

Editorial:
Sex and Sensibility



Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'
William Wordsworth

Surely one of the most arresting discoveries one makes in digging into the past is that children haven't always been such Innocents, trailing clouds of glory from Heaven, and only tumbling into sex and rebellion at fifteen. Reading the seventeenth-century records of Louis XIII's physician, for instance, reveals that the childhood of the young dauphin was closer to *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* than *The Velveteen Rabbit*. As soon as Louis XIII could talk, he was given the facts of life; as soon as he could walk, he took part in adult ballets, appearing, even, as a naked Cupid. At five, he attended a farce about adultery which he enjoyed enormously; by seven he was a regular theatre-goer who was also an aspiring hunter and an accomplished gambler. Most surprising of all is what Philippe Ariès notes so often about Medieval and Renaissance children: they were not shielded from the sexual practices of adults. Not only was the dauphin a fan of the "blue" stories the courtiers of all ages told in his midst, but also he seems unfazed by the keen amusement his own sexual play with his sister (placed naked in the King's bed) evokes from a courtly audience, including Henry IV.

Such revels do, however, come to an end. In the case of the dauphin, they ended at age seven when his "infancy" was officially over and his sexuality thereafter curbed. In the case of many girls, especially less-privileged ones, any and all revels often end in their early teens when their childhood, as this seventeenth-century street ballad reveals, ends in motherhood:

When once I felt my belly swell
no longer might I abide;
My mother put me out of doores,
and bang' d me backe and side.

Ironically, being "out of doores," would, to subsequent generations of poets

(especially the Romantics), bespeak the child's organic union with Nature, her innocent, asexual, pure and harmless merging with God's earth; it would not be the sign of sexual shame it is for the "young lass" of the ballad.

Of course, children are not the picture of Wordsworthian Innocents *now* any more than they were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but we still cling to the comfort of binary oppositions that relegate the child to the space of purity and darling incapacity, while we claim, somewhat begrudgingly, ownership of experience, competence, power and — yes — sexuality. Children, we tell ourselves (blissfully ignoring Freud), are free of sexual feeling and response; and the longer they stay that way the better. But, better for whom? Jacqueline Rose and James R. Kincaid, both critics of children's literature, argue that the construction of children as asexual is necessary to the psychic and cultural life of the *adult*: it functions to completely deny what Rose identifies as "frightening" — a child's sexuality — and to help sustain a nostalgia for a world, like *The Wind in the Willows*, "free of problems, clear of the clash of sex."

This special issue of *CCL* will not encourage nostalgia for any such lost idyll; it will, however, encourage debate as new and important voices interpret the contours of a vast and neglected terrain: young adult sexual experience. We begin with Charles Montpetit and his wonderfully witty article on the publication history of *The First Time*, a history that hints that English Canada may be more nostalgic about that Eden of childhood than French Canada — or perhaps just more embarrassed about sex (doesn't inquiry into young people's sex lives seem prurient?) or more fearful that giving young adults stories about first-time sexual experiences will ineluctably lead to the fate of the lass in the ballad: *swollen belly, ruined life*. We offer, in the review section, four viewpoints on the success of Montpetit's controversial anthology.

The other articles in this issue all ask us to re-evaluate how we view sex — not just whether or not we think children and young adults should be exposed to writing about it, but also how we construct, for instance, homosexuality (Perry Nodelman's "Bad Boys and Binaries"), *female desire* (Anna Altmann's "Desire and Punishment"), and the way in which our constructions of these things can be taught in the classroom (Meredith Cherland's "A Postmodern Argument Against Censorship"). For those who take Cherland's message to heart, we offer Lynne McKechnie's useful bibliography of titles to explore. For those who want "Just the facts, please," Aniko Varpalotai will show you what you might, or might not, learn in three new books about body changes.

But this issue is, finally, not so much about the body as it is about the mind. And what goes on in the mind is sometimes more tantalizing, more disturbing and more touching than what goes on behind closed doors (when the clouds of glory have gone for the night and so have your parents).

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