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Jacqueline Wilson
edited by Lucy Pearson

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Over the last twenty years, Jacqueline Wilson has published well over 100 titles and has become firmly established in the landscape of children's literature. She has written for all ages, and tackles a wide variety of controversial topics. Although she has received some criticism for presenting difficult and seemingly 'adult' topics to children, she remains overwhelmingly popular among her audience.

This collection of newly commissioned essays explores Wilson's literature from all angles. The essays cover not only the content and themes of Wilson's writing, but also her success as a publishing phenomenon and the branding of her books. Issues of gender roles and child/carer relationships are examined alongside Wilson's writing style and use of techniques such as the unreliable narrator. The book also features an interview with Jacqueline Wilson herself, where she discusses the challenges of writing social realism for young readers and how her writing has changed over her lengthy career.

Lucy Pearson is Lecturer in Children's Literature and leader of the Children's Literature Unit at Newcastle University, UK.

This latest series of *New Casebooks* consists of brand new critical essays specially commissioned to provide students with fresh thinking about key texts and writers. Like the original series, the volumes embrace a range of approaches designed to illuminate the rich interchange between critical theory and critical practice.

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Jacqueline Wilson

Edited by

LUCY PEARSON

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Series Editor's Preface

Welcome to the latest series of New Casebooks.

Each volume now presents brand-new essays specially written for university and other students. Like the original series, the new-look New Casebooks embrace a range of recent critical approaches to the debates and issues that characterise the current discussion of literature.

Each editor has been asked to commission a sequence of original essays which will introduce the reader to the innovative critical approaches to the text or texts being discussed in the collection. The intention is to illuminate the rich interchange between critical theory and critical practice that today underpins so much writing about literature.

Editors have also been asked to supply an introduction to each volume that sets the scene for the essays that follow, together with a list of further reading which will enable readers to follow up issues raised by the essays in the collection.

The purpose of this new-look series, then, is to provide students with fresh thinking about key texts and writers while encouraging them to extend their own ideas and responses to the texts they are studying.

Martin Coyle

Notes on Contributors

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Julia Eccleshare is children's books editor of the *Guardian* and a writer, broadcaster and lecturer. She is chair of the Guardian Children's Book Prize and founder/chair of the Branford Boase first novel prize. She has judged numerous other prizes including the Booktrust Teenage Prize and the Whitbread Children's Book Prize. She won the Eleanor Farjeon Award 2000 in recognition of her outstanding contribution to children's books and in 2014 was appointed MBE for services to children's literature and awarded an honorary DLitt for her contribution to children's literature by the University of Worcester. In addition to numerous anthologies her books include *Treasure Islands: The Woman's Hour Guide to Children's Reading* (BBC Books, 1987), *A Guide to the Harry Potter Novels* (Continuum, 2002), *Beatrix Potter to Harry Potter: Portraits of Children's Writers* (National Portrait Gallery,

2002), *The Rough Guide to Picture Books* (Rough Guides, 2007) and, with Nicholas Tucker, *The Rough Guide to Teenage Books* (Rough Guides, October 2002). She is the editor of *1001 Children's Books to Read Before you Grow up* (Cassells, 2009). She is a founder member of the steering committee for the Children's Laureate, and a trustee of Reading is Fundamental, Listening Books and the Poetry Book Society.

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With thanks to Jacqueline for her generosity and time.

Introduction

Lucy Pearson

Jacqueline Wilson has formed an important part of the British children's literature landscape in the last 20 years. She has published well over 100 titles, ranging from picture books for very young readers (*Ricky's Birthday* 1973; *Lizzie Zipmouth*, 2000) to challenging young adult fiction (*The Dream Palace*, 1991; *Love Lessons*, 2005). Although best known as a writer of social realism (most notably *The Story of Tracy Beaker*, 1991 and its sequels), she has also written fantasy (*Glubbslyme*, 1987; *Four Children and It*, 2012) and historical fiction (*Hetty Feather*, 2011; *Queenie*, 2013). Since 1997, Wilson has occupied a place among the top 20 children's authors borrowed from public libraries, and in 2002 she ousted Catherine Cookson from the top spot of most-borrowed author across both adults' and children's books.[1] Wilson's books regularly top the bestseller lists – she had the fourth highest UK sales in the first decade of the millennium – and a 2005 survey of children's reading habits identified Wilson as one of the top three favourite authors (alongside J. K. Rowling and Roald Dahl).[2] This is reflected in Wilson's regular appearance on the shortlists of awards chosen by child readers themselves: her awards include the Red House Children's Book Award (1996), the Smarties Prize (1995, 2000) and the Blue Peter People's Choice Award (2002). Her popularity with child readers has given her superstar status: in 2004 she was nominated for a Guinness world record after a mammoth eight-hour book signing which attracted more than 8,000 fans.[3] Several adaptations have further raised her profile: the BBC adaptation of *The Story of Tracy Beaker* ran for five seasons (2002–2006), and it was followed by two 'spin-off' series, *Tracy Beaker Returns* (2010–2012) and *The Dumping Ground* (2013–). *Hetty Feather* has also been adapted for the BBC (2015), and is the most high profile of several stage adaptations of Wilson's books: the spectacular production by Novel Theatre debuted at the Rose Theatre, London, in 2014 before going on to the West End later that year. Wilson's significance as a children's writer has also received more formal recognition: she was made Children's Laureate in 2005, awarded an OBE in 2002 and in 2008 was made Dame Jacqueline Wilson. In 2011, her work was recognised

in 'Daydreams and Diaries', a major exhibition at Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books. The exhibition attracted over 65,000 visitors at the Centre's home in Newcastle and was visited by a further 364,837 people when it toured the rest of the country, making it Seven Stories' most-visited exhibition to date.

To the casual observer, Wilson might appear an almost overnight success, springing onto the children's literature scene in 1991 with *The Story of Tracy Beaker*. Certainly her rise following *Tracy*'s debut was meteoric: within five years Wilson's name was a familiar sight on award lists as well as on the public libraries lists of most-borrowed books.[4] *Double Act* (1995) won both the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize (ages 9–11 years and overall) and the Red House Children's Book Award, and was highly commended for the Carnegie Medal. In fact, this success was a long time in the making: Wilson's first book for children appeared in 1973, almost 20 years prior to *Tracy Beaker*, and her career as a professional writer predates this by almost a decade. Her writing career thus spans a period of significant change in British children's literature, beginning in the midst of the so-called second golden age of children's literature in the 1960s, spanning the 'difficult' years of the late 1970s and 1980s (when recession and changing market conditions posed new challenges for children's publishing) and coming to fruition at the dawn of a new period of vibrancy in British children's literature. A critical evaluation of Wilson's work therefore offers the opportunity to understand not only her individual contribution to the world of children's literature – which is significant – but also the development of children's books in Britain as a whole. Curiously, however, children's literature scholarship has lagged behind in recognising Wilson's significance: with the exception of a few short chapters and articles, scholarly material on Wilson is confined to brief discussions in more wide-ranging texts.[5] This volume begins the work of evaluating Wilson's contribution to children's literature in more detail.

Becoming Wilson

Jacqueline Wilson is indelibly associated with one of Britain's most successful teenage magazines, D. C. Thompson's *Jackie*. Although the often-repeated claim that she was the inspiration for the magazine's title is inaccurate, the relationship between the two is significant. Wilson's professional writing career began after she submitted an article to D. C. Thompson in response to an advertisement seeking material for their new teenage magazine. Several more articles

followed, and shortly thereafter Wilson accepted a staff job with D. C. Thompson. It was an auspicious moment to become involved with the company: *Jackie* magazine was at the forefront of a new way of writing for young people, offering a connection with the concerns of teenagers in a way that was largely absent from the children's books of the period. When it launched in 1964, it included fashion tips, pin-ups of Elvis Presley and The Beatles and an article on 'The Art of Being Kissable'. By contrast, the 1964 list of Puffin's Peacock Books – the first British imprint specifically for teenagers – included Rosemary Sutcliff's historical novel *The Rider of the White Horse*, L. M. Montgomery's classic *Anne of Green Gables* and Geoffrey Household's 1939 spy thriller *Rogue Male*. While Wilson chafed at the house style of the magazine – she recollects that she 'had a very different approach to being a teenager […] and tended to poke fun at things' – magazine publishing offered an alternative to the kind of fiction Wilson had encountered during her own childhood, which 'just didn't seem to reflect life the way I knew it'.[6] As a staff writer for D. C. Thompson she had the opportunity to write about issues which were just beginning to emerge in fiction for teenagers, not only in articles for *Jackie* – where the realism was constrained by the desire to 'nurture [readers'] romantic dreams' – but also on the women's magazine *Red Letter*, where Wilson answered readers' letters and produced articles on pregnancy and babies. This early experience in writing about real-life issues which lay well outside her own personal experience was a good preparation for Wilson's later work, which would see her engaging imaginatively with issues such as the lives of looked-after children.

D. C. Thompson's decision to offer Wilson a staff position reflected their interest in finding new voices which would appeal to the new market they were trying to reach. However, it almost certainly also owed much to the fact that Wilson had quickly shown she would be able to meet the demands of magazine publishing, following her initial article with a series of others in order to show, as she put it, 'that I wasn't a one-trick wonder'.[7] During her time with the magazine she not only produced a steady stream of writing for immediate publication, but also worked on developing her own voice. Although her writing was a good fit for D. C. Thompson's publications, this work was a means to an end: she recollects, 'I wrote endless short stories not only in my teens but in my twenties and thirties for magazines simply to make money whilst I was actually writing proper books as well.'[8] In 1972 her first 'proper book' was published: *Hide and Seek* appeared on Macmillan's crime list. Although it was not a novel for children, it was centred on child characters, as were the four adult

novels which followed. Shortly after *Hide and Seek* Wilson's first book for children was published: *Ricky's Birthday* appeared in Macmillan Education's *Nippers* series in 1973.[9] These two early books represent two types of writing which were to come together in Wilson's later work: *Hide and Seek*, which deals with the kidnapping of two little girls, shows Wilson's ability to deal with difficult topics sympathetically. *Ricky's Birthday*, a 32-page picture book for beginner readers, steers clear of difficult issues but combines humour and understanding of the child's experience of the world with a realistic portrayal of a working-class family.

Although Macmillan had published both *Ricky's Birthday* and her early crime novels, they declined her first efforts for teenagers. These eventually found a home with Oxford University Press (OUP). Wilson has suggested that the subject matter of *Nobody's Perfect* (1982) struck a chord with OUP editor Ron Heapy, but OUP's acceptance of the novel also indicates that Wilson's years of writing had paid off. Writing for magazines, she had been conscious that 'it was no use putting in long passages of description or trying to use metaphors or similes, or striving to give my writing a little bit of sparkle or originality or humour'.[10] By contrast, OUP positioned themselves on the literary side of the market and offered more scope for the kind of writing Wilson had been working to develop. Wilson's reputation as a leading writer of social realism for children often leads to a focus on her subject matter rather than her style, but her writing is also complex and at times highly literary. Her move into writing for young people attracted immediate recognition: *Nobody's Perfect* was a runner-up for the 1982 Young Observer / Rank Organisation Fiction Prize. Although it was ultimately judged 'too slight', its appearance on a shortlist which included Jan Mark's challenging work of science fiction *Aquarius* and Aidan Chambers's complex postmodern novel *Dance on My Grave* (1982) indicates the success of Wilson's shift into a more literary genre.[11]

OUP offered Wilson the space to extend her literary style, but her breakthrough into novel writing also enabled her to begin developing the social realism with which she has become so closely associated. Writing for D. C. Thompson, she had been constrained by the need to offer romantic fantasies, but at OUP there was room for her to take a more unflinching approach to topics such as teenage pregnancy (*Amber*, 1986), suicide (*Falling Apart*, 1989) and drug use (*The Dream Palace*, 1991). This willingness to tackle difficult issues was to become a hallmark of Wilson's fiction: her novels for younger readers have addressed a range of challenging topics.

Humour had been a feature of Wilson's books from the beginning, but the OUP novels were relatively serious in tone. By the late 1980s, however, she was beginning to develop the style which would allow her to write so successfully for younger readers. Her *Stevie Day* series (*Stevie Day: Super Sleuth*, 1987; *Stevie Day: Lonely Hearts*, 1987; *Stevie Day: Vampire*, 1988; and *Stevie Day: Rat Race*, 1988) shows some of the stylistic characteristics which would reappear in Wilson's later work, notably in the use of a first-person narrator with a tendency for exaggeration. The jackets of the *Stevie Day* books also included a questionnaire purportedly filled out by Stevie, giving name, sex, age and details of family; a device which Wilson would deploy to much greater effect in *The Story of Tracy Beaker*. These books, which have a more light-hearted tone than Wilson's work for older teenagers, were published not by OUP but by Collins Armada, a paperback series which aimed at the more popular end of the market (Enid Blyton was one of Armada's key authors). *Books for Keeps*' review of the first two titles characterises them as 'Harmless escapism for the younger reader with more quality in the writing than one normally expects from this genre'.[12] Even in these books, it is clear that Wilson was interested in more than harmless escapism: *Stevie Day: Vampire*, for example, tackles both heroin addiction and badger baiting. However, she had not yet achieved a perfect balance between humour and a more thoughtful approach, and both themes are the fodder for an exciting adventure rather than part of a deeply felt experience for Stevie.

Wilson's appearance on the more popular Armada list reflects a shift in her sense of the kind of writing she was producing. An article in *Books for Keeps* commenting on *Nobody's Perfect* had expressed a wish 'for writers and editors who recognise that those reading books at this level will not, by and large, react when reference is made to Spare Rib, Laura Ashley, Durer, the Brontes etc. etc'.[13] In her early books for teenagers Wilson was not seeking to attract teenagers 'at large'; she 'deliberately aimed at the odd ones out, the quirky and imaginative and awkward' and – by default – at the kind of 'literary' reader who *would* react to references to feminist magazine *Spare Rib* and the Brontës.[14] Writing for this kind of reader allowed scope for the kind of literary writing she had not been able to produce when writing for magazines. By the late 80s, though, her position as a writer for young people was well established and she was beginning to receive invitations to speak at schools, where she encountered many children who were decidedly *not* 'literary' and 'started to think it might be good to try to interest the sort of kids who said they thought reading boring'.[15] At the same time, children's publishing was shifting, and

the distinction between the 'literary' and the popular was becoming less pronounced. It was with a new publisher – Transworld – that she would combine elements of her earlier work to produce a style of writing which appealed to a much wider range of readers.

Beaker and beyond

Wilson's 'breakthrough book', *The Story of Tracy Beaker*, appeared just three years after *Stevie Day: Vampire*, but unlike the earlier novel it displays all the richness of Wilson's long apprenticeship. It is notable that the book appeared on a new list edited by David Fickling, who had worked on some of Wilson's OUP novels and suggested that she might like to try writing for a younger audience. Fickling's approach to children's publishing embraces the blend of the literary and the popular which had characterised Jacqueline Wilson's career up until that point. He 'discovered' Philip Pullman while working at OUP and was to go on to publish literary and demanding books under his own imprint David Fickling Books (now an independent publishing house). At the same time he is keenly aware of the need for children's books to compete with other popular media, pointing out that 'Books stand cheek by jowl with computers, computer games and music. Children watch "Pop Idol", E4 and the Cartoon Network as well as reading our books.'[16] This eclectic approach to children's books made Fickling receptive to Wilson's suggestion that she should write a different sort of book which would include plenty of illustrations to break up the text and attract more reluctant readers. Fickling suggested that Nick Sharratt might be a suitable illustrator, launching a partnership which has endured through the 25 years since.

Nick Sharratt's illustrations certainly made Wilson's text more eye-catching and appealing; combined with her innovative use of a diary style they also enabled a new shift in her writing style. The *Stevie Day* books had been light-hearted and humorous, but had lacked the emotional depth of her work for teenagers. In *Tracy Beaker*, Wilson uses Tracy's first-person narrative to balance these two elements. As a child in foster care, Tracy is completing her 'book about me' as a means of recording important information about herself. It therefore functions simultaneously as a personal, private record of her identity and a potential source of information for future carers. This allows for an intimate narrative that nevertheless withholds some important details and emotions. Tracy is always aware of her potential reader, and while she is keen to express her criticisms of the care system she is also concerned with putting on a brave face. Thus the reader is asked

to infer many of the more potentially disturbing aspects of the narrative: while it is clear that Tracy's mother has essentially abandoned her, for example, this is partially masked by Tracy's creative excuses for her mother's absence and her insistence that she will eventually be reclaimed. Nick Sharratt's illustrations sometimes work to expose the gap between Tracy's version of events and the reality, but also add humour to the text, leavening the more serious themes. The result was favourably received: a review in the *Guardian* described it as 'an appealing mix of events and reactions that are both entertaining and moving. A book that lingers in the mind long after it is put down', and the book was highly commended for the Carnegie Medal.[17]

Wilson had found her voice with *Tracy Beaker*, and her subsequent works employed many of the same strategies to similar effect. She has often used the collaboration with Nick Sharratt to support more demanding literary strategies or to soften the impact of challenging or upsetting material. In *Double Act*, which was highly commended for the Carnegie Medal and won both the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize and the Red House Children's Book Award, Wilson's doubled narrative, which alternates between the voices of her twin protagonists, is visually represented by the use of separate illustrators: Ruby and Garnett are drawn by Nick Sharratt and Sue Heap respectively, underlining the fact that they are 'similar but different'. In *The Illustrated Mum*, the style of Sharratt's drawings encourages the child reader to view the eponymous character's tattoos as appealing rather than threatening or weird. Sharratt's illustrations thus help Wilson to avoid some of the constraints which might otherwise be associated with writing for 8–12-year-olds.

Jacqueline Wilson's most notable contribution has been to literature for 'middle-grade' readers: although her post-*Tracy Beaker* works range from books for children as young as five (*The Dinosaur's Packed Lunch*, 1995; *The Monster Story Teller*, 1997) through to novels for the early teens (the *Girls* trilogy, 1998, 1999, 2002; *Love Lessons*, 2005), she has never returned to writing for older teenagers, and the vast majority of her work has been for the 8–12 category. Within this category, she has pioneered a distinctive form of social realism. Part of the broad appeal of Wilson's fiction lies in her avoidance of the middle-class settings which used to dominate children's books. Her novels consistently feature children from working-class and sometimes deprived backgrounds, and often draw a contrast between their lives and those of more affluent children. In *Secrets* (2002), for example, Treasure lives on a 'vast tower-block council estate', 'very big, very bleak and very tough', while India lives on a 'luxury complex', but both girls have

problematic families.[18] Similarly, in *Diamond Girls* (2004) Dixie lives on the deprived Planet Estate and her family rely on benefits, but although her family is chaotic, it is middle-class Mary who is revealed to be suffering from abuse. Wilson consistently shows that families who live on benefits, feed their children junk food and are regarded by more affluent people as 'feckless single mums on drugs and gangs of drop-outs' are just as loving as middle-class families, and she writes about the experiences of working-class children from the perspective of an insider.[19] Within this setting she is willing to tackle challenging issues: the balance between humour and seriousness which she established in *Tracy Beaker* has enabled her to write about a range of difficult topics, including the experiences of looked-after children (*Dustbin Baby*, 2001, as well as the *Tracy Beaker* novels), unstable accommodation (*The Bed and Breakfast Star*, 1994), mental illness (*The Illustrated Mum*, 1999), bereavement (*Vicky Angel*, 2000) and domestic violence (*Lola Rose*, 2003).

By writing realistically about such topics, Wilson has sometimes provoked discomfort: when interviewed, she often comments on the wariness she has encountered from parents about the content matter of her books.[20] A *Daily Mail* article from 2008 exemplifies the kinds of criticism Wilson has attracted: Winifred Robinson complains that 'the form Wilson pioneers […] accounts for a good deal of the tension in otherwise stable middle-class homes' and 'opens the door to experiences from which [children] should be protected for as long as possible'.[21] Given her prominence in the children's market, however, it is striking how *little* controversy she has engendered: it is difficult to find extant news articles which criticise her approach. Even the *Daily Mail* has frequently praised Wilson for her handling of difficult issues: *Bad Girls*, which features bullying, shoplifting and foster care, was reviewed as 'a clear and sensitive book about very common problems', and *The Illustrated Mum* was recommended as the best of the 2000 Carnegie shortlist.[22] This reflects the striking achievement of Wilson's post-*Tracy Beaker* writing, which introduces a note of optimism which is less prominent in the earlier teenage novels. As a young fan responding to Winifred Robinson's criticisms in the *Daily Mail* pointed out, 'Her bestselling books aren't particularly graphic, or malign; they introduce children to such issues in a subtle way.'[23] This subtle and sympathetic handling of difficult issues has enabled Wilson to establish a special connection with young readers. As she has wryly commented, 'I never set out to be an agony aunt but I seem somehow to have become one. I get hundreds of letters and emails from children telling me about their problems.'[24] The fact that even today

Wilson answers many such letters personally illustrates another reason for her popularity.

Given her prominence in the British market, it is no surprise that Wilson has also made her mark internationally. Her books have been translated into over 30 languages, including Chinese, French, German, Hungarian and Japanese. She has been well received in Australia, where one of her early teenage novels, *Falling Apart*, was recently brought back into print (none of these novels are currently in print in the UK). It is striking, however, that although Wilson has been well reviewed in the USA, she has not attracted the level of acclaim she has enjoyed in the UK. Whereas British fantasy has thrived in the US, spurred along by the Harry Potter phenomenon, realistic fiction has always been slower to cross the Atlantic. The relatively limited recognition of Wilson's books in the US can perhaps also be partially accounted for by the much weaker branding of the US editions: many of the earlier US editions were rejacketed with new cover illustrations, setting a different (and usually more serious) tone and disrupting the strong recognition factor which has aided Wilson in the UK market.[25] The revisions made to the US edition of *The Bed and Breakfast Star*, which was retitled *Elsa, Star of the Shelter!* and equipped with humorous footnotes explaining some of the British details, also indicate the possible cultural barriers in place for American readers. Wilson's very distinctiveness and nuanced depiction of the lives of British children may be less appealing to American readers with access to a wide range of home-grown social realism.

In recent years Jacqueline Wilson has moved away from contemporary social realism into historical fiction. Her first historical novel, *Hetty Feather* (2010), arose out of her time as Coram Fellow with the Foundling Hospital and follows the life of a Victorian foundling. Three more novels about Hetty followed: *Sapphire Battersea* (2011), *Emerald Star* (2012) and *Diamond* (2013) (told from the point of view of another character).[26] Wilson has also explored the Edwardian period in *Four Children and It* (2012) and *Opal Plumstead* (2014), and has tackled more recent history in *Queenie* (2013), which is set at the time of Queen Elizabeth's coronation. These novels feature many of the elements which have made Wilson's contemporary work so popular, including strong and characterful heroines and challenging social themes, but the historical context has allowed Wilson scope to develop her style in new directions. It is this versatility which has enabled Wilson to maintain her freshness and success after over 100 novels. Perhaps the move away from contemporary social realism will also open up new markets: *Katy*, her 2015 adaptation of Susan

Coolidge's *What Katy Did*, seems likely to catch the attention of fans of this American classic.

The essays in this casebook

This volume examines many of the issues touched upon above. The first two chapters of the volume consider Jacqueline Wilson's early career and the way both her writing and her 'brand' have developed. Julia Eccleshare's chapter sets Wilson's books in the wider context of the children's market and shows how her talent and experience as a writer, her engagement with her child readers and a combination of publishing and marketing decisions have combined to help make Wilson the household name she is today. Ika Willis also looks back at Wilson's apprenticeship as a writer: her chapter explores the novels published by OUP in detail and shows how they laid a foundation for much of Wilson's later work. As Jacqueline Wilson herself has observed, her books take place within a world as distinctive as that of Anita Brookner or Anne Tyler; a world which 'is always going to be about misunderstood girls: shy ones, bookish ones, lonely ones, naughty ones, fierce ones'.[27] Willis shows how the OUP novels work to establish this world, not only with respect to Wilson's characters, but also in terms of her thematic concerns, settings and distinctive language.

The middle chapters of this volume consider Jacqueline Wilson's contribution as a writer of social realism, examining how her books have engaged with issues relating to gender and family, and how she has responded to the question of children's books as 'bibliotherapy'. Lucy Pearson shows how Wilson's approach to the latter issue has evolved over the course of her career, comparing her approach to fantasy and escapism in her OUP novel *The Other Side* (1984) with that in her later work *The Illustrated Mum* (1999). Pearson sets these works in the wider context of debates around fantasy and realism in children's literature, showing that Wilson's early work reflects some of the ideas about children's need for realistic fiction which were current in the 1970s and 1980s, while her later writing develops a more nuanced approach to fantasy which reflects her pioneering approach to writing social realism for younger readers.

Kay Waddilove's chapter deals with the issue which Wilson herself has identified as the one which is at the heart of her work: girlhood. The OUP novels are explicit in their exploration of gender issues: the heroine of *Nobody's Perfect* reads *Spare Rib* and reflects ruefully, 'I still wanted to be a feminist – but I wanted to look pretty too.'[28] Changes in social context and in Wilson's intended readership mean that later

books engage with feminism less directly, but Kay Waddilove's chapter on Wilson's 'feisty girls and fearful boys' shows that they continue to grapple with issues of gender. Waddilove suggests that while Wilson has created a gallery of strong female characters whose emotional, and sometimes physical, survival is contingent upon their cussedness, her books do not simply offer a reversal of gender expectations. Instead, they engage in current debates on gender and the family by offering representations of girls and boys, women and men, which transcend concepts of masculine–feminine polarities.

One gendered issue to which Jacqueline Wilson has repeatedly returned is the question of motherhood. She has created a series of heroines with absent, neglectful or simply unconventional mothers, from Sandra in *Nobody's Perfect*, whose early life included a period in care due to the mental breakdown of her single mother, through to the eponymous heroine of *Hetty Feather* (2010), abandoned by her mother at the Foundling Hospital. As the short story Wilson wrote for an anthology on mothers suggests, however, although mothers may be absent or problematic they are not dispensable: Wilson's story was titled 'No One Else Will Do'.[29] Helen Limon explores Wilson's representation of mothers and mothering, arguing that her books show both the importance and the ambivalence of the mothering role. Limon shows that Wilson's representation of 'distributed' mothering practices acknowledges that carer–child relationships are not always perfect, but also offers the possibility of a wider range of nurturant relationships which can offer 'good enough' care regardless of sex or age. While acknowledging the importance of the mothering role, Wilson shows that someone else *will* do, and that children can thrive even when offered incomplete care.

The later chapters of this volume focus more closely on Wilson's literary strategies. Her status as a literary writer is often obscured by her reputation as a writer of social realism, but her writing is playful, complex and often innovative. Her successful use of an unreliable narrator in her most famous book, *The Story of Tracy Beaker*, is indicative of the innovation Wilson has brought to writing for younger readers. Unreliable narration is a feature more commonly associated with books for young adults but, as Helen Day's chapter shows, *Tracy Beaker* successfully deploys this technique for much younger readers. Day considers *Tracy Beaker* in the context of cognitive and rhetorical approaches to unreliability, showing how Wilson's text and Nick Sharratt's illustrations work together to give Tracy's lies psychological realism and enable the child reader to engage with her unreliable narration. By contrast, the popular BBC television adaptation sacrifices

some of the complexity of Tracy's unreliable narration in favour of a clearer distinction between fantasy and realism, a choice which Day suggests offers less to the developing child audience.

Like her fellow OUP authors Jane Gardam and Geraldine McCaughrean, Jacqueline Wilson frequently employs metafictive strategies, and often writes about characters who are themselves writers or storytellers. Clémentine Beauvais looks at the recurrent motif of the double, twin, replica or döppelganger in Jacqueline Wilson's metafictional works, in particular *Double Act*, *The Lottie Project* (1997) and *Four Children and It* (2012). In these three novels, the figure of the young female writer (or writers, in the case of *Double Act*) is markedly accompanied by the shadow presence of another self very much like her own, and yet distanced from her by the creative act of writing. Beauvais's chapter offers a literary critical analysis of some of the same concerns explored in Pearson's chapter on bibliotherapy, showing how the 'doubling' of the self in the young writer allows for the opening up of a parallel world of 'illusion' and the consequent escape into a 'copy' of reality marked by 'duality'. Beauvais suggests that the preservation of narrative and psychological duality in these texts is precarious, and frequently collapses as, to put it colloquially, 'reality calls'. Only in these moments of heightened tension can we be sure that, for instance, it is Charlie who is 'writing Lottie' in *The Lottie Project*. In *Double Act*, it is when Ruby and Garnet part ways, each writing into their own notebook, that Garnet finally confirms to herself and to the reader that she can now 'write about me' and 'not about us', that she is not a creation of Ruby, despite being her double. Such lapses into unicity provide gateways for the teenage female reader to project herself outside of the innumerable, literary 'doubles' of herself which Jacqueline Wilson's books offer. By counterbalancing the comfort of having a double – an alternative self – with the unsettling realisation that this dual relationship always falls back on itself and reveals unicity, Jacqueline Wilson forbids closure. Beauvais suggests that this strategy ensures that the young reader is able to project herself into the story, but ultimately escape complete identification with the characters and their worlds.

Sheena Wilkinson also considers Wilson's use of metafictive strategies, showing how the series of historical novels which begins with *Hetty Feather* traces the coming of age of its heroine as both a young woman and a writer. Wilkinson argues that Wilson's move into historical fiction, which is heavily influenced by her own reading of Victorian novels, enables her to employ a more complex literary style and to follow her heroine from childhood to the cusp of womanhood