

Other Worlds Other Lives

children's literature experiences

Proceedings of the
International Conference on Children's Literature

4–6 April 1995

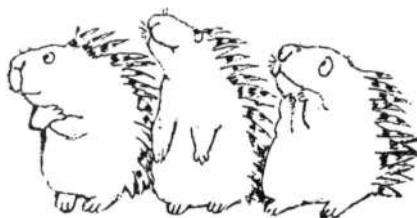
volume 1

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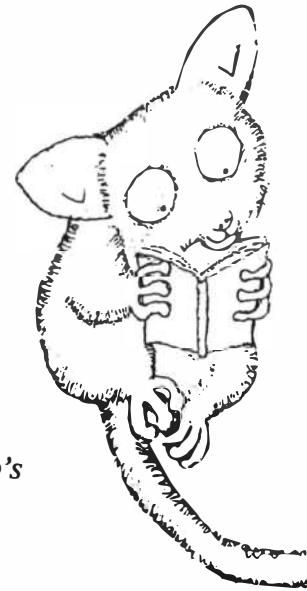
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Foreword



The Department of Information Science of the University of South Africa was forty years old in 1995. As part of the celebration of this milestone an international conference on children's literature, *Other worlds, other lives: children's literature experiences*, was held at the university from 4 to 6 April 1995.

The conference was more than just an opportunity to commemorate this event. The organisers were of the opinion that a conference of this nature at this particular time was especially relevant because children's literature can play an important role in the understanding of peoples from other countries, and can also contribute to the development of understanding between children of different cultural backgrounds in South Africa. It can help with the important process of nation building – and where better to begin with nation building than with children?

South Africans have for a very long time been isolated from the rest of the world. This cultural isolation has also affected children's literature. After all these years there is a great deal that we can learn from overseas colleagues and those in other African countries with regard to their children's literature. South African children's literature has progressed during this period and shows a distinctive development from which other countries can also learn.

Multiculturalism in children's literature is a question that is enjoying worldwide attention. From an international standpoint children's literature can build bridges between children from South Africa and those from other countries. During this

conference bridges were built and knowledge exchanged and we learnt from each other. It was clear that children's literature is an international language.

More than 450 people from throughout South Africa attended the conference daily. It was indeed an international gathering in every sense of the word. Delegates from 22 countries from six continents were present. Geographically speaking a thorough acquaintance was made with "other worlds".

The range of themes and topics that were raised and the variety of viewpoints through which they were approached by the speakers of different backgrounds is proof of the multidimensional nature of children's literature as an area of study. Academics, teachers, librarians, psychologists, parents and others each had their own approach – some academic and theoretical, some practical and popular – and there is as far as possible an attempt to represent all these approaches.

Owing to the extent of the conference various lectures and workshops were offered concurrently. By publishing the contributions, delegates will have the opportunity to read those lectures that they could not attend and those that they did attend but can no longer remember. The organisers of the conference felt that it was such an important conference that the proceedings deserved wider exposure. We believe that these proceedings are a valuable contribution to the limited number of South African publications on children's literature.

It is, however, not possible to include everything that took place during the conference in these proceedings: the discussions that took place between sessions and at social gatherings; the variety of workshops that were offered by experts;



the exhibition of children's book illustrations; exhibitions of South African and various overseas children's books; book launches of new South African children's and youth books; the stimulating and jovial atmosphere between people that may have spoken different languages but who all had the universal language of children's books in common.

The text of the different contributions is faithfully reproduced. Owing to time limitations it was not possible to do comprehensive editing. Where it was necessary to edit contributions, every attempt was made to retain the original style. The reference style is standardised where possible but in spite of various attempts to correct and complete references and bibliographies, the editors were not always able to obtain the correct information from the authors. The editors would have liked to have had greater conformity in the proceedings but to achieve this would have meant delaying publication for several months.

Not all the papers delivered have been included in this publication. It was decided to publish the Afrikaans papers in a separate volume. In certain cases it was not possible to publish a paper due to the nature of the presentation – for example, where the contribution was in the form of a slide presentation, or, where a large part of the presentation was in audiovisual form. Unfortunately, certain contributions could not be included because the speakers did not make them available.

The scope of the conference is reflected in the fact that the contributions have to be published in three volumes. We trust that everyone with an interest in children's literature will find something to engage them. The Department of Information Science hopes that this conference and these publications will play a

role in making people aware of the importance of children's literature in the development of the people of this country. The study of children's literature is multidisciplinary and justifies exhaustive study on an academic level.

We wish to thank the Rector and Administration of the University of South Africa for making the conference and the publication of the proceedings possible.

The papers published in these proceedings do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Information Science nor the University of South Africa nor those of the editors, and therefore the Department, the University and the editors accept no responsibility for opinions expressed in these proceedings.



Curricula Vitae

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Edward Ako is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Yaounde in the Republic of Cameroon. He has published several scholarly articles as well as *On the road to Guinea: essays in black comparative literature; vol 1*, and is editor of *SOSONGO*. He holds a PhD from the University of Illinois-Urbana, Champaign.

paul biegel (netherlands)

Paul Biegel is one of the foremost Dutch writers for children. Since the publication of his first book in the early 1960s he has published some 45 books, many of which have been widely translated. His awards include the Best Children's Book of the Year, two Golden Pencils, four Silver Pencils, the State Prize of the Dutch Government for his complete *oeuvre*, and the Woutertje Pieterse Prize.

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Cristina Colombo is a translator, author, poet and researcher. She has received several literary awards for her works which include poetry for adults and short stories, novels, poetry and riddles for children. She is a member of Alija's committee (Argentine section of IBBY), a member of the jury for Alija's Honour List and the National Selection Committee for IBBY Honour List, and is an associate editor of *Bookbird*.

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Marisol Dorao is a senior lecturer in the French and English literature department at the University of Cádiz. Her main interests and research revolve around children's literature and literature by and about women. The theme of her doctorate was the life and fairy tales of E Nesbit, and her publications include *The way to Oz: children's literature in the US up to 1900*.

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Stephen Finn is Professor of English at the University of Pretoria. He obtained a DPhil from Potchefstroom University and has published four books and several dozen articles on communication, propaganda, and English and Hebrew literature. At present his main concern is with Holocaust writing, particularly by women and children, and with the diary as a literary form. He is on the editorial board of three journals.

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Maureen Nimon comes from the University of South Australia. She has taught in teacher-librarianship for 20 years, with children's literature part of her teaching responsibilities. She holds a doctorate, has done research on the relationship between children's reading habits and their reading abilities, and has a particular interest in the social context within which children's literature operates.

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Thuli Radebe is a lecturer and coordinator for the school librarianship programme in the Department of Information Studies at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. She holds a master's degree from this university on the topic of reading interests of black children. In 1989 she was awarded the Princeton Fellowship which she utilised for research on reading and cross-cultural aspects.

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The Spirit of my story

gcina mhlophe

*In the beginning was the word. The word gave birth to language.
Language gave birth to a story, with stories real fun began!*



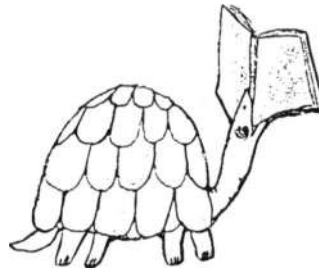
That certainly is how I feel. You see, I was lucky to be born in a family with a lot of singing and story sharing. Yes, sharing is the key word for me at all times, for what good is a story without an ear to receive it? So I say, stories are there to be shared, to mould us, to teach us values, sometimes to tickle us and make us laugh uncontrollably, to take our minds to the worlds of Make Believe, of Never Never Land, of Bhakubha ... the list is endless, and so is the capacity of our imaginations.

South Africa is a multicultural country and we are so lucky to have been born here, to have the family and friends we have, and most importantly all that lies ahead of us in terms of writing for our children, or writing with our children, or better still, to listen to what the beautiful children of South Africa have to say. Writers, teachers, storytellers and educators of every kind, let's get our bricks ready, the building has only just begun.

There is an African tradition or way of doing things together called 'ILIMA'. It is a spirit we can all enjoy and grow from. Communities from all over the world, big and small, can try to invite this spirit into their lives and it will come rushing like a bright light to lead them forward.

Every writer who calls themselves a children's writer must, in some way or other, look for and find the child inside them. This child still has all the innocence of youth. This child inside has a very clear and distinct voice, all we have to do is listen. As people who are used to talking and being listened to, or should I say we are used to writing and being read to, so we have to really take time and learn to listen to the inner child. Sometimes there are many other sounds trying to drown the child's voice, but we must try and let the child have an ear. There is no doubt in my mind that the time for new stories and new ways of telling them is long overdue. I am constantly struggling to find ways to see, to hear, to feel, to imagine and to go inside a story so much so that I can be a vehicle or a medium through which the story can reach out and touch other people's lives. I sing, I chant, I clap and I smile as I feel the words of a story touch and caress every part of me – my very soul. I am carried on the wings of imagination and I do not demand to know the address of where we are headed because I know I am in good hands. I am in the company of words, let me share a favourite poem with you.

IN THE COMPANY OF WORDS



It is truly marvellous, wonderful and comforting
to know that I have eyes to read
hands that can write
and an enormous love for words
I am lucky to be speaking a few extremely beautiful languages
for I love words – language's ancestors
when I am happy words define my happiness

when I am sad and confused
words turn into clay and allow me
to mould and remould my muddled up thoughts
till I find inner peace in my soul

Had I to choose between weeping and reading
I'd most definitely choose reading a good book
for I have proof, for aches and tensions – it works!
Countless times I've turned my back on pain
and found friends in characters from far off lands
countless times I've defied anger
and caressed my nerves with an old comic book
countless nights I've triumphed over insomnia
and had a heart to heart talk with my pen and paper.

I come to my desk in the dead of the night
I sit without a clue as to how I wish to start
but then, before I know it, words of all types and sizes
come rushing unto my finger tips
as I feel my whole body smile
I welcome them, every single one of them
like the good old friends that they are
then, when they start dancing in large circles around me
throwing teasing wordy circles on my walls
I am convinced that I was not born to be bored
for how indeed can boredom even begin to penetrate
my timeless word circle?
Now you see why I'm so content in the company of words.

I do not for a minute want to pretend that there are no difficult, impossible times in a writer or teller's life when stories just are not ready to be born. Sometimes I feel too that I have a story alright, but do not feel strong enough to tell it. Then I hum little song prayers to help me along:

Sibhaka bhaka, Langa Nyanga
Mhlaba noLwandle, nginike ukuhlakanipha
Ngixoxe le ndaba, ngixoxe le ndaba
Kubuye inhlonipho yamasiko ethu

I call on you Sky, Sun and the Moon
You Earth and the Sea, Give me the wisdom I need
To tell the story, to tell the story
And bring back respect to our culture.

This sure is a song-prayer for me. I sing it several times and feel strength coming into my body even when I am very tired after a long fast day in the city.

Stories of a certain kind can sort of grow on you, for instance, with me the African tortoise has been so much a part of my life that I cannot imagine my life without one. It all started with a story called the *Queen of the Tortoises* almost ten years ago. Now I look at the Tortoise character as a creature I can aspire to emulate, I hope that is good English! I am a very impulsive person naturally, the tortoise is slow, patient, lives long and is very wise. It has a way of protecting itself in hard times and it is a very grounded animal, need you ask why I love the tortoise? Now it is my symbol and many creative people seem to have symbols like these, or are they guardian angels? All I know is that we can learn from each other, we can share our skills to build a very colourful tree that can soon be our children's literature. The spirit of ILIMA can be called to help again and again. My way is not the best, but is only one way of saying

ngiphonsa itshe esivivaneni!
inyoni yakhela ngoboya benye!

We all have our Aunt Flossies:

literacy, cultural heritage and inter-group appreciation through family stories

elizabeth fitzgerald howard

Sani Bonani

Goeiemôre

Thank you ... And aren't we all fortunate to be coming together in this glorious place at this auspicious time! I am truly grateful to be part of this important conference on *Other Worlds, Other Lives* discussing family stories because I believe family stories are a powerful force to connect us to ourselves and to others. Making such connections is surely one of the deepest hungers of the world today.

I had written my paper before my husband and I came to South Africa, but I have had to write another because after almost five weeks of memorable encounters and events I am bursting with feelings and impressions and information and inspiration. I have learned so much. Now I will be writing not only from my African American experience, but also from my experiences here in South Africa, where the message *family stories are for us all* seems even more vital: We all have our Aunt Flossies.

In this paper I plan to touch in turn on family stories and literacy, family stories and cultural heritage, and then family stories and appreciation of others. Then I



will introduce some of the people from my books, people in the particular African American family that I am part of. I hope that by sampling some African American culture, you will see some of your own culture and appreciate some of the universal qualities of our common humanity.

My perspective then is of an African American author broadly though briefly exposed to the changing education for children in the New South Africa. Literally the linking of heretofore quite separated worlds. I have had the opportunity to meet children, education students, teachers, librarians, authors and publishers in several regions of the country. READ¹ has allowed me to help in their efforts to promote literacy through using family stories. In these almost five weeks I have rediscovered that it is all because of Aunt Flossie.

What are family stories? I am not including traditional folklore but rather stories and sayings from ordinary family experiences and family memories. In my own writing it is about Uncle Clem throwing a surprise off the train that night for my Dad and cousin Marie. It is about my 98-year-old Aunt Flossie living in a house so crowded full of stuff and things because she never threw anything away ... The lives of all of us are *crowded* full of stories.

Family stories might actually be seen as a *new genre* of children's literature because of their potential for making possible connections to other worlds, other lives. Family stories suggest that by knowing ourselves better we are more able to connect to humanity. Because we all have our Aunt Flossies.

First, a look at the importance of Family Stories for literacy. Literacy is a major focus, perhaps the major focus in South African education for adults as well as

children. Research on reading (and writing) has long demonstrated the value of stories in emerging literacy. Stories are important for reading because they help children to associate reading with enjoyment while developing feelings and imagination. Reading is about meaning, and children can find meaning more directly in stories about familiar events and people. (Sylvia Ashton Warner years ago focused on children's own stories as "helps" to reading.) But for South Africa's black children especially there are few family stories in print reflecting *their* family lives. One way that this need might begin to be fulfilled would be for teachers, and through them, children, to be enabled to write stories about their family experiences.

READ has long been endeavouring to respond to this need. Since I am an African American author who writes about family I was asked to conduct a two-day workshop on writing from family experience with some teachers from townships. Over the two days participants tried going back into their childhoods, capturing memories, recalling incidents and writing them down. The child who always put off cleaning up the kitchen when it was her turn, risking the anger of her father; the little girls who journeyed to their aunt's house for the weekend but were too homesick to spend the night; the school monitor who risked his own safety to rescue a fellow student caught under a taxi ... Real stories out of the ordinary experiences of the people who lived them. Workshop participants were enthusiastic about the possibilities for building on these efforts and publishing ... perhaps in desktop format ... stories which might be used in furthering literacy for emerging readers.

This leads me to my second topic, family stories and cultural heritage. I believe that family stories might be playing the same role today as the folktales have done in the history of all peoples: defining our identity, establishing right behaviour, educating the children, providing a link to the past and a guide

toward the future. In African American author Camille Yarbrough's book *The Shimmersine Queens*, 90-year-old Cousin Seatta says "A people's story is the anchor dat keeps um from driftin', it's the compass to show the way to go, and it's a sail dat holds the power dat takes um forward."² Although the author was referring to the larger history of African American people, it is also true for the particular story in a particular family. Family stories, remembered, repeated, enjoyed, do help us to know who we are and where we have come from, and where we might go. Stories based in the ordinary experience of a child's own culture enhance that child's self esteem – as he or she sees self in the context of that culture.

In South Africa stories are everywhere. My husband and I have made a point of asking people, whenever we could, can you tell a story about your family? The stories have poured out from Sotho and Tsonga, Venda and Afrikaner, from Xhosa, English and Zulu, some full of humour, others poignant: The nightmare of seeing one's grandparents' home bulldozed, while grandfather refused to leave. ... How a twist of fate spared another grandfather's life: Late getting back to his ship in WWI, he was the only one who lived as all his comrades – 800 of them – drowned when the ship sank.

Family stories help to *preserve* the traditions, the values and our memory of our grandparents, parents. The compassion of my great Aunt Lulu who consoled me when I broke a plate: "If nobody every broke a dish, there wouldn't be any work for the people who make dishes." My mother's uncompromising pronouncement all through my high school years: "Books and boys don't mix." And her subtle request when the hour was late and a young man should be leaving the house: "Betty, will you please bring up my scissors?" Cautious Aunt Flossie's dire warning: "Betty, darling, don't get your feet wet. You'll injure

your internal organs.” In family stories are the hopes of mothers and aunts for their children’s future and the cultural wisdom of the past. And we all have our Aunt Flossies.

My third point is that stories from families of different cultures take readers out of their own lives, into other families’ lives, other families’ worlds and lead to intergroup appreciation. In the USA one reason for publishing authentic stories about African American children has been to provide children who are not African American a way of getting to know African Americans. Not only is black children’s self esteem enhanced as they see themselves reflected in books, but white children seeing brown and black faces, and finding that they can identify with black characters, realise that white is not inherently superior. The same is true in books for South African children. Children in different cultures share so many ordinary family experiences: rivalry with siblings, birthdays, school, moving to a new house – there is a universal culture of childhood which is conveyed by such stories.

Stories derived from authentic family experiences carry within them values that transfer across cultures. There is not a large body of literature in print for children portraying the cultures of black, coloured or Indian South Africans, and very few written by people of these cultures. But the stories are there waiting. This is not the time to discuss *who* can write about a culture. There will be more books as new developments in education cause new demands. And, as is happening with children’s books from the different cultures in the United States, stories of the experiences of the families of South Africa’s varied cultures will enrich the lives of children here and in other worlds. Family stories build bridges for us all.

All of my books have been based in family stories, stories reflecting aspects of African American culture, and I hope they are contributing to the forging of connections. We all have our Aunt Flossies.

What might a reader – adult or child – find out about African Americans in *The Train to Lulu's*? Beppy and Babs' story is the story of an extended family. Our parents had moved to Boston, in the north, from Baltimore, in the south: paralleling the migration of thousands of African Americans in the quest for opportunity; back in Baltimore were all the relatives, the story of so many African Americans whose roots are somewhere else, and that is where all the aunts and uncles were.

Children are taught to follow directions and to be obedient. “Don’t open your lunch box until the train stops in New Haven.” The older sibling is responsible for the younger one, “Babs, people are looking at us. We have to be good. You are acting like a silly baby.”

The welcome at the station in Baltimore: all the aunts and uncles; so many hugs and kisses. ... Lulu is here. “Lulu, Lulu, we came on the train. We’re going to your house for the whole summer.” To Lulu’s? Yes, but we would be shared by Aunt Flossie and Cousin Chita ... and all the other relatives ... fulfilling the African axiom: It takes a whole village to raise a child.

African American culture? Sure. But connections beyond because stories about African American children – authentic stories – show how our lives are linked to other lives and other worlds.

Chita's Christmas tree is based on my now 87-year-old cousin Chita's reminiscences plus one Christmas memory of my own of the celebration at Chita's parents house. What might a child listener or adult reader find out about African American culture? A loving family. A father and daughter who have a special relationship: A secret conspiracy which they act out every Saturday when they take the peanut butter sandwiches from mama and never eat them. They feed the sandwiches to Henry the horse while they eat the hot, sugary waffles they buy from the waffle man. The week before Christmas they go into the deep woods to find the tree that Chita hopes Santa will bring ... the Christmas eve supper and celebration with all the relatives ... Christmas morning ... how does that tree get there? This story also conveys some little known history of African Americans ... that in turn-of-the-century Baltimore there was a thriving black middle class, living *ordinary* lives in the midst of a segregated society; Chita's father was a doctor ... a small glimpse of African American culture evoked in a picture book. Children might find connections because they too plot secret excursions or special surprises with their fathers ... And the experiences of holiday festivities and traditions are transferable in many ways – across cultures, linking us to other lives, other worlds.

Mac and Marie and the train toss surprise comes from a story my father told of waiting with his cousin Marie for Uncle Clem to throw a surprise off the train as it passed The Big House, Mac's house. What is there of African American culture? Young black men did get jobs as porters and waiters, and were an essential part of the railroad industry ... I made Uncle Clem into a student to indicate that there were African Americans who went to college ... The Big House? A little irony here. That is the name my grandparents gave to their big house in the country, actually the traditional name for the plantation master's house in slavery times. Children from other worlds can respond to the promise of a surprise ... and to the dream of Mac, that one day he will be big and old enough to do something special. My sister's next door

neighbour, not an African American, reported that one night her four-year-old son concluded his prayers, “God bless Mommy and Daddy and Grandma and Uncle Clem.”

And then there is *Aunt Flossie’s hats and crab cakes later*. Once upon a time I had an Aunt Flossie. A teacher in the Baltimore schools, she lived in one tall narrow house for 65 of her 100 years and she never threw anything away. Her house was full of treasures: old utility bills, old magazines and Christmas cards, school tests from the 1930s, fabric for sewing dresses, half sewn dresses, all the shoes she ever had (these were under her bed), gift items for possible weddings ... and boxes and boxes of hats. At 98 she was still busy and spry, never missing a wedding or funeral, and always decked out in a special hat. One Sunday afternoon her hat blew into the water, and I had an idea for a story. The story tells of Sarah and Susan who visit Great Aunt Flossie on Sunday to drink tea and eat cookies and try on hats – Aunt Flossie tells stories about her hats. I hope the story conveys Aunt Flossie’s love of children, her graciousness, her sense of humour, along with her own memories of Baltimore history. Reviews of the book have highlighted the celebration of family, and the importance of extended family, and the loving intergenerational relationships. All African American cultural values ... but children in most cultures have warm associations with older family members ... perhaps spending Sunday afternoons playing with grandma’s button box or grandpa’s tool chest. Many listeners have said that Aunt Flossie reminds them of people in their family, who also may be keepers of family memories. We all have our Aunt Flossies. Again, family stories do transcend boundaries, show us other lives, other worlds, but help us to know that we are all part of the same world, and that other lives are ours, too.

Something memorable happened as I was speaking one morning with about a hundred first-year education students at Kagisaning Teachers’ College in

Bloemfontein ... After I had told them Aunt Flossie's story, and talked about how books help us to realise our connections with each other, one young man seated at the back raised his hand and said to me, "You could be my aunt!" I went right up to him and shook his hand, and said, "Why not, how are you, nephew?"

Family stories, told in ordinary language, by ordinary people, enhance children's reading, preserve and hand down culture, and promote awareness of our connections. Ordinary family stories are an extraordinarily rich resource to be mined for the treasure they contain. They lead us to other worlds, other lives. We all have stories. We all have our Aunt Flossies.

Notes

- 1 READ is a widely acclaimed NGO (non-governmental organisation) working all over South Africa to improve literacy and build a reading culture.
- 2 Yarbrough, Camille, *The Shimmershine Queens*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1989, p. 21. I am indebted to Professor Rudine Sims Bishop, Ohio State University, for calling my attention to this quotation.

"Pigs aren't meant to have fun":

the Swedishness of Swedish children's literature

maria nikolajeva

The title of my paper is a quotation from Astrid Lindgren's book *Emil and his clever pig* (1970). The little rascal Emil and his well-behaved sister Ida have taught their pet piglet to skip rope. One day, Emil's father, a sound and sensible Swedish peasant, sees Piggy-Beast skipping and is filled with indignation. Before he says anything, though, little Ida hurries to save the situation: "He thinks it's fun," whereupon the father comes with his splendid comment: "Pigs aren't meant to have fun." In Swedish children's literature, this retort is a perfect illustration of the typical Swedish attitude to life, in mainstream literature best reflected in the infamous Jante Law, proposed by the Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose in a novel from 1933.¹ It can be summarised as: "Don't think that you are worth anything." For many decades, the Swedish people seem to have lived according to this principle. This kind of national inferiority complex, paradoxically combined with a conviction that Sweden is the best country in the world, has naturally been reflected in their literature.

It is my firm belief, confirmed by profound socio-anthropological studies, that geographic, climatic, historical and social conditions of a country leave their marks on national mentality, and also influence the dominating themes, settings, figures, imagery, and attitudes in literature. Thus, in order to understand and appreciate Swedish children's literature, it is essential to have some basic knowledge about these conditions.



If you look at a map of the world you will see that Sweden is situated between latitudes which in other parts of the Earth would be considered uninhabitable. The cold, long and dark winter – in the Northern provinces of Sweden, the sun does not rise for half a year! – makes the Swedes melancholy, and the Swedish literature full of longing. In Swedish literature, from folktales to modern poetry, winter is directly associated with death. Quite a few literary works, for adults as well as for children, depict a dramatic snowstorm, as often as not also representing the protagonist's inner confusion and fears. This is a peculiarity of cultural typology; in countries nearer to the equator, the heat and drought are instead symbols of death.

If winter is dying, then spring is resurrection, the long waiting for spring brings gloom and longing, but also promise and hope. On the contrary, the short Nordic summer with its light nights and even, in upper latitudes, the midnight sun, is naturally a very special occasion for joy and celebration; the Swedish Midsummer Eve is literally the heyday of the year, recurrently portrayed in literature as a time of wild merrymaking. The culmination of quite a few Swedish children's books is the cheerful dancing round the Maypole, originally a symbol of fertility, but in children's literature simply a representation of unlimited happiness.

Indeed, the Swedes are obsessed by summer. In many children's books throughout the world, the summer vacation is the typical setting, but nowhere is the ecstatic delight of the first sunny day in June, the first flowers, the first strawberries, the first brief swim in an ice-cold pond or river felt as strongly. The heroine's recurrent spring shout in Astrid Lindgren's *Ronia the robber's daughter* (1981) may be seen as a representation of a Swede's yearly astonishment at being alive after the misery of winter. Ronia's winter isolation from her friend Birk becomes a powerful

symbol. We can also remember Pippi Longstocking escaping from the cold and dismal winter into the summer paradise of the Southern Seas. Naturally, this can be viewed on a symbolic level as a frantic attempt to retreat into the summer idyll of childhood. It is on return from the summer island to the cold and snowy Sweden that Pippi invites her friends to take the magical pill that will prevent them from growing up. It is even possible, as one of my students recently suggested, to interpret Pippi's adventures on the South Sea island as pure imagination, merely one of Pippi's many tall-tales, this time reflecting once again the Swedish longing for sun and the warmth of summer.

The drastic seasonal changes are the best reminder of the flow of time, of growing, aging, death and rebirth. Summer is brief and unreliable, it is inevitably followed by the dismal autumn and the long, gloomy winter.

Sweden is a large country, the third largest in area in Western Europe after France and Spain, but it only has a population of eight million, concentrated in larger coastal cities and in the southern parts of the protruded Scandinavian peninsula. This means that the density of population, especially in rural areas, is very low. Traditionally, the rural population of Sweden lived on separate farms rather than in villages or settlements, and a self-supporting family could practically live their whole life without meeting other people. In Astrid Lindgren's *Noisy Village* series (1947–1952), we encounter a closed, limited world of three cottages, three families, six children – three girls and three boys, in perfect harmony, where the big world outside is as far away as the moon. The characters of *The Noisy Village* do not, however, long for anything else; whereas in many other literary works this isolation creates anxiety, dissatisfaction, and grief.

At the same time, unlike the people of Central and Southern Europe, or still less, like the inhabitants of the New World, the Swedes are rooted, reluctant to move,

bound to their homes, their land, their relatives. Sweden of the 19th century was a backward, poor, agricultural country, unable, once again due to its climate and geography, to feed its growing population. During the period of 1850–1930, over one million Swedes emigrated – often quite unwillingly – to America, which in Swedish literature is often described as a tragedy rather than an optimistic promise of a new and better life. Still today, people of older generations are cautious about foreign people, customs, food; the spirit of adventure and discovery is alien to most of them. The whole American mythology of frontier life, expansion, and struggle for survival is thus unknown to Swedish mentality and is almost never found in Swedish children’s literature.

On the other hand, the sense of place, of belonging to a specific “little homeland”, is important. This results in many stories of the traumatic loss of home, for instance, in the works of Selma Lagerlöf; and in contemporary children’s literature, the pessimistic depictions of children moving into a new community. The passionate love of their country, which is in strong contrast to the inferiority complex mentioned earlier, is just one of many paradoxes of the Swedish national character. True, in Swedish children’s literature we will not find patriotic poems or stories like we see in Norway or Finland, two nations which gained independence as late as 1905 and 1917, respectively. However, the Swedish devotion to the land is clearly seen in the very themes and tone of books, the caring love of nature, mountains, forests, lakes and rivers. It is not accidental that the foremost classic of Swedish children’s literature, which has also become the bestknown Swedish book in the world, *The Wonderful adventures of Nils* (1906–1907), by the Nobel Prize winner Selma Lagerlöf, originally a school reader in geography, is permeated with pride of Sweden, its nature, its wildlife, and its people. The inevitable loss of contact with nature is felt in contemporary children’s novels,

with their frustrated urban protagonists, “children of the concrete.” The city as opposed to the countryside, especially in the teenage novel, is depicted as a threat, associating civilisation with an unfamiliar and unwelcome adulthood.

Culturally, Sweden is a minor nation, with a language hardly spoken outside its borders (and certain regions of Finland). With a few exceptions, like Selma Lagerlöf or Ingmar Bergman, Sweden has contributed little to world literature, drama, art, or music. This fact results in a cultural self-contempt of the Swedes, who are seldom aware and proud of their history and their cultural heritage. The rich intertextuality of contemporary children’s literature is often lost on young Swedish readers of today, since they do not carry in their cultural luggage the treasury of quotations and allusions which writers may wish to explore. A modern rewriting of *The Wonderful adventures of Nils*, by Sven Wernström, is based on the premise that the reader does not know anything about this major classic. Today’s young Swedes have lost their roots, their very sense of history, and thus their feeling of their place in history. To a certain extent this is the consequence of the radical 1970s, when the sense of “here and now”, the solidarity with struggle for independence in the third world, and great visions of the future forced aside the historical memory. Swedish writers of today have discovered this national amnesia, and genres such as historical novel, family chronicle, memoirs and biography are more popular than ever. Also in children’s literature, a new type of historical novel has appeared, focusing less on kings, leaders, battles and great events and more on the individual, and exploring the sources of national identity. Instead of being merely a spectacular setting, history in contemporary Swedish juvenile prose has become a metaphor of the present.

Once a great military power, and losing this position as far back in history as 1721, Sweden has been reduced to a back of beyond of Europe, which better

corresponds to its dimensions. The long-term policy of neutrality (terminated by Sweden's entrance into the European Union in 1995) has to a certain extent contributed to its anonymity, which, however, has not prevented the country from being internationally acknowledged in some specialised fields.

Further, Sweden has not been at war since 1814, almost a unique case in the world, and this fact has naturally also formed the mentality of the Swedes, making them psychologically unprepared for natural catastrophes, terrible accidents, like the wreck of the ferry "Estonia" in September 1994, as well as extreme acts of violence, like the murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986. The very rare descriptions of the Second World War in Swedish children's literature are reduced to the mention of rationed coffee and fuel, or at most of the Finnish refugee children; and even the generation that lived during the war is often happily innocent about many events that took place outside the country. In the same manner, many Swedes today, even when they wish to engage in the darker aspects of life, are fairly ignorant about them. The impact on children's literature is, curiously enough, a *stronger* interest in misery, social deviations and conflicts, and in general a more pessimistic view of society.

The fact that Sweden did not participate in the Second World War accounts for much of its rapid industrial growth in the postwar decades, transforming the country into one of the best-developed in the world and raising the living standard to one of the highest in Europe. We must also regard this as one of the prerequisites of the explosive growth of children's literature after 1945. Having its industry intact after the war, the publishing industry included, Sweden could immediately see to the needs of its young readers, taking into account the new pedagogical and psychological views on childhood, developed during the 1930s. The year of 1945 is in Sweden considered to be the beginning of the era of modern children's

literature. Nineteen forty-five was the year of a mass debut of a number of children's writers who are still active today, like Tove Jansson, Lennart Hellsing, Hans Peterson, and Marta Sandwall-Bergström. They all contributed, each in their own way, to the creation of a contemporary children's literature in Sweden. Furthermore, 1945 was the year of the first *Pippi Longstocking* novel, and Astrid Lindgren's contribution to children's literature cannot be overestimated. Of course, Astrid Lindgren is an unparalleled genius, a unique talent impossible to imitate or otherwise exploit. It is difficult to point out any follower of hers among the younger generation of Swedish juvenile authors; but her impact on children's literature must be seen foremostly as creating an extraordinarily favourable climate, paving a path for a broad variety and freedom of genres and styles, and also raising the general status of children's literature.

The rapid change of the Swedish society during the 1950s and '60s had its dark sides. Industrialisation had inevitable consequences: the reorganisation of the population from rural into urban, and the disintegration of traditional family structures. The most welcome emancipation of women, resulting in almost one hundred percent of the women going out to work, had the negative impact of high divorce rates. The positive effects of extensive child care were counterbalanced by the alienation of children and parents, adjustment problems, and in addition, psychological disturbances of children and adolescents, alcoholism, drug addiction, violence, and suicide. The problems were naturally not worse than elsewhere, but by the middle of the 1960s, Swedish children's writers were painfully aware of them, which accounts for a particular social commitment of Swedish children's literature. Since the 1920s, an interest and profound knowledge of child psychology has been developed in Sweden. "The century of the child," proclaimed in 1900 by Ellen Key in a book of that title, did not only result in new educational systems, but also primarily in a deep respect for the child, which is manifest in

children's books. Although Astrid Lindgren has been given credit for unquestioningly taking the part of the child in her books, this feature had been present in Swedish children's literature long before, not least in *The Wonderful adventures of Nils*. What we see, however, in Astrid Lindgren's books, and what makes them subversive to the point of being revolutionary, is the questioning of authority, be it parents, school, or society at large. The pathos of *Pippi Longstocking* is the child's superiority over the grownups, but only partially due to Pippi's physical strength. In fact, Pippi is superior because of her spiritual and intellectual freedom, reflected also in her superb mastery of language, which unfortunately is practically lost in English translation. Pippi is the best reincarnation of the Romantic view of the child as pure, uncorrupt, and therefore omnipotent.

Children's literature in Sweden has always been far more democratic than in many other countries where books were written for and about middle- and upper-class children. The school reform of 1842 made elementary education obligatory, so that the vast majority of the population could actually read, and a number of excellent publishing endeavours at the turn of the century made books available even to the poorer families. Thus, the portrayal of poor orphans in *The Children of the moor* (1907) by Laura Fitinghoff was aimed at offering identity to young readers from the lower classes, rather than providing children from more well-off families with objects for compassion. The same year as *Pippi* (1945), another major children's classic, *Anna all alone* by Marta Sandwall-Bergström, was published. Although treated by some critics as a sentimental Cinderella-story (it does have similarities to *Oliver Twist* or *Sans famille*), the book has a strong democratic pathos and elements of social indignation, typical of the Swedish mainstream literature of the 1930s and 1940s. This empathy for the poor and the oppressed goes over quite naturally into a deep understanding of an emotionally underprivileged child.

By the middle of the 1960s, Swedish children's literature was filled to the brim with social issues: lonely, abandoned, insecure children, divorced parents, stepparents, unmarried mothers, alcoholic fathers, sibling rivalry, school problems, cruel comrades, and indifferent teachers. The dark side of reality entered the children's book. The most common feelings were fear and despair. Everything that had been taboo in children's literature suddenly made itself manifest.

One of the more serious questions treated in children's literature was the child's response to death. In Sweden of the 1960s and later, where most old people die in hospitals and the majority of the children never see a dead person, where the burial ceremony with a sealed coffin is cold, impersonal and abstract, and therefore the bereaved has no real chance to grieve, death becomes something alien and dreadful. Therefore it is more and more common that death and the child's contemplation of death appear as a secondary motif in some children's books while in others it becomes the central theme, reaching its climax in *Admission to the feast* (1969, also translated as *Nineteen is too young to die*) by Gunnel Beckman. It is a story of a young girl who learns that she has leukemia, written as letters to a friend, in imitation of a confused and unaffected personal style. The form allows a retrospective view of the events with a distance, a possibility for self-reflection. The narrative structure with the condensed time (a few days) and the unity of place, the direct, living language and the deep insight in the young character's situation makes this novel indeed outstanding.

The majority of Swedish children's and young adult novels of the 1960s and '70s show a deep psychological insight which is quite unique. For the new themes and subjects naturally demanded a new form, new poetics, new stylistic devices. Evidently the traditional narrative with an omniscient narrator was no longer

sufficient. Such a narrator could never penetrate into the child character's mind in the way the new subjects demanded.

For instance, in *Elvis and his secret* (1972) and sequels, Maria Gripe interprets the boy's thoughts and emotions and dresses them in a more advanced literary language making the impact all the stronger. Everything in the books is described not only through Elvis' eyes, but through his soul.

Another narrative device may be the diary or letter form. Fictitious diaries by Barbro Lindgren, published in the 1970s, were a step further towards a renewal of form and language in children's books. In many novels from the 1980s and '90s we see experimental forms combining first- and third-person narratives, multiple narrators, limited, strictly focalised point of view, complicated temporal structures, different metafictional frames, and in general showing more sophisticated narrative patterns than are usually met in children's books. The unreliable, nonironical first-person narrator, familiar from modern adult fiction, has become most common.

A characteristic stylistic feature is the abundant use of present tense in order to bridge the distance between the author and the reader, to make the reader experience the character's situation directly and strongly. In the Swedish language, the narrative present tense is generally less usual than in other languages and therefore more conspicuous as a stylistic device. In the American translation of *Elvis and his secret*, the present tense of the original is rendered into the past tense. Present tense narrative conveys a very intense, immediate and direct empathy, while the past tense creates a distance and alienation. I think that the translator's wilful substitution is not accidental, it is rather adapting the

Swedish intensity of emotion to American striving to spare the reader a too deep involvement.

The peculiarity of Swedish children's literature becomes still more evident as compared to American, just to take one example. While Swedish writers often explore the traumatic processes of passage from childhood to adulthood, American young readers seem to be much more oriented towards rationalism, everyday situations, comic events, down-to-earth problems, on the whole, towards material things, as Brian Attebery has noted in his study of American fantasy. Being a young, dynamic and expanding nation, raised on the national myth of a strong and active hero (Superman, the invincible cowboy, the brave cop), America favours characters who provide material wealth for themselves rather than gain spiritual knowledge and maturity. The "spirituality" of Swedish children's literature will probably be alien to young readers elsewhere.

In many contemporary Swedish children's books nothing really "happens", they develop slowly, and there is definitely no happy ending, hardly any ending at all. *Elvis and his secret* by Maria Gripe, mentioned earlier, and its sequel, *Elvis and his friends*, are very good illustrations. There is no plot in the traditional sense in these novels. There is no logical beginning, conflict and resolution, which is the normal structure of an epic narrative. We learn about the character's feelings and experience of events, but not about the events themselves. Epic narrative is disintegrating, it becomes what the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin calls polyphone, many-voiced. The omniscient, clever, commenting adult writer takes a step back and disappears.

Thus, the traditional epic plot of children's literature, described in many critical sources as "home – departure – adventure – homecoming", has in recent

Swedish children's literature been transformed into a search for identity. Most of the protagonists are extraordinary, alienated children or adolescents, who have problems in their contacts with the world around them. The spiritual quest is depicted through intensive friendship, often cross-sex friendship, where the friend of the opposite sex represents the missing parent. The books become less and less "realistic" or verisimilar, but can be seen more as symbolical representations of maturation, or, if one so wishes, the Jungian individuation process.

Not many books present any solution of the problems – the fulfilment of the Self. Most of them are isolated periods from a child's life. This disintegration of the plot has both advantages and disadvantages. It gives a feeling of a "real" life, but while the author sets a tentative stop at the end of a school year, at Christmas or a birthday, the posed questions remain unanswered. For many readers and critics, Swedish children's literature may thus seem hopelessly pessimistic.

It is especially true of the young adult novel which first appeared as a clearcut text type in the 1960s, went through a period of decline in the '80s and re-emerged with many innovations in the early '90s. JD Salinger's *The Catcher in the rye* (1951) is sometimes pointed out as a model; it was translated into Swedish in 1953. The Swedish young adult novel of the '60s was, typically, also described by the terms "socially critical", "problem-oriented", or "problem-realistic". The social commitment and problematic focus were apparent, and characteristic motifs were loneliness, exposure to the world of grownups; the teenager's conflict with the environment and with him or herself; the longing for something uncertain, felt in titles like *Where are you going? – Out* (1969) and its sequel *Where are you going? – Don't Know*² (1975) by Kerstin Thorvall. Other

aspects which had formerly been taboo were introduced into juvenile books: sex, violence, alcohol and drug addiction.

In the 1970s, the Swedish critics coined the concept of “utility literature”, that is, books which could be used practically to introduce urgent subjects for teenagers in school. Such a subject could be sexual relationships with their inevitable consequence of unwanted pregnancy, for instance in Gunnel Beckman’s *Mia alone* (1973), and still further – teenage parenthood as in *Peter’s baby* (1971) by Gun Jacobson. Gunnel Beckman’s books were at one time internationally acclaimed since they took the side of young people in their transitional period from teens to adulthood, discussed the problems of adolescence with unheard of candour, and showed a deep psychological insight into the minds of young protagonists.

The search for identity is as manifest in teenage novels as in children’s books, but it can of course be discussed on a different level. What should one do in search for one’s identity? If the surrounding world is corrupted and evil, if nothing is good, what is the point of going on living? Thus, the solution, if there is any, often lies in compromise and pain, or, at the extreme, in death or suicide. This cruel tendency has reached its peak in the novels by Peter Pohl, whose debut *Johnny my friend* (1985) has become a sort of a watershed in Swedish children’s literature in its evolution from social commitment towards a focus on an individual, towards imaginativeness and a higher literary quality. The open ending of Peter Pohl’s novels has by now become almost a cliché; still, it is undoubtedly a better alternative than ready solutions and authoritative comments.

As in many other things, Astrid Lindgren was in fact one of the first to introduce an open ending, aperture – as opposed to closure, into children’s

literature. In the fantasy novel *Mio, my son* (1954), she rejects the traditional happy ending and the basic pattern of all children's literature with a safe homecoming. She never brings Mio back to his own world as most fantasy authors did and still do; she lets him stay in the Faraway Land because nobody and nothing waits for him in his own world. Mio does not go on an adventure for its own sake, but because of his deep unhappiness in the "real" world. But the magical journey is not a helpless escape into daydreams; it is a psychodrama which makes the protagonist strong enough to cope with his inner problems. This, however, is not necessarily realised by young readers, since Astrid Lindgren makes her story so vivid and easy to believe in. To the child reader, an open ending is offered. The denouement is camouflaged by the fairy tale code, which deviates from the standard time framework. We may interpret it as we wish: whether Mio returns home – which he in his heart of hearts longs to do; whether the adventure has actually taken place or whether the boy has made it up in his imagination while in fact he is still sitting on a park bench when the book has ended. This kind of ending demands a great deal from the reader, and one of Astrid Lindgren's main strengths is her trust in the reader.

Almost twenty years later Astrid Lindgren ventured on a similar theme in *The Brothers Lionheart* (1973), where the force of the psychodrama is stressed by the shadow of death. This book was condemned by many critics outside Sweden as cruel and lacking in hope.

To summarise the specific traits of contemporary Swedish children's literature, it has gone a long way from the traditional epic story toward the complicated modern novel in the full sense of the word. The Swedish children's novel today is closer to mainstream literature than ever before. We can also notice the tangible convergence of genres, characteristic of the contemporary Western novel.

If we take a closer look at *Ronia the robber's daughter* by Astrid Lindgren we can state that no ordinary genre category will suit this book. As the title suggests, it is related to the robber novel tradition, to the adventure story with all its features like escape, quest, robinsonade, and so on, a real book for boys. But the main character is a girl, and the book often discusses the male and female stereotypes in family and society, in a way that many feminist authors could be envious of. It is also a typical fairy tale, which among other things depicts the miraculous birth. It is also a fantasy with supernatural creatures and events that threaten the idyll of childhood. It is also a historical novel with a correct description of the ways and tokens of the medieval period. It is also a love story with clear allusions to *Romeo and Juliet*. It is also a modern psychological family story of a father's relations with his adolescent daughter. It is a *Bildungsroman* as well, in the best Goethe-spirit, about a young person's breaking away from home, wandering, trials and final maturing. We see that Astrid Lindgren uses the old well-tried popular forms, but she moulds them into something radically new – a highly literary, complicated novel, not an adventure story, not a love story, but a novel.

The same is true of the best Swedish junior novel of the past decade, the above-mentioned *Johnny my friend* by Peter Pohl. It makes use of the superficial traits of a detective story, with a criminal mystery, with real and false threads which hold readers in suspense throughout the book. But it also carries features of a traditional school story, a traditional family story, of robinsonade, of fantasy and also of love story. Here too we have a mixture of traditional genres that result in a many-dimensional, psychological novel which can stand comparison with many books for adults.

In the 1980s many Swedish critics were both astonished and shocked by the series by Maria Gripe known under the common title of *Shadow* books, a typical

Romantic title. The novels are indeed romantic in style and theme, they are regular Gothic novels which troubled the critics. Gothic novels for children in the 1980s? With romantic castles and clandestine underground corridors, identity change, a girl in boy's attire, false death, shadows, mirrors, mystical ladies in white dresses – every attribute of mystical Romanticism. But this is only superficial. The novels are about a young girl's inner development and maturity, her search for identity, while the elements of mystery and suspense are only used as narrative devices, in order to attract the reader. Here too a keen, self-examining first-person narrator is used.

The tendency to use patterns from popular literature is quite apparent in Swedish children's literature, when serious problems are masquerading behind crime stories, adventure, or science fiction. Many writers create a “counter-discourse” to traditional genres.

Thus, Swedish children's literature today lacks quite a few features normally ascribed to books for young readers. It is generally not entertaining, but selfreflective, serious rather than light in tone; it does not shun cruel and difficult themes and discusses them with an open mind. It has departed far from simple plots, in fact, has abandoned the plot in the traditional sense of the word, and instead offers the reader a chaotic collage of the protagonists' observations, feelings, and reflections, in a sophisticated, modernistic style. The didactic, omniscient narrator of the classical epic children's book is almost never to be found in contemporary Swedish novels for children and young adults. Also, without drawing any conclusion, I can simply state that the most prominent Swedish children's writers today are male. Besides being a token of the high status of children's literature in Sweden, this fact contradicts the usual view of a typical children's author as a female.

The two questions that arise from my arguments are the following. I began my paper by suggesting that children's literature in Sweden has been influenced by the geographical, historical, and social conditions of the country. Is the present state of Swedish children's literature really the consequence of these factors?

Second, is the Swedishness of Swedish children's literature a serious obstacle for its recognition outside the country? Swedish books for children have a very good world reputation thanks to Astrid Lindgren on the one hand, and a number of internationally acknowledged picture books, on the other. During the 1970s, many picture books by Gunilla Wolde reached far outside Sweden, filling the lack of simple, utilitarian everyday stories for the very young, like *Thomas goes to the dentist* and *Betsy's first day at day-care center*. Today, internationally most popular Swedish picture books are stories about Festus and Mercury by Sven Nordqvist: funny, dynamic, slapstick adventures, definitely originating from the comic-strip and animated-cartoon techniques. However, more sophisticated Swedish picture books, making use of postmodern narrative devices, based on extensive intertextuality, and devoid of action and adventure, like *Come into my night, come into my dream* (1978) by Stefan Måhlqvist and Tord Nygren, seem to be less attractive. Picture books naturally have the best prerequisites to cross national boundaries; but Swedish picture books, praised in *The Oxford companion to children's literature* as being among the best in the world, have yet to fight for acceptance. The sophisticated novels have still more difficulties in reaching the international audience. Not because children outside Sweden are dumb or disinterested; but basically because adult mediators of children's literature have so far questioned the value of Swedish books.

Finally, I must make the necessary reservation that everything that I have said about Swedish children's literature is certainly true about some part of it, which

may be called quality literature, while there is of course a good deal of formula fiction and also quite a few mediocre as well as bad books. I am not suggesting that Swedish children's literature is better than other children's literature. However, because of all the peculiar circumstances discussed above, it seems to have gone further toward integration with mainstream literature. I am not sure that this development is desirable. This is something that I hope the future will show.

Notes

- 1 Sandemose was a Norwegian author, Danish by birth, and his Jante Law is equally applicable in all three countries, as it seems.
- 2 Here and elsewhere titles in inverted commas indicate that the book has not been translated into English.

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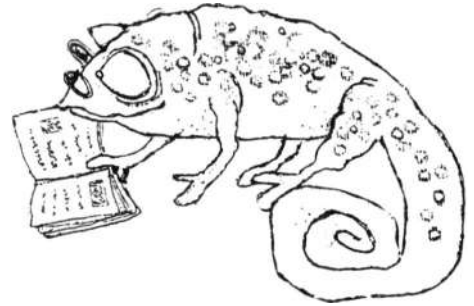
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Oral tradition and children's literature:

facing the challenges of nation building

mohd sharif mohd saad

Introduction

All of us share the belief that children are our future. They must be watched closely and nurtured with love and care. Children need physical and emotional security, they need beauty and order, they need stability and change. A nation is built based on the seeds sown today. Prosperity of a country is based on the unity of its people.

Today many countries comprise different races, religious beliefs and culture. In this situation racial unity, religious tolerance and cultural understanding are the key ingredients in nation building. How can oral tradition and children's literature play their role in building a nation that can share a common destiny?

Role of Oral Tradition

Oral tradition or folk literature is often conceived as children's literature to enthrall children at bedtime. These traditional oral narratives such as myths,



legends, folktales, dramatic repertoires of traditional theatres, proverbs, riddles, oral sayings, dirges, magical spells, invocations and formulaic expressions in games and folksongs are not merely entertainment.

Some narratives play a straightforward function as an agent of socialisation for the young as well as the old especially in promoting positive norms and attitudes among its society. There is also a possibility that they also serve as an expression of protest or even licence for feelings or actions normally suppressed by the norms of the society.

As cultural phenomena, they are related to other aspects of culture, especially the belief system, the worldview and ethos for social values of society. The fabric of traditional society is held together by these narratives. Analysis of this literature can tell us many things about a culture. Unlike modern literature, these tales do not belong to anyone in particular but to the whole community. They are actually social manifestations.

As in many folk literatures, these narratives are usually about the supernatural origins and superhuman feats of the ancestors of the ruling dynasty. Studies of these stories have thrown a great deal of light onto the social values and social organisation of the societies concerned. Themes, plots and motifs in such tales show affinity with other cultures.

For example some of the tales are of adventures and love stories whereby the hero who will be seeking for something magical will have been victimised. During those days the hero who is usually the prince, king, princess or the queen is viewed as the symbol of prosperity and unity. Their happiness (happy endings)

provides good examples for the people. There is a “Cinderella” not only in France or China but also in other lands. Even “Taro and his Grandmother” or “Momotaro” exist outside Japan.

In the stories, good will always triumph over evil; “be good to others and others will be good to you” with many other positive values being cultivated among the people. Without realising it, people from all walks of life will always respect their kings and queens with dignity and will also try to perform good deeds and pledge their loyalty to their country and thus be responsible citizens.

Influence of children’s literature and nation building

Today, we claim that our societies are becoming more sophisticated and complex. How can we build a nation of peace with strong moral and ethical values, ethnically integrated, living in harmony with loyalty and dedication to the nation? Can present day children’s literature contribute to the creation of racial unity, religious tolerance and cultural understanding?

Many have claimed that children’s literature can help to develop the sense, emotion, language, and personal, mental, emotional and spritual growth of children. We must, however, have the right materials for them to read and comprehend. Children’s literature is not purely an exercise for reading the words or for improving vocabulary. It is an agent of self-development among the young.

Literature for children is affected by the socio-political atmosphere, by the media and by the values and mores of the society. Children’s literature is a reflection of

the society. Society will influence children's books. We are concerned if there are negative values in the books for our children. Even though there is a belief that children are indiscriminate readers, studies have shown that books may indeed indoctrinate children in socially prescribed behaviour (Robinson 1994).

A study carried out in the USA in 1944, found that by exposing a group of junior high school students to books which presented blacks in a positive manner may cause them to have more positive attitudes towards blacks in general (*How books...* 1980). Miriam Bat-Ami (1994) stated that her four-year-old son cried when she read to him the book entitled *Hiroshima no pika* especially when he saw the illustrations of suffering in the book concerned.

Literature obviously has an effect on children. While looking for satisfying images, experiences and inspirations for their own creativity, indirectly they are subjected to "ideals and beliefs" of what they are reading. A good book will make the reader hear, feel and see in what is described as "aesthetic experience". Literature can nurture or harm the reader. A child being exposed to books on airplanes will definitely choose model airplanes as preferable toys. Books may help children build a concept of the society they live in and their role in society.

Multiculturalism

Today, the term "multicultural literature" is widely propagated as a means to promote understanding and give children experiences from cultures other than their own. By encouraging understanding of the different backgrounds, it will thereby influence their decisions about how they will live in this culturally pluralistic world.

Michael Thomas Ford (1994) discusses the different perceptions of multicultural literature. Minorities felt that images portraying them have been stereotyped and an illustration of an African-American character appeared to be “too black”. Realistic, contemporary stories are a must in multicultural literature. Stereotypical images of immigrants belong to stories of the past. Literature showing the different peoples, cultures and beliefs is not enough to promote understanding. More stories should also portray that despite these differences, people are able to compromise and live with each other. Sensitivity to the different cultures and beliefs must be observed.

Malaysian national literature

When Malaysia achieved her independence from the British on 31 August 1957 colonialism was a strong socio-cultural influence. With the advent of communication techniques and the media the country was also influenced by a universal culture imbued with Western ideas and values. Like many other developing countries with pluralistic societies Malaysia faces problems in her search for a national identity and in her attempts at nation building.

The people of Malaysia comprise indigenous groups, such as Malays, Ibans, Kadazans, Dayak, Bajaus and immigrant groups for example the Chinese and Indians. English language and literature which were foreign to both the indigenous and the immigrant groups, were the most influential means of linguistic and literary expression at one time.

The decision to adopt the Malay language as the national language was a momentous decision in the development of a Malaysian national literature. We

believe that when there is enough interaction between the various groups of people there will be an opportunity for the literature of each group to be known, especially if written in the national language.

It is realised that the formation of a Malaysian literature cannot materialise in a short time. Through the years the types of literature found in Malaysia still reflect the characteristics of the Malaysian population. The traditional literature of the immigrant groups consists of works brought over from their countries of origin. Meanwhile there are also works written in the new Malaysian environment.

Children's literature in Malaysia

Malay children's literature began to be published as early as in 1924. In the seventies only about 200 books were published in the Malay language. However the content of these books is more relevant to the life of the Malays, since the authors were all Malays. There were not many elements of "pluralism". The characters in some of these books are very stereotyped – the Malays are farmers in the rice fields, the Chinese are businessmen and tin miners whilst the Indians work in rubber plantations.

Malaysian children's literature improved drastically in the mid-80s and the 90s. Authors and illustrators now came from different races and their works depict their environment. Not only do the illustrations in picture books portray a pluralistic society, but the stories, themes, characters, setting, and the style are more realistic and contemporary in nature and most important of all reflect the

multi-ethnicity of present day society. Malays and Indians are now also portrayed as businessmen and -women, and children of different races seeking adventure make the plots, themes and characters more colourful and realistic.

As an example, let us look at a picture book entitled *Bermain kereta api* (Playing with train) which was published in 1993. This book portrays children of different races playing a common game. You can identify the Malay boy by his eyes, the Chinese girl from her dress and the Indian girl by her hair. The book has a common message for all, there is a time for play and a time to go home. Recently *Dewan Pelajar*, a monthly magazine popular among school children published a special publication commemorating its 25th anniversary. The content of the publication consists of poems, short stories written by children of different ethnic groups with photographs and illustrations showing people of different cultural backgrounds intermingling.

In connection with this paper, I visited three public libraries asking children between the ages of 10 and 12 what kind of stories they like. I interviewed about 30 children from the three different races – that is Malays, Chinese and Indians – at each library. Books in the library collection are in English, Malay and other vernacular languages. I was interested to find out about language preference. Although Malay is the national language, there is also an emphasis on the English language.

Over 80 percent of the respondents prefer to read story books in the Malay language. When they were asked why, most of them answered that they like reading in Malay, because they are familiar with the language; they could relate to the characters and they feel the settings of the stories are familiar to them.

Since there were many translated works of popular series, like the *Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew* in Malay, I also asked whether children liked them. Most of them prefer to read books written originally in Malay because for them, the settings in the translated books are foreign. I also found out that they do not like reading in English because they find some of the vocabulary is difficult.

One bright Indian boy said to me “by reading books written in Malay not only will I improve my Malay language but they also help me to understand that we must live in a harmonious society and that there are different races living peacefully in Malaysia”.

What about the 20 percent that prefer to read in English? I found them competent in the English language, they speak English at home and most of them said that the plots of story books in English were more interesting. For them it does not matter whether the characters or settings in the story are Malaysian. As long as “the story is interesting”.

Literature written for children in Malaysia does depict reality and promote racial integration. I used to hear comments that the Malaysian Chinese are different from the Chinese in Singapore or Hong Kong. Of course they are different because they live, understand, and have adopted the different values and cultures of the other races in Malaysia.

Conclusion

What do these findings suggest? I believe literature is one of the most important cultural expressions in the process of social and cultural integration at national

and international level. By reading stories children understand more about other cultures, other races, other religions. Children's literature can play a significant part in national unity and nation building. We in Malaysia have gone through racial clashes in the 60s. Certain people in the world are still at war thus the children of these countries are continuously suffering and unable to learn how to understand humankind.

Economic growth cannot be achieved without stability, peace and harmony in a country. Children must be nurtured, and cooperation from all is needed for racial integration and to teach tolerance of different religious beliefs and cultures.

Today the government is encouraging people to master the English language. I believe this is possible not only by reading literature published in English in countries where English is the mother tongue, but also by publishing and reading more Malaysian literature in English with its reflection of a pluralistic environment.

I believe that literature is vital for children to develop a sense of their own identity, positive self-image and the pride of cultural heritage (as advocated by many children's literature experts). It is also important that through literature they must be made aware of their neighbours, their schoolmates and also the different peoples of the world and learn to appreciate and respect them. The settings, characters and names may be different but the themes, the message, the hopes, the feelings, the dreams are similar.

Like adults, children read for many reasons: to learn, to dream, to enjoy, to explore both the familiar and unknown. What they read they absorb. What they

have absorbed may help shape their perceptions of other people and contribute to their self-understanding. What we need is for children to understand and respect each other irrespective of race, colour, beliefs and cultural background. I believe in the potential of literature for children not only to make them aware of the pluralistic society around them but to help them understand the people of the universe. God has created us equal and literature can help in fostering understanding and maintaining peace.

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Children's literature in Cameroon

edward o ako



I came to realise as soon as I had a child of my own growing up, that the question of education for children in Africa was really very complex. Especially for those of us you might call the middle class, who are not in the villages. We are at cosmopolitan centres, and the predominant culture of those centres is from Europe. And so, whatever your own political or ideological position might be, you very soon discover that your child is inheriting all kinds of nefarious ideas about race, about colour and so on (Chinweizu 1981:23).

Children's literature, it has been generally acknowledged, is something of a new phenomenon in Africa¹. Even when a few texts do exist, they are generally ill-suited for the African child and do not fulfil the role such literature is meant to fulfil. A number of writers in the African continent are fully aware of the value of this literature and are making an effort to fill the void. Some critics are also lending a hand at the birth of this literary genre by critically evaluating the works which are already available.

One such critic is the Nigerian Mabel D Segun. In her article "Children's literature in Africa: problems and prospects", she quotes Nancy Schmidt who comments on the 20 years of African children's literature from Ghana's independence to 1987. Schmidt's comment runs thus:

In 1987 the typical children's book is markedly different from the typical children's book of 1957. It is written by an African artist, edited and published by Africans in

Africa. The context is almost always African, usually specific to the African country or geographical region in which it is published. Folklore includes stylistic features of oral literature to the extent that this is possible in print.

Illustrations depict African people in African settings and are more often in colour than they were in 1957.

Although most books are didactic, as they were in 1957, they are not single-mindedly didactic to the point of excluding creativity and stimulating writing for pleasure.

Although some Europeans still write, illustrate, edit and publish books for African children, most of them live or have lived in Africa and are familiar with contemporary African life (Segun 1992:27).

Still along the lines of the evolution and growth of this literature, Segun herself adds: “Most of the books published in Africa come from four countries: Nigeria with about one hundred publishers, followed by Kenya, then Ghana and Cameroon” (Segun 1992:27). In the 18 page essay, she makes no reference to a work of children’s literature in Cameroon. The present essay should therefore be regarded as an attempt to throw some light on literature for children in Cameroon. It shall examine the three genres: the novel, poetry and drama.²

But before we move to a discussion of the genres, a few words need to be said about the value of children’s literature. At the beginning of this essay, we cited a statement by Chinua Achebe in which he explains how and why he got interested in writing for children. In his article “Children’s literature in Africa: myth or reality”, Ahukanna (1989:48) argues that this kind of literature could be “one of the powerful tools that the school could use to inculcate values, develop skills, influence attitudes and affect physical, social, emotional, intellectual and moral development”. Mabel Segun makes the same point when she states that “work ethics, selflessness, loving relationships, acceptance of responsibility are a few of

the values which can be taught through literature, not in a didactic off-putting manner, but with subtlety so that children can be mobilised towards national and international development” (*Children and literature in Africa*:32). In my discussion, we shall see to what extent the various texts fulfil some of these requirements.

Prose

Comparatively speaking, children’s literature first manifested itself through the medium of prose with Sankie Maimo’s *Adventuring with Jaja* (1962)³. Patterned after Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer*, it deals with the adventures of a group of young men playing at being grown-ups, always talking of “the days of yore” or of “glorious times now lost”. The characters, who belong to a kind of worldwide youth movement, are mainly from Nigeria and Cameroon as their names testify: Aduba, Jaja, Kayode, Tita, Kefi, Tunde, Baye, Awo and Ako. The work has no clear-cut plot as such. What holds it together are the various episodes. From the very outset of the novel, the author clearly states that his objective is to “provide the young at heart with a work of adventure with a strictly local background”. As I pointed out earlier, *Adventuring with Jaja* is Tom Sawyer in tropical Africa.

If youth is a necessary stage in everyone’s life, one must nevertheless learn to make the transition from childhood and adolescence to manhood. Kayode, the main narrator, like Voltaire’s *Candide*, realises that one must cultivate one’s garden. And so, he realises that to continue “adventuring ... was to ask for unnecessary and untold troubles” (Maimo 1974:87). Consequently, the following morning “he sat up in bed in wonder. With the song of birds outside and light streaming into the room, it looked all very pleasant. The light caressed me with

its kindly glow. This was an invitation to an active life. Now my adventures were over” (Maimo 1974:87).

It was well over a decade later that the next prose work was to appear. This was Kenjo Jumbam’s *Lukong and the leopard and The White man of cattle* (1975). From the point of view of craftsmanship, Jumbam’s novel is probably the best prose work produced for children. It lays emphasis on the values held dear by the Nso people: manhood, the pride of being Nso, the importance of obeying one’s parents, et cetera. The author no doubt expects his work to serve as a vehicle for the transmission of cultural values. Since there is emphasis on manhood, he goes on at length to explain what men do or are expected to do. On one occasion the reader is told:

the Banso people are always armed when they go on a journey. A man usually carries a spear and a cutlass, and if he can afford it, he carries a gun. The men always wear caps on their heads except when they are mourning. That is the mark of an adult, of a man. When they meet a Fai, or any other traditional ruler, he waits; they disarm and greet him, then they may begin to talk (Jumbam 1975:30).

A little later, we are equally told that, to go into the Fon’s palace, the people “disarmed themselves, putting their spears and guns against the wall and hanging their cutlasses and bags on the nails in the wall. That was the custom. Everybody who went there was expected to comply” (Jumbam 1975:31).

If Kenjo Jumbam’s *The White man of cattle* is set in Nso country, Nsanda Eba’s *The Good foot* is set in one of the Cameroon Development Corporation Camps in the then Southern Cameroons. In several ways, it is a faithful record of the everyday life of labourers in a plantation, seen through the consciousness of an intelligent young boy. It also raises the issue of appropriate reading material for the young school child. Of the school experiences then in the early fifties, the narrator says:

School was such fun, even work was pleasant; but above all the marching and singing. The teacher taught many nursery rhymes, although very inappropriate for Africa, most of all for Bantem. But the melodies were good, and that was what mattered. You could always hear the school the good distance away, singing:

Hot cross-buns
Hot cross buns!
One a penny, two a penny
hot cross buns!

Nobody knew the exact words, not even the teacher.
But the melody was good, and that was what mattered
(Eba 1977:24).

Drawing his inspiration from Bertha M Clay, George Che Atanga's *The Last of the virgins*, dwells on the power of love and is the narrative of Evelyn Ndangeh's love for Lesley Njapa. It is a work bound to appeal to young readers. The author gives free rein to his imagination and does not seem at all perturbed by the numerous unrealistic elements. The main weakness of this work, it seems to me, is the very poor use of language. Just one example will suffice:

He thus expected me to offer sexual satisfaction before he could love me wholly. This was very uncompromising with me and I knew that even if I satisfied him this way, the situation would not be different for he was a lover of too many girls, all of whom he promised marriage (Atanga 1986:54).

In the same vein as Nsanda Eba's *The Good foot*, Comfort Ashu's *Ayamoh's days at school* is the record of a young boy's last days in primary school and his stay in secondary school. Besides being the account of a growing child's life, the book explains and occasionally justifies certain values of the tradition. These, no doubt, are meant to be passed on to the younger generation. Among other things, we are told that wives have to obey their husbands (Ashu 1987:13).

When the whole family gathers to bid Ayamoh farewell, we are told:

According to tradition, the hot drinks could not be taken without first informing the ancestors using one of the bottles of whisky. There was no doubt that Ta-Tarh knew what was expected of him. He opened the bottle and carried it in his left hand to the entrance of the house. He poured the drink on the ground and at the same time called on his ancestors. "Ta Mbeng, Ta Ndip, Ta-Mbu, Ta Agbor and all other important personalities in your world of the dead, I call on you to share in the cup that we are about to drink. We are gathered here to send off Ayuk's first son who has been accepted at a secondary school far away from home. We call on you to share in our discussions as you share in our drinks, and we ask for wisdom, prosperity and more children" (Ashu 1987:22).

Joseph A Ngongwikwo's three prose works: *The Lost child*, *Taboo love* and *Taboo kingdom* are marred by poor editorial work. Still, like the other works, they try to pass on aspects of Cameroonian culture to the young, in this particular case, of Kom culture. Curiously, though, they are a kind of apology of both Western civilisation and especially, of the Catholic church. As concerns cultural values, the opening page of *Taboo kingdom* gets the reader right into the heart of the matter. When Bobe Su helps Nawain Bi with her basket of corn and a big bundle of firewood, she tells him:

Since I became pregnant no one has helped me the way you did today. I do not know. This is my last month. If I get a girl child, she is your wife; but if a boy, you will come down to the house and eat your meal of foo-foo corn and egusi soup, when the child is born. Now you know the house. It is your house. Before we see the next new moon, this stomach should be empty.

And the narrator adds:

Bobe Su knew the tradition of the people of the tribe. He had helped a pregnant mother and this favour had earned him a future wife (Ngongwiko 197:1).

Poetry

Along with prose, poetry is one of the other areas in which the literary production for children is quite encouraging. Besides Kenjo Jumbam and Comfort Ashu, Takere Mesack, Jacob A Ndifon and Bitame Lucia Bikaku have produced collections of poetry for children. Of these five, we shall discuss the works of Takere Mesack, Jacob A Ndifon and Bitame Lucia.

If others came into writing poetry for children by accident or simply as a passing fancy, Takere Mesack had a very clear idea of what he was after. His *Kingfisher poetry: junior verse* is so well illustrated with bright colours that it automatically catches a child's attention. Besides paying attention to the aesthetics of the text, the author announces from the outset the educational value of his work for young children. In his dedication, he declares:

This offer I make in true dedication,
For moral formation of springing tender young
And reformation of some adults in daily life,
Who, for reasons far beyond my own scope,
Were victims of some ill-process of growing up (Mesack 1982:1).

Though some of the poems in the collection are important mainly because of their rhythmic pattern which makes it easy to commit them to memory, most of them deal with important social issues. In "Pom-Pumpkin-Pom" the repetition of the first verse in each of the five stanzas as well as the refrain, make the poem easy to recite.

We saw our lovely pumpkin
In round and greenish gray
Fresh from mother's own farm
Worked behind the hills.

Angum, Abit, Anim and I,
In joyful song we sang
Pom-Pumpkin-Pom.

We saw our lovely pumpkin
In round and greenish gray
Mother sliced him in pieces
To cook him in the pot

Angum, Abit, Anim and I
In joyful song we sang
Pom-Pumpkin-Pom (Mesack 1982:4).

In such poems as “These things”, “My country” and “Devotion”, the poet extols the love of fatherland. In “My country” we hear the chant:

I pledge to you my country,
A faith strong in loyalty
To uphold truth and unity
In honour and responsibility.

I pledge to you my country,
My precious blood to even spill
In defence of green, red and yellow
And the star that forever shines (Mesack 1982:41).



Determination and hard work are emphasised in the poem “Laziness”. Using the well-known story of the lizard, to illustrate his point, he states:

There once lived a lizard,
In gay and happy mood,
Sprawling upon each rock
To spend his day in warmth.

He loved this luxury life
And forgot his other problem.
When night did fall at last,
He felt so awefully (sic) cold.

He wished he'd gathered twigs
To kindle a fire at night
This he swore to do at dawn,
But the sun soon rose again.

And of course, the lizard never learnt his lesson. And then the admonition:

You see lizard in a predicament,
In luxury warmth and misery cold,
Ever putting off till tomorrow
What he ought to do today (Mesack 1982:25).

Like in Takere Mesack's *Kingfisher poetry Book I*, Jacob A Ndifon's *Integrated rhymes* (For Beginners of English in Cameroon) pays a lot of attention to the aesthetics of the text. More attention is paid to the mnemonic nature of the poems, than to any need to teach any moral lessons. Of those writing poetry for children, he is probably the only one with an ear for rhythm.

In "The Baby, the poet writes:

Akwi the baby
Plays with a toy
She's bouncing
And laughing
And shouting
With joy (Ndifon 1984:7).

In "The Fish", the use of alternating rhymes, assonance and alliteration, make the poem a real pleasure for children. It goes thus:

Rise little fish
Swim swim to me
Dive little fish
Down under the sea (Ndifon 1984:9).

In “Moon-Light dance”, the poet once more shows his skill at the use of poetic devices. The sound of the drum seems to rise from the pages:

In a moon-lit night we clap
As we run about and shout
Jumping high to touch the sky
Running into the house and out
Twisting, dancing on our toes
While the drummer’s music flows (Ndifon 1982:40).

Of the three collections of poetry under discussion, Bitame’s *Environmental poems and nursery rhymes for primary schools*, exhibits ambition rather than talent. Most of the poems in the anthology actually deal with the Cameroonian environment and are meant to help the young Cameroonian master his or her history and culture; the effort does not quite pay off since she does not seem to have a firm grasp of her chosen medium of expression.

Drama

In the area of theatre, only Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh has, so far, tried to use this medium of literary expression for children. His Yaounde Children’s Theatre Collective was founded in October 1989, “more by accident than by design, following an invitation received from the organisers of the First World Festival of Children’s Theatre which was held in Lingen, Germany, in April 1990” (“Children’s Theatre in Cameroon: some experiences”:1). The two plays the theatre group has performed to date are *Munyenge* (1990) and *The Magic fruit* (1990).

Though the author developed an interest in theatre for children by accident, once he got started, things became clear in his mind. As a child, he states that he had not “read children’s literature beyond the Cinderella stories”. He goes on to add: “I found these inadequate for the children I was working with and decided to choose Cameroonian lore as a starting point, and this perhaps because of the need for a cultural identity of our own”. Besides the entertainment, he saw this kind of literature as something very useful and important. He states his case thus:

The child is said to be father of the man. If literature must grow, if enjoyment of literature should develop, if new creators of literature have to be born, then literature should begin with the child ... it expands the child’s linguistic competence, develops his creativity, provides him with entertainment, and provides him with a perception of his world (Interview with H.N.E.:1).⁴

His first play, *Munyenge* (1990), draws its inspiration from a well-known folk-tale: that of the self-willed young girl who stubbornly insists on picking a husband of her choice and who ends up marrying a skull. The author weaves his tale in such a way that the young girl, Munyenge, is rescued at the last minute and ends up marrying her childhood love.

In *Munyenge*, the author does more than just retell a well-known tale. The other issues raised in the play are those of the conflict between generations, the battle of the sexes and oppression. Thus, though the play is meant for children, it also appeals to adults. Muyenge’s father, who is also the Chief of the village, muses out loud:

In our days, men were men ... and children were children.
Just look at them now. Foolish, stupid,
rebellious, noisy ...
yes ... AND IRRESPONSIBLE (Eyoh 1990:4).

In pushing his daughter to pick a husband, the Chief claims that he simply wants her to select a husband in “a democratic manner”. In spite of this, the Chief seems to be everything except a democrat. Of him, the first villager says:

He has his ears and eyes everywhere. I
cannot even speak about him in the presence
of my wife (Eyoh 1990:5).

If Munyenge is dismissed by her father as belonging to the new generation of irresponsible children, she on her part, does not think much of him and of his sex. To her, men are “unreliable, fake, dishonest, hypocritical” (Eyoh 1990:12).

And if for the Chief, Munyenge and his brother Mukete are made of the same stuff, Mukete distances himself from his sister, by placing the mountain of sex between them. He says to his sister: “your problem is that you think too much for a woman” (12). To which she later ironically retorts: “They command, the rest of us obey” (Eyoh 1990:14).

Eyoh’s other play, *The Magic fruit*, like *Munyenge* draws its inspiration from folklore. The play deals with the problems of a polygamous home in which each of the mothers tries to place her son in a position to inherit the father’s property. The play functions as a musical comedy. The popular children’s songs interspersed throughout the play clearly show that the author has a keen ear and the ability to enter into the inner being of the characters, whatever their ages.

In the work, Mother One who had abandoned her husband and children, returns after his death to get his son back to their village because “getting my son back home means that he can inherit his father’s throne” (10). But, because there is a curse on Mother One’s family, only the son of Mother Two, can aspire to the throne.

Throughout the play, the children express the desire to return home, but above all to be good, for:

... goodness, not badness
will take you to the heights (9).

This idea of goodness, and along with it, kindness and fairness is reiterated in the story the Uncle tells at the end of the play, and which gives its title to the play. The story concerns a village which was blighted and whose inhabitants were plunged into misery and hunger. The children, in search of food, saw a squirrel eating a nut. They ran after it; it disappeared into a hole, they followed and found themselves in a “beautiful city full of squirrels”.

There they ate a lot and wanted to carry some of the food home. The Chief Squirrel thought of something else. He gave them “a magic fruit and also gave them a wand”. And with this, the villagers had enough food for everyone for many years. Then one day, the magic wand and the magic fruit disappeared. On investigation, it was found out that it was the village Chief who had stolen the wand and the fruit. And so, “the people collected their fruit and their wand and chased the Chief out of their village” (27).

The intent of the story becomes very clear. The newly installed Chief must think of the overall welfare of his people rather than just that of his immediate family. Given what is going on in most of the African continent today, this message needs to be driven into the heads of today’s children who are, after all, tomorrow’s leaders.

This survey shows that those writers who have chosen to write for children intend, among other things, to educate and to inculcate certain cultural values in

these children. They do this with varying degrees of success and of commitment. It is up to critics to seek out and to give this budding literature, the attention it deserves.

Notes

- 1 To show the extent to which children's literature has been ignored, Richard Bjornson's authoritative *The African quest for freedom and identity: Cameroonian writing and the national Experience*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991 and the recently published *Cameroon Anglophone writing* (1993) make no reference whatsoever to children's literature.
- 2 This essay is concerned with children's literature in Cameroon, written in English. The works written in French will be the subject of a separate study.
- 3 The Cameroon edition of Sankie Maimo's *Adventuring with Jaja* appeared in 1974. Though the work is set in Nigeria and most of the characters are Yorubas, it does not figure in any discussion of children's literature in Nigeria.
- 4 The interview with Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh was conducted in February 1993.

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Lore and worldview:

a folkloric and thematic exploration in the oral compositions of the Congolese schoolchildren

jean-pierre ngole

Documented investigation throughout the world points to the universal nature of children's oral compositions. As observed in a great number of papers presented at this conference, this literature abounds in imagery and fantasy, and thrives in accordance with an overwhelming sense of genuine creativity embedded in the children's verbal performance. That is the literature which shapes their worldview and tailors their behaviour in society.

Children's oral compositions have received serious attention since the works of such inspiring folklorists, anthropologists, oral literature and linguistics specialists such as Marcel Griaule (1938), Ruth Finnegan (1970) and Alan Dundes (1978), to name but a few. As a matter of fact this growing interest has been vividly depicted by the insightful international book illustrations exhibited at this conference.

Whereas in the Congo little investigation has been carried out in the domain of children's literature in spite of sporadic attempts by authors who have appended a few songs to primary school readers. However, it should be noted that these songs are exclusively adults' compositions intended for children, thus not a reflection of the learners' own interests and imagination.

One may wonder why in a country which boasts of an impressive number of writers of international reputation, children's literature draws so little attention?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that quite often, this literature triggers a déjà vu experience within a given portion of the adult population. Once, they believe, in their tender years they also performed the same repertoire to a certain extent. And nowadays, they merely take it for granted that children's rhymes convey no meaning whatsoever. This biased and paternalistic view tends to underestimate the youth's sense of creativity. Yet the oral compositions of Congolese schoolchildren, although they are performed for ludic purposes, embody indeed a flourishing treasure of intrinsic social and cultural values worth scrutinising for a better understanding of their lore, worldview and behaviour.

This paper purports to investigate the oral compositions of Congolese kindergarten and primary school pupils. It seeks to treat the children's rhymes beyond the mere collection and descriptive tasks previously undertaken in the scholarship. In order to fulfil that objective, consistent with the contextual approach, I will address the textual features of the children's verbal lore, its performance and function.

The material under consideration was collected from pupils attending a private and two public institutions, respectively the Fondation Chevriot and the Ecole de la Poste located downtown in the commercial district of Brazzaville, the capital city, and the Mbaya primary school in Gamboma, an administrative centre located in the Plateau region. The data contains 50 songs, but for reasons of economy, I will concentrate on eight compositions only which are relevant to my topic. The children's rhymes with their English translations are appended.¹

Due to the contextual approach this topic suggests, at the outset this paper will provide a brief ethnographic account of the complex environmental features that

surround the children. These features are amongst other things physical, economic, social, and political.

The schoolchildren belong to the Bantu-speaking people who presently occupy the Congo. The land covers an area of about 139 000 square miles, and stretches northwest from its 60 mile long coast-line in the southwest to the dense equatorial forest bordering, respectively, the Central African Republic and Cameroon in the North, Zaire in the East, Gabon in the West and Cabinda (Angola) in the southwest.

The Republic of Congo is basically an agricultural country with two major seasons: the rainy season (September-May) and the dry season (June-September). During these periods, Congolese engage in various activities involving subsistence farming, hunting and fishing.

The country derives a great portion of its revenue from oil whose bonanza but perturbing price fluctuations induced the Congolese to tighten their belts notably with regard to their political, economic and socio-cultural affairs. Added to these measures of austerity is the devastating consequence of the recent devaluation of the CFA Franc which unexpectedly forced householders to seek additional means of survival.

“Devaluation”, reiterates a schoolgirl in her comment on the rhyme entitled *Na mboka na biso* (In today’s Congo), “has taught us how to add more holes to our belt”. “In other words”, said she, “you can tighten your belt alright. But the more you starve, the more you have to add holes to your belt”. We shall return to the song in subsequent sections (see Rhyme no 8).

The Congo comprises a population of more than two million inhabitants. The last reliable census held in 1974 showed an overall slight imbalance in the female population over the male (52% women compared with 48% men). These figures may have a bearing on the higher rate of school enrolment observed among women (55% compared with 45%). The desire for education is best expressed in the Congolese school children's poetic song verse:

Landaka nzele ya lekole
La vie mwana ekoya sima
(Child, go to school,
and life after hard work will be rosy.)

We shall discuss that specific point later. Let us finally turn to the political environment.

The Congolese entered the democratic era more than two years ago after the country had undergone 30 years of marxist and military rule.

As acknowledged in most societies emerging from political mutations, change does not occur overnight. Generally people struggle to adjust to their new socio-political environment. However, in the Congo previously acquired attitudes still linger among a few nostalgics of the monoparty era. Peculiarly enough, some Congolese schoolchildren have not been spared this mentality. For instance, listen to them sing: "Militaire à gauche" or "Bana Sassou baleki" (see Rhyme No 2).

In the first rhyme, allusion is made to the soldiers' march cadence. The second praises the former president, an army general, who ruled during the period preceding the country's acceptance of the democratic process. It should be

remembered that throughout the world, for various reasons, the military career has always attracted youngsters. It suffices, for instance, to observe scores of military toys which some of them collect proudly in their toy arsenal. Likewise, Congolese schoolboys, exposed to the lavish military parades which they attended during the former régime, have also nurtured a certain passion for military toys and career. Usually they play at being soldiers and are totally unaware of the ongoing disruptive influence which their toys can exert on their underdeveloped and innocent minds.

Seen within this scope, the above ethnographic background provides the context for the present paper. A study of the Congolese children's oral compositions calls primarily for an examination of their form and content.

Dundes (1978:78) in his insightful introductory work, *The Study of American folklore*, lists four major categories of American rhymes performed by both adults and children. They are: nursery rhymes; rhymes of play, games and fun; rhymes of work; and written traditional rhymes. Ruth Finnegan's (1970:303) informative treatise of African expressive forms, *Oral literature in Africa*, classifies the African children's songs and rhymes under such broad terms as nonsense songs, singing games and catch rhymes. Similarly these categories are also observed in the Congolese folk poetry.

Based on Dundes and Finnegan's classifications and related subdivisions, one may posit for the Congolese schoolchildren's rhymes the following categories: praise rhymes including work rhymes and advice rhymes; play rhymes; derision rhymes; parody rhymes; march rhymes; nonsense rhymes and topical rhymes.

Seemingly they differ in form, but in content some of these rhymes convey the same meaning and fulfil the same function. Their form can be exemplified by the praise rhyme entitled *Koko* which, in addition to its original form, also displays semantic features similar to those encountered in rhymes of advice and play rhymes.

Most of these rhymes are of various lengths ranging from two rhythmic verses (eg *Namboka na biso/batekaka mike mike*) to five lines or more whereby the performer may in “medias rei” improvise a lengthy rendition from a formulaic verse (eg *Koko*, *Bana jardin* and *A l'Ecole*). In the second case, for instance, the leader introduces a formulaic verse which is repeated in a refrain by the chorus, fully embellished with onomatopoeic words.

Onomatopoeia occur in verses such as *Elayila*, in the rhyme *Koko*, *Ewa* in the *Bana jardin*, and *A l'Ecole* in *Qui veut chanter?* The flowing vowels i, e, a and o render the rhymes easy to learn and add to the poetics of the rendition.

As stylistic and communicative devices, the Congolese schoolchildren's rhymes display linguistic and paralinguistic devices comprehensively investigated in folk poetry. These are: rhythm, intonation, figurative language, parallelism and codeswitching.² For reasons of economy, I shall narrow down my study to the themes drawn from the rhymes only. Since in folklore, form, content, including meaning, and function overlap, I shall proceed with a holistic approach towards the assessment of themes embedded in the children's oral compositions.

The much exemplified praise rhyme *Koko* tops my collection of rhymes. The schoolchildren sing it in order to honour their mates who do not cut classes, the

mothers and fathers who showed them the way to school, and the teachers for their painstaking task of educating them. It has been noted above that Congolese children treasure education. For them a good training can secure their future by enabling them to land a good job when they graduate. In addition to being a learning institution, the school also provides the playgrounds where boys and girls socialise. For as their song *Qui veut chanter?* (Who wants to sing?) goes, it is only at school that one can “... work ..., listen ...” and “... concentrate ...”, “... play ...” and “... laugh ...” (see Rhyme No 2).

Where else but at school can one learn and have fun, prompts the kindergarten’s rhyme *Bana jardin*, another praise song which substantiates the themes of work, leisure and courage. In this rhyme, the pupils recall their mother’s advice when they outlined:

Bokende lekole
Bokende koyekola
Mama alobaki
Soki babeti y o
y o mpe azongisa

(Go to school
Go and learn.
Mother said,
If they beat you,
fight back) (see Rhyme No 3).

Thus, at an early stage, the Congolese child understands that at school, far from the parental shelter, he or she evolves in a relatively hostile environment where it is the survival of the fittest. “Occasionally”, remarked the singer “the teacher looks after us. She provides protection. But for how long? There are a lot of kids in the playground ... It’s self-defence sometimes when you are facing a bully

... Just like Bruce Lee (mimicking the late movie star), he took a karate stance and launched a shout amid the approving laughter of his colleagues.’’

Derision rhymes such as *Mama Elisa*, *Batiye zemi* and *Pharmacie* depict respectively themes of mockery, precarious pregnancy and authority. Children sang *Mama Elisa* in order to poke fun at the women who cannot perform the latest dance steps. Readers who are versed in music and dance, will probably know that each new hit comes along with its dance steps. So in this metaphoric rhyme these children ridiculed *Mama Elisa* who can be anybody who fumbles when dancing. In fact, they likened her to a ‘‘Mokomboso’’ (chimpanzee). Allusion is made to the dancer’s awkward moves which resemble the animal’s when he walks.

Naturally, this behaviour can make the untrained Western observer bat an eyelid. Nevertheless, in Africa, and in the Congo in particular, it is not unusual to see a five-year-old child dance as well as – and even better than an adult. Dance holds a significant position in their traditional culture. Children consider their elders as models who should not fail to transmit this legacy to them. Therefore, failure to perform the latest dance hit can indeed incite sarcasm among Congolese schoolchildren.

Mockery takes a bitter turn in *Batiye zemi* (The pregnant young girl) who is debased by her peers when they remarked:

There you are, prematurely expecting a baby. Who’s going to look after you, poor girl. Now that you’re out of school, who’s going to take care of you and your child when you up? You’ve let your studies go to waste!

The issue of the pregnant young girl has been widely debated in African societies. In the Congo for instance, unmarried girls are somewhat marginalised by their married counterparts. The latter dread them as potential rivals whose charm may attract their husbands and consequently jeopardise the harmony in their households. The plight of the unmarried girls reaches an abysmal point when they have not undergone formal education, are unemployed, and worse still, are single mothers. Due to the imbalance in the population mentioned earlier, more females than males, competition for marriage remains a serious matter of concern for parents whose mature offspring wait to meet the expected suitor in vain. Likewise, at times, schoolchildren ponder this matter. Girls in particular stress the hazards of pregnancy and fear to be an object of derision when their friends warn:

Batiye zemi
Monoko esila
(She's pregnant
She's speechless) (see Rhyme No 5).

The rhyme *Pharmacie* is chanted in order to assert oneself in a quest for authority, role change and status in society. The author Patty, a 10-year-old girl commented on her rendition as follows:

One day, I went to the pharmacy. I met two kids.
I fought one of them. They ran away and hid themselves.
I kicked them so hard that they ran for diapers.

She meant that the pain made the boys pass water.

This derision rhyme reveals a subtheme worth noting, that of violence. The girl, a tom-boy, attacks a passer-by because he has invaded her territory. Violence is

expressed rather vividly in the closing lines of the song when the aggressor calls for a soldier to frighten the unfortunate victim away with his gun:

Mimi Kaoule
Basoda babeti masasi
Toyo, toyo (see Rhyme No 6)
(Mimi Kaoule!
She yelled.
The soldiers fired
Toyo, toyo). (Dramatising the shouting).

Furthermore, the theme of violence recurs in the boys' cadence rhymes, *Militaire à gauche* (see Rhyme No 7). They employ these two rhythmic verses when they mimic their ideal officers marching during official parades held at the Army Boulevard. Questioned why they composed the rhymes, the boys merely replied that they admired the soldiers and gendarmes for their authority. "They carry guns and can kill you", they emphasised before continuing: "We hope to finish school and enrol in the army. We will arrest thieves and torture them."

One may wonder who instilled this notion of violence in the minds of the children? The question triggers two hypothetical answers. First, they were born and raised during the military régime which indulged in tacit overt and covert violence. In addition throughout their early years, they listened to eyewitness accounts of, or witnessed the bitter social upheavals instigated by soldiers. These experiences gave rise to mixed feelings, on the one hand there was bitterness and on the other hand admiration for the soldiers.

Secondly, the recent shootings which destroyed the social tissue in various districts of Brazzaville left little to the imagination of the children. They are also

constantly exposed to violence in the media, to their detriment. Local authorities display an indifference to the situation.

Surely, to wipe out these sad and disruptive memories, and the Rambos and Bruce Lees of the television screen, will take time. Meanwhile, the schoolchildren seem bound to recall past events and model their behaviour on that of their respective heroes. Unless drastic actions are taken to eradicate violence in the country by all means possible, it will unfortunately continue to fuel the Congolese children's imagination.

Finally, let us consider the topical rhyme *Na mboka na biso* (In today's Congo). To a certain extent the rhyme reveals an aspect of stress endured by the Congolese in the aftermath of the transitional years to democracy. It is caused, among many other factors, by the decrease in buying power and the puzzling effects of the devaluation of the local currency with which housewives are confronted.

Due to the devaluation of the CFA Franc, the cost of living, including the price of foodstuffs, has skyrocketed. These prices increase so rapidly that in market places people must indeed sharpen their bargaining strategies in order to pay reasonable prices.

In her commentary, Little Evelyne describes the crisis by observing that in today's Congo we have to spend cautiously because even in the marketplace the koko seller strives to shred her vegetables in smaller heaps than usual. She does so in order to reduce the amount of her product and make a profit³. At the end the girl asked why in an agricultural country like the Congo which produces a

great variety of vegetables the koko, which grows unattended in the wilderness of the forest, should be so expensive?

“In today’s Congo goods are sold in bits at higher prices. What does the future hold for us children?”, she concluded. That is one of the numerous problems posed by the schoolchildren while performing their oral compositions.

Taken altogether and considering the themes discussed above, the children’s rhymes may lead us not to look down on their authors as ordinary people. But rather just like the bard, to a certain extent they merit being raised to the status of critics of the society, social commentators and active participants in the shaping of tradition. These roles, I believe, can contribute efficiently to the making of a new cultural and didactic environment related to the books intended for our young readers. In order to achieve that goal, the decision makers, children’s book writers, illustrators and publishers should shake off their possessive instincts and lucrative interests. Furthermore, they should cease to create a fictitious world which binds our children to acculturation.

As mentioned in the opening sections of this paper, there exists no written children’s literature in the Congo. In what might be considered a case study, I endeavoured to analyse the Congolese schoolchildren’s rhymes which could at this particular stage of inquiry shed light on the topic under discussion. I am convinced that this seminal task will result in further investigations which will hopefully help to lay the foundations for a more comprehensive treatise of the children’s oral compositions, including their sense of imagination and verbal artistry.

Notes

- 1 The taped rhymes appear without the singers' commentaries. The author omitted them voluntarily due to space and editorial constraints. The tape can be obtained by special permission.
- 2 For additional linguistic notes on the linguistic and paralinguistic devices observed in the Congolese folk poetry, refer to Jean-Pierre Ngole's doctoral dissertation: *Bargaining strategies as performance: an ethnographic and sociolinguistic study of women sellers in Congo* (Indiana University, Bloomington, USA, 1988:233–238).
- 3 Koko is an exotic vegetable which grows in most central African forests. Its green leaves resemble spinach but are smaller in size and bitter in taste sometimes. Koko occupies a prominent position in the culinary recipes of the Congolese housewives as would salad or cabbage in Western foodways. The leaves are sold in shreds and prepared with dry fish, palm oil or peanut butter sauce.

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Appendix

1. Koko



Leader: Koko (bis)

Koko (twice)

Chorus: Koko elayila (“)

Koko elayila (“)

L: Et les enfants

Long live the children

C: Elayila

Elayila

L: Et les mamans

Long live the mothers

C: Elayila

L: Et les papas

C: Elayila

L: On va crier

C: Elayila

L: Et les maitresses

(by kindergarten pupils)

Elayila

Long live the fathers

Elayila

Let's shout

Elayila

Long live the teachers

2. Qui veut chanter?

L: Qui veut chanter?

C: A l'Ecole

L: Qui veut travailler?

C: A l'Ecole

L: Qui veut écouter?

C: A l'Ecole

L: Qui veut jouer

C: A l'Ecole

(by kindergarten pupils)

Who wants to sing?

At school

Who wants to work?

At school

Who wants to listen?

At school

Who wants to play?

At school.

3. Bana Jardin

L: Bana Jardin

C: Ewa!

L: Tutaa tuta!

C: Ewa!

Kindergarten pupils

Ewa!

Hurry, hurry!

Ewa!



L: Tuta makolo
 C: Ewa!
 L: Bokende lekole
 C: Ewa!
 L: Mama alobaki
 C: Ewa!
 L: Soki babeti yo
 C: Ewa!
 L: yo mpe ozongisa
 (by kindergarten pupils)

Hurry up!
 Ewa!
 Go to school
 Ewa!
 Mother said
 Ewa!
 If they beat you
 Ewa!
 Fight back

4. Mama Elisa (Mother Liz)

Mama Elisa e
 Boya kotala e
 Bomona wapi e
 Mokomboso akobina
 A ee, mama!
 (by Evelyne, 9 years old)

Mother Liz eh
 Come and see eh
 Where have you seen eh
 A chimpanze dance
 Oh Mother!

5. Batiye zemi (The pregnant girl)

Batiye zemi
 Monoko esila
 by Ngabou, 12 years old)

She's pregnant
 She's speechless

6. Pharmaci (Pharmacy)

Nakendaki na pharmacie
Namonaki bana mibale
Nabeti moko double patte
Bana yango bawela kobombana
Aie mama, hum, hum!
Bana yango bawela bacouche
Aie mama, hum, hum!
Mimi Kaoule, kanga ye Ma, ma
Mimi Kaoule
Basoda babeti masasi Toyo, toyo
(by Patty, 10 years old)

I went to the pharmacy
I saw two kids
I kicked one down
They ran away for safety
Oh mother, hum, hum!
They ran for diapers
Oh mother, hum, hum!
Mimi kaoule, stop him Ma, ma
Mimi Kaoule
The soldiers fired Toyo, toyo

7. Militaire a gauche (Soldier, left)

L: Militaire a gauche! (3 fois)
C: A gauche, a gauche
(by kindergarten pupils)

Soldier, left! (3 times)
Left, left

8. Na mboka na biso (In today's Congo)

Na mboka na biso
Batekaka mike, mike, mike
(by Evelyne, 9 years old)

In today's Congo
They sell goods in bits

Aboriginal narrative: its place in Australian children's literature

maureen nimon



Until the last quarter of this century, the exposure of most non-Aboriginal Australians to Aboriginal narrative was restricted to collections of stories marketed as children's books. The principal example of this was *Australian legendary tales*, composed of material originally published by K Langloh Parker in 1896 and 1898. An edition of *Australian legendary tales*, edited by H Drake-Brockman and illustrated by Elizabeth Durack, was published in 1953 and another in 1978.

The importance of this collection in providing some access to Aboriginal culture for young Australians must be acknowledged. Without it Aboriginal culture would have been entirely invisible for many. Moreover the dedication of Langloh Parker to the preservation of a culture she perceived to be vanishing deserves respect, as does the work of those who edited and promoted her work, not only to continue that preservation, but in the hope of creating by such a book, a window into Aboriginal traditions that would foster understanding in the wider community. Unfortunately for such intentions, *Australian legendary tales* did not win widespread popularity. Niall (1985) attributes this to Langloh Parker's attempts to remain as close as possible to the stories as she heard them by her incorporation into the text of a large number of Aboriginal words (Niall 1985:206). Even so, *Australian legendary tales* remained the standard title representing Aboriginal narrative in a form accessible to the non-Aboriginal

population, apart from anthropological studies, until the books by Percy Trezise and Dick Roughsey began to appear in 1978. These took the form of picture books in which Trezise, a white man, wrote the text from stories he collected in the Cape York Peninsula of Far North Queensland and Roughsey, an Aboriginal person from that area, provided vivid illustrations which presumably reflect an authentic conceptualisation of the characters.

The importance of *Australian legendary tales* in the history of Australian children's literature is acknowledged, but nevertheless consideration has to be given to the fact that the manner of the creation of this collection offers an argument for assessing it to be more truly a representation of the culture of those responsible for the book than an accurate record of Aboriginality. Furthermore, the context within which the book was read between 1896 and World War II argues that it may have served to reinforce some of the negative perceptions of Aboriginal peoples in the white community rather than modify them. The discussion of these matters which follows is necessarily broadbrush and oversimplified, but it provides a background for the examination of some recent titles published by Aboriginal authors and their place in Australian children's literature.

The three women whose work ensured the creation and continued existence of *Australian legendary tales* were all from pastoral families. The stories Langloh Parker collected she heard as a child when living on her father's property in northern New South Wales. Both Drake-Brockman and Durack were, likewise, people well acquainted with particular Aboriginal communities which, because they were still living in the countryside though partly displaced from their lands, retained connections with the culture of earlier times. Yet consideration of the processes involved in the collection, writing and editing of the tales raises

questions as to the relationship between them in published form and the original sources. Firstly, one asks, what kind of tale would have been told to an uninitiated white female child and young woman? Probably the answer is that those chosen by the tellers would indeed have been stories for children. Secondly, mention was made above of the large number of Aboriginal words Langloh Parker used in her text. In doing so, her aim must have been to respect the original, but the hurdle they constituted for English language readers highlights the compromises that have to be made to make the cultural artifact of one society comprehensible to another. What other decisions did Langloh Parker make in the process of converting an oral tale into a written text? Not only was there the matter of the use of Aboriginal words and the editing of the non-standard English of Aboriginal tellers, but there may have been a restructuring of the material to fit into the accepted form classified by Western specialists of the time as “folk-tale”. Given Andrew Lang’s praise for Langloh Parker’s first edition (Drake-Brockman 1953:vi), it seems likely that restructuring took place. The preface to the 1953 edition claimed that Langloh Parker was “the first to set forth, to any noteworthy extent, their (the Aborigines) own vision of themselves and their conditions of living, so far as she was able to reproduce their thoughts and speech forms in written English” (Drake-Brockman 1953:vi). As a person with no expertise in Aboriginal cultures and languages, I am not well placed to judge the validity of this comment, but my inability to distinguish striking differences between *Australian legendary tales* and representative collections of other people’s folktales reduced to English language children’s literature persuades me that not only compromise was involved in spanning the enormous gulf between the lost world of Aboriginal peoples and that of the white invaders, but that the process was also one of mutation. The suspicion is strong that the imposition of Western language and literary criteria forced the originals into forms that destroyed their uniqueness. An allegory to illustrate this may be created by imagining a teacher confronted by Picasso’s cubist portraits telling the

artist he needed anatomy lessons. Thus the value of *Australian legendary tales* as an item which acknowledged the right of Aboriginal peoples to a place in Australian cultural life remains, but there is substantial doubt as to the accuracy of the representation of Aboriginality. Or at least the nature of that Aboriginality is elusive to the non-expert reader.

The context in which *Australian legendary tales* appeared and was read over decades needs to be mentioned briefly. Aboriginal people were not physically visible as a normal part of everyday life to the majority of Australians. Our great open spaces misled many people overseas in their assumptions regarding the Australian way of life. Throughout the history of our country, our great open spaces have been just that – spaces which white people have on the whole avoided assiduously. Instead we huddle together on the seaboard, on a narrow strip of relatively fertile land generally less than 30 miles wide, and live as we have always lived – in cities – among the most urbanised people on earth. This distribution of settlement and the small proportion of the population that is Aboriginal, and the even smaller proportion of that category who in the past chose to live in cities, has meant that Aboriginal people have been largely out of sight in a literal sense until comparatively recent times. Here, though, we also need to reflect for a moment on cultural factors which rendered Aboriginal people out of sight and out of mind for much of Australia's brief history. These cultural factors ensured that most Australians assumed the Aboriginal peoples to be socially, culturally and politically insignificant, peoples living on the margin of all that mattered. I chose the word “assumed” here with care, because if I used the word “judged”, this would imply that people gave consideration to the issue, while it is evident most did not. Some white Australians undoubtedly knew better, but in the generalised argument I put here, I wish to remind you of influences on Western views of the world which, in 1896 and for some decades

later, seemed to prove scientifically that Aboriginal people were insignificant and were, indeed, “dying out”.

The first is that at the end of the 19th century, the Whig notion of history as a discernible march of progress by European peoples was still powerful. Given the immense scientific and technological changes of the century, it is not surprising that civilisation was often measured in terms of products. One hundred years before, travel, production and lifestyles were still governed by machinery driven by horses, water and wind, though change had begun in Britain. By the end of the century, the application of power-driven machinery had not merely transformed Britain, but that country had been eclipsed already by Germany and the United States. Religion remained an acknowledged authority, but religion was, for many, measured by outward conformity to the formal structures of organised churches. Against such standards, the Aborigines were seen to have no civilisation at all. They grew nothing and produced only the simplest of tools. In the classification of the times, they were “stone age” peoples. Moreover, at that time their spirituality was beyond the perception of all but a handful of Europeans, so that it was commonly believed that they had no religion: childish stories, perhaps, but no religion.

Not merely history but science also condemned them. When European explorers first encountered Aboriginal people, the interpretation of natural phenomena was guided by Linnaeus’ chain of being. Such was the vision of the 1770s, that for many scientists the Australian Aborigine appeared to be best placed in the chain between the monkey and man (White 1981:8). This judgment was not improved by the impact of Darwin’s *Origin of species*. More particularly, Herbert Spencer’s application of Darwin’s ideas to human society, with his arguments for the right of might distilled as “survival of the fittest”, seemed to justify the dispossession

of Aborigines as “natural” and to render inevitable their demise. Even those most well disposed towards the Aborigines interpreted the relationship of Europeans to them as the stewardship of the more intelligent for the essentially child-like. Under the influence of such ideas, Aboriginal children who had discernible European genetic inheritance were taken from their mothers and raised in missions so that their supposedly greater intellectual potential could be developed. This practice was official Australian government policy before World War II and it operated in some parts of Australia until the 1960s.

Finally, since there was no gain to be made by the Australian community in general from the study of Aboriginal languages, only a tiny number of anthropologists and missionaries had knowledge of even one of the hundreds that existed. Consequently, most communication between Aboriginal groups and other Australians depended on the degree to which Aboriginal people could speak English. The limitations of their command of formal English served only to reinforce the conceptualisation of them as child-like and simple.

Reference to these views of the nature of Aboriginal culture and the place of Aboriginal peoples in society was made in the preface of the 1953 edition of *Australian legendary tales*. The anthropologist, Professor Elkin, was quoted as warning “some folk carry the metaphor of child-race too far”. The professor went on to explain “a child-race is so called because it has not attained the stature of our civilisation ...”, but “its grown men and women, however, are adults” (Langloh Parker & Drake-Brockman 1953:vi). That Elkin felt such a reminder was necessary and Drake-Brockman considered it an important inclusion in her preface highlights the awareness of Drake-Brockman and Durack of attitudes towards Aborigines in the general community and their interest in seeking to alter them. However, their chosen tool of a collection of stories produced as a work

for children, while intended to shape the view of the next generation, may have served to confirm ideas of the “child-like” nature of Aboriginality. Similarly, the bestowal of the 1954 Children’s Book of the Year Award on *Australian legendary tales* may be interpreted as a community acknowledgment of Aboriginal culture, but if this is so, the acknowledgment was bestowed upon that culture as expressed in a children’s book in English, a format unlikely to rupture established community views of Aboriginality.

How different is the position today of Aboriginal literature in Australian children’s literature? A great deal, we all assure ourselves and hope it to be true. Yet we find in recent publications, criticisms which echo the points just raised in regard to earlier times. Sutton (1992:34) asserts that Aboriginal sacred narratives have been appropriated and colonised “especially in the bowdlerised, infantilised versions published as children’s literature in English ...”. Rowse (1992:7) asks:

If Australia’s indigenous oral literature comes to non-indigenous readers primarily as illustrated stories for children, isn’t there a danger that “Aboriginality” is, in effect, being distanced from the concerns of adult Australians? Might not the proliferation of Aboriginal “fairy tales” give new life to an older non-Aboriginal prejudice that “Aboriginality” is a thing of child-like simplicity, of charming naivety?

The situation today is different from that of the past, though not perhaps in as clear cut a fashion as is desirable. Firstly, there remains the question of to what degree the requirements of adapting another’s cultural artifact to meet the criteria for acceptability in our society forces Aboriginal authors to compromise what they consider significant. (Of course they are not alone in facing such pressures. At the launch in Adelaide of *The Watertower* in September, 1994, Gary Crew spoke briefly of the major rewrite of *Angel’s gate* which he had to undertake to suit it to his American publisher’s requirements. The adaptations required are not a

matter of the substitution of American terms for Australian colloquialisms, or even changes in emphasis, but nothing less than a recasting of the book to make it suitable for a younger audience than that for which it was originally intended. In Crew's case, however, the author is master of both the original form and that of the new book which will result. This may not be so for Aboriginal authors.)

Nevertheless the evidence is that Aboriginal authors, whatever compromises they must struggle with, are choosing to write books for their own purposes. For instance, Mary O'Brien (1992:7) responded to Rowse's comments by pointing out that she had selected the material she published to avoid the secret or sacred. She also stated that she wrote stories because she "wanted Aboriginal children to be proud of their Aboriginality" and be able to see themselves reflected in the books found in school. The choice of Aboriginal authors to become part of Australian children's literature in itself radically alters their place within the field.

So does the attainment of excellence. Among Aboriginal authors today, there is one who has not only chosen to be part of Australian children's literature, but has demonstrated his right to be recognised within it for his mastery of the European folktale form. In *Enora and the black crane*, Arona Meeks (1991) has written a book with a haunting admonitory tale, urging respect for the bush and its creatures. He draws on his culture to do so, but expresses it within the structures of European narrative and permeates it simultaneously with a concern for conservation, a concern shared by many Australians of different backgrounds. His illustrations illuminate the text and fuse both into a brilliant whole.

Other titles, however, may be seen to introduce new ways of communicating across gulfs of culture, experience and language. Two of these titles are discussed

here. The first is *As I grew older* by Ian Abdulla. *As I grew older* is in the traditional format of a picture book. It offers three texts to the reader by which to share something of the life of “an Aboriginal family on the Murray River in the midtwentieth century” (Abdulla 1993:jacket cover). Abdulla tells of his childhood in a series of paintings which form one text on which he has written his verbal text. These paintings appear on the right in the two page spread, while the third text, which may be regarded as a translation of Abdulla’s, stands on the left. The left-hand text is a translation in that it puts Abdulla’s words into standardised spelling and grammar. In the early pages, the reader finds that there is little difference between the texts, Abdulla’s and the translator’s, except for the standardisations and an occasional sentence that gives Abdulla’s words more of the structure of the English language autobiography. For example, in the texts on the opening double-page spread, the first sentence of the standard text gives a time-line and clues to the context of Abdulla’s recollections that are not otherwise there for the non-Aboriginal reader.

Further into the book, however, the standard text provides information indiscernible in Abdulla’s own words: it fills in gaps that are necessary for the understanding of the reader expecting a sequentially linked narrative that makes sense independently of the pictures. Clearly an anonymous person¹ worked with Abdulla to help him record his story in a form comprehensible to the wider community. It is a significant part of the communication of difference that this book offers that the assistant remains anonymous. He or she is simply facilitating the telling of Abdulla’s story. Another is that Abdulla’s own text is respected as a dialect of English reflecting the cultural world in which he grew up, dispossessed of his land, but not displaced from it. Earlier times would have seen Abdulla’s own words replaced by a standard text, not explicated by it. In *As I grew older*, his words, together with the pictures, can be claimed to be the primary story and the standard text a bridge to them.

It is important to recognise that this approach legitimises Abdulla's experiences and the language he has developed to express himself within the Australian community. It acknowledges his manner of narrative, rather than concealing or denying it by transforming it into something that is "acceptable". Abdulla appears to have conceptualised his life as a series of visual memories which he has painted, then to which he has added explanatory annotations. In turn the person I have called the translator has provided elements of time, context and order, as understood by non-Aborigines, to assist them to interpret Abdulla's work more fully than they otherwise could. Non-Aboriginal readers must also be prepared to re-read text to modify the connotations they first apply to some of Abdulla's words as they discover that the understanding they first bring to them is inadequate. Thus the "rats" he and his family hunted for their skins were native water rats, not the common domestic nuisance known to most of us. The presentation of Abdulla's life in the format to be found in *As I grew older* acknowledges that it is non-Aboriginal readers who are deficient in the skills needed to understand Abdulla's narrative and the translator's role is to provide them with the structures they need; it is not to "correct" Abdulla's story.

The discontinuities (in our literary terms) of another title are also the keys by which non-Aborigines may glimpse through it a world that is immensely alien to their own. These are to be found in *Do not go round the edges*, by Daisy Utemorrah, illustrated by Pat Torres. There are three texts by which readers may explore this book. The first is the collection of poems, written by Daisy Utemorrah. The poems appear in a framework of an illustrated double-page spread, incorporated into Pat Torres' paintings. Underneath and across both pages, there runs an account of Daisy's life, told in the first person, but given final form by people who worked with Daisy to record her story. The reading of this account brings surprises to many non-Aboriginal people as they interpret

words such as “father” in conventional ways only to come to another understanding of what the word meant for Daisy as they learn more about her life. The order and explication in the narrative suggests a different concept of time, even as Daisy’s poems speak in the present tense of her being in her own lands, which, we discover, her people left before she was born.

The thoughtful exploration of the apparently jarring or discontinuous elements of these two books offers experience of difference not only to children but also to adults. While they are published as Australian children’s literature, they deserve examination in other arenas and promotion as books for everyone. It is time now that they are seen for what they are – autobiographies classified as Australian children’s literature because we find it handy to pigeonhole picture books as such. We have already learned from Raymond Briggs across the years that the picture book format is a unique form of communication which may be used to telling effect for adults. Gary Crew is currently demonstrating its power when designed for an audience of boys aged nine to twelve.² Now Aboriginal authors have found that it has given them a form they can use to tell us about their lives. It is important that we do not allow patterns of habit to disguise from us that while the two books discussed here are picture books, they are not children’s books.

Similarly, it is important that we do not force them to fit our preconceptualisations in other ways, for to do so is to destroy much of their potential for communicating difference and to distort the authors’ voices. In *From picture book to literary theory*, edited by John Stephens and Ken Watson (1994:46), there is an article on *Do not go round the edges* which describes it thus: “... this book does ‘go round the edges’. It tests and transgresses the boundaries of conventional stories, showing many of the characteristics often associated with postmodernism”. A few lines below, the book is again described as “postmodern, self-ironising”.

The article further describes the book as “ideal for helping students question some of the traditional white Western norms of narrative ...” (Stephens & Watson 1994:46) and it is easy to see that this is so. However, the stance taken in the article implies that *Do not go round the edges* is a postmodernist text, written from within Western tradition and consciously devised so that it “tests and transgresses the boundaries of conventional stories”, as though trying to break free of them. There is no acknowledgement that Utemorrah’s book is one the publication of which has only been made possible because in the past few decades we have dismantled our own criteria of acceptable literary forms and, in the process, allowed ourselves to recognise as valid, narratives from other cultures. *Do not go round the edges* is a book able to enter the field of Australian literature, because we have broken down former barriers to accepting novel forms of story. It is vital that we do not raise new barriers to our understanding of it by labelling it in a way that associates it with specific developments in main-stream culture in an inappropriate manner.

To summarise, in Australian children’s literature today, there are some pointers to significant developments in Aboriginal narrative to be seen in several titles currently available. It is argued, however, that children’s literature experts should be working to see that some of the titles being published as children’s literature are recognised for being documents of much broader social significance and promoting their examination in other areas. Some are in fact properly autobiographical materials, the extraordinary forms of which offer truly novel windows into other worlds for all non-Aboriginal readers.

Notes

- 1 The person whom I have chosen to treat as anonymous was almost certainly John Kean who provided a page of supplementary information as a postscript. What is important, however, is that Kean does not claim any role in telling Abdulla's story.
- 2 Raymond Briggs demonstrated the use of the picture book format for adults in his title, *The Tinpot general and the old iron woman* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), as well as in other titles. An example of Gary Crew's picture books for boys is *The Watertower* (Adelaide: Era, 1994).

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The Diaries of Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic

stephen m finn



I have now reached the stage that I don't care much whether I live or die, the world will still keep on turning without me; what is going to happen, will happen, and anyway it's no good trying to resist.

I trust to luck but should I be saved, and spared from destruction, then it would be terrible if my diaries and my tales were lost.

Anne Frank – 3 February 1944

Some people compare me with Anne Frank. That frightens me, Mimmy. I don't want to suffer her fate.

Zlata Filipovic – 2 August 1993

Fifty years separate the lives and diaries of Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic. The former was a girl who started keeping her diary when she was a 13 year old in Amsterdam, and wrote for over two years, nearly all of which was spent holed up in a few rooms while hiding from Nazis; she and her family were eventually caught, transported to the transit camp of Westerbork and then to Auschwitz; later Anne was sent to the death camp of Bergen-Belsen where, wracked with suffering and disease, she died in March 1945. The latter is a girl who started keeping her diary as a 10 year old in Sarajevo, and also wrote for over two years, most of which was spent fearing for her life as snipers and bombers tried

their utmost to destroy the city and those living there; but Zlata and her family were flown to safety in Paris, one reason being that she had become a celebrity through her writing, through her being widely regarded, even if somewhat facetiously, as “the Anne Frank of Sarajevo” (Filipovic 1994:v).

Both girls had their lives disrupted, and turned increasingly to their diaries as a means of expression and escape, as an object of confidence and a surrogate for a fuller social life.

As such, both can be considered as continuing in the 18th century tradition of the diary, a time when religious journals were increasingly replaced by introverted, secular ones. Martens (1985:56) points out that these diaries “became a major confessional type throughout continental Europe. We find this outpouring of dreams, desires and traumas throughout the diary writings of both Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic which range, as so many others,

from intimate details or introspective self-assessments to descriptions of the events of [the] day, random observations or aperçus, outbursts of anger, aphorisms, drafts for poems, or even quotations (Martens 1985:3).

It is in their diaries that they evidently can write from the heart. “You know why I think you’d be interested?” Anne asks her diary. “Because although I can’t express myself properly anywhere else even in my tales, in my diary I can completely” (Frank 1989:521)¹.

However, the *raison d’être* for and increasingly the motivating factor behind the writing of these diaries is that they become the “best friend”, the confidante, the person (because the diaries are increasingly regarded as such by the writers) to whom Anne and Zlata can tell their most intimate thoughts.

Both girls deeply regret the loss of friends in their changed worlds as both once enjoyed being surrounded by their coterie. Anne regales Kitty (the eventual name for her diary) with descriptions of Hanneli, Sanne, Ilse and Jacqueline, among others, and the boys, including Maurice, Emiel, Rob, Max, Herman, Leo, Albert and Hello, many of whom we are told are her admirers (cf Frank 1989:179; 187–188). Indeed, the first part of her diary concentrates on what most youngsters of her age would: her social life and her time at school. Her writing is light-hearted, superficial and, at times, flippant. But once in what has become known as the “Secret Annexe” (“Het Achterhuis”), Anne misses her friends terribly and writes a series of farewell letters to them, in which we can see that she is crying out for friendship, for a life already gone by (cf Frank 1989:243; 246; 248–249; 252; 260; 266). She dreams at times of Hanneli (Frank 1989: 422–423), and now she no longer dwells on personality, but on situation; no longer on day-to-day trivia but on a matter of fear and death – as we see in her entry of 29 December 1943:

And Hanneli, is she still alive? What is she doing? Oh, God, protect her and bring her back to us. Hanneli, I see in you all the time what my lot might have been, I keep seeing myself in your place

You could cry when you think of your fellow creatures, you could really cry the whole day long. We can only pray that God will perform a miracle and save some of them. And I hope that I am doing that enough (Frank 1989:436).

Anne cries out a week later: “If only I had a girl friend!” (Frank 1989:443) Although it is, of course, a one-way relationship, she has a surrogate girl friend in Kitty, her diary. This she hopes for from the very beginning; her first entry reads:

I hope I shall be able to confide in you completely, as I have never been able to do in anyone before, and I hope that you will be a great support and comfort to me (Frank 1989:177).

Eighteen months later Anne confides to Kitty:

I have three things to confess to you today, which will take a long time. But I *must* tell someone, and you are the best one to tell, as I know that come what may you always keep a secret (Frank 1989:440).

And even later:

There's no one in the world I've told more about myself and my feelings than you, so I might as well tell you something about sexual matters too (Frank 1989:545).

The pathos emerges here: a young girl, developing into adolescence, acquiring a new knowledge of herself of her sexuality, and with only a book she feels totally free to express herself to. Her beloved father is of a different generation and a different sex; her mother she cannot relate to at best, and despises at worst; her sister, Margot, is older, regarded as different and is, obviously, not forthcoming; and Peter is a boy who, although the object of her desire, cannot be told everything.

The younger Zlata is not so bereft of contact with friends, but she, too, has suffered losses with both girls and boys she has known being killed in the war. Like Anne, her diary starts with a somewhat shallow narration of her everyday life with her friends, summed up succinctly on 6 October 1991, a month after starting her writing, with: "Basically, we have fun" (Filipovic 1994:3). She chatters on gaily about Mummy, Daddy and various relatives and friends, but seven months later she cries out:

AND NINA IS DEAD. A piece of shrapnel lodged in her brain and she died. She, was such a sweet, nice little girl. We went to kindergarten together, and we used to play together in the park. Is it possible I'll never see Nina again? Nina, an innocent eleven-year-old little

girl – the victim of a stupid war. I feel sad. I cry and wonder why? She didn't do anything. A disgusting war has destroyed a young child's life. Nina, I'll always remember you as a wonderful little girl (Filipovic 1994:42–43).

Like Anne, Zlata's life is forever changed by this loss of friends. Also like Anne, she turns to her diary, in repeated acts of anthropomorphisation. After not having written in it during a weekend away, she apologises:

I took you with me, dear Diary, but I didn't write anything. You're not cross with me, are you? (Filipovic 1994:9).

Eighteen months later, after having received copies of her published diary, Zlata exults: "Today I received five copies of YOU" (Filipovic 1994:144). Later she prattles about the promotion of the book:

All in all, it was nice. It couldn't have been otherwise, since it was your promotion, Mimmy represented you. You know how much I love you. I represented you with all the love I feel for you (Filipovic 1994:153–154).

It is both obvious and understandable that Zlata's intimacy with her diary is not as emotionally fraught as Anne's: she is younger and also not as isolated or confined; she has outlets other than her diary to talk to. One also gets the impression that Zlata is consciously writing for a wider audience much of the time.

This is opposed to Abbott's (1984:10) contention that

diarists are supposed to write only for themselves; they have no one to impress, no one to perform for, and thus can be quite simply themselves.

Culley (1985:11), on the other hand, is more discerning in holding that the “importance of the audience, real or implied, conscious or unconscious, of what is usually thought of as a private genre cannot be overstated.” The diarist Marie Bashkirtseff reveals her awareness of this aspect of her genre in saying, somewhat cynically:

The record of a woman's life, written down day by day, without any attempt at concealment, as if no one in the world were ever to read it, yet with the purpose of being read, is always interesting: for I am certain that I shall be found sympathetic, and I write down everything, everything, everything. Otherwise, why should I write? (Quoted by Simons 1990:1).

Similarly, but in a much lighter vein, Oscar Wilde (1981:357) has Cecily in *The Importance of being Earnest* refusing to allow Algernon to look at her intimate and private diary. “You see,” she says, “it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication.”

It does appear that Zlata Filipovic has just this in mind for much of her diary. No doubt, she started her writing as a fun exercise, but early on she reveals an awareness of the implied reader. This is evident in her explaining to her diary (before it has taken on the personality of Mimmy) that Crnotina is “our place about fifteen kilometres away”, and then describing it in detail (Filipovic 1994:4). Likewise, she explains that Srdjan is her “parents' best friend who lives and works in Dubrovnik, but his family is still in Sarajevo” (Filipovic 1994:7); she continues with these annotations throughout the period before the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina hits Sarajevo (cf Filipovic 1994:11). This is even more obvious a year later, halfway through the diary where Zlata admits to copying part of the diary with a view to publication:

... they want to publish a child's diary, and it just might be mine, which means – YOU, MIMMY. And so I copied part of you into another notebook and you, Mimmy,

went to the City Assembly to be read. And I've just heard, Mimmy, that you're going to be published! You're coming out for the UNICEF week! SUPER! (Filipovic 1994:88).

Only half of the diary had been written at this point. No wonder there is nothing derogatory about anyone in the diary and nothing intimate is revealed, apart from the obvious fear and anger. The diary is a competent work by a child aged between ten and twelve, but it remains emotionally bland throughout, possibly because of the knowledge that it might be, then will be, then is read by a worldwide audience vicariously and with 1990s immediacy experiencing the problems (and instant celebrity) of a little girl in a war-ravaged city and surrounded by journalists and television crews. Of course, their promoting her as a modern-day Anne Frank adds hype to the cause.

Admittedly, Anne Frank is also aware of an implied readership, but with her the position is much more complicated. On 28 March 1944, almost two years after she had started writing the diary, Gerrit Bolkestein, Minister of Education, Art and Science in the Dutch government in London, delivered the following address to the Dutch nation on Radio Oranje:

History cannot be written on the basis of official decisions and documents alone. If our descendants are to understand fully what we as a nation have had to endure and overcome during these years, then what we really need are ordinary documents – a diary, letters from a worker in Germany, a collection of sermons given by a parson or a priest. Not until we succeed in bringing together vast quantities of this simple, everyday material will the picture of our struggle for freedom be painted in its full depth and glory (Quoted by Gerrold van der Stroom in Frank 1989:59).

It was really only then that Anne Frank gave serious thought to the publication of her diary, and started revising it (but her original writing has survived, and

forms the basis of discussion in this paper). Therefore, there is no sham when she writes on 12 July 1942: “Dear diary, I hope no one will *ever* read you except my dear sweet husband ...” (Frank 1989:227). She is obviously her own and only reader; no adolescent girl would willingly share her thoughts on her physical development, her sexuality, her frustrations, her cattiness, and her sensitivity with the world. This is why she edited many parts out, and why the original diary remains a testament to the sensitivity and psychological turmoil of a girl living through a traumatic time in emotionally difficult years.

Emotionally, Anne appears to be little different from most adolescents of her age. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984:xiii) could well be talking of her when they write:

Of all the stages of life, adolescence is the most difficult to describe. Any generalization about teenagers immediately calls forth an opposite one. Teenagers are maddeningly self-centered, yet capable of impressive feats of altruism. Their attention wanders like a butterfly, yet they can spend hours concentrating on seemingly pointless involvements. They are often lazy and rude, yet, when you least expect it, they can be loving and helpful.²

Anne remarks on these attributes of hers throughout her diary: her preoccupation with herself but, especially later on, her ability to perceive how others regard her; her caustic comments on Mrs van Pels, but her acceptance of her finer points; her adoration of her father, but her awareness of his failings; her insight into her two natures – the bubbly, gregarious and superficial Anne, and the quiet, lonely and introspective one. Her conflicting emotions are seen especially from the beginning of 1944, a time of her growing attachment to Peter van Pels and the awakening of her sexuality. On 12 March 1944 she writes:

The hardest thing of all is to keep looking normal, when I feel so dismal and sad. I have to talk, to help, sit with the others and above all I have to be cheerful! Most of

all I miss Nature and a little corner where I can be alone as long as I like! I think I'm getting everything mixed up, Kitty, but then I'm completely confused: on the one hand I am mad with desire for him, can hardly be in the same room, without looking at him and on the other hand I ask myself why he should actually matter to me so much, why I am not sufficient unto myself why I can't be calm again (Frank 1989:524).

She knows she might be regarded as just a "silly little schoolgirl" but is aware that she has "more experience than most; I have been through things that hardly anyone of my age has undergone" (Frank 1989:623). (Unfortunately, here she was proven wrong.) In short, she sees herself as "a little bundle of contradictions" (Frank 1989:696–697).

The ambivalence about her ability also comes through at this stage:

... I must work so as not to be a fool, to get on to become a journalist, because that's what I want! know that I *can* write, a couple of my stories are good, my descriptions of the "Secret Annexe" are humorous, there's a lot in my diary that speaks, but – whether I have real talent remains to be seen (Frank 1989:586).

Anne dreams about becoming a journalist; Zlata is feted by them. Unlike Anne, she does not reveal massive conflicts of feelings, or instances of the seesawing of emotions; but, then, she is a younger writer, less experienced, less able, and more aware that she is writing for and on behalf of others. Whereas Anne's diary increasingly becomes a means of expressing her private ideas and passions in a society unaware of her existence and uninterested in her plight, Zlata's increasingly becomes a public performance for a guilt-stricken and inept world.

Both Anne and Zlata undergo the different facets of extreme stress that Kahana et al (1988:55–79) have delineated in their work on trauma brought on by

environmental conditions involving man-made disasters. Their life experience is disrupted, with conditions replacing “the total fabric of normal life with a surrealistic existence ...”; their familiar elements of reality might remain the same with their immediate loved ones, but the environment in which they find themselves is changed as it is “extremely hostile, threatening and dangerous” with limited opportunities to act upon it. Furthermore, there is no predictable end to this experience and their suffering appears to be “meaningless and without rational explanation” (Kahana et al 1988:59).

With all the disruption, Zlata manages to develop within the social settings of family, peers and school, even if these are somewhat unusual and truncated; Anne has to develop without the last two. Both, however, are beginning to discover the paths to adulthood in their starting to say goodbye to childhood (cf Hauser 1991:3). Anne, of course, being older is further along the road, but both are forced by a changing world to grow up more quickly than they otherwise would have.

We become aware of a terrible irony when Zlata refers to politicians by the popular nomenclature of “kids” (Filipovic 1994:26), indicating that the people regard those involved in the machinations of government as immature and irresponsible; it is the real “kids” who have to grow up too quickly in a devastated world that is destroying their childhood.

She comments that the wrong kind of “kids” are playing (Filipovic 1994:95) and, repeatedly with much pathos, perceives that she has lost her childhood. She plaintively observes that

the children no longer seem like children. They've had their childhood taken away from them, and without that they can't be children So how can I feel spring, when spring is something that awakens life, and here there is no life, here everything seems to have died (Filipovic 1994:122).

Childhood also starts dying in the once carefree Anne. On 24 December 1943, she confides:

Believe me, Kitty, if you have been shut up for 1½ years, it can indeed get too much for you some days. No matter if it's unfair and ungrateful you can't get rid of your feelings.

Cycling again, dancing, flirting and what-have you, how I would love that; if only I were free again! Sometimes I even think will anybody understand me ... and just see the young girl in me who is badly in need of some rollicking fun? (Frank 1989:432–433).

Three weeks later she adds:

... I do believe that if I stay here for very long, the youth in my young woman's soul will have fled. And I did so much want to grow into a real young woman! (Frank 1989:458).

It is at this stage that she looks over her diary again and cannot believe that she ever was “such an innocent young thing” (Frank 1989: 304). Increasingly, she realises that her childhood is forever lost, and she expounds on this in her remarkable six-page entry of 7 March 1944 where she reviews her life, her feelings, her dreams and desires, and her philosophy:

Go outside to the fields, enjoy nature and the sunshine, go out and try to recapture happiness in yourself and in God; think of all the beauty that's still left in and around you and be happy! (Frank 1989:520).

Childhood might be going, suffering, deprivation and frustration might be the order of the day, but Anne retains a positive attitude to life, a *joie de vivre* that remains until her last entry five months later, even though she is beset by loneliness and an increasing feeling of being smothered because of her incarceration.

As early as 1 August 1942, she complains: “The fact that we can *never* go outside bothers me more than I can say” (Frank 1989:227). She had to endure another two years of this. However, she does regard herself as lucky to be where she is, compared to the suffering of others and those being hauled off to the death camps in Poland. Anne, in longing for freedom and fresh air, philosophises:

... the best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature, and God. Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that God wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of Nature (Frank 1989:498).

Her notions are, of course, understandable: we have a girl, to all intents and purposes locked up in a few rooms, with the same people around her all the time, with little real privacy, and few opportunities to be alone. She has the insight to realise why she has this overwhelming desire to commune with nature and with God in nature. She asks:

I wonder if it's because I haven't been able to poke my nose outdoors for so long that I've grown so crazy about everything to do with nature? I can perfectly well remember that there was a time when a deep blue sky, the song of the birds, moonlight and flowers could never have kept me spellbound. That's changed since I've been here It's not imagination on my part when I say that to look up at the sky, the clouds, the moon and the stars makes me calm and patient (Frank 1989:676).

One can extrapolate that subconsciously Anne holds that God is not with her, and the only way to reach the eternal is in a nature unspoilt by the horrors

wrought by a war based on greed and an oppression based on hate brought on by a nefarious policy of ethnic cleansing.³

With regard to these last factors, Zlata's condition is similar: she is someone who is also the victim of racial hatred and a war that makes no sense to her. She, too, complains that she has not been out of the house, when she has been shut up for six weeks (Filipovic 1994:46), and laments:

God, what did I do to deserve being in a war, spending my days in a way that no child should. I feel caged. All I can see through the broken windows is the park in front of my house. Empty, deserted, no children, no joy (Filipovic 1994:62–63).

But for her, this is not a lasting situation. The streets might be devastated, the buildings bombed out, but she is able to get to different parts of the city at times. This does not take away from the pain experienced and the horror witnessed. Like Anne, she records events and a life that has been warped in an atmosphere of perversion.

It is possibly because of such surroundings – physical, mental and moral – as well as her seemingly eternal proximity to two women she frequently dislikes and despises, that Anne's thoughts turn to her status as a woman and to the role of women in the world, concepts which are obviously beyond the scope and present thought processes of the younger Zlata. In relating consistently to the female gender, Anne evinces a desire to be remembered and highly regarded, aspiring to something beyond the dull, humdrum and predictable life accepted by those of the older generation. On 5 April 1944, she affirms:

... I want to get on; I can't imagine that I would have to lead the same sort of life as Mummy and Mrs v.P. and all the women who do their work and are then forgotten, I must have something besides a husband and children, something that I can devote myself to! (Frank 1989:587).

Anne continues in the same vein four days later:

I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inward strength and plenty of courage! If God lets me live, I shall attain more than Mummy ever has done, I shall not remain insignificant, I shall work in the world for mankind! (Frank 1989:601).

In all likelihood, Anne's beliefs and desires come in some way from the negative influence of her mother's example, an attempt to be just what her mother is not. She understands, too, that such an independent feminism is a result of her hardships. In an unusual entry she regards her diary objectively and depersonifies it for once, also revealing the general tenor of her emotions at this stage with the promise of liberation, but, in effect, three months before her capture:

I have often been downcast, but never in despair; I regard our hiding as a dangerous adventure, romantic and interesting at the same time. In my diary I treat all the privations as amusing. I have made up my mind now to lead a different life from other girls and, later on, different from ordinary housewives. My start has been so very full of interest, and that is the sole reason why I have to laugh at the comical side of the most dangerous moments (Frank 1989:628–629).

This attitude and thematic concern continues until the end of Anne's diary, but her main entry devoted to the role of women in the world comes on 13 June 1944, three-and-a-half pages of which are given over to this. She ponders the question of why women have been treated as men's inferiors throughout the world during the course of time, and militantly holds that "it is stupid enough of women to have borne it all in silence for such a long time" She continues that "modern women demand the right of complete independence!" The catalyst here is Paul de Kluif's book *The Fight for life* that has affected Anne deeply. She endorses his views that women deserve to be held in as high esteem as soldiers, for

women suffer more pain, more illness and more misery than any war hero just from giving birth to children. And what reward does woman reap for coming successfully through all this pain? She is pushed to one side should she lose her figure through giving birth, her children soon leave her, her beauty passes. Women are much braver, much more courageous soldiers, struggling and enduring pain for the continuance of mankind, than all the freedom-fighting heroes with their big mouths (Frank 1989:678).

It should be borne in mind that these are the thoughts of a 15 year old writing 25 years after women had been given the vote in Germany and the Netherlands, but decades before an even more assertive feminism held sway. In this way the precocity and compassion of Anne Frank are evident.

Such fellow-feeling can be seen in both Anne's and Zlata's attitude to their own people, although neither feels strongly about religion as such: Anne is Jewish, but Christmas is commented on and celebrated more than Jewish holy days; Zlata manages to avoid any confirmation of her own religious upbringing (if any), mentions Jewish convoys and a Muslim holy day, but admits to enjoying Christmas and New Year, without any religious implications. However, she does see herself as at one with her own people.

On 14 April 1992, Zlata comments on the sadness of friends and family leaving Sarajevo, and seven months later continues in the same course:

It was sad. Sad and upsetting. November 14th, 1992 is a day Sarajevo will remember. It reminded me of the movies I saw about the Jews in the Second World War (Filipovic 1994:92).

Anne, a Jew living through this war, is more expansive about her people:

... during the two years they [the Germans] have been here, there have been all sorts of Jewish laws. Jews must wear a yellow star; Jews must hand in their bicycles; Jews are banned from trams and are forbidden to use any car, even a private one; Jews are only allowed to do their shopping between three and five o'clock and then only in shops which bear the placard Jewish Shop; Jews may only use Jewish barbers; Jews must be indoors from eight o'clock in the evening until 6 o'clock in the morning; Jews are forbidden to visit Theaters, cinemas and other places of entertainment; Jews may not go to swimming baths, nor to tennis, hockey or other sports grounds; Jews may not go rowing; Jews may not take part in public sports. Jews must not sit in their own or their friends' gardens after 8 o'clock in the evening; Jews may not visit Christians; Jews must go to Jewish schools ... (Frank 1989:226).

This might be factual, but the detail and length of it reveal Anne Frank's deep concern and her bitter awareness of discrimination. It must be remembered that this was written in July 1942 and is part of the unedited original diary, not intended then for publication or to be read by anyone else. With this in mind, the pathos of the situation is underscored. On 2 and 3 October 1942, nearly 5 000 Jews were arrested in large-scale arrests in Amsterdam; when Anne learns about this, she succinctly comments: "Horrible" (Frank 1989:266). Her horror at the events and compassion for those affected grow throughout her diary, and in her 15-page entry of 9 April 1944, after a burglary, Anne remonstrates in such a way that her and her family's situation is seen as microcosmic of that of the Jews in general:

We have been pointedly reminded that we are in hiding, that we are Jews in chains, chained to one spot, without any rights, with a thousand duties Sometime this terrible war will be over. Surely the time will come when we are people again, and not just Jews (Frank 1989:600).

Liberation, even if anticipated, is a long time in coming, something Zlata feels, too: "God, is anyone thinking of us here in Sarajevo?" she asks (Filipovic 1994:83).

Because of her diary, people did think of her. Just as “no single document written during the Holocaust riveted the attention of the Western reading public more than the diary kept by Anne Frank” (Gilman 1988:9), so Zlata Filipovic has become the emblem of the oppressed, the stricken and the violated in Bosnia.

Like Anne, Zlata remained in a dangerous situation for over two years, but unlike her, she did not stay isolated for long. Where Anne in her diary reveals that she fears the knock at the door, Zlata in hers shows how terrified she is of snipers.

Where Anne becomes the object, like all Jews in Europe, of specific searching out, Zlata always has the possibility of being the next random sacrifice. But both girls in their changed circumstances and longing for those of their own age in a once more normal life, bear witness to the carnage and brutal destruction of buildings, lives and youth.

Because of her own perception together with the media assumed equivalence with Anne Frank much of Zlata Filipovic’s diary suffers from the suspicion of contrived intent. In addition Zlata’s scriptural ability and depth of philosophy are immature and shallow compared to those of Anne with her prodigious skills, but it must be remembered that she is the younger writer by two years, and it would be unfair to depreciate her for this. Both Anne and Zlata lived through excruciatingly parlous times. Anne Frank died and has, thus, become a victim forever; but because of the conscience of a world who neglected her and 1½ million other children like her, people intervened to save the life of another girl writing 50 years on. Both diaries are testaments to the anguish of a child torn between the joys of childhood and the horrors of the war and confinement they had to grow up in; they reveal a change in consciousness in a changed world.

Notes

- 1 The references to and quotations from Anne Frank's diary come from her original, unrevised one, unless otherwise indicated. It has not been possible to determine how much of Zlata Filipovic's diary was revised for the purpose of publication.
- 2 Freud's letter to the editor of *A Young girl's diary*, a controversial diary written purportedly by an adolescent girl and first published in 1915, could well be referring to Anne Frank's, too: We are shown how her feelings grow up out of a childish egoism till they reach social maturity; we learn what form is first assumed by her relations with her parents and with her brother and sister and how they gradually gain in seriousness and inward feeling; how friendships are made and broken; how her affection feels its way towards her first objects; and, above all, how the secret of sexual life begins to dawn on her indistinctly and then takes complete possession of the child's mind; how, in the consciousness of her secret knowledge, she at first suffers hurt, but little by little overcomes it. (In Gunn & Guyomard 1990:3)
- 3 In her *Tales from the Secret Annexe*, Anne Frank (1983) puts forward her views about the revitalising aspect of nature and the presence of God in it in several stories, including "The Flower girl", "Fear", "The Fairy", "Rita" and "Cady's life".

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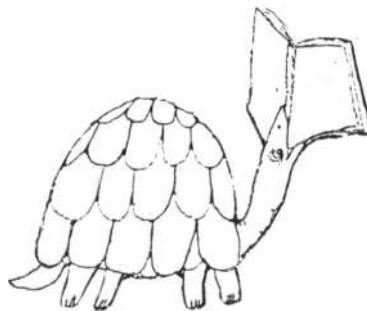
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The World out there:

an author's perspective

gillian leggat

GILLIAN LEGGAT



Good afternoon to everyone who has come here today to celebrate the world of children's books: to teachers, librarians, educationalists, parents, booksellers, authors, illustrators and most importantly, to all those readers out there, welcome to a wonderful world.

It is from an author's perspective that I will be discussing a number of issues facing those who are involved with the creation of children's books today.

One of the most pressing challenges for authors, amidst all the competition from television, video-games and computers, is to write fiction that is relevant, that will arrest children's attention and make them clamour for more books to read.

Not so long ago, I was talking to a group of parents about encouraging children to read. I asked them to imagine the following scene: there is a very long queue of children waiting for a special event. The queue stretches all the way around the block, across a road and extends right through a park. These children are not waiting for an international soccer team, or a famous pop star, or the latest popular movie. They are waiting for the library doors to open so that they can

go inside and browse, so that they can spend time choosing a really interesting book. Unfortunately, the scene described above is not a familiar one, but it is the author's delight to entice children into a fascinating and magical world, the world of the printed word that unfolds between the covers of a book.

Many authors have lofty aims for their fiction; for example, to encourage tolerance and understanding, to broaden a child's horizons and to help him to organise his world and to make sense out of chaos. The moulding of a child's mind: an awesome responsibility indeed for the author of children's books!

It was John Leonard, an editorial critic writing in *The New York Times*, who said: "Books, if they are any good, and even if they are significantly bad, have consequences. They are part of our cultural respiration ... they alter attitudes and perceptions, (they) change lives" (Yolen 1973:3).

As an author, you may well wonder how on earth it is possible to achieve all these inspiring ideals, particularly if you are catering, not only for children in your own land, but also for the children in foreign countries.

Think, for a moment, of the rich variety of cultures and traditions of the children around the world. How are we to write stories with which they can identify? Consider the wide range of experience of various children, their social lives and their circumstances. For example, are they affluent or poverty stricken, do they live in rural or urban communities?

What range of experiences have they had, and indeed, what are they capable of imagining? Is there a "limit" to what a particular child in a particular society can

imagine, and if so, what defines that limit? What are their moral standards and the approaches to codes of behaviour of the communities in which they live? And what type of education do they receive? Are they encouraged to think innovatively, or is the society in which they live so plagued by restrictive censorship and propaganda that their imagination actually decays and may even eventually die?

How is the author to address these difficult problems, bearing in mind the vast differences in the life styles and experiences of children around the world? To use a cliché, variety, they say, is the “spice of life”, but this very variety presents the author with a variety of dilemmas when deciding on relevant topics for fiction. Should she try to identify subject matter which is common to all children’s experiences? To use some examples from my own writing: are shoes, suitcases and trolleys the norm? And do all children know what crocodiles, ostriches, blossom trees, pizzas and snakes are? And have they all played soccer, or been in a school play, or blown out the candles on a birthday cake.

How many of them have rootled around in a rubbish dump, or entered an art competition, or played a game called Moroba-roba Kofi. Very few, you might say. So if you want the child to identify with your story, what must you do about setting and plot? For most of us, our logical minds will immediately send out warning signals.

“Don’t be ridiculous”, they will chide. “Don’t attempt to achieve the impossible!” they will insist. After all, what is “common experience?” It must surely vary tremendously from culture to culture, and from circumstance to circumstance.

“There is no such thing as common experience”, the logical mind will tell us. But our imaginative minds will have something to say about this: we don’t

necessarily only enjoy stories about events and places that we have had direct experience with! Surely this is one of the important functions of books, that is, to broaden a child's mind and present him with new experiences.

If I was a child, I might very well cry: "There's a world out there. I want to learn about it." Perhaps then, after all, the author should not restrict herself too much when deciding on a topic for her fiction. Perhaps her own experiences and exposure to certain events should be her guideline when deciding on topics which she is most competent to write about. But beware of generalisations, like the much-heard advice: "Never write about experiences or things you have had no direct experience of yourself."

In my opinion, that is like telling a child not to read a book which contains subject matter he is not likely to be familiar with! Just as the child can broaden his experience by reading, so can the author by reading and research. Do not let anybody ever tell you that it is impossible to write a good book about something you have not directly experienced. It may be more difficult, of course, more of a challenge, but that does not make the task impossible.

But to revert to the choice of topic for her fiction, there are a number of options open to the author. One of them is to write about a local situation with as much accuracy and sensitivity as possible. Hopefully, the universal message of this type of story may appeal to children of different cultures and in different lands.

Then there are other choices: should she write about the child's immediate surroundings or about distant places, about reality or fantasy, the familiar or the

unusual, the “topical” or the “universal”. If, as educationalists tend to suggest, the age of the child is the determining factor when deciding on these issues, at what age should the author introduce the child to stories about other lands and fantasy? Teachers and librarians might point out that a small child would be more interested in learning about his immediate surroundings than distant lands, just as he is not expected to run before he can walk! Reading about the familiar would be likely to increase the small child’s confidence and self-esteem. He will feel secure and experience the satisfying feeling that he “knows” all about what he is reading. However, one could argue, the older child will be more fascinated by the possibility of what could happen to him, in learning about a new experience and having his eyes opened to the endless possibilities of life. He will appreciate a spirit of adventure, he will indulge his creativity as he allows his imagination to soar. And all this will encourage him to show initiative, to be innovative. There will be almost indefinable hints in the literature that he is reading that change is not necessarily a bad thing, that difference can add richness and variety to his life, that conformity is not always beneficial.

Then there is another aspect of choosing her subject matter that is a consideration for the author. How “fashionable” should her subject matter be?

It was Jane Yolen who said:

Starting with an aim to “fit the trend” is starting with the wrong conception, if one hopes to write a story that will move the reader and will live beyond a day. Such stories always must start with oneself, with a conviction centred in one’s own being, with a theme and emotion so felt that it cannot be denied (Yolen 1973:144).

In the same book, Yolen advised: The author must write “about what he cares most about” (Yolen 1973:152).

So then, there is nothing to stop an author from venturing beyond her own horizons to the world out there, and there is certainly nothing to stop her from the thrill of experimentation. As long as she realises that the masters are at work out there, that she has stiff competition, and that her task will be complex, she can enjoy the freedom of her own creativity, and who knows, she may even surprise herself and the world out there!

In a country where so much emphasis is placed on the acquisition of facts as gateways into the world of employment, the author is faced with another, more serious dilemma: should she write to increase knowledge or to provide pleasure? And in a country where funding by the state for additional material like supplementary readers is, to my knowledge, virtually nonexistent, should she soldier on in an attempt to entertain and interest the reader to the best of her ability, or should she adopt the more pragmatic approach of trying to write a book that could possibly get prescribed by the department of education.

For, contrary to popular belief, authors have to eat! They have to be conscious of the market! Most of them cannot afford the luxury of unadulterated idealism! They do need their books to sell for the simple reason that they, like any other breed of people, need to survive.

I believe that South African authors who have been conscious of recent market trends have turned their attention to social realism as a vehicle for their writing. But this very form of writing raises another dilemma for the writer: how is she going to make the “everyday” situation fascinating for her reader. And indeed, with this type of writing, will her book be relevant only for today, or will it be universal, with a possibility of being read long after she is dead? It was Ruskin

who announced that: “All books are divisible into two classes: the books of the hour and the books of all time” (*Oxford dictionary* ... 1985:8).

It seems that the criterion for all books then, whatever their subject matter or theme, is one of excellence. If a book appeals to the reader, and if it is indeed worth reading, then “the world will make a beaten path to (the author’s) door” (*Oxford dictionary* ... 1985:201).

And on this very subject of the classic in literature, Claudio Lewis said:

True, our trends and fashions change, but contemporary writers who have something lasting to say to our children are in many respects very little different from those writers of long ago whose books are still on the shelves, still pleasing children.

I must apologise at this point for the personal perspective which I am about to use in quoting extracts from my own writing. It was Lord Glasgow in the House of Commons who said: “An author who speaks about his own books is almost as bad as a mother who talks about her own children” (*Oxford dictionary* ... 1985:181).

However, arguably, I feel that I know more about my writing than anybody else’s, if only because I have been through the sometimes painstaking process of creating, revising, and developing my own ideas, plots, characters, themes and so on. Many of the stories in my little books are based on the everyday event, but I have tried to introduce a sense of fun and drama into these books. I have tried to convince myself that warmth and humanity can emanate from the simplest tale. For example, in *Thandi’s new suitcase*, Grandmother gives Thandi a brand-new suitcase which she is very proud of. However, the suitcase experiences a

series of mishaps both on the way to, and at school itself. Grandmother's comforting arms when Thandi, upset, explains to her what happened to the suitcase, are a testimony to the warmth of family love.

In the story, *The Best nurse in the world*, I have attempted to introduce a sense of drama, as I hope to show by quoting the following extract:

"Swati, Swati, where are you?" called Nomzamo, running all round the house. There was no answer.

"Swati!" she called.

Then she saw Lerato running towards the gate.

"Nomzamo, come quickly," cried Lerato.

"Bring the bandages. Swati's fallen out of a tree".

Nomzamo rushed inside for the bandages, then ran with Lerato to the place where Swati was lying. "It's sore, it's sore," cried Swati, holding his arm.

Nomzamo looked up at the tree. Very high up, there was a thin broken branch.

"Did you climb that high?" asked Nomzamo.

Swati cried in fright when he looked up.

"Mother told you not to climb," she said, folding the bandage.

Swati cried even louder.

"Don't worry, I'll make you better," she said.

She put his arm in a sling, held his other hand and took him home to bed. She made him a cup of tea with plenty of sugar. Then she sat with him on his bed and told him a story about ambulances" (Leggat 1991:12–14).

And then in the simple supplementary reading book, *Squeaky shoes*, I have tried to introduce a sense of fun, as I hope will be illustrated in the following extract, which shows just how much chaos one naughty little boy can cause in the classroom:

“What’s that noise?” asked the teacher.
The pupils looked up, surprised.
“Listen,” said the teacher.
They were suddenly very quiet.
“There it is again,” said Mrs Dime,
“squeak, squeak, squeak.” “A mouse, a mouse,” said Lerato, running towards the door.

“Oh no,” screamed Thandi, lifting her legs onto her chair.
Even the teacher looked scared.
“Where’s the mouse?” she asked, stepping on to the platform.
Thabiso rubbed his shoes together again.
“Squeak, squeak, squeak.”
Mrs Dime sat on the table and lifted up her legs.
“There’s that mouse again,” she said.
“Somebody must do something.” (Leggat 1992:4–7).

At this stage, I would like to briefly discuss techniques of the author and my own sources of inspiration. As every reader can tell you, the opening sentence and the opening paragraph is critical, as your story is doomed if you cannot capture the reader’s or the editor’s attention as quickly as possible. On the first page of *The Trials of Gang Gassey*, I attempt to interest the reader in the struggles of pupils in the classroom:

It was Friday the 13th, the unluckiest day in the calendar, and for Lucky everything was going wrong. His pen wouldn’t work, the classroom was hot and stuffy and he was having trouble keeping his eyes open. Borer Beetle was getting on his nerves. He was coughing a lot, sneezing and blowing loudly into his handkerchief. Lucky wanted to get up and open a window but he was afraid he would attract Borer’s attention. Borer Beetle was their boring old English teacher. He was always writing down long lists of words on the chalkboard and making the class repeat them. His favourite trick was to draw columns on the board and then pounce on people to fill in the missing words (Leggat 1992:1).

And of course, if the reader cannot believe in your character, you have lost the battle of the book. The structure of the story is significant, and the tempo, or

speed, of the story, can make or mar the dramatic effect of what you are trying to say. The plot itself does not necessarily have to be full of action, but your language should have a lively sense of immediacy.

Childhood experiences, feelings and emotions are a great source of inspiration in writing a children's book, then there are the visits to various places, newspaper and magazine articles, personal observation, and the more deliberate development and ideas and plots which come from specific commissions.

It was my own thwarted attempts to take part in a school play in my youth which inspired the story, *Regina's dream*, from which I will quote:

Regina sighed as she put her bag neatly in the corner. She changed into jeans and a T-shirt and put her school clothes in the washing bag at the bottom of her cupboard. Then she went and looked into the mirror. As she stood in front of it, she put her hands on her hips. She sighed as she examined herself. Her face was all wrong. Her ears stuck out, her eyes were too close together and her cheeks were too fat. She would never be an actress if she looked like that.

Then she looked at her legs. They were much too long – good for running, but that was about all. She didn't know very many tall actresses.

Still, she was not going to give up. She had come quickly to practise for the audition the next day. It was the first time they had ever done a real play at their school (Leggat 1993:1–2).

And it was a chance glimpse of a drawing of an ostrich and a visit to the Johannesburg zoo which inspired the story, *Jabu and the red drum*, from which I will quote two extracts. But before I do so, I would like to tell you very briefly about the book, which, I hope, will illustrate something about the very process of creation itself. When I saw the drawing of the ostrich, I thought, “What an

interesting African animal to write about. And I took the first possible opportunity I could to go to the Johannesburg zoo. And there, at 8:30 one Monday morning, sitting on the grass outside the ostrich cage, the idea for my story began to come together. It was about the ostriches pecking at their seed trays that made me think of musical instruments and more specifically, of drums. After that visit, comprehensive research about the habits of ostriches helped to fill out the details of the story, but the inspiration, and the theme, came from that peck-peck-peck at the seed tray.

And now, I am ready to quote the extracts:

In the window was a drum with bright red sides and a shiny silver top. Jabu stopped and looked. He wanted to touch the drum. He wanted to run his fingers down its smooth sides. He wanted to bring it outside so that he could see it glinting in the sunlight. But most of all, he wanted to pick up the golden drumsticks and bang on the drum (Leggat 1989:28–29).

The hen shook her feathers, dipped her head, jerked it up again. Her feet stamped the ground, churning up the dust. Black Lightning circled the hen, kicking his legs in time to the drum beat.

Faster and faster the birds danced, whirling around each other. They seemed to know that they were dancing to the beat of Jabu's red drum (Leggat 1989:53).

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with some ideas which I hope will be thought-provoking. Can books change our lives? Do books have wings? In other words, can they transport us to other worlds and other lives? Can they build bridges and break barriers? These inspiring and challenging questions have been answered to a large extent by organisations like IBBY, the International Board of Books for Young Children who have made great strides in fostering the growth, internationally, of children's books of quality. Thanks to IBBY, and organisations

like the Children's Book Forum, the various writing schools and writer's magazines, we are not a world in isolation. There is a whole body of people out there, librarians, teachers, and lecturers, booksellers, who are dedicated to broadening the child's horizons and to improving the standards of books. It was only in 1992 that South Africa became a member of IBBY. We are indeed grateful to be out of our isolation, and to be part of this fascinating and exciting international community fostering the growth of children's books of quality.

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Viewing gender through Tanzanian lullabies

femk senkoro

Literature and art are, at once, a perceptual reflection of the social reality of a given people at a given time in their history. Thus, in order for one to form a rounded picture of that social reality, one has to familiarise oneself with areas like the wisdom of that people's proverbs, popular literature, music, fine arts, handicrafts, riddles, songs, and so on. It is within these "remote" areas where one can discover a people's values and attitudes, likes and dislikes, their patterns of interaction and communication, social obligations, and their way of life in general.

Looking at the various genres of literature from Africa, one realises how important it is to approach literature, if not all cultural products, from the producers' and the audiences' gender perspectives. For example, one can discover in some proverbs from Africa, the proclamation of man's physical and even moral superiority over women ("Never marry a woman with bigger feet than yours", or "The bearded mouth does not lie"). One can even see the sanctioning of polygamy in such proverbs like "A man with one wife is chief among the unmarried", and "Beat the bad wife with a new one". Man is given the right to speak and the woman the duty to remain quiet as we are told that "Women have no mouth", and the fact is stressed that although man and woman live together, it is man who leads woman ("The hen knows when it is morning, but she looks at the mouth of the cock").¹



Similar perspectives can definitely be obtained from other literary genres from which one can perceive the fundamental, diversive, even pervasive “prisons” of opinion regarding relations between men and women in different African societies. Development agencies, feminists, and all who are in one way or another currently involved in gender matters, can not really come to grips with the gender realities of Africa without understanding the philosophy contained in the folkloric intelligence of the communities among whom they are working. The present short paper is meant to introduce the subject of the way Tanzanian lullabies reflect gender orientation and realities. It tries to show how one can get a certain gender perspective even from a literary genre as *innocent* as the songs and chants used to lull the child to sleep.

“*Silie mwana, silie*. Hush, hush my dear.” These are common, simple expressions, sung by mothers or ayahs, which basically aim at lulling the baby to sleep. Among the few scholars and critics of African oral literature who have cared to include lullabies in the indexes of their works, the genre has been treated as a “simple, natural, and spontaneous expression of feeling in all societies, of a mother singing to her child.”² Not many among these scholars seem to have discovered that in most of the lullabies are hidden some very intriguing, penetrating, and even aggressive commentaries which go beyond the function of a mother or ayah singing to the child.

Only in very few cases have scholars gone beyond that function in their analyses. For example, Ruth Finnegan³ mentions that although the above seems to be the prime function of lullabies, the genre is, in fact, governed by convention and is affected by the given society’s constitution. Finnegan then mentions in passing, how one comes across the feelings of nurse-maids in some lullabies, which express their resentment and protest against the mothers’ attitudes towards them. Finnegan

cites a few lullabies from the Ngoni of Malawi and the Nyoro of Uganda, to illustrate her point. Although these examples are quite interesting, they are, by no means, representative of African lullabies in general. After giving these two examples, Finnegan concludes thus:

Other African lullabies fit more easily into our common picture of a mother concentrated on the needs of her child.

This hurried conclusion should have stirred further and fuller discussion on the nature, role and function of African lullabies. Yet, the discussion has not been forthcoming.

This paper proposes one way through which Tanzanian lullabies could be examined beyond the mother-child relationship. It tries to show how women have used lullabies as a medium for expressing their worldviews; their views about the institution of marriage and their husbands; their fears, grumblings, resentments and hopes.

Towards the end of the paper we ask a few, provocative questions when we introduce a debate on the Adam-Eve Metaphor and the protest lullaby. This hidden metaphor in the lullabies seems to revolve around the tricky institution of marriage. How much of it is real protest and how much of it is not? If in discussing gender matters we must go beyond the protest level as the current trends in such discussions suggest, how much further can we, as literary critics, go beyond the actual level of the artists and producers of the literature that we are analysing?

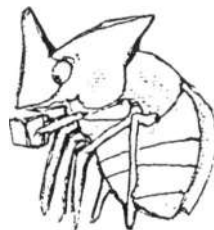
The following lullaby can serve as a good starting point for our discussion:

Nyamaza ee mwanangu
Nyamaza mziwanda wangu
Nyamaza nisijelia
Nikashindwa kukulea.

Baba anamangamanga
Kazi anapiga chenga
Uvivu wake ni janga
Sasa njaa yatunyonganyonga.
Mwanangu
Mwanangu
Mwanangu ...

(Stop crying my baby
Hush hush my dear
You'll make me cry too
Then I'll fail to look after you.

Your father is a loiterer
He evades working
His laziness is the source of our misery
And now hunger is killing us.
My child
My child
My child ...)⁵



In the mid-1970s this lullaby was banned from being broadcast over Radio Tanzania. Up till then, it had been Radio Tanzania's favourite piece usually before news time, apparently as a "consciousness raising" campaign against laziness and loitering. However, the Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania, Tanzania Women's Organisation, strongly protested against the lullaby, charging that it advocated women's dependency on men as their breadwinners. Yet, ironically enough, especially in the coastal town areas, the lullaby correctly reflected the concrete socio-economic relations which, due to man's position as the breadwinner, and also due to some cultural practices which dictated that the woman should stay

indoors, subordinated women and made them overly dependent on men. The lullaby was thus banned over Radio Tanzania, but not in real life. For, in real life, one still came across a number of similar lullabies, especially in areas where patriarchal rather than matriarchal relations existed.

The dichotomy between patriarchal and matriarchal relations can help us, at this initial stage, to work out a hypothesis that lullabies in the former societies in Tanzania reflected the woman's subordination to man, while in present-day societies the woman is expressing her self-confidence. The following worksong-cum-lullaby from the Kaguru of Kilosa, in Morogoro, a matrilineal people, illustrates this point:

Saga, Saga
Sagile dilume dyangu,
 saga
Kigana wakwe dyalima,
 saga.
Kumbe wa mai na baba,
 saga.⁶

(Grind, grind
Let me grind for it,
 grind.
So that it eats to its full,
 grind.
As if it is the one who produced the food,
 grind.
While, in fact, it was my mother and father,
 grind.)

Usually this lullaby was sung by a mother while grinding some millet, and at the same time trying to silence the baby on her back. "It" in this song refers to the husband, for '*dilume*' is the derogatory word for a husband. The last two lines

of the song show that in this society, the wife has a say on the land on which the family grows its crops. Among the Kaguru, usually the husband-to-be was required to go and live-in with his inlaws-to-be for at least a year, to prove his worth first before being given a wife. In any case, even after getting married, the husband would move to the wife's side of the family and, thus, any property given to them would, in effect, belong to the woman. These socio-economic relationships, therefore, could not accommodate lullabies which portray the woman as a weak creature caught irredeemably in a web of miseries. They even encouraged the woman to formulate lullabies which not only showed her to be comparatively independent, but also which jeered and mocked the husband as illustrated in the following lullaby from the Kaguru again:

Chidege chisumuke
Amalume genghali genda
Hona gejile
Amalomo gwaya.⁷

(Let us eat quickly to our fill
While the men are still roaming
The village over
When they come back
Their hungry mouths will be drooping.)

The fact that the men are at large in the village, yet the women still eat to their hearts' content, indicates the woman's independence and self-reliance in this society.

The scene along the East African coast and in other areas where patriarchal relations exist is quite different from the above. Here we get, among others, lullabies in which the woman expresses her bitterness against her husband and sometimes against the institution of marriage in general. For example, in the

following song which was collected by the present writer from Pemba Island, the woman is protesting against arranged marriages:

Mama na baba watende
Kunioza dume kongwe
Halisafiri halendi
Kazi kumega matonge
Likikaa uvunguni
Hunguruma kama ng'ombe.

(My mother and father, what have they done!
They have married me off to an old man
A docile, inactive and useless man
All it knows about is gluttony
And when seated near me
All it does is to snore like a cow.)

It is not only the forced marriage that the woman is protesting against in this lullaby. The fact that she is married to an old, useless, almost impotent man makes it worse. Note the use of "It" again in this lullaby.

Among the East African coastal people where feudalistic, patriarchal influences abound, one discovers lullabies which either express resentment at the institution of marriage in which polygamy is the order of the day, or they mock the whole business of having more than one wife. Among the 80 lullabies which I collected from Zanzibar and Pemba Islands, 32 touch on the issue of polygamous marriage, albeit from differing points of view. In the following lullaby, again from Pemba Island, the senior wife lashes out at the second, newly-wed wife:

Nyamaza, nyamaza mwana
Alinikuta, alinikuta
Sasa kawa ngamia ya Mwarabu
Nyamaza, nyamaza mwana.

(Hush, hush my baby
She arrived after me
Yet she has now turned into an Arab's camel
Hush, hush my baby)

The story in the third line is the familiar one in which a camel is said to have asked its Arab master for some space in the tent just to protect its head from the bitter cold of the desert night. Having been given some space, the camel gradually invades the whole tent until finally the Arab found himself outside in the biting cold while the camel was enjoying the warmth of the tent. Before we look further at the contents of this lullaby, let us cite another one whose content adds to our better understanding of the lullabies from this area:

Ukenda nisalimie
Kwa jina usinitaje
Mlangoni pana watu
Kidege nitapitaje?
Ukenda nikonyezee
Jioni mwambie aje.

(When you go pass on my greetings
But do not mention my name
There are many people at the door
How can I, poor bird, pass through?
So, when you go there give him a wink
Tell him to come in the evening.)⁸

The picture that one gets in this lullaby is that of a chained and imprisoned bird. For those who are familiar with the East African coastal customs, a picture of a veiled young woman in a fenced home emerges. The lullaby, in this instance, turns into the veiled speech of a veiled woman.

The two lullabies above are products of feudal societies in which polygamous marriage, a hangover of precapitalist labour and social relations, was an institution similar to slavery.

The husband owned the first wife who then owned the second wife who owned the third wife, and so on. So, while the lullabies from the matrilineal system show the social importance of the woman in the society in which she participates fully and equally in the social, economic and cultural life, the ones quoted above, from the feudal, and thus patrilineal system, are the exact opposite of the former. In the latter, one discovers the imagery of slavery, poverty, social disqualification, and all political and economic forces which make the woman an incapable, unworthy and dependent creature whose major preoccupation is petty jealousy.

The above comes out clearly not only in the lullabies from the East African coast, such as the one banned over Radio Tanzania, but also from the hinterland, such as in the following lullaby from the Jita people of North-Western Tanzania:

Ooye! Ooye! Ooye!
Jibila omwana
Omwana mjwando, jibila
Jibila emugongo
Jibila mai, jibila kaka
Jibila emugongo
Siga kundisya
Mai enichuka myafu.

(Stop crying tiny baby
Stop crying
You on my back stop crying
Stop crying my mother
Stop crying grandmother

You on my back, stop crying
Stop making me cry too
When you cry you remind me
of many bitter issues.)

The idea expressed in the last line of this lullaby, that of the crying baby reminding the mother of the “many bitter issues” is very common in many recent lullabies from East Africa. It seems that the expression is an indication of the way the institution of marriage under social class systems has been one source of the woman’s bitterness. The man in these lullabies is portrayed as the golden fly which, through the institution of marriage, rises from the underworld to feed on the woman.

The mother and grandmother mentioned in the above lullaby have great significance in that they illustrate the reincarnation of one generation into the other. In the mother and grandmother one discovers the cosmological passage of time.

We must note, however, that while in a host of lullabies from Tanzania the woman is seen to be wholly at the mercy of her husband, yet, in an equally large number of lullabies from Zanzibar and Pemba islands which are predominantly patriarchal, one discovers the satirical voice of the woman who does not only make mockery of the polygamous marriage, but actually portrays the man as some sort of a fool. This satirical and sarcastic tone comes out clearly in those lullabies which do “encourage” the husband to bring in a new wife. We shall cite two of these very interesting and hilarious, short lullabies.

The first one is actually called “Kaowe”, meaning “go and marry”:

Kaowe bwana, kaowe
Na sisi tuwe watatu
Mmoja ashike birika
Mmoja ashike upatu
Ukija ukianguka
Hamadi! Mwana wa watu.

(Go marry, sir, go marry
So we too may be three wives
When one holds the kettle
Another holds the tray
And the third waits to catch you
Should you fall, poor thing.)

This sarcastic portrayal of the polygamous marriage is fully depicted in the lullaby called “Kaowe mke mfupi”:

Ukitaka kwenda owa
Kaoe mke mfupi
Atakusukia nywele
Kama ncha za makuti
Utamani kuziramba
Kama asali ya nyuki.

(If you want to marry
Go marry a short wife
She will braid her hair for you
Like the tips of coconut fronds
So you may desire to lick them
Like the honey of bees.)

Obviously such a wife is not the most beautiful, and the lullaby here is making a mockery of the husband’s poor tastes.

Our major concern so far has been to relate the lullabies to the relations between woman and man. In so doing, we have, of necessity, looked into the gender

question. The oppression of women began with the establishment of the system of private ownership as the means of social production. Consequently, this brought about the first class oppression with women being treated as private property.

One interesting issue which would make our analysis of the lullabies even more fruitful is the examination of the changing role and position of women in society in their struggle against economic and social oppression. Since the condition of the woman in Africa cannot be divorced from the general situation of all the African peoples, it becomes imperative for the gender scholar of African lullabies to look at the genre alongside the African peoples' struggle against neocolonial exploitation, oppression and domination. It would be interesting, for example, to see what the lullabies in those few Ujamaa villages which have survived in Tanzania say, since these are supposed to be communal in nature.⁹ This would also indicate to us how much the lullaby has changed from its traditional form. Would the "culprit" now be the village in general?

One lullaby from Zanzibar which has been adapted into a popular type of music, Taarab, can serve as our last, concluding example. This lullaby has been sung by a Mombasa Taarab singer, Zuhura. Besides blending the genre with Taarab music and thus, actually singing the lullaby with the accompanying instruments, Zuhura has expressed her self reliance and her responsibility for raising her child, notwithstanding her husband's "death" caused by the cash economy. The following is the lullaby-cum-Taarab song:

Siliye ewe mwanangu, kilio unacholia howaaa x2
Bure sijipe matungu, mwanangu utaumia howaaa
Heri mshukuru Mungu, babako metokomea howaaa

Kiitikio:

Howa ee mwanangu howa, nyamaza kulia x2
Hukuongoa mwanangu, howa ee mwana, howa ee
Silie mno mwanangu, howa nyamaza kulia.

Babako twabia yake, ni tabia ilo mbaya, howa x2
Apatapo pesa zake, mshahara kipokea howaaa
Hapiti nyumbani kwake, hwenda kiguu na njia, howaaa

Kiitikio:.....

Basi mwanangu nyamaza, fahamu unapolia howaaa x2
Na mimi utaniliza, kilio kitaenea howaaa
Mwanangu wajiumiza, imani nakuonea howaaa

Kiitikio:.....

Siku hiyo arudipo, pesa zikishamwishia howaaa x2
Mlangoni afikapo, hili nimemuwekea howaaa
Atarudi papo hapo, nyumabni hatoingia howaaa

Kiitikio:.....

Hapa ndipo mwisho wangu, kigingi nimekitia howaaa x2
Maadamu nyota yangu, bado haijafifia howaaa
Hupati tabu mwanangu, mwenyewe nitakulea howaaa

Kiitikio:.....¹⁰

(Hush hush my baby, the way you cry
Don't hurt yourself, you will suffer dear
Just thank your god, your father has disappeared.

Chorus:

Oh, my child. Oh! stop crying
It will weaken you, oh my child, oh!
Don't cry too much my child, oh! Hush! hush ...

Your father's manners are bad
When he gets his cash salary
He is not seen at home
He disappears

Chorus:.....



So, stop crying my baby
For when you cry, you'll make me cry too
Tears will then overflow
Poor you, you are hurting yourself dear

Chorus:.....

The day your father comes back
When he has run out of cash
I have one thing reserved for him
Right at the doorstep
He will have to go back to wherever he came from
I won't allow him into the house.

Chorus:.....

My word is final, I'm firm on this
As long as my star still shines
And since it has not faded yet
You'll never suffer my child
I'll single-handedly bring you up.

Chorus:.....)

The self-assertion and confidence expressed in this lullaby give a clear indication of the social changes that have taken place in East Africa. A new type of woman has been born out of the web of the cash and urban economy which has robbed her of her husband. This lullaby has portrayed the life of single parenthood which has driven this woman not into desperation, but to a cry of self-confidence which was unheard of before in this male-dominated society.

Conclusions and Debate

Several conclusions can be drawn from this account. We will, however, concentrate on two.

First, the tentative study begun in this paper has limited itself to the genre of lullabies. It would, indeed, be a very interesting exercise, as suggested earlier on, to see how the other forms of Kiswahili and Tanzanian oral literature in general, such as wedding songs and funeral dirges, use veiled speech to express gender views and feelings. For, in these, one can confidently test the hypothesis that whenever gender matters are expressed in art, for example, whenever women get the chance to use such genres like the lullaby, the issues are always bent to go beyond the forms' conventional functions to embrace broader and deeper perspectives of struggles against degradation, oppression, and exploitation.

The second conclusion which is even more relevant for our purposes is that, although our major concern so far has been the gender issue and the way it is portrayed in Tanzanian lullabies, it does not mean that we have neglected the other roles played by lullabies. Even if the examples we have given of the lullabies from patrilineal versus matrilineal societies seem to concentrate on man-woman relationship only, that does not mean that the lullabies in each one of those societies are homogenous in their contents. For, when we talked about the social reality at the start of our paper, we did not imply that this social reality is restricted to that relationship only. For certainly there are examples of lullabies in which a mother will just express verbally, the sheer joy of playing with her child or of having a child like the one she is carrying on her back. Definitely the role of just rocking the baby to sleep and, thus, the use of soft, constant rhythm, liquid vowel sounds, cadence and onomatopoeic words found in most lullabies, is an important one. Certainly, the role of the lullaby as a medium of instruction in language and music also needs to be seriously looked into. However, our major aim in this short paper has been to go beyond those functions which seem to be conventional, and to have a fresh look at the generic complexity of lullabies. This has, invariably, raised the important question: since most of the lullabies

seem to indicate the pre-occupation of adults regarding their adult problems, how much of this genre is children's literature, anyway?

How can the gender issues in Tanzanian lullabies go beyond the protest contained in the Adam-Eve metaphor?: a debate

After these two major conclusions, perhaps at this juncture, and as a way of stirring further and fuller discussions on gender issues and the Tanzanian or, for that matter, African lullaby, we can raise a few points which need further examination. The man-woman relationship as evidenced in the lullabies which have been examined seems to revolve around a single metaphor: the Adam-Eve metaphor. For the purposes of this conference, this paper has not attempted to break this delicate metaphor. It has just shown how the relationship exists in the institution of marriage, itself a very delicate institution. However, a look "between the lines" reveals that the relationship, though seemingly one of protest, goes beyond mere protest. In fact it would seem plausible to say that the aspects of "combat" and "resistance" are sometimes meant to create some sort of a joking relationship between husband and wife so that even if the protest lullaby is sung in the presence of the husband, the man might even find it amusing and can laugh it off. By doing so, the bond of endearment between husband and wife is strengthened. Perhaps then, it means that what seems like a protest lullaby does not in fact imply any serious protest after all.

Should one want to go beyond the lullaby as a protest symbol, then one will need to break and replace the Adam-Eve metaphor with another metaphor and another type of approach, an exercise which is not as easy as it sounds. What kind of new metaphor and approach, that is an open question. However, we

may suggest one tentative approach which might go beyond mere protest. In every man's life there comes a moment when one wants to talk to oneself about one's problems. Each one of us has a way of dealing with such a situation. Some will take to alcohol or drugs which will then transport them to another world where they can talk loudly, laugh, even cry in the midst of people; and others will whistle or hum a song, while sometimes not really taking the song's words all that seriously. In a way, the lullabies cited above seem to fall within the last category. One can say that the lullabies are used here as a form of "talking to oneself", in spite of the dual audiences of the child and the father who might indeed not be present at all when they are sung or hummed. These are the moments when a mother would like to have someone to listen to her and sympathise. The silent sympathy that she gets from the lulled baby seems to be the most appropriate. The lullabies sung at such times might contain some therapeutic values which might, indeed, rival those contained in fairy tales. This is one further avenue which interested critics of the lullaby genre might be interested to research and explore further.

Notes

- 1 These proverbs are taken from Mineke Schipper's *Source of all evil: African proverbs and sayings on women* (London: Allison and Bushby, 1991). There are more themes in the book, of course, such as condoning and even eulogising wife beating, stressing the horrors of infertility and blaming it on the woman, presenting women as mere breeders whose value rests on reproductive duties, and so on. Yet, finally, as if to tone down the sharpness of the negative portrayal of women, one finds such ironic twists in a proverb like, "One who seeks a wife does not speak contemptuously of women". Niyi Osundare has given a short review of Schipper's book in *African Literature Association bulletin*, 18(3), Summer 1992, pp. 40–41.
- 2 I am using Ruth Finnegan's statement taken from her book, *Oral literature in Africa* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 299.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 299–314.

4 Ibid., p. 300.

5 All translations into English are the author's.

6 Courtesy of Professor Penina Mlama who belongs to the Kaguru group.

7 Same as above.

8 A similar, love lullaby was given to me by Bibi Sharia Suleiman (76) who lives in Kengeja, Chakechake, Pemba Island; and it goes like this:

Ndege ruka na barua ubawani

Ukifika kwa mpenzi kaibwage uwanjani

Huo ni moto wa kumbi

wawaka ndani kwa ndani.

(Please my bird, fly with my letter on your wings

When you reach where my love resides

Throw it on his court

That is a long lasting fire

Which continuously burns from within.)

9 These villages were part and parcel of the socialist policies contained in the 1967 Arusha Declaration, the blueprint for Tanzania's development strategy which engineered the take-over of some major means of production by the state (ie nationalisation). These villages were similar to the Israeli kibbutzim. For an interesting account on the Declaration and how it was perceived by the country's intelligentsia and other scholars twenty years later, see Jeanette Hartmann, ed., *Rethinking the Arusha Declaration* (Copenhagen: Centre for Development Research, 1991).

10 Courtesy of the British Broadcasting Corporation through Mr Abdillatif Abdalla, to whom I am most thankful.

Sexism in the schoolroom:

a feminist literary analysis of the reading schemes used in primary schools

margaret labuschagne



... blatant quotes denigrating one sex, usually women, are relatively common in children's books, and it is not at all difficult to find statements that girls are dumb, silly, unable to keep secrets, and generally incompetent (Sadker, MP & Sadker, DM, quoted in Norton 1987:99).

This paper is a report on a study conducted in 1993 to 1994, which hypothesises that the prescribed books for primary school readers offer children a biased or sexist vision of gender relations. The paper will mention the results of the study, although a very brief theoretical background will be given, and recommendations on the basis of these results will then be made.

From earliest times, those concerned with education and social control have been aware of the power of fiction – Jesus, Mohammed and Confucius all taught through parables (O'Dell 1978:3). This didactic nature of literature is a widely accepted and often unquestioned assumption, often taking for granted that “reading is a good thing”. Marshall (1982:123,124) mentions the basic ideas that books educate, develop, stretch and enrich the minds of children, and goes on to explain that “good” books should reflect national, local and individual values; introduce children to their own cultural heritage; enlarge and expand their minds,

imaginations, knowledge, and creativity; provide enjoyment; allow for discernment of right and wrong, good and bad and, she tacks on, contribute towards their development intellectually, socially and psychologically. Of what this development actually consists, Marshall (1982:135) does not suggest, except to point out that there is a growing understanding of how social conditioning affects attitudes towards people of different sexes and ethnic backgrounds.

Since its “beginning” in the 18th century, children’s literature has primarily been a vehicle for communicating the beliefs of a specific society in a specific period, for perpetuating the status quo, and for inculcating in children the right responses to the dominant culture (Tötemeyer 1988a:87; 1988b:115). A short investigation of the history of children’s literature easily indicates that the ideological demands of those in power determine what children read, in order to maintain the values and principles of that group. Power wielders who resist social change will use all apparatuses, including the supposedly innocent children’s book to instil values to preserve this *status quo* and stifle others (Tötemeyer 1988a:87). As Becker and Oberfield (quoted in Tötemeyer 1988c:178) comment, juvenile literature is a medium produced by powerful interest groups in society for powerless children.

Jan Esterhuyse, for example, (1988:103), in his study of prescribed texts for Afrikaans schools, emphasises that book selections fall within the ideological demands of the apartheid system and are based on political-economic criteria. He thus exposes the hidden curriculum” (Lalor, quoted in Davies 1984:84) of book prescription to a certain extent, explaining how children are raised to fit into a system, and socialised according to a specific agenda whereby the dominant ideology is apparent. He concludes that the underlying agenda for the prescription of books cannot be divorced from the dominant ideological paradigm, which is apartheid (Esterhuyse 1988:106,108). Similarly, Tötemeyer (1988c:173) explains

that “institutionalised racism” can become part of the tradition and culture of the oppressor to such an extent that the society is no longer aware of the racism inherent in society nor of personal racial prejudices. As she points out, it is through the socialisation process that prejudices are transmitted to children.

Esterhuyse and Tötemeyer are working only within a racial paradigm; however, these hypotheses can be applied to a gender paradigm as well. Just as the apartheid paradigm has dominated much children’s literature, so does the gender paradigm of the dominant male supremacist (patriarchal) discourse, which defines women in relation to a male norm. There is growing consensus that the society which we live in today may be defined as patriarchal, in other words, a society which favours the male sex. A patriarchal society is manifested in the fundamental assumption that women’s biological difference from men fits them for different social tasks and hence, different roles are ascribed to each sex, often resulting in discriminatory practices (Weedon 1988:2). However, these roles are not biologically, but socially, based, and are referred to as gender roles, which are social meanings entrenched in the dominant discourse (language system) which assumes that biological sexual difference equals social difference. In simple terms, this means that, in a patriarchal society, the female sex is expected to be feminine, while the male sex is expected to be masculine. Hence, gender differences may be defined as “conditioned differences resulting from the societal roles thrust upon women by a male dominated society, in a kind of ongoing brainwashing process” (Deming, quoted in Grobler 1988:127). It is clearly the purpose of patriarchal society to make these social differences appear “natural”.

In literature, gender differences are often depicted in terms of stereotypes – physical, intellectual, emotional and occupational. Shestakov (cited in Michel 1986:15) defines a stereotype as “a standardised mental picture held in common

by members of a group, and representing an overly simplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgement''. Importantly, stereotypes ignore the reality of individual differences and produce normative, standard values, very often reflecting common prejudices. Furthermore, sexist stereotypes tend to operate according to a strict binary logic, whereby women are assigned the qualities and shortcomings denied to men and vice versa. Male and female characters are sometimes stereotyped to such an extent that the glorification of men inevitably implies the degradation of women (Michel 1986:16).

Huck et al (1987:468) emphasise that stereotypes develop from what was once the norm, and, hence, portray the beliefs of a past society. Although stereotypes are, therefore, historically and traditionally authentic, problems arise when stereotyped thinking is perpetuated in contemporary literature, and reinforced daily. This results in the self-images of the male population being built up at the expense of the female, in a system which marks half of the world's population as second class citizens (Grobler 1988:128). Michel (1986:23) lists specific effects of sexist stereotypes as: robbing girls of their independence; inhibiting their development; standing in the way of equal opportunity; curbing girls' ambitions and professional goals; and cutting men and boys off from their emotions and natural feelings. Furthermore, children are offered limited positions which to take up in society. Weitzman et al (1972:1138–1139), in their study of sexism in prize-winning children's books, conclude that girls who wish to be more than placid and pretty are left without acceptable role alternatives, having to make a choice between alienation from their assigned gender, and alienation from their real behavioural and temperamental preferences. However, gender stereotyping is not only harmful to girls: boys are equally constrained by the necessity to be brave and active, taking the lead at all times. Rigid sex-role definitions not only foster unhappiness in children, but also hamper the child's optimal intellectual and social development.

Feminist research on children's literature has already emphasised the gender stereotyping and sexism which occur not only in the prescribed school readers, primers and textbooks (such as in the studies by Sharpe 1986 and Lobban 1976 – both in Davies 1984 – and Michel 1986), but also in collections of children's literature (see Belotti 1974 in Davies 1984) and prize-winning children's books (see Weitzman et al 1972). However, although some suggestions have been made regarding research in this field in South Africa (see Klerk 1987, as well as the recommendations of the SADTU Southern Natal Gender Committee, 1994), no in-depth study has been made. The issue of gender stereotyping in educational materials was recently brought to the fore in the ANC's *The Reconstruction and Development Programme*. In this document, the education system under apartheid is described as being characterised by “the racist and sexist ideology and educational doctrines of apartheid” – condemned by the ANC as “distorted culture” (RDP 1994:58,59). The document emphasises that “the existing curriculum bears the mark of racism, sexism, authoritarianism and outmoded teaching practices. Transformation is essential.” This is reiterated in the recent White Paper on Education (1994:9), which specifically refers to “the curriculum, textbooks and teacher education” being “manipulated for ideological purposes”, one of which is the imposition of state-determined gender roles.

In order to achieve equity in the educational system, a Gender Equity Task Team will be established. Part of the process of eliminating sexism from the educational system will obviously be the revision of curricula and textbooks, with the transformation of the existing sexist materials regarded as “essential” (RDP 1994:65). Specifically, it is the purpose of the task team to “propose guidelines to address sexism in curricula, textbooks, teaching, and guidance” (White Paper 1994:26).

It is necessary to examine in detail the reading schemes used in this country to determine whether they reinforce patriarchal ideologies about family, occupations

and women's positions in society. The present study was designed, therefore, to investigate how these concerns are treated by reading schemes used in South Africa. This recognition of sexism and stereotyping found in the curriculum is the first step in a concrete process of challenging the existing sexist practices and sexist consciousness in South African schools.

The data for the study was obtained from an analysis of a systematic, stratified sample of ten prescribed reading schemes from Grade One (year one) to Standard Five (year seven), including those currently prescribed by the former Transvaal Education Department (TED). The study made use of a dual methodology: a content analysis of the books, as well as literary analysis. The reason for the use of this dual methodology is that content analysis, a common means of analysis employed by most other studies of sexrole stereotypes in textbooks, can only describe what is in the text – it cannot reveal the effect that the messages in the text have on those that receive them. It can thus show that books are sexist – but cannot indicate that children imbibe sexist beliefs through books. The hypothesis of the study implies that children do accept the roles which texts imply for them and are thus positioned in specific social positions. Thus the study also deals with the important question of how gender stereotypes are transmitted to children. The literary aspect of this process is important – how exactly does children's literature function to instil these beliefs in children? Thus, it was important that a literary analysis was also performed on the same texts. Althusser's (1970) theory of interpellation, which sees literary texts as an apparatus for summoning people to accept certain social positions and Iser's (1978) theory of the implied reader were combined in the literary analysis to suggest that literature, and children's literature in particular, creates an implied reader with which the reader identifies. This implied reader is not a person, by any means; it is a structure which draws the real reader into the text and which manipulates them into accepting and

imbibing the ideologies offered by the text. Because children are not yet educated in either social or literary skills, they are prime targets for this so-called interpellation, and, hence, are easily socialised by literature. The dual methodology thus facilitates evidence that children accept the roles which texts present to them and are summoned to take up specific, gendered social positions.

Huck et al (1987:468) offer a definition of what constitutes a sexist book: “A book may be considered sexist if women and girls are exclusively assigned traditional female roles, and if men and boys are expected to behave in prescribed ways ...” Offering a broader definition of sexism, Abu Nasar et al (cited in Michel 1986:11) comment that “sexism is ... [an] attitude which demeans, excludes, under-represents and stereotypes people on the basis of gender”. In an even wider sense, sexism may be regarded as all practices, prejudices, and ideologies which treat one sex as inferior to the other in worth and status.

When one considers these definitions, it is clear that the reading schemes investigated are indeed examples of sexist children’s literature. The hypothesis of this study was thus proven correct: results of both the analyses indicate this gender stereotyping and explicit sexism. In the first place, a total ratio of 72 percent male to 28 percent female characters appears for humans, while 65 percent of animals are depicted as male, and only 35 percent as female. As Weitzman et al (1972:1128,1129) emphasise, Because women comprise 51% of the population, if there were no bias in these books [women] should be presented in roughly half the pictures, and text. It is important to realise that these books are therefore unrealistic as well, since they refuse to acknowledge social reality and diversity of situations.

Furthermore, males are represented as more valuable in worth and status than females, with male protagonists dominating, with 79 percent to only 21 percent,

and male secondary characters also appearing more frequently, with a ratio of 65 percent male to 35 percent female.

However, Huck et al (1987:593) also point out the dangers of stereotyping through omission, whereby a book could imply that, for example, because all the doctors presented are white males, no other people become doctors. Such books, which omit significant facts, such as that women or black people also become doctors, only tell part of the truth. On the other hand, as Michel (1986:49) also emphasises, perhaps this situation may be realistic, in that white, male doctors are the majority. However, the failure to challenge this or to introduce children to equitable alternatives is also stereotyping through omission. Significantly, tacit acceptance of inequalities and discrimination serves to strengthen these.

Michel (1986:17) refers to this as “latent sexism” or “hidden discrimination”, which implies that the portrayal of the sexes is confined to the portrayal of specific qualities and roles. She offers the example of girls being provided with only one role model, that of homemaker, while a much wider range is open to boys. This kind of stereotyping is evident as regards the presentation of adult occupations in the books investigated: in total, 70 percent of occupations were depicted as suitable for males, while only 12 percent for females, and 18 percent as suitable for both (or the gender of the character was not indicated).

Clearly, these texts do not take into consideration that people’s life patterns have changed significantly in recent decades. New roles and careers – often traditionally for men – have been taken up by women of different social, cultural and traditional backgrounds, while men have also entered traditionally women’s areas. By failing to reflect this, books continue to convey messages which are false and out of date (Michel 1986:87).

Hidden discrimination is also evident in the activities regarded as suitable for male and female characters, as well as in the personality traits ascribed to the various characters. The analyses of these two aspects indicate that the domestic sphere and the sphere of child care are both feminine activities, while exciting and adventurous outdoor activities, particularly sports, are the male preserve. Furthermore, conventional personality traits dominate in these books, with males being portrayed as strong, brave and intelligent, and females as weak helpless and stupid, or beautiful, wicked and scheming. Although exceptions were found, the impression formed as a whole is that of stereotypical masculine and feminine qualities.

It is clear that the conclusions of this study correspond to those of other similar studies, particularly the results of the Unesco sponsored international studies on sexism in children's literature. The study completed in China, for instance, emphasises the so-called stereotype of importance, also found in this study, which is an opinion implied in literature that the male is superior to the female in any sphere of human activity. Similarly, in studies in the Ukraine and France, it has been noted that there are far more male protagonists than female, while the Norwegian study concludes: "... children's literature portrays men as active and responsible, and women as wives and mothers who are passive, not to say irresponsible." Similar findings were also found in Peru, Zambia, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen.

Of course, these results really become significant when combined with the results of the literary analysis – which imply that various literary techniques function to position the child reader as accepting and imbibing such gender stereotypes. First, the level of readership is appropriate to the child readers, and therefore they are immediately more inclined to accept the role of implied reader, as they are not

conscious of the reading process itself, and are thus drawn into identification with a secondary world.

Secondly, the narratorial perspectives of these texts play a fundamental role in positioning the reader as accepting gender stereotypes. Particularly important is the effaced third person narrator, the voice of authority, manifested in the disapproving attitude of the narrator to unstereotypical female characters. This is effectively disguised through the frequent overlapping of the narratorial and character perspective. The third person narrator also acts as an intrusive narrator, addressing the child reader directly and positioning him or her as accepting the gender stereotyped world presented. An imperative tone is also important in this direct teaching, as the child reader assumes the role of an implied reader on the receiving end of various sex-stereotypical commands, with little choice in the matter. However, the first person narrator is also used effectively, particularly for character identification: here the significance of the presentation of many more male characters than female is clear – the child has little choice in gender identification, and gains the impression that females are not as important as males, and not worth identifying with. Furthermore, this means that a male perspective becomes dominant.

The use of dialogue was also identified as a third important guide to the reader, often functioning in the same way as the character narrator and presenting a single (often male) perspective. Similarly, the sexist content of dialogue tends to create a world of sexism, borne out by the sexist content of the books themselves. However, patterns of dominance and submission in dialogue also indicate that males tend to gain the upper hand (although there was some evidence of powerful females – notably witches – making their mark here).

A fourth important technique evident in the schemes was the use of the narratorial structure itself as a means of teaching sexist patterns of thought. An important aspect repeatedly found in the readers is the element of closure and the acceptance of limitations, often based on gender, and the gender *status quo* (the idea of marriage and living happily ever after is particularly evident). The status quo tends to be presented as idealised and highly positive. Another repeated technique is the framing of stories to be identified as fiction, and their juxtaposition with a “real” world in which sex stereotypes are rife. However, the sexist content of these “fictional” narratives is also notable, particularly as regards the stereotyping of women as witches.

Finally, the illustrations tend to offer a vision of a gender stereotyped world, in the use of mainly male characters, in their positioning of male characters as more important and as dominant, and in their depiction of gender stereotyped activities, which support both the literary techniques of positioning and the sexist content of the books. However, there was a little evidence of challenging of gender stereotypes in the illustrations.

It is clear that gender stereotypes persist in contemporary society, and are evident in children’s readers. In all cases, these stereotypes serve to legitimise, justify and exacerbate women’s position of dependence, subordination and inequality in society (Michel 1986:18). The effects of serving these up to children in the form of literature is highly significant, as books function to position the child as accepting them. It is important, however, to observe this functioning in the context of a sexist society, as literature is not the only instrument which positions children in this way. The media, politics, the labour market, the family, the peer group and particularly the school situation all reemphasise and support the

stereotypes imbibed through literature. As Michel (1986:80) comments: “Neither school nor teachers nor pupils are an island in society and society is full of stereotypes.”

However, as these are school readers, a brief word on their context in the school situation must be added. The White Paper on Education (1994:9) emphasises that “the management and control of the education and training system has always been kept in male hands ...” The *RDP* document (1994:59,62) emphasises that women and children bear the brunt of this injustice, with the result that “women have suffered discriminatory treatment in service conditions and promotion practices”, while many girls have been educated and trained to fulfil traditional roles which perpetuate their oppression, if not denied education and training completely on the basis of their gender.

Similarly, all the UN studies (cited in Michel 1986) conclude that sexism permeates the entire educational system: sexist stereotypes are not only apparent in school readers, but throughout the educational curriculum, the school administrative hierarchy, the classroom relations, and even pupils’ interaction and games (Michel 1986:31). According to Basow (1986:126), teachers tend to call on boys more often than girls in the classroom; boys are rewarded for academic achievement while girls are rewarded for nonacademic achievements; teachers tend to interact more with boys, while little accurate and continuous feedback is recorded with girls. This influences the realistic appraisal of children’s abilities and the development of self-confidence and achievement motivation. Michel (1986:28) sums up the attitude well:

... the most antiquated and ridiculous sexist stereotypes pursue school children and students throughout their educational career ... surrounding them with an atmosphere

in which men are omnipresent and have all the good roles, write history and lead the world, while women are despised, downtrodden and confined to housework and motherhood ...

It is indeed clear that it is not only the books themselves which require massive revamping – the entire sexist hierarchy of the school system needs to be challenged and redefined: the need for special attention to be given to “the special interests of girls and women” is highlighted by the *RDP* document (1994:62). This entails, amongst other things, adult education for women trapped in rural areas, a wider range of educational opportunities to be opened to women, and the encouragement of women to pursue nontraditional subjects (*RDP* 1994:62). Obviously, this would include the revision of curricula and textbooks as well. Michel (1986:73) adds the following requirements: changes must be made to all educational materials; to teachers’ biased and preferential behaviour; to women’s subordinate role in the management and administration of schools; and to the training of teachers.

However, changes can only occur when those responsible for the conception, writing, illustration, editing and interpreting of schoolbooks are convinced that the perpetuation of stereotypical sex roles and images has a negative effect on society (Michel 1986:87). This is because literature is such a powerful tool of socialisation, and writers can successfully use it as a means of changing the thinking of a society, of changing those stereotypes inculcated into children. This role of literature becomes even more important when one considers that the books at stake here are educational, used at schools every day. Importantly, education should “contribute to a change in attitudes by abolishing traditional stereotypes of men’s and women’s roles and stimulating the creation of new and more positive images of women’s participation in the family, the labour market

and public life” (*Report of World Conference of the UN Decade for Women* 1980:34).

However, Townsend (1980:387) warns against the dangers of counter-stereotyping: “A demand to avoid stereotypes can easily become in effect a demand for a different stereotype.” He also emphasises the need to take other media, such as film and television, into consideration, as part of any counter-stereotyping activity, since children’s books form only a small part of the child’s environment. This is also emphasised by Michel (1986:80), in a comment pertinent to South Africa’s status as a developing country: all media have a decisive role to play in the education of the illiterate and newly literate – thus if audiovisual media carry sexist messages, achievements in schoolbooks will be useless. It is therefore essential to synchronise the campaigns of all media: “non-sexist media could constitute an education sub-system that would enrich teaching by contributing slides, educational films, cassettes, etc.”

Furthermore, as Michel (1986:77) states changes to school textbooks will require an increase in women’s participation in the production of school textbooks, and a concomitant campaign to sensitise educators, parents, students, administrators, publishers, authors, illustrators and the general public to the problem of sexism in school textbooks, through committees, seminars, evaluations, guidelines and meetings. The production of textbooks must also be monitored.

It is evident that children’s readers themselves can be used positively, in order to correct stereotypes. This study recommends the rewriting of children’s readers in order to incorporate specific guidelines for nonsexism, and emphasises the need for this to be achieved as swiftly as possible, especially when one takes the highly

anglocentric nature of the texts investigated into account. Obviously, the major role which economic considerations play in the prescription of children's readers must be noted. However, as Foster (1989:206) emphasises, the choice of class reader should not be based on their availability or riveting nature, but on their content and suitability for all children, no matter what their sex is.

First, it is of the utmost importance that books are produced which dispel myths of superiority and prepare children for a dispensation of equality (Jansen 1988:92). This is particularly appropriate in the current South Africa, as the equality of the sexes has been entrenched in the Bill of Rights in the recent constitution.

Secondly, Shestakov (cited in Michel 1986:47) emphasises that achieving equality between men and women in literature is a two-fold process. On the one hand, there is the so-called negative process, whereby unfavourable stereotypes and prejudice against women must be removed from instructional materials. On the other hand, the positive approach requires the forging of a new image of women and increasing their capacity for self-esteem. This is known as the "correctional approach", whereby literature is produced and presented to children for the purpose of changing stereotypes, presenting history in a different light and new heroes and role-models to children (Nhlanhla 1988:164).

Thirdly, new aims of children's literature may be offered: reading must put children in touch with their fellows; sensitise them to human conditions; help children experience a whole range of human emotions and activities; enhance their sense of belonging to humankind and encourage them to ask questions (Jantjies, quoted in Jansen 1988:90).

Thus, a final list of recommendations for a truly nonsexist South African children's literature may be offered:

1. Books should contain an equitable balance of male and female characters.
2. Books should depict both males and females as contributing to society in a variety of roles, implying that all people can prepare for and succeed in numerous occupations, be they traditionally regarded as professional or not.
3. Males and females should be depicted as sharing the same basic emotions, personality traits and capabilities. All people must be shown to have both positive and negative, "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics.
4. All characters should be depicted as taking pride in their achievements.
5. Explicit comments on sex discrimination, including legal, economic and social issues, should appear, but only where required by the plot.
6. Historical references to the contributions of all people in past centuries, including both well and lesser known figures, should appear where required by the plot.
7. Characters should reflect and encourage positive social changes, offering new roles for all people.
8. Sexism must be avoided in language: in vocabulary, grammar and syntax, with particular attention being paid to personal pronouns and collective nouns.

It is the recommendation of this study that nonsexist literature be introduced into schools as soon as possible. Concomitantly, there is a massive need for the reinforcement of nonsexist models in schools. Any action taken must be aimed at the social fabric as a whole – it must reach beyond sexism in the schoolroom.

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Archetypes or stereotypes:

fantastic realism in children's literature

miriom w maranga



In this paper selected children's stories are analysed against the backdrop of Jung's ideas on the psyche. It is therefore necessary to dwell briefly on Jung's ideas in order to give the paper its necessary theoretical background. Jung, the Swiss psychiatrist, attempted to understand the human psyche through analysis of dreams and fantasies. His ideas eventually developed into a theory of psychology known as Analytic psychology. According to Jung's ideas the personality has three levels of awareness:

- the Ego – the 'I' of the conscious mind
- the personal unconscious of the individual's own repressed memories, thoughts and feelings
- the basic collective unconscious that is shared by all mankind

The collective unconscious is evidenced in the common symbols, images, and themes that emerge spontaneously in fantasies, dreams and myths of all mankind. These dreams, fantasies and myths reflect basic human urges, fears and experiences. Jung called these fundamental forms of the collective unconscious archetypal or primordial images. He held that although archetypal images appear in many forms, the archetypes themselves are limited in number. Archetypes are expressed

uniquely according to culture: the English, for example, portray the hero archetype as a courteous and controlled gentleman, while the Greek portray the same archetype as a guileful trickster.

Jung argues that the formation of archetypal images is spontaneous in every age and in all social circumstances. This is due to the fact that they grow out of the basic and fundamental nature of the psyche. The collective unconscious which is the source of these images may be seen as the contact between the individual and the larger-than-individual forces. Archetypes manifest the fundamental and primordial process of symbol-formation in man. As natural symbols, archetypes reflect man's elemental contact with the world.

Due to their fundamental function and resourcefulness in symbolic value, archetypes are a useful tool to creative writers. Archetypes have been exploited variously by many creative writers in order to generate meaning in works of art.

Examples of archetypal images include the mother archetype, the hero, the villain, the wise old man, the amina (the beautiful princess) and the persona among others. When manifested through individual psyche, the archetype may take various forms. For example the mother archetype may appear to a child as "the good mother". This archetype takes various forms such as the virgin Mary, a goddess and abstract things associated with fertility. The "bad mother" would on the other hand appear as a witch, dragon, and graves. These archetypes, among others, appear in fiction with varying degrees of frequency and with unique characteristics.

Examples of works of art that have exploited archetypal images are abundant. A good example is Oyono's *House boy* where we see M Moreau as the figure of the archetypal villain while Toundi is the figure of the archetypal scapegoat. In Derek Walcott's *Ti-Jean and his brothers*, Ti-Jean is the figure of the archetypal trickster.

Due to the nature of its audience, children's literature is more open to the use of archetypal figures. This is because in their early years, children are generally willing to accept any world the writer presents to them. This acceptance is, however, not a conscious and conscientious belief in the truth of the world presented, but acceptance through participation in this world. Writers of children's stories have therefore drawn from the enchanted world that gratifies the child's wish for a "reality" where nothing is impossible; the world he or she still knows. Given such a context it is easy to see why the Jungian archetypes render themselves more readily usable in children's literature. This is because exaggeration and fantasy which may hamper credibility are more readily acceptable to a child than to a grown up.

It is in the attempt to fulfil the child's wish for a world where nothing is impossible that the writer makes use of archetype to create fantasy. Due to the nature of his or her audience, the creative writer is exposed to a particular danger: the danger of reducing archetypes to stereotypes or simply creating stereotypical patterns and characters. A stereotype has been defined as a special kind of flat character, a figure that has occurred so often in fiction that his or her nature is immediately known. Examples of stereotypes include: the brilliant detective with eccentric habits, the beautiful international spy with a mysterious background and the sharp child-detective. A stereotype is a fixed and familiar

figure whose use in fiction is to fulfil an established function. Archetypes are similar to stereotypes in that they possess fixed and familiar characteristics. However, the main distinguishing factor is that while an archetypal character is capable of development, a stereotypical one is not. The stereotype never rises above the accepted role and associations of his or her kind.

Both archetypes and stereotypes have their place in art and the literary artist can use both to great interpretive purpose. While this is true, it is also possible for these character types to be used in a way that hampers creativity. An analysis of Barbara Kimenye's *Moses* series will help demonstrate how stereotypical patterns and characters can lead to a dead end in creativity. But before we get into that it is necessary to analyse a story that makes use of archetypal figures in order to demonstrate how archetypes generate meaning in children's literature. I shall analyse the story "my father's gourd", in which a young girl's gourd is accidentally carried down-stream as she uses it to fetch water.

This narrative tells of how this young girl follows the gourd for many days trying to retrieve it from the river, without success. As she follows the gourd, she encounters very many strange things including food that is mashing itself. She hears a voice from the food telling her, "Young girl, come mash me and eat me". The young girl mashes the food, but she does not eat even a bite. She continues with her journey and encounters similar tests of patience, endurance and self-control. She passes all the tests and is rewarded with beautiful jewellery and the recovery of her father's gourd. When she returns home her father is so proud of her, but her ugly stepsister is jealous and envious. She decides to re-enact her beautiful stepsister's drama in the hope that she will get a similar reward. She deliberately lets her father's gourd slip out of her hands into the river and then she starts running after it and sings just as her stepsister had

done. On the way she encounters the same tests, but out of greed she fails all of them. Finally she is “rewarded” with a skin disease that covers her whole body. When the father sees her, he is so horrified that he decides to escape and leave her behind. Her mother, however, plays a trick and consequently the beautiful stepdaughter is left behind while her own ugly daughter is taken along. When he discovers that he has been tricked, the father is very angry and he kills his wife and daughter and finally himself. The beautiful girl looks for her family in vain and eventually gets married to a handsome man with whom she lives happily ever after.

This narrative could be read as a demonstration of the duality of human nature. The two girls may be seen to represent different sides of the human psyche: the persona and the shadow. According to Jung, the psyche has three components: the persona, the shadow and the amina/aminus. The persona is the social front which we display to the world. The shadow is the inferior and darker part of ourselves which we suppress. The amina/aminus is the feminine designation of the male psyche and masculine designation of the female psyche.

In the context of Jung’s interpretation of the psyche, the beautiful, patient and self-controlled girl represents the persona while the ugly, gluttonous and impatient girl represents the shadow.

A child reading this story participates in the events re-enacted within the fictive world. This story contains several fantastic elements and necessarily calls upon the audience to suspend disbelief while in the fictive world. The suspension of disbelief is something that will come naturally to a child. The child audience will easily grant the writer the initial impossible supposition on which the fantasy

begins, but the child's mind expects (though not in a conscious way) probability within this impossibility.

The plot in this narrative develops in a fantastic, but plausible manner. Due to this "plausibility" of plot and character, the child-audience will tend to identify with the beautiful and virtuous girl (the heroine) while she dissociates herself from the ugly vicious girl (the villain). Gradually, this will affect the child's consciousness as she starts observing heroic and villainous traits in herself. In the earlier stages of the child's development she is not able to distinguish between the self, the symbol and the symbolised. The child is not consciously aware of the symbolic relations within the narrative, but gradually such a narrative helps her in her quest for integration of the identity towards realism in dealing with the outer world. The symbolic exploitation of archetypal images in children's narratives thus becomes a useful identity tool.

The stories that I would like to use for the discussion of stereotypical patterns in children's literature, are some of the most popular children's stories in East Africa: the *Moses* series which includes more than eight books. Some of the titles are *Moses and the kidnappers*, *Moses and Mildred*, *Moses the camper* and *Moses in a muddle*. The books are authored by a lady by the name of Barbara Kimenye. The setting is an imaginary school in some part of Uganda. The target audience is children of about 11 to 14 years of age.

Nearly every schoolboy in East Africa knows Holy Moses, the main character in the series. This is the boy who has a knack for spotting trouble and getting stuck knee-deep in it. The books are full of adventure, mischief and wit. The writer makes use of humour and ridicule to satirise Mukibi Educational Institute for the

Sons of African Gentlemen (MEISAG), the school where the action is set. The popularity of this series is no doubt due to certain merits within the books. The concern of this paper does not include a detailed discussion on the merits of the books.

The discussion will centre on two of Kimenye's books: *Moses in a mess* and *Moses and the man from Mars*. In these two books like the rest in the series we have particular characters around whom action revolves. These are Holy Moses, the narrator, his friends King Kong, Itchy Fingers, Rukia, Old Mukibi (the headmaster), Mr Karanja (the deputy head) and Kigali the old gatekeeper.

All the stories in this series follow the same basic pattern: the main boy-characters get into trouble or are involved in an adventure that eventually gets them into trouble. There is therefore not much variation on plot development. Although the regular main characters are present in all the stories, every story introduces at least one new character around whom the adventure revolves. In *Moses in a mess* the new characters are the inspector of schools and Zenobia, the rich widow. In *Moses and the man from Mars* the new character is Zeddi, the lunatic.

The regular characters are flat and a good number of them are recognisable stereotypes. The headmaster of MEISAG is the figure of the mean and miserly headteacher. He is described in the following terms in *Moses in a mess*:

Old Mukibi, the Headmaster, was more vulture-like than ever. He hunched, scowling, in the high-backed chair reserved exclusively for him (Kimenye 1991:1).

The adjective “old” that is used throughout with reference to Mukibi is not so much a designation of his age, but of his eccentric habits. He is stubbornly strong-willed and clings to his own ideas however awkward or outlandish. As Holy Moses observes one wonders why old Mukibi bothers to hold staff-meetings since he never listens to anybody else’s opinion. Throughout the series, any reference made to the headmaster is done in a way that makes him look ridiculous. A good example is when Itchy Fingers and Simbwa get stuck in the collapsing roof. When Old Mukibi arrives on the scene he “screeches” at the boys to get down immediately. As the boys are being rescued “Old Mukibi ranted like a maniac about vandalism and destructive students”.

Mr Bulega, one of the teachers at MEISAG, is the figure of the absent-minded school-master. He is described as being the mildest member of the teaching staff if only because his memory is so poor. According to the boys, Mr Bulega is sometimes in danger of forgetting his own name.

The rest of the main characters are all recognisable to the audience by means of a particular aspect of their character which becomes their mark of identity throughout the series. King Kong, whose real name is Sebastian Mlutu, is the singer who, in his imagination, has become engaged to Miriam Makeba. Rukia, Dorm 3 prefect, is “a man of the world” who always knows more than everybody else. Itchy Fingers is the boy who always “absentmindedly” lays his hands on other people’s belongings. Kigali the old gatekeeper is perpetually after his bottle of Waragi. The only character in the series who does not have a flaw in his character is Mr. Karanja the deputy headmaster. He is the only teacher on the whole staff who would dare to talk to old Mukibi with boldness and “he probably got away with it because he is the only member of staff with proper teaching qualifications and no blemish on his career”.

The character portrayal in this series does a lot to give the books their sense of humour. It also engenders familiarity between the characters and the audience, no doubt one of the reasons why the books are very popular. However this could also lead to the wrong emphasis because it is the flaw in each character that is the object of focus. Itchy Fingers, for example is recognised by his disposition to always be in possession of other people's belongings (stealing). This aspect of his character is not only his mark of identification, but is also what earns him a place of "honour" among his dorm-mates. He always comes in handy when they want something from another dorm. Rukia, is always talking about girls and drink. He never misses an opportunity to drink anything alcoholic. This gets him into trouble when they go to rescue King Kong and Holy Moses and he drinks so much of Zeddi's drink that he ends up being the one to be rescued. After this misadventure everybody expects Rukia to be expelled or at the very least lose his post as the prefect of Dorm 3. Nothing of the sort happens. He gets away scot-free and immediately resumes his "man of the world" pose.

In this particular case one can almost see an attempt on the part of the writer to manipulate the story to fit into a certain pattern. Having Rukia expelled and consequently a new prefect elected would naturally disrupt the familiar pattern, something the writer wishes not to do. This highlights one of the problems that stereotypical patterns can lead to. It hinders the natural development of the narrative where the plot comes to its own logical conclusion. If allowed to develop naturally, the narrative would burst the seams of the plot thus destroying the organised pattern of a series. The writer of the series therefore finds himself forced by formal requirements to sacrifice certain creative liberties.

These restrictions have significant effects on plot, character, theme and consequently, on the audience. As we have already observed, the author has to tailor her

narrative in such a way that it does not burst the seams of the plot. She also has to fashion the story in such a way that characters fit within the plot. This means that characters neither advance in age nor develop in character. Perhaps this is one of the major problems facing the writer of a series. She will find her characters growing up and growing old and consequently struggling to burst out of certain confinements. The events leading to Rukia's apparently imminent expulsion are precisely such a case. Everything Rukia has done points to the logical consequence that he should be demoted and possibly expelled, but the confines of the plot and the series insist he has to be forgiven and maintain his position as prefect of Dorm 3.

The audience of the *Moses* series interact with all the familiar characters everytime they read any of the books. They interact with characters who do not creatively "surprise" them. The absence of reform and development does not aid character-building in the children (audience). Another effect that this stereotypical character portrayal can have is hampering the children's sense of perception of realistic and logical progress. There is nothing in the stories that indicates the class level of the boy-characters. They remain static, not moving to higher classes in school. Significantly, group clusters are on the basis of dorms and not class-level. This may be seen as the author's tactic to make the time factor in the stories remain amorphous and noncommittal. This device succeeds, to a certain extent, in that it naturally shifts the focus of the audience from progression in time to scenes of adventure. But despite this, the child-reader who is more critical may insist on some degree of realism especially in this crucial aspect of time.

Apart from having a basic plot and basic character types, the *Moses* series has a basic thematic pattern. At the centre of these adventure stories is the concern with the state of the education system in general and MEISAG in particular. The

author portrays a country where education is so greatly valued that everybody is ready to get it at whatever cost. Old Mukibi exploits this situation by establishing a substandard school. To compensate for the absence of quality and substance he gives the school a high sounding name (Mukibi's Educational Institute for the Sons of African Gentlemen). The irony is that people are so desperate for education that they fail to insist on the most basic aspect, quality. They therefore send their children to this school in complete disregard of the poor educational and living standards that it offers.

In this school everything always goes wrong. Commenting on the debating session that sparks off the dramatic action in *Moses and the man from Mars*, Holy Moses observes:

Mr. Karanja ... saw the Debating Society ending in a mess like everything else at MEISAG (p 2).

After this Moses gives examples of several undertakings that have failed in this school: the Drama Society failed because everybody wanted to be a star while the singing Club failed because King Kong thought he was the only star. The miserly headmaster and proprietor is of course at the centre of the mess in this school.

MEISAG is the refuge of the rejects from all the other schools in the country. This is probably the reason why old Mukibi does not bother to improve the standards. The boys in this school are perpetual trouble-makers. They languish in boredom whenever the school is running smoothly causing them to be always on the look out for adventure, which in most cases gets them into trouble. The boys know each other and their teachers well. They know how their school operates including all its loop-holes. The boys have one driving passion: to have adventure

and fun and to out-manoeuvre anybody who stands in their way. The author's concern with satirising the education system and MEISAG operates within this preset pattern. The boys voice what they know to be wrong within the school, but do not do anything beyond this. What emerges from a reading of the series is that the basic pattern of the stories does not allow for a thematic development. The stubborn and miserly nature of the headmaster and the run-down state of the school are basic structuring components in the stories. A major change in either would lead to basic changes in the structure of the stories. In *Moses in a mess* action revolves around the school inspector's visit. The ensuing drama is directly related to the unkempt state of the school. In their attempt to make the school presentable for the inspector's visit the boys of Dorm 3 encounter Zenobia. Similarly in *Moses and the man from Mars* it is due to the nature of the pupils at MEISAG (everybody wanted to be a star and to hear their own voice) that the debating session finally ends with King Kong and Moses in the wilds where they have their adventure with Zeddi. The objects of the author's satire are the basic structuring elements, and action is inevitably tied to them. They place certain restrictions on the author in dealing with her themes: she can poke fun at the objects of her satire but cannot proceed beyond this. This is because the structuring principles of the story do not allow for a more complex thematic development.

From the discussion of these three aspects of Kimenye's works (character, plot, theme) what emerges is that a strictly patterned structure of artistic creation is successful only up to a certain degree, beyond which it becomes a hindrance to creativity. The creation of stereotypical characters and patterns could lead to sterility whereby all we have are stories that pander to children's desire for entertainment and adventure, but do not develop other faculties such as logical reasoning and the sense of poetic logic and justice.

Writing about children's literature Margery Fisher has observed:

The reading of a child is more thorough and more definite in its impact than the reading of an adult (Fisher 1967:9).

This necessarily places a mighty responsibility on the writer of children's fiction. It cautions against seeing children's books as some form of toys. Although the world of children may be disproportionate thus causing exaggeration to be a natural way of portraying this world in fiction, the writer of children's fiction should be cautious lest he exaggerates in a way that hampers sincerity. The adult writer must give purpose to the story. She should be an interpreter of life, inform the child and make statements for him which the child is not old enough to make for himself.

The writer of children's literature can do this by striking a balance between the real and unreal. Stephens (1992) has observed that one of the curious sides to the criticism of children's literature is the urge to polarise fantasy and realism into rival genres. Felicity Hughes has observed that this is as a result of the view that seriousness is associated with realism and fantasy is associated with nonserious or popular literature for audiences such as children who are deemed incapable of serious aesthetic responses.

It is the contention of this paper that such a polarisation is an over-simplification of the child's mind. Instead of polarisation what should be sought is an integration of the two, what is here termed as Fantastic Realism. Elements of fantasy will gratify the child's need for delight and pleasure and enable him or her to participate in the enchanted world of the collective unconscious. On the other hand realism is also necessary. This is because as Stephens observes, realism reflects society

and in so doing, by means of a fictional construct, helps children mature intellectually and emotionally by enabling them to engage with subject positions that are “similar” to consensus reality.

Whether the writer of children’s literature decides to make use of archetypes or stereotypes, what should be aimed at is a sincere portrayal of life. The balance of fantasy and realism will produce literature that will satisfy both the emotional and intellectual faculties of children.

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One city, other worlds:



the reading preferences of black second language English readers in a large urban library

sue mcMurray

In August and September 1993, we undertook an informal survey of our child readers in the Johannesburg Public Library with a view to assessing changing reading preferences. We were aware of new cultural influences on our young readers, such as the influence of American television programmes, as well as the fact that children are being exposed at an ever younger age to adult feelings and experiences. This gives them a surface sophistication that was not so noticeable in the past. We also took into account the change in the borrowers using our library. The Johannesburg Public Library has been open to all races since 1974. In practice, until recently, the nonwhite usage of the library was limited to our libraries in the South West Region, which was a coloured and Indian residential area, and to the Central Children's Library in the CBD which was heavily used by Indian and, to a lesser extent, by black children. The loosening of the group areas laws from the late 1980s brought an interesting shift in borrower usage. Mayfair Library, because of changing residential patterns, changed from a predominantly white Afrikaans branch to a predominantly Indian English branch. Other branches followed suit. The picture changed even further with the replacement of the formerly whites only TED (Transvaal Education Department) schools with the model B and C schools. Bearing this in mind, we included a

space for home language on our questionnaires with a view to gauging the preferences of our second language English readers.

The first questionnaire asked only for age, standard, home language, what books the child had enjoyed recently and favourite authors. We wanted to use the information for book selection and readers' guidance. The overall result was fairly predictable. The top six authors were Roald Dahl, Enid Blyton, Carolyn Keene, Franklin W. Dixon, Judy Blume and Francine Pascal. The six most popular titles were *Charlie and the chocolate factory* by Roald Dahl, *The Secret diary of Adrian Mole* by Sue Townsend, and *The Witches*, *The BFG*, *Matilda* and *The Twits*, all by Roald Dahl. A noticeable aspect was the preponderance of series amongst the favourite books mentioned. The most mentioned of those were; *The Nancy Drew* series, *The Hardy Boys*, *The Famous Five*, *The Secret Seven*, *Sweet Valley High* and *Asterix*. There was a noticeable swing to American titles and series. It was disappointing that the same relatively few authors and titles were mentioned over and over again. There was a sad lack of variety in the preferences of our readers. This seems to point to the importance of image and marketing in the youth culture and the lack of individual exploration.

The responses of our black second language readers were different from those of the first language English readers. They were less "brand" conscious. They seemed to make do with the titles available rather than seeking out specific books. They were also more likely to cite books about sport or aeroplanes, for instance rather than a specific title as their favourite book. Although there was a predictable difference in reading ability there was not as big a difference in age and school standard as expected.

The youngest children, up to Std 1 (children in year 3), chose a mixture of picture books, beginner readers and fairy tales as their favourite reading matter.

The children in Stds 2 and 3 liked some picture books, some easy nonfiction, fairy tales again, books from our “easy to read” section, including some specifically designed for black second language readers, and some of the books by authors popular amongst first language readers like Roald Dahl and Judy Blume.

In Stds 4 and 5 there was a greater contrast between the good readers and the inexperienced ones. The latter mentioned picture books, fairy tales and easy to read books intended for much younger children but also titles chosen by first language readers in their age group. These included titles by Judy Blume, Roald Dahl (though the actual titles are suitable for younger children), Betsy Byars and Victor Canning. Favourite series included *The Famous Five*, *Nancy Drew*, *Freshman follies* and *Sweet dreams*, the latter two being teenage “soap opera” type series. Interestingly, though most of the books mentioned are popular, accessible titles, one 12 year old stated that *The Railway children* was one of her favourite books.

The intriguing results of this survey prompted us to evaluate the reading preferences of our black second language English readers in more detail. This time the children filling in the questionnaire were asked their age, standard, sex, school and place of residence. They were asked to state their favourite authors, titles, series and kind of book. The object was to see if there was any correlation between school and home and reading level and preferences. Selected libraries were chosen for the survey. They were the Central Children’s library which has mainly black children as borrowers, Melville and Murray Park branch libraries which are used by children from “bridging” schools, Hillbrow library situated in what is rapidly becoming a black residential area, and Emmarentia, Linden and Rosebank, traditionally white suburban libraries which now have a fair number of black child borrowers.

The Central Children's Library caters mainly for black children. It is used on weekdays by children who live in Soweto and other townships but go to school in Johannesburg, some to bridging schools, some to centre-city colleges and others to schools in the suburbs. Most of their parents work in the city centre and see the library as a safe haven for their children in the afternoons. On Saturdays it is also used by children who go to school in the townships. There has always been a comparatively large demand for picture books, fairy tales, beginner readers and easy nonfiction. In recent years, newly available books intended especially for nonnative speakers of English have become popular. Heinemann's *Junior African writers* or *JAWS*, Macmillan's *Hop, step and jump* beginner readers, *Mactracks* and *Melts* series, *Longman Gems* and Maskew Miller Longman's *Sunny day readers* among others, have been greatly in demand. The several Ladybird series of fairy tales retold for beginning readers have always been very popular in the Children's Library. In fact when children in this survey cited a classic as their favourite story it was usually the Ladybird or Disney retelling which had been read.

Favourite titles, as expected, included picture books and fairy tales up to Std 1 and the same together with easy-to-read stories, simple nonfiction and popular titles for Stds 3 to 5.

The choice of favourite authors was very interesting when taken with the age of the child. A Std 2 who lives in Berea chose Roald Dahl while a Std 5 who lives in Soweto chose Richard Scarry and another, Enid Blyton. A Std 3 mentioned Mark Twain and a Std 4 JM Barrie, but had probably read them in a simplified edition. More interesting authors mentioned by Std 5s included KM Peyton and Chico Twala, Don Mattera and Mzwake Mbuli who are not children's writers at all but are perhaps more culturally relevant to the child reader.

Under favourite series *Ladybird* and *Little Golden Books* were mentioned as well as *Black Hole School*, *Tintin* and *Asterix* and *The Secret Seven*.

Favourite kinds of books included sport, adventure, nature and romance from a pupil in Std 5.

Melville is a medium sized suburban library. All the children who took part in the survey go to the Foundation School which is a bridging school in the neighbourhood. Some of the children live locally while others come in from the townships.

In a small sample, Dr Seuss and Tony Blundell were the favourite authors.

The favourite titles were fairy tales, picture books, a Bible story and *The Wizard of Oz*, presumably in an easy-to-read edition.

Favourite series from the Std 2s and 3s were *Ladybird*, *Secrets* and *Tintin*.

A Std 2 from Dobsonville favoured books about animals.

The children who use Murray Park, a small branch library east of the city, are divided between those who live and go to school in the area and those who come in from the townships to school. The nearby Dominican Convent acts as a bridging school for children from Soweto.

Favourite author by far was Roald Dahl. Others mentioned were Enid Blyton and Michael Morpurgo (by a Std 1).

The titles included picture books, fairy tales and Dahl titles as well as a book called *The Babysitter*, which is a picture book intended to help young children who are not used to being left with a minder.

Favourite series included *Asterix*, *Tintin*, *JAWS*, a Beginner series and (from a Std 5) *Sweet dreams*.

The respondents were more forthcoming about the kinds of books that they enjoyed than about specific authors, titles and series. They liked fairy tales, adventure stories, science fiction and horror. Jokes and music appealed, as did books about sport, especially karate and cricket, the stars, nature, history, children in other lands, sewing and cooking and trains.

Hillbrow, as most people are aware, is a flatland area where many black families live. The children in the survey using the Hillbrow library either lived in the area or came in from the townships to the Johannesburg Girls Preparatory School. Most of the children have had relatively little exposure to open education.

Again, the most favoured author by far was Roald Dahl. Others mentioned were Enid Blyton, Yvonne Coppard (rather surprisingly from a Std 3) and Jan and Stan Berenstain, authors of the books about the Berenstain Bears. One author mentioned had written one of the titles in the Usborne mysteries series while several others wrote books which were published in the *JAWS* series. Some

authors were untraceable and one child listed a publisher as an author. Three pupils listed Charles Dickens as a favourite writer but did not specify a title and one chose Louisa M Alcott, also without specifying a specific title, so it was difficult to work out why these authors had been picked as favourites unless they had been introduced to the pupils by a teacher, which is possible as all the children concerned went to the same school.

The titles chosen as favourites were a mixture of picture books, books at various levels in *JAWS* and similar series and titles from American series about everyday life. The reading standard among these children was very uneven. Many of the titles listed were not readily identifiable, either being little-known or nonlibrary material, or so garbled that it was impossible to trace the title. A Std 3 from Cyrildene Primary chose Roald Dahl's *Charlie* titles and another from the same school *Simple Simon* by Yvonne Coppard, which is a surprising choice as it is a rather English story about a boy who is a little slow but comes into his own in a family crisis, but other Std 3s from Eden College and Johannesburg Girl's Preparatory School chose picture books, one of which was a *Little Golden Book* and easy nonfiction. Two Std 3s from different schools chose *For your own good*, a picture book about fostering. One of these pupils chose, in addition, *Raging robots and unruly uncles* by Margaret Mahy which is linguistically demanding. In contrast one of the Std 4s, from the United Church School listed *Nan and the sea monster*, which is classed as a beginner reader, as a favourite title and another *The Three little pigs*. Std 5s, from I H Harris, liked titles in the *Babysitters Club* series, *Nancy Drew* and Roald Dahl books.

Favourite series included *The Berenstain Bears* from a Grade 2, presumably meaning the beginner reader titles, and *The Berenstain Bears chapter books*, which are easy to read titles suitable for a much younger child, from a Std 5.

The Std 3s mentioned *JAWS* and *Gazelles*, a publisher's easy-to-read series. Two readers mentioned the *Julian stories*, a series of stories about a young Carribean boy. There was a general tendency to confuse publishers with series as Collins, Adlib and Heinemann were all listed as favourite series. The Std 5s liked *Nancy Drew*, *The Babysitters Club* and *The Secret Seven* as well as several series for young adults like *Freshman games*, *Lion tracks*, *Point horror* and various *Sweet Valley* series.

The kinds of books listed as being preferred were in some ways wider than the specific authors, titles and series that were chosen. Up to Std 4, fairy tales featured prominently as did mystery, adventure and ghost stories. Std 3s from the same school liked both fairy tales and love stories! Comics too were mentioned by a Std 3. Std 5s liked detective, mystery, horror and adventure stories as well as young love books. Some of the choices were more specific, for example, one girl wanted books about girls and what happens in life. Another girl wanted sad books. Nonfiction subjects listed included dinosaurs, making and baking things, Bible stories (especially about Christmas) and "books about experimenting in books".

Emmarentia is a quiet suburban branch in a formerly all white neighbourhood. The children who use the library all live and go to school in the area. Some of the children live in the houses with their families, others are children of domestic workers.

The authors mentioned as being popular are all well-known mainstream children's writers such as Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, Michael Hardcastle and Terence Dicks but interestingly some of the specific titles mentioned are from series intended for second language readers like *Hop, step and jump* and *Sunny day* readers.

Favourite series included some that are not really series at all, such as animal books from our beginner reader section. Others mentioned included *The Berenstain Bears*, *The Rupert books*, *The Famous Five*, *Banana books* (a publisher's easy-to-read series) and *Goosebumps*.

Preferred types of books were about sport, nature and animals, people and trains. The children liked fun books, ghost and scary stories.

Linden is our busiest branch library. The children who responded to the questionnaire all live and go to the school in the suburb.

The authors mentioned as favourites were all well-known mainstream children's writers. Most popular was Roald Dahl. Others listed were Enid Blyton, Herge, Quentin Blake, Jeff Brown, Caroline Keene, Jill Murphy and two "teenage writers" Caroline B Cooney and June O'Connell.

Favourite titles included *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* and *Flat Stanley* (from a Grade 2), several Roald Dahl titles (from a Std 3) and two *Sweet Valley High* titles (from a Std 3 who goes to the German School). Two YA titles, *Camp reunion* and *Love letters for sale* were mentioned by a Std 5. There is no difference here in the choice for age from a first language reader.

Favoured series were; *Ladybird* (Grade 2), *Tintin*, *Ladybird graded readers* (Std 1), *Asterix*, *Sweet Valley High*, *Dana girls*, *Nancy Drew*, *Famous Five*, *Secret Seven*, *Freshman Dorm*, *Sisters* and *Sweet dreams* (from Std 2–5).

Kinds of books that were mentioned as desirable were adventure books, funny books, story books and mysterious books. Subjects favoured were cricket, arts and crafts, birds, animals and cook books.

Rosebank is another large suburban library. The area is becoming more commercial as residential properties in the immediate vicinity have been taken over by offices. There have always been a lot of schools in the area, including private schools that were open to all races long before the government ones. Therefore some of the black pupils have had a long exposure to better education even while living in the townships. Most of the children who filled in the questionnaire live in the area now, though some come in from Soweto and Alexandra to school.

Favourite author by far was Roald Dahl, followed by Judy Blume and Francine Pascal. Other well-known authors mentioned were Anne Fine, Dodie Smith, Enid Blyton, Chris Smedley and Anne Holm. These are all mainstream children's writers. Less well-known are Candy Malherbe, who writes about South African history and ethnic groups, Brian Ball, a writer of easy-to-read titles, and James Nisbet whom I was unable to trace. The pupils who chose the less well-known authors all live in Pimville.

Only one fairy tale was listed among the favourite titles and that was by a Std 3 from Alexandra. Other favourites included an easy nonfiction title from a Grade 2 who lives in Elton Hill and *Pretty Star the pony* by Enid Blyton from a Std 2 from Alexandra. The Std 3s who live in the area favour Enid Blyton school stories, Dahl titles and *Pongwiffy* by Kay Umansky which is a humorous story about a witch. In contrast, a Std 3 from Pimville favoured a little-known easy-to-read title. A Std 4 pupil who lives in Soweto also likes *Pongwiffy* and *Sir*

Gadabout, a funny story about a medieval knight but again a Std 4 from Pimville chose the same easy-to-read title as the Std 3 pupil from the same township, another similar title and Anne Fine's *Flour babies* which, though deceptively easy-to-read, is on another level when it comes to the ideas contained in the book. The choice of the Std 5s was very wide from some easy to read titles, more appropriate for younger children to *Matilda*, *Anastasia Krupnik*, *Blubber*, *The Cricket in Time Square*, *I am David*, *Me, Jane* and *White Fang*. Here there was no difference in the taste of those who live in the suburbs and those who live in the townships.

In Rosebank the favourite series were *Bright sparks*, a nonfiction series for the young, and *Noddy* in Grade 2. A Std 2 from Alexandra liked the Disney titles. The Std 3s favoured Enid Blyton's school series, *Pongwiffy*, *Scrambled legs* and *Sweet Valley Twins*. The Std 4 and 5s liked *Almost sisters*, *Anastasia*, the various *Sweet Valley* series and one mentioned Puffin books which is an imprint not a series.

The list of favourite kinds of book was also interesting. Sport featured prominently. Netball, softball, tennis, gymnastics, boxing and soccer were mentioned specifically. One child liked chess books best. The children also liked books about things to do, ancient legends, places, countries and cultures. Then there were those who liked fiction especially teenage and love stories. One specified that these must have a happy ending but the most specific wanted books "with girls that can't stop talking about boys"! And that was from a boy who was voluble in expressing his preferences.

Again there were no real surprises in the overall favourites. Favourite author by far was Roald Dahl, followed by Enid Blyton and Judy Blume. No other writer

received more than three mentions. Favourite titles were *Matilda* and *Charlie and the chocolate factory* followed by *The Mystery of Mister E*, a *JAWS* title, *Peter Pan* and the *BFG*. All the other titles received two mentions or less.

Favourite series was *Sweet Valley High* with *JAWS*, *Ladybird*, *The Secret Seven* and *Tintin* tying for second place. These were followed by *Anastasia*, *Asterix* and *The Famous Five*.

From this information it is clear that there is not one typical black second language reader. Each child is affected by her background and education. Black children with a long exposure to open schooling have tastes similar to those of their first language counterparts. They choose the child bestsellers, so to speak.

There is a marked difference in the reading habits of our borrowers in different branches across the library system. A definite pattern emerges when home and school are taken into consideration. Children who live in the suburbs and go to school there, and children who have spent a large part of their school careers in private or formerly TED schools and who are presumably more affluent and therefore exposed to Western cultural influences via the media of television and film, find it easy to read and enjoy the same books as their English-speaking colleagues. The real difference is in the children who have had little or no experience of Western culture. They are learning both the language and the culture that goes with it. They can cope only with the bare skeleton of a story that has been pared down to essentials. Retellings of fairy tales and the more concrete beginner readers are perfect for them as they tell a straightforward story in a direct way. These children are not yet ready to cope with linguistic subtleties. This of course means that they miss most of the childhood English classics unless

they read them in simplified editions which lose most of the magic of the original. First language readers miss these also if they are not read to from an early age and so become accustomed to the more literary forms of the language.

Older children, once they can read fairly fluently, seem able to go on to the easier teenage books. Most of these are geared to the modern teenager, who has little time available for reading, and are therefore quick and easy to read. The language is usually no more demanding than that spoken on television, which is probably familiar to many of our second language speakers. Other children find books by black African or local writers, though perhaps intended for adults, more accessible because the subject matter is relevant to the child.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the more disadvantaged second language readers and first language readers is the knowledge of what books are available. Either through word of mouth or clever marketing, English-speaking children know about the popular authors and ask for them by name. Often the books they want are not the best of their type but only the best known and the skilful librarian can broaden their horizons by introducing other titles. Second language readers mostly do not know what to ask for and are dependent on whatever titles are available at the time. It is therefore very important that the libraries used by these readers stock suitable, accessible books and display them so that the children can find them easily.

Subject relevance is more important for the children who are just beginning to read English. It is too difficult for them to cope with a foreign language and foreign background and concepts at the same time. As they become more fluent in the language they can broaden their horizons and read about other people and

places. It was encouraging to see books about other peoples and cultures listed among the favourite kinds of books of some of the older children.

It was also encouraging that, though the good readers favoured the same small band of authors as the general survey, one of the writers favoured was Roald Dahl. Adult critics are divided about his moral views but he is a writer who delights in words and lets his imagination soar. So many of the other really popular writers for children are mundane and belong to the examining your own navel school of writing. Series like *Sweet Valley High* are virtually junior soap opera in print. They appeal to the children because they seemingly mirror real life. Unfortunately it is a very pedestrian real life and with no scope for the possibilities of imaginative literature. This is a problem found in child reading across the board at the moment. Children growing up with the wide range of media available today, lack time and seem to be losing the attention span to tackle books that are more linguistically and intellectually demanding but more rewarding in the literary sense.

Ideally children grow up surrounded by adults, parents and teachers and librarians, who know about books and can point them in the right direction. Often the parents of the most disadvantaged black children cannot read themselves and are not familiar with what books are available. In these circumstances any adult who is concerned with the child, either teacher or librarian, has a great responsibility to forward the child's reading. Introducing the right book at the right time can make all the difference. This was borne out in all the surveys that we conducted. We found pupils from the same school choosing titles that had obviously been recommended to them by a teacher. Word of mouth and personal recommendation work for all children regardless of their background.

In conclusion, the child borrowers at the Johannesburg Public Library who read English as a second language, are a diverse group, representative of our country as a whole. All stages of development, from educated and sophisticated to severely disadvantaged, are found in our readers. Each branch reflects a different pattern of preferences and book selection policies must take this into account.



Context and culture

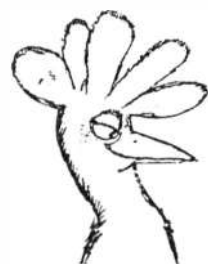
as a factor in black children's responses to books

thuli radebe

Introduction

The lack of a reading culture amongst black South African children (and especially amongst rural black children) is a cause for considerable concern to researchers, authors, library and information workers, teachers, publishers and parents. The theory is gaining currency that the basic problem lies with supplying black children with irrelevant books, books with settings and situations with which they cannot identify. This concern has become stronger with the advent of Model C schools where school librarians/media teachers and teachers are baffled by black children's preferences in terms of reading matter. Amongst the reasons which have been suggested as being responsible for this nonreading culture, is the issue of interaction between the cultural background depicted in the text and the cultural background of the reader. Hence the focus in this paper on *context* and *culture* and how they affect children's responses to books.

First, it is necessary that the two key concepts in this paper are defined, namely, context and culture. Such definitions are essential, as the issue of cultural background/cultural perspective stems from one particular interpretation of the concept of "culture".



Context

Barnhart and Barnhart (1979:448) define “context” in general as “the immediate environment; attendant circumstances or conditions; background”. After a review of general definitions of “context”, I have arrived at the definition which views context in children’s literature as the “setting, the environment, the socio-cultural background, the situation”. This definition would include the pictures and illustrations contained in the text, and is consistent with Pritchard’s view, which refers to the cultural perspective of the text (1990:291).

Culture

Also, although there are a number of general definitions of the term “culture”, two main contending approaches are evident.

The static approach

The first approach views culture as a static phenomenon which cannot change. According to this view of culture people are born into cultural categories that determine the way they are going to be moulded and will function throughout their lives. This understanding of culture sees blacks as a homogenous group with communal tendencies (Luthuli 1982), with uniform aspirations and values. Interestingly, black people’s aspirations are conceived as being related to gaining the ability to serve their own immediate communities and not the community at large.

The dynamic approach

The second approach views culture as a dynamic phenomenon. Thornton (1988:22) believes that culture is historical and changes over time, often in

relation to changes in society. Of interest is his view of culture as a resource which, “like other resources such as sunlight, energy, food, cannot belong exclusively to any particular individual or group of individuals”. He goes on to add that humans are not born with culture: it must be learned during the long process of education, socialisation, maturing and ageing, because humans need this culture in order to interact with each other in social life. In her paper on African mythology and South African juvenile literature, Töttemeyer (1989:393) expresses a preference for a definition which regards culture as a dynamic force which changes constantly rather than for a definition which declares culture a basis of division which remains fairly static.

The argument

At this stage, it is necessary that these two definitions of culture are linked to two arguments that have surfaced in the literature on the issue of context and culture as they impact on the reading interests of children.

The first point of view

The main point of view finds its roots in what I call cultural identity.

1. Cultural identity

Researchers such as Machet (1989), Maria (1989), Pritchard (1990) and Morrow (1992:251) have established a correlation between the cultural background of the reader and the cultural perspective of the text and the interplay between these two factors in the comprehension of a particular text.

These researchers believe that when people read they essentially bring background knowledge based on their “cultural schema” to a text and that background knowledge is perceived as assisting the reader in comprehending and interpreting a particular text. This suggests that unless the reader possesses some cultural background relevant or related to the text in hand, he will not be able to understand the story. A further generalisation arising out of the issue of “familiarity” is that readers will be more likely to enjoy and respond positively to books in which there are characters from their ethnic group or culture, and settings they can identify with, especially if these characters are recognisable as accurately representing personality attributes or values found in their culture. This generalisation has resulted in the claim that a child should be given literature with which she can identify from a cultural perspective; the settings and activities depicted must be recognisable in her daily surroundings. A further implication of course, is that rural children should be provided with books depicting rural settings in order that they can comprehend what they are reading. There is also the (unconscious) tendency to suggest that even urban black children recognise and identify with rural characters in rural settings and deprived backgrounds and enjoy reading books with such milieu. This whole analysis has made people who work with children very unsure and hesitant in supplying black children with leisure reading material.

Another important issue which is closely related to the foregoing argument is that of “own experience”:

2. Own experience

Nhlanhla suggests that “a black author will write about influx control, migratory labour, cholera, squatting ... all of which will be best understood by his own

people'' (1988:162). This of course implies that black authors will of necessity be conversant with all these situations.

Sikhosana (1993) demanded that ''the future curriculum should teach our children African values and norms. Our children must read books written by Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Aime Cesaire and Zeke Mphahlele among others instead of Shakespeare and TS Eliot, as has been the tradition. The setting of literature must be in Africa so that you do not have to imagine some London or New York''.

This assumption has its roots in the definition which views culture as a static entity that I referred to earlier. The foregoing argument summarises one view that has surfaced in the literature.

At this point I would like to move on to what I call:

The alternative or variant view

Another group of researchers assert that children's exposure to literature should not be restricted, but that they should be left alone to choose freely what appeals to them.

Bennett (1991) is concerned about the criticisms levelled against some books for being

too foreign, too different, too strange to be understood, to be successful with this or that child, on this or that kind of child, or age of child.

She claims to

have known children of rich and poor backgrounds whose skins were black, brown or white who have all read the same book and who all identified with the protagonists, who all enjoyed it and to all of whom the events, background and setting were foreign, strange and different – what counted was the perspective and the literary quality (Bennett 1991:73).

Hurst (1993) used traditional folktales, both African and European, in her study to test the idea that “children respond best (or only) to stories set within their own cultural milieu” and to test their responses to humour. Of importance to the argument in this paper is her conclusion that in one racially mixed class there was “no great difference” in the kind of incidents the different racial groups found funny (Hurst 1993:119). She concluded from the children’s responses to Hlakanyana, an African traditional folktale, that the cultural origin of the story had no relative effect on enjoyment of the story. She further suggested a cluster of other factors rather than simple cultural specificity, that operate to make a story appealing to children.

Leeb (1990:30) tested the general perceptions, regarding their lives, of children from the Natal Midlands farm schools. These children came from a squatter community, lived without any infrastructure for everyday life and their lives were insecure. Leeb reports how young children drew the houses they lived in but “embellished them with the things they wanted most – television aerials and steps” which they did not have. Older children are reported to have reproduced typical Natal Midlands farm houses, right down to the air bricks. As Leeb (1990:30) puts it, these children “drew their unattainable dreams”. It is interesting to note that they did not reproduce their squatter settlements. This challenges the principle of the familiar background appealing to children.

A contrast in reading interests and needs is suggested to exist between children from deprived backgrounds and those from more privileged backgrounds (Maria 1989:296). In response to that intimation, Edman (1967:40) and Tucker (1981:225) concur that the general interests of children from deprived backgrounds do not vary markedly from those of more privileged children. Edman (1967:40) claims that

they laugh at humorous situations, they understand tragic and disappointing ones, they can be led to enjoy rhyme and rhythm, stories of adventure, stories of animals, stories of real life.

Tucker (1981:222) asserts that the social background to the story has relatively little to do with its popularity among young readers. To support this theory he compares the writings of Leila Berg and Enid Blyton who, although writing from two different social backgrounds (working-class and middle-class respectively), both appeal to a large audience of all children to whom they offer something exciting. Support for this point of view also comes from Tucker's example of novels about naughty boys in preparatory schools, which sell very well even in France, a country without any tradition of preparatory school education at all.

Robinson and Weintraub (1973:90) discuss a study in which the sample of 597 included 515 working-class African Americans from large and small cities. Again the individuals in the sample chose stories and illustrations depicting middle-class characters and backgrounds. This finding contrasts with opinions often expressed about inner-city children, and about black children in South Africa, that familiar illustrations and social backgrounds are needed with which they can identify.

Rosenheim (1967:9) has expressed a grave concern about the way the "principle of familiarity – of *comfortable recognition*, has been overworked". Amongst his

concerns is the allegation that the child cannot be expected to show an interest in the unfamiliar, and that literature should make no demands that transcend the literal limits of his or her own experience. Rosenheim regards this argument as fragile, and he believes that the commonplace is the most unexciting object to the imagination.

Robinson and Weintraub (1973:90), Tucker (1981:225), Maria (1989:296), Diakiw (1990:297) and Bennett (1991:73) all agree that it is indeed very simpleminded to assume that working-class children will always prefer books set in familiar backgrounds and warn against being overconcerned with the issue of background information.

It is essential to take cognisance of Anderson's (in Maria 1989:297) warning regarding the issue of background knowledge. She argues that a child may possess the necessary and relevant background knowledge but may fail to call it up and use it as an aid to comprehending a text. He may have a rich fund of knowledge and yet lack the kind needed for a specific text, or have a misconception about one aspect of the topic that interferes with comprehension more than a lack of knowledge would. Even in groups of middle-class children with very similar backgrounds, variation in background knowledge is to be expected.

This group of researchers acknowledges, among other aspects, the universality of children's literature and that of their interests.

My own stand

At this stage, for those who have not discerned it, I confess my stand in this matter.

Firstly, I concur with and adopt the second definition of culture and I conclude therefore, that culture is with one wherever one is, that culture is part and parcel of one's growing-up, day-to-day experiences. It is concerned with the way one perceives the environment, it permeates the way one engages and interacts with the environment in order to survive.

Secondly, I identify with the group of researchers discussed in this paper, who caution against overworking the issue of familiarity in book selection for children and this I do on the grounds that generalisations cannot be made with regard to "familiarity".

Based upon the above arguments I refute the view that black children should be exposed only to what is perceived to be familiar to them. This is because we do not know what is familiar to every black child.

Having set out the two contending viewpoints; and having stated my own stand in the matter; before I draw conclusions and make suggestions I believe it will be useful to examine, very briefly, the value of exposing children to the unfamiliar in literature. This, of course, is incorporated in the broad benefits attached to exposing children to literature as discussed in the following section.

Value of literature for children

i. The issue of imagination

Many authors such as Harris (1970:22), Robinson (1973:100), Bamberger (1975:7-8), Spink (1989:36) and Norton (1991:2,18,22,24) agree that through

literature, children develop favourable attitudes to books which result in the broad understanding of their cultural heritage as well as those of others. As Norton (1991:2) and Diakiw (1990:297) put it, through the medium of the book, children get to enjoy an intriguing voyage as they follow past people's experiences crossing the oceans to discover new countries; they relive survival on isolated islands; they can speculate and fantasise about the future. As Diakiw (1990:297) puts it: stories can be a powerful way to transport students to distant countries with cultures and traditions far removed from their own. Delpit (in Morrow 1992:252) suggests that it is important to empower all children to go outside of their own immediate world with the ability to succeed.

Robertson (1991:60) advises that children should be exposed to the “unfamiliar” if we hope to widen their understanding of themselves and their world. The issue of imagination is of extreme importance – recently I had the honour of listening to Marguerite Poland and one thing she said lingers in my mind: “Imagination is like a little plant which needs to be (constantly) nurtured”. I strongly believe therefore, that if we subscribe to the principle of familiarity we are depriving black children of the opportunity to have their imagination stimulated and nourished.

ii. The issues of dreams and escape

An escape from depressing reality as well as the nurturing of a child's daydream can be effected in books (Harris 1970; Robinson 1973; Robertson 1991). This statement is relevant for South African children who are exposed to many traumatic situations such as violence and many other forms of abuse. For this reason they should be given the opportunity to escape and enjoy, even if only in fantasy, a world they dream of attaining one day.

iii. The issue of individuality

The issue of individuality and reading is crucial and applies to all children. It is important to nurture at an early age, by means which will include literature, individual interests as they manifest themselves in children. It is for this reason that I regard seriously the advice given by many authors, such as Harris (1970:24); Robinson and Weintraub (1973); Tucker (1986:3,210); and Brann (1992), that generalising about individual needs and interests in reading must be avoided at all costs. These researchers have identified variations in the types of material that different individuals from whatever cultural background find enjoyable.

Harris (1970), Robinson and Weintraub (1973) and Landy (1977) agree that we should be sensitive to each learner's pattern of strengths and weaknesses and they agree that individual differences are so evident that group studies are of little value in helping teachers meet the needs of a particular class. This is crucial especially now in South Africa when the focus in education is on acknowledging that each child is an individual in his or her own right.

Conclusions

As a way of introducing my conclusions I would like to pose a few questions. The FIRST question is:

If, for argument's sake, it is true that children will relate best to what is familiar in literature, what is a "familiar" setting for all black children in South Africa? I do not believe that anybody can describe it in one short, or even long sentence,

because black people in South Africa live in a variety of settings, in slums, ghettos, affluent suburbs, downtown, uptown, et cetera and have done so for years. What we need to appreciate is that each black adult or child is a product of his or her own personal experience. One of the most dangerous philosophical and academic traps is that of generalisation!

The dynamic approach to the definition of culture is very important for our understanding of what is familiar to black children, to what forms part of their cultural background. The point I am making is that the “cultural schema” or cultural background of a group cannot be assumed. That of each and every group must be researched thoroughly because no two communities are the same and nor do they have absolutely similar dynamics at play within them. The fact is, in spite of the political history of South Africa, black people display an interest in a very wide diversity of materials, a phenomenon which reinforces the fact that black people are not one homogenous group.

The SECOND question is similar to the first question but put differently to make another point:

What makes rural Zululand more familiar to a black child living in Scottsville (a Pietermaritzburg suburb) or Midrand than to a white child living in the same suburb?

I have observed that black children from urban and affluent backgrounds are expected to identify with and enjoy rural settings and life styles in literature. I do not rule out the need for an awareness of all situations, but I am against the tendency to impose situations on any group. The hypothesis seems to be that

generally black people do not belong in an urban setting and the attitude is that they need to be saved from the ominous urban setting by constantly reminding them “where they come from” which always seems to be rural anywhere. This of course has resulted in the tendency to assume people’s backgrounds to correspond unequivocally with colour.

It is commonly believed that (urban) blacks who have lost their base are to be pitied as they are hanging in the middle of a divide (vacuum) between urban and rural life, having lost their identity. Sadness is often expressed for black children who are raised in urban surroundings who miss out on the African caring and closely knit family structure which is falsely assumed to be the prerogative of the rural dweller.

These assumptions are false. The urban black child knows exactly who he or she is, having been born and raised in an urban setting. Such a black urban child probably has more in common with the urban child of another colour than with a rural black child. Generations of black children have been raised in urban surroundings and that is the milieu which is familiar to them. Price’s (1993:17) observation bears relevance to this point:

many of the children in the townships have never been out of the stifling environment of the city, they have no experience of the traditional way of life and they are far more sophisticated than many (graded readers) authors give them credit for.

Price further advises authors to genuinely take into account the changes in society and to study the modern urbanised youth, and not to generalise when it comes to the rural African child.

Although it *is* essential that people be aware of and identify with their history and those traditions and customs which shape their existence as normal and successful human beings, if an individual feels stifled by one tradition it should be remembered that it is acceptable to break away, because some traditions can be very repressive and can stifle progress.

The **THIRD** question is:

Why is it crucial for all children to be exposed to variety, to the unfamiliar? I believe that subscribing to the theory of “cultural schema” is locking children into categories from which they desperately need to be released. There is a need to avoid deprivation, to stimulate in every child maximum cognitive development and to allow exposure of the child to all valuable resources such as, in my view the “fantastic unfamiliar” background in literature.

Multiculturalism or the global perspective

We are inclined to be scared for black children that they will not be able to cope with the world outside of their own (for obvious old reasons) and it is for this reason that I briefly refer to the issue of “global perspective”:

If the argument is accepted that all people are different and come from different social backgrounds, it is still essential that children should be exposed to the unfamiliar very early in life. Evans (1987) confirms that children can deal with a global perspective earlier than it is normally presented. Diakiw (1990:296) quotes

a research study which showed that children aged between 10 and 13 are receptive to learning about people from other countries. He refers to a number of studies of primary school students in social studies programmes with a strong global education focus. It turns out that these students developed more positive attitudes not only toward themselves but also toward people from other countries.

To return to my questions, The FOURTH question is:

What will it take for us to accept that there IS a “South African culture” which has been developing for a while now? Are we avoiding this fact because we do not want to acknowledge the inclusiveness of this South African culture?

I recommend that we take cognisance of Tötemeyer’s proposal (1989:393) for a common Southern African cultural vision in juvenile literature which will transcend ethnicity and promote a national culture for the country as a whole instead of reinforcing ethnic consciousness which has been used to augment political biases.

What direction should we take?

In my attempt to address this question I will revisit some of the sections I have referred to already:

Own syndrome

The “own syndrome” (a term that I use to refer to the tendency to encourage, exclusively, own language and pictures which depict own people in familiar

surroundings and situations, for instance) should be discouraged at all costs. The “own” hypothesis is worn out and dated. It must be remembered that this “own” syndrome was forced on people, which caused both enforcer and victim to forget the universality of the human experience. I base my advice on my observation that this syndrome underpinned the principle of Fundamental Pedagogics which endorsed the Christian National Education (CNE) policy and the values it espoused. Enslin (1984:141) supports this observation by stating that this CNE policy served the purpose of justifying a separate and inferior schooling system for blacks. It is this policy which has led to restriction and deprivation resulting in “disadvantage” or “underpreparedness” (the monster which has manifested itself in all tertiary institutions and cannot be destroyed overnight if at all).

Sikhosana’s (1993) demand (referred to earlier) for our children to be exposed to books written by African authors such as Achebe and wa Thiongo is riddled with contradictions: Achebe is Nigerian, Wa Thiongo is Kenyan and the settings and cultural background in their books are as foreign to South African blacks as they are to anybody else who has not grown up in Nigeria or Kenya. Besides, the authors both refer to foreign lands in their books as they recount their colonial experiences and of course, having studied overseas, they talk about their foreign alma mater. I must emphasise that it is right for children to be exposed to African writers as much as they should be exposed to everything else in literature.

I would like to revisit Nhlanhla’s (1988) claim (referred to earlier) that a black author will write about influx control, migratory labour and so on ... and that these issues will be best understood by his or her own people. I agree that some of the black authors (not all) may well be conversant with these issues, but I

believe that it is arbitrary to assume that even they will want to write about such topics and just as arbitrary to assume that all these situations will be best understood by all and only by black people.

I find it stimulating that Diakiw (1990), a Canadian, praises the African folk-tales like *Mufaro's beautiful daughters*, *Anansi the spider* and others for making it possible for foreigners to explore what African cultures have in common with their own, reaffirming that people are more alike than they are different (1990: 297–298).

My suggestion, therefore, is that we should stop focusing on difference even at the level of researching cross-cultural issues; let us try something else and make an effort to target whatever similarities exist among us to find answers. The area of research in children's literature in South Africa needs to be strengthened and I believe that "multiculturalism" stands to offer us something.

Culture

The concept of culture is one of great concern to me because I believe that in many instances it has been exploited, even abused in order to justify deprivation. There is a grave need for an open and generous definition of culture which will allow everybody a broader and more inclusive view of life. It has become evident to me that if we blindly subscribe to the "familiarity" view point, we are not being realistic. Life is much more open and dynamic than we make it out to be.

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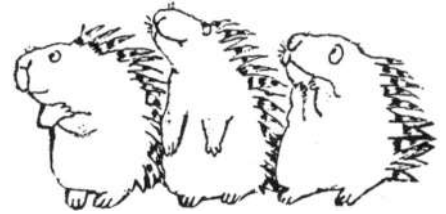
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Revolting rhymes:

humour as a subversive activity in
children's literature

lawrence gordon



A sense of humour

Over 50 years before Shakespeare conceived his first dramas, the French humorist Francois Rabelais proclaimed with remarkable insight that “*le rire est le propre de l’homme*”, thereby affirming his belief that laughter was a property peculiar to humankind. Laughter is an overt expression of mirth popularly associated with conceptions of humour. Laughter is also the source of popular misconceptions concerning humour because laughter is frequently a response that does not signify a joyous insight into the nature of humanity. Nevertheless, the so-called “sense of humour” is highly esteemed as an essential prerequisite for human survival amidst the pressures and demands of life in highly complex postindustrial societies.

Humour is a leveller that facilitates a social climate in which a shared experience allows human beings to bond in spite of their differences. Humour defuses tensions by providing a platform on which individuals preserve their own sanity whilst also cementing human relationships. A “sense of humour” is a highly valued personal and social asset in contemporary society for both enjoying life as well as coping with it. This standpoint is reinforced by the popular belief that humour implies insight into the human psyche because it stems from a sense of humanity that is the mark of a sympathetic response to the human condition.

Not surprisingly, a sense of humour is considered a highly desirable personal characteristic.

This desirability results in the common practice of confusing behavioural characteristics (eg repeated laughter) with the cognitive capacity to make humorous insights concerning the human condition. Furthermore, humour (like love) is associated with emotional warmth and understanding, and many people regard these qualities more highly than less emotive and more singular pursuits such as skill in abstract reasoning. Most people willingly admit to human frailties such as being impractical or unambitious or even unintelligent, but very few admit to lacking a sense of humour.

Humour and humanity

With a collective sense of satisfied anticipation, millions of children and young-at-heart adults have witnessed a recurring in-joke on the popular Star Trek television series over the past 25 years. The familiar scenario is that the human hero Captain Kirk (William Shatner) passes a humorous remark that puzzles the extraterrestrial super-intelligent Vulcan Captain Spock (Leonard Nimoy with elongated false ears). There is that customary pregnant silence as the joke falls flat, while the intellectually superior Spock looks quizzical, and finally mutters in confusion: “Humour – it is a difficult concept. It is not logical” (McCrone 1993:232).

This response induces conjugal warmth within the global village as electronic cave dwellers everywhere share yet another affirmation that being clever is not all

there is to life. Spock may be of sound moral fibre and a genius, **but** he is not human. He does not possess that magical “sense of humour” that virtually all human beings claim as a birthright. It is the latter quality that kindles a sense of brinkmanship that enables the vast Star Trek audience to feel comfortable with the outsider Spock’s unquestionably superior intellectual capabilities.

Emotional warmth is associated with what is commonly referred to as a “sense of humour”, and both are highly valued as “human” traits. In the same way as Spock’s alien origins are characterised by his inability to “see” the joke, there is also an implicit belief that our own humanity is somehow measured by the depth of our humorous insights. The mature person is one who can rise above the immediacies of personal problems, and “see the funny side”. A sense of humour is considered an important element of personal and social development as it allows the individual to cope with the human frailties of self and others.

Human frailty and humour are inextricable. It has been said almost to the point of cliché that: “To err is to be human”, and there seems to be a universal acknowledgement that human frailty is an acceptable and normal human characteristic. Certainly, it is written into Western belief systems that man is basically a humble sinner because he is human and not a god, and that the meek shall inherit the earth. The socially acceptable face of Western man’s self-image is founded on the Christian ethics of humility and tolerance. On the surface at least, this perspective traditionally aggrandises the virtues of modesty and concern for others, while deploring inordinate self preoccupation as manifested in the so-called “inflated ego”. An abiding defect usually attributed to the latter is a nonexistent sense of humour – perhaps the unkindest cut of all!

John Donne’s observation that: “No man is an island” is a central consideration in a social climate in which the development of a sense of humour is part of an

extended awareness of others in relation to ourselves. Concepts of humour are rooted in a process of identification with others as individuals interpret the nature of human behaviour. Human sympathy derives from empathy towards others, and humour is the result of perceptions derived from a contagion of feelings that have been referred to as “primitive passive sympathy” (Drever 1964:290). As such, humour is a qualitative response deriving from a state of “being human”. Humour is man’s humanity to man.

Defining humour

Precise and satisfying definitions of “humour” are hard to find. *The Concise Oxford dictionary* (1966:592), for example, uses rather unsatisfactory terms such as “facetiousness”, “comicality” and “jocose imagination”. It is more useful to follow the lead provided by the use of “humour” as a verb that implies the act of indulging or gratifying another’s pleasure. This gives an indication of the empathetic basis of humour that is so evident in the distinction made between the meanings of humour and wit as being primarily a difference between heart and head. Wit is generally regarded as a more cerebral, less sympathetic and therefore more detached mechanism. By contrast, humour is characterised as relying less on intelligent wordplay but more on the emotional well-being derived from insights into incongruencies in human behaviour.

The value of the distinction between humour and wit is also enlightening when considering allied terminology such as “comedy” or “farce”. These terms may be regarded as denoting forms or vehicles in which humour may appear as a device or mechanism. Therefore, for example, a critic may refer to the “lack of

genuine humour” in a “weak comedy” or “poorly contrived farce”. On the other hand, the mechanism of humour may be employed tellingly to heighten the impact of a tragedy, as for example in Shakespeare’s dramatic use of the gate-keeper scene in *Macbeth*. In a similar respect, the tragic atmosphere of *King Lear* is heightened by the sad humour in the old king’s ramblings. Humour has many faces but here it has the sigh of “*la dolce vita*”, the bitter sweetness of human frailties.

The use of humour in children’s literature is perhaps in most cases less sublime, but common threads can be identified. Authors using humour as a device in children’s literature usually derive a sense of “funniness” from an ability to empathise with their intended audience as receivers of textual communication. These insights deriving from “primitive passive sympathy” are the basis by which the author interprets the attitudes and cultural values of potential readers of the work. The author’s insights into the nature of human behaviour under certain conditions and in certain situations are reflected intrinsically in the treatment of aspects such as character, plot, theme and setting.

Humorous subversions

Literary tradition cannot be ignored. Authors of fiction write within the context of what Leavis once called “the great tradition”. This awareness of past and contemporary performance in the field extends to practising authors of children’s literature where the classic folktale also has a “great tradition”. Humour is also a vital ingredient of children’s books, but is a device used pervasively across the genres with the result that many of the more humorous children’s books are not

in fact categorised as “children’s humour”. In practice, the majority of books described as “children’s humour” are based on the “situation comedy” (eg the farmer and his wife exchange roles for the day), and the humour derives from the author’s treatment of the central dilemma. In recent times, the label of “humour” has become identified strongly with the sub-genre known in the literary circles as the “subverted text”. The appeal of this sub-genre to both adults and children has led to it rapidly becoming a well-patronised source of revenue in the children’s book trade.

The so-called “modulated” or subverted texts in children’s literature refer to manipulations of established literary models. Godwin (1991a:303) indicates that “modulation” refers to any such manipulations, whereas “subversion” refers to a “more radical overturning of prior text, meaning or generic convention”. This form of literary subversive activity is founded in the postmodernist tradition of reevaluating both function and form. The result is that the structure and function of the traditional tales are reformulated to varying degrees as part of the creative writing process. This involves a process of reconstruction and development of the tale, and is far more than merely a case of a stylistic or cosmetic updating of the text.

Reactions to textual humour are symptoms of pleasurable physiological release aroused by an insight that an unexpected turn of textual events has subverted the readers’ expectations. This may involve the use of unexpected wordplay, as in Garner’s “politically correct” perspectives of the emperor who was not essentially naked *per se* but merely endorsing a clothing-optional lifestyle. However, usually the unexpected textual events involve radical plot subversions such as in Roald Dahl’s *Revolting rhymes* where Red Riding Hood shoots the wolf, or in Anne Sharpe’s *Not so little Red Riding Hood* (Zipes 1993:324–327) where the heroine has a black belt in karate and flattens the wolf without ceremony.

The elementary basis of the humour in the subverted text lies in the irony perceived by the audience initiated to the original text prior to its subversion. In a sense, the effect on the reader is a sort of painless “future shock” with a smile. The events that are anticipated do not in fact transpire as the reader’s expectations are pleasurably subverted. Godwin (1991a:299) refers to this as irony perceived by an “inner circle” of readers who recognise textual incongruities in terms of the conventions established by a prior model.

An oft-quoted example is Roald Dahl’s undermining of the traditional Little Red Riding Hood plot conventions by having the far-from-innocent Miss Riding Hood use a lethal weapon to eliminate the wolf. Furthermore later in the anthology, the redoubtable Miss Hood, her appetite whetted by her first kill, demonstrates all the hallmarks of a psychopathic killer. She extends her subversive activities in new directions. Firstly she unhesitatingly eliminates another wolf who had been bothering the three little pigs, and secondly both figuratively and literally bags the last surviving pig as well.

Once more the maiden’s eyelid flickers.
She draws the pistol from her knickers.
Once more, she hits the vital spot,
And kills him with a single shot.

Pig, peeping through the window, stood
And yelled, ‘Well done, Miss Riding Hood!’

Ah Piglet, you must never trust
Young ladies from the upper crust.
For now, Miss Riding Hood, one notes,
Not only has *two* wolfskin coats,
But when she goes from place to place,
She has a PIGSKIN TRAVELLING CASE.
(Dahl 1982:47)

The politics of entitlement

With rather heavy academic licence, the phraseology used in the title of this paper borrows from two sources. The first and more conspicuous is “Revolting rhymes” drawn directly from the title of Dahl’s anthology of “twisted tales”, while the second concerns the reference to “humour as a subversive activity” found in the subtitle of this paper. This phrase is borrowed from the title of Postman and Weingartner’s radical sixties publication *Teaching as a subversive activity* in which the authors express their vehement criticism of the prevailing American teaching “establishment” and urge a more radical approach based on overturning traditional educational conventions. In many ways, this postmodernist desire to critically examine structures and functions rather than simply blindly accept past conventions out of reverence for their longevity is reflected in the subversive activities of the authors of subverted tales. This spirit is found rather pointedly in Dahl’s bland irreverence. It also resides in the greater subtlety of more thought-provoking and more innovative essays than Dahl’s within the sub-genre of the subverted classic children’s tale, such as for example in the works of Tomi Ungerer, and Philippe Dumas and Boris Moissard.

However, whatever may be said of the lack of subtlety and twisted logic of the content of Dahl’s book, there is no doubt that the title is a semantic *tour de force*. “Revolting” is popularly used to signify extreme distaste but may be granted a positive connotation when used colloquially with a humorous cue. Little encouragement is needed to understand the playfully conspiratorial inflections in phrases such as “How wickedly hilarious!” or “How delightfully revolting!”, both having very British nudge-nudge wink-wink cues to shared humour. In this sense, the term “revolting” probably accurately describes the popular perception of Dahl’s so-called “devilish” sense of black humour that combines elements of the macabre with an air of subversiveness.

However, there is more to the phrase “revolting rhymes” than the implication of a collection of stylishly distasteful humorous tales. “Revolting” derives from “revolt” that means to overturn or subvert, and describes what Dahl does in subverting traditional folktales to produce a humorous response from readers who find his plot details at odds with their conventional literary expectations. The reader is called upon to embrace the subversive activity by joining the “revolt” and taking pleasure in the unexpected. An intimate conspiracy is forged between author and reader with the aim of both having fun in bringing down the status quo which is after all fair game because it is a folktale that belongs to the people. This is a literary *toyi-toyi* with verbal toys.

A further point of irony in Dahl’s title is the use of the term “rhymes” that connotes a modest literary form of little intellectual significance, as used in the phrases: “nursery rhymes” or “rhymes for the times”. Irony rests in the fact that Dahl’s recasting of the classic tales cannot simply be dismissed as “rhymes” that some may find revolting. In essence, Dahl has modified the conventional plots to suit the times. Dahl’s Red Riding Hood is at first glance the modern woman, defending her honour and dealing uncompromisingly with the wolf. However, in Dahl’s very next story, *The Three little pigs*, the intrepid Miss Hood flatters to deceive, when she emerges as a seemingly assertive feminist role-model extending a handgun of friendship to the male (chauvinist?) pig who is destined to become her travel bag. These little macabre touches involve modern plot subversions that journalists would currently describe as “pure Hollywood”, as testimony of their populist appeal.

Dahl’s dialectic, in which textual conventions are undermined and new structures created, is generally aimed at arousing laughter while at the same time demonstrating a little heavy handedly that “crime does not pay”. The humour at the base of

these functions resides in Dahl's cheerful assault on the reader's textual expectations. This pleasurable enough process is made all the more painless by Quentin Blake's appropriate cartoon-style illustrations that clearly signpost the author's devilish intentions. Between them, Dahl and Blake succeed in removing all the tension from any future shocks within the text. The readers anticipate the "shocking" humour on the horizon.

Typecasting the subversive activities

The subverted tale has distinctive literary characteristics. The mechanisms of subversive activity in this subgenre can be classified in terms of the aspects that are subverted. The following categories pertain:

- (i) **plot** subversion in which the author alters plot elements as in Tomi Ungerer's inventive version in which Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf elope and find conjugal bliss;
- (ii) **character** subversion in which the humour resides in the fact that the personality of the characters has changed radically (such as Dahl's gun-toting Miss Hood), or the characters themselves are subverted (such as in Ahlberg & McNaughton's *Big bad pig* that gives sympathetic treatment to the three little wolves);
- (iii) **setting** subversion in which humour derives from a re-creation of the setting as in French's stylish updated account of *Snow White in New York*;
- (iv) **standpoint** subversion in which the main thrust of the humour stems from a changed viewpoint in the retelling of the story from a new angle, as in Scieszka's device in using A. Wolf as narrator in telling *The True story of the three little pigs*;

- (v) **theme** subversion in which the underlying theme of the tale is humorously subverted so that the thrust of the tale receives new meaning, as in the selected series of tales under the title *Rapunzel's revenge: fairy tales for feminists* that is self explanatory; and
- (vi) **style** subversion in which the literary style of the work is subverted to achieve a humorous effect as in James Finn Garner's *Politically correct bedtime stories* in which the pseudo-intellectual tone parodies the simplicity of the original versions of the classic tales (eg "Snow White and the seven vertically challenged men").

These mechanisms of subversive activity in children's literature are of course not mutually exclusive. For example, Scieszka's *The True story of the three little pigs by A. Wolf* employs a range of interesting plot, setting and theme subversions while being told from the Wolf's perspective. The publication also has a lively Runyonesque stylistic tone as befits a "hard luck" tale told by an imprisoned wolf indignantly insisting that he was "framed".

Similarly, Fiona French's *Snow White in New York* not only enjoys a downtown Manhattan setting, but also has interestingly understated plot and character innovations such as the wicked queen being a ruthless socialite and the seven vertically challenged men as comprising a jazz band who (in the spirit of the original tale) accept Snow White at face value and are instrumental in her instant success as a nightclub singer. The heroine's prince charming is the dashing New York Time's society page reporter who puts her on the front page, thereby igniting the ire of her explosive stepmother. The modernised plot details run true to theme, and the story ends with a wedding and a sunset. French's tale is subverted primarily on the level of setting (ie the modern concrete jungle replaces the traditional dark woods).

Dahl's "revolting rhymes" have an interesting modulation in the didactic literary style that ultimately effects a standpoint subversion. Dahl uses the aside to the audience as a feature of his informal literary style, taking readers into his confidence, and at times conspiring with them as to the fate of characters whom he intends to punish. Of Goldilocks, Dahl (1982:29) says:

his famous wicked little tale
Should never have been put on sale.
It is a mystery to me
Why loving parents cannot see
That this is actually a book
About a brazen little crook.
Had I the chance I wouldn't fail
To clap young Goldilocks in jail.

The eye of the beholder

The process of contextualisation is a focal concept in determining the nature of humour as the product of the reception dynamics of experiencing children's literature. The subverted text draws its sources of humour from the overturning of the expectations brought to the reading experience by the readers themselves.

The aetiology of the humorous reading experience is difficult to encapsulate in metacommunicational formulae. However, it may be safely assumed that humour (like beauty) is in the eye of the beholder. The reception of textual humour requires reading activity that enhances the hedonic or pleasure-oriented experience, and the phenomenon of humour is created as a product of the reading experience. Contextualisation is the key in a phenomenological process in which the active receiver "sees" the humour within the intrapersonal context of his or her own literary background and personal value system.

Three fundamental humour theories tend to be predominant. Firstly, the so-called superiority theory, typified by the German term “*schadenfreude*” (ie malicious glee), is generally based on the pleasure derived from the misfortune of others that brings a sense of security. Secondly, the so-called incongruity theories are based on the idea that humour stems from insights deriving from perceptions of unexpected phenomena. Thirdly, the so-called relief theories are chiefly Freudian in origin, and focus on the view that laughter affords a release of tension and has a cathartic effect that cleanses aggressive instincts.

Attention should also be given to reasons for the failure of receivers to see humour in texts obviously perceived by authors as “humorous”. Dahl’s subversions are viewed with horror by purists wishing to preserve the status quo, and leave others unsmiling for a variety of reasons. There is no doubt that the perception of humour (or lack of it) within the reading experience resides in the unique reception dynamics with which each reader encounters the text. For example, the sophisticated folktale specialist would immediately recognise Dahl’s version as a stylish eighties reworking of James Thurber’s shorter 1939 version in which Little Red “took an automatic out of her basket and shot the wolf dead” (Zipes 1993:229). But the derivativeness of the plot may not be the only reason Dahl’s version of *Little Red Riding Hood* has been seen as lacking in humour. Some regard the tale as being distasteful in the extreme for a variety of reasons, not the least being the unsympathetic treatment of Miss Hood or indeed the fact that the tale has been perceived as a monument to speciesism, insensitively perpetuated by Dahl. Nevertheless, *Little Red Riding Hood* has proved to be a remarkably adaptable folktale that has survived in many forms and with coats of many colours.

In Frank Yipes’ scholarly treatise on Red Riding Hood, many versions (some subversions) of this folktale are presented with varying plot resolutions, including

Tomi Ungerer's inventive version in which Little Red and the wolf elope and find conjugal bliss (Zipes 1993:261–4). Apart from the fact that this tale is species-friendly and affirms the concept of a “suspension of belief” as a dominant feature of the author-reader relationship in the “once-upon-a-time” context, it also imaginatively captures the whimsical air of French humour. One imagines that if Ungerer were asked to account for his tale's denouement, he would probably smile and say: “If a dog can laugh and a cow can jump over the moon, then surely a wolf can marry the girl of his dreams”.

A rhyme for all times

The survival of folktales through the ages is a fascinating phenomenon. There was a time when the almost uncontrollable drive towards automation seemed to threaten the very existence of print media. In the aftermath of publications by Lancaster and others concerning the looming “paperless society”, there was a spate of journal articles focusing on the imminent demise of the book. To some extent, a similar scenario pertains in respect of the classic tale that must endure the onslaughts of both intrinsic and extrinsic pressures.

Extrinsically, the so-called “media explosion” has threatened the textual basis of classic tales by placing them in a new audiovisual dimension through the growth of the film and videotape and audiotape industries. The trend, has been extended into an interactional dimension in which children may now use CD-ROM technology to participate in computer games based on the plots of the classic tales.

Intrinsically, modulations of many sorts have subversive effects on traditional aspects of classic tales. Not least among these are media intrusions such as the

“Disneyfication” of the classic tales. This has extended far beyond homely practices such as giving cute names to the Seven Dwarfs. It involves modifying plots to produce happy endings as in “The Little Mermaid”, and it involves tampering with the story to provide opportunities to include enough musical items to compile an LP for audio-disc or CD marketing as in “Beauty and the Beast”. We also have a generation of children who think that Captain Hook looks like Dustin Hoffmann, and that the genie in Alladin sounds like Robin Williams.

The unparalleled increase in the popularity of subverted folktales seems to beg the question as to whether this phenomenon threatens the survival of classic folktales. Purists who seek to preserve the integrity of the classic tales face an uphill struggle in the face of corporations driven by the profit motive. There is no doubt that the prospect of the quick dollar has made the classic children’s tale something of an endangered species. Nevertheless, the popular children’s text cannot be regarded in splendid isolation. The overwhelming reality of the market-oriented multimedia environment cannot be conveniently waved aside and labelled as “crass commercialism” from a position of moral high ground.

Certain facts are incontrovertible. The humorous subverted classic tale has gained strength from its appeal to adults as purveyors and purchasers of children’s literature. Likewise, children who grow up amidst a heritage of traditional “classic” tales do so in a social milieu in which change is regarded as a goal, and in which the printed page is generally a poor second to the “flickering screen”. The increasing sophistication of the children as “media-consumers” constitutes a power group that has placed radical new demands that affect the survival of traditional children’s tales.

Through all these pressures, the hardy classic tale appears to have adapted to the nature of this onslaught for a variety of reasons, not the least being that subverted tales owe their existence in no small measure to the popularity of the tales towards which the subversive activity is directed. Genre and subgenre are by definition juxtaposed like unidentical twins. The results have been witnessed in the assimilation of the subverted tale as an integral part of an ongoing dynamic literary tradition. In traditional or subverted forms, the classic children's tale is a rhyme for the times as well as a rhyme for all times.

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In search of Latin American identity:

the nonofficial story

cristina colombo



When adventuring into a literary text, the reader will always experience a deep emotion, like that of an encounter. For the results of that encounter, the reader as well as the text will be responsible.

We know that there is no single meaning of a text as if it had been closed in upon itself, or sealed at its writing. The meaning is provided by each reader applying her own reading approach and from her own personal history, and yet even so, this will not be the definitive meaning. When renewing our contact with a well-known text, we are always dazzled by a double discovery, of elements we can now extricate from the very entrails of the text and of our own discovering selves, which have been forged in time.

It is life that mediates between reader and text. Life is the great mediator. It guards the key to all text and in it begins the original reading. The reader knows what the signs of life are and discovers that the role of the texts is that of ratifying existence. To learn this is to mark the border between erudition and wisdom.

Language, as the incandescent matter of life, envelops us and makes us transcendent. We are created by language and to it we turn in order to create. Naming things

makes us share in an act of creation, contains us, measures our humanity while at the same time it gives us the unique invaluable opportunity to transcend the limits of our lot.

The opposite of language is its absence, where it also predominates. Language is both presence and absence. It also appears in silence because we are what we say and what we refrain from saying. Language and silence are the common space where man expands his essence and achieves his real stature. Therefore the text is there, with its language and its silences, to say or refrain from saying and, in silence, continue to say. When a writer chooses her words, she simultaneously commits herself by choosing her silences. It is a game of opposites leading to the ultimate sense of the text.

Every word I have uttered in my life is part of a public memory, outside me, but only those who can penetrate my silences will have reached my truth and most intimate secret. Where I come from, silence is a living presence, a compulsive actor of multiple roles and also a safe shelter, an alibi, a shameless accomplice, a forced exile. Inadvertently a culture appropriates a language and in doing so, even more inadvertently, appropriates its silences.

Silence, like language, has to do with power and also with identity because man is made in “otherness”. My conscience is forged in “otherness”. If “the other” has disappeared as a mental structure and boundaries have disappeared, everything turns on itself; forms return to matter and time to eternity, and man becomes a conscience expanding in infinity. In the void then, identity will only be a rhetorical concept; and in this way, identity is the product of intersubjectivity.

Books always speak to us of our relation with others. Consequently, they always speak of identity and power.

With respect to all this, what do books for children and adolescents say to us and what do they refrain from saying? Beyond the unrepeatable personal adventures of the hero, his spirit forged in sadness or humour, love, impudence, irreverence, pain, transgression or courage, is it possible to find a thread to lead us through the intricate landscape of a Latin American identity? And furthermore, is there such an identity?

To many Latin Americans this issue of identity is a question yet to be settled. With its own proper name invented by the French in the 18th century as the starting point of an hegemonic political project, Latin American identity is still at the centre of passionate controversy.

At this point it is then valid to insist on our former question: Beyond historical data and geographic fatality is it possible to find a real formative process of a Latin American identity? And in that case, does children's and young adults' literature represent an important contribution to that process?

The political vacuum caused by the withdrawal of the Spanish authorities, the weakness of the institutions and the uneducated masses without any civil rights of their own gave rise to internal strife and to the eventual concentration of an all-embracing power in the hands of autocracies of different types. Thus, this unrestrained exercise of power by petty tyrants and the habitual occurrence of libertarian revolutions which, in most cases, surpassed in cruelty the despotic rulers they had overthrown, became a phenomenon of continental characteristics.

The subject of authoritarianism is recurrent in Latin American children's literature. *The Honourable prison*, by Lyll Becerra de Jenkins, was awarded the Scott O'Dell prize for the best historical novel. It is a first person story, taking place in the fifties, told by Martha, the daughter of a journalist known for his courageous editorials against the dictator of his country, Colombia.

Neither threats nor bribes can silence the brave man who is finally confined, with his family, in an abandoned house near a military base, in the Andes. The way in which the whole group must strive against boredom, hunger and fear; the dignity with which they endure humiliation inflicted by their wardens is described in a text full of deep insight and emotion.

From the very beginning a series of visual and auditive images creates the appropriate setting within which the rites of daily violence are displayed:

People emerge from the buildings. Theaters and cafés begin to close. Though it is still early the panic preceding curfew descends over the city. "Taxi, taxi," shout a couple holding a child, but the cars passing them ignore shouts and signs. The military jeeps have begun to patrol the streets. Two officers jump out of a police car and there are soldiers taking their stand all along the avenue, their rifles threatening the hurrying crowds. It's a day like any other.¹

The time of despotism is a suspended time. Man remains defenseless, in the open; perceptions alter and even habitual sounds disappear.

Suddenly I realize that the night enveloping us has lost its noises. No children run in the garden, nor can their voices, like excited bells, be heard at their last game before they've gone to bed. Nor the meowing of cats or the chirping of crickets or the far-away music from radios. The police whistles and their shouts of "Halt" and even the silence of fear have deafened us against all other sounds.²

Soon, for Martha's family the moment of decision arrives. The no longer sustainable clandestinity in which they live turns exile into the only possible way out.

But the choice of a future destiny is not an easy one. The answer to Martha's question: "Where shall we go, mum?" beyond reflecting a cruel reality seems to parody the most stereotyped Latin American fiction:

"That's what your Dad and I were talking about the other night. He explained it can't be Venezuela because of Pérez Geménez, or Paraguay because of General Stroessner, or Cuba because of Batista. It can't be Haiti or Guatemala. And naturally, we can't go to the Dominican Republic because of Trujillo. So I don't know, Martha, but your father will tell us, tonight for sure."³

All these names are real. This was Latin America in the fifties. A number of countries treated as private property by feudal lords in office for lengthy periods of time and whose only political agenda, at the best of times, was to enjoy the sensuality of power.

In *The Honourable prison*, crime, torture and persecution mark the days of a regime whose schizophrenic nature helps to create a fictional world of its own:

"I remember what my father said the other day" – Martha says – "to go by what is published under censorship, this is an ineffable happy country: beauty contests, football games, religious processions; all doubtless useful information to cover up the daily assassinations and disappearances."⁴

In 1978, under the military process, Argentina hosted the Football World Cup and the paraphernalia around this event took the country to the front pages shifting the attention from the fratricidal war that, in those days, was staining with blood many Argentinian homes.

The Honourable prison is not only the story of the heroic resistance of a family; it also offers a thorough picture of the different circumstances around dictatorial processes all over the world.

In *Language and ideology in children's fiction*, by John Stephens,⁵ the author claims that, "Tyranny is not just a political phenomenon, but also social and cultural". In this respect, *The Honourable prison* discloses the intricate network of human behaviour that makes that phenomenon possible: duplicity, submission, cruelty, moral stupour, opportunism and fear.

This, in turn, leads us to the problem of good and evil that cannot be considered as a question between two irreducible categories only but that also includes a whole range of nuances which in their inter-relationship create a space of hybridism where the real battle must take place.

Manichaeism, the poisonous foundation of absolute power, is a system of exclusions. Manichaeism denies otherness its ontological existence. Within its structure, the opponent is an enemy that must be destroyed:

All those against the government must live in either the terror of being killed or of being jailed and tortured.⁶

Thus treason and heroism become concepts lacking all content, sheer points of view, valid only to the antagonistic positions that support them and to which they, in turn, refer.

In the unrestrained madness of a dictatorship, human behaviour is judged only in positions of extreme moral tension:

“I remembered what my father said one night in our town house when he discovered he was losing friends on account of his editorials against the dictator”: “Some call me a traitor. Here you are either a hero or a traitor. Our fellow countrymen don’t understand moderation.”⁷

And then:

A memory comes to mind: that of Enrique Sarmiento, the young twenty-two-year-old student who was detained after making a speech against the dictator and became a national hero. He talked to himself in jail. The other prisoners heard him argue, laugh, call out to his fiancée “Isabel, I’ve brought you a carnation for your hair” and “Where are we going tonight?” “He’s gone mad,” the guards said. At night he used to recite poems by Garcia Lorca and Pablo Neruda. Even on his way to the prison yard where he would be executed, he kept up the illusion that he was surrounded by his loved ones and talked to them. “I’ll remain a human being to the very end,” he had scratched with a nail on the walls of his cell.⁸

After several months of imprisonment and suffering, a revolution breaks out and the tyrant is overthrown. But, in the history of the country, the uprising is only one in a long series. Thus a feeling of hopelessness prevails:

Along the Avenue of the Liberator, men and women marched arm in arm singing the national anthem. A man standing on the steps of the equestrian statue of Bolivar gesticulated as he improvised a speech. The crowd surrounding him applauded and waved small flags. “This is hysteria,” said Dr. Camacho. This nonsense has been going on for a week. How much longer will freedom last: And what for?⁹

It is here, near the end of the book that we find precise doubts as to the renaissance traits of a new political process based on an exacerbated division between friends and foes.

Anyway, denunciation suffers from an overcharacterisation of the bad guys. The tyrant’s men, who only five years before were held as the hope of a whole nation

have turned into drunkards, lascivious murderers, torturers, masturbators and rapists whose wives are good-for-nothing women dressed like whores. In the end, the book extols the fight for freedom and dignity. Beyond any contingency or aberrant behavior, resistance to any kind of absolute power, up to the limit of heroism, is endowed with a trans-historical worth. The inability to find the key to a civilised way of life of mutual respect and to a democratic debate reveals the existence of a society infected by a totalitarianism of a nihilistic kind. The neutralising and in its terminal phase, the annihilation of the adversary have distinguished Latin American revolutionary methodology until recently.

A revolution is also the historical event around which the story of *Tonico and the state secret* by A Diaz de Moraes, is focused. An uprising takes place somewhere in South America. Very soon legalists and rebels get involved in a fierce struggle for power. The insurgents have the support of Tonico's gang. Tonico is appointed as "liason agent: and in that position he will prove very helpful to the cause".

The story lacks the insight of *The Honourable prison* but it has a realistic pretension and a clear ideology marked by class struggle. The revolution flourishes in the streets but it is in the semantic field where it becomes really appealing and wins the most committed support.

Listen to the following dialogue between Tonico and his friend Ze:

"The revolution? What's that? I've never heard of it."

"The revolution is ... well, there's a dragon that kills people and devours everything and sends what's left by ship to the ends of the world. You can't see the dragon because he breaks into lots of pieces which then become men with the heads of grasshoppers with guns and submachine guns."

“And is that the revolution?”

“Certainly not! The revolution is when a guitar starts playing and everyone goes to fight the dragon. All that’s missing is the red airplane; then the dragon is frightened and turns into tiny pieces. You pick up the bits and throw them into the San Juan bonfire and then you send the ashes to the end of the world with a message for the owner of the dragon: The days of the dragon are over. The gang, too, is the revolution and we fight with slings.

In his enthusiasm, Ze got to his feet, made as if he was shooting with a sling and said: “I too have a sling and I throw a stone at the dragon’s head and he dies in bits and then I go with the gang and burn him and then jump over the bonfire and fall on the other side and nobody will jump like me.”¹⁰

It is hard to imagine anybody resisting the fascination of such an intense romanticism of hallucinating characteristics.

As a matter of fact, Tonico’s allegory is a synthesis of a longer account in the same mythical, religious terms used by a mysterious character, “older than the world”, appearing at the beginning of the book. The story epitomises the fight between good and evil as unique, extreme positions – once more Manichaeism as an implied ideology – and it will be Tonico’s obligatory referent to which he will return time after time, distorting facts through an a-historical and surrealist transcendence. The darkest nuances of autocratic behavior are ever present in Latin American children’s literature like a leitmotiv that cunningly and wickedly pervades simple human stories with its ominous presence.

In *Lightning strikes* by Vilma Areas, the story of the conflicting end of Veronica’s childhood, it is Joao, an intimate friend of the girl’s father, who has endured torture. The mentioning of this fact alongside the transference, by Joao,

of certain divine attributes to a sweet smelling golden orange, source of all comfort and redemption, renders an experience of great emotive power:

“When I was a kid I was furious with God. That business about him seeing me all the time, even in the bathroom, you know.”

“But because of that fury I spent all day thinking about God, and trying to discover something that was totally mine, with nothing between that something and myself.”

“One lovely afternoon I was at the kitchen door sucking an orange. A marvellous orange, golden, round. First, I played with it; it had an irregular skin, some parts were rough, others so smooth. Then I began to smell the orange very slowly, imagining how sweet it would be inside, a bit cold, imagining its smell, slightly sour. Finally I peeled the orange and began to suck it. It was such an enormous pleasure, and I felt so happy that I thought, this orange is mine, and this pleasure is mine too. Nothing can come between this orange and me. Nothing, not even God.”

“Oh, Joao, What a lovely story! Why don’t you write it?”

“Maybe I will some day. And you know what? When life is difficult or painful I think about that orange and ...

When I was in jail, when they tortured me, I thought about that orange. It grew and grew ...”

Suddenly I shivered. “Joao, I said, don’t you think you may have put that orange in God’s place?”¹¹

Once again politics and power become decisive in *My friend the painter*, by Lygia Bojunga Nunes, (Brazil).¹² The author, who was awarded the Hans Christian Andersen Medal in 1982, is renowned as a defender of freedom and dignity in works that denounce fundamentalisms of all sorts.

My friend the painter, is about the friendship between a boy and an artist. The latter’s suicide makes the protagonist ponder over the feelings and values underlying

human behaviour. The painter's involvement in the political life of his country brings upon him imprisonment and the loss of his beloved. Nothing will ever be the same again. The impossibility of love and the freedom to express himself politically, denied by an all embracing power, deeply hinder his creative will. Thus, the subtle balance between art, love and politics, based on the closest links, breaks, and the artist chooses his own death as a final exile.

In the process of transforming his experience of the misery of the world into literature, Bojunga Nunes has developed a technique of estrangement. The delicate connection between realism and fantasy, in a style bordering on magic realism, is achieved in different ways: oneiric experiences, metafiction and the materialisation of concepts in an appealing and effective imagery: the button to button up ideas or the thought preventing sewing of a cock's brain. Bojunga Nunes puts forward a multiple and enriching perceptive field, the decoding of which, by means of a permanent exercise, will finally enable us to reach reality in its most meaningful content.

In *Kike*, by Hilda Perera, a celebrated Cuban writer living in Miami, the author renders her rich experience of exile in a story full of feeling and understanding. *Kike* is an emotive first person narration by an eight-year-old Cuban boy who is sent to Miami with his brother and little cousins in a first wave of exiles.

The parents' departure from the island suffers a delay and this event will be of great consequence for the children. Kike will have to endure, in turn, a bitter uprooting, his grandfather's insanity, the separation from the rest of his family and neglect on the side of an American couple that accepts him only to obtain a government subsidy.

Filthiness, hunger and loneliness will also haunt Kike, in spite of the foster homes and the goodwill of a society, nevertheless racist and biased, that feels powerless vis-à-vis the influx of undesired refugees.

Little by little, Kike's early, happy unconcern gives place to a full awareness of his painful condition. His friendship with Osceola, an Indian of the Micosuki tribe, exiles in their own land, reveals a new vision of the world to him and enhances with different nuances his "white" reading of reality.

Eventually Kike enjoys the happiness he has long been looking for in the heart of another American family, but then, the unwanted meeting with his parents, after years of separation is the cause of more grief and a poignant recognition of his split identity.

In the end, it is at the side of his biological parents, through an enormous and courageous effort of mutual support and understanding that Kike will be able to reverse the grievous process of physical and spiritual distress that all exiles provoke and find his own significant space amidst solidarity and love:

I am 27. I am in Cayo Hueso. I've come with a group of volunteers to meet the ships arriving from Cuba, from the port of Mariel, all jammed with people. The ships dock and the Cubans jump ashore. Some kneel and kiss the ground. They look like shadows. Disoriented, sallow, hungry. They don't know what will become of them. They don't know when they will again see the children, parents, and brothers and sisters they left behind in Cuba. All they have are the clothes they are wearing. But they fall into lines and march. They march before me, these men, women, children, haggard old people, immigrants without a country. I feel I too am a child alone, marching with them fifteen years ago.

I get a lump in my throat. I would like to tell them that we have demonstrated in the streets of Miami for them to be admitted, that everyone who could afford it has hired

a boat or mortgaged his house if necessary to come and meet them. That we have formed committees and organizations to collect food, medicines, clothes. But I can't. I can't. Words won't come out. I can only stretch out my arm and place it on the head of a child, perhaps, like me, without parents, and I say "Welcome, brothers!"¹³

Exile is also the only way out for Angelica, a little stork, the protagonist of an ingenious, homonymous book, by the previously mentioned Brazilian author, Bojunga Nunes.¹⁴ Angelica learns the truth about how babies are born and from that moment on she refuses to submit to her family's insistence on sustaining the ancient myth, known the worldover.

Unable to base her life on a lie and mad at her father's refusal to let her go, Angelica suffers, torn between her own present unhappiness and the sorrow she would cause her family if she disclosed the truth. In a Gandhi-like mode of pacifist resistance, Angelica chooses an inner exile as the last refuge for her distressed soul. Going back decidedly into the past, getting younger and younger, Angelica is about to disappear into her own prebirth egg when her father agrees to her going away. Thus Angelica emigrates in search of a place of her own.

Once in Brazil she will get to know Puerto, and they will fall in love. It is with him and other peculiarly charming people that Angelica will engage in an artistic project (the staging of a play that tells her own story). In turn, this common effort will help to demystify and overcome unequal power relationships so deeply rooted among men.

The underworld of poverty is also a major subject in Latin American children's literature. The unredeemed conditions of crowds of illiterate outcasts living in

ghettos and usually falling prey to violence and crime have frequently found a place in fiction.

The Adventures of a street urchin, by Julia Mercedes Castilla is the story of two boys, who, having been abandoned by their own parents are obliged to roam the streets in search of a living.

The daily life of Joaquin and Armando, with its sadness and joy, its moments of danger, tenderness and despair include a wide range of experiences where happiness rests on friendship and freedom and survival depend on work and art:

“Pretend you are ill,” Joaquin whispered to Armando. He stretched and relaxed his body and looked as if he was hanging from a wall; he even went pale under the muck that covered his face. The gentleman took a few coins from his coat and shared them out between the two boys.¹⁵

It is in this daily successful acting that pride and mutual admiration help to draw paradigms of redemption:

“Good job, Joaquin.”

“You didn’t do too badly, mate, we’re becoming professionals ...”¹⁶

Many are the enemies that the two boys must learn to face: the sporadic rain that confines them to inaction, the gangs whose violence they must endure and the permanently and urgent presence of hunger. But Joaquin and Armando are not alone. God and Pingo Pingo, Joaquin’s invisible friend are two instances of the same miracle the two boys need to avoid the daily dangers of their precarious life. Pingo Pingo shares, admonishes and helps; he offers comfort, hope, courage and advice. He is a confidant, psychologist, a friend, a pal.

Pingo Pingo is an alter ego in a parallel ethic dimension; he fixes limits to the street amorality of Joaquin and Armando's real world:

Pingo Pingo: "What's this? Drinking and smoking? Behave yourself, Joaquin."

Joaquin: "We're having some fun. Fair, isn't it?"

Pingo Pingo: "Yes, but ..."

Joaquin: "Don't preach at me, help me. What are you waiting for?"¹⁷

The gloomy style in the description of violence and dereliction in the boys' lives emphasises the desolate side of this aesthetics of destitution:

Armando: "When you are small, people give you money. Ma sent me out to beg, she pricked me and hit me for me to scream so people felt pity. Sometimes she scratched me with a knife for blood to come out so I could bring home more money."¹⁸

Joaquin and Armando will complete a true ordeal through which their friendship will be strengthened. Imprisonment, the proximity of death, kidnapping and separation are some of the hardships they will have to undergo but in spite of that neither a fixed job nor a safe shelter seems alluring enough to them. In the anarchic childhood of Joaquin and Armando, poverty, homelessness and unemployment are legitimised by the freedom they imply.

By the end of the book, Pingo Pingo appears to restart the dialogue with conscience and otherness:

At eleven that night, Joaquin and Armando found themselves in the street again, with the sky for a roof. They looked wistfully at the house which had been their home for a week.

"We'll come back and visit," said Joaquin. "Maybe they'll let us stay here from time to time for a day or two. Or maybe they'll let us come back and also go out."

Pingo Pingo cut in then:

Pingo Pingo: "Sure they will. You can't become a prince overnight."

Joaquin: "Don't mock, Pingo. Oh, well, with you for a friend we've nothing to worry about."

Pingo Pingo: "I don't know. I may get tired. You fag me out. See the mess I got into."

Joaquin: "Now don't you say you are no longer my friend."

Pingo Pingo: "How could I not be? I'd be bored to death."¹⁹

The book ends with a reassuring message in a hostile world, hopeful but naive, given the naked facts that show how often street gamins fall victim to crime, prostitution and drugs long before adulthood. In *Cuentatrapos* by the Chilean author Victor Carvajal, the eight stories of the book depict different social problems with poverty as a common trigger. In this other kind of violence and while under an autocratic regime, it is possible to suffer still more deprivation: layoffs, eviction, hunger and further still, the eventual loss of freedom and life are hazardous factors causing lack of safety and fear. But even in times of want it is still possible to retain some dignity. Matilde is having a baby in the middle of an eviction and she refuses the help of a policeman, representative of an order both arbitrary and violent. Solidarity also crosses the desolate landscape of poverty like a hopeful bird. A group of friends make illegal, electrical connections to help those who cannot afford these indispensable services. The use of poetic language softens the effects of an encounter with a subject that does not fall within the reader's daily range of experience and adds a melodramatic touch.

The following is part of a monologue by a shoeshine boy who has left school to support his family:

“In the shiny point of my customer’s shoe I read the words that my teacher’s hand draws on the blackboard, how she places them nicely one by one till she has a complete sentences. Like clouds in the sky. Like little trees and shrubs in bloom because maybe that is how the flowers and bees make their language and the birds can read there because the flowers write them letters full of perfume.”²⁰

The deep contrast between the seriousness of the facts that the stories disclose and the election of an exalting aesthetics demands a thorough intellectual effort to close the gap between literature and reality, lest the formal structure of the text damage its verisimilitude and the understanding of the underlying ideology while exempting the reader from all commitment.

In the work of the Argentinian author Maria Elena Walsh, “highly commended” by IBBY in 1994, the principal subject is language. Her poetry, songs and stories for children and adults appeared in a country that up to the ’80s was characterised by its state of subjection to an oppressive social and political order.

Walsh introduces nonsense and the absurd into the Argentinian Literature to disrupt the order of discourse. Her linguistic disobedience and her semantic audacity are irreplaceable tools used to denounce the rules in force and the society that makes them.

The texts disclose the real idiosyncrasy of nonsense: a “metacultural”²¹ phenomenon that creates an alternative reality with a time and a space of its own. Walsh pierces the armour of logic and common sense, epistemological pillars of reality; frees words from their referents and thus brings forth our own liberation.

Hers is a joyful literature that going beyond any “semantic truth or falsehood”²², provides not only musicality and pleasure but also the basis for a critical and transgressive reading of facts.

She fights her ideological battle in the world of the absurd where her iconoclastic work shakes the intellectual foundations of power by means of poetry, humour and play.

Walsh speaks in a mild colloquial tone, with a demystifying language of unexpected turns: The ambiguity of a text that condemns arbitrariness and correction, a poetry achieved through sheer sonority or a nonlinear discourse with unusual and multiple points of view.

*Manuelita la tortuga*²³ tells the story of the tortoise Manuelita who, in order to keep the affection of her beloved, swims the Atlantic to have her wrinkles removed in Paris. The surgery is a success but her journey takes so long that she arrives home looking as old as she did when she left.

The little tortoise’s effort beyond measure, her antiheroic condition, her naïveté have become deeply attached to the Argentinian spirit and Manuelita is often sung in public gatherings, in the celebratory style of a hymn.

In Walsh’s world, the characters become intensely appealing when from the privacy of sleepers in their nightclothes they disclose their fragile and flagrant humanity. The sun, the wind, monkeys, toads, kings, cats, policemen, dogs, queens, mice, colonels and ants are frequently forgetful, they easily get lost or desperate or

drunk, they naively disclose their ambitions and wishes, they criticise, complain and demand, they snore, sneeze and cough and they die out of fear, love or just bad luck.

During the military process, Walsh raised her voice at the risk of her own life, against censorship and other forms of oppression that had reduced the country to the state of a “kindergarden” and its citizens to mere subjects under an absolute power.

To all Argentinians then, Maria Elena Walsh is an obligatory ethic referent. Without grandiloquent speeches or revolutionary manifestos, only through humour and poetry, denouncing intolerance and authoritarianism she has taught us that it is possible “to recompose the world on the basis of benevolence, charity and peace”.

Argentinian authors have found their own singular way of expression faced with the outstanding events that took place in our country in the past decades: the civil war in the '70s that led us into the so-called “Military Process” and the Malvinas War.

It is only natural that a literature predominantly fantastic would resort to allegory when speaking about subjects so dear and painful to all of us.

Otroso, by Graciela Montes,²⁴ tells the story of a group of adolescents who build an underground secret refuge in response to the clear threats of a gang. The story begins with the removal of a kitchen floor tile and ends with an

intricate network of tunnels and galleries: Otroso, a space of freedom won from the arrogance of a violent and unfriendly way of life that will be overcome in the end.

After the last battle is fought in the wet entrails of this territory, the hopeful reverse of an oppressive reality, after punishment has been inflicted and expiation achieved, Otroso, its cycle completed, closes, keeping in its heart, like a living flower, the assurance of an eternal human commitment to freedom.

In 1976, *Un Elefante ocupa mucho espacio*, by Elsa Bornemann,²⁵ was included in the IBBY Honour List. A year later, the Military Process banned the book and accused the author of ideological indoctrination. Finally, with the arrival of democracy in 1983, the book was republished achieving a great success.

Un Elefante ocupa mucho espacio speaks of justice, freedom, equality, common action in pursuit of better life conditions and love. Only a haughty, paranoid government could have seen subversive traits in these deeply human stories. In 1988, the same author published *Help*, a series of horror stories, thus beginning a period in which this genre became most popular with thousands of books being sold.

I am really persuaded that it is in these horror stories that the real ghosts which have been haunting recent Argentinian history appear: cruelty, sadism, disappearances, kidnappings, terrorism, panic, complicity, desolation and death with frequent references to reality:

Soon there was hardly a family in the place who had not lost one of their children. It was only then when the older people stopped thinking that tragedy was something that

only happened to others and understood that nobody is free from terror when that terror – arrogantly, the offshoot of pitiless crass stupidity – settles over their own land.²⁶

It is meaningful that one of the very few stories about those who disappeared during the Military Process was again included in a book of love, humour and horror stories, also by Bornemann.²⁷ In Sudaquia (a pejorative term for South America) an adopted girl, daughter of a couple who disappeared in the course of a civil war, meets her twin by chance and this event leads to a series of conflicting situations.

Anyway, these decontextualised stories without of any explicit frame of reference fulfil only partially a cathartic function of recognition and acceptance. I think that our children's and youth literature is still missing a story like *The Official story*, which won the Oscar for the best foreign film in 1986, by means of which we Argentinians might overcome our historical past and question our individual and collective conscience to find out who we really are.

As regards Malvinas only one book has been published till now, *The Deserter*, by Marcelo Eckerman.²⁸ The book is about an Argentinian soldier who deserts from battle together with a Gurkha. A first approach to the book is that of an interesting postmodern, mass mediatic reading of the subject with video-clip techniques, though deprived of all deep feelings that would allow any emotional engagement on the part of the reader. We have by now paid thorough attention to some of the most renowned Latin American authors and to their most relevant works. At the beginning of this paper we contemplated the possibility that Latin American children's and youth literature could throw light on the

polemic problem of identity. The voices of our authors rise, like a living and obstinate memory against autocratic power and the spiritual and material destitution it provokes. They remind us that the authoritarian impulse is always latent and that it is necessary to fight the battle for freedom day after day.

In the continental fashion that has always marked the political phenomena in our land, a democratic process, that reaches many countries of Latin America is taking place. Although with great difficulty and hesitation, men are moving forwards in the only direction possible, to reach a state of development which may guarantee a dignified living within everybody's reach. To achieve this my people have both the will and the vitality that have so often blossomed in our children's literature, among others, in the shape of gigantic trees bursting out of the entrails of great cities.²⁹ Meanwhile, in this short time we have shared an honourable prison, poverty, marginality, exile, derelection and grief. In the darkest hours of hopelessness we have not been alone. The impulse of love has sprung up: solidarity, friendship and familiar links turned into a moral imperative are natural havens in the long night of Latin American indigency.

From this vital substance, as from a prodigious source, our identity flows, and children's and youth literature, in the manner of an unofficial story, bear testimony to it. From this complex Latin American literature, the weakest echoes, almost whispers, for ever remain the portentous voice of truth.

Notes

1 Lyll Becerra de Jenkins: *Prison de honor*. Editorial Norma, Colombia, 1989.

2 *ibid.*, 27.

3 *ibid.*, 27.

- 4 *ibid.*, 32.
- 5 John Stephens: *Language and ideology in children's fiction*, Longman, London, 1992, 115.
- 6 Becerra de Jenkins, *op. cit.*, 32.
- 7 *ibid.*, 285.
- 8 *ibid.*, 246.
- 9 *ibid.*, 288.
- 10 A. Dias de Moraes: *Tonico y el Secreto de Estado*. SM, Barco de Vapor, Madrid, 1990, 123–124.
- 11 Vilma Areas: *A Golpes de Relampago*. Libros del Quirquincho, Buenos Aires, 1991, 51–52.
- 12 Lygia Bojunga Nunes: *Mi Amigo el Pintor*, Editorial Norma, Colombia, 1989.
- 13 Hilda Perera: *Kike*. SM, Barco de Vapor, Madrid, 1990, 121–122–123.
- 14 Lygia Bojunga Nunes: *Angelica*. Editorial Norma, Colombia, 1991.
- 15 Julia Mercedes Castilla: *Aventuras de un Nino en la Calle*. Editorial Norma, Colombia, 1990, 12.
- 16 *ibid.*, 12.
- 17 *ibid.*, 73.
- 18 *ibid.*, 67.
- 19 *ibid.*, 191–192.
- 20 Victor Carvajal: *Cuentatrapos*. SM, Barco de Vapor, Madrid 1991, 50.
- 21 Ilse A. Luraschi – Kay Sibbald: *Maria Elena Walsh o el Desafio de la Limitacion*. Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1993, 66.
- 22 *ibid.*, 70.
- 23 Maria Elena Walsh: *El reino del reves*. Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1980, 59.
- 24 Graciela Montes: *Otroso*. Alfaguara, Madrid, 1991.
- 25 Elsa Bornemann: *Un elefante ocupa mucho espacio*. Ediciones Librerias Fausto, Buenos Aires, 1985.
- 26 Elsa Bornemann: *Socorro*. Rei Argentina, Buenos Aires, 1988, 87.
- 27 Elsa Bornemann: *Socorro*. Rei Argentina, Buenos Aires, 1988, 87.
- 28 Marcelo Eckhardt: *El Deserter*. Editorial Quipu, Buenos Aires, 1994.
- 29 Graciela Cabal: *Barbapedro*. Libros del Quirquincho, Buenos Aires, 1989. Graciela Montes: *Y el Arbol Siguió Cresciendo*. Libros Del Quirquincho, Buenos Aires, 1989.

Children's literature in Turkey

serpil ural



A dominant theme that I realised would be running through this conference, is “being multicultural”, and I said to myself, “What can be more multicultural than Turkey: a country, which because of its location in the world, at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, is committed to being multicultural?”

A country which, for centuries has been affected both by Europe and by Asia; by those who were going from East to West or from West to East. They all have left their traces. A nation that is built on the remains of various civilisations dating back to 2000 BC: Hittites, Assyrians, Urartaeans, Phrygians, Tracians, Lydians, Persians, Ionians, Romans, Byzantines, Mongols, Seljuks and Ottomans. Their reminiscences have formed a highly diverse and unique culture. What can be more multicultural?

This variety of cultures, this co-existence of differences has, certainly, affected all fields of life in Turkey. Naturally, children's literature is also a reflection of this unique atmosphere.

Let me give a short history of children's literature in Turkey before going on to the present situation, which, I believe, is more of interest to you all.

The history of Turkish children's books dates back to the early 18th century. The first examples were mainly instructional and, mostly by using poetry, taught children how to behave. In the mid-19th century, translations of international children's literature, like *Gulliver's travels*, Jules Verne's novels, et cetera, started to appear.

The beginning of the 20th century was a time of transition which ended with a major change: the establishment of a new state, the Republic of Turkey. In other words, starting with the year 1923, which is the date of the founding of our Republic, Turkey began to experience an era of renewal which your country, South Africa, is now undergoing.

"Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator" said Robert Kennedy in one of his addresses. How right he was. Looking over the first years of our Republic, one sees a lot of changes that were made to better living conditions which meant progress. One has to admit, also, that they were very brave changes, indeed.

The founder of our Republic, set out to institute many changes which, eventually, had positive consequences. One of these changes, which is of particular interest to our subject here today, is the change of alphabet in 1928. Before the Republic, Arabic letters were used in Turkey. Ataturk replaced them with the Latin alphabet which made reading and writing easier for everyone, plus Turkey could now link easily with the literature of the Western world. Nationwide public education courses followed this change of alphabet, so that illiteracy could be overcome.

In children's literature, the years following this change of alphabet, was a period of rewriting earlier publications using the new letters. New works started to appear in the late 1930s.

Changing the alphabet was not the only factor that affected children's literature in Turkey. It was a state policy to develop children's literature. Consequently, famous authors of the New Republic and poets of the day, made numerous contributions to this field. They were trying to convey the principles of the Republic to the new generation.

Turkish children were lucky to have a policy-maker that cared for them. "Children are important. They will shape our future" said the founder of our Republic and its first president, MK Ataturk, and proclaimed the date of the first parliamentary session (April 23, 1920) to be a "Children's Day". Turkey is the first country in the world to have had such a special day, celebrated as a national day every year, for her children.

As a result of the new policies affecting children's literature, there was a boom in the number of books for children published in the 1940s and 1950s. The generation that lived through the changing of the alphabet and those that were educated in schools that were set up after the founding of the Republic, held office in positions where decisions were made. Children's magazines, encyclopaedias for children, comics and picture books started to appear and grew in numbers. Samples of oral literature and folktales were collected and published.

Nineteen seventy-nine was the International Year of the Child. It focused attention on children's literature. Along with numerous new publications and several awards in this field, conferences, seminars, and panel discussions were organised and people interested in children's literature got together to talk about matters of common interest.

Unfortunately the following years were not as favourable as the year 1979 for children's literature in Turkey. The development of television, new channels with so many cartoons for children and the introduction of VCR systems drew attention away from books. Just when many qualified authors and illustrators had begun to create good books for children and when the number of publishers for children's books had increased, the number of consumers decreased considerably. The effects of economic bottlenecks and the high rise in paper prices also contributed to these negative developments.

At present, Turkey is a country with a population of almost 60 million people. It is a young nation, as 42 percent of its population comprises children and young people under the age of 17 years. This means over 25 million potential consumers for the children's book market.

However, it is an unfortunate fact that books are not among the list of priorities of most of these potential consumers. An average of 700 different titles are published annually and each is published as a print run of 2000, 3000 or 5000 copies. Only the Ministries of Culture and of Education publish 10 or 15 thousand copies of children's books.

The development of technology and of internationalism motivated Turkish publishers to improve the quality of their products. They now have to compete with other countries' books at international fairs. Also, their consumer group in Turkey is now travelling more and are exposed to books on foreign markets. This means they can see the differences in quality and in content. At the same time, authentic works are required for the international market: children's books written and illustrated by Turkish authors and artists. Consequently there are now very high quality children's books published by Turkish publishers.

Picture books, story books, novels and fairy tales rank first among the different types of children's books published in Turkey. Roughly speaking, about one third of these are translations. Translated books are mostly the classics like Grimm's tales, Andersen's tales and Jules Verne's novels. Publishers are still in favour of translations simply for economic reasons: getting the colour separations from foreign publishers and only having to translate the text means lower costs. In addition these books have been tried and tested over the years. They always sell. Therefore it is safer to publish these instead of works by new local authors and illustrators whose works have not been tested. "Will it sell well?" is always a question on publishers' minds.

On the other hand, the number of qualified authors and illustrators of children's books is rapidly increasing in Turkey. This development is the consequence of the following:

- the public's increasing consciousness about the importance of children's books;
- an increase in the number of publishing houses that call for books written and illustrated by local authors and artists
- an increase in the number of art schools that include book illustrating courses in their curriculum.

The authors and illustrators of children's books in Turkey have various problems. A major one is that of royalties. What the publishers pay to these people is never high enough to make a living. Therefore, writing and illustrating children's books is always an "on the side occupation" for them. Another problem is the limiting expectations and demands of publishers who do not know enough about the specific requirements of a children's book.

“What concerns everyone, can only be resolved by everyone” is a quotation from Friedrich Durenmatt. This could apply to the situation and to the problems our authors and illustrators are facing. To tackle the problems of royalties and uneducated publishers, authors, illustrators and all others concerned are coming together in Turkey to find ways of reaching solutions. An Association of Children’s Publications has finally been officially formed. Its objective is to promote the quality of children’s literature in Turkey and to protect the rights of those involved in the field of children’s books. In 1986, the Ministry of Culture formed several professional organisations that act as related legal bodies to protect the copyrights of authors and artists working in various fields.

On the other hand, various government organisations and NGOs have started public training programmes to educate young parents, mainly in the rural areas, so that they will include children’s books among their priorities. What I hope and foresee will follow, is a training course to raise the level of understanding of publishers.

A new attitude towards education, which is still very textbook oriented, is developing. A new system that will emphasise the use of libraries and books other than textbooks, is slowly being introduced to replace the present system.

All of the above are positive developments that are taking place in the field of children’s books in Turkey. Although the present picture with its small figure for book sales, is not a very bright one, personally, I am hopeful as I look toward the future. Things may not progress at the pace I would like them to, but things are moving in the right direction; that is, to better and more books on the Turkish market.

When I entered this field in 1979 with my first picture book, even the concept of books for preschool children was not as widely accepted as it now is. When I was first confronted with the question “Are there many authors and illustrators in Turkey who work on children’s books?”, the fingers of my two hands were more than enough to count the number. Now, I am not even familiar with all of them. Nor do I know all of those who have won international recognition in various competitions. These are all very encouraging developments.

I hope that this brief history and explanation have given you an idea about the present state of children’s books in Turkey. To further your knowledge on this subject, I recommend that you look at the original works of a few of our illustrators.



Children in the Spanish Civil War

marisol dorao

The Spanish Civil War

There are many books about memories of the war written by those who lived it, although most of them refer to the postwar period.

Josefina Aldecoa has a very interesting testimony titled *Children of the war*, in which she collects the experiences in the war by some of her friends, now very well-known writers, to whom she refers as the “generation of the 50s”, the generation of the war.

Those children had been born in the period between 1925 and 1928, more or less, and at the time of the war were eight, nine, and 10 years old: “the age of the conscious childhood”, to use her own words.

But to be able to understand why these children felt impelled to write about their experiences during the war, I think it is important to analyse, even if it is superficially, the causes and general atmosphere of the Spanish Civil War.

Many books have been written about the war itself, but only a few have tried to disentangle the causes that made a country divide into two antagonist groups. I have not chosen a Spanish author because, in my opinion, a foreigner would write in a more dispassionate way. Gerald Brennan has lived in Spain a long enough time to acquire both love and knowledge of this country, and this is why I have chosen his book *The Spanish labyrinth* to try to present the facts that made the war inevitable. He starts by describing the situation in which Spain was left after the last king, Alfonso XIII was sent into exile.

The elections of the Constituent Corts gave an enormous majority to the Republicans and their Socialist allies. But, whilst the Socialists presented a compact Left group, the Republicans themselves were split into two sections, Left and Right. The fall of the monarchy had made the right wing Republicans the party of the Conservative Republicanism: all over the country the middle and lower-middle classes who were tired of the king and had little love either for the Army or the Church, voted for them.

The Left Republican parties contained a large number of intellectuals (among which the famous “generation of 98”): doctors, lawyers, and university professors who had received a magnificent education at the Institucion Libre de Ensenanza.

The first Government of the Republic, however, included members of all Republican parties. The Republic had come in as a reaction against the Dictatorship and the Monarchy, both strongly supported by the Church, so, during the recent elections, the Republic had deliberately identified the cause of the Monarchy with that of the Church. The working classes then considered the Church as their mortal enemy, and dozens of churches and convents were destroyed, especially in Andalusia.

Although the first President of the Republic, Don Niceto Alcalá Zamora, was an Andalusian landowner, the main error of the Republic was to ignore the importance of the land and the land workers, the “campesinos”. That is why, although in 1932 the new Spanish Republic had consolidated itself in the eyes of Europe, and Spain had ceased to be the country of the Black Legend, only two years after this, in a wretched hamlet in the province of Cadiz, called Casas Viejas (“old houses”), an old anarchist known as Seisdedos (“six fingers”) organised a party armed with sticks and shotguns and attacked the barracks of the Civil Guard. It is important to bear in mind that the inhabitants of Casas Viejas, as all the field labourers on these great latifundia, were miserably poor and ignorant, which explains their audacity and the impossibility for them to measure the importance of their action.

It was not long before troops were on the move through the whole province. Seisdedos and his followers retired to their houses, where, refusing to surrender, a siege began: their houses were set on fire and 25 people, including Seisdedos, were killed.

To many historians and researchers, this was the real beginning of the Spanish Civil War. A professor of Anthropology at Indiana University (USA), Jerome M Mintz, has written a very well documented book about it. In *The Anarchists of Casa Viejas*, he explains that, although the insurrection of January 1933 momentarily spurred the government’s agrarian reform programme, the efforts were short lived and the end results, minimal. In July 1935, the land reform programme of the Republic soon stagnated because of legal snarls, landlord protest and lack of energy and initiative. Large states were made virtually invulnerable to expropriation, and land reform came to a standstill.

So, on 17 July 1936, three and a half years after the uprising at Casas Viejas, (the hamlet is now a village and has changed its name to that of Benalup de Sidonia) the Spanish Civil War began. Immediately a purge started of those identified with the Republic and the Left. The blood-bath quickly reached out to include all those “with ideas”: Socialists and Republicans, and also anarchists who were known for their strong opinions and their actions.

The rest is already known: the garrisons of Spanish Morocco were taken by the troops of general Franco, and moorish troops were flown across to the mainland and solidified the rebels’ hold on Andalusia. The whole country would be split in two: the Blue Zone (right wing) and the Red Zone (left wing).

Children in the war

Josefina Aldecoa, in the book mentioned above, writes about the generation of writers whose testimony we now have. There must have been many others who could not express their ideas through the written word, but very likely, their experiences must have been very similar. These children came from different parts of Spain (North, South, etc) and belonged to different sections of society, but circumstances seemed to have made them alike, and their reaction to the war was very similar. As Josefina points out in the prologue:

In the different towns and villages, in one or other zone of the conflict, these “children of the war” lived the same experience; an experience that we have never forgotten, and that, somehow, had a deep influence on us all.

Although each wrote about the things that they were especially attracted to, there are some recurrent themes which affected all of them:

- ★ Freedom
- ★ Religion
- ★ Social injustice
- ★ The awakening of sexuality.

Freedom

Except for those who lost members of the family, or friends, the time of the war was a period of freedom: there were no rigid hours for meals, for lessons, or for bed. The grown-ups seemed to have forgotten all notions of discipline. Familiar life deviated its attention from domestic themes and fixed it on what was happening outside. In fact, most of the time, they seemed to have forgotten the children ... except in the moments of the bombing, when the main question, every day, was “Where are the children?”.

Josefina Aldecoa points out in the prologue of her book, that they, the children of the war, matured very quickly during the war, precisely because the grown-ups ceased to watch over them.

The children had left the atmosphere of protection in which they had been living, and felt free and happy amongst fear and ruins.

We children, were always somewhere else. We were wandering through the streets, unguarded, uncared for, looking for unexploded bombs and bullets, treasuring pieces of shrapnel ... queueing for potatoes, begging the soldiers for pieces of bread ...

As a matter of fact, many a child died after having found an unexploded bomb among the ruins; many saw, for the first time, a corpse abandoned on the debris.

In *My cousin Rafael*, Julio, the protagonist, whose family is spending the summer in a village near Segovia (like many other families from Madrid), is asked by her aunt:

“Are you longing to go back to Madrid?

Yes ...

I am sure you must miss Madrid”.

“Madrid” meant to go back to normal life. And the boy remembered that, in normal life, he never went out by himself; that, after school, he used to sit at the balcony and watch the sun go down. That, on Sundays, he was taken to the cinema by one of the servants. And that, apart from his sisters, he did not have a single friend. No, he did not want to go back to Madrid, he rather stayed in the war, which, for him, meant freedom and company.

Because of this possibility of going everywhere, Julio receives the greatest shock of his life: his first encounter with death. Climbing the mountain, in the sierra, looking for bullets and bombs, he finds a swarm of ants, and following them, there was a dark form lying by one of the pine trees. A strong, penetrating smell, unknown to him, was brought by the wind. He did not see much: he rather guessed. Part of the grass was charred, and, from behind the tree, a pair of legs were showing, almost burned, with the boots still on. But he knew there was a corpse behind them, and, unable to stop crying, he ran down the mountain like the wind. It took him a long time to forget the vision of that dead man, and he never told his family.

Carmen Martin Gaité writes about a trip to Burgos from Salamanca, with her father and her uncle, during the war. Her cousin, also a girl of 13, like her, was

going too. Carmen remembers the excitement of going to a hotel for the first time in their lives, and sharing a room with her cousin: such a thing would have been unthinkable in peacetime. The grown-ups, in the other room, were speaking about the problem which brought them there, and did not pay any attention to them.

Our happiness was based on the fact that we had been left alone, they had not even told us to put the light off, or to shut the window, because they had their own problems. Our foolish happiness was fed on their sorrow. But we did not care.

The two girls, unguarded, left the hotel at night, just for the pleasure of going round the streets by themselves. The streets were full of soldiers, and of strange women they had never seen before, and military songs were heard. They returned to the hotel quite soon, without the grown-ups suspecting anything, and the next morning, they went down to breakfast, full of remorse, but immensely happy.

Jose Fernandez Comerzana used to wander through his home town, Murcia, by himself, for the first time in his life. Then one day he saw a group of people, going in the direction of the State prison, an old castle. They shouted, and seemed to be very excited. The child followed them, and, terrified, impotent, watched the execution of 10 prisoners, who had been acquitted the day before by the Popular Tribunal, but would not be acquitted by the mobs. Terrified, he saw one on his neighbours, Ezequiel, and ran to him, his eyes blinded by tears, unable to speak. The old man tried to console him:

“What are you doing here, child? This is not for your eyes. You shouldn’t be allowed to run free and see this.”

It was the ugly face of Revolution. It was the price I had to pay for my freedom.

Madrid-born Maria Asunción Echage wrote a book about her childhood with her numerous relatives, and the war was part of it:

The war had started, without us realising what was really happening around us, a warm morning, in July.

She also remembers their unexperienced and unexpected freedom in the times of the war:

Being a child in a war, in spite of what people think, has many advantages. One of them was to be able to wander unmolested throughout a town which had been bombed, and was partially destroyed, and full of misery, unafraid of being imprisoned, or questioned, or killed. Nobody cared for us.

The day after the end of the war, her sense of freedom disappeared.

As soon as the school opens, you shall start with your lessons. A new life began.

Religion

The first time José Fernandez Comerzana realised that there was a religion for the poor and a religion for the rich, was when he had to go to the Parish Church to be prepared for First Communion. “The poor children were at one side and we were at the other side”, he remembers.

That was in the time before the war. Later on, when the revolution burst out, he would think of this again, when he sees the rage of the poor children burning the Churches and destroying the statues of the saints.

He is unable to understand, and nobody is able to explain it to him. Neither is he able to admit why he is mainly told about punishment and the everlasting fire of hell, rather than of love.

On the first Christmas of the war, José's mother hesitates about preparing the crib, a traditional Spanish custom. At last she decides to, but her neighbour does not dare: she tells her children that to prepare the crib is a sin, and José is scandalised by her hypocrisy. Why, he thinks, is this a sin now, and was it a good custom before the war?

On the whole, Christmas has not changed much, except that there is no Midnight Mass, and that the words of the traditional Christmas songs have been altered to suit the moment.

But the injustice that he had always found incomprehensible, was that of the Three Wise Men. If they were reputed to be saints and come from Heaven, why was it that the richest children received the best toys? The war gave him the answer, through the confidence of one of his friends, and he was happy to be able to separate this tradition from religion: there are no Wise Men, but the parents bought the presents.

José is also surprised, and somehow scandalised, by the presence of the Moorish troops in the war. In the blue zone, too, the zone of the religious people.

Hadn't we fought a war, many centuries ago, to expel them from Spain, unless they were converted?

His parents find it very difficult to explain, and he is not convinced by the story about those Moors, who had come to help their Spanish brothers, and who, in their own way, also believed in God.

Julio, in *My cousin Rafael*, connects praying with the nights in the shelter, when the smaller children are already asleep. Every night, at that time, a voice started to pray. Julio wonders about the result of these prayers. Is God on their side or on the side of the others? Because the others may pray, too, but the war cannot be won by both parties.

Social injustice

Carmen Martin Gaité has two good friends, two confidants of her secret dreams and of her fantasies: one was the son of the Lieutenant Commander, who belonged to the same social class as her, and who accompanied her to the air shelter; the other was the daughter of a couple of Republican teachers who were in jail because of their ideas. Carmen could never understand this: she knew they were good people, so why would they not be accepted by her family?

Josefina Aldecoa, in *Historia de una maestra*, writes about the mentality of the teachers, who were mostly Republicans, convinced that the Republic was going to make great reforms to teaching.

Nevertheless, although she did not accept something that she could not understand, she never played with them at the same time, and she never told the one about the other.

The Three Wise Kings, who on the sixth of January give presents to the children, were another source of problems for both José, the boy from Murcia, and Celia, a little girl from Madrid. José, as we have seen before, prior to being told by a school mate that the presents really came from the parents, could not really understand why some children received more expensive presents than others. And when he was told that it depended on how good they have been during the year, he understood even less.

A tremendous injustice it was because I had been a good boy throughout the whole year, and the Kings, coming from Heaven, must have been aware of it. Or else they were not well organised.

Celia, in *Celia lo que dice*, by Elena Fortún, has a very interesting conversation with King Balthazar on her balcony. She asks him why is it that she has so many toys, more than she has asked for, and Solita, the daughter of the janitor, has none. King Balthazar tells her that rich children must share their presents with the poor, and she immediately sends some of her toys to Solita. When Celia tells the story to her parents, they do not know how to react, because the girl is convinced that it has not been a dream, and insists on Solita keeping the toys. It must be said that Elena Fortún was a Republican, and always did her best to minimise social differences.

José Dominguez Comerzana discovered the social differences when he went to the parish Church to be prepared for Holy Communion and sees the separation between rich and poor children.

After all, the uprising of Casas Viejas, which had marked the beginning of the Civil War, took place after many years of social differences, when the “campesinos” decided that they would not endure it any longer.

The Awakening of the senses

The fact that the grown-ups were worried and did not pay much attention to the children, left them uninformed about the changes that were occurring in their bodies and in their minds. But perhaps it was, in a way, an advantage, because they found out everything by themselves, without being misinformed or misguided. Here we can recall the words of Carmen Martin Gaité, in the episode mentioned above: “Our happiness was based in the fact that we had been left alone.”

After the first year of the war, the situation in Madrid had become unbearable, and those who had relatives, or friends, in other towns, went there, asking for shelter, in exchange for material help. There were also “official” shelters. José Dominguez Comerzana describes one of them:

There were two near my house: one under the ruins of our Parish Church and the other in a convent near by. It was a kind of concentration camp, without vigilance, of people from all the parts of Spain. They were dirty, sick, hungry, wrapped in old dirty blankets, or even in newspapers. Nobody looked after them.

Those who had relatives, or friends, or even friends of friends, used to try to send them to private houses, to spare them from all this misery. Don Ezequiel, the neighbour of the Fernandez Comerzana, had sent to his neighbours a young girl from Madrid, Tina. She was 15 and a widow: her husband, an 18-year-old boy, had been killed in Madrid. She was supposed to help the priest’s servant, but, as they had no room for her there, she went to live with José’s family.

“You will have to sleep in the children’s room” – my mother said, excusing herself for not being able to offer her a private room.

“This is the eldest” and she pointed at me.

“Never mind”. Tina said, “They are so young!”

That same night, José slept, for the first time in his life, near a young female. He never touched her, but he never had peace again. He had discovered a new feeling, about which no one had spoken, clearly, to him before.

All at once I understood what was written in my book of religion about the dangers of the flesh. Nobody had been able to explain that to me, who was incessantly asking. Now I understood ... and although I had been told that it was a sin, I liked it.

Carmen Martin Gaité relates her first “sexual experiences” in the air shelters.

“It is impossible to breath here!” said the grown ups, and some children cried, but I did not feel any claustrophobia: my friend was holding me by the hand and I felt safe. Much safer than with my parents. My friend was the son of a Lieutenant Commander who lived on the second floor, who was all the time nervously shouting commands to everybody in the shelter. And nobody listened.

I did not care. I was quite happy, almost embraced by him, both isolated from the rest of the people.

“Don’t you think it is nice here?” he said. And I agreed.

The Lieutenant Commander used to take home all the images of saints he could steal from the churches, and from the streets, and the house was filling up with religious treasures. Carmen found the house fascinating, and the boy used to invite her to have a look each time a new item was introduced. Not only because it was interesting to see them there, but because it was an occasion to be together without grown-ups around.

“Will you come tonight?” he said. “I’ll call you when my parents are out, and just Lucinda, the maid, is at home”.

Lucinda was the protector of their furtive love. A 10-year love, forbidden but undiscovered.

Juan Garcia Hortelano discovered sexuality when he was sent to his grandmother's house to avoid the danger of bombing: grandmother had a bigger and safer air shelter. His cousin told him that Concha, the maid, used to go to the top of the house when everybody went down to the shelter, and basked in the sun completely nude. So, whenever there was an air raid, they used to escape unnoticed and went upstairs to have a look at Concha's body, "Chocolate Flesh" they used to call her. Looking was the only thing they could do, because when Concha discovered them one day, she was furious and sent them down, under the threat of telling their grandmother.

Once the war ended, things became calm again, in every sense, but Juan could never forget the "experience".

Tina returned to Madrid, and was killed not long after, during an air raid. She did not want to stay in the house any longer, although it was safer, because she understood the effect her presence had on the boy.

When the war ended, in 1933, life changed completely in Spain, for the worse for some, for the better for some others.

But this is another story, as Rudyard Kipling would have said.

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Multiculturalism in children's literature

adie wagner

This paper is based on issues as addressed in my book, *Sandile and the silver city* (1984) – the story about a little Zulu boy, who came from the far green hills, to look for his father in the City of Gold (Johannesburg) and then his experiences in a squatter camp. The story of Sandile stems from the author's involvement in an aid programme in the two big squatter camps on the West Rand, Doornkop and Swanieville.

Sandile's story is universal – a story addressing the basic and most important factors in the life of every child worldwide. All quotations are from the said book. The introduction of children to different worlds of culture, is not new.

In South African literature though, it has become the latest trend. Numerous publications on educational matters, such as introducing the African child to a more Westernised civilisation in the form of the white school, the museum and the art gallery, suddenly appeared on our bookshelves.

In other words, the African child gets introduced to what, in the past, used to be an almost all white affair. What about the white child and his knowledge of so-called "black-life"? Or, to make it more universal, the question may be asked: "Do other children live the same way?"

The mere fact that families, similar to his or her own, survive and live elsewhere, could be totally remote. Although television brings worlds closer, nothing can have a greater impact than the good story. Through the word, feelings, fears and dreams can become universal.

Although the story of Sandile is an African story, I tried to address a few of the most important factors in the life of the universal child.

The first and major issue addressed, and a very real one in the South African context, is the migrant worker. In this case a father coming from afar to earn a living in the City of Gold. The missing father figure features strongly throughout the story.

“My father says the sand-dumps are the trouble,” said the boy. “It’s where they dig out the gold. The gold brings people from far away to this place. They have to stay in the hostels. That’s the trouble” (23).

The father, through his child Sandile, the breaking up of family life, a safe home and also the constant insecurity caused by this, become very real to each and every child reading the book – exactly what the white child or all children worldwide would experience when there is no father figure. Throughout the story, the search for his father and the accompanying emotions play a dominant role.

Everyday Sandile thought about his father. His father had been away for a long time. Every time he asked, his mother promised that they would go and look for him (1)

and elsewhere,



His heart lurched when he thought of his father. Babomkhulu Sipho had promised that he would go and look for his father. He saw again in his mind how his mother had taken Babomkhulu Sipho's hands before he had left for work. "You must bring Zondi with you," she had said (29).

He did not understand why his heart was only half-glad this morning. But he knew that when his father came the hurt would be gone and the half-glad would become glad all over (42).

The second issue, that of having a home (strong family ties), is also clearly addressed.

How could the day become good? The day was only good at your own house. When Gogo woke you up. When the fire burned brightly. When you walked together with the other children to school. Why did his father not run home? A person could not stay here. Only your own place was good. Then the day would become good (8).

Sipho put his big bag down on the floor. He picked up Sandile just as he was, rolled up in the blankets. Then he began to sing. He sang the song of the great hills and the birds. Sandile saw his home. Gogo was stirring the pots and his heart felt warm (31).

But for the first time he felt happy again. He had the same joy in his heart as when he was at home with Gogo, sitting on the little bench before the front door. When she held his hand and told him a story of the ancestors. That's how happy he was now (25-26).

Animals in general and an own pet in particular is an issue all children can relate to. The misconception, more often than not from the white world, is the patronising view that poorer people should not own pets or cannot care for them.

The story begins with Sandile and his grandmother's dog.

Sandile bent down and ran his hand over Thasi's warm black body. Although the dog actually belonged to his grandmother, Sandile loved him very much (1).

There were always some of them that were sick, and when the good doctor came the children took the animals so that she could look at them. They were washed in a big bath of medicine because the doctor said the ticks made the animals sick and the children could also catch the fever (32).

Throughout the story there are references to the singing birds, their horse and goats back home and most of all his longing for and eventual acquiring of his own pet.

I also try to show children that people care about animals.

Today is Tuesday. This is the day for the animal doctor. She will be coming past very soon. Sandile wondered whether the animal doctor looked like the one they had gone to see long ago. They had walked far and the sick horse had been nearly dead when at last they got to the doctor. But the good man had made the horse well (15).

Mamkhulu Lindiwe looked at Sandile. "Do you see the animal doctor?" she asked. "The people did not want to go to her at first. They were scared she would take the animals away and then not come back again. But just look now. Everyone understands now. She helps them. Over there, far away at the hospital, she looks after the animals, and when they are better they come back again in the white truck" (16).

His heart was afraid. And when his heart was so afraid, then he longed for a dog. That was when he most wanted a dog. He would hug him tightly and he knew that when he held the dog's warm body everything would get better (32-33).

Two last issues of the utmost importance are LOVE and HOPE. No child can survive without love and the universal child needs hope more than anything else today.

It was nice when Babomkhulu Sipho was at home. He always lifted Sandile up high, and if Sandile closed his eyes he imagined it was his own father (33).

Your wife and your child are good. These are the things that make your heart sing (33).

As far as hope is concerned, I dedicated the whole story to hope in all its facets. Sandile is hoping for his father to come home so is his mother and the rest of family. He hopes that his uncle will bring him a dog. His mother's sister, Lindiwe, hopes for a better house somewhere away from this misery. And all these come true.

"It's the dream ..." she said. "It's Sandile's dream and Lindiwe's dream ... and now my dream." Then she began to run and in his ears he heard her calling: "Zondi, Zondi, you've come!" (50).

In writing a universal story, the above-mentioned aspects are all important but certain practicalities need to be kept in mind too.

Is the story translatable? I think that simplicity, honesty and clarity in descriptions should be present from start to finish. Try to tell the story in such a way that children all over the world can relate even when a totally unfamiliar matter is addressed.

Foreign words and their use: When using foreign words be explanatory. In *Sandile* the word "Spaza" and "Shebeen" are used but then explained to the reader.

He read slowly: "Spa-za". "The shop," said his mother (22).

"It's actually a shebeen" (28).

"The men drink beer when they come here!" (29).

Also where Zulu is spoken, all words are repeated in English.

Do not leave everything to the imagination. One of the biggest and most rewarding aspects of reading to or by the child, is the fact that imagination comes alive. Certainly when writing for children, authors all want them to imagine but I think it is only fair to sometimes help the imagination along. Especially in the case of a story from a foreign country.

1. What does Silver City look like?

There was a lot of smoke and many houses. These houses looked different to the ones among the green hills at home. They were flat and shiny (11).

2. What do the mine dumps look like?

They stood high and naked in the veld. The sand did not look like earth. It was hard and deep furrows ran everywhere down the sides (24).

3. Also the way the child from the country sees the big city:

The houses were huge! It was misty between the big houses but it was not the white mist that he saw at his own house, blowing in from the sea. The mist looked dark and cold (3).

4. The typical city girl compared to his mother, from the country:

Her hair hung around her head in bunches of small plaits. Her shoes were tall. Sandile looked at his mother's shoes. The flat black shoes that he knew so well (5).

There are a thousand more words to be said on the topic of multiculturalism, but it is my sincere wish that we shall all learn from each other and give to children all over the world from the capacious pockets of our individual countries!

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Images of the San

elwun r jenkins

The tourist posters use the slogan, “A world in one country”. Within this one country of South Africa could be found, until a century ago, one of the greatest contrasts in human culture that has ever been seen: between modern, Westernised people and members of a hunter-gatherer society whom many considered to be living examples of the earliest form of human society. Today, some of those people represent just as great a gulf between two forms of society, for they are examples of the degraded fragments of indigenous peoples to be found in many parts of the world, living on the edges of affluent society, impoverished, ridden with alcohol and disease. Others have been incorporated more painlessly into society.

The theme of the conference is appropriately entitled “Other worlds, other lives”, for when South African writers have attempted to write about these other lives, such a mental leap was necessary that they have often resorted to writing about other worlds: spiritual worlds, fantasy worlds, even imaginary geographical zones.

This paper deals with the representations of the San to be found in South African children’s and youth literature. If the picture that emerges is a complicated one, it is right that in a conference focusing on the “Other” we should note the cautionary advice of Linda Hutcheon in her book *A Poetics of postmodernism* (1988:61):



The modernist concept of single and alienated otherness is challenged by the postmodern questioning of binaries that conceal hierarchies (self/other) ... Difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather than binary opposition and exclusion.

Why write about the San?

In approaching a genre of children's books as a cultural phenomenon, such as those on the theme of the San, I find myself asking why the authors chose that topic and why they wrote about it in the way they did. In a previous work (Jenkins 1993) I wanted to know why retellings of African folktales constitute what is one of the largest single genres of South African children's books. Now I find myself asking why writers have taken the San as a theme and presented them as they have done in their books. However, literary critics speak dismissively of the "intentional fallacy"; and of course one cannot get into the mind of the writer. What one can do is place the works in the intellectual climate of the time when they were written, analyse the statements that they make, and content oneself with the contribution that this analysis may make to our knowledge of the way the San have been and currently are portrayed.

There is an extensive literature on the subject of representations of the San, which has analysed the work of anthropologists, archaeologists and other academics, government documents and the writings of travellers and popular historians. Davison (1991), Dowson and Lewis-Williams (1994) and Skotnes (1995) have critiqued the representation of the San and their art in museums, and Tomaselli (1986) has investigated their image in film and television. (After all, *The Gods must be crazy* is the most successful film ever made in South Africa.) Many

writers (such as Dunae 1975, Gates 1986, Brantlinger 1988, Tötemeyer 1988, Richards 1989) have also studied representations of the African in juvenile fiction, though the San have not been specifically singled out.

Children's books have much to contribute to an understanding of the portrayal of the San. In general, children's books are an invaluable source of information on popular culture because they catch people, as it were, with their guard down. Not only do they reveal what society wants its children to think about a topic, but they are rather more frank than they would be if written for an adult audience.

Ultimately, however, both scientists and writers are creatures of their time. Anything we may learn about popular images of the San will probably amplify what is already known about their representation in scientific literature. Gordon (1992:217) is of the opinion that, "At the risk of oversimplification, I would suggest that there is little difference between the current scientific and popular image of the Bushmen The overwhelming textbook image is that they are *different* from us in terms of physiognomy, social organisation, values and personality." In the analysis of children's books that follows, I therefore draw freely on the categories of representation of African and San that have already been identified, as well as modifying them or adding what can be more readily discerned in the children's books.

The material

Various kinds of children's books contain representations of the San: fiction for ages ranging from young children to teenagers; fiction written "to order" for

prescription as a school reader; nonfiction, both of a popular kind and in a form apparently intended as school textbooks or as reference works for libraries; and collections of folktales. There could, conceivably, also be verse and drama on the subject, but I am not aware of any. Some fiction that is not specifically about the San contains references to them which also portray them in a certain light.

The creation of a particular image of the San begins before one even opens the book and starts on the text. Even the very series in which a particular volume is included tells us something about how the San are to be seen. For example, Winchester-Gould's *God's little Bushmen* (1993) is one of a series from a Pretoria publisher, Rhino Publishers, entitled "ECOSPACE – Reality of space for wild things – for all life", in which all the other volumes are about animals.

Other indicators of the image of the San are the size and format of the book, the cover, the layout and typeface of the text, the contents, style, size and position of the illustrations, and the publisher's, authorial and editorial apparatus.

Is a chronology possible?

English fiction about Africa and its inhabitants has been published since early in the 19th century. However, the children's books about the San that I have been able to trace start with the classic *Skankwan van die duine* by the Hobson brothers, first published in 1930, though Ernest Glanville's *The Hunter: a story of the Cape* (1926) may well be considered a children's book as well. Books from this period may rightly be expected to show more modern attitudes and more South African concerns than the old imperialist stories, for they were written by

Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans for South African children in the post-imperial era. Although some of the attitudes towards the San of books published as late as 1993, such as Rhino Publishers' classification of the San under natural history, can be traced back to the 19th century period of rampant imperialism and blatantly racist attitudes, and obsessions such as RM Ballantyne's fear of moral regression into black barbarism (Brantlinger 1988:66) have largely disappeared. Nevertheless, has there been a development in the period since 1930?

That a sequence of racial attitudes can be traced in South African children's books has been shown by Tötemeyer in various papers based on her research into "1 500 Afrikaans children's and youth books published between 1897 and 1987" (Tötemeyer 1988:173). Particularly striking is her analysis of the portrayal of black people in children's book illustrations (1986), which shows a broad development from crude racism, through patronisation and sentimentality, to acceptance of the black child simply as a person. In an illustrated paper, it would be possible to show a similar pattern in the portrayal of the San. However, the written contents of the San books do not show a clear chronological development, perhaps because the period covered is shorter than that reviewed by Tötemeyer.

A third source of a model chronology can be found in critiques of the scientific literature on the San, such as those by Wilmsen (1989) and Gordon (1992). Lewis-Williams (1994:2) identifies five "popular stereotypes of the San": "ignoble savages", "incorrigible children", "harmless people", "natural ecologists" and "historical actors". Although he is able to discern something of a chronology, from the 18th to the late 20th century, he also shows how certain attitudes persist, or crop up again after having disappeared. Gordon (1992:219), after remarking that "what has intrigued recent commentators on Bushmen is how dramatically their image has changed over the past few decades from that of

‘Brutal Savages’ to that of ‘Harmless People’ ’’, says that “there are, however, a number of problems related to this simplistic approach”, and he illustrates how both extreme views have long existed alongside each other.

The different images of the San which are enumerated below are not, therefore, arranged according to some *a priori* chronology, nor does a sequence emerge from reading the books, though it is quite often possible to contrast books from different periods.

The Bushman as “man child”

Two books by Laurens van der Post, *A Story like the wind* (1972) and *The Lost world of the Kalahari* (1958), are included by Jay Heale in his bibliography (1985) which is subtitled “A descriptive booklist of Southern African children’s books in English”. However, he classifies the former as “The story of a boy – though it needs a mature mind to read it” (1985:60), and the latter as “an adult novel” (1985:110). Should they find a place in a discussion of juvenile literature?

As I compiled my list of books about the San, similar choices confronted me. Certain books which, because of their physical size and appearance, their covers and use of illustration, appear to be firmly within the genre of children’s books, turn out, because of the way they are written, to be for adults ... and then again, perhaps not. Some books catch the eye as children’s books: *The Hunter: a story of the Cape* by Ernest Glanville (1926), *Farewell the little people* by Victor Pohl (1968), *Hunters of the desert land* by PJ Schoeman (third edition, 1982) and *God’s little Bushmen* by Dennis Winchester-Gould (1993). All of these have full-page

illustrations, *The Hunter* and *Hunters* also including vignettes as chapter headings, and *God's little Bushmen* (in addition to its twee title) using colour, including an attractive watercolour cover. But the length of these books, the diction, the ethnographic "facts" that are included, sometimes suggest otherwise. Louis Knobel's book, *Tlhamab, die Boesmankind*, although obviously written for children, nevertheless includes an adult foreword in tiny print that gives anthropological information. Why does Winchester-Gould want to tell a child reader that a Bushman "squatted to urinate" (21) or describe – though vaguely – the sex act? His book takes up in a more sophisticated form the discourse of Schoeman's *Hunters of the desert land*, which deals with gender relations and marital and sexual mores. Large portions of these books, therefore, are not appropriate for children, however naive the narration might be.

Schoeman's ambivalent *Hunters of the desert land* can be contrasted with his earlier book, *Op die klein spoortjies* (1944), which all the evidence shows was clearly intended for children. Linguistically, this orientation is most striking. *Spoortjies* uses a "twee" register replete with diminutives, which was particularly common from the 1920s to the 1940s in both English and Afrikaans South African children's books (Jenkins 1994:138; Tötemeyer 1993:167). In this tradition of "fairies in the mealie patch", "veld folk", "veldkindertjies" and "prinsessies in die veld", it describes a San boy:

Gaggaboemboem het begin lag. Hy het "ga-ga-ga" gelag, en dan sy pensie styf opgeblaas en "doem-doem-doem" daarop geslaan met sy knoetsige vuissies (6).

After starting in the mode of realistic fiction, with a little white boy straying from a group of Dorsland Trekkers, it becomes a fantasy in which the children keep company with anthropomorphised creatures, an ape and a cricket.

What exactly defines a juvenile book is a matter of theoretical debate. The books mentioned above possess (the worst) distinguishing features: excessive didacticism, perfunctory characterisation and narrative, patronising linguistic sentimentality, and clumsy fantasy. Hunt (1991) identifies narrative closure as a typical feature of youth novels, and this is true of most of the books under discussion. In the case of Lesley Beake's novel about a young San woman, *Song of Be* (1992), although the physical appearance of the book clearly indicates that it is a youth novel, Flockemann (1992:141), in a review, rather obstinately picks on closure as evidence of its intended audience: "What appears to set this book in the young market is its happy ending."

Why should there be this ambiguity about the intended readership of some books about the San? "Man child" is the term used by Laurens van der Post for the San in *The Lost world of the Kalahari* (1958:13). JanMohamed (1986:102), writing of *A Story like the wind* (1978), says that Van der Post's "decision to depict his own experience of African oral cultures takes the form of a novel about a young boy's adventures" because of "his belief that only a child would be interested in such cultures". In her "Word to parents and teachers", Hanneke du Preez (1985 np) introduces a selection of San folktales for children with the remark that "Children sense in them a kinship for which there is no rational explanation."

There is no particular virtue in being able to draw a clear distinction between whether a book is intended for adult or juvenile readers; indeed, cross-readership often occurs, and some books, such as folktales, are perhaps intended to be read aloud by adults to children (although there may be no evidence that the original stories were for children). However, it would appear that the ambiguity as to whether these books are intended for adults or children reflects the ambivalence of the authors as to whether the San themselves are adults or children.

At times authors such as Pohl, Glanville and McAdorey (*The Old man of the mountain*, 1992) present the San implicitly as children, emphasising their changeable emotions, delight in simple pleasures, and lack of care for the future. Sometimes the comparison is explicit: Schoeman, in *Hunters of the desert land*, says, “These nomadic people, who loved their children so, were still children at heart themselves” (176); he speaks of old Xameb’s “child-like belief” (94), and has Xameb say repeatedly of his own people, “These people are children” (158). Xameb habitually calls him “White Father”.

Some of the book titles give a further clue to the confusion of the authors about the status of their subject matter: *The Search for the little yellow men* (Hastings, 1956), *These small people* (Malherbe 1983), *Children of the Kalahari* (Mertens 1966), *Farewell the little people* (Pohl 1968), *Op die klein spoortjies* (Schoeman 1944), *God’s little Bushmen* (Winchester-Gould 1993). The small physical size of the San and their paedomorphic features suggest to the authors in some vague fashion that the San are childlike, and therefore, possibly, an appropriate subject for children to read about. Mary Phillips introduces *The Cave of Uncle Kwa* by saying, “They are a tiny people – a childlike people”; Knobel’s foreword calls them “hierdie primitiewe natuurmensies”. The “ideology of littleness” in literature (Armstrong 1990) serves to place certain categories of people, such as the women in Dickens’s novels, in a particular light. In the case of Du Preez, Van der Post, Schoeman and others, their treatment of the San as children is patronising and often denigratory, and lies behind the ambiguity as to the intended readership of their books.

In contrast to books with a dubious readership, four that are admirably suited to their young readers are *Narni of the desert* (1967) by Gwen Westwood, *Kattau the hunter* (1983) by Edna Quail, *Kabo of the mountain* (1988) by Joan Nockels

and Alex Willcox, and *The Bushmen and their stories* (1971) by Elizabeth S Helfman. *Narni*, *Kattau* and *Kabo* extol family values and the security and happiness that San children enjoy both in the clan and through their harmony with nature. Although the subject matter is alien to the readers, by making a child the implied reader and by emphasising their common humanity the authors create a feeling of solidarity between white and San children. Helfman's book is a retelling of Bleek's San folktales, presented in large format and typeface, with stunning pictures by Richard Cuffari. San beliefs are framed by accounts of the people, their beliefs and history, including a moving quotation from Bleek's informant, Xhabbo, on their longings while imprisoned. Unpleasant facts about their present circumstances and likely future are sympathetically discussed. Helfman has taken great care over her diction, which is simple but poetic:

The Bushmen are a graceful people. When they walk along, or simply bend to pick up something from the ground, their motions are like part of a dance (11).

These four books exemplify how books about the "other" can widen the experience and understanding of young readers.

Didacticism and the facts

The imperialist children's fiction of the 19th century took its inspiration from utilitarianism, science and moral instruction (Bratton 1981). Writing in the mode of the immensely popular travel writers of the period, boys' adventure writers such as Henty, Ballantyne, WHG Kingston and Mayne Reid gave detailed accounts of the way of life of African tribes and "all forms of natural history" (MacKenzie 1988:45).

This tradition has continued in the fiction about the San written by South Africans for local white readers in the 20th century, which is packed with “facts” about their way of life and beliefs. At one level this approach takes the “otherness” of the San to the extreme, putting the San in the same category as flora and fauna – the image of the San that still sees their lifecasts and their art displayed in natural history museums. But perhaps this is a harsh judgment on well-meaning writers, who find the ways of the San so different that they feel it is instructive for modern, urban youngsters to read about them. The San are also a gateway to the ways of wild creatures, which the authors enjoy digressing to describe.

Often the authors seem bursting to share their knowledge of the facts. Some of them are reputed to be extremely knowledgeable on the subject, and this is often given prominence on the cover or at the beginning or end of the book. PJ Schoeman, after holding a professorship in anthropology at the University of Stellenbosch, became Chief Warden of the Etosha Pan Game Reserve and chaired the South West African Commission for the Preservation of the Bushmen, 1949 to 1953. Others whose first-hand experience and knowledgeability are emphasised are the Hobsons and their modern editor, Esther Linfield, Victor Pohl, Louis Knobel and Willem Kotze. Jan J van der Post’s childhood, we are told, included an amazing episode when he ran away and lived with a San band. This forms the basis of the first part of *Agarob, kind van die duine* (1963), and the eponymous hero was still alive, living on the author’s sister’s farm, when the book was published.

By the time novels and children’s stories about the San started appearing in the late 1920s, the mood in South Africa had already shifted to one of pity for their extinction. However, accurate information about their history had not yet reached

a wide public, and so it is perhaps understandable that popular literature often presented a distorted picture, though the distortions become less forgivable as we approach the present. Pohl, for example, simply repeated in 1968 some of the bizarre inventions of Glanville in 1926.

Glanville and Pohl give highly inaccurate versions of the history of migrations into southern Africa and the interaction of the San with Africans. Other authors accurately include more references to how whites hunted them down and captured their children to work on the farms; they relate that until recent times the San clashed with black and white farmers when they killed their livestock; and that some San in Namibia and Botswana now work permanently or seasonally for farmers. Nobody goes far enough back in time to consider the interaction of the San and the Khoikhoi pastoralists.

While the Africans are portrayed by Glanville, Pohl and Knobel (in *Tlhamab, die Boesmankind*, 1970) as absolutely ruthless towards the San, the whites are shown by Pohl, Jan van der Post in *Agarob, kind van die duine* (1963), Ann Harries in *The Sound of the gora* (1980), Lesley Beake in *Song of Be* (1991), and Dolf van Niekerk in *Karel Kousop* (1985) to be more complex in their motives and in the relationship that develops when the San come to live on the farms. Jenny Seed's *The New fire* (1983) holds a middle position by portraying the relations between white and San as bleak and offering no way out.

Only Alex Willcox and his co-author, Joan Nockels, present a revisionist portrayal of the relations between the San of the Drakensberg and the newly arrived Africans. In *Kabo of the mountain* (1988) they show, first of all, that the San previously lived in the Drakensberg out of choice, and not because they were

later driven there; and that they and the Africans coexisted in peace. In the friendship of the San boy and African girl there is even a hint that San and Africans might have intermarried. In all this the story is in keeping with the historical facts as now known, best documented in Wright's definitive work, *Bushman raiders of the Drakensberg 1840–1870: a study of their conflict with stock-keeping peoples in Natal* (1971), with which Willcox must have been thoroughly familiar. However, Wright (1971:12) offers a sobering gloss on Willcox's idyll: "Most probably the pattern was one of co-existence alternating with enmity from the start." However, Willcox is having nothing of that: the book explicitly teaches that racial prejudice ought to be, and can be, overcome, especially by the young. *Kabo* is a romanticised backlash to the oversimplified accounts of extreme clashes between African and San, which served white authors and readers as a way of "othering" both savage blacks and the almost mythical San, and in this way displaced white guilt – a typical pattern in the literature of colonialism and imperialism (Brantlinger 1988:195).

Wright, and later Gordon (1992), raise some other complicating facts about the oppression of the San, such as that "most of the atrocities committed upon them were done with the active collaboration of fellow indigenes" (Gordon 1992:218). Jan van der Post superficially portrays the complicity of San people in the oppression of their fellows, as do two of the most recent Afrikaans writers, Dolf van Niekerk in *Karel Kousop* (1985) and *Koms van die hyreën* (1994), and Piet van Rooyen in *Die Spoorsnyer* (1993). None of the children's writers goes so far as to acknowledge another point made by Gordon (1992:11), that "rather than being victims of pastoralists and traders who depleted the game, they [the San] appear as one of many willing agents of this commercial depletion".

By far the majority of the writers prefer to write about what were known in Namibia as the "wild Bushmen". The fascination for most authors is with their

“original” way of life, problematic as such a concept now appears to be. Wilmsen (1989) goes so far as to say that the San have been interacting with other peoples for thousands of years, and that this interaction is what actually produced a definition of a particular category of people who could be called “Bushmen”; but only a few of the most recent books adopt this poststructuralist view. For example, the anthropologist, Esther Linfield, who translated and adapted the Hobsons’ *Skankwan van die duine* in 1977, tackles in her introduction the fact that the San have no name for themselves, and how this ties up with the question of their identity.

Nonfiction works on the San that are intended for children are easily classified chronologically. Agnes Jackson’s *The Bushmen of South Africa* (1956) still perpetuated some of the most notorious stereotypes of aboriginal peoples to be found in Western writing:

When the Bushmen want to prepare themselves for a festivity they throw dust all over themselves, instead of water, just as animals do (5).

Although they have hard lives, the Bushmen are naturally a gay and happy people who are fond of dancing and music (20).

Some of the pen sketches in this book reflect this tone. In contrast, the books by Mertens (1966), Helfman (1971) and Malherbe (1983) are much more accurate and sympathetic.

The information about the way of life of the San which the authors of the fiction present – in the case of John Coetzee in *Flint and the red desert* (1986) one can say *hasten* to present, as soon as the San appear on the scene – is so similar that it is predictable. Often the authors use the device of children being

taught by their elders, in order to present the information. Mostly it is man-talk, or women's activities seen by a male (such as little boys who fret at having to go gathering with the women when they would rather be hunting), but there are also some detailed accounts seen through female eyes. This information is easy to summarise: their appearance and the colour of their skin; how they make poisoned arrows and hunt; animal lore; how the women gather, especially what we are told they themselves call "Bushman rice" (ants' larvae); what they eat, especially insects, reptiles ("lizard biltong") and putrid meat; how they overeat when meat is available; how they suck up water; that they are nomadic; how they dress and ornament themselves; how they abandon old people to die, and abort babies or bury them alive in times of stress; some books show that women are treated as inferiors and even worse, and that women are silly; courtship and marriage customs and rites of passage; children's games; how and why they paint; how they dance; that they practise divination and have witchdoctors, and, in some books, that they possess supernatural powers; their folktales and religious beliefs; and what their language sounds like, with special emphasis on how, to a white person, it sounds like clicks.

The earlier books in particular, illogically have the San speak a strange English idiom, partly archaic, including calling hyenas "wolves" and leopards "tigers" (which are presumably Afrikanerisms). Considering that the San knew the animals very well, and that we are reading a translation of their speech, these inaccuracies are unnecessary. As recently as 1993, Winchester-Gould in *God's little Bushmen* has the adults speak in a mixture of archaic and childish language.

It would seem that not only are these "facts" selective, but in a number of cases they are simply wrong. (See, for example, Tobias 1978.) Although only Glanville (1926) and Schoeman in his early *Op die klein spoortjies* (1944) specifically make

the San out to be savages or animal-like (“die snaakse halwe aangesiggie van Doedoempie” – Schoeman p 10), often one feels that the more unpleasant details, reiterated so often, are introduced to mark their primitiveness. The effect of all the books is that white readers would come away with the impression that the San are extremely different to themselves.

On a more positive note, readers will also gain a picture of the San as people who live close to, and in harmony with, nature. At their best, these books convey quality of life rather than dry ethnographic facts. Edna Quail’s *Kattau the hunter* (1983) exemplifies this. The little boy senses the warmth of the sun, the shade of the trees and clouds, the heady taste of honey, even “the springbok sensation” (39) when he hunts. He learns,

This was the place where his people and the birds and the beasts had lived since Mantis first threw a feather into the sky and made the moon (9).

His people’s beliefs form a meaningful part of his experience of the world rather than being conveyed as quaint stories, as they are in Mary Phillips’ *The Bushman speaks* (1961) and *The Cave of Uncle Kwa* (1965). A recurring theme is that because of the oneness of the San with nature, “they never took from the land more than they needed” (Linfield, in her Introduction to *The Lion of the Kalahari*, 1977). In *When whales go free* (1988:48), Dianne Hofmeyr specifically introduces a description of the harmonious way of life of the hunter-gatherers on Robberg in order to contrast it with the rapacious whalers of modern times. Nick Greaves spells out the moral in the introduction to his collection of African folktales, *When hippo was hairy* (1988:14):

Mantis assigned this place to the Bushman – that of Hunter-Gatherer. The Bushman fulfilled his designated role faithfully, living in close harmony with the animals, birds and the plants upon the earth.

This image coincides with the stereotype of the San which Lewis-Williams (1994:3) calls “natural ecologists”.

The theme of harmony extends to human relations in the San bands. The books that have very young protagonists emphasise the security of the nuclear family and the importance of parents as role-models. Most of the books make a point of the overriding ethic of the San that harmony must prevail in the clan as a whole and even between clans (though the bands are often depicted in destructive conflict).

Without exception, all the books bring in San religion, ostensibly treating it with respect. In this concentration on San religious beliefs one can detect the urge, epitomised by Laurens van der Post but going back to Rider Haggard, to search for spiritual truths that only Africa may be able to provide. Two versions of San religion are given: in some books, it is a monogamous belief; in others, a simplistic animism that consists mainly of praying to the sun and moon. It would appear that the latter version is a figment of the imagination of the authors – Biesele (1978) makes no mention of the practice. The way that the authors insistently introduce praying to the sun, moon and stars, often on almost every page, serves to trivialise San beliefs as something barbarous, even though the practice is disguised as something quaint, attesting to the spirituality of the San.

Factual presentations of the San in modern society are much rarer than those of “wild Bushmen”. We see them living on farms, collaborating with the police or film-makers, or working for the Namibian government as election officials. The most detailed and up-to-date is that in Lesley Beake’s *Song of Be*, which is a remarkable imaginative feat. The narrator is an educated young San woman who

works with her mother on the farm of a white man in Namibia. Her inner strength is emphasised by the contrast with the farmer's wife, who is driven mad by life on the farm and commits suicide. As the story of Be's life and that of her parents emerges, many aspects of the lives of modern San are covered. Beake emphasises her own interest in the present-day San by including a note at the end entitled "The future", in which she says that the Ju/'hoan people are going back to the land with new skills, and she gives the address of their co-op. This novel and, to a lesser extent, *God's little Bushmen* by Winchester-Gould, are an assertion of feminism in the portrayal of the modern San.

When fact becomes fantasy

In looking at the didactic nature of the fiction, we have noted accurate and inaccurate history and the selective use of facts, all of which it is possible to explain, understand and even forgive. But there is a further aspect of the fiction that is less explicable. Woven in among all the ethnographic information about the San and their way of life, even from the pens of authors who are introduced as authorities on the subject, are outrageous inaccuracies and impossibilities. Perhaps San children did keep animal pets, as some of the books show, but it is hard to swallow when Mary Phillips gives her small hero a tame lion cub which he takes for walks. Glanville has the San capable of the most detailed telepathy; Pohl has them sending smoke signals; the Hobsons have a San villain with extraordinary skills in ventriloquism through which he holds sway over a band; Schoeman's ostensibly historical narrative framework for *Hunters of the desert land* is generally regarded as suspect; and Jan van der Post, in the same book that relates his own childhood experiences, ends up with a hocus pocus of tunnels, a white lady, paintings in hidden caves, and handfuls of diamonds, all presented in the same realistic narrative mode as the autobiographical material.

Several of the authors invent “medicine men”, or even “witchdoctors”, who bear no resemblance to the actual San practice of shamanism. Many depict San men throwing the bones or *dolosse*, from which they are able to foretell the future in specific detail. I can find no evidence for this in the ethnographic literature. (See, for example, Biesele 1978.) Their accounts of how and why the San executed rock paintings continue to the present day to ignore modern understanding, which dates back to the 1960s, that this was largely an aspect of shamanistic practices.

These factual inaccuracies perpetuate centuries-old European images of Africa as a dark continent inhabited by indigenous peoples endowed with mysterious supernatural powers. One redeeming feature is that we might take the Hobsons’ villain who uses ventriloquism to control the gullible as a deconstruction, from as early as 1930, of the mumbo jumbo image.

Most disappointing is a very recent book, *The Old man of the mountain* by Ursula Karsen McAdorey (1992). The cover announces that it was specially written as a reader for use in secondary schools in southern Africa, with a controlled language level, which implies that it is intended for readers for whom English is not their mother tongue. It should be a welcome extension of the curriculum, introducing all southern African children to the San. On the cover is a coloured photograph of an old San man which, like the photographs in Knobel’s fictional *Tlhamab*, adds verisimilitude to the story.

The framework of the story is a fantasy that a multiracial group of modern children stumble upon a band of San who live according to their old ways, and they join them for three months on their travels through an unidentifiable part of

Africa. The author repeatedly makes it clear, once one accepts the fantasy device for bringing the children to the San, that they are undergoing a didactic experience, to learn from the ways of the San. Implicitly, one may assume the same for the school pupils who will read it. Yet she ignores modern scholarship and perpetuates some totally discredited stereotypes of the San. Filled with cliché and mumbo jumbo, it has an old man, “holding a spear in one claw-like hand” (33) who explains his mind-reading and prophetic powers by saying, “I, Leader of the San, know these things. The gods have said that I should know” (72). Prospero-like he summons up a vision of prehistoric creatures fighting to the death, which he tells them carries the same message about the need for conservation as the extinction of the quagga. More supernatural elements include a “witchdoctor” (160) who wears an “enormous ostrich-feather head-dress” (54), and a legendary black hyena that nevertheless casts a real shadow. When, in the course of an authorial intrusion, the author writes that “The San had lived through the volcanic eruptions of the continent’s birth ... they had survived the sabre-toothed cats, the three-toed horses, the giant baboons” (63), the value of the book as a source of factual accuracy is irredeemably destroyed.

Earlier I referred to a similar unsatisfactory merging of history and fantasy in Schoeman’s *Op die klein spoortjies*. As Stephens (1992:207) points out, the danger of incorporating elements of fantasy in historical fiction is that “within the narrative frame all events are treated as ontologically equivalent and mutually coherent”. The consequence of this is that the child reader is ideologically misled.

Another book which uses fantasy to bring modern children together with the San is *The Sound of the gora* by Ann Harries (1980). Its popular success proves that fantasy need not resort to overheated images of the supernatural: it brings to the fictional portrayal of the San something which the purely realistic novels cannot.

(The novel is also remarkable for having been the first to assert a feminine point of view in the fictional portrayal of the San.) While the realistic novels, and the collections of folktales, carry the awareness that the San and their old way of life are practically extinct, fantasy lifts the San out of time, granting them a timeless status in which are preserved those admirable qualities of their lives (their physical and spiritual harmony with nature and their harmonious human relations) which the world should never forget, and which the authors would like their young readers to absorb.

Nevertheless, making the San timeless is ideologically problematic, as Davison (1991) has pointed out: instead of placing the San historically, most of the fiction implies that until the arrival of other peoples the San had a way of life that had remained unchanged since primeval times, whereafter the change was catastrophic. This denies the San a history which includes gradual adaptation to and incorporation into the society of the Khoikhoi, Africans and whites.

Like much South African historical fiction for children (see Jenkins 1993:139), some of the books about the San do tackle the passage of time. Mary Phillips in 1965 deplored the degeneracy that modernity has brought to the San; Lesley Beake in *Song of Be* (1991), on the other hand, has a San man say,

“It’s no use trying to go back, back in time, back to an old life that doesn’t – that can’t – exist any more” (73).

Beake, Jan J van der Post and Dolf van Niekerk quite matter-of-factly portray San people leading their lives in modern circumstances. Other writers, such as Ann Harries in *The Sound of the gora* and Jenny Seed in *The New fire*, awaken the conscience of the reader, with the implicit warning that history should not

repeat itself: never again should atrocities such as those perpetrated against the San be allowed.

A common humanity

According to Stephens (1992:205), one of the main premises of historical fiction for children is that “Humans behave and feel in ways that remain constant in different periods”. In this way, readers can empathise with the historical characters. He acknowledges that this tenet of humanism has been weakened in recent times by arguments for cultural relativism, but concludes, “Nevertheless, historical fiction continues to be written for children and to some extent read by them.”

A technique used by most of the authors which strongly draws the reader into the lives of the San is the use of a San character as the focalisation or point-of-view of the narration. Another way in which we might expect the reader to enter the minds of modern San could be when the plot involves what I have previously (Jenkins 1993:134) called the *umtalaan* theme in South African children’s literature, entailing socially approved friendship between black and white playmates. One would have hoped for insights from Jan van der Post’s *Agarob, kind van die duine* (1963), since it is based on his own childhood experience of close friendship with a San boy, but he is not particularly interested in interiority, and the narrative proceeds mostly by incident. Dolf van Niekerk’s *Karel Kousop* (1985), on the other hand, does convey the awkwardness and uneven development of the friendship of a white boy and a young San farm labourer, but the story is told firmly from the point of view of the white boy, deliberately leaving the other an enigma throughout. However, both books stress the common humanity of the

San and white boys, using, for example, the device of having them strip naked together.

It is also refreshing to encounter, in *The Sound of the gora*, *Song of Be* and *God's little Bushmen*, a shift from the voices of white males to narratives told from the point of view of young San women, which is a welcome move to gender awareness.

In the course of looking at these books, I have pointed out some of the stereotypes of the San that they present, and I have also referred to other, often more brutal, stereotypes that have circulated over the last two centuries. Davison (1991:140), remarks,

The common denominator of these stereotypes, which have entered popular consciousness to varying degrees at different times, is that the people so classified are denied voices or histories of their own, they become objects of scientific or popular interest because of their difference from the observer; they are cultural Others.

It is true that the authors may have chosen the San for their plots because they offer a different, almost exotic setting and subject matter for an exciting children's story; but unlike the authors of the British colonial period, they were writing for South African children about their own land. Through fiction they have been able to create a voice for the San, bringing them alive for modern white children. For all their faults, most of these books can help children, through identifying with the San characters, experience different social relations and a different relationship with the land and its creatures, and experience a different spiritual quality of being in Africa.

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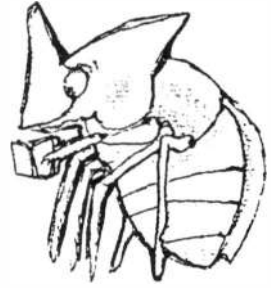
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Tell me a story

poul biegel



“Tell me a story” refers to my two children, who used to order a story every night at bedtime, a bed-time story and not just a story. They would propose two items that it should be about. Each child would offer one – say, a cork and ... a door handle; and they would rush upstairs to undress quickly, wash and get into bed. The advantage was of course to get them into bed quickly – the disadvantage was my having very little time to invent something.

But as it is: stories lie about everywhere; just shut your eyes and you see them, so climbing the stairs my mind’s eyes saw the cork, flying though the air. Off a champagne-bottle, of course!

Champagne means a party, a rich party, a gathering of very rich people drinking nothing but champagne, corks flying everywhere, one landing on the windowsill, behind the curtains, where ... ah outside, their noses pressed flat against the window-pane are two thieves peeping through a gap between the curtains goggling at the smart people inside wearing the most expensive jewellery.

So there, already a story was developing, and I sat down on the bed and started telling. Describing the party, the firing off of the champagne corks flying here and there along the ceiling, and the one landing behind the curtains, where outside these two highwaymen stood spying.

Well, how to get at the glistening jewellery inside?

Says one thief to the other: “Hey mate, you are such a skilled pickpocket. Why don’t you rush home, get into some smart outfit and walk in through the front door as though you were one of the guests? Just dance with them smart ladies, pick off their earrings and bracelets and rings and before anybody misses anything you have left again. How about it?”

The other thief doesn’t even reply, he is already on his way home, changes into his old wedding-suit, takes a taxi, enters the house with an attitude as though he were an invitee and starts dancing. Everything goes to perfection: he dances and waltzes with the ladies, telling them how beautiful they are, how attractive, how sweet, he kisses their hands meanwhile pocketing their rings, their necklaces, the lot. His mate watching through the window grows anxious. Come on now, come on now, that’s enough, don’t play it too far! But our hero inside wants one more dance, a lovely waltz, and oh! he’s had a few glasses of the superb champagne too, so round and round and round he waltzes, faster and faster, the ladies’ skirts are blossoming out ... but so do the tails of our friend’s old wedding-suit, the pocket of which is heavy with jewellery ... and alas, there comes the door-handle, prescribed item of the story, as a fateful object, sticking out as a hook, catching the tail-pocket like a fish and tearing it open, so the diamonds, necklaces, rings, bracelets are spilled out onto the floor.

And now the cork! Our thief of course is spotted, he tries to escape but the door is blocked, so he rushes to the window where his mate is witnessing the disaster, he climbs onto the windowsill, but as he tries to open the window his knee skids on the champagne-cork. He falls back and is caught.

End of the story.

But this was just to get us in the mood for what I really want to tell you. A story once more, also commissioned by the same two, and this time they wanted something about a giant – an enormous giant; they both wanted a giant, I said: “two giants perhaps?” But no no no, just one. So I said OK, one giant, and I made it enormous – that is to say: *I* didn’t make it, it came from where all stories come from, some unknown realm of the human mind, and this creature rose up before my eyes, like the one in that famous painting by Goya, but bigger still. Up and up and up he grew, so much so that even his legs disappeared in the clouds, his belly must have been in the stratosphere, his head near the moon. Goodness what a giant! And it was not just standing there, it was striding along, at a steady pace, taking enormous footsteps, I mean like one foot just here in Pretoria and the other somewhere in the Kalahari. (But of course in telling about him to my children his one foot was in Amsterdam and the other in London. One step across the North Sea.)

Where was it heading, my children wanted to know?

West! I promptly answered. It was going West, it had to go West, this giant creature, as though it were pushed, it could not stop or be stopped, and meanwhile he kept asking in a thunderous voice “Where is the West. I have got to reach the West. Where do I find the West?” And the answer he got was always: “That direction, mister Giant. There!” Pointing with trembling arm. “Please don’t eat me, there it lies!”

And the giant strode on and on and on. He must have gone around the world a hundred times, a thousand times, round and round and round, Japan, Asia, Russia, Europe, the Atlantic, America, the Pacific, splash, splash, splash, wading

through the Pacific, down to Australia, around to Madagascar, South Africa, Brazil ... all the time in his thundering voice asking the way to the West.

I can still picture my children's bright eyes listening, whereas I myself had no idea where and how this story would end.

But then something unexpected happened: the striding giant skidded. He had come to a vast and very slippery moor and putting down his right leg it slid forward while his left foot was still on firm ground, and not being able to put a halt to his foremost leg, it slid on and on, as if of its own accord, so the Giant began to sink, sprawling most uncomfortably, with one leg stretching out before him in the mud and the other staying behind. And he sank and sank and sank, lower and lower, unable, with all his might, to get both legs in their right position again ...

Poor giant, what was to become of him? I did not know. I never ended this story.

I still do not know. I have come here to put this question before you all, not expecting an answer right away, but in the hope that you may agree to the direction in which I am trying to find it. I shall explain it to you in this way:

On my journey here from Amsterdam I am accompanied by my 84-year-old sister Elisabeth. She is a very brave little woman, nicknamed Owl, and she copes most wonderfully with modern life. Her only trouble is electronic payment. All these gadgets like credit cards and pin-codes are too complicated for her taste.

“Ah!” she says, “but what do you expect? As a child I have seen the horse-drawn trams!”

Indeed, the development in the Western world in one lifetime is incredible, and one cannot deny that the speed of it is only increasing. The things we can do nowadays! Flying to the moon will soon be surpassed by flying to Mars. That one small step Neil Armstrong took to set foot on the moon meant an enormous leap ahead for mankind, he said. But did it? Was not this step rather like the Giant’s skidding, his forward leg being the physical achievement of mankind, his “lagging behind” leg the status of our psychological insight? Because: what enormous step forward since the horse-drawn tram has mankind made in the field of the human mind? Are we not like this poor Giant being driven forward continuously by we know not what force, and are we not now skidding like him and sagging down most uncomfortably, if not to say in horrible pain? Do we not all feel the pain of being able to fly to the moon and construct the most intricate electronic chips and not being able to stop the Yugoslavian war?

Already in the fifties someone foresaw this gap: the German-Italian Jesuit Romano Guardini on receiving the Erasmus Prize pointed out the enormous difference in speed between the development of the material world and the world of the mind. And whereas he thought it was up to Europe, battered by age-long quarreling and fighting and now old and wise, to set to the task of filling in the gap, I personally think the task is worldwide and up to the next generation. And the next generation is the very subject of this conference.

I prefer the word *next generation* to the word *child*. A child is woman or man, and a member of the human race of tomorrow. It needs a surrounding in which it can grow up and develop into maturity.

And do we provide it?

As a writer of books for children I am often asked whether I am a child myself.

“You understand the world of children, you must still live in it,” people say.

“Or at least,” they add, “there is something of the child left in you.”

Growing tired of these questions I decided to look within myself to be sure it was all nonsense. But it was not. It took quite some effort and disappointment and pain to admit to myself that deep inside I perceived a frightened little boy continuously keeping himself hidden away. It was not a very nice experience, I must say. But far worse was when later on, when I looked up again and glanced around me, I perceived in almost everybody else a child too! With subsequent behaviour of yelling, fighting, insulting and throwing stones which in their case means firing bullets that kill. Since then my answer to the people wondering about the childish nature of the writer for children is: “and how grown-up are you yourself?” Is reaching the moon perhaps just a childish achievement?

Is our behaviour in respect of war, torture, drugs, racial discrimination only just very childish?

So I wonder: Are our systems of education, focused as they are on factual knowledge, at the same time a barrier to insight? Do they keep the human race away from developing into maturity, into finding out what drives that giant creature on and on westward? In short: does our system of education contribute to knowing ourselves?

I do not know the solution to all this, but I think we should be aware of the specific influence that children's literature has on the human race of tomorrow. So let us surround the next generation with as much insight into themselves as possible, and as little hypocrisy towards others.

Stories can do that. And there are thousands of them all over the world; every culture has them in great quantities; they only need to be told – it is my humble suggestion as a help to solve the problem of the skidding giant.

So I shall end with one more story, a very short one. I came across it only recently and it struck me in its deeply sensed truth, in its breaking through hypocrisy. It is about the scorpion and the frog, and it goes like this:

Once upon a time there was a scorpion who wanted to get across the river and as he saw a frog sitting on the bank he asked this good swimmer to ferry him over.

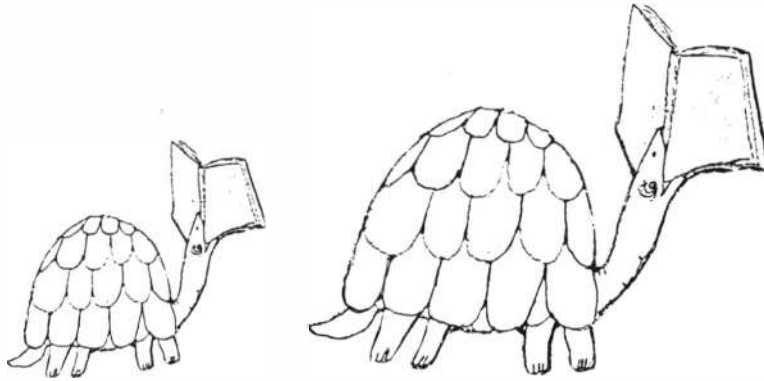
“Why,” said the frog, “do you think I am mad? You, a scorpion, if I carry you on my back you'll sting me to death!”

“Oh no!” replied the scorpion, “I'm not that stupid. If I'd sting you to death you'd sink to the bottom and I'd sink with you and get drowned.”

The frog took some time thinking this over and came to the conclusion it sounded absolutely right. No scorpion would be that foolish ever! So: “Alright,” he said. “Climb onto my back.”

They set off, the frog swimming for all he was worth, the scorpion just sitting. But halfway it happened. The frog suddenly felt a horrible sting in his back, and the pain surging through his body was laming him. He has been stung and he is dying. But he is still able to breath the question: “But why ... why did you do it?”

And the scorpion, already sinking to his death, replied: “Because it is in my nature ...”



Information about "other worlds"

in children's book illustrations

mare muursepp

This paper is based on experimental research done on children's reception of illustrations. The problems with this experimental approach have been:

- what kind of details and qualities of illustration denote the belonging of the story to OUR or to the OTHER world;
- how children can recognise the time and the place of the story's action;
- how the information obtained from the illustration helps to identify the genre of the book?

About the theoretical background

Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation of chronotope will be discussed. The term "chronotope" is used as the essential and formal category in literature theory. It means a unity of time and space. The chronotope specifies the genre of literary work. A certain form of chronotope is typical of a certain genre. Time is the leading component in the literary unity of time and space (Bakhtin 1987).

The child's understanding of history and of time is relatively poor. There is only an understanding of the concrete unit of the time of the day even in seven to

eight year-olds. The past is – “when I was little” and “long, long ago”. For that reason it was interesting to test how the children would perceive the time of a story’s activity. Do they imagine themselves in the same situation as pictured in the illustration – as if they were acting in this story and living at the time of the story’s happening?

So on the one hand the problem has been: the our and OTHER world in time and on the other hand – the our and OTHER world in space.

The work of Virginia Lowe (1993) about the possibilities of literature helping children to become aware of cultural differences through literature has also influenced this research. Virginia Lowe analysed the literary experience of her own two children. She has shown that the response to the domestic tale and to fantasy can be different. The domestic tale inspired an interest in people living in other countries. The fantasy tends to be seen as placeless. Those stories happen “in the land where rabbits talk”, not in the child’s actual world.

At the same time Virginia Lowe pointed to the child’s confusion and difficulties in comparing the people of other cultures in books with reality. The child starts from his or her own limited but concrete experience and his or her ability to generalise is insufficient. The people in picture books who looked different would be called, for example, “Chinese” or “Aborigine” because the child does not know other words for foreign or different looking people.

The process of the experiment

The problem investigated in this work has been the information in children’s book illustrations. The illustrations of fairy tale books and of realistic books, describing every-day life, have been used.

1. The picture in the Hungarian fairy tale “The Fairy of flowers” depicts a boy in national costume that is similar to Estonian national dress. The boy has met a fairy – a young man dressed in flowers. Their meeting place is a forest.
2. The picture in the book *The Son of Warrior* by Tshingiz Ajtmatov, the Kirghizian writer, presents a boy together with his mother. The boy is wearing a national cap and the mother a kerchief, though they are not wearing clothes for the outdoors – so the headgear must be traditional and obligatory. The characters are walking in the mountains. This story is about the boy whose father is lost in the war.
3. The illustration in the French fairy tale presents a youngster in medieval clothes. He is kneeling in the bushes and watching big white birds. They are fairies, an enchanter’s three daughters.
4. The picture from the book by the Komi writer, Jegor Rotchev, *The Little Mitruk and the big tundra* depicts a boy, kneeling in the snow and playing with or speaking to his dog. The reindeer is painted in the background. The book is about this boy helping his parents with the rearing of reindeer and discovering the secrets of the tundra – his home.

All these pictures have been done by Estonian illustrators.

The four pictures described above were shown to children of seven to eight years that had not read these books and for whom the information in these illustrations constituted their entire knowledge about these stories. The illustrations were used in pairs that were formed by analogy to the composition of the pictures: two pictures about boys communicating with another human; two pictures with kneeling boys depicted in the centre.

There were 44 children, both girls and boys, who took part in this experiment.

The following questions about every picture were answered during individual interviews:

1. Does the activity of this story happen here in our land or in another land, abroad? Which details are strange and which familiar?
2. Does the story happen in the present (nowadays) or in the past?
3. Could you get into the same situation as the hero in the picture?
4. Is the story a fairy tale or a realistic story – story of every-day life?

The children's answers have been analysed and generalised in Table 1.

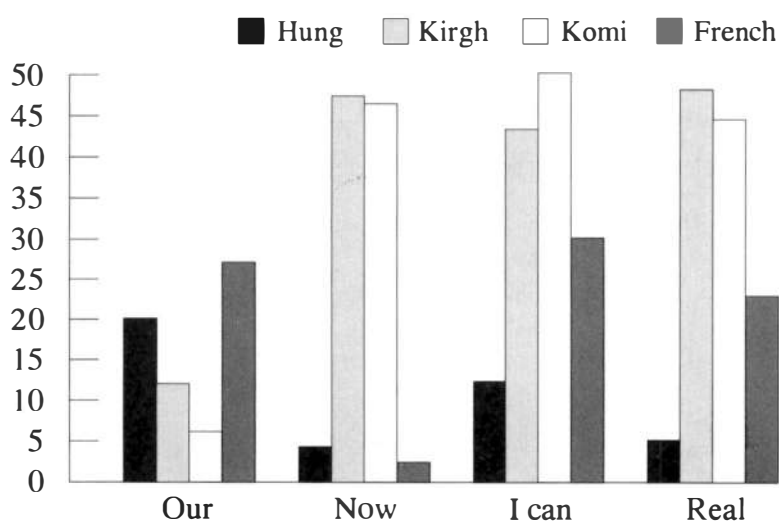


Table 1. Children's answers to the question about 4 illustrations

Hung - Hungarian fairy tale

Kirgh - Ajmatov's "Son of the Warrior"

Komi - Rochev's "The Little Mitruk and the big tundra"

French - French fairy tale

Results and conclusions

The tendencies reflected in children's answers will be analysed below.

Recognition of *place*

All these books are about the OTHER world for the Estonian child. Hungary is in Europe, only 2 000 km from our land. Kirghizia is in Central Asia, at a distance 12 000 km from us. France is twice as far as Hungary. Komi is the nearest country in this selection but it is situated in North Siberia which has other climatic conditions.

Children's answers showed that more "our" lands – the places more similar to Estonia – were France and Hungary. The similarity perceived has been influenced by their belonging to the European landscape with big trees which are reminiscent of our broad-leaved trees.

The picture about Komi depicts a snowy expanse. This place led children to recall stories about Santa Claus' life in the North. The Estonian winter is also snowy: we usually have snow for four months. Unhappily the winter has been warmer in recent years and our children are having less experience of snow – they have seen it for a few weeks only; they have even forgotten about playing in the snow. Many of the children have remarked about this picture: "It is not Estonia because it is snowy! Where is our snow? We do not have snow!"

The picture of the North has also seemed stranger because of the character depicted in the illustration. There is a boy in Nordic national costume. The children have noticed his Asiatic appearance – narrow eyes – and this detail is linked to the specification of nations like “Japanese”, “Chinese” or even “Hindu” (which could also have been confused with “Indian”). These nations are really very far away.

Here we must say something about the Komi nation. This nation, situated 1 200 km from us, belongs to the Finno-Ugrian like the Estonian. We have cultural and everyday contacts. People with features similar to this boy are seen in our streets. Also we can find a lot of people who have Asiatic features among Estonians – prominent cheekbones, narrow eyes, dark hair. Our people are very varied in their appearance. Why has the boy in this book illustration been perceived as a stranger?

The conception of Virginia Lowe given above will be recalled here: children are either unaware or uninterested in the differences in ethnicity and culture that they encounter every day. The example about the boy living in Komi shows that the reception of this picture has been influenced by the stereotypical view: people with narrow eyes are Chinese or other Asians living far from us.

Many children have said that this land is in the North because it reminded them of Santa Claus. Our children have heard in children’s broadcasts and read in children’s magazines that Santa Claus is really living in Finland and even his address has been given. None the less only one boy noticed that the country depicted in the illustration could be Finland. Maybe children imagine that only

magic characters like dwarfs are living in Santa Claus' land. It cannot be a place where a real boy raises reindeer.

There are details perceived differently – for example the fairy birds from the French tale. Some children said that this is an Estonian story because the birds are Estonian. Other children mentioned that it cannot be Estonia because our big birds do not fly so close by. The faint grey drawing in this picture appears to some children to be the sea, to others to be the mountains. The conclusions made about the country are different.

In addition to the concrete objects – clothes, trees, flowers – abstract qualities have also been noticed: “It seems like the people are speaking a foreign language there” (about the Hungarian fairy tale); “they are strangers because they are poor; our people are not so poor” (about Ajtmatov's book).

Sometimes the child's remark is influenced by association. One girl said, looking at the illustration of the French tale: “It is not our land because we do not have orange trees”. Why has she mentioned orange trees? The landscape in this book is also without orange trees!

Children's experience is limited and besides this their perceptions can be different. Looking at the illustration of the Hungarian fairy tale – the picture with a big tree and frog – one seven-year-old boy said: “I cannot say what country this could be because I have never been in the forest”, but another little boy came to the conclusion: “It cannot be Estonia because we do not have a place like it” – as if he could know all the possible places in our land.

Here too the differentiation between younger and older children is remarkable. The children of the first form (7 years) have more often recognised the place in the story as “our land”. The pupils of the second form with their wider geographical knowledge have better understood that the illustrations are of other countries.

The *time* of story

Here the difference between illustrations is very clear.

Both fairy tales are identified as stories that happen in the past (Hungarian fairy tale – 96% and French fairy tale – 98%). The books about the Kirghizian boy and about the boy living in Komi appear as stories happening in the present for 47% and for 46% of the children. In both case there were some answers that these books could as well be about the present as about the past. So approximately half of the children recognised the illustrations in the realistic stories are up-to-date.

Children’s arguments:

The clothes are old-fashioned – this is often said about fairy tales. One boy found that the Nordic clothes of the boy living in Komi are modern – and this is not wrong! Many people now are dressed in coats that are in an ethnic style.

Also the face can be old-fashioned (for example the boy living in Komi) and even the trees can be described as old-fashioned (French fairy tale).

Children's concrete thinking and undeveloped time sense have generated answers like: "It is about the past because I have not seen a boy like this" and "The story is happening in the olden times because it is in the summer but now it is winter".

Some children can draw logical conclusions: "because I know this land, this story can be happening in the present."

The magical details are identified as belonging to the past:

"The story is about olden times because the wolf is not evil". – "Please explain!" –
"Nowadays the wolves are evil". (Nordic boy and his dog)

"Nowadays we cannot see birds like these". (French fairy tale)

"This boy is from olden times because he is not usual." (French fairy tale)

We could also encounter more generalised expressions about the picture. The story is "about the olden times because the illustration is so heavy" (Ajtmatov's book is illustrated in black-red tonality that appears unusually dark for a children's book). Some children have expressed that olden times, the past, were of another kind of time than nowadays. They have noticed that the things which seem unreal nowadays could have been real in the past (about French and Hungarian fairy tales).

The evaluation of the possibility of being *in the same situation* as the character in the illustration

This question can seem difficult or even nonsensical but children's answers indicate an interesting tendency.

The readiness “to go into the picture” is the highest in the case of Rotchev’s book about the Nordic boy. Fifty percent of the children mentioned that they could be in the same situation. Also the illustration in the book of Ajtmatov presents the situation as real. Nearly half of the children affirmed: “I can be in the same situation”.

A fact that is noticeable is that the readiness to be in the same situation (in the place) depicted in the illustration is not connected with the similarity between our land and the place in the book but with the nearness in time.

The finding with regard to the answer – I can or not – is usually very realistic:

“I can be in this situation because I have been in Norway” (Ajtmatov’s book from Central Asia);

“I cannot travel so far” (Rotchev’s book about the boy living in Komi);

“I can see this place when I will travel. This boy is also travelling: he is from the South, look – he has eyes like the people in the South ” (a girl’s version about the boy living in Komi).

The French fairy tale has woken the desire to be in the same situation but at the same time many children have recognised that it is impossible in real life. They have often answered: “I can be there but in dreams” or “in the theatre”. One boy said: “I don’t know the way to this place” but saying this sounds like the way must be secret and unreal. Probably he does not know the way to either Kirghizia or to Siberia but he has not mentioned this.

The most unreal situation is depicted in the Hungarian fairy tale’s illustration – maybe because there is an anthropomorphic fairy in this one only. It seems unreal to have contact with this world.

Of course this problem is not just one of the book's illustration but also the problem of the child's possibilities and need to identify with the character.

The *genre* of story belonging to the illustration

The genre of stories is identified relatively adequately. Nearly half the children identified the books of Ajtmatov and Rotchev as the realistic stories. Some children said that they could be either realistic stories or fairy tales.

The French fairy tale is identified as a realistic story by 22 percent of the children. In this experiment it seems to be the Hungarian fairy tale which is most often identified as a "fairy" tale.

These results show that the recognition of the genre of the stories is in accordance with the specification of the time of the stories.

- The illustrations depicting the situations of the present are identified as belonging to the realistic style – both by 50 percent of the children.
- The illustrations depicting the situations of the past are identified as belonging to the fairy tales.

So Bakhtin's idea about the unity between the chronotope and the genre will be affirmed by the reception of one illustration only.

Those results show that even one picture can include so much information about a book's content, that half of the children could relatively closely identify the

genre of the book and the time of the story's happening. This first impression can be very powerful. Some children identified the boy living in Komi as a girl and the Hungarian fairy as a woman. Later the researcher used the right word – “the boy” or “the man” but there were children who clung to their first impression and could not change their interpretation.

We encountered a lot of examples of children's lively imagination that generates original versions about these stories and also the conclusions they come to. Why does this story (about the boy living in Komi) seem to be a fairy tale? – “Because the boy is without a cap”.

Many children have told their own stories about these illustrations. For example, their ideas about the Nordic boy:

- This is a girl. She travels around the world. She has been to different countries already.
- This girl is like the sorceress. She can be friends with the wolves.
- This boy must tramp because his parents are drinkers and they have forsaken him. Now the animals are this boy's best friends.
- The wolf has an owner, a man, but they have lost each other. Now the wolf is living together with the boy but later the owner will find his animal.
- This boy has travelled to the North and because he found the dog there he will stay in the North.
- It is a didactic story about how the winter comes; about whether Santa Claus' reindeer become wet in the snow or not; about how the snow could be blue ...

A problem is raised by children's versions like these: how can the reading of text influence those first ideas?

Some children consciously articulated the technical qualities of the illustration and the book generally:

- “The story is from an other land because the illustrator is a foreigner, not our man.”
- “The picture is about olden times because the paper is brown” or “the pictures do not shine, grey things were made in olden times” – about the illustration in the French fairy tale where there are delicate details in grey.

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Weave me a story:

multiple input in the creation of children's stories

sue hepker

The creation of a children's picture book usually follows a set procedure: first there is the concept, created by either the writer or the illustrator. Then the text gets generated, followed by the artwork under the guidance of the editor, then the material is proofed. And finally the camera-ready product is taken to the printer. Although this scenario may vary, the process is in essence linear and fairly straightforward.

The books in the Little Library had a more complex genesis. They were not created in a straightforward linear process: they are more like a fabric which has been woven with a variety of different threads.

In order to understand how the books in the Little Library were "woven", one has first to understand the necessity for their creation. Young black children had no access to picture books of quality in the years of apartheid and before. Without appropriate reading material they could not easily develop reading skills, nor the kind of motivation essential to the development of a culture of literacy.

It was generally accepted by publishers that the only buyers of books for black children would be the institutions, such as libraries or education departments. Publishing for a retail black market place was a high risk venture, and few

publishers could take the risk. It was a widely held belief that black parents could not or would not buy books for their children. So the kinds of books that might have appealed were never published and the prediction became self-fulfilling. Children's books for black children were not easily accessible, as no bookshops existed in areas accessible to the majority of black parents. Commercial realities meant that publishers targeted their publishing for the white, middle income group.

While there was a steady supply of South African children's books for the English and Afrikaans groups, only a negligible number were published for black children, and these were mostly commissioned by educational publishing houses, specifically for use in black schools. The literary and aesthetic quality of the books ranges from fair to dubious. The quality of the translations has been generally condemned as inferior by many of the teachers who had to use them. Frequently, schools received books in a language which was not spoken in their schools.

In 1989, a study by Dr Carol Macdonald, entitled *The Threshold report*, clearly demonstrated the dangers of not developing reading skills before the age of 10. In the study, Dr Macdonald indicated the need for the development of quality picture books for young black children in particular.

The report was taken seriously by the Liberty Life Foundation, which decided to invest a substantial amount of money in the creation of books for disadvantaged children. They decided that I would lead the development of a project to create the books which were so badly needed.

As READ's book selector, I had been frustrated for several years by the difficulties of finding appropriate reading material for young children in the first years of

school, and I welcomed the opportunity of generating some original books. But I realised that I was faced by an enormous challenge. For there was no way that I was going to “tailor make” books for any one community. I firmly believe that if a story is good enough it will overcome all cultural barriers. I wanted to create story books that would appeal to ALL South African children, not to just those who were black or disadvantaged.

I set the criteria from the outset: the stories not only had to be universal, child-centred and entertaining, they had to be so good that they could be used as didactic tools in the classroom. They had to carry the weight of the “curriculum” and the “syllabus”, for many teachers, specially those conditioned by an overwhelming authoritarian education system, would not use them in the classrooms unless it could be proved they were part of the curriculum.

Yet their didacticism had to be so deeply embedded that it was invisible. Most importantly, the books had to provide children with a distinctly pleasurable and meaningful experience. The greatest challenge was to create stories that would link all the different population groups in South Africa: stories that would bridge barriers of race, language and culture. Apartheid had created deep chasms between cultures and people, and I had to devise some way to bridge those gaps by creating stories that would touch all South African adults and children alike.

In August 1990 I had run a workshop to create picture books, in which I created teams of individuals who were given the task of creating a dummy book in two days. This had been phenomenally successful, and in fact seven of the twelve books created in that workshop have subsequently been formally published by a variety of publishers.

This positive experience proved to me that it was in fact possible to “weave” a story, using the creative inputs of several individuals as the basic “threads”.

In 1991, I ran six workshops in different parts of South Africa: Magaliesberg, KaNgwane, Pietermaritzburg, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth and Magoebaskloof. The workshops were residential and in each workshop I created a microcosm of the population mix in that area. There were other mixes too: individuals from the art world like writers and illustrators were mixed with teachers and children. There were singers and musicians and dancers, and psychologists and linguists and inspectors of education.

I began the workshop by setting the parameters, and showing the delegates what motivates children to read by having a teacher demonstrate with a class of children.

The workshops were fun, and this was an important element in the creation of the stories. At any hint of didacticism, I would sabotage the story! There was an enormous pressure on the teams in the creation of the stories, for they had to negotiate ideas with people whom they hardly knew, who came from backgrounds very different from their own. Sometimes this was an effective challenge to the creativity of the group. Sometimes it ended in disaster, as there was no way of knowing in advance which delegates would work well together.

Each team had to present its story to the group at the end of the workshop, and the delegates were invited to make constructive criticisms.

But this was only the start of the creative process. In fact, it served as a very basic “pattern”. For the stories were then tested with groups of children in the area, and I tried to identify which stories had potential and which did not.

I had been given just the rough design of the “fabric”, and now I had to pick up “threads” from a much wider audience: the teachers and children in the schools where the stories were tested.

The story *One dark dark night*, was very different in its initial form. In the original story, a snake gets into the *kaia* or house of the family and causes all the household animals to be disturbed. The women hunt all over for the intruder, but in vain. The end of the story showed the snake curled around the baby in its basket. Both snake and baby were fast asleep, unaware of the furore around them.

The teacher responsible for the snake element came from a tribe whose totem was the snake. They believed that it was great fortune if a snake came into one’s home. But in the testing environment, children and teachers responded very negatively to the idea of the snake in the story, and it was clear that the snake had to go. At the same time, there were elements in the story that evoked an extremely positive response: the sound effects connected with the characters and the animals, and the idea of something that created a disturbance in the night.

It was clear from the response to the story that we had touched on a raw and vitally important issue. For most children, the theme of night fears is extremely common. For **these** children, who had just experienced the horrors of vigilante attacks in the townships by groups of thugs, it was not just an ephemeral fear. It

was a harsh reality. This story provided many of them with the opportunity to talk about their experiences in a safe and unthreatening environment.

At a further workshop with some of the editors from other publishing houses, other writers and illustrators, a new story was created around the elements of the sound effects and the noises in the night. This became the story *One dark, dark night*.

The six workshops generated about 73 stories in all, and from these, 23 were selected to be made up into full colour dummies, which were translated into nine languages. I needed to test the illustrative styles with the children, and I knew that visual literacy was poorly developed in many communities in South Africa.

The dummy books and the translations together with many other posters of the books went on an exhibition in July 1991 to four centres in South Africa: Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Port Elizabeth. Audiences voted for the stories they liked best on specially designed voting cards. These opinions enabled me to select the final 12 stories.

I still had to decide on the 10 best stories, so they were tested again in a workshop for preschool educators and linguists, who were asked to comment on which stories would be most valuable to them. Two stories were cut in that workshop because the educators proved that they were too threatening for the very young child.

One story which was very “Dahlist” was called *Mama Sizwe and the bad monkey*. This was about a bad monkey that stole food from the communal

cooking pot. In the end the monkey got its “come uppance” by being pushed into the pot while it was stealing. It was then eaten with great relish. Older children were very entertained by the story, but I accepted that younger children who might empathise with the monkey, might find it threatening.

The other story which had equally dark humour, was a variation of the Henny-Penny story with a “Dr Cat”, instead of the Fox. *Dr Cat* had as the central character a sleazy character posturing as a doctor who was said to cure almost anything. The story and illustrations appealed to the humour of older children who could easily spot the deception. But the threatening subplot might have undermined children’s confidence in their doctors. And so it was cut from the selection.

Even when I finally had 10 stories that I knew were accessible to all children, I had to ensure they were going to work in the classroom as didactic tools. Another workshop was held with psychologists and it was at this late stage that it became apparent that one of the stories, *Dorothy’s visit*, was in fact seriously flawed. The story was the only fantasy in the series, and originally it involved the visit of an elephant called Dorothy to a little girl who lived in town. The elephant caused all sorts of problems and in the end had to be sent back to the Game Reserve. It was pointed out that rural children, identifying with the elephant might read from this that they could not transfer to an urban environment as they were too conspicuous and clumsy. I agreed with the validity of this perception, and was appalled, specially as we had virtually completed the art work for the book.

Thanks to the ingenuity of the art director and illustrator, Marjorie van Heerden, we shifted the fantasy in the story in order to retain those elements that worked,

and eliminate those that did not. In the final version, the little girl misinterprets the information on a postcard. She *thinks* that an elephant is coming to visit, but in fact, when the visitor arrives, it is not an elephant after all, but a little girl just like her.

What is significant in the book is that the two little girls are clearly from distinctly different cultural groups. But the story stresses their commonality and as such has become an enormously valuable teaching tool.

However, I must admit that the fantasy in the story is not clearly understood by many children, who still believe when they have heard the story or seen the marvellously vivid illustrations, that an elephant **did** come to visit. This is not really important though: what is important is that we removed the dangerous subtext before it could do any damage. Because the elephant had not actually come from anywhere, it did not matter how the complications of having an elephant come to visit were resolved.

But the weaving process was still far from over. Children use different learning modes or styles in their acquisition of knowledge, and learning to read is no exception. For this reason, I wanted to incorporate a multimedia approach in the development of the series. Posters would stimulate visual literacy skills and provide opportunities for developing literate thinking. The audiotapes would assist children whose learning styles depended on aural and kinaesthetic skills. In addition, the audiotapes would ensure that learning other languages would be strongly related to play.

Poster workshops were held to focus on how visual literacy skills could be developed. These workshops heightened our awareness of the design of the book

and which important visual elements to include in the illustrations and posters. Each poster was carefully planned to tie in with curriculum needs and children's needs as emergent literates. Most of the 10 illustrators were involved in the educational workshops too, and so were fully aware of all the issues that were involved in the creation of the stories.

At the same time, both the music for the stories and the translations of the stories were being developed. I had no idea what a hornet's nest I had opened by insisting that all the translations be properly tested and proofed before publishing.

Firstly I discovered that at least 17 different dialects of Xhosa existed in the country, and that at least three different styles of Zulu. I also discovered that only one computer in the country contained software for publishing in Pedi, and so every proofing error meant that the entire story had to be filmed again. Very expensive mistakes they were!

In reaching consensus on which words or phrases to use, the translators and myself also became involved with the notorious Language Board. The Language Board had been established by the apartheid government to keep the different languages "pure". I fiercely resisted the notion of language purity, and demonstrated my determination to allow "mixing" of languages in principle by including sound effects in different languages in as many stories as possible. This is particularly evident in *Eddie Ndlovu*, which provides English-speaking teachers with unpronounceable clicks – delighting the non-English speakers who proudly help their teachers over some of their difficulties!

In the end, a translation workshop was held which was attended by 28 translators, working simultaneously in nine languages. Each translator had to present his or her version of a story and justify the interpretation.

At this workshop, I was faced by a “strike”. Some of the translators refused to translate the most popular story, *Does your father snore*. They claimed that the story was untranslatable for a variety of reasons: one could not be so impolite as to tell an adult male that he snores; one could not enter his room uninvited; one certainly could not carry him outside and one could not add insult to injury by not allowing the father to beat the children when a spider fell into his mouth! All these elements were culturally unacceptable, despite the fact that the story itself is based on a **real** anecdote that happened to a Zulu father in kwaZulu!

Much negotiation followed before a compromise was reached: if the father was white, none of the cultural restrictions would apply. And as for the beating that they believed should be built into the text ... we left the ending unresolved. The text reads: “You can guess what happens next ...” Each child is left to decide what appropriate action should follow the incident.

The story is currently used by the National Children’s Rights Commission as a way to introduce the subject of parent-child relationships and discipline.

During the testing of the translations, translators had to tape the way in which stories were read aloud by teachers in order to check the fluency and rhythm of the translations. They also had to collect musical improvisations of the refrains that were written into the stories.

These were eventually incorporated in the music workshop, in which linguists, translators and musicians participated. The music workshop was in essence a “jam” session where we played with musical extensions to the stories. Original songs had also been specially written to accompany the stories, but in addition to these songs were the musical games which formed an extension of each story. The games ensured the playfulness in the project which is essential in any material intended to be used at this level.

By the time the two years of development were over, at least 700 individuals had actively participated in creating, shaping and embellishing the stories and the supporting teaching material.

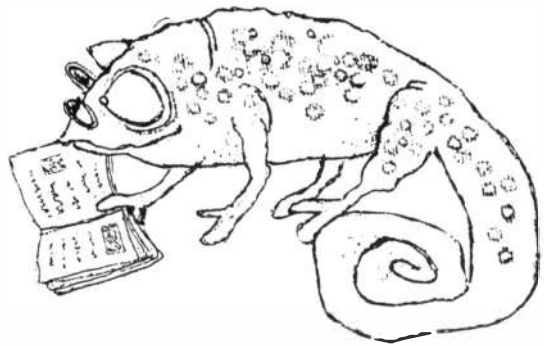
It seemed miraculous when we finished: the books looked ordinary enough, but they were “tapestries” of incredible complexity and density. The wonder of the Little Library is what happens in classrooms and homes when children hear the tapes and see the posters; when the possibilities hidden in the stories are opened to them, when they become participants in the creative process of reading and thinking and writing and drawing and playing and singing.

The value of the Little Library is simply this: the books work. They provide both pleasure and learning. They are accessible and stimulating and relevant. And they are all these things because of the time-consuming, painstaking, complex “weaving” of the ideas of all those who offered up their creativity and skills in the formulating of the Little Library.

Multiple input is not for the faint hearted. It is not for those who have strong and definite ideas of how things should be. Weaving a story with others means

that one has to trust and respect the thoughts and feelings of those who enter into intimate relationships with books. It means that one has to trust and respect one's own judgment too: there are sometimes difficult choices to make, and plenty of critics who would delight in finding fault.

But for those with energy and a spirit of adventure it is a craft well worth learning and immensely satisfying to complete.



Can fairy tales help?

cicely van straten



Fairy tales have been enjoyed by young and old for millennia. Like the rock art that graces our caves and kranses, the fairy tale has its roots in the myths and rituals of the earliest dawning of consciousness, or as the Australian Aborigines call it, the Dream Time. Yet, just as our Bushman rock art not only depicts the myths of long ago but also the coming of men riding horses, so the fairy tale not only embraces elements that are ancient but it can also reflect cultural developments of the last hundred years.

But what are fairy tales? For the purposes of this paper, I shall use the term just as everybody uses it. The name “fairy tale” in the English language covers a wide range of rather different kinds of stories. As JRR Tolkien pointed out in his essay “On Fairy-stories” (1938) fairy tales have nothing to do with fairies of the small garden variety at all. They have to do with that other dimension in which the marvellous, the impossible, the fantastic happen. The land of Faerie is a perilous and wonderful country where the human protagonist adventures among the mythic and fabulous beings of a magic realm.

Northrop Frye makes some useful distinctions between the realms of myth and fairy tale:

First, there is undisplaced myth, generally concerned with gods or demons ... Second we have the general tendency we have called romantic, the tendency to suggest mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience (Frye 1957:139).

The hero of romance, as opposed to the hero of myth:

moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended: prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him – terrifying ogres and witches, and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established (Frye 1957:33).

What distinguishes fairy tale from myth then, is not necessarily subject matter (we meet maidens, heroes and dragons in both) but the way in which this subject matter is handled. Myth, worldwide, was implicitly believed. Mythic stories explain how the world was made and why things are as they are. Myths were articles of faith, they were the great stories that mankind lived and died by. Fairy tales, on the other hand, are not implicitly believed. Our relationship with the fairy tale is more subtle, more changeable, more flexible. We do not believe in fairy tales as factual truths, yet somehow they live in our hearts and often we live by them, consciously or unconsciously.

Two of the most common characteristics of the fairy tale are conflict and the quest. “Agon, or conflict is the basis of the archetypal theme of romance, the radical of romance being a sequence of marvellous adventures”, as Frye maintains.

A very striking contrast between the realm of myth as opposed to the realm of the fairy tale is recorded by Geza Roheim:

I have collected myths and folktales in many areas, and if I just make a hasty mental survey of my own collections I find that in some areas a clear line of distinction runs between the two, while in others matters seem to be more confused ... I will consider the situation only in central Australia. Here we have a very clear distinction between a folktale and mythological narrative. Before I went out into the field very little was

known about folktales in central Australia. The narratives recorded by Spencer and Strehlow were pure myths and more than that they were esoteric myths, that is, they were known only to initiated. I wondered whether women and children had no narratives of their own: it did not seem probable to me that this type of sublimation would be absent. I never found it by looking for it: I found it by pure chance. One of the old women who used to come and tell me her dreams launched out into a long narrative that did not sound like a dream at all. "Did you really dream this?" I asked her. No, this is not something she dreamt last night, it is an old altjira (dream). Then I found out that the Aranda word Altjira meant both dream and folktale (Roheim in *Myth and literature* 1966:26).

Now both Freud and Jung were also struck by how much the content of fairy tales resembles the content of dreams. And as everyone knows, Freud called dreams "the royal road to the unconscious". It is not surprising, then, that a psychotherapist, such as Marie Louise von Franz, the colleague of Jung who spent many years of research on fairy tales in psychotherapy was to write:

Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious psychic processes ... They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest and most concise form ... In myths or legends, or any other more elaborate mythological material, we get at the basic patterns of the human psyche through an overlay of cultural material (Von Franz 1970:1).

Another characteristic that Roheim noted of the hundreds of oral folktales he collected was that the folktale, as opposed to the myth, has a happy ending, a positive outcome. There is always conflict, struggle and quest, but the end of the tale brings resolution of conflict. In Northrop Frye's words, "the ethos of optimism" reigns in the fairy tale, as opposed to the often stark or tragic ethos of the myth. Speaking of the aboriginal tales he garnered Roheim writes: "The ogre is always burnt at the end and the human beings are always victorious. Besides cannibalism, the other outstanding feature of these narratives is the happy end."

This happy ending is what Bruno Bettelheim considers one of the most important gifts of the fairy tale to the child:

The message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form is that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence – but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardship one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious (Bettelheim 1978:8).

The figures and events of fairy tales also personify and illustrate inner conflicts, but they suggest ever so subtly how these conflicts may be solved, and what the next steps in the development towards a higher humanity might be. The fairy tale is presented in a simple, homely way ... even the smallest child is never made to feel inferior. Far from making demands, the fairy tale reassures, gives hope for the future and holds out the promise of a happy ending. That is why Lewis Carroll called it a 'love-gift' (Bettelheim 1978:26).

The folktales I have been describing here could be called fairy folktales – an important subgenre of the general fairy tale species. But there are other kinds of stories that come under the heading of fairy tale. There are the very old, boisterous and untamed Trickster tales which are the same the world over and are represented in Africa by the tales of the tricky little hare, or by the Zulu Uhlakanyane (who was described to the folktale collector Henry Callaway as being just the sort of person the little mongoose is!) who does the most appalling things to everybody – particularly those in high or venerable positions – and gets away with them. There are also fables which are very simple stories that point a clear moral, such as Aesop's fables. Then we have the fabulous world of the hero legends, the world of Beowulf, the Arthurian cycles, the deeds of Herakles, the Homeric cycles, Russia's Prince Igor, the epic of Gilgamesh, Maui the Stealer of Fire, the Norse legends and sagas (a saga lays emphasis mostly on the deeds and histories of family and clan whereas the heroic legends focus on the life and doings of the hero). We have the incredible deeds, and the boasting thereof, of Irish Cuchulain

and a great host of other marvellous and valorous heroes, as well as the stories of encounters between mortals and the denizens of another world such as nixies and kobbolds and other nature spirits. These are the true fairies, the remnants of the old gods who were banished by Christianity. Growing smaller, they fled beyond human civilisation to the wild reaches of the world, from whence they still exercise their enchantment and fascination upon mortals.

Just as the young child needs the gift of the happy ending that the fairy folktale offers, so adolescents need the hero-quest during the phase of life when they start out to transcend the bonds of the nuclear family and see themselves as members of a wider community which will make its demands on them. And Joseph Campbell has this to say about the inner journey as depicted in legends and in many hero myths as well:

It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back. In fact, it may well be that the very high incidence of neuroticism among ourselves follows from the decline among us of such effective spiritual aid. We remain fixated to the unexorcised images of our infancy, and hence disinclined to the necessary passages of our adulthood (Campbell 1986:11).

We would do well to consider his words in the light of so many young lives shorn of meaningful ritual in the huge amorphous cities of today's technological civilisation.

There are basically two kinds of fairy tale text in the world today: the written and the oral. The oral tale is very much alive in preliterate societies all over the world and is, thank goodness, coming back into favour in literate societies as well! One of the characteristics of the oral tale is that it always exists in a great

number of variations and we look in vain for a single “original” or “authentic” text. Each tale type consists of multiple renderings and the vitality of the tale depends entirely on the performance of the individual teller. Like music or drama, the oral performance is a recreation anew each time of old themes woven together in new combinations and the voice and gestures of the performer create a unique artistic occasion. For instance in my research on Southern African tales, I have come across as many as ten different variations of the Milk Bird stories, (very like our Hansel and Gretel and Tom Thumb (Perrault’s Poucet), of the Mbulu tales (close to our Goose Girl and True and False Bride tales), and the Sikhulume and Nanabulele stories. Some of these tales are more meaningfully and completely expressed than others, but there is no one text that can be considered to be more “genuine”, or correct or authentic than any other.

In the literate societies of East and West we have proof of a delight in fairy tales that goes back for millenia. The story of the lost slipper of Rhodopis passed from ancient Egypt into the lore of Greece and Homer’s *Odyssey* is full of fairy tales while purporting to be legend and saga! In the 5th century AD the first great collection of fairy tales, the *Panchatantra* (The Five Books) appeared in Hindu. It was followed 400 hundred years later by:

The vast assemblage of Indian folk tales set down nine hundred years ago by Somaveda, a Kashmir Brahmin, entitled *Katha Sarit Sagara* (Oceans of Streams of Story), contained stories with elements that, happily, are still familiar to the young today: helpful animals, invincible swords, shoes of swiftness, and vessels which continuously provide good things to eat no matter how much is taken from them. In particular the collection contained a splendid version of Hans Andersen’s ‘The Princess on the pea’ ... (Opie & Opie 1984:22).

The 9th century saw the Persian collection “The Book of Sindibad” and the “Thousand and one nights” can be traced to the 10th century. In Europe the

“Delightful nights” (or “Le Piacevoli notti”) of Straparola appeared in 1550–1553 in Italy and was followed in 1634 by Basile’s “Lo Cunto de li Cunti” or “Tale of tales”. None of these ancient collections were made for the benefit of children. They were all (strictly one would think) for adult delectation and were, it seems, particularly enjoyed by women during the long hours of spinning, weaving, sewing and other tasks that could be carried out in company. The dire warnings of medieval sermons against women who indulged too freely and credulously in fairy tales attest to the popularity of the ubiquitous stories.

However, it was Charles Perrault, amongst the many writers of fairy tales in 17th century France, who first insisted on retelling the tales in written form for children. Perrault excised from the old “nurse’s” tales what was not considered proper for the ears of children and at the end of each story he added his own little “moralité” in verse in which he pointed out the moral lesson of the tale with both praise for virtue and warnings against transgression.

Today we smile at Perrault’s moralités for we know that there is a great deal more to the fairy tale than the moral message of the fable or cautionary tale. Yet, the purveyor of these ancient stories to children always has a problem, for the originals were not for children and in our reshaping of them for childish ears we always have to leave out what the society of the day would not have children hear. In spite of the Grimm brothers’ protestations that as collectors of folklore they must respect the integrity of the oral stories they collected, Wilhelm proceeded to change both plot and style of the tales they assembled. Ruth Bottigheimer, for example, has pointed out how he altered women’s speech from direct to indirect in Märchen dialogue, portraying a shift from active to passive, until the stylistic rendering of the later editions of “Kinder- und Hausmärchen” was attuned to German morality of the 19th century that disallowed the ribald or burlesque or the power, initiative and free speech of women.

Maria Tatar documents a more sinister result of the “refining” of oral stories in the Grimms’ collection. She traces back to its roots the tale of “Little Red Riding Hood” which was originally popular as a tale told by and to adults, particularly women’s working groups:

Folk versions of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ are less concerned with presenting lessons than with entertaining an audience by rehearsing a sequence of racy events. Red Riding Hood begins by unwittingly eating the flesh of her grandmother; she then performs a striptease for the wolf, gets into bed with him, and engages in a dialogue that leads up to a terrifying threat; in the end she escapes by pleading with the wolf for a chance to go outdoors and relieve herself. For centuries, adult audiences depended on the telling of such tales as ‘The Story of Grandmother’ (one is reminded here of the story of Hlakanyane and Grandmother in the pot) to shorten the hours devoted to repetitive house chores or harvesting tasks. Is it any wonder that they demanded fast-paced adventure stories filled with bawdy episodes, violent scenes, and scatological humor? (Tatar 1992:37) (My parenthesis).

So far so good, Little Red Riding Hood is a witty and courageous heroine who sums things up pretty quickly and gets herself out of trouble with ingenuity. A typical peasant lass who knows what’s who and who’s what. But what happens when moralising pedagogues get hold of tales like this and reshape them in order to be edifying to children? We get a tale in which the violence is preserved (the threat of being eaten by a wolf) but is turned into a didactic instrument:

But the pretty flowers that in the wood
Bloomed gay and bright on either hand,
So lured the maiden to gaze and pluck
That she quite forgot the strict command

To her mother’s words, ever after this,
Red Riding Hood gave better heed;
For she saw the dreadful end to which
A disobedient act may lead
(Tatar 1992:39).

Here we have a great discrepancy between the action of a little girl stopping to pick a flower or two and the ghastly punishment of nearly getting eaten for it.

In a survey of the origins and earlier versions of tales such as “Frau Trude” (Grimm) Tatar traces the conversion of a tale about women’s involvement with witchcraft into a story in which a young girl is gruesomely punished for simple childlike curiosity. As Ruth Bottigheimer has pointed out in her study of gender-related punishments in Grimms’ tales, “*Bad girls and bold boys: the moral and social vision of Grimm’s tales*”, curiosity or a sense of initiative in girls is heavily punished whereas the same qualities in boys is rewarded.

As Tatar has pointed out:

That variants of the ‘The Household of the Witch’ (Later called ‘Mother Trude’) moved out of the melodramatic and comic modes to take a turn in the direction of moral edification is unfortunate, for they thereby instituted a death penalty for such character traits as curiosity and audacity. Once the household of the witch ceased to function as a source of entertainment for adults it began to deteriorate into a frightening story about the way in which the deviant behaviour of children is punished with death (Tatar 1992:40).

The Italian ‘Caterinella’ also offers a striking example of the way in which a folktale once full of earthy humour could be converted into a heavy-handed text with a pedagogical agenda. In the process, the surreal violence of the original was converted into a frightening punishment for a relatively minor transgression (Tatar 1992:40).

Scholars such as Torborg Lundell¹ have pointed out the gender-related biases in the very wording of the famous Aarne and Thompson Folktale Index and feminist studies such as those of Kay F Stone and Ruth Bottigheimer highlight the manner in which the dialectic of the tales endorses female passivity, self-negation, obedience and silent impotence in the face of brutal treatment by male

protagonists, or the shifting of villainy onto female protagonists to cover up male transgressions, particularly in the case of fathers' incestuous advances towards daughters in the Catskin type stories such as "The Maiden without hands". Sadly, we have to admit that the collecting and transcribing of ancient tales is not without hazards, especially when we fashion tales for children that were certainly not originally intended for them.

But there is another side to this coin. Once we admit that adults have altered folktale texts in order to control children, to impregnate them with certain beliefs and codes, we can also allow ourselves to do this in more positive ways. We can use fairy tales to challenge and to change. We can allow our young readers to turn things upside down and to question what the solemn grown-ups have taught them. We can use fairy tales for the delightful task of subversion.

On the face of it, one can hardly think of two men more dissimilar than the Scots writer George MacDonald and Oscar Wilde. And yet they had something in common. They were among the first authors writing in English (one a Scot and one Irish!) to write subversive fairy tales in the last 30 years of the previous century. In stories such as *The Light princess*, *At the back of the north wind*, *The Princess and the goblin*, *The Lost princess* and *The Princess and Curdie*, *The Golden key* and *The Day boy and the night girl* MacDonald turned upside down not only the class distinctions of Victorian England but also the traditional gender roles encoded in the fairy tales of the previous 200 years. Moreover he reinstated quite explicitly, in the teeth of current Protestant theological thinking, the divine value of the imagination as a means of apprehending spiritual truth.

In his very different way with *The Happy prince and other stories* Oscar Wilde made new fairy tales to undermine the messages of many old ones. He used the

genre to subvert and question itself and its messages. Cut from the same mould as MacDonald and Wilde, also owing much to the thinking of Ruskin and Morris, was L Frank Baum, the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and its much-loved sequels. The experimentation with the fairy-tale discourse, that ongoing dialectic between the fairy tale and its thinking reader, that these three authors initiated has been followed by “counter-cultural” fairy tales that challenge gender roles and class distinctions still operative in today’s society. Authors such as Tomi Ungerer, The Merseyside Women’s Liberation Movement, Catherine Storr, Iring Fetscher, P Dumas and B Moissard, Jay Williams, Jane Yolen and HJ Gelberg, the Italian writers Turin, Cantarellis, Bosnia, Soccaro and Selig as well as the well-known German writer Michael Ende, creator of *Momo* and *The Endless story* all contribute towards a truly living fairy-tale tradition. In their work lies the future of the genre of the literary fairy tale, for without a genuine dialectic between the exigencies and challenges of now and the ancient mythic core, the tales will eventually be found wanting and will be abandoned.

Where does all this leave us in South Africa? Happily, although a written tradition of tales has come into being from translations made by collectors such as Theal, Callaway, Junod, Jacottet, Bleek, Postma, Doke, Stuart and Scheub, the great majority of folktales and fairy tales in Southern Africa exist in their oral form. This means that no one version is considered “correct” or authentic above others and each tale type exists in several variations. And the richness and vitality of oral performance still gives the tales the warmth and immediacy that is the special beauty of the folktale:

Expressiveness of tone, gesture, facial expression, dramatic use of pause and rhythm, the interplay of passion, dignity or humour, receptivity to the reactions of the audience etc ... Such devices are not mere embellishments superadded to the already existent literary work – as we think of them in regard to written literature – but an integral as well as flexible part of its full realization as a work of art (Finnegan 1970:3).

How fortunate our children would be if they could all participate in what the Nigerian writer Mabel Segun has termed “a childhood of delightful nights spent listening to folktales or telling riddles under the silvery light of the moon.”

Where the European child will have the story of “Hansel and Gretel”, which according to the psychologists, depicts the progress of the young child away from complete dependence upon parents towards autonomy – the African child has a rich variety of milkbird stories. There is the “Umuntu Nenyoni” in Zulu, and there are different versions in Ndebele, Sotho, Tswana and Venda, each with its own intriguing variations.

There is the powerful group of Mbulu stories, widespread among the language groups of Southern Africa, that seems to be very close to the European “Goose girl” or “True and false bride” tales. These stories – “Ukcombekantsini” in Zulu, Mbulumakhasane in Xhosa and Polomakhsane in North Sotho – comprise elements that are strongly reminiscent of the European tales but they also have a haunting quality of suffering through rejection and humiliation that perhaps harkens back to the experience of a young bride in a culture that turned her virtually into a nonperson and certainly the homestead drudge, as typified by the hlonipa customs, until she had borne a son and heir for her husband’s family.

Interestingly, the well-known Indo-European story of Cinderella, is seldom found in Africa. In my comparative study of European and Southern African folktales, I have come across only one indigenous version. It is a very fascinating one. It is the story of a girl, Nondwe, whose own mother dies and she falls victim to bitter persecution by her father’s second wife. While her half-sister is spoiled, she is stripped of her pretty clothes, starved and sent out to do the work of herding

(which is usually given to young boys). While she is in the veld tending the cattle she is befriended by a fish in the river who gives her all the food she needs and she becomes strong and beautiful again in spite of all her stepmother can do. The mother is incensed, pretends to be ill and sends her husband to kill the fish in the river. insisting that only the flesh of a fish will make her well. Nondwe weeps bitterly when she knows the fish will die. But the fish acceptingly foretells its own death, and tells the girl to collect up its bones when they are thrown away.

But the chief's son comes upon the fish bones lying discarded in the veld and tries to lift them up. He cannot and nor can anyone else. He declares that the girl who can lift up the bones shall be his bride. Needless to say it is only Nondwe who can do so and "as she came in her tattered rags and skins, the people stood aside to let her pass between them to where her chief was waiting."

This story interests me greatly for the only other story of the Cinderella type which involves a fish and its bones is the story of Yeh Hsien from China in the 9th century. If anyone can suggest to me how this story might have made its way into the Xhosa tradition from China, I would be delighted to know. Cinderella tales as such are rare in Africa. There is a delightful Hausa adaptation of the European Cinderella from Nigeria, "The Maiden, the frog and the chief's son" in which the mother-tree, or fairy godmother is replaced by a wonderful frog in the river. But this is known to be an adapted importation, whereas the Xhosa tale "The Magic fishbones" is a unique and mystifying phenomenon.

There is a male Cinderella tale in the Tswana tradition called "Matong and the big black ox". This is so like the Bracket Bull stories of Europe that it may well have come into the Tswana tradition during the last century. However, the fact

that it was adapted and turned into a thoroughly African tale suggests that it spoke to the hearts and minds of its first African hearers and was retold so often that it became thoroughly incorporated into the Tswana tale tradition. It may well be an example in our own times of the age-old way in which tales have gradually spread across the world over millennia and have been refashioned into the new forms that are meaningful in their adoptive cultures. It attests to the protean beauty of fairy tales that they can be used and changed and live on in new ways, to serve old as well as new meanings.

One of the most widely known fairy tale motifs in the world is the Animal Groom tale, best known in Western tradition as “Beauty and the beast”. In these tales a human bride is betrothed (often in an arranged marriage) to an animal bridegroom. In most instances she is revolted by her future husband. But only by overcoming her revulsion and by showing affection and respect for her groom, can she break the spell that binds him to an animal body.

This story which entered the Western written tradition in the story of “Cupid and Psyche” is found in Apuleius’s “The Golden ass” (1st century AD). In it the beautiful Psyche is married to a monster groom in the form of a snake although he is the god of love in disguise. Tales of this type appear in European forms where the groom can be a pig, or a bear or even a frog. But in Africa the commonest form of the story has a bridegroom snake (sometimes a crocodile) just as the Greek tale did. What is fascinating about the African snake-groom stories that I have studied is that they range from being myth proper, such as the Venda tale of the bride of the python god who angers him and can only appease him by giving up her life, right through tale forms that contain elements of both myth and folktale (as “Cupid and Psyche” does) and then to some that are pure

folktale. It is as if we are given a privileged glimpse into the process whereby a myth is turned into a folk fairy tale.

There is another interesting motif that is ubiquitous in Southern African tales (and also found elsewhere: ie the Nigerian tale “The Two wives”) but rare in the European tradition. It is the motif of the loathly lady, or the decrepit hag. She appears as the Hag at the Well in an Irish tale and she figures in the story of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell in the Arthurian romances and in Chaucer’s popular “Wife of Bath’s tale”. She is a repulsive figure, deformed, hideous and often covered in sores and a young man is forced to accept her as his bride. If he accepts her with kindness and respect she becomes a beautiful young wife.

In the African version, however, it is usually a young woman who encounters the old hag, on her way to her bridegroom’s kraal, or in the river depths where the old woman is the prisoner/wife of a dimo, or cannibal ogre. She can even be the keeper of the legendary nanaboleles in the depths of a river. If the young girl hears the old woman’s pleas for help and kindness (often to the extent of licking her sores) then she is richly rewarded. If she scorns the old one she becomes the prey of the dimo or snake bridegroom.

When one looks at the richness and variety of the oral tradition in Africa today one is struck by the fact that in Africa the teller of tales feels free to tell a story in her own way. She can change or adapt the stories she knows for new purposes and new messages. Those of us who have grown up with the written texts of fairy tales tend to regard them as holy writ, or as stories carved in stone. We need to learn from the African oral tradition which treats the stories not as inscribed in stone but rather as clay in the hands of sensitive and skilful workers.

Our fairy tales can be retold to suit the needs of our children today in a changed and changing society.

- Alas the hundreds of thousands who live in the great urban sprawls of our cities do not always have the privilege of hearing fairy tales these days, although the work of highly gifted storytellers such as Gcina Mhlophe is beginning to change this. But perhaps publishers, teachers, lecturers, community and educational centres, creches and preschool care centres and organisations promoting literacy at grass-root levels can all share in bringing to life the rich and fabulous fairy tale tradition of Africa.

Let our children have their fairy tales. Let them be tales full of mirth and of heroines and heroes, those who go forth to meet the challenges of life with hope and high spirits. Let us not be too severely didactic or moralising, remembering that: “We are utilitarian, we are executive, we are didactic, we are earth-tied, we are hopelessly adult!” in the words of Lucy Sprague Mitchel.

Rather, let us grant our children the joy of their youth with the gift of a good story, whether it be the tale of Hlakanyane cooking grandmother, or Mosimane going in search of a feather from the wing of Tloding Pela the Lightning Bird, or Thakane, the brave sister of Masilo in search of the hide of the nanabolele. It is my hope that before long our white children shall know them all as well as they know Red Riding Hood, Snow White and Cinderella.

Maria Tatar who knows a great deal about fairy tales and how they mould our thinking, has recommended that we cast off our Western tendency to regard the written word as sacred and unalterable

Despite the stabilizing power of print, fairy tales can still be told and retold so that they challenge and resist, rather than simply reproduce, the constructs of a culture. Through playful disruptions, it is possible to begin transforming canonical texts into tales that empower and entertain children (Tatar 1992:237).

Stories [can] point the way to a folklore that is reinvented by each new generation of storytellers and reinvested with a powerfully creative social energy (Tatar 1992:238).

If we can keep our fairy tales supple and alive, if we grant our children the freedom to tell, re-form and retell them, then indeed fairy tales can and will help us.

Note

- 1 See essay: "Gender related biases in the Aarne-Thompson Indexes", in *Fairy tales & society*. Ed. R. Bottigheimer, p. 149.

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The History of Sakisizwe INSET Unit and the Swedish Book Project

mandy reddcliffe

The Swedish Writers' Union and its South African equivalent COSAW together with Sakisizwe INSET Unit in Grahamstown have collaborated in a project to produce a book featuring work from farm school pupils in the Eastern Cape. The project was funded by the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA). The Sakhisizwe INSET Unit (SIU) started in 1984 at the request of Grahamstown secondary school township teachers who needed help with English setwork books. In the mid-eighties the prevalent political unrest of the time saw INSET's work in township schools suspended due to school boycotts and the Unit then turned its attention to these neglected rural teachers. It was soon discovered that there was a great shortage of books in the farm schools. The two major areas of concern that arose were that children could not read English and teachers were struggling with English teaching. INSET then decided to train teachers to use Molteno Project materials to lay a good literacy foundation for pupils. The implementation of these materials started in six schools and today it reaches almost 60 farm schools.

Presently 70 percent of the unit's activities are concentrated on junior primary training while the other 30 percent is for senior primary and secondary training.

Sakhisizwe INSET Unit uses a five-pronged approach: training; monitoring through school visits; support through workshops; materials development and provision; teacher development, both professional and personal.

While the Farm School Project rolls annually with its cycle of training, monitoring and support, the SIU's latest developments concentrate on sustaining and capitalising on the work of the previous years. The Teacher Leadership Programme is one example of the sustainability of the project.

With the end goal of teacher development and empowerment in mind, the SIU sees it as imperative that teachers contribute to the school community in which they operate, not just as recipients of our programmes, but as leaders and support organs for inexperienced new teachers. We see them as taking on a new role in which they need a different kind of training and support, which at the same time permits us to work with larger numbers of new teachers.

Other activities which will utilise our "project wise" teacher body are the involvement of teachers and pupils in the Grahamstown Foundation Eisteddfod and the National Schools Festival. The piloting of new materials and language courses in schools involved in our programme have proved very successful as teachers are receptive and experienced at providing constructive feedback.

The Sakhisizwe INSET Unit was excited to be part of the Swedish Book Project because it afforded farm school pupils the opportunity to share information about their lives.

The Swedish Book Project could not have come at a more opportune time in the history of our country. A time when the different peoples of South Africa are beginning to interact and discover both differences and similarities, aspects of which are illustrated in the book.

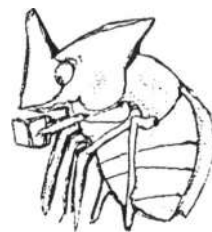
Gunilla Lundgren and Kerstin Gidfors of the Swedish Writers' Union skilfully and sensitively worked with these farm school pupils to produce a wonderfully authentic piece of work. Full involvement by both teachers and pupils resulted in immense enjoyment, insight and an understanding of the importance of their contributions to this project.

The book serves a dual purpose in that it exposes other children to the world of rural children through words and pictures and it helps them express their life experiences in a similar way. Following didactic principles, the book encourages incidental learning of skills and concepts, a potentially new experience for users of the book.

The book attempts to be inclusive of all South Africans with regard to language by using rhymes, songs and greetings in all the 11 official languages. The fundamental idea behind the book is to develop within all South African children a sense of pride and identity of themselves and respect for others.

This book could also be seen as a tribute to the historically least-listened-to, rural, black child. It is hoped that work of this nature will encourage children in this country to learn about each other and develop a deeper understanding of the South African context.

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