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INTERNATIONAL COMPANION

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ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

# Children's Literature

Edited by

PETER HUNT

International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's  
Literature

# **International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature**

*Edited by*  
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## Editor's Preface

Children's literature, as a body of oral and written texts to be described, and as a subject of study to be investigated, is the confluence of many cultures and of many disciplines.

As a result, the essays in this volume not only present a huge range of material, they also represent a wide range of critical and theoretical attitudes and approaches. Children's books are at once the business of bibliographers and historians, librarians and teachers, theorists and publishers, reviewers and prizegivers, writers, designers, illustrators and publishers—and these and others are represented here. Each discipline has its own preoccupations and its own discursive techniques: the overall blend of voices demonstrates the growing interest in and profound commitment to a multi-faceted subject worldwide.

The *Encyclopedia* moves outwards from theoretical and critical bases, through types and genres, to the production and application of these oral, visual and written texts. The final section surveys the world picture; here the emphasis and the extent of the discussion has been determined by both the strength of children's literature in the countries and regions, and also by the extent of information available. Some countries have more sophisticated information networks than others; and in response to this, the selection has been pragmatic rather than political.

I would like to thank the many contributors and non-contributors who have helped me to navigate the world of children's literature by recommending and introducing me to writers—especially my Advisory Editor, Rhonda Bunbury, who gave me the benefit of her experience as President of the International Research Society for Children's Literature.

Many thanks are also due to Nancy Chambers, Geoff Fox, Margaret Kinnell, Margaret Spencer and Jack Zipes; to the School of English at the University of Wales, Cardiff for generous support in terms of time and materials, to Dr Alfred Whit for translations from the German and to my successive editors at Routledge: Alison Barr, Michelle Darraugh, Robert Potts, and Denise Rea.

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# Introduction

*Margaret Meek*

## Acts of Definition

Encyclopedias are usually designed to assemble and to encompass, for the purposes of recognition and study, as much of what is known about a subject of interest and concern as the conditions of its production and publication allow. Children's literature is an obvious subject for this purpose. Its nature and social significance are most clearly discerned when activities associated with children and books are brought together. These activities may be as diverse as creating a book list, a publisher's catalogue, a library, an exhibition, a school's Book Week, a rare collection, a prize-giving ceremony, as well as the compilation of scholarly works of reference. Children's literature is embedded in the language of its creation and shares its social history. This volume is its first avowed encyclopedia, and thus, a representation of children's literature at a particular time.

The by-play of an encyclopedia is the view it offers of the world as reflected in its subject matter. Promoters and editors long for completeness, the last word on the topic, even when they know there is no such rounding off. Instead, there is only an inscribed event, which becomes part of the history of ideas and of language. When this moment passes for works of reference, we say the book has gone 'out of date', a description of irrelevance, calling for revision or reconstitution. But later readers continue to find in encyclopedias not simply the otherness of the past, but also the structures of values and feelings, which historians teach us to treat as evidence of the perceptions a culture has, and leaves, of itself. The appearance of this Encyclopedia in the last decade of the twentieth century, the end of a millennium and the traditional teleological judgement time, lets it become a significant mirror image of certain aspects of childhood and of a distinctive literature.

In this, as in other ways, the present volume differs from many of its predecessors. Earlier compilations of information about children's books were more heroic, written by individuals with a commitment to the subject, at the risk, in their day, of being considered quaint in their choice of reading matter. It is impossible to imagine the history of children's literature without the ground-clearing brilliance of F.J.Harvey Darton's *Children's Books in England* (1932/ 1982). But although Darton's account has a singleness of purpose and matching scholarship, it is not the whole story. There is more than diligence and systematic arrangement in John Rowe Townsend's careful

revisions of *Written for Children* (1965/1990), a text kept alert to change; it is still a starting place for many students. Over a period of forty years, Margery Fisher's contribution to this field included both a series of finely judged comments on books as they appeared, and a unique vision of why it is important to write *about* children's books, so that writing them would continue to be regarded as serious business. Better than many a contemporary critic she understood how, and why, 'we need constantly to revise and restate the standards of this supremely important branch of literature' (Fisher 1964:9). *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* (Carpenter and Prichard 1984), however, shows how acts of definition are upheld by editors and their friends. Collectors, cataloguers, bibliographers and other book persons stand behind all works of summation, including those of the single author-as-editor-and-commentator.

By virtue of its anthologising form, this volume replaces the *tour d'horizon* of the classical encyclopedia with something more characteristic of the culture of its epoch, a certain deliberate untidiness, an openness. The writers brought together here are currently at work in different parts of the field of children's literature. Encompassing all their activities, their individual histories and directions, children's literature appears not as something which requires definition in order to be recognised or to survive, but as a 'total text', in what Jerome J. McGann calls 'a network of symbolic exchanges' (1991:3), a diverse complexity of themes, rites and images. There are many voices. Each writer has an interpretative approach to a chosen segment of the grand design, so that the whole book may be unpacked by its searching readers, or dipped into by the curious or the uninitiated. Some of the writings are tentative and explorative; others are confident, even confrontational. As the counterpoint of topics and treatments emerges, we note in what is discussed agreement and difference, distinction and sameness. Thus the encyclopedia becomes not a series of reviews, but a landmark, consonant with and responsive to the time of its appearance.

Children's literature is not in this book, but outside, in the social world of adults and children and the cultural processes of reading and writing. As part of any act of description, however, a great number of different readers and writers are woven into these pages, and traces of their multiple presences are inscribed there. This introduction is simply a privileged *essai*, or essay, of the whole.

### **Common Themes and Blurred Genres**

Our constant, universal habit, scarcely changed over time, is to tell children stories. As Iona Opie tells us (see [Chapter 15](#)), children's earliest encounters with stories are in adults' saying and singing. When infants talk to themselves before falling asleep, the repetitions we hear show how they link people and events. As they learn their mother tongue they discover how their culture endows experience with meaning. Common ways of saying things, proverbs, fables and other kinds of lore, put ancient words into their mouths. Stories read to them become part of their own memories. Book characters emerge in the stories of their early dramatic play as they anticipate the possibilities of their futures.

The complexity of children's narrative understandings and the relation of story-telling to the books of their literature become clear from the records many conscientious adults



have kept of how individual children grew up with books (Paley 1981; Crago and Crago 1983; Wolf and Brice Heath 1992). One of the most striking of these is Carol Fox's account of the effect of literature on young children's own story-telling, before they learn to read for themselves. In her book, *At the Very Edge of the Forest*, she shows how, by being read to, children learn to 'talk like a book'. This evidence outstrips the rest by showing how pre-school children borrow characters, incidents and turns of phrase from familiar tales and from their favourite authors in order to insert themselves into the continuous storying of everyday events. Children also expect the stories they hear to cast light on what they are unsure about: the dark, the unexpected, the repetitious and the ways adults behave. Quickly learned, their grasp of narrative conventions is extensive before they have school lessons. For children, stories are metaphors, especially in the realm of feelings, for which they have, as yet, no single words. A popular tale like *Burglar Bill* (1977) by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, invites young listeners to engage with both the events and their implications about good and bad behaviour in ways almost impossible in any discourse other than that of narrative fiction.

Narrative, sometimes foregrounded, always implied, is the most common theme in this Encyclopedia. Most writers engage with children's literature as stories, which gives weight to Barbara Hardy's conviction, sometimes contested but more often approved, that for self-conscious humans, narrative is 'a primary act of mind transferred to art from life' (Hardy 1968/1977:12). (The same claim is made in various ways by Eco (1983), Le Guin (1980, 1981), Lurie (1990), Smith (1990), Bruner (1986), Barthes (1974) and others.) Stories are what adults and children most effectively share. Although myths, legends, folk and fairy tales tend to be associated particularly with childhood, throughout history they have been embedded in adult literature, including recent retellings as different as those of Angela Carter (1990) and Salman Rushdie (1990).

It is not surprising, therefore, that modern studies of narratology, their accompanying formalist theories and the psychological, linguistic, structural and rhetorical analyses developed from adult literary fictions are now invoked to describe the creative and critical practices in children's literature. Ursula Le Guin, whose renown as a writer of science fiction is further enhanced by her imaginative world-making for the young, acknowledges the continuity of story-telling in all our lives, and the vital part it plays in intellectual and affective growth.

Narrative is a central function of language. Not, in its origin, an artefact of culture, an art, but a fundamental operation of the normal mind functioning in society. To learn to speak is to learn to tell a story.

Le Guin 1989:39

Narrative is not a genre. It is a range of linguistic ways of annotating time, related to memory and recollections of the past, as to anticipations of the future, including hypotheses, wishes, longing, planning and the rest. If a story has the imaginative immediacy of 'let's pretend', it becomes a present enactment. If an author tells a reader about Marie Curie's search for radium, the completed quest is rediscovered as a present adventure. While their experience is confined to everyday events, readers do not sort their imagining into different categories of subject-matter. Until they learn different

kinds of writing conventions for different school subjects, children make narrative serve many of the purposes of their formal learning. The words used by scientists, historians, geographers, technologists and others crop up in biographies and stories before formal textbooks separate them as lessons.

Quite early, however, children discover that adults divide books into two named categories: fiction and non-fiction, and imply that books with 'facts' about the 'real' world are different from those that tell 'made up' stories. In modern writing for children this absolute distinction is no longer sustainable. Both novels and 'fact' books deal with the same subjects in a wide range of styles and presentations. Topics of current social and moral concern—sex, poverty, illness, crime, family styles and disruptions—discovered by reading children in newspapers and in feature films on television, also appear as children's literature in new presentational forms. The boundaries of genres that deal with actualities are not fixed but blurred. Books about the fate of the rainforests are likely to be narratives although their content emphasises the details of ecological reasoning.

Although stories are part of young children's attempts to sort out the world, children's literature is premised on the assumption that all children, unless prevented by exceptional circumstances, can learn to read. In traditionally literate cultures, learning to read now begins sooner than at any time in the past. Books are part of this new precocity because parents are willing to buy them, educators to promote them and publishers to produce them. At a very young age, children enter the textual world of environmental print and television and soon become at home in it. Encouraged by advertising, by governmental and specialist urgings, parents expect to understand how their children are being taught to read, and to help them.

They also want their children to have access to the newest systems of communication and to their distinctive technological texts. In England, the national legislation that sets out the Orders for literacy teaching begins with this sentence: 'Pupils should be given an extensive experience of children's literature.' No account of the subject of this Encyclopedia has ever before carried such a warrant.

Over the last decade the attention given to how children learn to read has foregrounded the nature of *textuality*, and of the different, interrelated ways in which readers of all ages make texts mean. 'Reading' now applies to a greater number of representational forms than at any time in the past: pictures, maps, screens, design graphics and photographs are all regarded as text. In addition to the innovations made possible in picture books by new printing processes, design features also predominate in other kinds, such as books of poetry and information texts. Thus, reading becomes a more complicated kind of interpretation than it was when children's attention was focused on the printed text, with sketches or pictures as an adjunct. Children now learn from a picture book that words and illustrations complement and enhance each other. Reading is not simply word recognition. Even in the easiest texts, what a sentence 'says' is often not what it means.

Intertextuality, the reading of one text in terms of another is very common in English books for children. Young children learn how the trick works as early as their first encounter with Janet and Allan Ahlberg's *Each Peach Pear Plum*, where they are to play I Spy with nursery characters. The conventions of intertextuality encourage artists and

writers to exploit deliberately the bookish nature of books, as in John Burningham's *Where's Julius?* (1986) and Aidan Chambers's *Breaktime* (1978), both of which can be described as 'metafictive'.

Few children who have gone to school during the past twenty-five years in the West have learned to read books without also being proficient in reading television, the continuous text declaring the actuality of the world 'out there'. Book print and screen feed off each other, so there is a constant blurring of identifiable kinds. The voice-over convention of screen reading helps young readers to understand that the page of a book has also to be 'tuned'. Then they discover the most important lesson of all: the reader of the book has to become both the teller and the told.

Most of the evidence for children's reading progress comes from teachers' observations of how they interact with increasingly complex texts. But to decide which texts are 'difficult', or 'suitable' for any group of learners is neither straightforward nor generalisable. Children stretch their competences to meet the demands of the texts they really *want* to read.

### **Distinctive Changes**

Changes in the ways children learn and are taught to read indicate other symbiotic evaluations in children's literature. Marian Allsobrook describes children's literature as one of the 'numerous semi-autonomous cultures which have always existed alongside the dominant culture' (Chapter 34) and it has a continuous and influential history which is regularly raided for evidence of other social, intellectual and artistic changes. Encyclopedias are bound up in this tradition. Here, most writers give an account of their topic over time. This volume also extends the breadth of its subject to include the diversity of the scene at the time of its compilation. This includes textual varieties and variations such as result from modern methods of production and design and the apparently inexhaustible novelty of publishing formats.

Picture books exhibit these things best. However traditional their skills, authors and artists respond both to new techniques of book-making and to rapid changes in the attitudes and values of actual social living. The conventional boundaries of content and style have been pushed back, broken, exceeded, exploited, played with. Topics are now expected to engage young readers at a deeper level than their language can express but which their feelings recognise. In 1963, Maurice Sendak rattled the fundamentals of the emotional quality of children's books and the complacent idealised psychologies of the period by imaging malevolence and guilt in *Where the Wild Things Are*. Some contemporary critics said he threatened children with nightmares; in fact, Sendak opened the way for picture-stories to acknowledge, in the complexity of image-text interaction, the layered nature of early experiences, playful or serious, by making them *readable*.

Spatial and radial reading, the kinds called for by the original illustrated pages of Blake's *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) are now in the repertoires of modern children who know Janet and Allan Ahlberg's *The Jolly Postman* (1986) and all the other works of their contemporaries discussed in these pages. Children's imaginative play, the way they grow into their culture and change it, is

depicted in visual metafiction. In 1993 appeared Babette Cole's *Mummy Laid an Egg*, a picture story of two exuberant children who, when told by their parents the traditional fabled accounts of procreation, turn the tables on them. 'We don't think you really know how babies are made', they say. 'So we're doing some drawings to show you' (Cole 1993: np). Adult reactions to illustrations of this topic are always hesitant, despite contemporary convictions which support the idea of telling children the 'facts of life'. The sensitive delicacy of Cole's presentation of the children's exact and explicit understanding puts to rout any suggestion that this is a prurient book. Humour releases delight and increases children's confidence in understanding the metaphoric nature of language. It is also memorably serious.

Despite the attraction and distraction of many different kinds of new books, children still enjoy and profit from knowing myths, legends, folk and fairy tales. Some of these texts come in scholarly editions preferred by bibliophiles, but more often the versions are modern retellings, variable in quality and authenticity. Where the story is 'refracted' or told from a different viewpoint, the readers' sympathetic understanding undergoes a change. *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs by A.Wolf* (Scieszka 1989) caught the imagination of young readers in just this way. It also lets them see how stories can be retold because they are something *made*. Neil Philip's exploration of the history of Cinderella (Philip 1989), Jack Zipes's collection of the versions of Little Red Riding Hood (Zipes 1983), Leon Garfield's *Shakespeare Stories* (1985) and his reworking of the texts of the plays to accompany animated films devised by Russian puppeteers, all show how multiple versions of traditional stories are matched by different ways of learning to read them.

A perceptive suggestion about versions of stories is made by Margaret Mackey. She points out that adults of a post-war generation have read popular and classic authors (Beatrix Potter, for example) in reprints of the original forms. Sequentially over time, they see reproductions of the texts and pictures on plates, mugs, calendars and aprons. The next generation that reads Raymond Briggs's *The Snowman* also encounters multiple versions of the pictures in different book formats, on video and film, wallpaper and sweaters *simultaneously*, and have the skill to choose from a number of versions the one they prefer. This commodification of children's literature is examined by Mackey in the case of *Thomas the Tank Engine* (1946) and its sequels. Forty years after their first appearance as books, the BBC produced animations of the stories. This generated 'a small industry of toys, games, pyjamas and so forth' (Mackey 1995:43–44). This is how one part of the past of children's literature moves into the future.

Those small children whose first fictional love is Thomas the Tank Engine are meeting a creation whose roots are deep in the certainties of a bygone era but whose branches and blossoms are so multifarious as to be confusing to the uninitiated. One of the striking things about the saga of Thomas the Tank Engine, as well as about other picture book characters who are the focus of industrial empires, is that they make it possible for very small toddlers to belong to the ranks of the initiated, and to know it. Their first approach to fiction is one of coming to terms with different versions, an experience which makes them experts in the

settings and characters even as they learn the basic conventions of how story works.

Thomas's illustrations provide one single and small example of the way in which little readers learn the need to deal with plurality.

Mackay 1995:44

General agreement that picture books exemplify and adorn the domain of children's literature is countered by arguments about the nature and worth of novels written for adolescents. This age group is usually subdivided into those who are discovering, usually at school, the kinds of writing related to 'subject' learning, and the pre-higher education teenagers (a word now less in use than it was when books were first deliberately written to distinguish them as readers) engaging with more complex subjective and social issues and making deliberate life choices. By this later stage, boys are often differentiated from girls in their tastes and reading habits. Critics of the bookish kind and teachers concerned that their pupils should tackle 'challenging' texts emphasise the importance of 'classic' literature, usually pre-twentieth century. Adolescents choose their reading matter from magazines commercially sensitive to the shifting identities of the young, and from the novels that connect readers' personal growth to a nascent interest in the world of ideas and beliefs, their nature and relevance. Adolescents are prepared to tackle sophisticated texts in order to appear 'in the know', adult fashion. At other times, both boys and girls, pressurised by examinations and the social complexities of their age groups, take time out to read the books they came to earlier, and to ponder the kind of world they want to live in.

To account for the range of texts, the diversity of topics, the differences between readers, and the vagaries of critical reactions in literature for adolescents, is to write a version of the history of social events of the last thirty years. It is also to engage with the issues that emerge, including hypocrisy in social and political engagements, and global debates about how to protect the universe. As they confront incontinent streams of information in world-wide communication networks, young adults want to read about what matters. Dismayed by the single economic realism of their parents' generation, they salvage their imaginations by reading the chilling novels of Robert Cormier, where they discover the complexities of intergenerational betrayal in a book like *After the First Death* (1979). With some tactful help to encourage them to tolerate the uncertainties induced by unfamiliar narrative techniques, teenagers rediscover reading as an intellectual adventure. They learn to ask themselves 'Do I believe this? How reliable is this storyteller? What kind of company am I keeping in this book?' Good authors show them characters confronted by indecisions like their own in making choices. Happy endings are less in vogue than they once were.

Perhaps the most significant of the distinctive changes implied and dealt with in this Encyclopedia are those which differentiate readers and books in terms of gender, class and race. These issues and their ideological attachments go well beyond children's literature, but they have a part to play in books for readers more interested in the future than the past. As readers' responses are part of the adult involvement in writing for adolescents, and 'positive images' are now expected to be text-distinctive, then the influence of current thinking about these matters on authors of novels for adolescents is

strong. Consider the effect of feminism on literature. 'Children' are no longer a homogeneous group of readers; they are constituted differently. In this volume Lissa Paul (Chapter 8) shows how the situated perspectives of boys and girls have now to be part of the consciousness of all writers and all readers. Girls have always read boys' books by adaptation, but boys have shown no eagerness, or have lacked encouragement, to do the same in reverse. Their tastes are said to be set in the traditional heroic tales of fable and legend and their reworkings as versions of Superman and other quest tales. Boys also seem to be more attracted to the portrayal of 'action' in graphic novels. Ted Hughes's modern myth, *The Iron Man* (1968) has a hero more complex than the Iron Woman, who, in her book of that name (1993), has little effective linguistic communication. She relies on a primeval scream.

At the end of the twentieth century, the most distinctive differences in children's books are those which reflect changes in social attitudes and understandings. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the dominant white middleclass elite of children's book publishers in English-speaking countries was forced to acknowledge the presence in school classrooms of children who could not find themselves portrayed in the pictures or the texts they were given to read. In Britain, the Children's Rights Workshop asked publishers how many books on their lists showed girls playing 'a leading part', and let it be known that there were very few.

First attempts to redress the balance, the inclusion of a black face in a playground scene or an indistinct but benign 'foreigner' in a story, were dismissed as inept tokenism. In post-imperial Britain, two revisions were imperative: the renewal of school history texts to include the perspectives of different social groups, and the welcoming of new authors with distinctive voices and literary skill to the lists of books for the young. Topics, verbal rhythms and tones all changed, especially when a group of Caribbean writers went to read to children in schools. Consequently, as part of a more general enlightenment, local storytellers emerged, as after a long sleep, to tell local tales and to publish them. Now in Britain, children's literature represents more positively the multicultural life of the societies from which it emerges. At the same time, however, it is also the site for debates about 'politically correct' language to describe characters who represent those who have suffered discrimination or marginalisation.

Books of quality play their part in changing attitudes as well as simply reflecting them. But we are still a long way from accepting multicultural social life as the norm for all children growing up. Too many old conflicts intervene. Year by year, the fact that more and more people move to richer countries from poorer ones becomes evident. The next generation will encounter bilingualism and biliteracy as common, and the promotion of positive images of multicultural encounters is consequently important. Perhaps the isolation of monolingual readers of a dominant language such as English, who read 'foreign' literature in translation or not at all, will be less common.

Changes in the creation, production and distribution of children's books do not happen in a vacuum. They have been linked to the mutability of their economic environment at least since John Newbery offered *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* for 6d, or 'with ball or pincushion' for 8d in 1744. Publishing is as subject to market forces, take-over bids, the rise and fall in fashionable demand as other trading. 'Going out of print' is believed to be a more common occurrence now than ever before, but this may be an

impression rather than a fact. Although their intrinsic worth is judged differently, all books are packaged to be sold. Publishers are involved in advertising deals, literary prizes, best-seller lists, and are careful when they select texts to carry their name. Authors also estimate their worth in pelf as in pages. Copyright laws are organised internationally but there too changes are current and continuous. It is interesting to note that when Geoffrey Trease wrote *Tales Out of School* in 1949, the 'outright purchase of juvenile copyright' (185) was still a common practice.

The number of outlets for children's books has increased; their locations are also different. This does not mean that the book in the shopping basket with the grocery beans is a lesser object of desire than one bought elsewhere. A bookshop may be a better place to choose from a wider range of books than a supermarket, but the popularity of books for the very young owes more to their availability than to the formal institutions intended to establish children's books as literature.

### Academic Attitudes

The first section of the Encyclopedia makes the claim, which the rest of the book is summoned to support, that children's literature is worthy of serious scholarly attention. The implication is that, like its adult counterpart, children's literature promotes and invites critical theory, notably in the study of the relation of texts to children's development as readers. The essays in this section document some recent moves in this direction so as to demonstrate the evolution of a discipline fit for academic recognition and institutionalised research.

Although many serious books about children's literature throw light on established ways of studying literature *tout pur*, conservative scholars and teachers, concerned about the dilutions of their topic specialisms and the blurring of canonical boundaries, have declared children's literature to be a soft reading option, academically lightweight. Once fairly widespread, this attitude has been increasingly eroded by those who have demonstrated in books for children both different kinds of texts and distinctive interactions between texts and readers. Scholars interested in the relation of literature to literacy, who ask questions about access to texts and exclusion from them, know that social differences in children's learning to read are part of any study of literary competences. Resistance to the notion of the 'universal child' and to common assumptions of what is 'normal' in interpretative reading provoke new questions, especially feminist ones, in ethnography, cultural studies and social linguistics. In all of these established disciplines there is a context for discussing the contents of children's books. But there is also the possibility for new perspectives which begin with books, children and reading. These have been slowly growing over time, but have not simply been accommodated elsewhere.

Shifts in this kind of awareness can be seen as far back as Henry James's recognition of the difference between *Treasure Island* and other Victorian novels for children. In 1949 Geoffrey Trease insisted that reviewers of post-war children's books needed new categories of judgement. For many years in the second half of this century in Britain, just to make children's books visible beyond the confines of specialist journals such as *Junior Bookshelf* and *The School Librarian* was something of a triumph. More support

came from the London *Times Literary Supplement* in the 1960s, but children's literature remained a kind of appendage to serious publishing until the artists and authors who transformed it were backed by contracts, distribution and promotion so that they became socially recognisable. The world inside the books continued for a long time to be predominantly that of the literate middle classes. Critics thought that their obligation was to set the standards for the 'best' books, so as to separate 'literature' from ephemeral reading matter, comics and the like. If there was no evident body of criticism, no real acceptance of the necessary relation of literature to literacy, there were prizes for 'the best' books in different categories. Among these was 'The Other Award' to recognise what more conventional judges ignored or thought irrelevant: minority interests and social deprivation.

Academic research in children's literature is still a novelty if it is not psychological, historical or bibliographical—that is, detailed, factual, esoteric, fitting into the research traditions of diverse disciplines, especially those which establish their history, closed to those unschooled in the foundation exercises of the disciplines of dating. There is, I know, splendid writing about careful observations of children reading selected texts in hard-bound theses in some university libraries where education studies admit such topics. But who, besides competent tutors, admits as evidence the transcripts of classroom interactions which show readers breaking through the barriers of interpretation? Peter Hunt, reminding an audience in 1994 that the first British children's literature research conference was in 1979, suggested that this research enterprise has 'followed inappropriate models and mind-sets, especially with regard to its readership'. That is, 'we often produce *lesser* research when we should be producing *different* research' (Hunt 1994:10). He advocates 'the inevitable interactiveness of "literature" and "the literary experience"' as worthy of analysis. Readers of the Encyclopedia will doubtless comment on this proposal.

Meanwhile, the most fully developed critical theory of children's literature is that of readers' responses to what they read. Michael Benton (Chapter 6) provides a full account of the history and the supporting adult studies of this approach. Most of the evidence for children's progress in reading and interpretation of literary texts comes from classrooms where teachers observe and appraise children's interactions with books as they read them. It is clear that individual children reveal 'personal patterns of reading behaviour irrespective of the books they read'. Benton's concern is to 'explore the ways in which we can learn from each other how children's responses to literature are mediated in by the cultural context in which they occur'. By foregrounding the readers' constitution of textual meaning, reading response theory has become the most frequently quoted theoretical position in relation to books for children. What it also makes clear is the lack of any fully grounded research on the nature of the development of these competences over the total period of children's schooling.

In contrast to the notion of 'response', critics who, like John Stephens (Chapter 5), derive their insights from social linguistics, stress the power of authors to make young readers 'surrender to the flow of the discourse'; that is, to become 'lost in a book'. Sociolinguists are concerned that, having learned to read, young people should be taught to discern the author's 'chosen registers', so as to discover how a text is composed or



constructed. Then, the claim is, readers will understand, from their responses to the text, 'who is doing what to whom', and thus become 'critically' literate.

Even more challenging is Jacqueline Rose's assertion about the 'impossibility' of children's fiction...

the impossible relation between adult and child. Children's literature is clearly about that relation, but it has the remarkable characteristics of being about something which it hardly ever talks of. If children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp.

Rose 1984:1

There are ways of countering this view, but none the less it has to be considered. Later, Rose offers a less controvertible utterance, probably the reason so many adult readers find solace in children's literature:

Reading is magic (if it has never been experienced by the child as magic then the child will be unable to read); it is also an experience which allows the child to master the vagaries of living, to strengthen and fortify the ego, and to integrate the personality—a process ideally to be elicited by the aesthetic coherence of the book.

Rose 1985:135

Rose's examination of the textual condition of *Peter Pan*, the new tone of this criticism and the different paths she follows have opened up a number of possibilities for the theoretical consideration of children's books, even beyond the revelations that come from her social editing of the texts. One of these considerations is extended in Peter Hollindale's 'Ideology and the children's book'. Here children's literature is detached from the earlier division of those concerned with it into 'child people and book people', and firmly joined to studies of history and culture in the 'drastically divided country' that is Britain. Going beyond the visible surface features of a text children read in order to discover how they read it, Hollindale insists we 'take into account the individual writer's unexamined assumptions'. When we do that, we discover that 'ideology is an inevitable, untameable and largely uncontrollable factor in the transaction between books and children' (Hollindale 1988:10). Thus we are bound to accept that all children's literature is inescapably didactic.

In the 1980s and 1990s, critics of children's literature have experimented with the take-over of the whole baggage of critical theory derived from adult literature and tried it for its fit. Most now agree that reading is sex-coded and gender inflected, that writers and artists have become aware that an array of audiences beyond the traditional literary elite are becoming readers of all kinds of texts. Moreover, before they leave school, children can learn to interrogate texts, to read 'against' them so that their literacy is more critical than conformist. Some theoretical positions are shown to have more explanatory power than others: intertextuality is a condition of much writing in English; metafiction is a game which even very young readers play skilfully (Lewis 1990). There are also experimental procedures, as yet untagged, which show artists and writers

making the most of the innocence of beginning readers to engage them in new reading games.

If children's literature begets new critical theory and moves further into the academic circle it will become subject to institutional conventions and regulations which are not those of the old protectionist ethos. This may give new scholars more recognition, more power even, to decide what counts as children's literature and how it is to be studied. There will be no escape, however, from learning how children read their world, the great variety of its texts beyond print and pictures. Interactions of children and books will go on outside the academy, as has ever been the case, in the story-telling of young minds operating on society 'at the very edge of the forest', inventing, imagining, hypothesising, all in the future tense.

The contents of this Encyclopedia are a tribute to all, mentioned or not, who have worked in the domain of children's books during the twentieth century, and earlier. The hope is that, in the next millennium, by having been brought together here, their efforts will be continued and prove fruitful.

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## Part I

### Theory and Critical Approaches

## Defining Children's Literature and Childhood

*Karín Lesnik-Oberstein*

The definition of 'children's literature' lies at the heart of its endeavour: it is a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children. The definition of 'children's literature' therefore is underpinned by purpose: it wants to be something in particular, because this is supposed to connect it with that reading audience—'children'—with which it declares itself to be overtly and purposefully concerned. But is a children's book a book written by children, or for children? And, crucially: what does it mean to write a book 'for' children? If it is a book written 'for' children, is it then still a children's book if it is (only) read by adults? What of 'adult' books read also by children—are they 'children's literature'? As the British critic John Rowe Townsend points out:

Surely *Robinson Crusoe* was not written for children, and do not the *Alice* books appeal at least as much to grown ups?; if *Tom Sawyer* is children's literature, what about *Huckleberry Finn*?; if the *Jungle Books* are children's literature, what about *Kim* or *Stalky*? and if *The Wind in the Willows* is children's literature, what about *The Golden Age*?; and so on.

Townsend 1980:196

Attempts to dismiss categorisation and definition of texts as a side issue which should not be an end in itself are very problematic when it comes to children's literature: how do we know which books are best for children if we do not even know which books *are* 'children's books'? For this is what 'children's literature' means in its most fundamental sense to every critic who uses the term: books which are good for children, and most particularly good in terms of emotional and moral values. We can see this view reflected in Canadian critic Michele Landsberg's belief that

good books can do so much for children. At their best, they expand horizons and instil in children a sense of the wonderful complexity of life ...No other pastime available to children is so conducive to empathy and the enlargement of human sympathies. No other pleasure can so richly furnish a child's mind with the symbols, patterns, depths, and possibilities of civilisation.

Landsberg 1987:34

The meaning of children's literature as 'books which are good for children' in turn crucially indicates that the two constituent terms—'children' and 'literature'—within the label 'children's literature' cannot be separated and traced back to original independent meanings, and then reassembled to achieve a greater understanding of what 'children's literature' is. Within the label the two terms totally qualify each other and transform each other's meaning for the purposes of the field. In short: the 'children' of 'children's literature' are constituted as specialised ideas of 'children', not necessarily related in any way to other 'children' (for instance those within education, psychology, sociology, history, art, or literature), and the 'literature' of 'children's literature' is a special idea of 'literature', not necessarily related to any other 'literature' (most particularly 'adult literature').

Having said this, one of the primary characteristics of most children's literature criticism and theory is that it assumes that the terms 'children' and 'literature' within 'children's literature' *are* separable and more or less independent of one another, and that they are directly related to other 'children' and 'literatures'; critics often make use of, or refer to, theories from education, psychology, sociology, history, art or literature, in buttressing their opinions. But in every case they transform the material from other disciplines to fit their own particular argument.

This complexity arises partly because the reading 'child' of children's literature is primarily discussed in terms of emotional responses and consciousness. Children's literature criticism, for instance, actually devotes little systematic discussion (but many random comments) to cognitive issues such as the correspondence between vocabulary lists composed by educational psychologists and the vocabulary levels in books, or to levels of cognitive development thought to be necessary to understanding the content of a book. These areas are regarded as the province of child psychologists, or as appropriate to the devising of strictly functional reading schemes which are not held to fall within 'children's literature'. This is the case even with the teachers' guides to children's literature (such as those of Lonsdale and Mackintosh 1973; Huck 1976; Sadker and Sadker 1977; Smith and Park 1977; Glazer and Williams 1979; and Norton 1983) which purport to be able to draw connections between psychological and educative investigations and children's books. (This exercise, even when it is seriously attempted, is in any case fraught with difficulties, and even in the best cases produces very limited results—one need only think of the ongoing debates in education on how to teach children the basic mechanics of reading itself.) In fact, in the actual discussion of works of children's literature, the critics' attention is primarily focused on whether and how they think the book will attract the 'child'—whether the 'child' will 'love' or 'like' the book.

But it is even more relevant to the problems of children's literature criticism that, although the idea that 'children's literature' might pose problems of definition is often accepted and discussed by critics, the idea that the 'child' might pose equal—if not greater—problems of definition is strenuously resisted. This is despite the fact that historians such as Philippe Ariès and anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein (1955) have argued in classic studies that—at the very least—definitions of 'childhood' have differed throughout history, and from culture to culture. As Ariès writes:

the point is that ideas entertained about these [family] relations may be dissimilar at moments separated by lengthy periods of time. It is the history of the idea of the family which concerns us here, not the description of manners or the nature of law.... The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult.

Ariès 1973:8, 125

Ariès makes clear that the 'family' and 'childhood' are ideas that function within cultural and social frameworks as carriers of changeable social, moral, and ethical values and motives.

British theorist Jacqueline Rose further elaborates views such as those of Ariès with respect specifically to children's literature by applying them to contemporary processes within Western culture, rather than by tracing historical or cultural shifts. Rose argues that

children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple. It is an idea whose innocent generality covers up a multitude of sins... *Peter Pan* stands in our culture as a monument to the impossibility of its own claims—that it represents the child, speaks to and for children, addresses them as a group which is knowable and exists for the book.

Rose 1984:1

Rose points out that, to begin with, 'children' are divided by class, race, ethnic origins, gender, and so on, but her argument is more radical than that: to Rose, the 'child' is a construction invented for the needs of the children's literature authors and critics, and not an 'observable', 'objective', 'scientific', entity. Within Rose's argument the adults' needs are discussed within a Freudian terminology involving the unconscious, and Rose is therefore emphatically not arguing that this process of constructing the 'child', or books for it, can—or should—simply be stopped: it serves important functions which she is attempting to understand better in her terms. Children's literature and children's literature criticism have not, in fact, made much use of Rose's argument, and, indeed, in many ways they cannot, for the very existence of these fields depends utterly on a posited existence of the 'child': all their work is ostensibly on this 'child's' behalf. Yet, with or without Rose's argument, children's literature and its criticism continue to assume many different—and often contradictory—'children', and this can only be accounted for by either accepting the notion of the 'child' as constructed (which, again, it should be noted, should not be taken to mean that it is superfluous or irrelevant: this use of 'construction' has to do with wider philosophical ideas about the way meaning works), or by maintaining that some critics are more correct about the child than others and adhering to their view.

The problems of children's literature criticism and theory, then, occur within the confines of the field of tension established by the contradictions and gaps between the assumption that 'children' and 'literature' have self-evident, consistent or logically

derived meanings, and the actual use of 'children' and 'literature' within 'children's literature' in very specific, and often variable and inconsistent, ways. Attempts to define 'children's literature' and the reading 'child' thus also operate within this field of tensions. The British cultural theorist Fred Inglis argues that

it is simply ignorant not to admit that children's novelists have developed a set of conventions for their work. Such development is a natural extension of the elaborate and implicit system of rules, orthodoxies, improvisations, customs, forms and adjustments which characterize the way any adult tells stories or simply talks at length to children.

Inglis 1981:101

Australian critic Barbara Wall agrees, and bases her whole analysis of children's books on 'the conviction that adults...speak differently in fiction when they are aware that they are addressing children...[This is] translated, sometimes subtly, sometimes obviously, into the narrator's voice...[which defines] a children's book' (Wall 1991:2-3). But British critic Nicholas Tucker points out that Inglis and Wall's type of view does not avoid the difficulty that: 'although most people would agree that there are obvious differences between adult and children's literature, when pressed they may find it quite difficult to establish what exactly such differences amount to' (Tucker 1981:8).

Because it has been precisely the self-imposed task of children's literature critics to judge which books are good for children and why, all children's literature criticism and reviews abound with both implicit and overt statements concerning the definitions of 'children's literature', 'children' and 'literature'. When critics state in some way or another that this is a book they judge to be good for children this actually involves saying that the book is good because of what they think a book does for children, and this in turn cannot avoid revealing what they think children are and do (especially when they read). Joan Aiken, for instance, says she does not purposefully incorporate moral messages into her books because she feels that 'children have a strong natural resistance to phoney morality. They can see through the adult with some moral axe to grind almost before he opens his mouth' (Aiken 1973:149), but Rosemary Sutcliff writes that 'I *am* aware of the responsibility of my job; and I do try to put over to the child reading any book of mine some kind of ethic' (Sutcliff 1973:306). Pamela Travers, creator of *Mary Poppins* feels that 'You do not chop off a section of your imaginative substance and make a book specifically for children for—if you are honest—you have, in fact, no idea where childhood ends and maturity begins. It is all endless and all one' (Cott 1984: xxii), and E.B.White states that 'you have to write up, not down. Children are demanding... They accept, almost without question, anything you present them with, as long as it is presented honestly, fearlessly, and clearly...They love words that give them a hard time' (White 1973:140). Austrian critic Maria Lypp, in line with Travers and White, argues that the adaptations children's authors introduce to children's literature depend on an 'asymmetrical relationship' which forms the 'code of children's fiction', but that there is an 'ideal of *symmetrical* communication' which implies true understanding between author and reader, and this becomes Lypp's prescriptive criterion for children's



literature (Heimeriks and Van Toorn 1989:370–372). However, Barbara Wall argues in contrast to Travers, White, and Lypp, that

All writers for children must, in a sense, be writing down. If they write with an educated adult audience in mind—their own peers—their stories will surely be, at best not always interesting and probably often intelligible, and at worst positively harmful, to children, even when a child appears as a central character, as in *The Go-Between* or *What Maisie Knew*. Whenever a writer shows consciousness of an immature audience, in the sense of adapting the material of the story or the techniques of the discourse for the benefit of child readers, that writer might be said to be writing down, that is, acknowledging that there is a difference in the skills, interests and frame of reference of children and adults.

Wall 1991:15

But where Wall worries about harm to the child, Gillian Avery in turn believes that '[the child] has his own defence against what he doesn't like or doesn't understand in the book... He ignores it, subconsciously perhaps, or he makes something different from it... [Children] extract what they want from a book and no more' (Avery 1976:33). This adult critics' defining of the 'child' cannot be formed or disrupted by any child's own voiced opinions or ideas because these are interpreted—selected or edited ('heard')—by adults for their purposes and from their perspectives. One aspect of this is reflected by Nicholas Tucker when he explains that

Trying to discover some of the nature and effects of the interaction between children and their favourite books is by no means easy... One simpleminded approach to the problem has always been to ask children themselves through various questionnaires and surveys, what exactly their books mean to them. Turning a powerful searchlight of this sort onto complex, sometimes diffuse patterns of reaction is a clumsy way of going about things, however, and children can be particularly elusive when interrogated like this, with laconic comments like 'Not bad' or 'The story's good' adding little to any researchers' understanding.

Tucker 1981:2

It may be noted at this point that children's literature's constant underlying assumption of the 'child' as a generic universality connects children's literature criticism all over the world. Children's literature criticism in different cultures is united by speaking of the 'child' as an existing entity—even though this 'existing entity' may be described differently in different cultures as it is described differently within cultures. The 'child' and its attendant 'children's literature' are often, in this sense, described as Western imports by critics from other cultures: Indonesian critic Sunindyo points out that

as with other countries, Indonesian literature had its origins in an oral tradition... The history of children's books in Indonesia at this time is to be found entirely within the history of Balai Pustaka, a government publishing agency established in

1908 by the Government of the Netherlands East Indies [when Indonesia was a Dutch colony]. Sunindyo 1987:44–45

Japanese critic Tadashi Matsui notes that in 1920s Japan the growth of 'large cities with dense populations generated the birth of a middle class...among [whom] the ideas of European liberalism, the urban mode of living, free mass education and a modern concept of the child were being fostered' (Matsui 1986– 1987:14). Birgit Dankert, when noting the background to the development of children's literature in Africa, draws attention to another aspect of response to Western influences:

In addition to many other cultural 'achievements', the former colonial powers also introduced children's books to Africa. These cultural imports elicited then (and elicit still today) the same ambivalent mixture of respect and rejection which characterises African reactions to so many other borrowings from former colonial powers... If arguments in favor of children's books are brought up, then they resemble those of the early years of European children's literature: that children's books should educate, that they should preserve folk culture, that they should help guarantee Africa's transition to a culture of the written word, that they should support African cultural identity.

Hunt 1992:112

The disparities between the various definitions of 'children's literature', 'children', and 'literature', are problematic to children's literature criticism because they undermine the goal it sets itself. In this situation, children's literature criticism's prescriptions or suggestions of reading for children become problematic, with critics attempting in different ways to assert the validity of their particular views. Important social issues, such as racism, have led critics with the same anti-racist orientation to differ utterly in their judgement of a book. For instance, British critic Bob Dixon praises Paula Fox's *The Slave Dancer* (1973) as being 'a novel of great horror and as great humanity... [approaching] perfection as a work of art' (Dixon 1977:125), while American views have included Sharon Bell Mathis's: 'an insult to black children' (Mathis 1977:146), and Binnie Tate's claim that it 'perpetuates racism...[with] constantly repeated racist implications and negative illusions [sic]' (Tate 1977:152–153). The assumption that children's books somehow affect children makes the issues crucial: does, or can, *The Slave Dancer* perpetuate racism or does it counteract it (or does it do other things altogether)? In each case children's literature critics inevitably ultimately resort to one basic claim: that they know more about children or the child and how and why it reads than the critics they disagree with.

In examining various attempts to define 'children's literature' we find a constant assumption of the existence of the (reading) child (that is: the assumption that there is such a thing as a unified, consistent, 'objective' 'child reader') together with the capacity for knowing it that each critic claims for him or herself. This holds true for all children's literature critics, even if they claim to be 'literary' critics of children's books, because the 'literary' is defined in terms of how the book is supposed to affect the 'child'. Examining the processes of defining 'children's literature' and the 'child' which is essential to its

project also illustrates the extent to which differences of opinion exist and threaten the coherence of children's literature criticism: in other words, how and why the definitions of children's literature and childhood matter so much to children's literature critics.

The first and most basic step critics take in defining 'children's literature'—and one which still receives primary emphasis in discussions around children's books—is to differentiate books used for didactic or educational purposes from 'children's literature'. F.J. Harvey Darton classically outlined this split that critics make between didactic books for children and children's 'literature': 'by "children's books" I mean printed works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure and not primarily to teach them, nor solely to make them good, nor to keep them profitably quiet' (Darton 1932/1982:1). To the children's literature critic the outstanding characteristic of 'children's literature' is that it is supposed to speak to the reading child through amusement and inherent appeal, and not through primarily didactic messages, which are described as being merely instructive, coercive, intrusive, or dull to the reading child. This also often comes to be the main means of indicating the 'literary' qualities of children's books. As Margery Fisher writes:

We should not *expect* children's stories to be sermons or judicial arguments or sociological pamphlets. As independent works of art they must be allowed to appeal to the imagination, the mind, the heart on their own terms... If a writer cannot say what he really feels, if he cannot be serious in developing a theme...[If he has in any way to minimise] that approach to books for the young must eventually dilute their quality as mainstream literature.

Haviland 1973:273

This is how 'children's literature' defines 'literature': as something that in itself is good for children—that affects children better or more than non-literature—and this of course implies a world of assumptions about what the reading 'child' is and how it reads. Charlotte Huck sums up this view when she writes that 'good writing, or effective use of language...will help the reader to experience the delight of beauty, wonder, and humor... He will be challenged to dream dreams, to ponder, and to ask questions to himself' (Huck 1976:4). This concept of the 'literary' causes many children's literature critics considerable problems in its own right. In attempting to preserve both an essential, coherent, consistent, 'child', and a concept of 'literature', critics find themselves struggling with statements which in their self-contradiction inadvertently betray the ways in which the 'child' and 'literature' mutually qualify and construct each other within children's literature criticism. Joan Glazer and Gurney Williams, for instance, first state that good children's books are characterised by 'strong materials—good plots, rich settings, well-developed characters, important themes, and artistic styles...bold and imaginative language' (Glazer and Williams 1979:34, 19), and that this 'freshness... comes from the author. And in the author it begins with an understanding of who the child is' (22). Then they continue, however, by arguing that even if children don't like these books which are good for them, they may still be 'good literature...built of strong materials...the likes and dislikes of children do not determine the quality of literature...

Books must be judged as literature on their own merits. And children should be given excellent literature' (34).

'Children' in relation to reading have something to do with particular ideas about freedom and about emotion and consciousness, as Darton's statement implies; the 'child' develops as a concept produced by ideas of liberation from restriction and force, and is assigned various particular niches within cultural and societal structures. These ideas of literature and liberation are in fact derived from the ideals of Western liberal humanism, originating in classical Greek culture. This is clear if we compare Michele Landsberg, Charlotte Huck and Glazer and Williams's statements of the value of children's literature with the statement of the sixteenth-century humanist educationist Juan Luis Vives:

poems contain subjects of extraordinary effectiveness, and they display human passions in a wonderful and vivid manner. This is called *energia*. There breathes in them a certain great and lofty spirit so that the readers are themselves caught into it, and seem to rise above their own intellect, and even above their own nature.

Vives 1913:126

There are not many clearer articulations of the power ascribed to literature in the intellectual, moral or emotional education of children that dominates the concern of children's literature critics despite all their protestations of resistance to education or the dreaded 'didacticism'.

We may, incidentally—with respect to this relationship between the 'child' and specific formulations of liberty or freedom—refer back to Tadashi Matsui's linking of 'the ideas of European liberalism, the urban mode of living, [and] free mass education' with 'a modern concept of the child', as well as to Birgit Dankert's statement on African children's literature, which highlights the complex status of children's literature. It is written of as if it can be a value-free carrier of an oral home culture (an 'innocent text'), when it is inevitable that as a product of a written culture's liberal arts educational ideals it carries these values with it, whatever the actual content of the book.

The Swedish critic Boel Westin echoes Darton while specifying further how this ostensible move away from didacticism is seen by the critics as moving from adult coercion to a consideration of the 'child':

Well into the nineteenth century, [Swedish] children's books sought primarily to impress upon their young readers good morals, proper manners, and a sense of religion. In Sweden it was not until the turn of the twentieth century that children's literature began to respond to the needs of children rather than adults.

Westin 1991:7

'Children's literature' becomes defined as containing, both in form and content, the 'needs of children', and, therefore, this is how 'children's books'—written, published, sold, and usually bought, by adults—come to be spoken of as if the 'child' were *in the book*. As the New Zealand critic Sydney Melbourne states while discussing the portrayal

of the Maori in children's books: 'What are we after? Not just cultural trappings—that's for sure. The essence of children? Yes...' (Melbourne 1987:102).

The intimate interconnections between definitions of reading children and children's literature are fully evident here: in many ways, critics define them as one and the same thing, and children's literature is often spoken of as if it had been written by children expressing their needs, emotions and experiences. As Lissa Paul writes when she compares the situations of women's writing and children's literature:

as long as the signs and language of women's literature and children's literature are foreign, other, to male-order critics, it is almost impossible to play with meaning. So one of the primary problems feminist critics and children's literature critics have is how to recognize, define, and accord value to otherness.

Paul 1990:150

Paul discusses children's literature as if it were written by children and as if the situation were therefore the same as with books written by women, as she writes: 'But women make up more than half of the population of the world—and all of us once were children. It is almost inconceivable that women and children have been invisible and voiceless for so long' (150). In this way Paul submerges the fact that children's literature (when it is not written by women) may well be written by the very 'male-order critics' she is seeking release from (unless she is assuming, as many critics do, that writing children's literature involves becoming a child again). Myles McDowell, too, for instance, describes his 'child in the book' when he claims that

Children's books are generally shorter; they tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment, with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection; child protagonists are the rule; conventions are much used; the story develops within a clear-cut moral schematism which much adult fiction ignores; children's books tend to be optimistic rather than depressive; language is child-oriented; plots are of a distinctive order, probability is often disregarded; and one could go on endlessly talking of magic, and fantasy, and simplicity, and adventure.

McDowell 1973:51

American critic and author Natalie Babbitt, on the other hand, argues with respect to these type of criteria—and her 'child in the book'—that children's books are neither necessarily less serious than adults' books, nor necessarily concerned with 'simpler' or 'different' emotions: 'there is, in point of fact, no such thing as an exclusively adult emotion, and children's literature deals with them all' (Babbitt 1973:157). Babbitt then claims that there is also no genuine disparity in range or scope, 'Everyman' being just as present, for instance, in *The Wind in the Willows* as in, say, James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Furthermore, to Babbitt, there are few differences in content between adult and children's literature: 'war, disability, poverty, cruelty, all the harshest aspects of life are present in children's literature' (157), as is fantasy.

Language usage does not seem to Babbitt necessarily to distinguish children's literature from adult literature either:

A children's book uses simple vocabulary geared to the untrained mind? Compare a little Kipling to a little Hemingway and think again. Opening sentence of *A Farewell to Arms*; 'Now in the fall the trees were all bare and the roads were muddy'. Opening sentence of *How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin*: 'Once upon a time, on an uninhabited island on the shores of the Red Sea, there lived a Parsee from whose hat the rays of the sun were reflected in more-than-oriental splendour'. So much for that!

Babbitt 1973:157

One side-effect, incidentally, of the idea that 'children's literature' originated from a historical revelation of the 'child' and 'its needs' (John Locke and JeanJacques Rousseau are quoted as standard in this context as the 'discoverers' of childhood) is that many (although not all) critics tend to describe and define 'children's literature' in evolutionary terms: consciously or unconsciously 'children's literature' is described as progressing towards an ever better and more accurate inclusion of the 'child' in the book. As Boel Westin writes with respect to the history of Swedish children's literature:

After the Second World War, new trends in child psychology and a freer educational approach, prompted by such figures as Bertrand Russell and A.S.Neill, gained widespread acceptance in Sweden. The child's urge to play and seek pleasure was now to be gratified at the different stages of growth. In children's literature the world was now to be portrayed through the eyes and voice of the child itself.

Westin 1991:22

Within this type of thinking the 'classics' of 'children's literature' are often described as being avant garde or exceptionally and anachronistically perspicacious with respect to the 'child'. Barbara Wall, for instance, explains the classic status of *Alice in Wonderland*, by arguing that

Alice's became the first child-mind, in the history of children's fiction, to occupy the centre... No narrator of a story for children had stood so close to a child protagonist, observing nothing except that child, describing, never criticising, showing only what that child saw.

Wall 1991:98

The children's literature critics' didactic-literary split continues and maintains its career as one of the ultimate judgements of the value—and therefore definition—of 'children's literature'. It is in these statements that the 'child' in the book—in all its various manifestations—is defined by each critic. Sheila Egoff, for instance, writes:

May I suggest that the aim of children's writing be delight not edification; that its attributes be the eternal childlike qualities of wonder; simplicity, laughter and warmth; and that in the worldwide realm of children's books, the literature be kept inside, the sociology and pedagogy out.

Egoff 1987:355

Yoko Inokuma, similarly, in discussing writing about minority groups in Japanese children's literature, argues that

the didactic motive of the authoress is quite clear... There is no doubt about the legitimacy of her motive. But both Korean and Japanese readers will find it difficult to identify themselves with the characters who are only one dimensional... Finally... his [Imao Hirano's] desire to enlighten Japanese children...betrayed him into producing an autobiography of a mediocre literary value... Books of high literary value are, after all, short cuts to the real understanding of and sympathy with minority groups.

Inokuma 1987:75, 76, 82

Inokuma's statement introduces a word which is a mainstay of children's literature critics: 'identification'. The idea of 'identification' as an explanation of how and why the 'child' reads in turn supports the assumption that the 'child' is in the good 'children's book': the 'child' is supposed to be inherently and voluntarily attracted to books in which it recognises itself. As the Israeli critic Adir Cohen claims:

Writers have become aware that, for the child, a book is a source of satisfaction that derives from identification and participation, and an expansion of his own experience. They provide him with an opportunity for catharsis, self-knowledge, and broadening his psychic experience. The process of reading, identification, participation and relating brings the reader into the reality of the book in dynamic fashion.

Cohen 1988:31

But 'identification' is caught up in the same debates concerning the definition of the 'child'. Since the supposed process of 'identification' depends on the definition of the 'child' the critic employs; different definitions lead to different evaluations of a book's ability to lead to the child reader achieving 'identification', and this also involves different concepts of what 'identification' actually is and does. The whole discussion, however, emphasises the persistence and depth of the assumption of the existence of an essential 'child': how otherwise could the notion of 'identification' be thought to function with respect to children's fiction, which by definition has a complex relationship to 'reality'? An essential 'child' in fiction is still supposed to be recognised by the 'reading child' as 'real'.

Implicit and overt assumptions about the 'child' and children's literature thus permeate explanations of 'identification', as we saw already in Adir Cohen's statement. Donna Norton describes 'identification' as a 'process [which] requires emotional ties with the model; children believe they are like these models and their thoughts, feelings, and characteristics become similar to them' (Norton 1983:20). American critics Judith Thompson and Gloria Woodard draw the conclusion from this premise that

one limitation to [many] books, however, is their emphasis on, identification with, and relevance only to middle class children. For too many black children, they depict an environment removed from their immediate experience... Identification for the young black reader rests in the central character's intimate knowledge of the black subculture.

Thompson and Woodard 1972:23

But British critic Robert Leeson complicates this type of 'identification' as a description of the central mechanism of the emotional process of reading by pointing out that although he feels the 'child' needs 'to recognise himself or herself ...it is [also] argued that the working-class child does not want "only to read about itself" and likes to escape into a different world in its reading...to escape and have vicarious pleasure and thrills' (Leeson 1977:43). For Leeson, the good book for the 'child' offers not only the 'child' back to itself, but also needs to offer the 'child' that which is not itself. 'Identification'—despite its widespread and often unquestioned use—remains a problematic concept: it must assume a 'child in the book'; even if that 'child's' presence is assumed, 'identification' cannot account for reading which is not a perpetual reading of the self; and, finally, it cannot account therefore for other hypothetical processes in reading such as a possible learning of the new, or escapism, or what D.W.Harding has called 'imaginative insight into what another person may be feeling, and the contemplation of possible human experiences which we are not at that moment going through ourselves' (Harding 1967: 7).

The definitions of children's literature and childhood are thus enmeshed within the discourse of children's literature. They mutually qualify each other. Tension and problems arise within children's literature criticism because children's literature critics implicitly assume that there are independent, essential definitions of 'literature' and 'childhood' which only meet, to their mutual benefit, within children's literature and its criticism. Children's literature critics reveal this inherent assumption throughout their writings: besides the inherent contradictions and disagreements that I have touched on, this becomes most clear when critics attempt to divide themselves, for instance, into 'book people' and 'child people' (Townsend 1980:199). Townsend argues that

most disputes over standards are fruitless because the antagonists suppose their criteria to be mutually exclusive; if one is right the other must be wrong. This is not necessarily so. Different kinds of assessment are valid for different purposes... I would only remark that the viewpoints of psychologists, sociologists, and educationists of various descriptions have rather little in common with each other or with those whose approach is mainly literary.

Townsend 1980:193–207

Townsend's suggestion, however, has not lessened the problem (for children's literature itself!) of differing 'children'—and thus conflicting interpretations of books—occurring within even the works of critics who regard themselves as belonging to the same 'camp'. Children's literature and children's literature criticism define themselves as existing



because of, and for, 'children', and it is these 'children' who remain the passion of—and therefore the source of conflict for— children's authors and critics.

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## History, Culture and Children's Literature

*Tony Watkins*

Until the late 1970s, there was (outside Marxist criticism) a generally accepted view of the nature of history and its place in literary studies. Perkins (1991) points out that during most of the nineteenth century, literary history was popular and enjoyed prestige because it produced a more complete appreciation of the literary work than was otherwise possible. It functioned, too, as a form of historiography, revealing the “spirit”, mentality or *Weltanschauung* of a time and place with unrivaled precision and intimacy’ (Perkins 1991:2). For much of the twentieth century, especially in Renaissance studies, history was seen as outside literature and as guaranteeing the truth of a literary interpretation: ‘History...was the single, unified, unproblematic, extra-textual, extra-discursive real that guaranteed our readings of the texts which constituted its cultural *expression*’ (Belsey 1991: 26). In the traditional literary view of history and culture, there was no difficulty in relating text to context: history was singular and operated as a ‘background’ to the reading of a work of literature (‘the foreground’); and culture was something which the work reproduced or expressed, or could be set against. Literary history was ‘a hybrid but recognizable genre that co-ordinated literary criticism, biography, and intellectual/social background within a narrative of development’ (Buell 1993: 216).

Such notions have, until recently, remained the dominant ones behind the histories of children's literature. Thus, John Rowe Townsend, in the fifth edition (1990) of his standard one-volume history of children's literature, *Written for Children*, writes ‘While I have tried to see children's literature in its historical and social contexts, my standards are essentially literary’ (xi). However, in the 1970s, there was ‘a Turn toward History’ (Cox and Reynolds 1993:3) in American adult literary theory as it began to move away from the dominance of deconstruction. The consequent reconceptualisation of history and its relationship to literature had its roots in the work of such theorists and critics as Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, Edward Said and Frank Lentricchia. In the 1980s, new terms associated with literary history (including ‘the new history’, ‘cultural poetics’ and, especially, ‘the New Historicism’) entered the critical vocabulary through the work of such critics as Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose and Jerome McGann.

The ‘*new historicism*’ is distinguished from the old by a lack of faith in the objectivity of historical study and, instead, an emphasis on the way the past is constructed or invented in the present. Felperin quotes the opening paragraph of Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy* (1985):

History is always in practice a reading of the past. We make a narrative out of the available 'documents', the written texts (and maps and buildings and suits of armour) we interpret in order to produce a knowledge of a world which is no longer present. And yet it is always from the present that we produce this knowledge: from the present in the sense that it is only from what is still extant, still available that we make it; and from the present in the sense that we make it out of an understanding formed by the present. We bring what we know now to bear on what remains from the past to produce an intelligible history.

He comments: 'history' is freely acknowledged to be a kind of story-telling towards the present, that is, a textual construct at once itself an interpretation and itself open to interpretation' (Felperin 1991:89). The idea of a single 'History' is rejected in favour of the postmodern concept (Belsey 1991:27) of 'histories', 'an ongoing series of human constructions, each representing the past at particular present moments for particular present purposes' (Cox and Reynolds 1993:4).

The growth of radical alternative histories, such as women's history, oral history, and post-colonial rewriting of Eurocentric and other imperialist viewpoints, together with the more general blurring of disciplinary boundaries between historiography, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies, have all cast doubt on the validity, relevance or accessibility of historical 'facts' (Barker *et al.* 1991:4). Cultural history draws closer to the concerns of the humanities and anthropology: 'The deciphering of meaning...is taken to be the central task of cultural history, just as it was posed by Geertz to be the central task of cultural anthropology' (Hunt 1989:12). With the emergence of the postmodern concept of 'histories' several questions have been put on the agenda of theory: for example, what valid distinctions can be made between the 'narrative' of history and the 'fiction' of texts? (Montrose (1989:20) called for the recognition of 'the historicity of texts and the textuality of history'; see also White (1973).) What are the implications of our construction of the past from our present situation? What is the relationship between 'histories' and power?

The rise of newer forms of literary historicism is connected, in part, with social change and the effort to recover histories for blacks, women and minority groups within society. In turn, these social aims are linked with the recuperation of forgotten texts, including texts that have never been considered worthy of academic study. Such changes have, of course, benefited the academic study of children's literature.

The major influence in all this is that of Michel Foucault. As David Perkins puts it,

[Foucault] encouraged his readers to reject the traditional Romantic model of literary change as continuous development, to resituate literary texts by relating them to discourses and representations that were not literary, and to explore the ideological aspects of texts in order to intervene in the social struggles of the present, and these remain characteristic practices of present-day historical contextualism—of New Historicism, feminist historiography, and cultural criticism.

Perkins 1991:4

Not everyone, however, would agree with the implied radical political stance of the new historicist movements. H.Aram Veeseer, in his introduction to a 1994 collection of readings, asks of New Historicism, 'Is it liberal or Leftist? Literary or historical? Feminist or neuter? Reformist or radical? Canon-making or canon-smashing? Stabilizing or capsizing?' (Veeseer 1994:2) and points out that many believe that New Historicism is 'bent on neutralizing solidarity, subversion, disruption, and struggle' and that it 'entertained from the first the heresy of a good capitalism' (3). But he manages to give the following five-point definition of the assumptions held by New Historicists:

- 1) that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
- 2) that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
- 3) that literary and non-literary 'texts' circulate inseparably;
- 4) that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or expresses unalterable human nature;
- 5) that a critical method and language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. Veeseer 1994:2

Felperin argues that there are two broad schools of New Historicism, the American, sometimes called 'cultural poetics', and the British, often referred to as 'cultural materialism': 'Whereas cultural poetics inhabits a discursive field in which Marxism has never really been present, its British counterpart inhabits one from which Marxism has never really been absent' (Felperin 1991:88). The radical nature of cultural materialism is made clear in books such as Dollimore and Sinfield's collection of essays, *Political Shakespeare*. In their foreword, the editors define cultural materialism as 'a combination of historical context, theoretical method, political commitment and textual analysis' (Dollimore and Sinfield 1985: vii). The historical context,

undermines the transcendent significance traditionally accorded to the literary text and allows us to recover its histories; theoretical method detaches the text from immanent criticism which seeks only to reproduce it in its own terms; socialist and feminist commitment confronts the conservative categories in which most criticism has hitherto been conducted; textual analysis locates the critique of traditional approaches where it cannot be ignored. We call this 'cultural materialism'.

Dollimore and Sinfield 1985: vii

Examples of how some of these new historicist ideas could be applied to children's literature are provided by the work of Mitzi Myers (Myers 1988; 1989; 1992). In a statement which blends something of the American and the British brands, Myers argues that a new historicism of children's literature would

integrate text and socio-historic context, demonstrating on the one hand how extraliterary cultural formations shape literary discourse and on the other how literary practices are actions that make things happen—by shaping the psychic and moral consciousness of young readers but also by performing many more diverse

kinds of cultural work, from satisfying authorial fantasies to legitimating or subverting dominant class and gender ideologies... It would want to know how and why a tale or poem came to say what it does, what the envioning circumstances were (including the uses a particular sort of children's literature served for its author, its child and adult readers, and its culture), and what kinds of cultural statements and questions the work was responding to. It would pay particular attention to the conceptual and symbolic fault lines denoting a text's time-, place-, gender-, and class-specific ideological mechanisms... It would examine ...a book's material production, its publishing history, its audiences and their reading practices, its initial reception, and its critical history, including how its got inscribed in or deleted from the canon.

Myers 1988:42

Myers has also argued that 'Notions of the "child", "childhood" and "children's literature" are contingent, not essentialist; embodying the social construction of a particular historical context; they are useful fictions intended to redress reality as much as to reflect it' (Myers 1989:52), and that such notions today are bound up with the language and ideology of Romantic literature and criticism (Myers 1992; see also McGann 1983).

These ideas have been applied by Myers to eighteenth-century children's authors such as Maria Edgeworth. The child constructed by Romantic ideology recurs as Wordsworth's 'child of nature' in such figures as Kipling's Mowgli and Frances Hodgson Burnett's Dickon in *The Secret Garden* (Knoepfmacher 1977; Richardson 1992) and, as one critic points out, 'many children's books that feature children obviously wiser than the adults they must deal with—like F.Anstey's *Vice Versa* or E.Nesbit's *Story of the Amulet*—would have been unthinkable without the Romantic revaluation of childhood' (Richardson 1992:128).

The same crises in the humanities which resulted in radical questioning of the nature of history and the emergence of new historiographies of culture, including literary New Historicism, also brought forth cultural studies. It is difficult to define the field of cultural studies very precisely because, as Brantlinger argues, it has 'emerged from the current crises and contradictions of the humanities and social science disciplines not as a tightly coherent, unified movement with a fixed agenda, but as a loosely coherent group of tendencies, issues and questions' (1990: ix). Nevertheless, there are several points of similarity between the new literary historicism and cultural studies and their relevance to the study of children's literature. For example, it is possible to see such works as Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, not only operating as versions of the English and American national myth with their landscapes representing the 'real' England and the 'real' America, but becoming sites for ideological struggle and appropriation by, for example, the 'culture industries' (Watkins 1992).

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams describes culture as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams 1976:76). Culture is an ambiguous term: a problem shared, perhaps, by all concepts which are concerned with totality, including history, ideology, society, and myth. 'Cultural studies' is an equally ambiguous term, but most commentators would agree that cultural studies is 'concerned with the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies' (Fiske

1987:254). An anthology published in 1992 suggests the following major categories of current work in the field:

the history of cultural studies, gender and sexuality, nationhood and national identity, colonialism and post-colonialism, race and ethnicity, popular culture and its audiences, science and ecology, identity politics, pedagogy, the politics of aesthetics, cultural institutions, the politics of disciplinarity, discourse and textuality, history, and global culture in a postmodern age.

Grossberg *et al.* 1992:1

But the editors of the volume stress the shapeless nature of the field and the variety of methodologies in use: '[cultural studies] remains a diverse and often contentious enterprise, encompassing different positions and trajectories in specific contexts, addressing many questions, drawing nourishment from multiple roots, and shaping itself within different institutions and locations' (2–3). There are, for example, distinctions to be made between the British and American traditions of cultural studies. The British tradition may be traced back to the pioneering work of F.R. Leavis and Denys Thompson in the 1930s (Leavis and Thompson 1933), but, more particularly, it arises from the work of Raymond Williams (Williams 1958). The British tradition, it is claimed, believes that the study of culture involves both 'symbolic and material domains...not privileging one domain over the other but interrogating the relation between the two... Continually engaging with the political, economic, erotic, social, and ideological, cultural studies entails the study of all the relations between all the elements in a whole way of life' (Grossberg *et al.* 1992:4; 14). From the later work of Raymond Williams, from the work of Stuart Hall and others at the University of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and from major bodies of theory such as Marxism, feminism, psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, the British tradition derived the central theoretical concepts of articulation, conjuncture, hegemony, ideology, identity, and representation. (See, for example, Williams 1975; 1976; 1977; 1989; Hall *et al.* 1980; Hall 1990.) But even British cultural studies is not a coherent and homogeneous body of work: it is characterised by disagreements, 'divergencies in direction and concern, by conflict among theoretical commitments and political agendas' (Grossberg *et al.* 1992:10).

In the USA, a somewhat different inflection has been given to cultural studies by the 'new ethnography', rooted primarily in anthropological theory and practice (a 'postdisciplinary anthropology') which is, in turn, linked to work by feminists and black and postcolonial theorists concerned with identity, history and social relations. (Grossberg *et al.* 1992:14).

In some of the cultural studies theorists, one can detect the following characteristics: first, a belief that reality can only be made sense of through language or other cultural systems which are embedded within history. Second, a focus upon power and struggle. In cultural terms, the struggle is for meaning: dominant groups attempt to render as 'natural' meanings which serve their interests, whereas subordinate groups resist this process in various ways, trying to make meanings that serve *their* interests. (Fiske 1987: 255). An obvious example is the cultural struggle between patriarchy and feminism; but, of course, divisions into groups in society can be along lines of race, class, age and



so on, as well as gender. Third, cultural studies has tried to theorise subjectivity as a socio-cultural construction. Some theorists, under the influence of poststructuralist psychoanalytical thinking and Althusserian notions of ideology, replace the idea of the individual by the concept of the 'subject'. The 'subject' and his or her 'subjectivity' is a social construction: 'Thus a biological female can have a masculine subjectivity (that is, she can make sense of the world and of her self and her place in that world through patriarchal ideology). Similarly, a black can have a white subjectivity' (Fiske 1987:258).

But, because subjectivity is a social construction, it is always open to change. All cultural systems, including language, literature and the products of mass communication, play a part in the construction and reconstruction of the subject. It is in this way, according to the Althusserian wing of cultural studies, that ideology is constantly reproduced in people.

This notion can be seen perhaps more clearly in the fourth characteristic of cultural studies—the way it views acts of communication, including the 'reading process'. As one theorist puts it when talking about the 'reading' of a television programme as cultural text: 'Reading becomes a negotiation between the social sense inscribed in the program and the meanings of social experience made by its wide variety of viewers: this negotiation is a discursive one' (Fiske 1987:268). The relevance of this notion to children's literature is not difficult to perceive.

The fifth characteristic is that cultural studies is not exclusively concerned with popular culture to the exclusion of 'high' culture, or vice versa: 'Cultural studies does not require us to repudiate elite cultural forms...rather cultural studies requires us to identify the operation of specific practices, of how they continuously reinscribe the line between legitimate and popular culture, and of what they accomplish in specific contexts' (Grossberg *et al.* 1992:13). As a result, cultural studies does interest itself in the formation, continuation and changes in literary canons, including those of children's literature. For example, books originally denied inclusion in the canon of children's literature, such as Baum's *Oz* books, have later received recognition and have been included. Other books traditionally included in the canon of children's literature, such as Lewis's *Narnia* series, Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and Kipling's *Jungle Book* have been criticised on the grounds that the values they contain are too exclusively male and white.

The sixth characteristic is the use of ideology as a central concept, either as a 'critical' concept or as a neutral concept. Materialist, political approaches deriving from Marxism and feminism obviously stress *power* as the major component of cultural text, power which is often hidden or rendered apparently 'natural' through the process of ideology. These approaches use what has been called the 'critical' concept of ideology which is 'essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power—that is, to the process of maintaining domination' (Thompson 1984:4). If ideology is embodied in cultural text, the major task of the cultural critic is not only understanding the meaning of the text but also unmasking what appears as natural as a social construction which favours a particular class or group in society. This process of 'ideology critique' or ideological deconstruction is often carried out in literary studies using an approach, derived from Williams, involving a combination of textual analysis, theoretical method, study of historical context, and a political commitment to socialism and feminism.

However, ideology can also be used in a neutral sense (Ricoeur 1986) and this is reflected in the work of Fred Inglis, who has written at length on children's literature (for example, Inglis 1975; 1981). Inglis favours, not cultural materialism, but cultural hermeneutics. In *Cultural Studies* (1993), he argues in favour of making cultural studies 'synonymous with the study of values (and valuing)' (Inglis 1993:190). The book is dedicated to the cultural anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, with his influential view that 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun' and that those webs are what we call culture'. For Geertz, the analysis of culture, therefore, will be 'an interpretive one in search of meaning', and culture itself is defined as 'an assemblage of texts' and 'a story they tell themselves about themselves' (Geertz 1975:5; 448). So the model of cultural analysis Inglis favours is the interpretative one which aims not to *unmask* texts, using such critical concepts as ideology or hegemony which deconstruct and demystify ideologies, but to *understand* intersubjective meanings (Inglis 1993:148). He argues against the tendency within cultural studies to collapse 'both aesthetics and morality into politics' so that 'the study of culture translates into politics without remainder' (175; 181). He quotes Dollimore and Sinfield's statement (see above) that cultural materialism 'registers its commitment to the transformation of a social order which exploits people on grounds of race, gender and class' (Dollimore and Sinfield 1985: viii) but asks, using the same phrase which formed the title of his book about children's literature (Inglis 1981), 'What about the promise of happiness held out by art? What about art itself?' (Inglis 1993:181). Following Geertz's concept, Inglis defines culture as, 'an ensemble of *stories* we tell ourselves about ourselves' (Inglis 1993:206) and argues that our historically changing identity is formed from experience and the 'narrative tradition' of which we are part. It is from this identity that we interpret the world. In a passage strongly relevant to the study of children's literature, (see, for example, Watkins 1994), he goes on to argue that

the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves are not just a help to moral education; they comprise the only moral education which can gain purchase on the modern world. They are not aids to sensitivity nor adjuncts to the cultivated life. They are theories with which to think forwards...and understand backwards.

Inglis 1993:214

Because of the variety within the cultural studies paradigm and the dynamic nature of the field, it is difficult to generalise about features which underlie such work in the study of children's literature. But the work of Fred Inglis (1981), Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (1994), Jacqueline Rose (1984), Marina Warner (1994) and Jack Zipes (1979), although in many respects very different, may be thought of as arising within a cultural studies framework.

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## **Ideology**

*Charles Sarland*

### **Introduction**

Discourse on children's fiction sits at the crossroads of a number of other discourses. In the late twentieth century the most important among these, for the purposes of this chapter, are the discourses that surround the subject of 'literature' itself, and the discourses that surround the rearing, socialisation, and education of the young. Thus discussion of ideology in children's literature requires the consideration of a number of issues. The very use of the expression 'children's literature', for instance, brings with it a whole set of value judgements which have been variously espoused, attacked, defended, and counterattacked over the years. In addition, discussion of children's fiction—my preferred term in this chapter—has always been characterised by arguments about its purposes. These purposes, or in some cases these denials of purpose, stem from the particular characteristics of its intended readership, and are invariably a product of the views held within the adult population about children and young people themselves and their place in society. Since there is an imbalance of power between the children and young people who read the books, and the adults who write, publish and review the books, or who are otherwise engaged in commentary upon, or dissemination of the books, either as parents, or teachers, or librarians, or booksellers, or academics, there is here immediately a question of politics, a politics first and foremost of age differential.

But wider than this, the books themselves and the social practices that surround them will raise ideological issues. These issues may be related to specific debates in adult society, to do for instance with class, gender or ethnicity, or they may be instances of more general debate about the role of liberal humanist values in a capitalist democracy. In addition to all of this, there is a continuing debate about reader response (see [Chapter 6](#)), a debate which also impacts upon considerations of ideology in children's fiction. And finally, no consideration of ideology in children's fiction would be complete without a glance at the current developments by which children's fiction is becoming a commodity in a global market, controlled by a relatively small number of international publishers.

### **Moral Purpose and Didacticism**

It is useful, in the first instance, to recognise the historical nature of the debate, a debate that initially centred around questions of didacticism and moral purpose. In the 'Preface' to *The Governess or Little Female Academy* in 1749, Sarah Fielding wrote:

Before you begin the following sheets, I beg you will stop a Moment at this Preface, to consider with me, what is the true Use of reading; and if you can once fix this Truth in your Minds, namely that the true Use of Books is to make you wiser and better, you will then have both Profit and Pleasure from what you read.

Fielding 1749/1968:91

Lest it should be thought that such overt moral purpose is a thing of the past, here is Fred Inglis: 'Only a monster would not want to give a child books she will delight in and which will teach her to be good. It is the ancient and proper justification of reading and teaching literature that it helps you to live well' (Inglis 1981:4).

Contrary views have almost as long a history; for instance, Elizabeth Rigby writing in 1844 in *The Quarterly Review*, while admitting that no one would deliberately put what she calls 'offensive' books in the way of children, goes on:

but, should they fall in their way, we firmly believe no risk to exist—if they will read them at one time or another, the earlier, perhaps, the better. Such works are like the viper—they have a wholesome flesh as well as a poisonous sting; and children are perhaps the only class of readers which can partake of one without suffering from the other.

Hunt 1990:21

The debate was lively in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but for the bulk of this century it appeared largely to have been settled. Thus Harvey Darton, in 1932, could introduce his history with the words: 'By "children's books" I mean printed works produced ostensibly to give children spontaneous pleasure, and not primarily to teach them, not solely to make them good, nor to keep them *profitably* quiet' (Darton 1932/1982:1, his emphasis).

For a considerable time, then, the question of values was left in abeyance. There was discussion about both how to write for children in ways that were not condescending, and about what the differences might be between fiction written for children and fiction written for adults, but considerations of moral purpose were not an issue. In the 1970s, however, the debate was revived, albeit in another form, and it was at this point that ideological considerations came to be labelled as such.

### **Ideology**

Ideology is a problematic notion. In the current general discourse of the electronic media, for instance, it is often considered that ideology and bias are one and the same thing, and that ideology and 'common sense' can be set against each other. This distinction continues into party political debate: 'ideology' is what the other side is motivated by

while 'our' side is again merely applying common sense. In the history of Marxist thought there has been a convoluted development of usage of the term, not unrelated to the distinction just outlined. For the purposes of this chapter, however, ideology will be taken to refer to all espousal, assumption, consideration, and discussion of social and cultural values, whether overt or covert. In that sense it will include common sense itself, for common sense is always concerned with the values and underlying assumptions of our everyday lives.

Volosinov (1929/1986) encapsulates the position when he argues that all language is ideological. All sign systems, including language, he argues, have not only a simple denotative role, they are also and at one and the same time, evaluative, and thus ideological. 'The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs' (10). From this perspective it will thus be seen that all writing is ideological since all writing either assumes values even when not overtly espousing them, or is produced and also read within a social and cultural framework which is itself inevitably suffused with values, that is to say, suffused with ideology. In addition, in Marxist terms, considerations of ideology can neither be divorced from considerations of the economic base, nor from considerations of power (that is, of politics), and that too is the position taken here.

### **Representation: Gender, Minority Groups, and Bias in the 1970s**

In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century didacticism the promotion of values had often taken the overt form of direct preaching, while in the 1970s the specific form of the debate was to do with questions of character representation and character role. The analysis consisted in showing how children's fiction represented some groups at the expense of others, or how some groups were negatively represented in stereotypical terms. The argument was that by representing certain groups in certain ways children's books were promoting certain values—essentially white, male and middle-class, and that the books were thus class biased, racist and sexist. The fact that the protagonists of most children's books tended to be white middleclass boys was adduced in evidence. Black characters rarely made an appearance in children's fiction, and working-class characters were portrayed either as respectful to their middle-class 'betters', or as stupid—or they had the villain's role in the story. Girls were only represented in traditional female roles.

Geoffrey Trease (1949/1964) had led the way in drawing attention to the politically conservative bias of historical fiction, and had attempted to offer alternative points of view in his own writing. Nat Hentoff drew attention to the under-representation of teenagers in children's books, and saw the need to make 'contact with the sizeable number of the young who never read anything for pleasure because they are not in it' (Hentoff 1969:400). Bob Dixon's work (1974) was characteristic of many attacks on the most prolific of British authors, Enid Blyton, and commentators were becoming increasingly aware of the white middleclass nature of many children's books, and of the sex-role stereotyping to be found within them. Zimet (1976) drew attention to the exclusion or the stereotypical presentation of ethnic minorities and women in children's fiction, and incidentally also in school textbooks, and espoused the use of positive images of girls and of ethnic minorities. Bob Dixon (1977), in a comprehensive survey,

demonstrated the almost universally reactionary views on race, gender and class, together with a political conservatism, that informed most British children's books of the time, and Robert Leeson (1977) came up with similar findings. The Writers and Readers Publishing Co-operative (1979) drew attention to the racism inherent in a number of children's classics and one or two highly rated more modern books, and examined sex roles and other stereotyping.

In order to respond to what was seen as the bias in children's fiction, it was argued that books should be written with working-class, or female or black protagonists. In this way working-class, anti-racist and anti-sexist values would be promoted. Thus, in 1982 Dixon drew up what was essentially an annotated book list of 'stories which show a positive, overall attitude with regard to sex roles, race and social class' (Dixon 1982:3), though he also insisted that the books should meet 'literary' standards that were essentially Leavisite. Such initiatives have multiplied in recent years and the practical outcome has been a proliferation of series aimed particularly at the teenage market, and the emergence of writers like Petronella Breinburg, Robert Leeson and Jan Needle in Britain, and Rosa Guy, Julius Lester, Louise Fitzhugh and Virginia Hamilton in the USA, who have offered different perspectives and attempted to redress the balance.

As has been indicated, the debate was essentially about representation, and 'literary standards' *per se* were not generally challenged. Thus more complex considerations of the ways in which ideology is inscribed in texts did not enter into the equation, nor did considerations of the complexity of reader response. What such initiatives did do, however, was to point out that all texts incorporated value positions, and that after all, as John Stephens has observed, 'Writing for children is usually purposeful' (Stephens 1992:3)

It was therefore not long before questions were raised about the grounds of the judgements made about the quality of children's books, and that in turn relates to a wider consideration of such questions with regard to literary criticism as a whole.

### **The Development of Criticism of Children's Fiction: the Leavisite Paradigm**

The criticism of children's fiction has been something of a poor relation in critical studies. For the first two-thirds of twentieth century there was little written that addressed the subject, and in an interesting article Felicity Hughes (1978/1990) offers some analysis as to why this was the case. She argues that at the turn of the century Henry James and others encapsulated the view that for the novel to fully come of age as an art form it had to break free of its family audience. Since then the tendency has increased to view writing for children as a 'mere' craft, not worthy of serious critical attention. Reviewing and commentary focused on advising parents, librarians and other interested adults on what to buy for children, or on advising teachers on how to encourage and develop the reading habits of their pupils. And while critical judgements were offered about the quality of the books, the criteria for such critical judgements were assumed rather than debated. When surveys of the field were published they also tended to sacrifice discussion of critical criteria to the need for comprehensive coverage.



However, a developing body of work did start to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s which was directly concerned with confronting the problem and trying to establish criteria for judgement. Such work drew on two traditions, the Leavisite tradition in Britain, and the New Criticism in the USA. Foremost amongst such initiatives was a collection of papers edited by Egoff *et al.* (1969). Rosenheim (1969) and Travers (1969), both from that collection, look specifically to New Critic Northrop Frye's mythic archetypes, as do Ted Hughes (1976), and Peter Hunt (1980). Wallace Hildick (1970) and Myles McDowell (1973) both address the question of the difference in writing for children and writing for adults, but both resort to Leavisite criteria for evaluating the quality of children's books, as does John Rowe Townsend (1971/1990). The Leavisite tradition perhaps reaches its apogee with Fred Inglis's *The Promise of Happiness*. Inglis's opening sentence directly quotes the opening of Leavis's *The Great Tradition* (1948): 'The great children's novelists are Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, Francis Hodgson Burnett, Arthur Ransome, William Mayne, and Philippa Pearce—to stop for a moment at that comparatively safe point on an uncertain list' (Inglis 1981:1).

The tradition is not dead. Margery Fisher (1986) for instance, assumes that the definition of a children's classic is still essentially unproblematic. William Moebius (1986/1990) brings similar assumptions to bear upon picture books, and Peter Hunt's book on Arthur Ransome is still largely rooted in Leavisite practice in its judgements of quality and value (Hunt 1992).

One of the features of the tradition is its refusal to address questions of value at a theoretical level. Here is Townsend exemplifying the point.

We find in fact that the literary critics, both modern and not-so-modern, are reluctant to pin themselves down to theoretical statements. In the introduction to *Determinations* (1934), F.R. Leavis expresses the belief that 'the way to forward true appreciation of literature and art is to examine and discuss it'; and again, 'out of agreement or disagreement with particular judgements of value a sense of relative value in the concrete will define itself, and without this, no amount of talk in the abstract is worth anything'.

Townsend 1971/1990:66

The values in question can be culled from a variety of sources. F.R. Leavis (1955) talks of 'intelligence', 'vitality', 'sensibility', 'depth, range and subtlety in the presentment of human experience', 'achieved creation' 'representative significance'. Inglis (1981) talks of 'sincerity' 'dignity', 'integrity', 'honesty', 'authenticity', 'fulfilment', 'freedom', 'innocence', 'nation', 'intelligence', 'home', 'heroism', 'friendship', 'history'. And Peter Hunt tells us that the virtues of Arthur Ransome are 'family, honour, skill, good sense, responsibility and mutual respect', and 'the idea of place' (Hunt 1992:86). All of these terms and formulations are offered by their various authors as if they are essentially unproblematic, and they are thus rendered as common sense, naturalised and hidden in the discourse, and not raised for examination. We may have little difficulty, however, in recognising a liberal humanist consensus which runs through them, even if one or two of Inglis's choices are somewhat idiosyncratic. Nowhere, however, are we able to raise

the question of the role that this liberal humanist discourse plays ideologically in a late capitalist world, and it is such a challenge that an ideological critique inevitably raises.

However, before moving on to such considerations, it is necessary to add that Inglis's book also marks a peak in the *educational* debate which has filled the pages of such journals as *English in Education* throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, and which is also a debate between the Leavisites and the exponents of newer developments in structuralism and semiotics. As I have indicated above, the discourses of children's literature and education continuously overlap. Felicity Hughes (1976/1990) highlights Henry James's concern that the universal literacy that would follow from universal schooling would endanger the future of the novel as an art form, leading to inevitable vulgarisation, as the novel itself catered to popular taste—and children's literature itself catered to an even lower common denominator. As a result, and in order to try to return some status to children's literature, it was, and often still is seen as the training ground of adult literary taste. From such a perspective the distinction conferred by the term 'literature' is crucial, since by that means the Jamesian distinctions between the novel as an art form and other fiction as *commercial* entertainment is promoted.

It is perhaps ironic that the criticism of children's fiction should come of age at precisely the point when the newer perspectives of structuralism, semiotics, and Marxism were beginning to make their mark in literary criticism in Britain, and to undermine those very certainties after which Inglis was searching.

### **The Ideological Debate in Literary Studies**

#### *Character and action: structuralist insights*

As already noted, the work of New Critic Northrop Frye (1957) had been influential in establishing a structuralist tradition in the criticism of children's fiction in the USA in the early 1970s. From Europe a different tradition began to make its influence felt in Britain in the later 1970s and 1980s, particularly with regard to the treatment of character and action. The Russian formalist, Vladimir Propp (1928/1968), suggested in his study of the Russian folktale that character was not the source of action, rather it was the product of plot. The hero was the hero because of his or her role in the plot. One can go back to Aristotle for similar insistence that it was not character but action that was important in tragedy (Aristotle 1965:39) and such views were echoed by the pre-war critic Walter Benjamin (1970) and in Tzvetan Todorov's work (1971/1977).

The Leavisite tradition had, by contrast, tended to emphasise the importance of psychological insight in characterisation, and had seen characters themselves as the source of the action of the story, and it is easy to see how the work of authors such as Philippa Pearce, Nina Bawden, William Mayne, Maurice Sendak, Anthony Browne or Aidan Chambers, to take a list not entirely at random, lends itself to such approaches. By contrast the work of popular authors, such as Enid Blyton or Roald Dahl, more easily lends itself to structuralist analysis: their protagonists are heroines and heroes primarily because that is their plot role, not because there is anything in their psychological make up that makes them inherently 'heroic'.

Such structuralist approaches need not be limited to popular texts, and can be applied with equal usefulness to the work of authors at what is often regarded as the 'quality' end of the market. To take an example, the character of Toad in *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame 1908) could be seen on the one hand as a rounded psychological creation, in turns blustering and repentant, selfish, self-seeking and replete with hubris. His exploits can then be seen entirely in terms of his personality. Structuralist analysis, on the other hand, might see him as comic hero, archetypal overreacher, functioning as the disruptive element in the social order that is necessary for the book's main plot to develop, and thus acting as a pivotal point for the articulation of the conflict between the uncertainties of the newer machine age, and the more settled life of the rural idyll, a conflict which is one of the major themes of the book.

Robert Leeson (1975/1980) led the attack on the application to children's fiction of the then prevailing tradition of adult literary criticism. He writes: 'these days, turning to adult lit-crit is like asking to be rescued by the *Titanic*' (209). He locates the debate about characterisation in a specifically ideological context, suggesting that enthusiasm for psychological characterisation is a bourgeois trait. The old tales, he argues, echoing Propp, didn't need psychology, they had action and moral. The claims made by traditional 'lit-crit' for such characterisation are elitist, and have little application for the general reader. J.S.Bratton, too, rejected the Leavisite tradition in her study of Victorian children's books: 'the liberal humanist tradition of literary criticism offers no effective approach to the material' (Bratton 1981:19) although she draws on Frye as well as Propp in her resort to structuralism (see also Sarland 1991:142).

The critique of the position which sees character as the source of meaning and action comes from a wider and more ideological perspective than that of structuralism alone, and structuralism itself has more to offer than insights about character and action. More widely, structuralism draws on semiotics to explore the whole range of codes that operate in texts and by which they construct their meanings; it also takes a lead from Lévi-Strauss (1963), who related structural elements in myths to structural elements in the society that gave rise to them. This becomes a central tool of ideological critique, allowing parallels to be drawn between ideological structures in the works and those in society at large.

### *The underlying ground of ideological value*

Marxist literary criticism analyses literature in the light of prevailing economic class conflict in capitalist society. This conflict is not slavishly reproduced in the ideological superstructure, of which literature is a part, but it is always possible to trace it in some form in individual work. The liberal humanist tradition, by contrast, sees not class conflict as the major determining structure in understanding history and society, but materialism itself. The ideological conflict then becomes materialism versus humanism and the paradigm distinction to be made about the work, *pace* Henry James, is that between art and commerce. Terry Eagleton (1976) and Catherine Belsey (1980) are among the major critics of the Leavisite tradition, identifying its liberal humanist roots, and analysing its escapist response to the materialism of bourgeois capitalism. Furthermore, they argue, by 'naturalising' its values as common sense, liberal

humanism conceals its reactionary political role, though the idealist nature of its position is often clear enough in its claim of transcendent status for those same values and for a universal 'human nature' in which they inhere.

To take an example, a liberal humanist reading of *The Wind in the Willows* might see it as celebrating the values enshrined in notions of home and good fellowship, in opposition to the threatening materialism of the wide world with its dominant symbol of the motor car. A case might be made that the recurrent plots and subplots, all of which involve explorations away from, and successive returns to warm secure homes, culminating in the retaking of Toad Hall from the marauding weasels and stoats, have a universal appeal, since such explorations and returns are the very condition of childhood itself. An ideological perspective might note, by contrast, the resemblance of those secure warm homes to the Victorian middleclass nursery, and comment upon the escapism of the response to the materialism of the wide world. Such an approach might further recognise the underlying feudalist presuppositions that are hidden within the 'common sense' assumptions of the book, and might identify in the weasels and stoats the emergence of an organised working class challenging the privileges of property and upper-middle-class idleness. Jan Needle's re-working of the book, *Wild Wood* (1981), starts from just such a premise. In addition the celebration of fellowship is an entirely male affair, the only women in the book—the jailer's daughter and the bargee—have distinctly subservient roles, and claims for universality just in terms of gender alone begin to look decidedly suspect.

In her continuing ideological critique Belsey suggests that from the liberal humanist perspective people are seen as the sole authors of their own actions, and hence of their own history, and meaning is the product of their individual intentions. In fact, she argues, the reverse is true: people are not the authors of their own history, they are rather the products of history itself, or less deterministically, engaged in a dialectical relationship with their history—both product and producer. The grounds for Leeson's argument, above, are now clear, for a criticism that espouses psychological characterisation as a central tenet of 'quality', and that insists that the stories in which those characters find themselves should be rooted in the intentionality of those characters' psyches, is liberal humanist in assumption, and will fail to expose the ideological nature both of the fiction to which it is giving attention, and of the fiction that it is ignoring.

In liberal humanist criticism it is the author who takes centre stage, and Belsey identifies 'expressive realism' as literature's dominant form over the past 150 years: reality, as experienced by a single gifted individual is expressed in such a way that the rest of us spontaneously perceive it as being the case. Grahame's intention is assumed to be that readers should see childhood as a time and place of adventure within a secure framework, and readers are to take his word for it. The resort to the author's intention as the source of meaning in the work, known to its critics as the 'intentional fallacy', had already come under attack for circularity from the New Critics, since the primary evidence for the author's intention was usually the work itself. Belsey takes the argument one step further, suggesting that expressive realism operates to support liberal humanism, and thus, effectively, in support of capitalism itself. Ideological perspectives insist, in contrast, that texts are constructions in and of ideology, generally operating

unconsciously, and it is the job of the critic to deconstruct the work in order to expose its underlying ideological nature and role. Thus, far from being the unique insight of an individual with a privileged understanding of the world, *The Wind in the Willows* can be seen as resting securely within a continuum of escapist response to developing bourgeois capitalism that stretches all the way from *Hard Times* to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

Peter Hollindale (1988) takes on a number of the perspectives outlined above, and applies them to his discussion of ideology in children's books. He distinguishes three levels of ideology. There is first of all an overt, often proselytising or didactic level, as instanced in books like *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler* (Kemp 1977). Then there is a second more passive level, where views of the world are put into characters' mouths or otherwise incorporated into the narrative with no overt ironic distancing. (There is a famous example of this from Enid Blyton's *Five Run Away Together* (1944), analysed by Ken Watson (1992:31), in which the reader is implicitly invited to side with the obnoxious middle-class Julian putting down a member of the 'lower orders'.) Finally, there is what Hollindale calls an 'underlying climate of belief' which he identifies as being inscribed in the basic material from which fiction is built. It is possible to detect a hankering after the old transcendent certainties in Hollindale's work. None the less he does substantially shift the ground of the debate in regard to children's fiction, recognising the complexity of the issues.

### *Circumstances of production*

Within the Marxist tradition it has long been recognised that literature is a product of the particular historical and social formations that prevail at the time of its production (see for example Lenin, originally 1908, 1910, 1911/1978; Plekhanov 1913/1957; Trotsky 1924/1974). Children's books have not received such attention until comparatively recently. Bratton (1981) traced the relationship between Victorian children's fiction and its various markets—stories for girls to teach them the domestic virtues, stories for boys to teach them the virtues of military Christianity, stories for the newly literate poor, to teach them religion and morality. Leeson, in his history of children's fiction (Leeson 1985), suggests that there has always been a conflict between middle-class literature and popular literature, a distinction which can be traced in the content of the material, and related to the market that it found. He draws attention to the roots of popular fiction in folktale, which had political content which survived (somewhat subdued) into the written forms. Leeson thus raises a question mark over the perhaps somewhat more determinist analysis offered by Belsey and Eagleton.

More thorough exploration of the issues in contemporary children's fiction has come from feminist perspectives, with a collection of studies of popular teen romance fiction edited by Linda K. Christian-Smith (1993a). Christian-Smith herself (1993b) provides a particularly powerful analysis of the economic, political and ideological circumstances of the growth in production of romances for 'teenagers' or 'young adults', which is now a global industry, with most of the publishing houses based in the USA. She traces the relationship between the imperatives of 'Reaganomics', the emphasis on family values in the rise of the New Right in the 1980s, and the need to enculturate young women into

the gendered roles that serve such interests. The collection as a whole analyses how such material both constructs and meets the needs of its market in a rich and subtle exegesis which I shall return to below.

In the meantime it is necessary to explore a further area which has important ideological implication, and that is the way in which the child reader is constructed by the texts he or she is reading.

### **The Construction of the Reader**

The initiatives of the 1970s to redress the balance in the bias of children's fiction took a straightforward view about the relationship between the text and the reader. At its simplest an almost directly didactic relationship was assumed. If you wrote books with positive characterisations of, and roles for, girls, ethnic minorities and the working class, then readers' attitudes would be changed and all would be well with the world. I do not suggest that anyone, even then, thought it would be quite that simple, and since the 1970s there has been something of a revolution in our understandings of how readers are constructed by texts. The insights of reader-response theoreticians like Wolfgang Iser (1978), applied to children's books most notably by Aidan Chambers (1980), had alerted us to some of the textual devices by which an implied reader is written into the text. Iser himself had drawn attention to the fact that texts brought with them a cultural repertoire which had to be matched by the reader. Macherey (1978) brought Freudian perspectives to bear on ways in which ideology operated in hidden ways in the text, and by extension, also in the reader, and Catherine Belsey drew insights from Althusser, Derrida and Lacan to further explore the ways in which the subjectivity of the reader is ideologically constructed.

It is Jacqueline Rose (1984) who offers the most thoroughgoing exposition of this view with respect to children's fiction. She argues that, by a combination of textual devices, characterisation and assumptions of value position, children's books construct children, both as characters and as readers, as without sexuality, innocent, and denied politics, either a politics between themselves or within wider society. As such they are seen as beings with a privileged perception, untainted by culture. More recently, John Stephens (1992), engages in a detailed analysis of a number of books to show how they produce ideological constructions of implied child readers. He concentrates particularly on narrative focalisation and the shifts, moves and gaps of narrative viewpoint and attitude, showing how such techniques imply certain ideological assumptions and formulations, and construct implied readers who must be expected to share them.

### **Implied Readers and Real Readers**

When real readers are introduced into the equation, however, the picture becomes more complicated, and it is here that the educational discourse overlaps with the discourse about fiction *per se*, for it is almost always within school that evidence is gathered, and intervention is proposed. The introduction of real readers has another effect, for it throws into relief some of the more determinist assumptions of the analysis offered

above. The evidence comes under three headings: identification, the polysemous text, and contradictory readings.

### *Identification*

The notion of identification has been a contentious issue for some time. The assumption is that readers 'identify with' the protagonists, and thus take on their particular value positions. Readers are thus ideologically constructed by their identification with the character. D.W.Harding (1977) offered an alternative formulation of the reader as an observer in a more detached and evaluative spectator role, and both Geoff Fox (1979) and Robert Protherough (1983) suggest that such a straightforward notion as identification does not account for the evidence that they collected from children and young people. It is clear from their evidence that readers take up a range of positions of greater or lesser involvement, and of varied focalisation. The ideological initiatives of the 1970s presupposed an identification model of response, and subsequent commentators are still most fearful of what happens should a young person engage in unmediated identification with characters constructed within ideologically undesirable formulations. Such fears underlie Stephens's analysis (1992) and the work of Christian-Smith and her co-contributors (1993).

### *The polysemous text*

Roland Barthes (1974) alerted us to the notion that texts operated a plurality of codes that left them open to a plurality of readings, and Umberto Eco (1981) offers the most extensive analysis of that plurality. Specifically, with regard to ideology, Eco agrees that all texts carry ideological assumptions, whether overt or covert. But readers, he argues, have three options: they can assume the ideology of the text and subsume it into their own reading; they can miss or ignore the ideology of the text and import their own, thus producing 'aberrant' readings—'where "aberrant" means only different from the ones envisaged by the sender' (22); or they can question the text in order to reveal the underlying ideology. This third option is, of course, the project that ideological critique undertakes. When real readers, other than critics, are questioned about their readings, it is clear that the second option is often taken up, and that 'aberrant' readings abound (Sarland 1991; ChristianSmith 1993a), though consensual readings also clearly occur. Texts, it seems, are contradictory, and so evidently are readings.

### *Contradictory readings*

Macherey (1977, 1978) and Eagleton (1976), both assume that the world is riven with ideological conflict. To expect texts to resolve that conflict is mistaken, and the ideological contradictions that inform the world will also be found to inform the fictional texts that are part of that world. Some texts, Eagleton argues, are particularly good at revealing ideological conflict, in that they sit athwart the dominant ideology of the times in which they were written. Eagleton looks to examples from the traditional adult canon to make his point.

Jack Zipes (1979) takes the argument one stage further and suggests that popular work too will be found to be contradictory. He links popular literature and film with its precursors in folktale and romance, and suggests that it offers the hope of autonomy and self-determination, in admittedly utopian forms, while at the same time affirming dominant capitalist ideology. In other words, while the closure of popular texts almost always reinforces dominant ideology, in the unfolding narratives there are always countering moves in which it is challenged. Zipes, then, denies the implications of Eagleton's work that only texts that sit athwart the prevailing ideology can be open to countervailing readings, and he denies too the implications of Belsey's work that popular forms sit within the classic expressive realist tradition, and as such demand readings that are congruent with the dominant ideology.

For example in Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* books, many of the plots are predicated on the refusal of the central female character, George, to accept her role as subservient, domesticated and non-adventurous, despite repeated exhortations to 'behave like a girl'. She even refuses to accept her 'real' name, which is Georgina. Countering this is the fact that Blyton only offers her the alternative of 'tomboy', an alternative that is itself determined by a predominantly male discourse; and the closures of the books re-establish traditional domestic order with the sexes acting according to conventional gender stereotype. (Zipes himself later turned his attention to children's fiction (Zipes 1983), and see also Sarland 1983.)

While this analysis is still essentially theoretical, supporting evidence is beginning to emerge from studies that have been done of readers themselves. The focus has been on popular fiction, and on teenagers. Popular fiction causes educationalists particular concern since it appears to reinforce the more reactionary values in society, particularly so far as girls and young women are concerned. The research evidence uncovers a complex picture of the young seeking ways to take control over their own lives, and using the fiction that they enjoy as one element in that negotiation of cultural meaning and value. Gemma Moss showed how teenage girls and boys were able to turn the popular forms of, respectively, the romance and the thriller to their own ends. She found unhelpful some of the more determinist ideological analysis that suggested that, by their reading of romance, girls were constructed as passive victims of a patriarchal society. The girls who liked the romances were tough, worldly wise working-class girls who were not subservient to their male counterparts. 'Girls didn't need to be told about male power, they were dealing with it every day of their lives' (Moss 1989:7). The traditional assessment of 'teen romance' by most teachers as stereotyped drivel was applied to the girls' writing, too, when they chose to write in that form. However, Moss shows how the teenage girls she was working with were able to take the form into their own writing and use it to negotiate and dramatise their concerns with and experience of femininity and oppression. Romance offered them a form for this activity that was not necessarily limiting at all.

In *Young People Reading: Culture and Response* (Sarland 1991) I have argued that young people engaged in 'aberrant' readings of pulp violence and horror, readings which ran against the reactionary closure of such material, and they thus were able to explore aspirations of being in control of their own lives, and I further argued that the official school literature as often as not offered them negative perspectives on those same



aspirations. Christian-Smith and her colleagues (1993) explore similar dualities and demonstrate the complexity of the problem. For instance, in her analysis of the Baby-Sitters Club books, Meredith Rogers Cherland shows how the characters are placed securely within feminine roles and functions, being prepared for domestic life and work in lowly paid 'caring' jobs. The 11-year-old girls who are reading them, however, 'saw the baby-sitters making money that they then used to achieve their own ends. They saw the baby-sitters shaping the action around them so that things worked out the way they wanted them to. They saw girls their age acting as agents in their own right' (Cherland with Edelsky 1993: 32). By contrast, horror, Cherland argues, which these girls were also beginning to read, casts women in increasingly helpless roles. In its association of sexuality with violence it seemed to offer the girls in Cherland's study a position of increasing powerlessness, living in fear and thus denied agency.

Research into the meanings that young people actually make of the books they are reading demonstrates the plural nature of the texts we are dealing with. While it was often claimed that texts within the canon had complexity and ambiguity, it was always thought that popular texts pandered to the lowest common denominator, and offered no purchase on complex ideological formulations. The evidence does not bear that out. Popular texts too are discovered to be open to more than one reading, and the deconstruction of those texts, and the readings young people bring to them, proves to be a productive tool of analysis for exploring the ideological formulations which constitute them. There is yet to be a large mainstream study of what readers make of the more traditional central canon of children's fiction, though John Stephens and Susan Taylor's exploration of readings of two retellings of the Seal Wife legend (Stephens and Taylor 1992) is a useful start.

### **Ideology and Children's Fiction**

We have learned from the debate in literary studies that ideology is inscribed in texts much more deeply and in much more subtle ways than we at first thought in the 1970s. The initial emphasis in the criticism of children's books was on the characters, and addressed questions of representation. The relationship between reader and text was assumed to be one of simple identification. Literary merit was an unproblematic notion built upon Leavisite assumptions. This was set in question by reconsideration of characterisation itself, and then by the revolution in literary studies. Hollindale (1988) made an initial attempt to explore the complexity of the problem, and Stephens (1992) has taken it further. Stephens brings powerful ideological perspectives to bear upon the themes of children's fiction, the ways in which the stories are shaped, as well as the ways in which implied readers are constructed by the texts. He looks at a range of texts, including picture books written for the youngest readers, and examines specific titles by a number of writers in the central canon—Judy Blume, Anthony Browne, Leon Garfield, Jan Mark, William Mayne, Jan Needle, Rosemary Sutcliffe, Maurice Sendak and others. The debate has been informed by a rerecognition of the moral/ didactic role of children's fiction, now recoded as its ideological role. Unresolved conflicts remain between those who want to retain or renegotiate some literary criteria for judging the quality of children's fiction and those who are more sceptical of such judgements.

The overlap with the discourse of child rearing, and in particular, education, reveals another conflict, that between determinism and agency. One view of fiction is that it constructs readers in specific ideological formations, and thus enculturates them into the dominant discourses of capitalism—class division, paternalism, racism. Such views are not totally fatalistic, but do require of readers a very conscious effort to read against texts, to deconstruct them in order to reveal their underlying ideology. This then becomes the educational project. The opposing view is that readers are not nearly such victims of fiction as has been assumed, and that the fictions that are responsible for the transmission of such values are more complex than was at first thought. Evidence from the children and young people themselves is beginning to be collected in order to explore this complexity. The argument is that readers are not simply determined by what they read; rather there is a dialectical relationship between determinism and agency. With reference to her discussions of girls' reading, Cherland quotes J.M. Anyon:

The dialectic of accommodation and resistance is a part of all human beings' response to contradiction and oppression. Most females engage in daily conscious and unconscious attempts to resist the psychological degradation and low self-esteem that would result from the total application of the cultural ideology of femininity: submissiveness, dependency, domesticity and passivity.

Cherland with Edelsky 1993:30

Applied to language itself, this analysis of a dialectic between individual identity and the ideological formulations of the culture within which it finds itself can be traced back to Volosinov. Within children's literature the dialectic will be found within the texts, and between the texts and the reader.

The collection of papers edited by Christian-Smith explores this dialectic in the greatest detail. There is initially the dialectic within the texts between feminine agency and patriarchy, traced by Pam Gilbert (1993) and Sandra Taylor (1993), who show how the female characters are agents of their own lives, finding spaces for decision making and autonomy within the gendered discourse of the culture, and in the case of younger characters, within the adult child power relationships of the family. They generally insist that boys treat them with respect, in an equal and caring relationship, yet they are trapped within stories that in their closure, suggest futures in domesticity, in poorly paid service and 'caring' jobs, and in monogamous heterosexual relationships.

There is, further, the dialectic between the mode of production, distribution and dissemination of the texts, and the fact that the girls themselves choose to read them despite whatever 'better' alternatives may be available (Christian-Smith 1993b; Willinsky and Hunniford 1993).

There is finally the dialectic in school itself as readers appropriate such texts as oppositional reading, and use them both to renegotiate their own gender roles in their writing (Moss 1993) and in their discussions (Willinsky and Hunniford 1993). Yet the schools' own rating of such reading as being beneath attention, and the tendency to regard the readers as therefore—and already—constructed by their reading in such a way that those readings do not merit serious attention, means that the young women

and girls are themselves excluded from full educational opportunity (Taylor 1993, Davies 1993).

In Christian-Smith's collection *Texts of Desire: Essays on Fiction, Femininity and Schooling* (1993) ideological criticism of children's fiction has come of age. The collection as a whole addresses the complexity of the debate, analysing the ideologies of the texts themselves, the economic and political circumstances of their production, dissemination and distribution, the ideological features of the meanings their young readers make of them, and the political and economic circumstances of those young readers themselves. The focus of attention is the mass-produced material aimed at the female teen and just pre-teen market, but their study offers a paradigm for future exploration of children's fiction generally, if we are to fully understand its ideological construction within society.

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## Linguistics and Stylistics

*John Stephens*

Because the contexts in which children's literature is produced and disseminated are usually dominated by a focus on content and theme, the language of children's literature receives little explicit attention. Yet style—which is the *way* things are represented, based on complex codes and conventions of language and presuppositions about language—is an important component of texts, and the study of it allows us access to some of the key processes which shape text production (Scholes 1985:2–3). The assumption that what is said can be extricated from how it is said, and that language is therefore only a transparent medium, is apt to result in readings with at best a limited grasp of written genres or of the social processes and movements with which genres and styles interrelate.

The language of fiction written for children readily appears to offer conventionalised discourses by means of which to 'encode' content (both story and message). The ubiquitous 'Once upon a time' of traditional story-telling, for example, not only serves as a formal story onset but also tends to imply that particular narrative forms, with a particular stock of lexical and syntactic forms, will ensue. But the contents and themes of that fiction are representations of social situations and values, and such social processes are inextricable from the linguistic processes which give them expression. In other words, the transactions between writers and readers take place within complex networks of social relations by means of language. Further, within the large language system of English, for example, it is possible for young readers to encounter in their reading an extensive range and variety of language uses. Some textual varieties will seem familiar and immediately accessible, consisting of a lexicon and syntax which will seem identifiably everyday, but others will seem much less familiar, either because the lexicon contains forms or uses specific to a different speech community (British 'Standard' English versus USA 'Standard' English, for example), or because writers may choose to employ linguistic forms whose occurrence is largely or wholly restricted to narrative fiction, or because particular kinds of fiction evolve specific discourses. Books which may be said to have a common theme or topic will differ not just because that theme can be expressed in a different content but because it is expressed through differing linguistic resources. For example, a large number of children's books express the theme of 'growing up', but since that theme can be discerned in texts as diverse as Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and Danziger's *Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?*, it cannot in itself discriminate effectively between texts of different kinds.

Writers have many options to select from. Thus fiction offers a large range of generic options, such as the choice between fantasy and realism, with more specific differences within them, such as that between time-slip fantasy grounded in the knowable world, or fantasy set in an imaginary universe. To make such a choice involves entering into a *discourse*, a complex of story types and structures, social forms and linguistic practices. That discourse can be said to take on a distinctive style in so far as it is distinguished from other actualisations by recurrent patterns or codes. These might include choices in lexis and grammar; use, types and frequency of figurative language; characteristic modes of cohesion; orientation of narrative voice towards the text's existents (that is, events, characters, settings). Aspects of such a style may be shared by several writers working in the same period and with a common genre, as, for example, contemporary realistic adolescent fiction, but it is usually more personal, as when we speak of the style of Kenneth Grahame, or William Mayne or Zibby Oneal, and at times we may refer to the distinctive style of a particular text, such as Virginia Hamilton's *Arilla Sun Down*. Because the patterns of a particular style are a selection from a larger linguistic code, however, and exist in a relationship of sameness and difference with a more generalised discourse, a writer remains to some degree subject to the discourse, and the discourse can be said to determine at least part of the meaning of the text. Moreover, a narrative discourse also encodes a reading position which readers will adopt to varying extents, depending on their previous experience of the particular discourse, their similarities to or differences from the writer's language community, their level of linguistic sophistication, and other individual differences. At a more obviously linguistic level, a writer's choices among such options as first/third person narration, single/multiple focalisation, and direct/ indirect speech representation further define the encoded reading position. Between them, the broader elements of genre and the more precise linguistic processes appear to restrict the possibility of wildly deviant readings, though what might be considered more probable readings depends on an acquired recognition of the particular discourse. If that recognition is not available to readers, the readings they produce may well seem aberrant.

The communication which informs the transactions between writers and readers is a specialised aspect of socio-linguistic communication in general. The forms and meanings of reality are constructed in language: by analysing how language works, we come nearer to knowing how our culture constructs itself, and where we fit into that construction. Language enables individuals to compare their experiences with the experiences of others, a process which has always been a fundamental purpose of children's fiction. The representation of experiences such as growing up, evolving a sense of self, falling in love or into conflict and so on, occurs in language, and guarantees that the experiences represented are shared with human beings in general. Language can make present the felt experiences of people living in other places and at other times, thus enabling a reader to define his or her own subjectivity in terms of perceived potentialities and differences. Finally, the capacity of language to express things beyond everyday reality, such as abstract thought or possible transcendent experiences, is imparted to written texts with all its potentiality for extending the boundaries of intellectual and emotional experience. Readers (and writers) often like to

think of this as a kind of 'word magic' (for example, Sullivan 1985)—and numerous fantastic fictions so represent it—though it is in fact an explicable linguistic function.

The socio-linguistic contexts of text production and reception are important considerations for any account of reading processes. But beyond satisfying a basic human need for contact, reading can also give many kinds of pleasure, though the pleasures of reading are not discovered in a social or linguistic vacuum: as we first learn how to read we also start learning what is pleasurable and what not, and even what is good writing and what not. Our socio-linguistic group, and especially its formal educational structures, tends to precondition what constitutes a good story, a good argument, a good joke, and the better our command of socio-linguistic codes the greater is our appreciation. In other words, we learn to enjoy the process as well as the product. Writing and reading are also very individual acts, however, and the pleasure of reading includes some sense of the distinctive style of a writer or a text. One primary function of stylistic description is to contribute to the pleasure in the text by defining the individual qualities of what is vaguely referred to as the 'style' of a writer or text.

Stylistic description can be attempted by means of several methodologies. These range from an impressionistic 'literary stylistics', which is characteristic of most discussions of the language of children's literature, to complex systemic analyses. The latter can offer very precise and delicate descriptions, but have the limitation that non-specialists may find them impenetrable. This article works within the semiotic analysis developed in contemporary critical linguistics (Fairclough 1989; Stephens 1992a).

To discuss the textuality of children's fiction one has to begin by considering some assumptions about the nature of language on which it is grounded. Linguists recognise that language is a social semiotic, a culturally patterned system of signs used to communicate about things, ideas or concepts. As a system constructed within culture, it is not founded on any essential bond between a verbal sign and its referent (Stephens 1992a: 246–247). This is an important point to grasp, because much children's fiction is written and mediated under the contrary, essentialist assumption, and this has major implications both for writing objectives and for the relationships between writers and readers. As mentioned above, fantasy writing in particular is apt to assert the inextricability of word and thing, but the assumption also underlies realistic writing which purports to minimise the distance between life and fiction, or which pivots on the evolution of a character's essential selfhood, and it often informs critical suspicion of texts which foreground the gap between signs and things. The essentialist position has been conveniently (over-)stated by Molly Hunter:

the belief underlying the practice of magic has a direct bearing on the whole concept of language... The meaning of every word, it is argued, is innate to its sound and structure. Thus the word itself is the essence of what it names; and to capture that essence in speech is to be able to direct its power to a desired end.

Hunter 1976:107–108

Later in the same paper Hunter balances this position against a writer's more sober awareness 'that words may be defined only to the extent of ensuring their correct use in context' (109), describing the difference as a contradiction which 'all creative writing is



an attempt to solve'. But a creative writer cannot resolve those incompatible assumptions about the nature of language and linguistic function. The following passages throw some light on this difference:

The glade in the ring of trees was evidently a meeting-place of the wolves ...in the middle of the circle was a great grey wolf. He spoke to them in the dreadful language of the Wargs. Gandalf understood it. Bilbo did not, but it sounded terrible to him, and as if all their talk was about cruel and wicked things, as it was.

*The Hobbit*, Tolkien 1937/1987:91

Charlie did not know much about ice... The only piece he had known came from a refrigerated boat, and was left on the wharf, cloudy white, not clear, not even very clean. Charlie had waited until the boat went with its load of lamb carcasses, and then gone for it. By then it had melted. There was a puddle, a wisp of lambswool, and nothing more.

He did not even think this was the same stuff. He did not think this place was part of the world. He thought it was the mouth of some other existence coming up from the ground, being drilled through the rock. The pieces coming away were like the fragments from the bit of the carpentry brace Papa used for setting up shelves. An iron thing would come from the ground, Charlie thought, and another Papa would blow through the hole to make it clear. Last time all the dust had gone into Charlie's eye, because he was still looking through. Papa had thought him such a fool.

*Low Tide*, Mayne 1992:163–164

The Tolkien and Mayne passages represent a principal character at a moment of incomprehension: Bilbo hears a foreign language, and has no actual referents for the verbal signs; Charlie perceives a physical phenomenon (the point at which pieces of ice break from a glacier into a river, though *glacier* is not introduced for two more paragraphs) and struggles with the socio-linguistic resources at his disposal to find meaning in it. A significant difference between the two is the implication that the Wargs' language communicates meanings beyond sense. On a simple level, this is to say no more than that it is obvious what the sounds made by a nasty horde of wolves signify. But Tolkien directly raises the question of comprehension—'Gandalf understood it'—and uses his overt, controlling narrative voice to confirm that Bilbo comprehends something which is a linguistic essential: the language is inherently 'dreadful' (presumably in the fuller sense of 'inspiring dread'); and the 'as it was' confirms the principle that 'the meaning is innate to its sound' suggested by the lexical set 'terrible, wicked and cruel'. Mayne focuses on the other side of the sign/thing relationship, in effect posing a question often posed in his novels: can a phenomenon be understood if it cannot be signified in language? Tolkien's shifts between narration and Bilbo's focalisation are clearly marked; Mayne slips much more ambiguously between these modes, a strategy which serves to emphasise the gap between phenomena and language. The first paragraph is a retrospective narration of Charlie's single relevant empirical experience, but because that ice then differed in colour and form ('cloudy white', 'a puddle') the past

experience does not enable him to make sense of the present. Instead, in the second paragraph Charlie produces a fantastic (mis-)interpretation on the premise that what he sees is visually isomorphic with another previous experience. The upshot is that, once again, he seems 'such a fool', though that is only a temporary state induced by linguistic inadequacy, and is set aside by the novel's congruence of story and theme. As a story, *Low Tide* is a treasure hunt gone wrong and then marvellously recuperated; a major thematic concern, articulated through the child characters' struggles to make sense of phenomena, language, and the relationships between phenomena and language, is a child's struggle towards competence in his or her socio-linguistic context.

The texts thus demonstrate two very different approaches to the semiotic instability of language. A third, and very common, approach is to exploit that instability as a source of humour, and this partly explains why nonsense verse is considered to be almost entirely the province of childhood. A rich vein of narrative humour also runs from the same source. In Sendak's *Higglety Pigglety Pop!*, for example, humour is created by exploiting the arbitrary relationship between signs and things or actions, specifically the instabilities which can result when significations slip, multiply, or change. In the following extract, Jenny, the Sealyham terrier, has undertaken the task of feeding a mysterious and uncooperative baby:

Jennie wiped her beard on the rug. 'If you do not eat, you will not grow.'

'NO EAT! NO GROW! SHOUT!'

Jennie sighed and neatly tapped the top off the soft-boiled egg. 'Baby want a bite?'

'NO BITE!'

'GOOD!' snapped Jennie, and she gulped the egg, shell and all.

Breakfast was disappearing into Nurse, and suddenly Baby wanted some too.

'EAT!' she cried, pointing to the cereal.

Jennie thanked Baby and gobbled up the oatmeal.

'NO EAT!' Baby screamed.

Sendak 1967/1987:24

Signification in this extract pivots on the Baby's shouted 'EAT!', which in its immediate context is an expression of the Baby's desire, but becomes an instruction when Jennie chooses to interpret it as such. Subsequently, 'NO EAT!', which initially signifies the Baby's act of refusal, shifts to become another instruction. The first line of the extract is itself a succinct example of how context determines meaning. As a discrete utterance, 'Jennie wiped her beard on the rug' would seem to violate two normal social assumptions: female names do not normally collocate with beards, and 'rug' does not belong to the lexical set comprising objects on which beards might be wiped (towel; handkerchief; sleeve; etc.). In such an example, 'correct use in context' extends beyond other nearby words and the grammar which combines them into intelligible form to include the situation of utterance and cultural context. The situation of utterance—the knowledge that Jennie is a dog—clarifies the focus of reference, but at the same time foregrounds how the 'same' utterance can have a very different meaning in different contexts. The instability of reference emerges even when we know Jennie is a dog,

because the primary association of *beard* is with human (male) facial hair, and hence is always to some degree figurative when transferred to animals or plants. In such ways, *Higglety Pigglety Pop!* is a richly subversive text, playing on meanings to such an extent as to suggest that if allowed free play, language will tend to be uncontainable by situation, hovering always on the boundary of excess. Such a view of language, however, tends to be uncommon in the domain of children's literature.

The issue of sign/referent relationship is of central interest here because it bears directly on linguistic function in children's fiction and the notion of desirable significances. The assumption that the relationship is direct and unproblematic has the initial effect of producing what might be termed closed meanings. The Tolkien example is especially instructive because it explicitly shows how language which is potentially open, enabling a variety of potential reader responses, is narrowed by paradigmatic recursiveness and essentialism. Writers will, of course, often aim for such specification, but what are the implications if virtually all meaning in a text is implicitly closed? The outcome points to an invisible linguistic control by writer over reader. As Hunt has argued, attempts to exercise such control are much less obvious when conveyed by stylistic features than by lexis or story existents (Hunt 1991:109).

A related linguistic concept of major importance for the issue of language choice and writerly control is register, the principle which governs the choice among various possible linguistic realisations of the same thing. Register refers to types of language variation which collocate with particular social situations and written genres. Socially, for example, people choose different appropriate language variations for formal and informal occasions, for friendly disputes and angry arguments, and for specialised discourses: science, sport, computing, skipping rope games, role-play, and so on, all have particular registers made up of configurations of lexical and syntactical choices. Narrative fictions will seek to replicate such registers, but also, as with a wide range of writing genres, develop distinctive registers of their own. Genres familiar in children's fiction such as folk and fairy stories, ghost and terror stories, school stories, teen romance, and a host of others—use some readily identifiable registers. Consider the use of register in the following passage from Anna Fienberg's *Ariel, Zed and the Secret of Life*. It describes three girls watching a horror movie, but one of them (Ariel) is giggling:

When the girls looked back at the screen, the scene had changed. It was dusk, and shadows bled over the ground. A moaning wind had sprung up, and somewhere, amongst the trees, an owl hooted.

'Ooh, *look*,' hissed Lynn, her nails digging into her friend Mandy's arm. 'Is that him there, crouching behind that bush? Tell me what happens. I'm not looking any more.'

'The nurse is saying goodnight,' Mandy whispered, 'she's leaving. She'll have to go right past him.'

*The Monster From Out of Town* was, indeed, breathing heavily behind a camellia bush. His clawed hands crushed flowers to a perfumed pulp, which made you think of what he would do to necks...

Ariel grinned. The monster's mask was badly made and his costume looked much too tight...

The scene from the movie is presented in the conventional register of the Gothic (dusk, shadows, bled, moaning wind, an owl hooted), though the unusual metaphor ‘shadows bled’ reconfigures the conventional elements with the effect of foregrounding the Gothic trait of overwording (or semantic overload). By then switching the retelling to the audience’s perceptions and responses, Fienberg builds in a common Gothic narrative strategy, that of determining emotional response to scene or incident by building it in as a character’s response. The switch also enables a version of the suspense so necessary to horror (‘him...behind that bush’; ‘the nurse...leaving’; ‘his clawed hands’). These narrative strategies set up the deflation occurring with Ariel’s response and the register shift which expresses it: detached and analytic, she epitomises the resistant reader who refuses the positioning implied by the genre. The deflation has the effect of retrospectively defining how far a genre can depend on its audience’s unthinking acceptance of the emotional codes implied by its register.

Fienberg is making an important point about how fiction works (her novel is pervasively metafictional), and it is a point which is well applied to modes of fiction in which register is much less obtrusive. It is easy to assume that realistic fiction is based on a neutral register, though this is not really so, and a stylistic account can help disclose how its registers position readers even more thoroughly than do obvious registers such as that of Gothic. This is readily seen in the tradition of realism in adolescent fiction in the USA, which developed in the 1960s out of a psychology of adolescence based in the work of Erik Erikson re-routed through the textual influence of Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye*. Thus a first-person, adolescent narrator represents significant issues of adolescent development, such as ‘experience of physical sexual maturity, experience of withdrawal from adult benevolent protection, consciousness of self in interaction, re-evaluation of values, [and] experimentation’ (Russell 1988:61). Cultural institutions, genre and style interact with a material effect, not just to code human behaviour but to shape it. A stylistic analysis offers one position from which we can begin to unravel that shaping process. Danziger’s *Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?* is thematically focused on the five concepts of adolescent development listed above; most are evident in the following passage:

[Linda] says, ‘How can you stop a buffalo from charging?’

‘Take away his credit cards,’ my mother answers.

My father turns to her. ‘You should know that one. Now that you’re going back to work, I bet you’re going to be spending like mad, living outside my salary.’

‘Why don’t you just accept it and not feel so threatened?’ My mother raises her voice. She hardly ever does that.

I can feel the knot in my stomach and I feel like I’m going to jump out of my skin.

‘Who feels threatened?’ he yells. ‘That’s ridiculous. Just because you won’t have to depend on me, need me any more, why should I worry?’

So that’s why he’s acting this way. He thinks it’s the money that makes him important, Sometimes I just don’t understand his brain.

‘Why can’t you ever celebrate anything?’ she yells again.

I throw my spoon on the table. That's it. I'm leaving.

Linda follows me out. It's like a revolution. Nothing like this has ever happened before.

Danziger 1979/1987:64

An important part of the register here is the first person and—as often—present tense narration, particularly in so far as it constructs a precise orientation of narrative voice towards a conventional situation. The function of present tense narration is to convey an illusion of immediacy and instantaneity, suppressing any suggestion that the outcome is knowable in advance. Thus Lauren, the narrator, proceeds through specific moments of recognition and decision—‘I can feel...’; ‘So that's why...’; ‘That's it. I'm leaving’; ‘It's like a revolution’—but each of these moments, as with the depiction of the quarrel itself, is expressed by means of a register which consists of the clichés which pertain to it. Linguistically, this has a double function. It is, now at the other end of the creative spectrum, another use of language which assumes an essential link between sign and referent; and in doing that through cliché it constitutes the text as a surface without depth, an effect reinforced by the way present tense narration severely restricts the possibility of any temporal movement outside the present moment. The outcome, both linguistically and thematically, is a complete closing of meaning: there is no interpretative task for a reader to perform, no inference undrawn. This closure even extends to the joke with which the passage begins.

Another way to describe this is to say that the metonymic mode of writing which characterises realistic fiction, and which enables particular textual moments to relate to a larger signifying structure (Stephens 1992a: 248–249), has been directed towards a closing of meaning. Another aspect of the metonymic process is that a narrative may draw upon recognisable scenes repeatable from one text to another and which constitute a ‘register’ of metonyms of family life. This example could be categorised as: situation, the parental quarrel; pretext, money; actual focus, power and authority. With perhaps unintentional irony produced by the present tense verb, the repeatability of the scene is foregrounded by Lauren's remark that ‘Nothing like this has ever happened before.’ It happens all the time, especially in post-1960s realist adolescent fiction, and its function, paradoxically, is to confirm a model whereby the rational individual progresses to maturity under the ideal of liberal individuality, doing so through the assurance that the experience is metonymic of the experience of everybody in that age group.

The presence of a narrative voice which interprets the scene for the benefit of readers is a characteristic of another linguistic aspect of texts, the presentation of scene and incident through the representation of speech and thought and the strategy of focalisation. These are important aspects of point of view in narrative, the facet of narration through which a writer implicitly, but powerfully, controls how readers understand the text. Because readers are willing to surrender themselves to the flow of the discourse, especially by focusing attention on story or content, they are susceptible to the implicit power of point of view. Linguistically, point of view is established by focalisation strategies and by conversational pragmatics. The first is illustrated in the following passage from Paula Fox's *How Many Miles to Babylon?*, which exemplifies a common textual strategy in children's fiction, the narration of incidents as they impact

on the mind of a single focalising character. Most novels which are third-person narrations include at least one focalising character, and this has important implications for the kind of language used, because in the vast majority of books written for children there is only one such focaliser, who is a child (or ersatz child, such as Bilbo in *The Hobbit*). Further, as with first person narrators, readers will tend to align themselves with that focalising character's point of view.

[James] *knew* he shouldn't go into the house—it wasn't his house. But that wasn't the reason why he wanted the street to be empty when he walked up the little path. What he knew and what he felt were two different things. He felt that going into that house had to be something he did secretly, as though it were night and he moved among shadows.

The door was open enough to let him slip in without pushing it. Sunlight didn't penetrate the dirty windows, so he stood still until his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. Then, as he smelled the dusty old rooms and the dampness of the wallpaper that was peeling off the walls, other things he felt came swimming towards him through the gloom like fish.

Fox 1967/1972:28

The text is shaped by the presence of represented thought and by direct or implied acts of perception. The narrative representation of thought—marked here by the verbs 'knew' and 'felt'—situates events within the character's mind but also enables a separate narrating voice. This narration is always evident here in such aspects of register as the quite complex left-branching syntax of the final sentence and lexical items such as 'penetrate' and 'accustomed', and by the use of analogies and figurative language. James is a 10-year-old, whose own linguistic level is shown to be a scant competence with a *Dick and Jane* reader (20), and there is no evident attempt at this moment to match linguistic level of narrative discourse to that of the character, though that does often happen. There is, nevertheless, an obvious contrast with the Danziger passage, which, despite having a much older main character (14), has access to a more limited range of registers. Figurative language is likewise less complex. Lauren's 'I can feel the knot in my stomach and I feel like I'm going to jump out of my skin' are cliché analogies, whereas in 'other things he felt came swimming towards him through the gloom like fish' the ground of the concrete/abstract comparison foregrounds the double meanings of 'swimming' and 'gloom', opening out the space between sign and referent and giving readers an opportunity to draw inferences which are not fully determined by the text but have room to include more personal associations.

The last sentence of the Fox extract is unusual in its complexity, however, because complex sentences, especially in conjunction with complex focalisation, tend rather to be the province of more difficult Young Adult fiction. In general, most fiction for children up to early adolescence is characterised by a lexis and grammar simplified relative to the notional audience: sentences are right-branching, and within them clauses are mainly linked by coordination, temporality or causality; and the use of qualifiers and figurative language is restricted. Even the passage cited from *Low Tide*, which has a very subtle effect (and Mayne is often thought of as a writer of 'difficult' texts), is entirely right-

branching and contains very few qualifiers. There, as elsewhere, subtlety depends on textual strategies which open, rather than close off, signification.

The second linguistic construction of point of view is by means of represented conversation. Various modes are available to a writer (see Leech and Short 1981), and all appear in children's fiction. These modes range from reported speech acts, which are mainly an aspect of narrative, to direct speech dialogues, which readers must interpret in the light of their knowledge of the principles and conventions of conversation. Because the intermediate forms of indirect and free indirect speech representation allow both for subtle interplay between narratorial and character points of view and for narratorial control, they have tended to receive most attention in discussions of general fiction. With children's fiction, however, more attention needs to be paid to direct speech dialogue, both because it exists in a higher proportion and because of the general principle that the narrator in the text appears to have less control over point of view in dialogue. Leech and Short envisage a cline running between 'bound' and 'free' forms, where 'free' corresponds with closeness to direct speech (324). But point of view in such conversations is affected by two factors: the presence of narratorial framing, especially speech-reporting tags, that is, the devices for identifying speakers which may in themselves suggest attitudes; and the pragmatic principles which shape conversation. The following passage illustrates these factors.

When they reached [the others] they slipped in behind Rebecca and Sue Stephens, and Juniper saw Ellie standing on the pavement buttoned up in her old red coat, Jake beside her. They waved and smiled.

'Your mum looks like...a pop star,' said Sue.

'No, someone in a TV series,' said Rebecca.

'It must be strange to have a mother looking like that,' went on Sue, still staring behind her.

'How would I know? I've only had her, haven't I? I don't know any different mother, so I don't know if it's strange or not.'

Sue kept on:

'Is that your dad? That one with the beard?'

'Shut up,' hissed Rebecca, then said very loudly and clearly, 'I liked your reading, Juniper. You were the best.'

'You sounded dead miserable but your arm didn't show. Nobody could tell. I expect Sir picked you because of being sorry for you. He's like that. What did you say?' asked Sue.

'I said Abbledy, Gabbledy Flook,' answered Juniper and then under her breath, 'Ere the sun begins to sink, May your nasty face all shrink, which came into her head out of nowhere, and wished herself away to a wide, pale beach with the shining down and a white horse galloping at the edge of the incoming tide, far, far away from the wind slicing down the pavement blowing up grit and rubbish as they made their way back to school. Kemp 1982:78-79

This exchange shows very clearly how meaning in conversations arises not from the simple sense of individual utterances but from the tenor of utterances in combination

and as shaped by narratorial tagging. It also illustrates how a children's book makes use of the main principles which inform actual or represented conversations: the principle of cooperation, the principle of politeness and the principle of irony. In order to communicate in an orderly and productive way speakers accept five conventions which organise what we say to one another: an utterance should be of an appropriate size; it should be correct or truthful; it should relate back to the previous speaker's utterance (a change of subject and a change of register may both be breaches of relation); it should be clear, organised and unambiguous; and each speaker should have a fair share of the conversation, that is, be able to take his or her turn in an orderly way and be able to complete what s/he wants to say (Leech 1983; Stephens 1992b: 76–96). These conventions are very readily broken, and much of everyday conversation depends on simultaneously recognising and breaking one or more of them. In particular, many breaches are prompted by the operation of politeness in social exchange. Whenever conversational principles are breached, the product is apt to be humour, irony or conflict.

After a sequence of four utterances which more or less adhere to the principles of coherence and turn taking, but skirt the boundaries of politeness by drawing attention to Ellie's unusual appearance (shabby but beautiful, she doesn't conform to the girls' image of 'mother'), Kemp introduces a sequence built on crucial breaches of relation and politeness, beginning with Sue's 'Is that your dad?'. This is flagged contextually because readers know that Juniper's father is missing, and textually because of the cline in the speech reporting tags from the neutral 'said Sue' to the intrusively persistent 'Sue kept on', and the heavy tagging of Rebecca's interruption and shift of relation ('hissed Rebecca, then said very loudly and clearly'). Finally, of course, Juniper's escapist daydream cliché also serves as a narratorial comment on how painful she has found the exchange: indeed, the blowing 'grit and rubbish' becomes a metonym for the anguish at the heart of her being. Second, Sue's response to Rebecca's intervention is to apparently pursue relation but to breach politeness by turning attention to Juniper's missing arm. The upshot is Juniper's final spoken utterance—interrupting, impolite and nonsensical, it terminates the exchange and the discourse shifts into represented thought. Such an astute use of conversational principles is one of the most expressive linguistic tools available to a children's writer.

A stylistic examination of children's fiction can show us something very important, namely that a fiction with a high proportion of conversation and a moderately sophisticated use of focalisation has access to textual strategies with the potential to offset the limitations which may be implicit in a disinclination to employ the full range of lexical, syntactic and figurative possibilities of written discourse. But stylistic analysis is also never an end in itself, and is best carried out within a frame which considers the relationship of text to genre and to culture. Obviously enough, stylistics alone cannot determine the relative merits of Sue and Rebecca's preferences for 'a pop star' or 'someone in a TV series', and cannot determine whether a reader treats either category as prestigious or feels that both consign Ellie to a subject position without selfhood. The example illustrates two general principles in language analysis: that significance is influenced by the larger contexts of text and culture within which particular utterances are meaningful; and that particular language features or effects can have more than one



function, simultaneously expressing both purposiveness and implicit, often unexamined, social assumptions.

Finally, attention to the language of children's fiction has an important implication for evaluation, adding another dimension to the practices of judging books according to their entertainment value as stories or to their socio-political correctness. It can be an important tool in distinguishing between 'restrictive texts' which allow little scope for active reader judgements (Hunt 1991:117) and texts which enable critical and thoughtful responses.

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## Reader-Response Criticism

*Michael Benton*

The importance of reader-response criticism in the area of children's literature lies in what it tells us about two fundamental questions, one about the literature and the other about its young readers:

- who is the implied child reader inscribed in the text?
- how do actual child readers respond during the process of reading?

The main advocates of reader-response criticism acknowledge the complementary importance of text and reader. They attend both to the form and language of poem or story, and to the putative reader constructed there, acknowledging, as Henry James put it, that the author makes 'his reader very much as he makes his characters... When he makes him well, that is makes him interested, then the reader does quite half the labour' (quoted in Booth 1961:302). Equally, they attend to the covert activity of the reading process, deducing the elements of response from what readers say or write, and/or developing theoretical models of aesthetic experience.

Whatever the particular orientation of the reader-response critic, one central issue recurs: the mystery of what readers actually do and experience. The subject of the reader's response is the Loch Ness Monster of literary studies: when we set out to capture it, we cannot even be sure that it is there at all; and, if we assume that it is, we have to admit that the most sensitive probing with the most sophisticated instruments has so far succeeded only in producing pictures of dubious authenticity. That the nature and dimensions of this phenomenon are so uncertain is perhaps the reason why the hunters are so many and their approaches so various. Accordingly, it is necessary to map the main historical development of reader-response criticism and, second, to outline the theoretical bases which its advocates share, before going on to consider how this perspective—whose concepts have been formulated largely in the area of adult literary experience—has been taken up by researchers interested in young readers and their books.

### **A Shift of Critical Perspective**

In the 1950s the criticism of literature was in a relatively stable state. In *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), M.H.Abrams was confidently able to describe 'the total situation' of the work of art as one with the text at the centre with the three elements of the author, the

reader, and the signified world ranged like satellites around it. What has happened since has destabilised this model. In particular, reader-response critics have argued that it is readers who make meaning by the activities they perform on texts; they see the reader in the centre and thus the privileged position of the work of art is undermined and individual 'readings' become the focus of attention. This is not to say that the emphasis upon reading and response which emerged in the 1960s was entirely new. It had been initiated famously by I.A. Richards forty years earlier; but Richards's (1924, 1929) seminal work, with its twin concerns of pedagogy and criticism, influenced subsequent developments in criticism in two contrary ways. For, in one sense, Richards privileged the text, and the American New Critics, particularly, seized upon the evidence of *Practical Criticism* to insist that close analysis of the words on the page was the principal job of critic and teacher. Yet, in another sense, Richards privileged the reader; and subsequently, modern reader-response criticism has developed to give the reader freedoms that infuriate text-oriented critics. Hence, Stanley Fish writes: 'Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems: they make them' (Fish 1980:327). Or, even more provocatively: 'It is the structure of the reader's experience rather than any structures available on the page that should be the object of description' (152). As Laurence Lerner (1983:6) has pointed out, perhaps the most important division in contemporary literary studies is between those who see literature as a more or less self-contained system, and those who see it as interacting with real, extra-literary experience (that of the author, or of the reader or the social reality of the author's or the reader's world). Reader-response critics clearly fall within this second category.

Reader-response criticism is difficult to map because of its diversity, especially in two respects: first, there are several important figures whose work stands outside the normal boundaries of the term; and second, there is overlap but not identity in the relationship between German 'reception theory' and Anglo-American reader-response criticism. On the first issue, two highly influential writers, D.W. Harding and Louise Rosenblatt, began publishing work in the 1930s which was ahead of its time (for example, Harding 1937; Rosenblatt 1938/1970) and their explorations of the psychological and affective aspects of literary experience only really began to have an impact upon educational thinking (and hence upon children's experiences of poems and stories in school) when the educational and literary theorists began to rehabilitate the reader in the 1960s and 1970s. Subsequently, Harding's paper on 'Psychological approaches in the reading of fiction' (1962) and Rosenblatt's reissued *Literature as Exploration* (1938/1970) have been widely regarded as two of the basic texts in this area.

It is an indication of the diversity and loose relationships which characterise response-oriented approaches to literature that Harding and Rosenblatt are reduced to complimentary footnotes in the standard introductions to reader-response criticism (Tompkins, 1980: xxvi; Suleiman and Crosman, 1980:45; Freund, 1987:158), and that writers in the German and Anglo-American traditions have, with the notable exception of Iser, little contact with or apparent influence upon one another. In a thorough account of German reception theory, Holub (1984) comments upon this divide and provides an

excellent analysis of Iser's work to complement that of Freund (1987), whose book summarises the Anglo-American tradition.

The development of reader-response writings since the 1960s has steadily forged a new relationship between the act of reading and the act of teaching literature which, as is illustrated later, has significant consequences for the way the relationship between young readers and their books is conceptualised. Prior to this time, during the 1940s and 1950s, the reader was hidden from view as the critical landscape was dominated by the American New Criticism, whose adherents took a determinedly anti-reader stance to the extent that, despite a concern for 'close reading', the major statement of New Criticism views—Wellek and Warren's *Theory of Literature* (1949)—makes no mention of the reader and includes only two brief references to 'reading'. Subsequently, the development of reader-response studies has seen the momentum shift periodically from literary theory to educational enquiry and practice almost decade by decade.

The 1960s were dominated by education, with the most influential work published by The National Council of Teachers of English (Squire 1964; Purves and Rippere 1968), culminating in two surveys, one English and the other American (D'Arcy 1973; Purves and Beach 1972). The 1970s saw the full bloom of reader-response theorising by literary critics of whom Holland (1975), Culler (1975), Iser (1978) and Fish (1980) were perhaps the most notable figures, all of whom were well represented in the two compilations of papers that stand as a summary of work in this area at the end of the decade (Suleiman and Crosman 1980; Tompkins 1980). During the 1980s the emphasis moved back to education, where the main concern was to translate what had become known about response—both from literary theory and from classroom enquiry—into principles of good (1985), Corcoran and Evans (1987), Benton *et al.* (1988), Dias and Hayhoe (1988), practice. Protherough (1983), Cooper (1985a), Benton and Fox (1985), Scholes Hayhoe and Parker (1990), Benton (1992a), Many and Cox (1992) have all, in their different ways, considered the implications for practice of a philosophy of literature and learning based upon reader-response principles. In Britain, one of the more heartening results of this development was that the importance of the reader's response to literature was fully acknowledged in the new National Curriculum as embodied in the Cox Report (1989) and in the official documents that ensued. Such has been what one standard book on modern literary theory calls 'the vertiginous rise of reader-response criticism' (Jefferson and Robey, 1986:142), that its authors see it as threatening to engulf all other approaches.

What are the theoretical bases that such writers share? Reader-response criticism is a broad church as a reading of the various overview books demonstrates (Tompkins, 1980; Suleiman and Crosman, 1980; Freund, 1987). None the less, a number of principles can be said to characterise this critical stance. First is the rejection of the notorious 'affective fallacy'. In describing the 'fallacy' as 'a confusion of the poem and its results', and in dismissing as mere 'impressionism and relativism' any critical judgements based on the psychological effects of literature, Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954/1970) had left no space for the reader to inhabit. They ignored the act of reading. New Criticism, it could be said, invented 'the assumed reader'; by contrast, reader-response criticism deals with real and implied readers. Iser, Holland, Bleich and Fish operate from a philosophical basis that displaces the notion of an autonomous text to be

examined in and on its own terms from the centre of critical discussion and substitutes the reader's recreation of that text. Reading is not the discovering of meaning (like some sort of archaeological 'dig') but the creation of it. The purpose of rehearsing this familiar history is its importance for children's reading. The central concerns of response-oriented approaches focus upon

- 1 what constitutes the source of literary meaning; and
- 2 what is the nature of the interpretative process that creates it.

Both issues are fundamental to how young readers read, both in and out of school.

The works of Iser on fiction and Rosenblatt on poetry, despite some criticism that Iser has attracted on theoretical grounds, have none the less had greater influence upon the actual teaching of literature and our understanding of children as readers than those of any other theoretical writers. No doubt this is because they avoid what Frank Kermode calls 'free-floating theory' and concentrate, in Iser's words, on 'an analysis of what actually happens when one is reading' (Iser 1978: 19). Iser's theory of aesthetic response (1978) and Rosenblatt's transactional theory of the literary work (1978, 1985) have helped change the culture of the classroom to one which operates on the principle that the text cannot be said to have a meaningful existence outside the relationship between itself and its reader(s). This transfer of power represents a sea-change in critical emphasis and in pedagogical practice from the assumptions most critics and teachers held even a generation ago. Yet it is evolutionary change, not sudden revolution—a progressive rethinking of the way readers create literary experiences for themselves with poems and stories. In fact, reader-response is the evolutionary successor to Leavisite liberal humanism. It is perceived—within the area of literature teaching—as providing a framework of now familiar ideas which are widely accepted and to which other lines of critical activity often make reference: the plurality of meanings within a literary work; the creative participation of the reader; the acknowledgement that the reader is not a *tabula rasa* but brings idiosyncratic knowledge and personal style to the act of reading; and the awareness that interpretation is socially, historically and culturally formed. All these ideas are ones that have had a sharp impact upon the study of texts and upon research into young readers' reading in the field of children's literature.

### **Young Readers and Their Books**

Reader-response approaches to children's literature which set out to answer the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter all have a direct relationship with pedagogy. Some are concerned with children's responses, mainly to fiction and poetry but latterly also to picture books, with the broad aim of improving our understanding of what constitutes good practice in literature teaching. Others employ reader-response methods in order to explore children's concepts and social attitudes. Others again, are text-focused and use concepts and ideas from reader-response criticism of adult literature in order to examine children's books, with the aim of uncovering their implied audience and, thence, something of the singularity of a specifically *children's* literature.

This diversity creates two problems: first, there is bound to be overlap. Many studies cover both textual qualities and children's responses as complementary aspects of a unitary experience which, as the foregoing discussion has argued, follows from the mainstream thinking of reader-response criticism. When considering a study under one or other of the headings below, therefore, its writer's principal orientation has been the guide. Second, there is bound to be anomaly. The nature and complexity of the studies varies greatly. In particular, there are two important collections of papers devoted to theoretical research and empirical enquiries in this area (Cooper 1985a; Many and Cox 1992). These are most conveniently considered between discussion of the first and second themes below to which most of their papers relate.

The discussion deals, in turn, with five themes: the process of responding; development in reading; types of reader behaviour; culturally oriented studies exploring children's attitudes; and text-oriented studies employing reader-response concepts.

### *The process of responding*

The stances of those enquirers who have explored the response processes of young readers vary as much as those of the literary theorists, but the most common one is that of the teacher-researcher attempting to theorise classroom practice. The range and combinations of the variables in these studies are enormous: texts, contexts, readers and research methods are all divisible into subsets with seemingly infinite permutations. Among texts, short stories, poems, fairy tales and picture books are favoured, with a few studies focusing upon the novel and none on plays. Contexts, in the sense of physical surroundings, also influence response. The 'classroom' itself can mean a variety of things and clearly there are crucial differences between say, monitoring the responses of thirty children within normal lesson time and four or five children who volunteer to work outside lessons. Most studies are small-scale enquiries run by individual researchers, perhaps with a collaborative element; hence, the focus is usually narrow when selecting the number, age—level, social background, gender and literacy level of the readers. Finally, reader-response monitoring procedures are generally devised in the knowledge that the medium is the message. The ways readers are asked to present their responses are fundamental influences upon those responses; they range from undirected invitations to free association or 'say what comes into your mind as you read', through various 'prompts' or guideline questions to consider, to the explicit questionnaire. Oral, written, or graphic responses and whether the readers are recording individually or in groups all provide further dimensions to the means of monitoring and collecting response data.

Guidance through this diversity is offered by two older books already mentioned (Purves and Beach 1972; D'Arcy 1973); and, more recently, by Galda (1983) in a special issue of the *Journal of Research and Development in Education* on 'Response to literature: empirical and theoretical studies', and by Squire's chapter 'Research on reader response and the national literature initiative' in Hayhoe and Parker (Squire 1990:13–24). What follows does not attempt to be exhaustive but briefly to indicate the main lines that process studies have taken.

The process of responding became one of the main objects of enquiry during the 1980s. Studies of children's responses to poetry began to appear in articles or booklet form: Wade (1981) adapted Squire's (1964) work on short stories to compare how a supervised and an unsupervised group of middle-school children responded to a poem by Charles Tomlinson. Dixon and Brown (1984) studied the writings of 17-year-old students in order to identify what was being assessed in their responses; Atkinson (1985) built upon Purves and Rippere's (1968) categories and explored the process of response to poems by children of different ages. Several books also focused exclusively on young readers and poetry and, either wholly or in part, concerned themselves with the response process, notably Benton (1986), Dias and Hayhoe (1988) and Benton *et al.* (1988). The work of Barnes (1976), particularly, lies behind the enquiries of Benton (1986) into small group responses to poetry by 13 to 14-year-olds. What is characterised as 'lightly-structured, self-directed discussion' is seen as the means of optimising group talk about poems and as the most appropriate way for teacher-researchers to explore the process of response. Dias and Hayhoe (1988) build upon Dias's earlier work (1986) to develop responding-aloud protocols (RAPs) which, essentially, require individual pupils to think aloud as they attempt to make sense of a poem with the help, if needed, of a non-directive interviewer. Preparatory group discussions were used to build up confidence for the individual sessions. The RAP transcripts were then analysed to see how pupils negotiated meaning. Dias and Hayhoe claim that their study is 'designed to track the process of responding as it occurs' (1988:51) and their methodology is a significant contribution to this end.

Similarly, the work of Benton and his co-authors (1988) focuses upon process. It shows three experienced teachers exploring how their students, aged 14 and above, read and respond to poetry. Rosenblatt's transactional theory underpins the approach, especially in Teasey's work which gives the hard evidence for the reader's 'evocation' of a poem through meticulous, descriptive analyses of aesthetic reading. Bell's data shows the emphases of the response process from initial encounter through group discussion, to an eventual written account, in such a way that what in mathematics is called 'the working' can be observed—in this case, the slow evolution over time and in different contexts of how young readers make meaning. Hurst's focus is upon the whole class rather than individuals. From studying the responses of pupils in a variety of classrooms and with different teachers and texts, he develops a model of three frames (story, poet, form), derived from Barnes' and Todd's (1977) notion of the 'cycles of utterances' that characterise group talk, as a means of mapping the episodes of a group's engagement with a poem. The three enquiries are set against a critical appraisal of the main theorists in the field from Richards to Rosenblatt and all contribute to the development of a response-centred methodology.

The process of responding to fictional narrative was first examined by Squire (1964) and Purves and Rippere (1968), whose early studies provoked many adaptations of their work with students of different ages and backgrounds. These studies all tended to categorise the elements of response, with Squire's list emerging as the most commonly quoted and replicated in studies of children's responses. Squire's study of adolescents responding to short stories described the six elements of response as literary judgements, interpretational responses, narrational reactions, associational responses,

self-involvement and prescriptive judgements (Squire, 1964:17–18). He showed that the greater the involvement of readers, the stronger was their tendency to make literary judgements; and that what he termed ‘happiness-binding’ (41) was a characteristic of adolescent readers’ behaviour. Here, as in many studies of fiction reading, there is a noticeable move towards a broadly psychoanalytical explanation for the gratifications readers seek in fiction (compare Holland 1975). More recent studies include those of Fox (1979) whose phrase ‘dark watchers’ (32) is a memorable description of the imaginary, spectator role that young readers often adopt during reading; and Jackson (1980) who explored the initial responses of children to fiction which later he developed more fully throughout the secondary school age range (Jackson 1983). Several books also focused wholly or in part upon young readers’ response processes, notably Protherough (1983), Benton and Fox (1985), and Thomson (1986). Drawing upon enquiries he conducted in Hull, Protherough suggests that there are five major ways in which children see the process of reading fiction: projection into a character, projection into the situation, association between book and reader, the distanced viewer, and detached evaluation. There is a developmental dimension and he argues that maturity in reading is connected with the ability to operate in an increasing number of modes.

Benton and Fox address the question of what happens when we read stories and consider that the process of responding involves the reader in creating a secondary world. This concept is elaborated with reference to children’s accounts of their experiences with various stories. The reading experience is then characterised in two ways: first, as a four-phase process of feeling like reading, getting into the story, being lost in the book, and having an increasing sense of an ending; and second, as an activity consisting of four elements—picturing, anticipating and retrospectively, interacting and evaluating. This latter description has been taken up by others, notably Corcoran (Corcoran and Evans, 1987:45–51).

Thomson’s work with teenage readers offers a further description of the elements of response to fiction and cross-hatches this with a developmental model. The requirements for satisfaction at all stages are enjoyment and elementary understanding. Assuming these are met, his six stages are described as: unreflective interest in action, empathising, analogising, reflecting on the significance of events and behaviour, reviewing the whole work as the author’s creation, and the consciously considered relationship with the author. Thomson’s is a sophisticated and detailed account, firmly rooted in young readers’ fiction reading, and drawing effectively upon the theoretical literature summarised earlier in this chapter.

As can be seen from this summary, studies of the process of responding tend towards categorisation of the different psychological activities involved and towards descriptions of what constitutes maturation in reading. Two collections of papers which should contribute more than they do to our understanding of the process of responding are Cooper (1985a) and Many and Cox (1992), although in their defence it has to be said that the former has a focus upon the theories that should guide our study of readers and the research methodologies that derive from them, and the latter is primarily concerned with reader ‘stance’ (Rosenblatt 1978) as the discussion of types of reader below indicates. Brief comment upon these two collections is appropriate before moving on to consider reading development.



Only some of the seventeen papers in Cooper's compilation bear upon the subject of children and literature. The first of the three parts of the book is helpful in relating theoretical issues of response to practice, especially the chapters by Rosenblatt, Purves and Petrosky. In Part 2, Kintgen's piece stands out, not only because its focus is poetry (a comparative rarity in such company), but because it faces up to the problems of monitoring responses, and attempts to describe the mental activities and processes of the reader. Kintgen's subjects (as with many researchers) are graduate students but the methodology here could readily transfer to younger readers. The four contributors to the final part of the book on classroom literature, whom one might expect to deal with children and their books, studiously avoid doing so, preferring instead to discuss theoretical and methodological issues such as the need to identify response research with literary pedagogy (Bleich), the use of school surveys (Squire), and the evaluation of the outcomes of literary study (Cooper 1985b).

Many and Cox (1992) take their impetus from Cooper's book and their inspiration from Rosenblatt (1978). The first part gives theoretical perspectives on reader stance and response and includes specific consideration of readings of selected children's books (Benton: 1992b) and of young readers' responses (Corcoran). The papers in Part two focus upon students' perspectives when reading and responding and tell us more about types of readers than about process; these are dealt with below. Part three deals with classroom interactions of teachers, students and literature. Hade explores 'stance' in both silent reading and reading aloud, arguing its transactional and triadic nature in the classroom. Zancella writes engagingly about the use of biography, in the sense of a reader's personal history, in responding to literature and how this influences the teacher's methods. Zarrillo and Cox build upon Rosenblatt's efferent/aesthetic distinction and urge more of the latter in classroom teaching in the light of their empirical findings that 'elementary teachers tend to direct children to adopt efferent stances towards literature' (245). Many and Wiseman take a similar line and report their enquiries into teaching particular books (for example, Mildred Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976)) with efferent and aesthetic emphases to different, parallel classes. At various points, all these studies touch upon the issue of the process of responding; but, equally, they also relate to some of the other issues that are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

### *Development in reading*

Of these issues, the question of how children develop as readers of literature is one of the most frequently raised. This has been approached in four main ways: personal reminiscences of bookish childhoods (Sampson, 1947; Inglis, 1981); the growth of the child's sense of story in relation to the Piagetian stages of development (Applebee 1978; Tucker 1981); the development of literacy, with the idea of matching individual and age-group needs to appropriate books (Fisher 1964; Meek 1982); and, deductions about development drawn from surveys of children's reading interests and habits (Jenkinson 1940; Whitehead *et al.* 1977). While none of these writers would see their work as necessarily falling strictly under the reader-response heading, all are in fact listening to what children as readers say about their experiences and, in more recent years, are

conscious of interpreting their findings against a background of reader-response criticism. This awareness is evident, for example, in the work of Tucker (1980) who, in a paper entitled 'Can we ever know the reader's response?' argues that children's responses are different from adults' (in, say, the relative emphasis they give to the quality of the writing as opposed to the pace of the plot) before he goes on to relate their responses to intellectual and emotional development as psychologists describe it (the subject of his subsequent book (Tucker 1981)). In the highly influential work of Meek, too, from *The Cool Web* (Meek *et al.* 1977) onwards, reader-response criticism has been one of her perspectives—evident, for example, in her 'Prolegomena for a study of children's literature' (1980:35) and in her exploration of the relationship between literacy and literature in her account of the reading lessons to be found in picture books (Meek 1988). Or again, in the discussion of their findings of children's reading preferences at 10+, 12+ and 14+, Whitehead and his team speculate about the cognitive and affective factors involved in the interaction between children and their books. All are aware that response-oriented criticism should be able to tell us more about this interaction at different ages.

Developmental stages in literary reading are outlined by Jackson (1982), Protherough (1983), and Thomson (1986) on the basis of classroom enquiries with young readers as we have already seen; and there have been some small-scale studies of reading development focused upon responses to specific books. Hickman (1983) studied three classes, totalling ninety primary school-aged children, and monitored their spontaneous responses, variations in solicited verbal responses, the implications of non-responses, and the role of the teacher in respect of two texts: Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (1974) and McPhail's *The Magical Drawings of Moony B. Finch* (1978). She was interested in the age-related patterns of responses and in the influences of the class teacher. Cullinan *et al.* (1983) discuss the relationship between pupils' comprehension and response to literature and report the results of a study, conducted with eighteen readers in grades, 4, 6 and 8, which focused on readings of and taped responses to Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977) and Le Guin's, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968). Their data confirmed that there are clear developmental levels in children's comprehension and they claim that: 'Reader-response provides a way to look at the multidimensional nature of comprehension' (37). Galda (1992) has subsequently reported on a four-year longitudinal study of eight readers' readings of selected books representing realistic and fantasy fiction in order to explore any differences in responses to these two genres. The 'realistic' texts included Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977) and S.E.Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1968); the 'fantasy' texts included L'Engle's *A Wind in the Door* (1973) and Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* (1981). She considers reading factors, such as developing analytical ability; text factors, arguing that children find it easier to enter the world of realistic fiction than they do of fantasy stories; and concludes by advocating the 'spectator role' (Harding 1937; Britton 1970) as a stance that offers readers access to both genres.

*Types of reader behaviour*

The third theme concerns different sorts of readers or readings. It would be too much to claim that there is an established typology of readers; there have been few studies that venture beyond generalised discussions such as that between 'interrogative' and 'acquiescent' reading styles (Benton and Fox 1985:16–17), itself a tentative extension of Holland's (1975) notion of personal style in reading behaviour. One study that does make some clear category decisions is that of Dias and Hayhoe (1988:52–58) in respect of 14- and 15-year-old pupils reading and responding to poems. Their 'Responding-aloud protocols' (RAPs), described earlier, revealed four patterns of reading: paraphrasing, thematising, allegorising and problem solving. They stress that these are patterns of reading not readers (57) but have difficulty throughout in maintaining this discrimination. None the less, theirs is the most sophisticated account to date of that phenomenon that most teachers and others concerned with children's books have noticed without being able to explain, namely, that individual children reveal personal patterns of reading behaviour irrespective of the nature of the book being read. The study of these four reading patterns under the sub-headings of what the reader brings to the text, the reader's moves, closure, the reader's relationship with the text, and other elements is one that needs to be replicated and developed in relation to other types of text.

Fry (1985) explored the novel reading of six young readers (two 8-year-olds; two 12-year-olds; two 15-year-olds) through tape-recorded conversations over a period of eight months. The six case studies give some vivid documentary evidence of individual responses (for example, on the ways readers see themselves in books (99)) and also raise general issues such as re-readings, the appeal of series writers like Blyton, the relation of text fiction and film fiction, and the developmental process. Many and Cox's (1992) collection of papers includes their own development of Rosenblatt's efferent/aesthetic distinction in respect of the stances adopted by a class of 10-year-olds in their responses to Byars's *The Summer of the Swans* (1970) and other stories. Encisco, in the same collection, builds upon Benton's (1983) model of the secondary world and gives an exhaustive case-study of one ten-year-old girl's reading of chapters from three stories in order to observe the strategies she uses to create her story world from these texts. Benton's development of the secondary world concept, after Tolkien (1938) and Auden (1968), is reappraised in Many and Cox (1992:15–18 and 23–48) and has also been extended by the author to incorporate aspects of the visual arts, notably paintings and picture-books (Benton 1992). The concept as originally formulated appeared in the special issue of the *Journal of Research and Development of Education* (Agee and Galda 1983) along with several other articles that focus upon readers' behaviours. Beach (1983) looks at what the reader brings to the text and reports an enquiry aimed at determining the effects of differences in prior knowledge of literary conventions and attitudes on readers' responses through a comparison between high school and college English education students' responses to a short story by Updike. Pillar (1983) discusses aspects of moral judgement in response to fairy tales and presents the findings from a study of the responses of sixty elementary school children to three fables. The responses are discussed in terms of the principles of justice that distinguish

them. This enquiry edges us towards the fourth theme, where reader-response methods are employed in culturally oriented studies.

### *Culturally oriented studies*

Children's concepts and social attitudes have been the subject of reader-response enquiries in three complementary ways: multicultural and feminist studies, which explore how far literature can be helpful in teaching about issues of race or gender; whole-culture studies, which consider children's responses to literature in the context of the broad range of their interests; and cross-cultural studies, which compare the responses of young readers from different countries to the same texts to identify similarities and cultural differences. An article and a book about each group must suffice to indicate the emphases and the degree to which reader-response theory and practice have been influential.

Evans (1992) contains several studies with explicitly cultural concerns, among which is 'Feminist approaches to teaching: John Updike's "A & P"' by Bogdan, Millen and Pitt which sets out to explore gender issues in the classroom via Updike's short story. They quote Kolodny (in Showalter 1985:158) in support of the shift feminist studies makes from seeing reader-response in a purely experiential dimension to a more philosophical enquiry into how 'aesthetic response is...invested with epistemological, ethical, and moral concerns'. The feminist position is stated explicitly: 'Reading pleasure can no longer be its own end-point, but rather part of a larger dialectical process which strives for an "altered reading attentiveness" to gender in every reading act' (Evans: 151). This dialectical response model is further elaborated and augmented by specific pedagogical suggestions to help young readers towards this new attentiveness.

Within the broadly, and somewhat uncomfortably, defined field of multicultural education, the most sophisticated use of reader-response criticism and practice is Beverley Naidoo's (1992) enquiry into the role of literature, especially fiction, in educating young people about race. Working with a teacher and his class of all-white 13 to 14-year-old pupils over a period of one academic year, Naidoo introduced a sequence of four novels to their work with increasingly explicit racial issues: *Buddy* (Hinton 1983), *Friedrich* (Richter 1978), *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor 1976) and *Waiting for the Rain* (Gordon 1987). Influenced by Hollindale's (1988) notion of 'the reader as ideologist', Rosenblatt's (1978, 1985) transactional theory and Benton's ethnographic approach to reader-response enquiries (Benton *et al.* (1988), Naidoo adopted an action-researcher role to develop 'ways of exploring these texts which encouraged empathy with the perspective of characters who were victims of racism but who resisted it' (22). Written and oral responses in journals and discussion were at the centre of the procedures. Many challenging and provocative issues are examined through this enquiry, including overt and institutionalised racism, whether teaching about race challenges or merely reinforces racism, the nature of empathy and the gender differences pupils exhibited. The cultural context, especially the subculture of the particular classroom, emerged as a dominant theme. The subtle interrelatedness of text, context, readers and writers, is sensitively explored in a study that shows how reader-response methods can help to illuminate the values and attitudes that readers sometimes hide, even from themselves.

The second group of whole-culture studies tends to focus upon adolescent readers. Stories and poems, especially those encountered in school, are seen as but one aspect of the cultural context in which teenagers live and in which books are low on their agenda after television, computer games, rock music, comics and magazines. Beach and Freedman's (1992) paper, 'Responding as a cultural act: adolescents' responses to magazine ads and short stories' widens the perspective from the individual reader's 'personal' and 'unique' responses to accommodate the notion of response as a cultural practice. They discuss the cultural practices required in adolescent peer groups and note the ways in which these are derived from experiences with the mass media, with examples from adolescents' responses to magazine advertisements and short stories. Particular points of interest in the responses of these 115 8th and 11th grade pupils are the gender differences, the tendency to blur fiction and reality when talking about the advertising images, and the low incidence of critical responses.

Reader-response criticism also influences Sarland's (1991) study of young people's reading. He takes seriously both Chambers's (1977) account of the implied child reader (discussed below) and Meek's (1987) plea for an academic study of children's literature which situates it within the whole culture of young people. Building on Fry's (1985) work, he considers the popular literature that children read both in relation to a culture dominated by television and video, and in relation to the 'official' literature read in school. By eliciting and analysing students' responses to such books as King's *Carrie* (1974) and Herbert's *The Fog* (1975), Sarland draws upon response-oriented theory and practice to discuss the importance of these texts to their readers and to begin to open up a subculture of which, at best, teachers are usually only hazily aware.

Cross-cultural studies are relatively uncommon for the obvious reason that they are more difficult to set up and sustain. Bunbury and Tabbert's article for *Children's Literature in Education* (1989; reprinted Hunt 1992) compared the responses of Australian and German children to an Australian bush-ranger story, Stow's *Midnite* (1967/1982). Using Jauss's notion of 'ironic identification', where the reader is drawn in and willingly submits to the fictional illusion only to have the author subvert this aesthetic experience, the enquiry considered a range of responses; while there are interesting insights into individual readings, it none the less ends inconclusively by stating: 'The best we can say is that the capacity to experience ironic identification extends along a spectrum of reading encounters which vary in intensity' (Hunt: 124). The study is ambitious in tackling two difficult topics whose relationship is complex: children's sense of the tone of a text and the effect of translation upon the readers' responses. To begin to open up such issues is an achievement in itself.

Chapter 6 of Dias and Hayhoe's (1988) book makes explicit the international perspective on the teaching of poetry that permeates the whole of this Anglo-Canadian collaboration. Views from Australia, Britain, Canada and the USA on good practice in poetry teaching all share the same principle of developing pupils' responses. Clearly, cross-cultural influences grow more readily and are more easily monitored in English-speaking countries than elsewhere; yet there is sufficient evidence here of cultural diversity to encourage other researchers to explore the ways in which we can learn from each other about how children's responses to literature are mediated by the cultural contexts in which they occur.

*Text-oriented studies*

Studies of children's literature which directly parallel the work of, say, Iser (1974) or Fish (1980) in their close examination of particular texts are surprisingly rare. It is as if those who work in this field have been so concerned with pedagogy and children as readers that they have failed to exploit reader-response criticism as a means of understanding the nature of actual texts. Two concepts, however, which have received some attention are the 'implied reader' and the notion of 'intertextuality'. The first, developed by Iser (1974) after Booth (1961), for a time encouraged the search for the 'implied child reader' in children's books; the second followed from enquiries into how readers make meaning and the realisation of the complex relationships that exist between the readers, the text, other texts, other genres, and the cultural context of any 'reading'.

Although Chambers (1977/1985) and Tabbert (1980) gave the lead, the implied child reader remains a neglected figure in children's book criticism. In 'The reader in the book' Chambers takes Iser's concept and advocates its central importance in children's book criticism. He illustrates Roald Dahl's assumptions about the implied adult reader of his story 'The champion of the world' (1959) in contrast to those about the implied child reader of the rewritten version in the children's book *Danny: The Champion of the World* (1975), and argues that the narrative voice and textual features of the latter create a sense of an intimate, yet adult-controlled, relationship between the implied author and the implied child reader. He generalises from this example to claim that this voice and this relationship are common in children's books, and identifies both with the figure of the 'friendly adult storyteller who knows how to entertain children while at the same time keeping them in their place' (69). Much of the remainder of his article rests upon two further narrative features: 'the adoption of a child point of view' (72) to sustain this adult-author/child-reader relationship; and the deployment within the text of indeterminacy gaps which the reader must fill in order to generate meanings. These three characteristics—the literary relationship, the point of view, and the tell-tale gaps—are then exemplified in a critique of Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* (1954).

Chambers's article is already regarded as a landmark in the development of criticism (Hunt 1990:90), not least because it opened up one means of defining the singular character of a form of literature that is designated by its intended audience. That this lead has been followed so infrequently calls into question the seriousness of the whole critical enterprise in this field. Among the few who have exploited these concepts in relation to children's books is Tabbert (1980) who comments usefully on the notion of 'telling gaps' and 'the implied reader' in some classic children's texts and sees a fruitful way forward in psychologically oriented criticism, particularly in the methodology adopted by Holland. Benton (1992a) parallels the historically changing relationship between implied author and implied reader that is found in Iser's (1974) studies of Fielding, Thackeray and Joyce, with a corresponding critique of the openings of three novels by children's authors—Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1856), Day Lewis's *The Otterbury Incident* (1948), and Garner's *Red Shift* (1973). The emphases, however, here, are upon the nature of the collaborative relationship and upon narrative technique rather than on the implied child reader. Shavit (1983:60–67) extends Iser's concept to embrace the notion of childhood as well as the child as implied reader. After giving a