation between two languages and two sets of competing cultural values.

In "Henri Beaulac et la modernisation de l'illustration pour la jeunesse au Québec," Stéphanie Danaux explores the power of illustrations to disrupt the common ground of Québécois fiction for children in the 1930s. As a tool of moral, religious, and nationalist instruction, such fiction tended merely to reproduce the dominant ideologies that circulated at that time. Illustrations by Henri Beaulac initiate a modern vision of children's literature, for which the linocuts used in *La vie gracieuse de Catherine Tekakwitha* in 1934 are particularly emblematic. In their technical, stylistic, and iconographic aspects, the four sets of illustrations Danaux examines suggest new ways of reading a body of literature that aimed to inculcate morality and patriotism in young people.

Meghan M. Sweeney's work in "'Where Happily Ever

After Happens Every Day': Disney's Official Princess Website and the Commodification of Play" shifts attention to the power of an international corporation, Disney, to shape the lives of consumers locally and globally. Negotiating the critical and theoretical boundaries of approaches to young people's agency in relation to cultural media texts—between young people being positioned as passive receivers of culture on one side, to their being understood as having multiple opportunities to be active and even resistant producers on the other—Sweeney argues that, in the final analysis, Disney's official Princess website severely curtails the interactivity of its users. A site with a dual implied audience of young children (primarily girls) and their parents (primarily mothers), the Princess website is one of Disney's heavy-handed attempts to track online habits and to shape consumers, which in this case means creating a profitable vision of girlhood that restricts agency to the choice between "pink and purple, purse and bouquet."

Entitled "Theorizing Young People," the Forum pieces in this issue explore new ways of talking about young people that resist the well-worn constructions of "the child" and childhood that have been so effectively deconstructed over several decades of theoretical work in the field. In their introduction to the Forum, Mavis Reimer and Charlie Peters provide an overview of some of those major deconstructions, particularly how they relate to the notion of children as innocent and to



linear models of child development. In “Picturing Her: Seeing Again and Again,” Loren Lerner explores the importance of conscientious, detailed observation to mitigate the effects of hegemonic assumptions about young people. Nat Hurley’s essay “The Perversions of Children’s Literature” considers what it might mean to read “perversely”—that is, against the grain of dominant ideologies about young people and the texts designed for them. Claudia Ruitenberg’s “Hospitality and Subjectification: On Seeing Children and Youth as Respondents” draws on Jacques Derrida’s theory of hospitality to offer a new possibility for conceptualizing schooling. The reviews included in this issue focus on print and film texts that engage genre conventions, as in the case of the Western fiction reviewed by Perry

Nodelman or the science fiction reviewed by Jonathan Ball, or which encourage cross-cultural identification, as in Julie Cairnie’s review of books that encourage young female readers in Canada to identify with girls in Africa.

Rather than waxing nostalgic about “what we have in common,” this issue of *Jeunesse* might be said to reflect on what might not be common ten years after 9/11. Without discarding entirely the potentialities of the common, conceived of variously in terms of shared affect, texts, or theories, many of the articles collected here explore the potentialities of that which refuses to stay in place, whether this be in the form of cultural values that trail behind words as they travel across the Atlantic or in the form of texts that challenge oppressive discourses of nationalism or globalism.

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