WORK IN PROGRESS:

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND CHILDIST CRITICISM –

TOWARDS AN INSTITUTIONAL RE-CONSIDERATION

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Á mes parents et grands-parents...

Summary

This thesis examines the place of the child within the domains of children's literature criticism from the angle of childist criticism, mainly as regards the production of literature. The introduction briefly addresses the world of children's literature criticism and puts forward some of the fundamental issues which will be dealt with as the thesis develops. Chapter One looks at some of the arguments put forward by Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein and their reading of the fundamental issues regarding the place of the child in the writing and criticism of children's literature. The chapter draws parallels between their work and that of Jean-Jacques Lecercle as he writes about the notion of alterity. Chapter Two introduces the notion of childist criticism, its origins, uses, and shortcomings. Through childist criticism, the chapter offers an alternative position to that of Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein. Chapter Three considers some of implications deriving from the arguments developed in Chapter One and Chapter Two. Some institutional possibilities are developed. Based on the notions of cultural respect and unconditionality, the chapter considers, and disrupts, the binary opposition between childhood and adulthood, as well as offers some academic possibilities as far as children's literature studies are concerned. The conclusion summarises the key issues dealt with in the thesis and suggests some more possibilities as far as the development of childist criticism is concerned, especially regarding the notions of education and children's rights.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: *Sebastien Chyla*

Date: 15th July, 2009

Statement One

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Statement Two

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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INTRODUCTION

Children's Literature: A Controversial Subject

In an interview explaining why [Madonna] decided to write some children's books, the pop star says: 'Now I'm starting to read to my son, but I couldn't believe how vapid and vacant and empty all the stories were. [...] There's like no books about anything.' Madonna is not alone in her conviction that she can characterize all children's books based on the few she's actually managed to read, or that she already knows exactly what kinds of book children should be reading. The students and parents I talk to about children's literature are almost always confident about these matters, long before I try to share my own expertise with them. They know that children have short attention spans, large imaginations, and a great need of moral improvement. They know that children's books are generally if not exclusively about princesses who live happily ever after, children who err and learn better, and adorable fuzzy animals in jackets and, sometimes, trousers. They already know everything there is to know about children and children's literature – and are surprised and a little offended by my suggestion that there might be more to know. (Nodelman 2004: 3)

A few days ago, the last *Harry Potter* film, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, came out in cinemas worldwide. It will be a great success, no doubt about it. No doubt, either, that the film based on J. K. Rowling's series will generate great debates about the worth of her achievement. Many will probably applaud her success, while others will question such behaviour, claiming that her fame is unjustifiable. With her previous successes, J. K.

Rowling has already attracted millions of children and adults. Since the first instalments of the Harry Potter series came out, hundreds of thousands of adults have already spent millions of pounds on the books and accompanying merchandise, either for their children, or for themselves. If in everyday life more and more adults seem to be interested in a phenomenon called 'children's literature', however things can be somewhat different in the academic world.

When the first book of the Harry Potter series – *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* – was published in 1997, it very quickly became one of the most phenomenal literary successes in history. When the fourth one – *Harry Potter and the Goblet cf Fire* – was published in 2000, it raised some serious controversial issues. As Kirsten Stirling notes in her essay "When Grown-Ups Read Children's Books", where she assesses the literary value of Rowling's books,

> [t]here was controversy when J. K. Rowling's fourth Harry Potter book, *The Goblet cf Fire*, nearly won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award in 2000, the first year that the children's category was considered for the overall prize. In 2002, Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, the last book of the fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials*, has become the first children's book ever to be awarded the prize, reigniting discussion about the characteristics and merits of children's literature. (Stirling 2002: 15)

The Harry Potter books, which have to a great extent come to epitomise the world of children's literature in general, seem to sit in the middle of conflicting discourses as regards their value. If *Harry Potter and the Goblet cf Fire* cannot win the Whitbread Award, it is, I suggest, because J. K. Rowling's series is too much of a representative of

childhood, whereas Philip Pullman's trilogy is much more ambivalent, full of symbolism which is more likely to be found in books for adults. Stirling argues that

> Pullman's trilogy, which functions very differently from Rowling's books, is best described as an adult book written for children. [...] J. K. Rowling is less problematic to classify. There is no doubt that the Harry Potter books are children's books. [...] If I contemplate the Harry Potter books with an academic squint, I can acknowledge that yes, there is something slightly clunky about the style. Rowling relies too much on adverbs to render speech and emotion [...] and she does make use of the slightly patronising tone often characteristic of children's books. And the language is simple. And the narrative is linear. (Stirling 2002: 15-16)

Here is, in a nutshell, the kind of response that often permeates discussions on children's literature within academic circles. Children's literature, because it is often described in adult terms, as Stirling does in her piece, very often suffers from prejudice and neglect. Stirling's comments, in this sense, are symptomatic of a whole set of condescending attitudes, attitudes which often rest on unsustainable ideological arguments.[1]

Children's literature, as an academic discipline – that is the study of texts published for children, in institutions of higher education, and the development of such a study through academic publications, conferences and similar peer discourses (in the context of literary and cultural theories, rather than in any *applied* contexts such as education) – for many years has had to fight, and, in some cases, still has to fight, against prejudice to be seen as a "legitimate" subject, worthy of attention in literature

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[1] See Peter Hunt's reflections on ideology in "Good? Good as? Good for...?" (1997: 8-9)

departments. It has had to fight in order to be acceptable and become a subject worthy of academic attention. Peter Hunt remarks that

> [a]lthough the subject was accorded respect in some institutions, suspicion and hostility were more common. In one university English department, a faculty member's evaluation complained that the children's literature course "dragged down" the "intellectual tone" of the department, and several courses were accused (without evidence) of an "innate lack of intellectual rigour". (1996 (b): 20)

The reason for this, Hunt argues, is that

> Children's Literature differs from almost any other academic discipline [...] in that it seems to be "owned" not by academics, but by the world at large; it appears to be accessible, and non-specialists feel that they can make a valid contribution to discussion. (1996 (b): 22)

Likewise, Karín Lesnik-Oberstein starts her *Children's Literature – Criticism and the Fictional Child* by saying that

> [c]hildren's literature and children's literature criticism attract people who often have a strong interest in children's books based on a conviction of personal knowledge and experience of children, childhood, or reading. Even as children's literature and criticism gain increasing academic acceptance as areas of study, they remain a field of study which many students approach with more confidence of their acquaintance with the material itself and the matrix of theoretical discussion than with their courses on, let us say, Shakespeare or literary theory. Nor does this attitude come only from students. Where theoretical physicists may often

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meet polite silence, or questioning, after revealing their chosen area of work, children's literature draws an opposite response: memories of favourite childhood reading are enthusiastically contributed to the discussion, or experiences with the reading of the speaker's own children or children they are acquainted with. Sometimes there follows an often shy or defiant admission of their continuing reading of children's books. If the speakers have a professional interest in reading or childhood, then this usually forms the basis for their remarks. Librarians, psychologists, teachers, and 'adult' literary critics draw on their area of expertise and on their skills when commenting on children's literature. As Peter Hunt puts it: "unlike any other form of the arts, children's literature is *available* to criticism, as well as to amateur writers; people are not afraid to comment, to censor, and to be involved." (1994: 1)

More recently, and in a very similar way, Perry Nodelman wrote that, usually, when one approaches children's literature, one feels as though one already knows about it. He writes that

> [s]cholars who study nuclear physics or structural anthropology or Jacques Derrida tend to be admired by other people because they know things the other people don't know – and for that matter, may not even care to know. The more obscure and mysterious their knowledge, the more respect most people will have for it. If it seems obscure and difficult, then it must be wise and important. That might explain why specialists in children's literature tend to get so little respect. When it comes to children's literature, everyone's an expert. Everyone knows already. (2004: 3)

This accessibility – both in terms of the number of books being published but also in terms of attention, that is when it is given some space in academia – of children's

literature has been a matter of conflict between many literary critics, as some of the above quotations suggest. Some of the tensions present in such debates have led to great and fruitful discussions and it can be said that if things have changed, or are changing, regarding the way many now approach the notion of "children's literature", there are still some issues which need debating. I would like to spend some time, in this thesis, reflecting on the way things have changed or are changing within academia regarding the discipline children's literature. Straightforwardly: how has it changed, and how is it changing?

What interests me, in this thesis, is the notion of silence. When I think about some of the way(s) in which literary critics tend to approach children's literature, the word silence seems to me to be extremely crucial: silence regarding the bias that permeate certain discussions *vis-à-vis* literary merit, for instance. I also believe that the notion of silence comes to mind regarding many of the way(s) in which childhood tends to be portrayed by many adults, within the domain of children's literature studies. In addition, when considering some of the writing produced by children's literature critics, I often think that there is a tendency to silence children, more precisely *real children*, as opposed to fictional ones.[2]

The notion of silence is therefore to be read in several ways: some critics *decide* not to justify their choices when it comes to excluding certain texts, remaining silent about such issues, not wishing to address issues of selection and canonisation. Some

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[2] The difference between real children and fictional ones will be explained more precisely later on when dealing with some of the work done by Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein.

children are silenced – not that they *are* silent (silence sometimes needs to be read as a verb, and not a noun) – by some adults, including, as we will see, some children's literature critics. In fact, regarding this latter claim, I know, just by looking around, that children are not silent. They can be shushed, and often they are hushed, but that does not necessarily make them mute. Some of this silencing happens consciously, some of it happens unconsciously. Hence, when thinking about silence, children, and adults, I would suggest that the notion of silence can be seen as an active smothering of the child's voice on the part of the adult – conscious or not. Furthermore, silence can often be connected to the notion of ignorance, as well to be understood as an active process. Silence and knowledge will therefore be discussed in conjunction in the pages to come, as these two notions seem to cover up quite a few mysteries which I will try to ponder.

In this thesis, I want to address the way(s) in which children's literature, mainly as a literary discipline in academia but also as a material construct (that is, something usually referred to as a children's book, or a book for children), has been approached, defined, and discussed by some adults. In a way similar to Peter Hunt, I strongly believe that as children's literature found a place within literary study, it had to adapt to the standards which prevailed within such circles. Thus, as children's literature became worthy of academic attention, as Hunt suggests, it quickly 'sold its soul to the academic Mephisto [...]' (Hunt 1996 (b): 22). This is because, in the process of adaptation which it has had to go through to be recognised as a subject worthy of academic attention, children's literature started imitating what was done (or acceptable) within the larger – and already strongly-established – domain of literature. As Hunt notes,

children's literature, it is suspected, has become merely another area where those who must publish or not be promoted can generate more solipsistic wordage. Similarly, the annual *Children's Literature*, published, most respectably, by Yale University Press, very rarely mentions children at all, and might be said to be more about the business of writing academic articles than about children's books. (*ibid.*)

Based upon such comments, the purpose of this thesis is to assess, through the a reading of some of the work and writing of major children's literature critics, the way that children's literature criticism has evolved regarding the notion of childhood, but also to put forward, and develop, an alternative view of children's literature as an academic discipline, a view which would not compromise with the academic standards that, as Hunt has often argued, made the subject lose some of its very subjectivity, or essence.[3] By concentrating on the place of the child within the domain of children's literature, I wish to develop what Hunt called childist criticism.[4] Childist criticism will in fact be the

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[3] See, amongst other instances, 1984 (a); 1984 (b); 1991 (a): 189-201; 1991 (b): 13-14; 1996 (b): 22; 2004: 16). In these articles, or book chapters, Peter Hunt introduced and developed what he called 'childist criticism'. He argued that the way most adult critics look at the books produced for children does not reflect the way children necessarily engage with the books, therefore pointing out a gap that exists between the cultures of childhood and the cultures of adulthood. As Hunt straightforwardly explains, as a man will read a book differently from a woman, so will a child from an adult (1984 (a): 46).

[4] It must be noted that childist criticism, which Peter Hunt initiated in the early 1980s, started as a literary concept. It is this literary concept that mainly interests me here, as

nucleus of my concerns, and around this nucleus will gravitate related issues. Basing my argument around the notion of presence, through that of childist criticism, I will consider one of Peter Hunt's claims regarding childist criticism in connection to children's literature as a literary discipline. In his introduction to *Understanding Children's Literature – Keys Essays from the Second Edition of the International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, Hunt suggests that

> both the range of children's books and the ways in which they can be studied are very extensive. Just as children's books are part of the ideological structures of the cultures of the world, so their history is constructed ideologically [...]. The two most obvious [*sic*] constructions of history are from an Anglocentric viewpoint, and from a male viewpoint (although, of course, those 'viewpoints' are far from stable). Other constructions of history – such as feminist, gay, or 'childist' approach – wait to be written, although much progress has been made in the first of these [...]. (1999: 4)

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my focus is on the notion of 'children's literature' from a literary perspective. Nevertheless, childist criticism has been used in non-literary debates, especially recently in discussions on children's rights. For instance, Carole Carpenter refers to childist criticism in an essay in which she attempts to define the emerging field of studies called child(ren) studies (as in, for instance, her unpublished essay "Why Child*ren's* Studies?", presented at the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English's conference in May 2008).

Putting forward some childist thoughts, I will contribute to this as yet unwritten childist history of children's literature Peter Hunt hopes for. I will do so, however, nnly partly, as I will only look at a specific aspect of children's literature criticism, namely that of its production, leaving some other aspects out of my arguments.

This thesis, for that purpose, will address the notion of children's literature mainly as it has been dealt with as a literary discipline in academia in order to concentrate on the very label 'children's literature'. The thesis itself is divided into three main chapters which approach, keeping the notion of silence at the back of our mind, the notion of children's literature, and the child and his or her cultures from various angles, both theoretical and practical, a greater emphasis, it must be said immediately, being put on the theoretical.

The first chapter will deal with some of the work of Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein and the way in which these two critics have commented on the phrase 'children's literature' as regards the notions of the 'real child' and the 'fictional child'. In doing so, I will weave my arguments through their thoughts as presented in, respectively, *The Case cf Peter Pan or the Impossibility cf Children's Fiction* (1984) and *Children's Literature – Criticism and the Fictional Child* (1994), where they suggested that the production of children's literature is problematic as it currently stands. Reflecting on their ideas, I will develop my own view of a discipline, suggesting a child-centred criticism. I will also spend some time concentrating on the notion of 'alterity' which, I will show, using some linguistic theories of communication, comes in opposition to the notion of 'identity'. I will argue that children's literature, as it is most commonly produced, embodies the notion of 'alterity', something Jacqueline Rose also argued in her

seminal study. Looking at linguistic theories of communication will be helpful in terms of introducing childist criticism. Thus, dealing with the two notions of 'identity' and 'alterity', I will comment on Peter Hunt's empirical definition of the poetics of the production of books for children, which he elaborated in his *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (1991), through a reading of Jean-Jacques Lecercle's *Interpretation as Pragmatics* (1999) where he defines the production of literature from the angle of some linguistic theories of communication. From absence to presence, or from silence to hearing, the first chapter thus will lay some of the foundations of an alternative view of children's literature.

Later, as I analyse the phrase 'children's literature' more closely, I will set up the critical context within which I wish to develop my argument. Here, I will reflect on the notion of *childist criticism*. Introducing childist criticism, I will summarise the way Peter Hunt defined it, and I will also spend some time looking at what his thoughts imply. I will also look at what has been happening, in general, in the literary world of children's literature criticism, thus emphasising the fact that, in a way, childhood is often silenced. Whereas Peter Hunt was interested in the act of reading when he introduced the idea of a childist criticism of children's literature, I will extend it to the *production* of children's literature which will lead me to engage with issues of canonisation and legitimisation. This will be an original way of using childist criticism, but also an original way of arguing, theoretically, that children's own writing could be part of children's literature studies.

In a following chapter, I will concentrate on the implications that derive from my previous argument. In order to do so, I will engage with the way children's literature has been institutionalised, that is, partly, and succinctly, the way books have taken shape

commercially and the way they have been studied academically. David Rudd's essay "Theorising and Theories: How Does Children's Literature Exist?" (2006), dealing with the notion of the constructive child, will provide me with a good basis as it partly deals with, I will argue, childist principles. Thus, I will engage with, and try to destabilise, the binary opposition between childhood and adulthood, a binary opposition that has repeatedly been compared to a sort of colonialism, or cultural invasion, by critics such as Perry Nodelman (Nodelman, 1992). I will also spend some time looking at the work of some children's literature critics, arguing that the voice of the child is central to their writing but somewhat incompletely. As some critics wish to position the child centrally to their argument, they only do so partly. I will therefore suggest some ways of engaging with that incompleteness.

In a later part of chapter two, I will look at childist criticism and some of its practical implications. I will question academia, partly relying on one of Jacques Derrida's latest publications, *L'Université sans condition* (2001), in which he deconstructs the institution of the university, and in which he reflects on the future of the academic world. The underlying premise of my argument will be that children's voices could be part of children's literature studies and that if so, that world could take a different shape in the years to come. What I want to see is what could happen tomorrow if childist criticism became more central to the study of children's literature.

The conclusion will address the main issues developed throughout the thesis. It will draw our attention back to the main premises of childist criticism and will offer some suggestions as regards areas towards which one might be taken if childist criticism finds its way into, or through, children's literature studies. It will open up my main

argument towards the future. It will also point to what I see as possible links – though my purpose will not be to develop those links thoroughly, but just to suggest them – between my literary argument and more politically-informed views.

Similarly to Perry Nodelman in his preface to *New Voices in Children's Literature Criticism* (2004), I wish to argue that, as far as children's literature is concerned, there is a lot more to know than one usually thinks, and that there is a lot more to discover beyond the traditional boundaries of children's literature criticism. Nodelman notes: 'I find myself wondering why so many people believe otherwise. And I find myself thinking that it has a lot to do with the very attitudes towards childhood that underpin the existence of children's literature in the first place' (2004: 3). Later, he adds that 'the faith in adult expertise [is] [...] inextricably interwoven into our most culturally powerful conceptions of childhood and children's literature [...]' (4). Trying to face the adult through the eyes of the child, this thesis sets up to give the domain of children's literature studies a new voice, that of a child, and take us, as scholars, towards new areas of investigations. Said differently, this thesis aims to uncover the adult's ears, so that the voice of the child is heard, and not hushed, as it is too often the case. Some of what follows, therefore, will probably seem extreme to some but also – let me be hopeful – fruitful. Some will surely be tempted to claim that my argument has got nothing to do with children's literature as it differs considerably from what the field of children's literature studies usually looks like. Some will believe, I hope, that this is one of the shapes children's literature scholarship could *also* take, one day.

Central to this thesis is the notion of childhood. Wishing to avoid ambiguities, I broadly define childhood as being the state or period of being a child, that is, generally

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speaking, from age two to age fourteen, or from, and again generally speaking, infancy to puberty. It is by no means my intention, in what follows, to enter in debates about the definition of the word childhood itself, even though, as will become very clear, I will challenge issues related to that definition. Writing about childhood, I will often refer to "the child", or "a child", and to "childhood". I find it necessary, before really starting my argument, to clarify how I will use these terms, for they might lead to some confusion.

Basically, these terms I will use synonymously. When using the phrase "a child", I will refer to the idea that every single child is unique, and that I am writing about any child. When using "the child", I will also refer to the same idea. When using the term "childhood", I will refer to a category composed of individual children, bearing in mind the above, that is, that all children are individual in essence. It will appear that I tend to use the phrase "the child" when writing from a more theoretical perspective but, it must be said, I also sometimes use that phrase in non-theoretical discussions. This idea of individuality when approaching the notion of childhood is central to what follows, and must be kept in mind throughout this thesis, never leaving any space to generalising tendencies.

Furthermore, when writing about the child in fiction and the child in reality, I will sometimes refer to terms developed by Jacqueline Rose in her *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, published in the early 1980s. For the image of the child we find in children's fiction she uses the phrase "the fictional child", for the child that lives in the house next door, the child that one can encounter in the supermarket, she uses the phrase "the real child". Throughout this thesis I will negotiate these phrases and will, at times, recapitulate on their meanings and implications.

CHAPTER ONE

Children's Literature: Whom Does it Belong To?

An Argument About Ownership: Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein

Another Similar Argument About Communication: Jean-Jacques Lecercle

Children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple. [...] If children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp. (Rose 1984: 1-2)

Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein

In 1984, Jacqueline Rose wrote a book which has had a major impact on the academic world of children's literature criticism. Her seminal *The Case cf Peter Pan, or The Impossibility cf Children's Fiction*, which is still widely read by children's literature scholars, has been described by David Rudd as "revolutionary" (Rudd 2006: 1). Ten years after Rose's study came another major study in the world of children's literature studies, by Karín Lesnik-Oberstein: *Children's Literature – Criticism and the Fictional Child* (1994), which came out of her doctoral thesis. These two books are, without a doubt, and according to many, key texts in the world of children's literature studies. Writing about the only child who never grows up, Jacqueline Rose suggests that J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan,*

which she uses as a metonymy for children's fiction in general, "gives us the child, but it does not speak *to* the child" (1984: 1). She believes that the fiction that is supposed to belong to children – something which the grammar of the phrase "children's literature" suggests – is not really theirs. This claim is taken further by Karín Lesnik-Oberstein who concentrates on the work of children's literature critics, arguing that what goes on in the criticism of children's literature is fictional, with critics speaking on behalf of a child they do not, and cannot, for that matter, really know. Both Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein are concerned with the fact that many adult critics/writers assume that there are actual ways to access what children think/know.

Jacqueline Rose's argument is that children's fiction "hangs on an impossibility, one which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation between adult and child" (1984: 1). Concentrating on some of the images of childhood found in children's fiction, Rose writes that "[t]o say that the child is inside the book [...] is to fall straight into a trap. It is to confuse the adult's intention to get at the child with the child it portrays" (*ibid.* 2). She is of the opinion that the child portrayed in children's fiction – what she calls the *constructed child* – is a reflection of the adult's desires regarding childhood. She argues, therefore, that despite the possessive case in the phrase 'children's fiction', it has never really been owned by children. As noted above, she says that "[c]hildren's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child who is simply there to be addressed and that speaking to it might be simple. [...] If children's fiction builds an image of the child inside the book, it does so in order to secure the child who is outside the book, the one who does not come so easily within its grasp" (Rose 1984: 1-2). Rudd notes that, according to Rose, "[a]dults [...] evoke this child for their own purposes

(desires, in fact), as a site of plenitude to conceal the fractures that trouble us all: concerns over a lack of coherent subjectivity, over the instabilities of language and, ultimately, existence itself" (2005: 16).[1] The gap, the differences, between the constructed child – the child inside the book – and the real child – the one that is outside the book – makes the phrase "children's fiction" a contradiction in terms, according to Rose. And she says that because of the difficult relationship between childhood and adulthood, a relationship in which the adult is uncomfortable, children's fiction is impossible. The notion of ownership that the possessive case in the phrase "children's literature" implies, is set aside by Rose as the writing of children's fiction is done by adults.

In 1994, Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, in the same vein as Rose, argued that adult critics create versions of childhood which they also use for their own purposes when it

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[1] This idea of wishing to create a stable "fictional" world based on adult desires is strongly present in Jacqueline Rose's *The Case cf Peter Pan*. Some critics, such as Ann Alston, have also argued that children's fiction tends to remain stereotypical when it comes to the way it describes families and home settings, for instance (see Alston's book entitled *The Family in English Children's Literature*, 2008). Nevertheless, some recent publications have pointed out that such views do not reflect more modern, even post-modern, fiction. Kimberley Reynolds says of Rose's book that it is based on children's fiction as setting boundaries around what "children's literature 'should' do and be. [...] But [this] argument sits uneasily with evidence from both within children's literature and from other aspects of Western culture. [It has been shown that] images of children and childhood have become deeply conflicted [...]" (2006: 3-6).

comes to writing or talking about books written for children. She claims that one of the main purposes of children's literature and its criticism is "about saying: 'I know what children like to read/are able to read/should read, *because I know what children are like'*" (1994: 2). According to Lesnik-Oberstein, "[h]ow to find the *good* book for the child is children's literature criticism's purpose, whichever way it is dressed up" (1994: 5).[2] Therefore, she believes that adult critics – including parents, publishers, editors, teachers, reviewers, academics, etc. – think on behalf of children, assuming that they can access their thoughts, knowing what they will think about the books they read, for instance. Karín Lesnik-Oberstein claims and demonstrates that this is a flawed enterprise, as adult assumptions necessarily rest on constructivist principles. As one cannot access someone else's thoughts, one can only assume what children think, as opposed to really know what they think. In this sense, she claims that unless adults manage to come to terms with this gap between childhood and adulthood, the criticism of children's literature is dead. As she bluntly suggests, "if children's literature criticism

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[2] This claim has been refuted by, for instance, Kimberley Reynolds and Perry Nodelman, in, respectively, *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* and "The Precarious Life of Children's Literature Criticism" (Reynolds 2006: 184, Nodelman 2007: 13). Quite bluntly, for instance, Nodelman writes that he has never tried to find a stable meaning as regards the notion of childhood, something connected to the claim of "being able to find the good book for the child" (2007: 13), as Lesnik-Oberstein insists in her introduction to *Children's Literature: New Approaches* (2004), a book which has the same central thesis as *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child.*

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depends on, and is defined by, its claim to the existence of the 'real child' [whom it claims to be able to speak on behalf of], *a claim which it undermines itself*, then it is indeed dead" (1994: 163). According to Lesnik-Oberstein, the impossibility of being able to identify the 'real child' leads to the impossibility of children's literature criticism. She writes that "[c]hildren's literature criticism abounds in comments about the 'child'. It provides us with various sources – scientific, religious, moral, mystical, commonsensical – backing up these statements. It tells us also to study the child, but it does not tell us how" (1994: 13). Not telling us how, Karín Lesnik-Oberstein argues, means that critics' beliefs rest on unjustified assumptions. "'[S]elf-evidence' and 'common sense' cannot", she continues, "have a place in a study of the history and dynamics of ideas and meaning [...]" (1994: 14).

Rose's and Lesnik-Oberstein's arguments, then, rest on the fact that adults tend to believe that they can have access to a ""knowledgeable", unified child reading audience" (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994: 4). And because it is not possible to know what children think, how exactly children like something, and how exactly children do not like something, and so on, Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein strongly argue that children's fiction and its criticism are flawed. Their critique can be described as post-structuralist in the sense that it goes against the idea that the 'real child' – the child outside fiction – can be recuperated. Someone else's identity can only be a reached through one's own reading of it, thus making it a translation, as it were. That is to say, they believe that the ideas one has of childhood are always and *necessarily* constructed. I would certainly agree with this position. Nevertheless, what I would like to engage with regarding Lesnik-Oberstein and Rose's argument is the pessimism present in their writing. I would like to suggest that

despite the validity of their views, there might be more to their critique than pessimism. Rose says that because of the gap between the 'real child' and the 'fictional child' that the writing of children's fiction – where the possessive case is meaningful – is impossible (1984: 1). But is it really the case? Is there not a solution? Can the possessive case not become meaningful? If it can, what are the necessary changes that must operate? What are the conditions necessary for the phrase 'children's literature' to make sense?

I would like to think that the phrase 'children's literature' can become meaningful, and that there is a solution, and what will allow me to be more hopeful is *childist criticism*. But before engaging with childist criticism, I would like to approach Rose's and Lesnik-Oberstein's argument from a different angle, an angle which will enable me to put forward some alternative thoughts on the issues of constructivism present in their writing. This, as I will show later on, will help me deal with the issue of ownership which permeates Rose's and Lesnik-Oberstein's writings more directly. Throughout *The Case cf Peter Pan* and *Children's Literature – Criticism and the Fictional Child*, Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein's suggestions remain focused on the production of children's literature as it most commonly stands, that is, with an adult writing for a child, whereas, it will become clearer and clearer as this thesis develops, that I prefer to move away from this schema, looking for/at an alternative approach.

Linguistic Theories of Communication: Similar Issues

Here, we will see, once again, but from a different angle, and in a more developed manner, that constructivism – which I will define through the notion of alterity, that is something other – is inevitable when discussing the way books for children are

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produced. We will see that Rose's and Lesnik-Oberstein's critique is pertinent and that it can also be read through some specific examples of linguistic theories of communication as developed in the work of Jean-Jacques Lecercle. We will also see, following their claims, that unless we manage to deal with issues centred around the notion of communication, the child and the adult will always be apart and thus that the problems pointed out by Rose will never be resolved. Looking precisely at what happens when a book for children is written, I will suggest, and argue for, an alternative position. By knowing precisely what happens when a book for children is written, I will put forward an argument which will make the writing of children's literature and its criticism possible enterprises. The following analysis is therefore crucial to what I will suggest in the next chapter. Indeed, looking at the production of children's literature from the angle of some linguistic theories of communication, I will show that the gap that Rose mentions is the result of problems/issues of communication. Implicit in what I am writing now is the wish to rephrase what Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein have been dealing with in order to be able to use their critique as a springboard that will take me to a place where the phrase 'children's literature' is not impossible. The following analysis will lead us towards an alternative position – an original position in the literary world of children's literature criticism – whereby the label children's literature does not necessarily mean what it means to most, but can suggest more: a children's literature whereby children's voices are audible.

Firstly, I wish to comment on the gap – which I will often refer to as *alterity* – between the writing adult and the reading child, and will suggest a theoretico-pragmatic paradigm as present(ed) in some of French literary critic and linguist Jean-Jacques

Lecercle's books. Lecercle's work I find particularly helpful to my argument. Indeed, the way Lecercle approaches the literary experience (the act of reading and the act of writing) suggested to me very clear parallels between his analysis of some examples of adult fiction and my own analyses of the writing and reading of books for children. Lecercle's work, it can be noted, has often been interested in the possible connections between linguistic theories and the production of texts. I therefore intend to approach the notion of children's literature in the light of, amongst other examples, *Interpretation as Pragmatics*, published in 1999, and *L'Emprise des signes – Débat sur l'expérience littéraire*, co-written with Ronald Shusterman, and published in 2002.

One of the purposes of what follows is to define the notion – and the production – of children's literature, as it currently stands, as being based on the notion of 'alterity'. In other words, as Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein argue, children's fiction and its production epitomise the gap that separates, in this particular context, the self (the real child) and the other (the fictional/constructed child).[3] 'Alterity' is a term I will use throughout this thesis. It represents the gap, or the distance, between the 'real' child whom Rose and Lesník-Oberstein write about, and the fictional child. 'Alterity' will be a term that I will contrast to that of identity, seeing the two notions, as far as my argument is concerned, as antithetical.

In order to show how children's literature is based on the notion of 'alterity', I will use Lecercle's 'ALTER EGO' paradigm – as he elaborates it in *Interpretation as*

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[3] Throughout this chapter, I will use the phrase 'children's literature' in the same sense as Rose use the phrase 'children's fiction', that is books written by adults for children.

Pragmatics (1999: 61-88)[4] – contrasting it with the empirical analyses Peter Hunt suggests regarding the production of children's literature in his *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature* (1991: 155-174). Lecercle's paradigm is one that I find relevant to my argument as it allows me to establish some parallels between already-existing theories – including Jacqueline Rose's and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein's – and the ones I am putting forward as my argument develops. In other words, I find it useful, and helpful, to weave my own thoughts through those of someone whose research has already proved valuable in the field of literary and linguistic studies. Some might therefore be tempted to consider my argument as a Lecerclean exercise, the legitimacy of which rests in my academic sympathy towards Lecercle's work. Lecercle, however, offers a useful theoretical approach that allows us to interrogate some of the assumptions in Hunt's work. This justifies my 'restricted' approach, as it would justify any researcher's work based on a single theorist: faith is at stake, here.

In his *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature*, Hunt elaborates a very detailed analysis of the production of children's literature (1991: 155-174). His approach to the process of production is very precise, and, as he partly bases it upon his own experience as a writer of books for children, it is also very useful as far as an understanding of some of the mechanisms involved in the production of a book for children are concerned. Having said that, I think that Hunt's analyses adopt an overly empirical angle as regards the production of books for children, in the sense that he does not necessarily reflect upon the theoretical implications that lie behind – and that probably conditioned – his arguments. The theories of communication that Hunt's argument imply are left out of his

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[4] See also Lecercle 2002: 104-110.

argument. This is why I would like to examine Hunt's empirical analyses, and *then* to see where some theoretical reformulations might be useful in terms of clarification and understanding, especially as I will be contrasting them to some of Lecercle's theoretical work based on linguistics. What I wish to do here is theorise the empirical analysis developed by critics like Hunt, and then to put forward a rather similar *but* theoretical analysis of the production of books for children. I would thus like to *unearth* Hunt's silent theoretical considerations. In addition, I wish to mix experience as a writer of children's fiction with some linguistic theories in order to consolidate his work, all this for the sake of understanding and clarity.

Producing a book for children is far from being a straightforward enterprise. It is, rather, a complex process that takes shape as it emanates from multiple discourses, angles, and perspectives (educational, editorial, market-driven, etc.). Looking specifically at the process of production, the simple tripartite spectrum author-book-child that could superficially define the writing of a book for children quickly turns into a more complex network where the adult and the child are surrounded by a variety of influencing parameters (Hunt 1991: 158). These parameters are closely linked together because of different pressuring discourses, which wish to make sure that the reading child benefits from the book. As Hunt insists,

> the overall process of transmission is generally regarded as benevolent, but it can be seen as an exercise in power, which surfaces in textual characteristics, or as an exercise in class-bound pressures. [But] [w]hile there is some truth in all these views, the actual process of production and transmission of the children's book is far more complex. (1991: 156-157)

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A variety of different discourses, as shown in the diagram below, influenced by different ideologies, makes the writing of a book for children a very intricate process to analyse. Nevertheless, as Hunt notes, it is possible to identify some of the main components present in the process of production, some components that seem to be always there. Hunt starts introducing his diagrammatic analysis thus:

> We can [...] base an outline model of the circular model of the circular process of transmission and reaction on the three major elements of author, publisher, and child, each with its own group of influences. Authors will be influenced by their own childhood, by the books they have read, by observation of their own families; and they will experience pressures from peer-groups, general cultural codes, and generic controls. Basically, they will start with some idea of the kind of book they wish to write, but not the book itself. (1991: 157)

Around these three essential elements gravitate other ones which influence the conditions within which the writing of books for children is to take place. It therefore appears that the process of writing happens through a series of feedback (sometimes literal, but sometimes also metaphorical). And this is where alterity, as I will argue, necessarily comes in and takes shape Alterity is a way of describing the gap between the idea of the 'real child' and that of a 'constructed' one. It is a gap that becomes more and more apparent as a great variety of discourses, coming from different angles, shape the writing of a children's book.

To make things clearer, let us have a look at Hunt's diagram:

SPECIFIC CHILD

FAMILY

GENERIC CONTROLS

GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

INFLUENCE OF CHILDHOOD AND CH BOOKS

AUTHOR/BOOK

PEER GROUP

AGENT

ADVERTISING

PUBLISHER

EDITOR

EDUCATION PUBLISHERS

TRADE JOURNALS

READERS   DESIGNER   MARKETING   ADVISERS

OTHER MEDIA BUYERS

SPECIALIST JOURNALS

WHOLESALERS

INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS

REVIEWERS

BOOKSELLERS

PEER CHILDREN

TEACHERS

PARENTS/ FAMILY

OTHER MEDIA

LIBRARIANS

SPECIALISTS

CHILD

ACADEMICS

Links in the transmission process from Peter Hunt, *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature*, (1991: 158)

I do not intend to change Hunt's diagram nor do I wish to claim that what I am now writing about the production of children's literature as it most commonly stands is original. But, for reasons of clarity, I want to reformulate what has already been done, most notably by Hunt, but also partially by Peter Hollindale through what he calls 'childness'. Childness, Hollindale writes,

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is composed of [adults'] memories of childhood, of meaningful continuity between child and adult self, of the varied behaviour associated with being a child, and the sense of what is appropriate behaviour for a given age, of behavioural standards, ideals, expectations and hopes invested in the child as a child [...] (1997: 49)

This provides some useful starting point for my own argument.

The whole process of writing starts from the author whose primary aim is usually to address children.[5] The writing of a book for children, as well as the category 'literature for children', resides within this wish from the author to address children. Writing a book for children, as Hollindale insists, is therefore an 'exchange'. Hollindale writes that

of the existing formulations, [...] the only secure grounds for [empirical] definition [of the production of books for children] are those that rest in the exchange between adult author and child reader of complex constructions of childhood. (1997: 23)

The author, in this exchange, is, it is clear, the only element we could describe as 'real', the child being, as we have seen, a dependent construct. Wishing to address children, the author creates an image of childhood – through an implied reader, that is the reader the author imagines will read the book – and writes accordingly to that image. That

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[5] I am therefore leaving aside the authors who might not have a specific child audience in mind. I am only considering the writers who, before they start writing their book, think "Now, the book I am writing is a book I want children to read."

constructed child finds its origins in two different – but cyclical, that is interrelated – ways: the author's own beliefs as regards what his or her book can do, or should do (through an interpretation of what reality is, or should be), but also external beliefs which will influence and generate his or her internal beliefs (similarly influenced societal beliefs upon or against which the author bases his or her own sets of beliefs). Then, once the author has established what constructed implied reader he or she is writing for – or wishing to write for – and what kind of reactions he or she is therefore expecting from that implied reader,[6] comes what we could call the 'publishing and editing machineries'. There are certain people like the agent, the publisher, the designers, the marketing team, some advisers, and so on, who will consider – which does not necessarily mean read – the author's book and will *comment* on it and who will *judge* it, that is approach it through their own sets of beliefs about childhood. But not only will they approach it through their own beliefs but also, and sometimes more importantly, through what they wish to achieve: for instance, this can take the form of educational desires, ideological or political desires, aesthetic desires, but also marketing desires. All this is also influenced by external pressure groups such as the education industry, specialist journals, parents' associations, and so on. Then, the publisher's desires take the form of feedback to which the author will have to accommodate himself or herself if he or she wants his or her book to be published. This gradual process of feedback – writing and rewriting – I believe, leads to different views being mixed together. In fact, the identity of the child, in the middle of all these discourses, is blurred. As all these groups cannot possibly focus on

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[6] This process of expectation will become clearer as I put forward some linguistic formulae in a later part of this chapter.

one particular child at a time – the way books for children are produced does not allow it – all these discourses create, as Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein argued, categories which serve their needs. In wishing to address children, writers of books for children cannot but generalise about childhood. They can only write one version of their text, a definitive version which, as it were, comes as a negation of the individuality of all the readers which it purported to address. Here the "I want children to enjoy my book" issue, which Karín Lesnik-Oberstein commented on in her *Children's Literature – Criticism and the Fictional Child*, is clearly and undeniably criticisable, due to the circumstances within which the publication of children's books happens.

This is how one can develop Peter Hunt's diagrammatic analysis and the world of publishing from an empirical standpoint. The gap between reader and writer is made extremely clear: and this is the reason why books for children encapsulate the notion of alterity, alterity as in 'something other', implying, even if only minute, differences of identity. Identify, here, can be read as meaning 'unique' or 'idiosyncrasy'. Because children's books are not produced by children, the identities of children are, inevitably, left out. Writing for someone else is synonymous to, as it were, *writing someone else*, which will become even more apparent as we read through some of Jean-Jacques Lecercle's linguistic arguments later on.

The notion of alterity, one could also suggest, is emphasised by the way publishing companies seem to operate nowadays. Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker note, in their preface to *Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945*, that '[t]here is nothing natural about the children's books scene today; it is a product of historical circumstance, ideology, and market force' (xi). As they go on, relating the way

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publishers have changed the way in which books for children have been produced over the second half of the twentieth century, they put a strong emphasis on the importance of economics as far as the publishing industry is concerned. This emphasis on economics, they argue, has led to a serious loss of autonomy on the part of writers of books for children. And this loss of autonomy has inevitable consequences. They write that

> [c]hanges in the marketing of books have affected every aspect of children's publishing. Today the success of a book is often attributed to the marketing department, which can influence the nature of the list. Editors are under pressure to produce books that sell and in quantities which are unprecedented. The demand to find co-editions is insatiable, and no matter how fine a book is, unless it is marked out as a UK prizewinner, it will not be published without a substantial commitment from publishers in other countries. The result is a vicious circle which effectively marginalizes those who create books – editors, writers and illustrators. Today, even once an editor has decided to bring out a particular title s/he may be required by the company to drop the book, for reasons which have nothing to do with its literary merit. (1998: xii-xiii)

It becomes clear that, as Reynolds and Tucker demonstrate, the gap that exists between the author and the child reader is linked to different sorts of social pressures coming from publishing houses which, in most cases, are only interested in making more profit. To conclude their study, Nicholas Tucker writes that

> [b]ig publishing houses [...] are putting more resources [...] into 'series' books, popular with readers but something of a strait-jacket for writers required to produce fiction to fit certain prescribed and narrow literary formulae. [...] [I]ncreasingly centralized book distribution through only a

limited amount of retailing outlets remains a constant threat to all publishers, particularly those without the large financial assets necessary for launching new projects which may or may not be successful. (1998: 156)

The production of books for children, it is clear, is more and more controlled – and therefore made available to readers – by a few marketing departments.[7] Reynolds says that

[m]any writers feel alienated from their editors, who in turn find their children's divisions run by managers and marketing departments who have little understanding of the special needs and patterns of their niche in the publishing business [...]. (38)

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[7] Sandra Beckett, as she analyses the success of cross-over fiction in an unpublished paper given at a conference held in Lyon, France, in July 2008, argues similarly, pointing out that more and more books are published with the idea that they could become films. Thus, as well as having writers controlled by publishers, many publishers are trying to adapt their editorial policies to what, in most cases, Hollywood producers demand. This is why, Sandra Beckett argues, there are so many fantasy stories being published at the moment. The success of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* book series has been so phenomenal, Beckett says, that fiction – and then films – based on similar characteristics as those of Rowling's series have flourished considerably, making it harder for other genres to develop. Such a phenomenon, Beckett regrets, also makes it harder for books from outside the English-speaking world to appear on English and north American bookshelves.

It is interesting to see and work on the connections that exist between the empirical definition of the production of books for children put forward by Peter Hunt and some linguistic theories concerned with language as an *act cf communication*. We have seen that Peter Hollindale believes that the existence of a literature for children resides in an 'exchange' between the child and the adult, and that Hunt also insists that the poetics of children's literature originate from the relationship(s) that different ideological pressure groups have *vis-à-vis* the child. Another way of putting it would be to say that the writing of 'a book for children' is an act of communication between the adult and the child, an act of communication surrounded by influential discourses. Precisely because the writing of a book for children *is* an act of communication, I believe that we can approach previous empirical descriptions through a more theoretical lens. This is not to say, nor imply, that analyses such as Hunt's do not offer us valuable insights into our subject; quite the contrary. Accounts of everyday negotiations between authors and their publishers are informative. But such empirical approaches – whether we acknowledge it or not – derive from some principles which can be defined theoretically. I believe that we can clarify our understanding of the act of writing/production thanks to – or through – some abstract/theoretical re-formulations.

At the moment, nowhere can we find any accounts of the production of books for children which consider the recursive principle at the heart of any act of communication, which, for instance, as I will discuss later, Jean-Jacques Lecercle develops in some of his theoretical works. Rarely can we find any account of a writer of books for children reflecting on the theoretical implications that lie behind his or her choices. There have

been excellent accounts of what some authors do when they write a book for children (see, for instance, some collections such as *Innocence and Experience – Essays and Conversations on Children's Literature*, edited by Barbara Harrison and Gregory Maguire as well as *Talking Books – Children's Authors Talk About the Craft, Creativity and Process of Writing*, edited by James Carter, or in the 'Authorgraph' section of the children's book magazine *Books for Keeps* and in which authors for children sometimes reflect upon their own writing), but these rarely – not to say never – reflect on the theories that could supplement their thoughts: not that they should, but just that they do not.

It seems to me that current discussions dealing with the writing of books for children are usually maintained outside, or on the margin, of theoretical discussions. This is the silent, and/or silenced, theories that the production of books for children rests on that I now want to approach, the silent theories that Peter Hunt's empirical argument epitomises, by reading through Lecercle's theoretical work, and see where his thoughts resemble those I just dealt with above. In doing that, we will be able to approach the poetics Peter Hunt describes through the above-mentioned diagram, and which he writes about in his *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature*, the poetics of alterity that make up the notion of 'books for children'. I wish, then, to re-define common assumptions/approaches/practices to shed some light on what is often left behind, untouched. This not to discredit existing practices – they have their own merits, and such merits are what many people involved in the study of 'literature for children' are interested in. As a result, it will be easier, later on, for us to see where childist criticism, as a theoretical apparatus, can be used in connection with linguistic theories.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle approaches the process of communication between an author and a reader theoretically, using his 'ALTER EGO' model (1999: 61-88).[8] Lecercle points out the five basic components present in an act of communication: a speaker (addresser, author), a hearer (addressee, reader), a message (a text), an encyclopaedia (in Umberto Eco's sense of the term; see Eco 1994: 143; for further developments see Lecercle 1999: 201-222),[9] and language. The speaker creates a message (or, similarly, an author writes a text) using language (influenced by his or her encyclopaedic knowledge) which the hearer (the reader) – at the end of the spectrum – receives (1999: 42). The analogy with our own author-book-child spectrum is, as far as I am concerned, already clear.

Soon after he starts introducing his version of the process of communication, Lecercle writes that 'in dialogue or interpretation, there is no direct access to the reality of things, of the world outside, but only one that is filtered through a systematic pattern of knowledge and beliefs. For even our senses are the product of culture' (1999: 42). This is yet another way of paraphrasing Jacques Derrida's famous '[i]l n'y a pas de hors-texte [...]' [there is nothing outside the text [...]] (1967: 227) which encapsulates most post-1960s literary theoretical criticism, and which is the basis for most parts of my argument and whereby one can only see the world from one's own idiosyncratic perspective. Lecercle adopts such an angle in order to put an emphasis on his use of Eco's critical term 'encyclopaedia'. This is how Lecercle defines the term 'encyclopaedia' in *Interpretation as Pragmatics*:

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[8] See also Lecercle and Shusterman 2002: 89-110, more specifically 104-108.

[9] See next paragraph for a definition of the term encyclopaedia.

it is the compendium of knowledge and beliefs which is partially ordered (by relations of entailment, of inclusion, of intersection, of inference), but being the result of a chaotic process of sedimentation does not conform to an overall plan. [...] The encyclopaedia is changing all the time, and therefore dynamic: it is not only a body of knowledge and belief, but also the operation that, in a context, selects the relevant information and gives it computable shape, or from a text infers a relevant context. (1999: 203-204)

As Lecercle defines his critical standpoint, he refers to an example used by Marx and he writes that

the art of painting is both the product and the cause of our sense of vision, even as the shape of our hands is both the cause and the product of our practice of working. This enables Marx to operate a neat semantic inversion on the phrase "human nature", which for him no longer means "what is natural to man" [*sic*] [...] but rather "the humanisation of nature". It is nature that becomes human, not man [*sic*] who remains natural: nature is humanised not only objectively (as in cultivated landscape), but also subjectively in that perception is not only informed, but also formed by practice. (1999: 42)

He concludes by saying that '"[e]ncyclopaedia" seeks to capture this type of interaction between man [*sic*] and the world: what is true of perception is, *a fortiori*, true for this second-order relation with nature than language is' (1999: 42)

What interests me in Jean-Jacques Lecercle's 'ALTER EGO' diagram is the first part: ALTER standing for Author-Language-Text-Encyclopaedia-Reader. Whereas Roman

Jakobson – whose theories helped Lecercle develop his – had the 'addresser' and the 'addressee' share the same encyclopaedic and linguistic knowledge, Lecercle slightly modifies this idea and proposes his own version where the addresser constructs his or her message with the help of his or her own language and encyclopaedia. The addressee, then, reconstructs what he or she takes the addresser's intentions to be with and through the (uttered or written) message, with the help of his or her own language and encyclopaedia (1999: 61-62). Communication, in this sense, is achievable thanks to the possible interaction(s) between the addresser's encyclopaedia and language and the addressee's (Lecercle uses the term *'intersection'* 66). In the words of Lecercle:

> [c]ommunication conforms to the conduit metaphor, it flows from [addresser] to [addressee], and [the message] carries it. The only postulation we need to make is the identity of [language] and [encyclopaedia] for [addresser] and [addressee], so that meaning can be shared, and the construction reconstructed. (1999: 66)

This is the basic schema defining all acts of possible communication between two human beings.

If we focus on writing a book for children *as* an act of communication we find that when an author decides to engage in such a process, there are no real connections between him or her and the child/children he or she wishes to address. The text, consequently, is the materialisation of an act of communication *in absentia*, the addressee not being physically present, but only imaginatively. The fact that there is a gap between the author (addresser) and the reader (addressee) is true of any act of communication, and this is where issues of constructivism arise: the child being

constructed, its existence depends on a degree of imagination/representation on the author's part. This constructivist argument links the act of writing – or any act of communication – to the notion of iterability and, consequently, alterity. As Jacques Derrida argues in his essay "Signature événement contexte" [Signature Event Context],

> [u]ne écriture qui ne serait pas structurellement lisible – itérable – par-delà la mort du destinataire ne serait pas une écriture. [...] Toute écriture doit donc, pour être ce qu'elle est, pouvoir fonctionner en l'absence radicale de tout destinataire empiriquement déterminé en général.' [A writing that was not structurally legible – iterable – beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing. [...] All writing, therefore, in order to be what it is, must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined addressee in general.] (1972: 375)

Therefore, a 'book for children' is a text that is legible – iterable – beyond the presence of an empirically determined addressee – *in absentia*. It transcends *individual* boundaries and addresses *different* identities.

Lecercle observes that not only does an author/speaker construct the reader/addressee whom he or she is writing for/addressing, but he or she also constructs himself or herself, as follows (where *R* means 'representation', *A* means 'author', and *R* means 'reader'):

> [e]ach actor has *representations*, of herself [*sic*], of other participants, of the situation as a whole. These representations are subjective [...]. A representation may be defined as a function with two terms, the first corresponding to the contents of the representation, the second to the actor who entertains it. Thus, *R(A, A)* will note the author's representation

of herself, $R(R, A)$ her representation of the reader, $R(L, A)$ and $R(E, A)$ her representations of language and the encyclopaedia respectively. If I replace A with R in the formulae, I describe the reader's representations. And [...] A and R beings subjects [...], their representations are recursive. Thus we do not merely have $R(R, A)$, but also $R(R(A, R), A)$, the author's representation of the reader's representation of him [sic]. (1999: 63-64)

Lecercle also insists that '[t]he crucial idea is that *the speaker does not directly address the hearer, but the representation she* [sic] *has cf him* [sic]. The latter, in turn, does not answer the speaker directly, but addresses the representation he has of her [...]' (1999: 64, emphasis in the original). It is through these technicalities that I now want to approach the writing of books for children. Significantly, it is within the second half of this last quotation – where Lecercle points out the *recursive principle* present at the heart of an act of communication – that my argument will now reside.

If we consider the theoretical propositions put forward by Jean-Jacques Lecercle in his *Interpretation as Pragmatics* we can start elaborating our own model *vis-à-vis* a precise example of literary production, that of the writing of a book for children. It will soon appear that our model will get more complex as we introduce more and more actors; it will go beyond the simple addresser-message-addressee (that is, author-book-child) spectrum that Lecercle limits his argument to.

Let us start with the adult-child relationship. The author wants to address a message to the child. The author has a representation of himself or herself, of his or her encyclopaedia, and his or her language; in formulaic form: $R(A, A)$, $R(E, A)$, and $R(L, A)$. The author also has a representation of the reader, which means he or she constructs or imagines the reader's language and encyclopaedia. Hence, using Lecercle's formulaic

writing, we also have $R(A, R)$. And there is also the recursive principle essential to the dialogic nature of any act of communication. From all this emerges a message which, in our case, means a book for children.

The author sees himself or herself as an author of books for children which means that he or she is positioning himself or herself within a series of other discourses that make up the category 'books for children'. This, as Peter Hunt has shown, includes ideas of what childhood is thought to be, and/or what it should be, what this means in terms of the relationships between childhood and adulthood, and how all this (should) influence(s) the way books for children are and/or should be written (Hunt 1991(a): 158). The positioning of the author is therefore the result of quite intricate ideological choices (readings) of all these surrounding discourses. The author's encyclopaedia and language mirror his or her choices as regards his or her beliefs concerning the category 'books for children'. Let us name these surrounding discourses 'pressure groups' or (P), and let us introduce them into our diagram. It must be noted that these pressure groups can be subdivided *ad infinitum*, but that (P) can only exist from a conceptual point of view, as one's knowledge cannot possibly encompass all possibly-existing pressure groups together. So (P) refers to all pressure groups together, and (p) to a specific pressure group. A single pressure group can be composed of one single person, with his or her own sets of beliefs. Our diagram grows larger (also *ad infinitum*), then. Here is a list of some of the representations involved in the early stages of writing. Firstly, leaving the recursive principle aside:

(i) $R(A, A)$ $R(p, p)$

            $R(E, A)$ $R(E, p)$

$R(L, A)$ $R(L, p)$

$R(R, A)$ $R(A, p)$

                                   $R(R, p)$

$R((R, p_x), A)$ $R((R, A), p)$

$R((R, p_x, p_y, ...), A)$ $R((R, p_x), p)$

                                   $R((R, p_x, p_y, ...), p)$

$R(p_x, A)$ $R(p_x, p)$

$R((p_x, p_y, ...), A)$ $R((p_x, p_y, ...), p)$

Now, with the recursive principle as well which, Lecercle argued, only applies to subjective elements (which, in our case, means (A), (R), and (p)):

(ii) $R(R(A, R) A)$ $R(R(p, R) p)$

                                   $R(R(p_x, A), p_x)$

$R(R(A, (R, p_x)), A)$ $R(R(p, (R, A)), p)$

$R(R(A, (R, p_x, p_y, ...)), A)$ $R(R(p, (R, p_x)), p)$

                                   $R(R(p, (R, p_x, p_y, ...)), p)$

$R(R(A, p_x), A)$ $R(R(p, p_x), p)$

$R(R(A, (p_x, p_y, ...)), A)$ $R(R(p, (p_x, p_y, ...)), p)$

First (i), similarly to any act of communication, the author has a representation of himself or herself, his or her language, and his or her encyclopaedia, and the reader he or she is writing for. The same principles apply to all the pressure groups. As far as the pressure groups are concerned, 'writing for' can be replaced by 'protecting', and 'representation' must be understood in terms of 'intersection' between the pressure

group's desire(s) and the child's reception of the message/text. Then (ii), representations get more centralised around the pressure groups, pressure groups which are extremely varied (see Hunt 1991 (a): 158). The author has a representation of all the different pressure groups he or she may be aware of (depending on his or her encyclopaedia). This can take two different shapes: firstly, the author has a representation of a specific pressure group (this is because he or she may decide to put some other pressure groups aside because some may not be relevant to what he or she wishes to write about, for example generic pressures differ from genre to genre): $R(p_x, A)$. Secondly, the author has a representation of some pressure groups *vis-à-vis* each other: $R((p_x, p_y, ...), A)$.

It must be said that none of these representations happens in a vacuum, in that all pressure groups are influenced by other parameters, which are also influenced by other parameters, and so on. The same patterns can be applied to the pressure groups. The same also happens with all the formulae to which we apply the recursive principle Lecercle so much insists on (1999: 64). To focus on one formula, say $R(R(A, (p_x, p_y, ...)), A)$, it means that the author approaches, or creates a representation of, the representation he or she thinks some pressure groups *vis-à-vis* each other have of him or her. An analogy may help here: let us say I am writing a book for children, and I am influenced by certain specific feminist critics. As I approach these feminist critics, I actually approach the representations of these feminist critics I think are relevant to me, the representations of what those feminist critics think of me, that is, how I think they wish me to write (that is the way they position me in their discourse). I then adapt my discourse – writing – to the way I wish these feminist critics to understand me, that is I write according to the way I think I will be read, because I wish to make sure that what I

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write corresponds to the way they wish me to write. That means that I actually write for *myself* because I can only address *myself* for it is in *myself* that reside(s) the representation(s) I have of (the) other(s). This may sound like a rather solipsistic process, but in fact, and as Lecercle puts it, it is not, for what matters here is the existence of possible *intersections* between the one who writes, and the one who reads (1999: 66; see also 152-198).

This sort of reasoning – or modelling – based on linguistic theories of communication can serve as a basis for the writing of any book for children – and of any book in fact, as long as the author wishes to be read by someone else (and escape Humpty Dumpty's own solipsistic wishes). Thus we can approach empiricist analyses from a more aware perspective, and appreciate what Hunt calls 'the poetics of children's literature' more appropriately (1991 (a): 157). Nevertheless, this model is bound to be re-written, as we are fully aware that, in writing a book for children, the author will have to submit it to a publishing team which will comment on it and which will ask the author to change parts of his or her work so that it fits their publishing policies, requirements, ideologies, and so on. And so again, our formulae get larger as we need to add another crucial pressure group which I will call 'publishing team' (*PT*).

As an author decides to write a book for children, and as the above illustrates, he or she is caught in a series of acts of communication which he or she has to deal with. His or her representations of these different discourses are unknowable, and one can only say that the writing of a book for children happens within the negotiations that these different discourses generate. Before the second stage of writing – that of revision after

submission of the manuscript to a publisher – the author needs to consider a series of positions and representations. In summary, the formulae are:

- Author's representation of himself or herself: $R(A, A)$

- The author's representation of his or her encyclopaedia: $R(E, A)$

- The author's representation of his or her language: $R(L, A)$

- The author's representation of the representation the reader has of him or her: $R(R(A, R) A)$

- The author's representation of the representation that the 'a-pressure-group-*vis-à-vis*-the-reader-and-*vice-versa*' pair has of him or her: $R(R(A, (R, p_x)), A)$

- The author's representation of the representation that the 'some-pressure-groups-*vis-à-vis*-the-reader-and-*vice-versa*' pair has of him or her: $R(R(A, (p_x, p_y, ...)), A)$

- The author's representation of the representation a pressure group has of him or her: $R(R(A, p_x), A)$

- The author's representation of the representation some pressure groups together, or *vis-à-vis* each other, have of him or her: $R(R(A, (p_x, p_y, ...)), A)$

This is what happens as far as the first stage of writing is concerned, that is, before he or she sends his or her work to the publisher.

Considering the second stage a book for children goes through, that of its re-writing after having been read and commented on, and if we add (PT) – and for matters of simplification I will not reduce (PT) to $(pt_x, pt_y, pt_z ...)$ – to our model (allowing us some shortcuts), we need to add a subsequent series of formulae:

- The author's representation of the representation the publishing team has of him or her: $R(R(A, PT), A)$

- The author's representation of the representation the 'publishing team *vis-à-vis* the reader and *vice-versa*' pair has of him or her: $R(R(A, (PT, R)), A)$

- The author's representation of the representation the 'publishing-team-*vis-à-vis*-a-pressure-group-and-*vice-versa*' pair has of him or her: $R(R(A, (PT, p)), A)$

- The author's representation of the representation the 'publishing-team-*vis-à-vis*-some-pressure-groups-and-*vice-versa*' pair has of him or her: $R(R(A, (PT, p_x, p_y, ...)), A)$

The above formulae – comprising both the first and second stages – correspond to what happens when an addresser addresses an addressee, and consequently to what happens when an adult decides to write a book for children.

What becomes even more apparent, then, after such a linguistic analysis of the phrase 'children's literature', is that if it is to become meaningful regarding the notion of ownership that it implies – thinking back to what Jacqueline Rose told us in her *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* – some practical changes have to take place. As things happen, books for children are essentially produced by adults for children, and such processes as the ones I described above are therefore inevitable. Rose's study, I would argue, shares some of the principles inherent in Jean-Jacques Lecercle's linguistic formulae. One of the original purposes of this thesis, as previously announced, is therefore to find a way to legitimise, through a close analysis of the phrase 'children's literature' which we have started, as well as its implications, the notion of ownership that it (grammatically) implies, thus bridging the gap between the notions of

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absence and presence. I will suggest some changes in order to make the phrase 'children's literature' meaningful, not wishing to get rid of what is already available, but simply as an alternative. Such changes I will deal with in the following pages. Doing so, I will also introduce and reflect on the critical framework within which I will position myself, for it is the angle from which I will be looking at the phrase 'children's literature' which will initiate the changes I will suggest. Very shortly, we will therefore be turning our attention to what Peter Hunt called 'childist criticism', back in the early 1980s. We will, that is, be sliding away from the notion of alterity to get closer to that of identity.

CHAPTER TWO

Childist Criticism: Looking at Alterity and Identity

Childist Criticism and Children's Literature: New Ways of Seeing Things

Notre question, c'est toujours l'identité. Qu'est-ce que l'identité, ce concept dont la transparente identité à elle-même est toujours dogmatiquement présupposée par tant de débats sur le monoculturalisme ou sur le multiculturalisme, [...] l'appartenance en général ? [Our question is still identity. What is identity, this concept of which the transparent identity to itself is always dogmatically presupposed by so many debates on monoculturalism or multiculturalism, [...] and, in general, belonging?] (Derrida 1996: 31-32)

In terms of children's literature, [...] it might still be argued that, unlike women and other minority groups, children still have no voice, their literature being created for them, rather than creating their own. But this is nonsense. Children produce literature in vast quantities, oral and written, both individually wrought and through collaborative effort (sometimes diachronically) and in a variety of forms: rhymes, jokes, songs, incantations, tall tales, plays, stories and more. Yet, apart from a few collections and studies [...], it goes largely unrecognised [...]. (Rudd 2006: 19)

[I]f woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very curious; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman in fiction. (Woolf 2000 [1928]: 44-45)

Alterity vs. Identity: Back to Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein

Alterity is *present* when dealing with the production of books for children. We have seen how inevitable it is through a "linguistic reading" of the production of children's

literature, using Jean-Jacques Lecercle's theories. To further emphasise and then challenge this fact, I now wish to turn back to Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein. Both have pointed out fundamental problems as regards the production of children's literature, problems linked to that notion of alterity. As I read through their writings, I find a great basis upon which, I believe, childist criticism can be developed, and, thus, I see children's literature as an incredibly fertile area where both the child and the adult can communicate.

Similarly to what Jacques Derrida wrote in his *Monolinguisme de l'autre* (1996) [*Monolinguism cf the Other*], what we are confronted with, when dealing with the notion of 'children's literature', is a problem of *identity*, the problem of what it means to *be*, of what it means to belong to a culture. Writing about the notion of belonging, Derrida says:

> [n]otre question, c'est toujours l'identité. Qu'est-ce que l'identité, ce concept dont la transparente identité à elle-même est toujours dogmatiquement présupposée par tant de débats sur le monoculturalisme ou sur le multiculturalisme, [...] l'appartenance en général ? [Our question is still identity. What is identity, this concept of which the transparent identity to itself is always dogmatically presupposed by so many debates on monoculturalism or multiculturalism, [...] and, in general, belonging?] (1996: 31-32)

What is at stake in the world of children's literature criticism is the same kind of problem: 'What does it mean to be a child?' is the question. This sort of questioning is at the heart of Rose's and Lesnik-Oberstein theses. What they concentrate on is the impossibility of easily knowing, or accessing, the other, other as in another person's individuality.

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The adult writes the child, and the child reads the adult. As Rose insists very early in *The Case cf Peter Pan or the Impossibility cf Children's Fiction*, '[t]here is, in one sense, no body of literature which rests so openly on an acknowledged difference, a rupture almost, between writer and addressee' (1984: 2). This essential dichotomy, this unavoidable rupture that separates the adult writer from the child reader, has compelled Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein to maintain that because writers and critics of children's books cannot possibly bridge the gap between themselves and the child for whom they write, therefore the writing of children's fiction is impossible (Rose 1984: 1) and its criticism dead (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994: 163). The challenge facing critics and writers, in order to oppose this view, therefore, seems to rest on dismantling that fundamental *aporia*, which implies that the child and the adult must become one, and that there must be a *competent* understanding of the child on the part of the adult. Writing about the possibility of establishing an authentic dialogue between the adult and the child, Lesnik-Oberstein, in *Children's Literature, Criticism and the Fictional Child*, suggests using psychoanalytic psychotherapy (168, 163-225), and it is this suggestion that I now wish to address, taking it through 'childist criticism'. In weaving my argument through Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein, I want to ponder the notions of production and individuality, in an attempt to see whether or not criticism can claim to be capable of relating them to each other.

Before I start to examine Lesnik-Oberstein's psychotherapeutic suggestions, let us stay for a while with Jacqueline Rose who, in many ways, initiated and influenced Lesnik-Oberstein's argument. Rose, as she takes *Peter Pan* (not only J. M. Barrie's original versions, but also later re-interpretations) as a basic example to support her thoughts,

claims that the 'constructed' child within children's literature represents adults' desires

in relation to childhood. Therefore, she refers to the writing of children's books by adults

as a 'form of investment by the adult in the child, and [as a] demand made by the adult on

the child as the effect of that investment, a demand which fixes the child and then holds it

in place' (1984: 3-4). Similarly, as we will see, Lesnik-Oberstein, following Rose, extends

this argument to the way critics of children's literature also tend to create versions of the

'real' child that differ from reality.[1] Both Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein point to, and

concentrate on, this dichotomy between fiction and reality, in order to argue that the

'real' child is absent from children's literature and its criticism, and if adults do not

manage to come to terms with this problem, then 'children's fiction is impossible, not in

the sense that it cannot be written (that would be nonsense), but insofar as it hangs on

an impossibility, one which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation

between adult and child' (Rose 1984: 1). And not only children's fiction, but also its

criticism, because, as Lesnik-Oberstein puts it, 'if children's literature criticism depends

on, and is defined by, its claims to the existence of the 'real child' [...] then it is [...] dead'

(1994: 163).

Children's literature rests on a rupture that keeps the adult writing away from

the child reading (Romanski 2002: 1), and as Rose develops this idea, she writes that

'[c]hildren's fiction sets up the child as an outsider to its own process, and then aims,

unashamedly, to take the child in' (1984: 2). And she insists that '[t]o say that the ['real']

child is inside the book [...] is to fall straight into a trap [...]' (*ibid.*); a trap, because, she

believes, adults do not write for children but for themselves. They write for the child they

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[1] I use the word reality for lack of a better term.

wish to believe is there or want to see there, outside fiction. When books are approached in this way, it seems that Peter Pan, the only child who does not grow up, seems to be a very appropriate representative of adults' desires. Rose writes:

> Suppose, therefore, that Peter Pan is a little boy who does not grow up, not because he doesn't want to, but because someone else prefers that he shouldn't. Suppose, therefore, that what is at stake in *Peter Pan* is the adult's desire for the child. (1984: 3)

Children's fiction, Rose goes on, simply serves as an excuse for adults' writing, enabling them to fictionalise their wishes and desires as regards childhood. Thus, children's literature becomes a myth, a sort of camouflage, for it creates a childhood that is controlled, shaped, constructed according to adults' wishes. And this, Rose insists, is 'a fraud', by which she means that children's literature 'gives us the child, [without speaking] *to* the child' (1984: 1).

Rose's entire argument centres itself around, and takes as a point of departure, this idea of the constructed child within children's fiction, a constructed child whom she constantly equates with the adult writer's desires. This argument, she insists, implies that children's literature does not belong to children and, as a direct consequence, that the sense of didacticism I wrote about above, will always permeate children's fiction. By writing for themselves, by projecting/writing their wishes into the book, adults wish to make childhood what they wish it to be, so trying to equate reality and fiction. David Rudd refers to Peter Hunt, as well as to Murray Knowles and Kirsten Malmkjær, whose stylistic analyses of children's literature often stress the 'ever-present speech tags, the

instances of telling rather than showing, the intrusive narrators [...], the 'have to' tone that Rose detects [...]' (Rudd 2006: 20).[2]

Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, following Rose, takes the argument of the 'constructed child' somewhat further, not limiting it to the writing of children's books only, but extending it to the criticism of children's literature as well. According to her, critics approaching children's books also construct versions of the child that essentially differ from reality (1994: 1-164, especially 131-164). To engage with issues of categorisation, she claims that one should approach the child through a psychotherapeutic lens in the sense that, if adults really wish to consider the individual 'real child', then they do need to work with that 'real child'. Following a Winnicottian method, she suggests that one should try and work directly with the child. It must be noted that when Lesnik-Oberstein starts putting forward her psychotherapeutic argument, she admits to be moving away from the criticism of children's literature towards a more general discussion of how an adult can talk to a child individually. What I wish to do, therefore, is see whether her concerns and suggestions could be brought back towards the criticism of children's literature, and more particularly the production of children's literature, and what a reading of her argument through childist criticism could lead us to.

Childist Criticism: Summary of Principles and Uses

Childist criticism started with Peter Hunt in the early 1980s, in an article entitled "Childist Criticism – The Subculture of the Child, the Book and the Critic" (1984), published in *Signal*. "Childist Criticism – The Subculture of the Child, the Book and the

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[2] See Hunt 1991 (a): 100-117; Knowles and Malmkjær 1996: 41-80.

Critic" was the first article of a series of four in which Peter Hunt developed his main views regarding childist criticism. This first article was followed by "Questions of Methods and Methods of Questioning: Childist Criticism in Action", published in 1984, "Necessary Misreadings: Directions in Narrative Theory for Children's Literature", published in 1985, and "What do we Lose When We Lose Allusion?: Experience and Understanding Stories", published in 1988. Peter Hunt also directly addressed the notion of childist criticism in his *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature*, published in 1991.[3]

It all started, Hunt writes, after a Modern Language Association of America convention which took place in 1982. During a session on verse and poetry for children, a heated debate started regarding the relevance of poetry for children. This led Hunt to wonder:

> Could it be that the distance between the child for whom the author writes and the real child is far greater than we have supposed? Is it possible that even those authors who seem to write very much in the world of the contemporary child [...] are dealing with a version of the child's culture which is so essentially adult that it only adds to rather than reflects the child's view? (1984 (a): 41-42)

Claiming that there is a gap between the adult and the child, Hunt quickly suggested, as he decided to concentrate on the act of reading, that the ways in which adults read and the ways in which children read are different. In other words, Hunt believed "that we do

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[3] Peter Hunt has used, but more implicitly, childist criticism in some other of his numerous publications, but the five suggested here as the main ones where childist criticism is explicitly addressed and developed.

not, and cannot, and perhaps should not know what readers are doing in their heads; whatever is being done is valid in its own context" (Hunt 2003: n.p.).

In order to challenge some of the practices which took place in discussions of children's literature – practices he described as adultist, that is based on adult views – Peter Hunt put forward an alternative agenda which he called "childist criticism". Childist criticism was, and still is, based on the principle that adults and children are different and, therefore, read differently. Putting forward such an argument, which most of the literary criticism of the time would have found hard to deny, as would most of the literary criticism of the early twenty-first century, Hunt suggested that children's literature scholars should take into consideration children's responses to children's texts. Thus, in terms of what childist criticism implies, he writes that "[i]f we do take [children's readings] seriously, we might find that the four current kinds of reviewing and evaluation of children's books ('children *might* like...', 'children *should* like...', 'children *do* like...', 'children *will* like...') are all equally suspect" (1984 (a): 44).

What is at the heart of Peter Hunt's suggestions regarding childist criticism is therefore twofold. Firstly, Hunt believes that children's individual reactions to literature should be brought to the fore in order to, secondly, make children's literature criticism more child-centred. The duality of Hunt's argument has led him to be criticised. Indeed, as he puts two arguments forward – one theoretical, and one practical – Hunt is caught in problems of consistency. On the one hand, Hunt suggests that all readers read differently and that what happens in a reader's head is unknowable and therefore no assumptions should be made on behalf of readers; on the other hand, he also says that adult critics should take children's readings into considerations when it comes to criticising

children's literature. In other words, he claims that on the one hand we cannot have access to children's thoughts when they read, but that, on the other hand, we should take children's readings into considerations (assuming, therefore, that we can) when criticising books for children. This inconsistency has been pointed out, amongst others, but most notably, by Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, throughout her *Children's Literature – Criticism and the Fictional Child*.

The gap, or inconsistency, that exists between Hunt's theoretical concerns and his practical ones should not, and does not, I believe, obstruct the fact that his claims are important. To be more precise, I would say that even though some of Hunt's suggestions are criticisable regarding their practical side, the claim that he makes on a more abstract level are still justified and justifiable. More recently, in an essay entitled "Childist Criticism Revisited: A Room of One's Own", Hunt pleads guilty as regards the shortcomings of his childist argument. Nevertheless, he also wishes to reinforce the fact that, he writes

> [t]he idea, and the need for the idea [of childist criticism] seems to me still to hold good: and, fundamentally, it is important that the acceptance in the academic, adult world, of multiple readings, which result in multiple articles, is paralleled by an acceptance of the multiple readings by young (or inexperienced, or – by whatever definitions – "child") readers, which result in ... who knows what? (2003: n.p.)

As far as my own argument is concerned, I position myself similarly. I do believe that the individuality of the child should be considered. The problem is that if such a claim is

easily made from a theoretical perspective, it is harder to approach it from a practical angle.

As childist criticism tries to consider the individual child, Lesnik-Oberstein's psychotherapeutic argument makes it clear that critics cannot, or, rather, should not, make categorical assumptions which are essentially wrong in relation to that individual child. After all, one should not forget that Barthes's truism when he says '[u]n autre n'est pas moi, et je ne suis pas un autre' [Someone else is not me, and I am not someone else], is inevitable (1977: 142). This argument, positing the 'real/individual child' at the fore of criticism is, I believe, interesting in principle, and I certainly agree with Lesnik-Oberstein's position, *in principle*.

But, as she develops her argument, according to which the criticism of children's literature is based on false claims as regards the 'real child', I become less enthusiastic. In other words, she does not seem to see a solution to her critique, hence her moving away from children's literature criticism in the final chapter of her study. A few illustrative quotations will suffice to summarise her argument. She writes that

> [t]o children's literature criticism, and many other areas concerned with children [this includes the writing of children's books], children are more 'children' [i.e. children as constructed categories] than they are 'individuals'. We have also seen that children's literature repeatedly refutes this, claiming that 'individuality' is its priority above all else. I have argued that this is precisely the claim which cannot be sustained [...]. To children's literature criticism, the 'child' is an 'individual' *within* the category of 'childhood', but its 'individuality' cannot transcend the category of 'childhood'. In fact, we can reformulate our conclusion with respect to the impossibility of children's literature criticism by saying that this field is

torn apart by the paradox of, on the one hand, involuntarily reflecting the disruption of 'childhood' by 'individuality', while on the other hand maintaining an unfailing devotion to the claim that 'childhood' encompasses 'individuality'. (1994: 166)

And as she starts advocating her own critical method, and as she starts moving away from children's literature criticism, she insists that

> [t]he belief in the ability to 'know' the 'real child' requires a conviction that levels of empathy, sympathy, identification, perception, or communication exist between persons – between 'selves' and 'others' – as the means of attaining communal knowledge and meanings. (1994: 166)

Psychoanalytical psychotherapy, Lesnik-Oberstein strongly holds, is therefore the answer to the problems that arise in relation to the relationships between the adult and the child. She says that

> [t]here are two reasons why psychoanalysis suggests itself as the discipline which may be helpful to us: first [...], children's literature criticism relies on random, loosely formulated ideas about emotional meaning and communication [*sic*] [...], the very processes and characteristics of which are the object of study of psychoanalysis. Secondly, there is a version of psychoanalysis which not only lends support to my claim that *all* 'children' are constructions and inventions, but which also concentrates on ways to work with the idea of the constructed 'individual' ('child' and 'adult') – this despite the fact that to many people the autonomous 'child' will seem to be

even more unavoidably present in a therapy session than in children's literature criticism. (1994: 168)

What makes me wonder as regards the way Lesnik-Oberstein's argument develops is the sort of one-to-one relationships, or individual therapeutic sessions, that she wishes to establish between the adult and the child. If her argument was applied to the children's literature, it could imply is that this sort of relationship should also govern the writing of children's literature, and that the provision of psychoanalytical apparatuses should enable writers and critics to engage with problems of categorisation. Unfortunately, and probably for practical reasons, she does not see this as feasible, and anyway, it would not enable them to avoid these issues, psychotherapy being based on constructivist principles as well, which might explain why Lesnik-Oberstein decides to move away from Rose's claim that children's fiction is impossible. As her critique stands, she still does not see a solution to this impossibility, something I will address soon as I suggest that the writing of children's literature is possible. The impossibility she implicitly addresses, in light of her psychoanalytical argument, makes me believe that there might be some hope. While Lesnik-Oberstein leaves children's literature behind to concentrate on other things, I find it interesting to use her thoughts as a platform and still focus on the writing of children's literature.

What I would like to suggest is that Lesnik-Oberstein's argument is very useful to childist criticism when considering the phrase 'children's literature'. With Lesnik-Oberstein's critique, we are back to the fundamental *aporia* upon which children's literature is based. Childist criticism asks adults to read children's literature *as if* they

were children. But an adult is not a child, or, at least, not in any socio-categorical sense. That is why reading and writing, as I outlined above, can only be – at best – asymptotic approximations. The writing of children's literature, in this sense, needs to acknowledge and reflect the diversity that constitutes childhood. Two cultures need to interact. And it is this interaction which is to be put under scrutiny.

Childist Criticism: Keeping Children's Literature (Criticism) Alive

We have seen that Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein are worried about the legitimacy of the very label 'children's literature' because of issues of constructivism which maintain the child and the adult apart. Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein's views, I agree, are quite daunting and extremely pertinent. But, as childist criticism centres the production of children's literature around the child, there seems to appear some hope, some hope challenging the critic and the writer. This challenge is carried on by an essential question: How can 'children's literature' become a legitimate label?

My purpose, within this context, is to negotiate a space between the views of Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein and some of the arguments present in critics such as Peter Hunt, Perry Nodelman, and David Rudd, to see whether there could be any chances of moving Lesnik-Oberstein's ideas forward in relation to the production of children's literature. We have seen that the production of children's literature, as it currently stands, basically relies on the adult. We are also going to see that some critics in the field of children's literature studies wish to position the child centrally. The legitimacy of children's literature and its criticism, therefore, lies in the reconciliation of

the two problematic notions of individuality and production, inseparable notions when considering the way children's literature is written.

Children's literature is produced massively. Every year, thousands of new titles are published and sold; this happens on a trans-national basis, that is, books are written not only for consumption within a specific country, but also, and more and more, to reach every possible corner of the planet. Contemporary examples such as J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials Trilogy*, but also older examples such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, and A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*, for instance, produced within English and North-American contexts, can also certainly be found on French, Brazilian, German, Russian, and Japanese bookshelves. The world of children's literature seems to follow the rules of globalisation. And in this sense, the way children's books are produced and marketed is often, and unfortunately, in my view, just another way of enforcing the structures of capitalism. So if the production of children's literature keeps relying on such globalising capitalist principles, Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein's argument, even though they might not be interested in arguing against capitalism, will remain the same, as they will keep insisting that the 'real' child is an outsider, and that he or she is absent, or put away, from the whole project.

On the other side, diametrically opposed to the notions of globalisation and production, there is that of individuality with which I am strictly concerned, and to which childist criticism tries to bring helpful and critical advice. Wishing to approach the world of children's literature differently, childist criticism approaches the child and the book from this angle of individuality. What childist criticism wishes to do is approach the

cultures of childhood on a horizontal level, rather than a vertical level where the adult would write *for* the child, as opposed to writing (on the horizontal) *with* the child. If children's literature is something that children are supposed to own, then adults need to place themselves on the same level as children in terms of 'cultural awareness': adults need to engage with childhood, they need to understand it, in order to be able to write (about) it comprehensively, and to legitimise their place in the production of children's literature and its criticism. The commonly accepted definition according to which children's literature means 'books written *for* children' must therefore be changed, if not grammatically, at least in its meaning. The 'for' in 'written *for* children' must not imply that verticality that has been leading Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein towards uneasy reactions but, as I have been arguing, a sense of horizontality, a legitimising horizontality. 'For' must become *'with'*, if not in the phrase, at least in its implications. This is the critical framework put forward by childist criticism, a framework where the adult is asked to coexist with the child in an inclusive way.[4]

Here, we can therefore realise that some of the quotations I referred to earlier on when discussing the way children's literature is commonly defined are somewhat adult-centred and do not represent the whole picture. For instance, take Philippe Romanski's comments on the writing adult and the mute child:

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[4] It needs to be stressed that so far I have used the phrases children's literature and literature/books for children synonymously. This was done on purpose as I wanted to use those phrases as they are commonly used, that is, as meaning the same thing.

l'écriture [...] en vient donner la parole à celui qui, ne serait-ce qu'étymologiquement, *ne peut* parler. Entendons, celui qui ne peut parler *la langue des adultes*. Or, là est l'incontournable aporie: l'écriture, quant à elle, est toujours adulte, et c'est donc dans un *a posteriori* qu'elle trouve, de fait, son lieu. Ecrire sur l'enfance et l'enfance ne peut se faire qu'à distance, proprement d'*en face*, chaque mot couché sur le papier n'étant que l'aveu sans cesse renouvelé de la distance qui sépare l'*ici* d'un *là*. [writing finally bestows speech on someone who, etymologically, *cannot* speak. More exactly, on someone who cannot speak *the adults' language*. Now – and here lies a fundamental aporia – writing is always adult and always takes place *afterwards*. Writing on childhood and writing childhood is a gesture that can only be made from a distance, from the other side as it were, every written word being the constantly reasserted confession of the distance that separates *here* from *there*.] (2002: 1)

This quotation clearly states that the child does not write: writing is adult. But this is not the case: children can, and do write. Similarly, with Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer: '[c]hildren's literature is, inevitably, written *by* adults *for* children, so that each text represents an effort to speak across what its mere existence defines as a gap between opposites' (2003: 203). Why 'inevitably'? As with Romanski, what we have here is a clear opposition between adult and child. The adult can do, but the child cannot do. And this is an adult decision, a blind, and partial decision.[5]

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[5] In order to alter such a situation, the child and the adult must coexist on the same horizontal level, even as the phrase 'children's literature' implies that the child is the one from whom the book (should) actually originate(s). Here, it would probably seem appropriate to engage in a discussion about the relationship (horizontal or not) between

The adult and the child must coexist: this argument, I must stress, is almost purely theoretical, in the sense that an adult wishing to write a children's book without any intervention would have to act as a scribe: the adult would have to listen to the child dictate his or her story, and write it for him or her. But even so, there would arise issues of form: what did the child have in mind when telling his or her story to the adult scribe? How did he or she wish his or her story to be written (issues of shape, size, and so on come to mind)? Therefore, and to avoid the sort of issues of constructivism raised by Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein, I must now say that horizontality is impossible in practice. One plus one cannot make one. Even laws of mathematics seem to apply here, which is why childist criticism takes the writing away from the adult – however committed he or she is to becoming one with the child – and centres it around the child, alone. Alone, here, must be understood not in terms of isolation from the rest of the world but, rather, as bringing us back to the identity of the child. Childist criticism is centred around the child, and thus leaves the adult in theoretical spheres. This is the logical conclusion which childist criticism, as a theoretical apparatus, has led me to reach.

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the adult and the child from the angle of education. In fact, what mostly characterises the relationship between the adult and the child is the educational power-relationship that unites them. But such considerations here are not my main concern. I prefer to remain out of such debates and continue concentrating on the phrase 'children's literature' and its meaning from a childist perspective. Such debates are sometimes addressed by Carole Carpenter in her efforts to develop the Children's Studies program at York University, in Canada.

Children's Literature as Identity and as Individuality

Moving away from the adult, and as I go further into my definition of children's literature from the angle of childist criticism, I now wish to address the notion of identity which the above has led me to put forward as I developed my argument. To that extent, and as has been implicitly present in my argument, I will now start suggesting that, with childist criticism, there could be some substantial revisions in the field of children's literature studies, or, at least, some essential re-consideration of definition. Thus, I will address the 'children's literature/literature for children' dichotomy that is so much present in debates on children's literature once again, drawing on some more precise implications.

In his "Passing on the Past: The Problem of Books That Are for Children and That Were for Children", an article that raised some controversy, Peter Hunt wrote that 'within the ambit of the subject of "Children's Literature" there are two quite different studies operating, with different assumptions and ideologies: the study of books that *are* for children, and the study of books that *were* for children' (1997(a): 200).[6] Here, I would like to develop Hunt's argument and re-visit what is usually referred to as 'children's literature', as a cultural construct, in order to reinforce my own argument, insisting that 'children's literature', from the angle of its production, cannot mean what we usually think it means, and that 'children's literature' and 'books for children' are not synonymous phrases. What Hunt points at in this article is that when dealing with children's literature, we are inevitably confronted with issues of temporality. What these issues of temporality imply is that childhood, as a concept, is very elusive (1997(a): 201)

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[6] For reactions to Hunt's article see McGillis 1997; Flynn; and Petzold.

and it cannot possibly be defined, in the sense that one cannot fix its definition. Children's literature, therefore, should also shift as definitions of childhood shift.

What Hunt argues is that there are some books which once could be called children's books, but which cannot any more:

> [y]ou may say that there are many borderline cases, neither dead nor alive, enjoyed by some children and sustained by adults: *Uncle Remus*, the *Alice* books, *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Water Babies*, and folk tales in general. These are perhaps the most interesting, but they make my point in that they are now being directed *at* childhood, rather than being *cf* childhood. [...] Can, say, the excellent edition of *The Princess and the Goblin* be said to have anything to do with a contemporary child? (1997(a): 201)

The production of children's literature, he says, needs to follow the intricacies of childhood. It is obvious that I agree with Hunt's position here. But even though it argues for the same kinds of revisions that I am calling for, in a way, because of childist principles, I still believe that he only reflects half of the problems one encounters when engaging in debates about the production of children's books. It is true that if one looks at children's books from a diachronic perspective, one cannot not notice the apparent differences between, say, Victorian Alice, 1950s Fern in *Charlotte's Web*, and late-twentieth-century Johnny in Terry Pratchett's *Johnny and the Bomb*. But, that is only the surface of the issue. The synchronic perspective Hunt advocates is only partly developed and still relies on constructivism (as analysed by Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein), which

maintains some of the contradictions that I have criticised previously. Hunt still generalises about childhood, categorising – even if loosely – children in time slots.

What all that signifies in practical terms is that the literature we usually call 'children's literature' (or even 'literature for children' – if, *and only if*, we understand 'literature for children' as meaning the same thing as 'children's literature) should reflect that notion of synchronic temporality, an *identical* temporality which is at the centre of the debates around individuality, and which represents the 'here' and 'now' – or 'there' and 'then' – childist criticism is interested in. In other words, childist criticism focuses on the *capturing* temporality of the phrase children's literature, the temporality which freezes the child's identity for a moment: a singular moment. Therefore, it signifies that there cannot exist a definable category of books called 'children's literature'. Only the process of production can be labelled or defined as regards what the phrase 'children's literature' comes to mean. Children's literature, which is an evanescent concept, like childhood, can only be approached as a process of becoming, a process of identification which can never be captured, strictly speaking. The cultural material construct 'children's literature', therefore, is a contradiction in terms. Only the *writing* of children's literature does, or can, exist. Children's literature is a process one needs to trace and track. A children's book can never be – it can only become. As it is written, fixed in time, children's literature becomes of the past.

What I want to do is also interrogate the plural that is present in the phrase 'children's literature'. I have been writing about a process of writing which could result in the existence of something called 'children's literature'. But, because an origin – a beginning – *cannot* be plural, and because an identity cannot be plural, and because

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identity is what is at the heart of the notion of belonging, a notion present in the grammatical genitive in the phrase 'children's literature', then a children's book cannot originate from a plural identity. In terms of origin, mine cannot be mine *and* yours. I cannot be I *and* you. You cannot be you *and* me. Yours cannot be yours *and* mine. Something called children's literature cannot exist, both as a category, and also as a process. Only a child's literature can exist, as a process of identification, and not materialisation. Therefore, to be able to define a 'child's literature', we must *not* define it – thus avoiding issues of generic definition – because the *only* way for 'child's literature' to *be* is that it must *not* be. It must constantly be remade *in praxis* – through a continual and unstoppable process of identification/writing. It is within this irreconcilable contradiction that resides the possibility of a 'child's literature'. The fact that it does not exist invites a 'child's literature' to – *potentially* – exist. By not *being*, a 'child's literature' *can be*. And this potential *beingness* can only reside within the individuality of the child: a synchronic temporality: an identical temporality: the *here* and *now* at the heart of childist criticism.

From the idea of a children's literature – in Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein – which rests on the notion of categorisation, whereby childhood is treated as a group and whereby identity is lost or denied, to the idea of a child's literature – which we arrived at through the notion of childist criticism – which puts forward the notions of singularity and identity, whereby a child's literature is something possible but also something that disappears as time passes. This reading, or continuation of Rose's and Lesnik-Oberstein's arguments is, I believe, rather radical but logical if one applies childist criticism not only to the reading of children's literature, as Peter Hunt did, but also to the

production/writing of children's literature. This is a new way of developing Hunt's ideas which could lead to critical changes in the domain of children's literature studies.

This child's literature, or children's literatures, is what I will be addressing in a subsequent chapter of this thesis. I will be addressing a child's literature through David Rudd's essay "Theorising and Theories – How Does Children's Literature Exist?" (2006) where he develops the notion of the constructive child, and Jack Zipes's critique of what he calls the institution of children's literature in his *Sticks and Stones – The Troublesome Success of Children's Literature From Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (2002: 39-60).

Before Moving On: A Transitional Summary

So far in this thesis, I have put forward and developed a number of points which I would like to bring back together, as a sort of transition, in order to clarify my critical stance but also the original perspective which this study sets to develop. As I decided to approach the phrase 'children's literature' from the angle of childist criticism, it became clear that most of my argument was deliberately – not to say unavoidably – theoretical. Indeed, we soon realised that, due to the *interactional* complexity – what Romanski described as an *aporia* – with which we are confronted as we face the culture(s) of childhood, we can only escape the constructivist issues with which Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein dealt at length by, precisely, remaining theoretical. In the same way as a male person can only engage in feminist criticism theoretically, an adult can only engage in childist criticism in the same manner: theoretically. Childist criticism, in its integrity, it must be clear, is something that can only operate theoretically on the part of the adult.

But, and this is the second aspect of childist criticism which I would like to emphasise, I have also argued that if it is true that an adult *cannot* see through the eyes of a child, he or she can still try. Thus, in an effort to develop my argument logically – one step at a time, as it were – I suggested that childist criticism allows the theoretical and the practical to meet in an effort to bridge a gap – alterity – between two cultures. This is where we realise that childist criticism bears some similitude with Jacqueline Rose's and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein's own argument. Indeed, and even though Rose's argument was not putting forward any 'solution' to what her critique suggested was objectionable – she was just pointing out a fact, after all –Lesnik-Oberstein's *Children's Literature – Criticism and the Fictional Child* argues that in order to bridge the gap that separates the child and the adult, there should be some sort of interaction between these two. In the last chapter of her study – "The Reading Child and Other Children" – Lesnik-Oberstein argues that one should address issues of constructivism by adopting a psychoanalytic therapeutical methodology (a Winnicottian version, which "concentrates on ways to work with the idea of the constructed 'individual' ('child' and 'adult') [...]" (1994: 168)). This, I feel, is somewhat deceptive, especially as she does not address the production of children's literature further after having put forward her critique. The challenge which childist criticism most wishes to engage in is the possibility of having a meaningful children's literature. This is what I questioned early at the beginning of this chapter: how can the notions of belonging and ownership encapsulated by the genitive "s' present in the phrase 'children's literature' be meaningful? This is why I tried to take Rose's and Lesnik-Oberstein's claims on, reading them through childist criticism.

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Conditions of Possibility: The Constructive Child, or Childist Criticism in Practice

The argument of Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein, which is mainly concerned with the notion of the 'constructed child', can be taken forward using David Rudd's idea of the 'constructive child', something which will turn the above theoretical argument into a more practically-aware one.

This constructive child is the child I am interested in – the child that is not mute and not totally subjected to the voice of the adult (writer). Thus, as Rudd puts it, 'while children can be construed as the powerless objects of adult discourse, they also have subject positions available to them that resist such a move' (2006: 17). He summarises Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein's psychoanalytically-informed arguments according to which

> [a]dults [when writing children's books] [...] evoke [the] child for their own purposes (desires, in fact), as a site of plenitude to conceal the fractures that trouble us all: concerns over a lack of coherent subjectivity, over the instabilities of language and, ultimately, existence itself [...]. Barrie's 'Peter Pan' texts are seen as perfect examples of this, purporting to be about the eternal child, but actually acknowledging the problems of such a construction, especially in the way that Barrie himself had problems producing a final version of his text [...]. (Rudd 2006: 16)

Rudd then takes another path and addresses the concept of the 'real child' who, indeed, produces his or her own literatures. He argues that one should go beyond the idea of the 'constructed' child, which ideological implications sees the child as *a priori* "muted" and consider, rather, the reader as 'construct*ive*' (2006: 17). Thus, Rudd starts disrupting the binary opposition between childhood and adulthood upon which the institution of children's literature tends to base itself. Therefore, and to start with, one can say that the

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only way to move the institution of children's literature towards the acknowledgement of the presence of the child, lies in the notion of the constructive child and childist criticism: childist criticism and the constructive child are inseparable.

The notion of the constructive child is one that Rudd borrowed from the Stainton Rogers's *Stories cf Childhood: Shifting Agendas cf Child Concern* (1992). Giving the child a voice, he writes that '[t]he Stainton Rogers' [...] Foucauldian notion of power, seen as not only repressive but productive, too, allows us to overcome what is otherwise a problematic shift; that is, from the spoken-for child to the controlling adult' (2006: 17). By approaching the child from such an angle, Rudd argues that

> [t]he fact that children are seen *not* to have a stake in this is, once again, a
> product of the way children's literature (in its texts and its criticism) has
> become institutionalised, such that – ironically – only commercially
> published work is seen to count; or, to put it another way, only adults are
> seen to "authorise" proper children's literature. Certainly, more work
> needs doing on this [...], but it does not help when scholars underwrite this
> culturally dominant version of events. (2006: 19)

Children's literature, described in such terms, is something that the adult is in charge of as far as its institutionalisation is concerned (see also Zipes 2002: 40-41). This process of definition is the result of various institutional apparatuses which have shaped 'children's literature' as most people conceive it now, that is something one can buy in any bookshop where there is a 'children's' section. But, unfolding the history – or genealogy – of children's literature as an institution can reveal where such an institution becomes, in the words of Rose, a fraudulent enterprise (1984: 1). Children's literature, as an

institution, became what it is, that is something that more or less excludes the child, because, as Jack Zipes writes,

> [f]or a children's book to be recognized as a book *for* children, a system had to be in place. That is, a process of production, distribution, and reception had to be instituted within which places where assigned to different groups of people. Gender, age, and social class played roles. Indeed, it was not possible for a broad range of books to be approved and to reach children in specific ways until the system of production, distribution, and reception was instituted and became focused on how to socialize children through reading. Children's needs were not necessarily taken into consideration. *It was and still is the need of socioeconomic order that dictates how children will be formed and what forms are and are not acceptable.* (2002: 46, latter emphasis added)

Similarly, Rudd adds: 'the more that children's literature became institutionalised (in texts and its criticism), the more it filtered out, or ignored, that which didn't fit [...].' (2006: 20) Thus children's literature is, as an institution is, indeed, something that belongs to the adult, and within which the child is apparently voiceless. But, is that the whole story? Is their – *adult* – story the whole story? As Rudd himself clearly points out, children do have their own literatures that they produce themselves.

> [i]n terms of children's literature, [...] it might still be argued that, unlike women and other minority groups, children still have no voice, their literature being created for them, rather than creating their own. But this is nonsense. Children produce literature in vast quantities, oral and written, both individually wrought and through collaborative effort (sometimes diachronically) and in a variety of forms: rhymes, jokes, songs,

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incantations, tall tales, plays, stories and more. Yet, apart from a few collections and studies [...], it goes largely unrecognised [...]. (2006: 19)

What we have is the possibility of a reconsideration of an institution which, for the reasons we have just seen, named itself 'children's literature', pretending that the grammatical genitive it uses is a legitimate one. What is at stake, therefore, is the possibility of a reconsideration of the binary opposition between childhood and adulthood, a binary opposition which, so far, and as the argument has taken us, conflicts with childist criticism.

Children's Literature(s) or A Child's Literature: A Room of One's Own

As I said earlier, I wish to see where my childist institutional considerations can be similar to other institutional discourses. By linking my ideas to already-developed or already-accepted ones, I will create working parallels with the work of other critics whose position I sometimes see as childist. Within an area which, looking at the dozens of books published every year in the literary criticism of children's literature, has adopted a specific line regarding whether or not the presence of children is worth considering, I want to, for instance, and to start with, show that there are epistemological similarities between some examples of feminist criticism and childist criticism. Lissa Paul, in her "Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows about Children's Literature", writes that

> [t]here is good reason for appropriating feminist theory to children's literature. Both women's literature and children's literature are devalued and regarded as marginal and peripheral by the literary and educational

communities. Feminist critics are beginning to change that. By tracing the history of women's writing, and especially in the nineteenth century, feminist critics are giving definition and value to women in literature and literature by women. As it happens, the forms of physical, economic and linguistic entrapment that feminist critics have been revealing in women's literature match the entrapment in children's literature. (1987: 187)[7]

Similarly, there is good reason for appropriating childist criticism to the domain of children's literature studies; and this reason is twofold. Firstly, as I argued earlier, it is only in approaching children's literature through childist criticism that one can give an adequate meaning to the phrase 'children's literature', and, secondly, because children and the literatures they produce are devalued and regarded as marginal and peripheral, and observing this from the angle of childist criticism has inevitable politico-cultural consequences. This is what Peter Hunt also addresses in "The Decline and Decline of the *Children's* Book? – The Problem of Adults Reading Children's Books and What Can Be Done About Them". Reflecting on the ways in which some adults tend to consider the cultures of childhood, and marginalise them, he writes:

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[7] It must be noted that Lissa Paul has also suggested a parallel between feminist criticism and the criticism of children's literature, writing that children, like women, have been put aside, kept "away from the scene of the action" (Paul in Hunt (ed.) 1990 (a): 148-66). Nevertheless, as Karín Lesnik-Oberstein points out, there is a major difference between the status of women and that of children, in literary criticism, as women have been able to become writers (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994: 139), whereas children's writings are not recognised.

teaching at San Diego State University, I asked students to give me a list of the five "best" children's books, and I got *Charlotte's Web, Where the Wild Things Are, Winnie-the-Pooh, The Wind and the Willows, Alice in Wonderland*, which is more or less what I might have got in the UK [...]. Does this mean that they are universal standards? I don't think so. [...] [W]hat relevance can [these books] have to children, who belong to a different kind of culture? [...]

[T]his is important because [the institution of children's literature] favours and legitimises certain forms over others, and parts of its tenets are that certain kinds of experience, certain complexities, are necessarily *more valuable* than others.

To sum up: we need to stop judging children's books – which means stop *producing* children's books in the context of cultural and formal definitions that are irrelevant to the readers. I am not throwing out that culture; I am only asking that it be seen as only one culture, and that others are equally valid. Almost all contemporary theory points to a freedom in the audience, to define and produce a literature that is not forced into the linear, beginning-middle-end-resolution "middle-aged" cultural mould. [...]

The position of women and women's writing in the world has changed, and is changing radically, because the implications of the theorists are, slowly, being followed through. If we want to do the same for children's literature, to make sure that the decline and decline does not continue, then we have to follow up some implications, and if we do not, then I think we have betrayed the children. (1991: 13-14)

Hunt's concluding paragraph is crucial here, for it insists on the necessity of taking childist criticism – as a theoretical-critical apparatus – forward. His approach, focusing on the reading of books for children, argues that the canon that is (un)consciously held up by adults should be reconsidered. This is similar to my own argument because, as I

defined the way in which I wished to use childist criticism – focusing on the production

of literature by children rather than by adults – I believe that adopting childist criticism

is the only way to make sure that, as far as the institution of children's literature is

concerned, *we have not betrayed the children.*

Jack Zipes's, David Rudd's, and Peter Hunt's arguments – which reflect (on)

Jacqueline Rose's claims – demonstrate that the way in which the institution of children's

literature defines itself is consequential to the way adults tend to consider childhood.

Hunt points at the way some adults tends to legitimise certain texts over others, and he

claims that this can be described in terms of non-respect towards the child's own culture.

This is what Perry Nodelman (1992) describes in colonial terms in his reading of the

institution of children's literature through Edward Said's *Orientalism.* Similarly, I believe,

the fact that what children really produce in terms of literature is being ignored by the

institution of children's literature is a direct consequence of the way childhood is defined

by adulthood. And this is what Beverly Lyon Clark also strongly argues in her *Kiddie Lit –*

The Cultural Construction cf Children's Literature in America. In a chapter devoted to the

study of literature for children within the academy, she writes:

> [n]or do the Jacques Derridas or Henry Louis Gateses or Stephen
> Greenblatts of criticism theorize about literature for children. The reasons
> for this lack of attention include [...]: our cultural anxiety of immaturity,
> our unwillingness to take children seriously. (2003: 49-50)

Children, when defined like this, that is, as immature and beings that cannot be taken

seriously, are bound to be often dismissed by adulthood. So, unless we reconsider the

place and the value of childhood – and therefore the place and role of adulthood *vis-à-vis*

childhood – in our society, children's literatures will never be truly acknowledged. This implies that the adult should go beyond the controlled-controller and immaturity-maturity binaries that most commonly epitomise the relationships between adulthood and childhood, and bring forward the notion of (cultural) respect.

This disruption of the binary opposition between childhood and adulthood is something that has sometimes been touched upon, for instance, as regards the study of sexuality. In an article called "Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality", Steven Angelides argues that the child's sexuality has often been placed under erasure (2004: 142) and that 'many people still believed [in the 1970s] in the notion of childhood asexuality or sexual innocence' (2004: 146). Angelides's article shows how childhood sexuality has been approached through recent history, and how discourses about the powerlessness of the child have (slightly) shifted towards a recognition of the child's (sexual) identity. But Angelides also insists that in most cases the sexuality of the child is maintained within adult discourse and is therefore silenced.

Even though adult discourse has changed as far as certain issues are concerned (for instance, the age of consent, as well as the voting age, have been lowered in recent years), it has been argued that, regarding the domain of children's literature, there is still a tendency to maintain certain ideological structures which keep the child's identity away from the institution of children's literature. For instance, Ann Alston, in an essay focusing on the ideological construction of homes and houses in some examples of books for children, argues, alongside Jacqueline Rose's reading of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, that the institution of children's literature often turns childhood into a mythological haven. She writes that

[t]he home is presented as a haven of family and idealised domesticity; it is an adult construct, an image that is so prominent that it has become naturalised. While sociologists and politicians often chart the demise of the family, the signs in children's books constantly reaffirm the position and importance of the family home: the dresser still appears, ordered and homely; the table comes complete with clean cloth; the houses often have four windows and a central door. The ideal home, like the ideal child, or indeed the ideal family is trapped in a past ideology, and adult writers, publishers, illustrators and readers [sic] seem to have little intention of letting the ideal of a 'good' family home grow into a fifteen-storey tower block and indeed, if it were so, then it is highly probable that in it there would be a dresser, or cloth on the table, a symbol of domesticity and thus harmony. (2004: 55)

In order to disrupt the binary between reality and fictionality, between the constructed child and the constructive one, and between absence and presence, thus allowing children's own literatures to exist in the eyes of the adult (and therefore allowing them to be part of the institution of children's literature), the relationships between childhood and adulthood should be reconsidered. Thus, the notion of horizontality becomes essential. Following Peter Hunt's comments, it is therefore the notions of respect and recognition that should be brought to the fore (1991 (b): 13-14). Similarly, writing about sexuality, Steven Angelides argues that

[w]e must actively reaffirm a social discourse of child sexuality and rethink the question of power in connection with subjectivity and adult-child relations in a much more complex manner than the binary of powerful/powerless allows. Children's subjectivities ought not to be

figured on the model of the tabula rasa, as the effects of a juridical inscription of power. Children's beliefs and experiences ought to be taken seriously, seen as shaped by and shaping adult knowledges. We must provide children with discursive spaces and subject positions that enable them to negotiate their own emerging sexualities and to empower them to act on their own behalf. (2004: 161)

As a follow-up to my references to feminist criticism, I find Virginia Woolf's *A Room cf One's Own* useful here, as it allows me to emphasise further the link between feminist criticism and childist criticism. Woolf's feminist manifesto is concerned with issues of recognition and respect, and it is easy to draw a parallel between the place of women within the institution of literature and that of the child within the institution of children's literature. As Woolf writes about the place of women in literature in contrast to their place in 'real' life, she claims that

if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very curious; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman *in fiction*. (2000: 44-45, emphasis added)

I could replace the word 'woman' in Virginia Woolf's text with the word 'child'. If it is true that when adults write for children they give children a great importance – an *extraordinary* importance: think of Harry and his friends defeating the forces of evil in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, or of Matilda's and Charlie's subversive positions in Roald Dahl's *Matilda* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, or think of the centrality of

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children characters in most, not to say *all*, books labelled children's books – this importance remains *fictional*. Using Woolf's argument, we can argue with her that

> [a] very queer, composite being thus emerges [out of the situation where woman, or child, has a voice only in fiction]. Imaginatively she [or the child] is of the highest importance; practically she [or the child] is completely insignificant. [...] [I]n real life she [or the child] was [is] the property of her husband [and the child of the adult]. (2000: 45)

The child exists without really existing. Jack Zipes and Beverly Lyon Clark, thinking along the same lines as Woolf, worry about the disparity between reality and fiction, that is, they worry about the gap that Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein pointed at, not only for the sake of definitional argument, as Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein essentially did, but, more importantly, for political reasons. Just as Woolf worried about the conditions in which 'real' women – that is, women outside fiction – lived, Zipes writes that '[t]he richer and more tolerant children's literature has become, both in criticism and in the writing for children, the poorer children and adolescents are becoming in their material and social conditions' (2002: 31). Similarly, Clark also argues that,

> [a]dvertisers foreground images of babies even when their product has little to do with children (automobile tires? interior painting? nursing homes?). Every package of toilet paper in my local supermarket features the head of an adorable baby, too young to use the product herself [*sic*]. Presidential hopefuls traverse the United States kissing babies and seize photo ops that capture them hugging their children. Yet the position of the country's children provides little cause for jubilation. There may be recent small gains – fewer teen pregnancies in the past couple of years, a decrease

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in juvenile homicides. But for many years children in the United States have been overrepresented among those living in poverty, at a rate of almost 50 percent higher than the national norm. In 1999, when the U.S. poverty rate was 11.8 percent, 16.3 percent of the nation's children were living in poverty. (2003: 1-2)

It appears to me that children *do not really own a room cf their own*, or if they do, that room remains rather insignificant, a mere Wendy house, in the middle of a gigantic real edifice owned by the adult. The way that Woolf develops her feminist critique as regards the place of women *vis-à-vis* the institution of literature is, I believe, *essentially* similar to the way childist criticism approaches the place of the child within the world of children's literature. Children, as far as the institution of children's literature is concerned, are often confined to a fictional world, as if reality did not exist, as if children had no sexuality, never took drugs, never fought in wars, or anything of the sort. Although things can be said to have slightly changed lately with the production of neo-realist books such as those of American writer Robert Cormier, or British writer Melvin Burgess, especially with the latter's *Doing It*, published in Great Britain in 2003, it remains true that such books are still considered as a deviation to the acceptable norm. That norm, in Great Britain, and at the time of the publication of *Doing It*, a novel overtly concerned with teenage sexuality, was exemplified in former Children's Laureate Anne Fine, the figure of the Children's Laureate, one could argue, being one of the public faces of the institution of children's literature (at least as far as the production of books for children is concerned). Even before *Doing It* was available in bookshops, Anne Fine wrote a review of it for *The Guardian*. Her review – unsurprisingly entitled "Filth, which ever way you

look at it" – was extremely severe and called for censorship. She describes the book as an 'assault on teenage morals' (2003: n. p.). She believes that in reading it, '[y]oung girls will be begging their parents to send them to single sex schools. Reading [Burgess's *Doing It*] will put many off dating for years' (*ibid.*). She also writes, towards the end of her review, that

> [a]ll of the publishers who have touched this novel should be deeply ashamed of themselves. Astonishingly, they are almost all female. It's time they sat round a table, took a good long look at themselves and decided that it was an indefensible decision to take this book on. (*ibid.*)

Here, some strong conservatism is expressed in the way Fine comments on the publishers' choice to publish the book.

Some children's literature critics – whether they see themselves as childist or not – are beginning to destabilise the *status quo* that childist criticism wishes to challenge. By looking at the history of the institution of children's literature, and especially the socioeconomic politics that have given it shape, childist criticism is giving a definition and some value to the literatures produced by children. This is because looking at how children's literature has evolved, one can point out what has been included and what has not. Just as Paul argues that uncovering the genealogy of what she calls women's literature is important, David Rudd also seems to suggest that understanding how children's literature has become – and is still being – institutionalised – can help us realise that children do produce their own literatures and that these literatures have been marginalised, so far, but that they are nonetheless worth exploring. Such reconsiderations also – and inevitably – lead us to reflect on what

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generates such debates, that is, the place of childhood *vis-à-vis* adulthood and *vice versa*. This is why I continually insist that a possible way forward as far as a childist reconsideration of children's literature as an institution is concerned resides in a notion such as that of horizontality, whereby children and adults are seen as equal in rights. For children to really exist in a world controlled by adults, and following what Roland Barthes argues in an essay on toys, in his *Mythologies*, adults must stop looking for themselves – or for what they want – in children. Barthes writes:

> [l]es jouets courants sont essentiellement un microcosme adulte; ils sont tous reproductions amoindries d'objets humains, comme si aux yeux du public l'enfant n'était en somme qu'un homme plus petit, un homunculus à qui il faut fournir des objets à sa taille. [...] [L]'enfant ne peut se constituer qu'en propriétaire, en usager, jamais en créateur; il n'invente pas le monde, il l'utilise [...]. [All the toys one commonly sees are essentially a microcosm of the adult world; they are all reduced copies of human objects, as if in the eyes of the public the child was, all told, nothing but a smaller man, a homunculus to whom must be supplied objects of his own size. [...] [T]he child can only identify himself as owner, as user, never as creator; he does not invent the world, he uses it [...].] (1957: 55-56)

Rudd's argument is helpful as regards a childist reconsideration of the institution of children's literature, a reconsideration the main purpose of which is to include what the child produces in terms of literature into the domain of children's literature studies (Rudd 2006). It must be noted, here, that even though David Rudd and I seem to agree, it is only partly. Indeed, as he tries to negotiate his way through both the constructed child and the constructive one, it appears that he still wishes to maintain the

status quo which I wish to destabilise. Significantly, as he finds a way between the notion of the constructed child (as present in Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein) and that of the constructive child, he argues that one of the futures of children's literature criticism resides in the acknowledgement of the child's unpredictable reactions to the literature produced for him or her. Thus, he develops a hybrid approach combining both the constructed child and the constructive one. In that sense, I see Rudd's argument as very similar to Peter Hunt's childist approach to children's literature. As they both engage with the place of the child in the study of the books that are produced for him or her, they believe that more emphasis should be put on the constructive child. Both Hunt and Rudd wish the cultures of childhood to be respected as far as the act of reading is concerned. As they insist on the necessity to respect how the child approaches the text he or she reads, they want to include the reading child in the criticism of children's literature, Hunt's criticism not going further than that. Nor does Rudd's in "Theorising and Theories: How Does Children's Literature Exist?" (2006). But, in another article, "Springs of Hope and Winters of Despair in Children's Literature", he seems to adopt a similar *but* more extended perspective, saying that children's own productions should also be part of children's literature criticism. He writes:

> There's [...] a great deal of [...] material that lacks bibliographical control, or even recognition, partly because so much of it is seen as ephemeral. It is worth noting the bias towards children's fiction (both in this piece and elsewhere), which seems to stand metonymically for children's literature. There is a huge neglect in other areas, which needs addressing: poetry, drama, non-fiction, chapbooks, comics, magazines, folklore and, of course,

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studies of children's own 'literary' product: rhymes, stories, fantasies, and the like. (2006: 16)

He also writes that 'this makes children's literature studies far more messy and complex, and challenges traditional forms of scholarship [...]' (2006: 24), which, to me, sounds like an interesting prospect.

These literatures that children produce in vast quantities *are* what I consider to be the children's literatures I described above, and these literatures are what my childist argument is most interested in. This is why what I now wish to do is to define the conditions of possibility of these children's literatures, more particularly in terms of academic possibilities. For even if 'arguing that the child is necessarily both constructed and constructive, and that this hybrid, border country is worthy of exploration [...]' (Rudd 2006: 25), considering the constructive child in more depth also seems to take us towards new areas of investigation and towards an even more messy reconsideration of the institution of children's literature. Otherwise, and even if one decided to follow Rudd's hybrid criticism, critics like Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein will never be satisfied and will always claim, rightly, that children's literature does not belong to the child, but is still based on adult constructivism/colonialism.

The Childist *Alternative* Conditions of Possibility of Children's Literatures

To take up David Rudd's claim that children do produce their own literatures, and to complement the theoretical suggestions made earlier, I believe that his argument – if taken further – could offer interesting alternatives as far as the domain of children's

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literature studies is concerned. As Iona and Peter Opie wrote in their introduction to their study *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959):

> [children's] fun [about their linguistic games] is the thought, usually correct, that adults know nothing about them. Grown-ups have outgrown the schoolchild's lore. If made aware of it they tend to deride it; and they actively seek to suppress its livelier manifestations. Certainly they do nothing to encourage it. And the folklorist and anthropologist can, without travelling a mile from his [*sic*] door, examine a thriving unselfconscious culture [...] which is as unnoticed by the sophisticated world, and quite as little affected by it, as is the culture of some aboriginal tribe living out its helpless existence in the hinterland of a native reserve. Perhaps, indeed, the subject is worthy of [more academic attention]. (1-2)

The literatures that children produce are absent from the literary domain of children's literature studies, and they pose a challenge to the *status quo* that defines the state of children's literature as an institution, and, as far as most of my argument is concerned, as regards the way the phrase 'children's literature' is perceived and understood in literary academic terms.

Similarly, as Zipes reflects on the way children's literature became institutionalised in North America and Great Britain, he writes that '[t]he institution of children's literature served a function in acculturating the child and molding his or her reading habits in the lights of specific socioeconomic needs' (2002: 47). He also comments on the commercialisation of books for children:

> [a]lthough production and sale of children's books are dominated by large corporations, which produce books largely to lure adults and children to buy their trademark, and although the books themselves take second place

to movies, TV shows, and even commercials, the institution of children's literature is seeing a flowering of innovative books and illustrations for readers from two to sixteen that are not simply economic ventures. Children's literature needs and thrives on the work of fine writers and artists and fosters experimentation and challenges to the market. (2002: 48)

So, as the institution of children's literature needs to resist – or challenge – the capitalist market it finds itself in the middle of, I also believe that the institution should challenge some of the principles upon which it is based. This argument, similarly to Zipes's, is essentially revolutionary, or counter-hegemonic – if one sees the institution of children's literature as basing itself and putting forward hegemonic – *adultist* on my part, *capitalist* on Zipes's part – discourses defining its current existence.

Because childist criticism, as far as the production of literature is concerned, challenges the state of the institution of children's literature as it is now, it could engage us in interminable debates focusing on the notion of literature. But for the moment, my focus is elsewhere, so I simply see literature as meaning a wide variety of things, from written and oral texts to drawings.[8] For this, David Rudd's non-exhaustive list is rather helpful: literature, I believe, can mean things like stories, songs, jokes, plays, but also drawings, e-magazines, fanzines, diaries, letters, and so on. I wish to remain open to what children can, and do, produce. In the same way as Peter Hunt defines childist criticism as somewhat anarchistic (2003: n.p.) – as far as the act of reading is concerned – I also

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[8] I will deal with the notion of literature in the next chapter, putting forward an argument which calls for openness.

believe that the production of literatures by children should be approached in the same way, *unconditionally*.

In her "Towards Cultural History", Catherine Belsey is concerned with English as an academic institution. She starts her essay by asking: 'Is there a place for English in a postmodern world? Does an academy where twentieth-century textual practice breaks down the nineteenth-century boundaries between disciplines offer English departments any worthwhile job to do?' (1993: 551) As she wishes to reconsider what constitutes English as an academic institution, her essay allows me to draw some other crucial parallels between her own argument and the way my childist argument asks for a reconsideration of the institution of children's literature. She writes that

> [m]uch of the work of the institution [of English] has been [...] a process of exclusion. The canon of great books by great authors has been important not only for what it affirms – the value and the coherence of admissible readings of those works it recognizes. [...] The relegation of certain authors, of particular texts and [...] specific textual practices helps to police the boundary of truth. Texts which are most obviously difficult to recuperate, which most obviously challenge conservative assumptions about race, class, or gender, have been systematically marginalized as "flawed," or banished from view [...] as inadequate [...]. (1993: 552)

This argument is not foreign to the world of children's literature studies. For instance, as Peter Hunt notes in his *Criticism, Theory, and Children's Literature*,

> although the list of accepted 'major' authors who have contributed to children's literature is, perhaps, surprising, it is no accident that you can

look in vain through many major critical works on these authors for mention of their work for the young. Among these authors are Hardy, Joyce, Woolf, Dickens, Thackeray, Wilde, Huxley, Ruskin, Eliot, Greene, Rossetti, Day Lewis, Twain, Masefield, Graves, and Jefferies. This is an impressive list, but not if their writing for children is dismissed as being necessarily inferior. [...] [I]f 'literary merit' is in the eye of the literary establishment, then no textual evidence is admissible. (1991: 19)

Fighting against the conservatism and the prejudices that have shaped English as an academic discipline, Belsey argues for an approach to the institution of English which would tend towards what she calls 'cultural history', a new institution that would 'refuse nothing' and that would take 'all signifying practices as its domain' (1993: 553). As she wishes the institution of English to shift its focus from what one could call 'traditional literature' towards a greater variety of texts (what Belsey calls 'signifying practices'), I wish the institution of children's literature to follow a similar move. And this is the very reason why I just argued that the notion of 'literature' is somewhat insignificant as far as my thoughts are concerned. I just wish the notion of literature, quite similarly to Belsey, to remain polymorphous and tend towards what I could also call textual signifying practices. Children's literatures are the texts written by children; and here, the notion of 'text' is also rather unstable, and, therefore, essentially polymorphous.

This argument, which wishes to broaden the domain of English studies (in Belsey's case) and children's literature studies (in my case) also finds some echoes in what Perry Nodelman writes in his "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature". He argues:

> I find it hard to imagine a world in which children have the right to vote, serve on juries, and control their own destinies. But then I remind myself of all the people in recent history who found it hard to imagine a world in which women [...] could do these same things.
>
> Treating children as if they were really just human beings like the rest of us might have some specific consequences unfortunate for readers of [*The Children's Literature Association Quarterly*]: it might mean the end of something specifically identified as children's literature. It might do us out of a job. (1992: 34)

Even if – *at this moment* – I find it hard to imagine a world where children have the same rights as adults, I nonetheless think that adults should constantly rethink their dominant position as regards that of children. And as far as institutional literary debates and the literatures children produce are concerned, I believe that they could be given equivalent attention as that given to the literatures that adults write (for children). If not, I want to ask: why not? Can we not learn from what children produce in terms of texts?

Personally, I do not find it hard to imagine that the domain of children's literature studies will eventually open its doors to the constructive child and that more studies (following the work of Iona and Peter Opie, as well as the implicit institutional reconsiderations present in Peter Hunt, Jack Zipes, David Rudd, and Perry Nodelman, for instance), that is, books, articles, surveys, courses, Ph.D. theses, and so on, will become available on what children do produce in terms of literature. How many English departments where children's literature is a focus area use texts written by children? Children's literatures do exist and should therefore, I believe, be considered as part of children's literature studies. Let me refer to an already-quoted passage from Rudd:

'[t]here is a huge neglect in [certain] areas, which needs addressing: [this includes] studies of children's own 'literary' product: rhymes, stories, fantasies, and the like (2004: 16). Their cultural existence and importance should be acknowledged and studied.

The notion of children's literatures, the way I have approached it, from the angle of childist criticism, can provide us with considerable insights into the cultures of childhood. For instance, as Iona and Peter Opie's work often argues and demonstrates, it can enable us to realise that 'the remarkable feature of schoolchild lore is how comparatively little it alters considering the usage it receives' (1959: 11). What interests me, as far as their work is concerned, is not so much the content of their research but more the epistemological possibilities it offers – I am not a historian, or cannot claim to be. As the Opies focus on specific playground rhymes, for instance, they realise that studying the language used by children as part of their games can help in the understanding of the certain historical linguistic transformations or, and sometimes surprisingly, linguistic perpetuations. About dialectal lore, for example, they write that

> [i]t belongs to all time, but is limited in locality. It is so timeworn indeed that it cannot be dated, and words of which Shakespeare would have known the meaning, as 'cog', 'lag', and 'miching', are, in their particular districts, still common parlance; while the language which children use to regulate their relationships with each other, such as their terms for claiming, securing precedence, and making a truce, vary from one part of the country to another, and can in some instances be shown to have belonged to their present localities not merely for the past two or three generations, but for centuries. (1959: 14-15)

In contrast, and about some other precise examples they observed over their years of investigation, they also write that

> regional variation in the children's dialectal lore has been as unexpected as the slavish uniformity of their slang lore; and when the children's customs and superstitious practices are examined, in particular their calendar customs, the regional differences are remarkable. While some children roll eggs at Easter, or nettle the legs of classmates on the twenty-ninth of May, or leave little gifts on people's doorsteps on St. Valentine's Day, or act under the delusion that they are above the law on the night on 4 November, other children, sometimes living only the other side of a hill, will have no knowledge of these activities. It is not perhaps of much consequence that in different parts of England children have different ritual ways of disposing of their milk teeth, that there are no more than sixty names for the illegal pursuit of knocking at doors and running away, that in some places walking under a ladder can be lucky and seeing a black cat can be unlucky, and that some children make fools on the first of May with more zeal than on the first of April; but the children's loyalty to local customs and forms of speech is at least evidence that the young in Britain do not take as their authority only what they hear or see on the wireless and television and at the cinema. (1959: 14-15)

What is interesting to notice is that whereas some certain customs are maintained, some others are not. Gaining insight into children's cultures enables these cultures to be addressed. And within the potential publicity of that culture resides the possibility of criticism.

Reaching the end of this chapter, I have reached a sort of definitional conclusion as regards what I understand, as a childist critic, or in the light of childist criticism, at

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least, by the phrase children's literature. This definition makes the writing of children's

literature possible. It makes it possible if we allow its common definition to be changed.

The childist definition I have put forward, and especially what it entails in terms of

institutional considerations, is what I have also tried to address in this chapter. How it

can happen, I have been dealing with theoretically and have started introducing some

practical suggestions, reflecting on the work of some critics whose writing share

similarities with mine. How it can happen more systematically in practice is what I now

wish to spend some time focusing on.

CHAPTER THREE

Childist Criticism: From Theoretical Suggestions to Practical Considerations

Children's Literatures: Inviting the Child to Speak and What Could Happen

The claim, therefore, "that the 'child' has no 'voice' within the hierarchies of our society, because 'adults' either silence or create that voice", actually helps construct the child as a helpless, powerless being, and contributes to the culturally hegemonic norm. (Rudd 2006: 17)

For a children's book to be recognized as a book *for* children, a system had to be in place. That is, a process of production, distribution, and reception had to be instituted within which places where assigned to different groups of people. Gender, age, and social class played roles. Indeed, it was not possible for a broad range of books to be approved and to reach children in specific ways until the system of production, distribution, and reception was instituted and became focused on how to socialize children through reading. Children's needs were not necessarily taken into consideration. It was and still is the need of socioeconomic order that dictates how children will be formed and what forms are and are not acceptable. (Zipes 2002: 46)

"Literature/*Littérature*": should the term refer exclusively to traditional texts in books, and what are the stakes if we say it does or doesn't? What might it mean for scholars and/or parents, teachers, and children? Does and should literature include nonfiction as well as fiction? Are the pictures in picture books literature also? Or the oral stories people tell? And what about the range of texts outside of books? What about movies and TV shows produced for children, or the stories implied by video games? And also: clothes and toys and all sorts of the paraphernalia of childhood can be read as texts, interpreted for their semiotics and ideological assumptions. Might they, too, be part of the literature we discuss [...]? Why should they or shouldn't they be? (Nodelman 2006: 3)

Issues of Definition – Definition of Issues

Unpacking the process of production of what is usually called children's literature, and reaching some of the implications that the phrase carries with it, I argued that it is a contradiction in terms. It is a contradiction in terms because of the genitive that tries to unite the word 'children' to the word 'literature'. Because this genitive link between the words 'children' and 'literature' is a link of identity, it cannot possibly be plural. Only a child's literature, or children's literatures, can exist. But, I also argued that because an identity – and thus the child's identity – cannot be fixed – as it always changes – a child's literature, or children's literatures, cannot be fixed either, thus turning the notion of a child's literature, or children's literatures, into (a) process(es) which, like the process of identification itself, can only remain phantasmatic and *aporetic* (Derrida 1996: 53).

Time and beingness are things one cannot grasp. The phantasmatic existence of a child's literature is an event that cannot remain existent as it cannot repeat itself. Nevertheless, braving time, beingness, and what my unpacking of the phrase children's literature led me to, I now wish to approach some moments of possibility. I wish to go around the *aporia* that makes a child's literature disappear *as it appears*. Thus, I wish to fix a child's literature in time to be able to approach it and engage with it: *as if* a child's literature existed or could exist. Therefore, if a child's literature ever existed as an event, I wish to consider that event and take it out of time. In this sense, a child's literature can have existed, and I will now deal with that child's literature that is necessarily bound to (belong to) the past.

Where is childist criticism taking us? What are the challenges that childist criticism bring forward as regards the academic domain of children's literature studies?

Earlier, I spent some time commenting on the implications deriving from the arguments I developed through a reading of the phrase children's literature from a childist perspective. In order to do that, I reviewed the ways in which some critics such as David Rudd, Jack Zipes, Peter Hunt, Beverly Lyon Clark, and Perry Nodelman, have engaged with the institution of children's literature – that is, the sets of discourses from which our common (academic) understanding of the phrase 'children's literature' originates.[1] I paid particular attention to David Rudd's essay "Theorising and Theories: How Does Children's Literature Exist?: How Does Children's Literature Exist?" (2006), to concentrate on his idea of the constructive child, to see where it particularly coincides with the principles of childist criticism. I also, and more importantly, tried to establish some links between David Rudd's argument and that of the children's literature critics I have just mentioned. I linked them to show that some of the principles of childist criticism, as well as some of its implications, are already present in those critics' writings. Childist criticism, I believe, implicitly permeates some of these critics' endeavours. My purpose, therefore, was to concentrate on what had already been done, to suggest some alternative possibilities as far as the domain of children's literature studies is concerned. Thus, I wished to shift already-existing arguments towards a uniting agenda: that of childist criticism. In doing so, I (implicitly) paid attention to the notions of (cultural) respect and unconditionality which are at the heart of childist criticism.

Now, I will spend some time reflecting more extensively on some of the *practical* implications of my theoretical argument. In order to do so I will discuss, at times

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[1] See Rudd 2006; Zipes 2002: 39-41; Hunt 1991(b): 13-14; Clark 2003: 48-76; and Nodelman 1992.

anecdotally, the notions of literature, canonisation, and exclusion. As regards this notion of literature, I will engage in debates focusing on value judgements and how such an idea has been approached as children's literature studies settled in academia. I will try to bring some old debates back, to take them further, by sometimes reviving them in the light of childist criticism. The debate centred around the question as to whether or not children's literature, as a literary discipline, is acceptable in academia will help me address some of the questions regarding the acceptability of children's own writings in critico-literary circles. I will also refer to some texts: some texts for children, and a text by a child, seeing, or trying to see, what their presence in children's literature studies, especially that of the latter, generates when seen through unconditional eyes. In doing so, I wish to show that children's own literatures are worth looking at.

Childist Criticism: From a Theoretical Argument to Practical Considerations

What I intend to do, in the following pages, is consider some of the way(s) in which childist criticism, as a theoretical apparatus, can lead me to approach the institution of children's literature from a practical perspective. In other words, I would like to put forward some of the practical arguments and examples I have used and developed in the light of childist criticism. In doing so, I will consider some of the work I have already discussed with other researchers interested in children's literature – mainly at conferences and symposia, but also in writing, in response to some published work – to see how my childist thoughts have been received and how they have generated or can generate debates. I wish to do this not to indulge in self-idolatry, but, rather, in order to allow myself some space for reflection and, maybe, debated justification. As I have

explained, or tried to explain, my thoughts to people whose established practices sometimes seem to contradict mine, or at least differ from mine, I have had to deal not only with theoretical justifications, but also, and perhaps more importantly, according to many, practical ones. Childist criticism suggests alternative ways of looking at our discipline, which, as I pointed out at numerous points earlier, can challenge, or destabilise, the established order. It can destabilise what many regard as, or consider, the *norm*; that norm which, for instance, has it that children's literature and literature for children are synonymous phrases. That norm which also has it that, as I will now try to show, one can only study certain texts as part of, or within the domain of, children's literature studies. Thus, and to start with, I wish to deal with issues of value judgement, primarily because the notion of literature – that is, what makes a text literature, or what do we mean by the very word 'literature' – seems to keep cropping up when I suggest that texts written by children are worth looking at, and, later on, ghettoisation, in the sense that variety is sometimes seen as counterproductive when it comes to establishing borders or limits around a specific subject.

Later on, and in relation to the notions of value judgement and literature, I will also address some of the prejudices which permeate some of the current (academic) discourses on the production of texts by children, prejudices according to which one cannot practise any worthwhile criticism when dealing with such writings. When arguing against such prejudices, I will refer to a text written by a young child which I asked prominent figures in the domain of children's literature studies to read and give me their thoughts on, from an *academic* point of view. With their replies and thoughts, and not mine, we will see that there might be some *serious* – and here I use the word

'serious' somewhat ironically – possibilities as far as literary criticism is concerned. Throughout the following pages, I will open some doors, inviting children's literature critics to walk through them. I will only be inviting them, not forcing them. What is being done in the domain of children's literature studies, from perspectives other than that of childist criticism, is of great importance, and I do not, by any means, wish to oppose myself to anyone, or any ways of, looking at children's literature. Similarly, were some to think that my argument is too different from what is usually found in the literary criticism of children's literature, I wish to suggest that my argument is, as far as I am concerned, just another way of looking at our discipline. I am only willing to suggest alternative options, in the hope that these may be allowed some space to grow.

Childist Criticism: a Debate about Literature

To start with, as it is something that seems to be essentially connected to my childist argument, I need to address a question that seems to be at the heart of literary criticism – *despite secret hopes that such a sword I would never see hanging above my head*. That question is a very straightforward one, but rather daunting, as it is upon its answer – if answer there is – that literary critics tend to define and legitimise their position as critics ("*These are the texts I look at, because I believe they are worth looking at*"). That question is: "what is literature?". Linked to that question, we are asked to wonder: What is that we study or *can* study? Hundreds of books, essays, articles, and so on, have been written on the subject. With Jean-Paul Sartre's *Qu'est-ce que la literature* (2000), or Tzvetan Todorov's *La Notion de literature* (1987), as well as more-recently published *On*

Literature (2002), by J. Hillis Miller, many have tried to define what literature is, or should be. What ideas they have come up with, I must blatantly admit, I am not interested in, to say the least. In fact, most of what has been written on the subject I find quite confusing: interminable *querelles de chapelles*, in most cases, whereby critics put forward definitions based on what can only remain value-judgements or personal appreciations. And those value-judgements are what I have been confronted with, mostly through my readings, since I started researching children's literature.

Indeed, we have seen that critics in the domain of children's literature studies have often dealt with issues of canonisation and marginalisation. Peter Hunt, in one of quotations I used above, reflected on the way some writers, despites their fame in the 'adult' literary world, were sometimes ignored because of the intended audience of some of their books. Some key writers' writings for children – by Hardy, Joyce, Woolf, Thackeray, for instance – were put aside by literary critics because childhood was not an audience worthy enough of attention. But, as Hunt implies, 'literary merit' does not goes far beyond the 'eye of the literary establishment' (1984: 19). It is therefore this 'eye', I believe, that needs scrutinising. This 'eye' is the 'I' of the self, the 'eye/I' that dictates our tastes and preferences. Of course, one would find it quite absurd to say that a tree is literature. There must be some limitations to a definition. But if literature is not a tree, it still seems rather hard to define what it is. Talking about literature, one could/would be tempted to say that it has to be fictional writing. After all, that is what most literary critics study: fictional stories in books. But what about the letters written by Dorothy Wordsworth to her brother William, which, as an undergraduate student I was told were part of the Romantic literature I had to read? Then, there are the stories told on market

squares by troubadours in medieval France. Those stories are considered, by many, to be literature, or at least these stories in their written form which we can access nowadays. Scholars interested in medieval literature would agree that oral stories are part of literature. Books written for children are considered literature by some, and not by some others. Comics: yes, some will say; no, some will proclaim.

Where do we stand then, as literary critics, amidst such implicit and explicit conflicting attitudes? The case of our area of research – the literary criticism of children's literature – is somewhat symptomatic of such attitudes. For instance, looking at a personal example, which is at the heart of my argument, as I started researching into the area of children's literature, numerous were the articles I read about the injustice books written for children had suffered. *Neglect* and *marginalisation* seem(ed) to be words that came/come to summarise most appropriately the way literary criticism at large engaged with books for children prior to the mid-1980s. And here I am, in 2008, writing from a British perspective. Things are still like they were in Britain before the mid-1980s in some other countries. One of the very reasons why I, as a French student, felt like I had to expatriate myself to Wales was because studying books for children was considered inappropriate in English departments. Such a decision was partly consequential to the neglectful attitudes that permeated French academia around the year 2000, just as I finished my Master's thesis – and, as far as I can tell, still permeate French academia, to a great extent. I had forcefully managed to convince my then-supervisor that writing a Master's thesis on a few examples of children's books was possible and, I thought, quite interesting. I had in mind, in vague terms, a study of the way children characters deal with adult oppression in some children's fiction. Rodolphe Blet, a friend of mine, had

written a thesis on the way some Romantic poets used childhood images, or images of childhood, in terms of escapism which I found rather inspiring. I thought I could have a look at Roald Dahl's *Matilda* and Terry Pratchett's Johnny Maxwell trilogy. My supervisor's reaction was largely uncompromising. She agreed, after some time, to supervise my research, but I had to look at some books she would choose for me. On her list were books like *History of the Fairchild Family*, by Mary Sherwood, Aesop's *Fables*, *Tales from Shakespeare*, by Charles and Mary Lamb, but also, and I opted for these latter two, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and James Matthew Barrie's *Peter Pan*. These, she told me, were part of literature, *because adult critics had written about them in a way which equated with her views of what literary criticism is, or should be*. Having a word with other professors around the department, I was advised to follow the wise and learned advice of my supervisor. As they agreed that Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* were literature, they did not manage to really explain what they meant. What is acceptable literature seems hard to explain.

Beyond the anecdotal tone, and beyond David Rudd's genealogical critique with which I dealt above, there seems to be that important question of what constitutes literature. I would rapidly suggest that there is no answer to that question – I might be wrong; many people have told me how wrong I am, actually, often quite virulently – only opinions ('eye/I'). Wrong or not, I cannot tell. I therefore consciously decide to adopt a very similar stance as Perry Nodelman who, in the Spring 2006 issue of the journal *Canadian Children's Literature / Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse*, wrote:

"Literature/*Littérature*": should the term refer exclusively to traditional texts in books, and what are the stakes if we say it does or doesn't? What might it mean for scholars and/or parents, teachers, and children? Does and should literature include nonfiction as well as fiction? Are the pictures in picture books literature also? Or the oral stories people tell? And what about the range of texts outside of books? What about movies and TV shows produced for children, or the stories implied by video games? And also: clothes and toys and all sorts of the paraphernalia of childhood can be read as texts, interpreted for their semiotics and ideological assumptions. Might they, too, be part of the literature we discuss [...]? Why should they or shouldn't they be? (2006: 3)

I think that a definition of literature should be as inclusive as possible. But all it can include I find impossible to tell, specifically. This is what is contained in Perry Nodelman's last words in the quotation above: "Why should they or shouldn't they be?" (2006: 3).

In January 2008, in response to an essay published in *Canadian Children's Literature / Littérature Canadienne pour la Jeunesse*, similar issues of selection were raised by French critic Virginie Douglas as she discusses the notion of childist criticism. She spends some time referring to the notion of "literariness" which, she suggests needs to be central when it comes to choosing the texts children's literature scholars study (2008: 120). Nevertheless, if one accepts that literariness is to play a central part, how does one define it? Accepting the notion of literariness, and the sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, notion of selection that goes with it, we are left in a position of doubt. Are we not just implying, by referring to the notion of literariness, that we only wish to look at the things we can actually comprehend? Are we not implying that we are only

willing to discuss and engage with the texts we can describe and discuss? If it is so, and I strongly believe that this is the case, are we not perpetuating adultist and/or elitist views of literature which, perhaps, we are right to wish to challenge? So, again and inevitably, the same questions will crop up again: how do we select, what do we select, and who does the selection?

What is also interesting about Douglas's views on childist criticism is that, as she writes, she approaches it from a rather conservative angle and therefore enables me to further emphasise my views. She writes, referring to a letter written by eleven-year-old Ginny Jones to her friend Anne, that it is not as worthy of attention as a letter written by Dorothy Wordsworth to her brother William because, "[s]implement, la correspondance de Dorothy Wordsworth présente un intérêt particulier à la fois d'un point de vue culturel et sociologique, puisqu'elle donne accès, dans le cadre des *women's studies* notamment, à une meilleure connaissance de l'univers féminin, et aussi parce qu'elle offre un éclairage sur l'œuvre de cet écrivain reconnu qu'est son frère [put simply, Dorothy Wordsworth's correspondence is of great interest both from a cultural and from a sociological perspective since it gives access, in the context of women's studies particularly, to a better understanding of the female world, and also because it offers insight into the work of the recognised writer who is her brother]" (2008: 119). This brief quotation from Douglas's article is symptomatic, I believe, of the way most literary critics would consider engaging with their own domain of research: a conservative approach. Douglas makes her conservatism even more apparent when she writes that "[l]e seul cas défendable d'une production littéraire enfantine est sans doute la collaboration de deux auteurs, l'un enfant et l'autre adulte, comme dans le cas du tandem

britannique Zizou Corder, où mère et fille écrivent de concert [the only justifiable case of children's writing is undoubtedly that of a collaboration of two authors, one a child and the other an adult, as in the case of the British duo Zizou Corder in which mother and daughter write in harmony.]" (2008: 119). I would be tempted to agree if I were looking at the world of literary studies as it is. Nevertheless, the adultist bias of such comments needs to be contrasted to the current developments of some corners of the university world. Would someone interested in the development of children's studies make similar claims as Douglas? Is a letter written by a child – be it now, or in the past – not interesting culturally and sociologically? Does a letter written by a child not give us a better access, in the context of children's studies, to a better understanding of the world of childhood? I believe that it is, and that it does. But again, it is only a matter of perspective. On the one hand we have an adult-centred perspective, on the other, a child-centred perspective.

Too Many Books, Too Little Time: Childist Criticism and Ghettoisation

Allowing a greater variety of texts into the world of children's literature studies leads me to the issue of ghettoisation which I am going to discuss, not unlike the issue of literature, in a rather anecdotal fashion. In doing so, I believe it is easier to address directly the concerns some may have as regards childist criticism and the way my argument has developed. It is easier for me, at least, to engage with issues that might otherwise have remained silent or discreet to me.

As I presented my work at several conferences, I was surprised, for quite unaware of such a term, to hear a few scholars mentioning the term ghettoisation in connection with literary studies. What I have always had in mind, when putting my childist argument forward, is a widening approach to children's literature studies, an approach which would see new ideas put forward and developed, new methods used. Focusing on the notion of the child, a notion that is quite distinctive to our field of research, I believed that allowing children's own writings into the arena, one would encounter more diverse forms of literatures and would benefit from such a phenomenon. What I had not thought about is that some would see this as a threat, a threat, it seems, to an established order which had taken long to find a stable place. But why? The answer I was given is that if there were too many varieties of literatures, researchers would most likely end up working on their own, isolated, due to an uncontrollable abundance of texts and therefore an absence of judgmental justifications. What this means, to me, is that we are back to our issues of definition, again. That is, why should we allow any text to be called literature? If we did, it would become impossible to find parameters that could define the academic discipline "Literature" itself. And it would become rather futile to try and legitimise the existence of departments calling themselves "Literature" departments. That is what some researchers told me. I must say that such a critique, in all cases, came from very established professors of children's literature, three of whom, it happens, are about to retire, which, without wishing to be ageist, made me think.

On two occasions, I had the opportunity to discuss this issue with two of these about-to-retire professors, with whom I happened to be present at the same conference. As I had excepted, they soon told me about the struggle children's literature critics faced

as they tried to establish the study of children's books as a respectable academic discipline. They said they were happy that one can now talk about Alan Garner's work, or Daniel Pennac's stories for children, as opposed to just his stories primarily written for adults, within the university. They also warmly welcomed the fact that more and more children's literature courses have become available in Anglo-American institutions, and that the trend seems, at last, to be burgeoning in France and in other countries in Europe. They are right. It is a great advancement, and I could not disagree with them, nor show them some kind of ungratefulness for their agonic fight with the rest of the literary establishment since a couple of decades ago.[2] One of the only worries I would still need to express, though, is concerned with the *status quo* some are happy to have reached in certain parts of the academic world, or that same *status quo* some wish to reach in other parts of the world where children's literature is not totally accepted yet by the literary establishment. That *status quo* is about making sure that children's literature has a place within academic circles. What is/was at the heart of their endeavours when they which/wished to achieve such a goal, from an epistemological angle, can be described as being rather similar to what is present within the idea of childist criticism, when dealing with issues of cultural respect. Take David Lewis, who wrote about the state of criticism as regards picture books a few years ago, for instance; he pointed towards identical concerns. He wrote that

[2] A good summary of such fights is the subject-matter of Peter Hunt's article "Dragons in the Department and Academic Emperors: Why Universities are Afraid of Children's Literature" (1996) and Isabelle Nières-Chevrel's "Enseigner la Littérature de jeunesse à l'université" (2006).

the workings of the picturebook are still rather poorly understood. This is hardly surprising as the serious study of any new cultural form is bound to lag behind its appearance and its adoption by the populace. In the case of picturebooks, it was only in the 1980s that the form began to be taken seriously as an object of academic study. (2001: xiii)

It will appear important and somewhat obvious to most of us, in children's literature studies, that picture books are worth looking at from an academic perspective. But, one must not forget that if critics such as Perry Nodelman and David Lewis, in their, respectively, *Words about Pictures* (1990) and *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks*, (2001) pointed at the lack of academic concerns for such writings until not that long ago, it implies that on the other side of the struggle – on the side of the literary establishment – some must have thought that allowing picture books to be studied within academia was in fact ghettoising the domain of literary studies in general. Some must have believed that it was attacking the established order and that if allowed in, literature, as an academic institution would start to crumble. Most of the evidence for this is anecdotal. Roger Sale, in his groundbreaking study of children's literature for Harvard University Press, noted that: 'serious and presumably intelligent people clench their fists in baffled rage when asked to teach children's literature' (Sale 1978: 3). Nodelman points out the basic difference in attitude between children's literature critics and others:

They all made judgements of excellence in terms of the effects of books on their audience – and that astonished me, for in the ivory tower of literary study I had hitherto inhabited, one certainly did not judge books by how they affected

audiences; in fact, one often judged audiences by the extent to which they were affected by books, so that, for instance, anyone who wasn't overwhelmed by Shakespeare was simply assumed to be an intransigent dummy. (1985: 4)[3]

Something similar happened, on a different, but not that dissimilar level, when the Whitbread Award was given to Seamus Heaney's new translation of *Beowuf* instead of to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner cf Azkaban*. As journalist Sarah Lyall notes in an article published in *The New York Times*, published in January 2000, what was at stake was the maintenance – or the crumbling – of an order with which some of the judges were concerned. All this is very well-described in Lyall's article when she writes the following:

> Does popular art – a crowd-pleasing sculpture of a shark in a tank by Damien Hirst, say, or an internationally successful movie like *Four Weddings and a Funeral* – have as much inherent worth as a traditional painting or a dark, beautifully created film that few people will see and fewer still might bother to understand? (2000: n.p.)

It is interesting that Sarah Lyall should mention and contrast visual examples, as it draws us back to what I started with, earlier on, when writing about the 'eye' or the 'I' of the critic. The opening of the literary canon has created more areas of research. This

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[3] The difficulties of establishing children's literature as an acceptable subject for study are also discussed in Hunt 1995, Clark 2003: 48-76; and Nodelman 2008: 133-244. Thacker (2000) gives a comprehensive survey of the way in which literary theory, to its own detriment, has ignored children's literature.

was probably comparable, in the eyes of many, though maybe in different terms, to the ghettoisation that my argument would lead to, according to some. But for those who established books for children as a respectable discipline, it must have been seen differently. It must have been seen as a fruitful widening of literature studies, whereby varieties of forms would meet and discuss, and whereby new theories or critical apparatuses would emerge.

Peter Hunt, as he writes about children's reading experiences, says that

> 'Children's Literature' as a study has produced, and is increasingly producing, intellectual achievements of the first order, and I would not criticise any branch of the profession. But my own predilections are, after years of working in the opposite direction, for the small, the local, and the particular (which may be "ghettoising") and for a practical, pragmatic involvement with the act of reading [...]. (2003: n.p.)

As regards the production of texts by children, I would argue in a similar fashion that I am working – perhaps in the opposite direction as some – for the small, the local, and the particular.

Writing about the literary forms that children produce, I place myself within a positive frame of mind and I see, or envisage, a discipline in constant making, thinking and/or re-thinking (of) its foundations and principles. Why should certain texts be included, or why should they not? I believe that one should not take the notion of value judgement for granted. Because critics such as Peter Hunt, Perry Nodelman, and Jack Zipes have had to fight against issues of critico-literary canonisation, they have had to work and reflect on what generates such issues: pointing out the ideological

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inadequacies present at the heart of academic debates, pointing out the bias of established scholars in the domain of literary studies, and so on. As this is part of the history of children's literature as an academic discipline, one should perhaps consider keeping questioning the notion of (academic) freedom ,f one has had to gain that freedom (a point developed by Jacques Derrida in his *L'Université sans condition* (2001) as he reflects on the way deconstruction has been neglected by some critics). The idea of having reached a *status quo* should, perhaps, not be seen as sufficient; rather, it should not lead to a static position, but, rather, generate an ever-lasting desire for questioning, a wish to make sure that past mistakes do not happen again. Let us not take anything for granted.

As we have just recently entered the twenty-first century, it is noticeable that a number of publications in the field of children's literature studies seem to draw our attention to the fact that children's literature as a group of texts is consciously being created. Indeed, thinking about Jack Zipes, Lissa Paul, Gillian Avery and Peter Hunt's work for Norton, Bernice Cullinan, Bonnie Kunzel, and Deborah Wooten's for Continuum, Peter Hunt's for Blackwell, Michel Manson, Jean Perrot, and Isabelle Nières-Chevrel's research for a French publisher at the moment, and Torben Weinreich's latest book in Denmark, it seems undeniable that what constitutes children's literature, or what is to constitute children's literature, is being even more affirmatively decided. The selection – though major publications, by major publishers and charismatic figures in the field – is happening. Unfortunately, I believe, the process of selection is rarely addressed, if at all, which makes these publications contentious from a childist perspective. The range of books chosen as part of these encyclopaedic volumes might be varied, and in fact *is*

varied, but the fact that almost all the books chosen are written by adults is quite significant and symptomatic of the attitudes of most adult critics *vis-à-vis* children's own productions.[4]

In November 2006, at the Danish Centre for Children's Literature, based in Copenhagen, such issues were discussed during the "Writing the History of Children's Literature Symposium – Meta-theoretical Perspectives" symposium. Historians and critics of children's literature were present: people such as Torben Weinreich (Denmark), Hans-Heino Ewers (Germany), Somja Svensson (Sweden), Peter Hunt (UK). It was noted, and strongly debated, during the symposium, that writing (national) histories of children's literature, or literature in general, for that matter, was an extremely contentious activity. It was emphasised that writing was synonymous to selecting; selecting which books were to be included was extremely debatable. It appeared that most people had their own opinion as regards the books which ought or ought not to be included. No one seemed to be able to convince others about the validity of their choices. It was clear that opinions were never to be universally accepted, justifiably so, which makes me think about Anne Lundin's work on this idea of a canon for children's literature. In her prologue to *Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers – Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature*, she writes that

> [t]he canon's main function is to position texts in relation to one another – and to exclude more than to include. As a classificatory construct, the

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[4] I say almost all, as there are rare examples of books written by child authors, such as Christopher Paolini, and Amelia Atwater-Rhodes.

canon is a collection, much like a library collection. [...] The canon is a political proving ground where its uses shift according to the rhetorical and reading audience. Our sense of what is literature is a product of ideological struggles for a selective tradition at work. Just have a look around. (2004: xvii)

And in her epilogue, she returns to this question, saying

Why a canon? [...] What, then, are the elements of a successful children's book? Would a librarian agree? Would a parent? Would a child? Are these valuations subject to the whims of time and fad? How useful is it to create a list a variable as the text that each reader finds? Can a canon exist if we really believe in reader-response? (2004: 145)

At the "Writing the History of Children's Literature Symposium – Meta-theoretical Perspectives" symposium, no satisfying answers were suggested, as far as I am concerned. This, as far as my argument goes, is due to the unavoidable fact that no universal answers are possible regarding what is to constitute the definition of the word literature. My own argument is also ideologically-biased. I also put forward a sort of definition of what I consider to be literature, but I try to do so without falling, or at least trying to avoid falling, into the trap of exclusion.

When David Rudd argued that allowing the constructive child to be heard was a way forward, he suggested that that would possibly make "children's literature studies far more messy and complex, and [would challenge] traditional forms of scholarship [...]' (2006: 24). It is exactly what I think, and also what I am looking for. I believe that, indeed, things might become far more messy, but also that out of that mess will come great things and challenging debates. Some of what might come out of all this might

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include a clearer realisation that literature is rather hard to define and that one should perhaps bear in mind Catherine Belsey's idea of cultural history which I approached earlier. It might also mean that scholars will engage in more trans-disciplinary research, towards more comparatist approaches: for instance, one could compare the way an example of a book for children deals with the idea of growing up with the way commercials on TV deal with the same idea and also how children, in their own writings perceive themselves as they grow up. We might want to see how gender issues are dealt with through wider varieties of texts or images. As the Internet becomes more and more prevalent in most parts of the world, we might want to develop a multi-mediatic criticism: what does the Internet bring to literary studies? Reading thousands of Blogs – i.e. online diaries, for the most part – on the Internet, what will critics interested in autobiographical writings think? Someone has already mentioned to me that she will soon be looking at popular autobiographies such as those written – or so we are told, or made to believe – by British celebrity Jordan, or footballer Frank Lampard and compare them to the writings of Romantic poets. Popular culture has definitely made its way into academia, so academia will have to prove itself that it can be flexible and quickly adaptable.

Recently, Kimberley Reynolds, in her *Radical Children's Literature – Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (2007), pondered similar issues and argued for a somewhat similar approach. She writes, in her conclusion entitled "The Foundations of Future Fictions", that

> a major transformation of children's literature [...] is taking place in cyberspace. As critics in the field regularly observe, children's literature is

the only body of writing to be defined by and named for its audience: children read children's literature, they do not produce it [...]. The situation is changing, and a great deal of writing by children is finding audiences via the Internet. As this trend continues, the nomenclature of writing read by the young may be forced to adjust. 'Children's literature' may indeed come to refer to writing by the young for the young, meaning that the work produced by adults for children to read will have to be relabelled. (2007: 180)

An example of children's writing Kimberley Reynolds briefly looks at in her *Radical Children's Literature* is fan fiction (2007: 180). Referring to Alison Evans's 2006 dissertation[5] on the topic, Reynolds writes that on the very popular website www.fanfiction.net, it can be estimated that fans produce the equivalent of around eight-thousand fifty-thousand-word novels annually. The material is there, available to *anyone*, on the Internet. It is easily accessible and most of the time clearly organised.

As explained by Kimberley Reynolds through her reading of Henry Jenkins's *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), reading the work of fans enables us to see how they express their approval and disapproval of their favourite narratives. It particularly enables them, Jenkins writes, to engage with issues present in the texts. For instance, as Jenkins shows through a close analysis of *Star Trek*-based fan fiction, published in his anthology *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers* (2006), some "fan writers characterize themselves as "repairing the damage" caused by the program's inconsistent

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[5] *The Global Playground – Fan Fiction in Cyberspace*, presented at Roehampton University.

and often demeaning treatment of its female characters." (2006: 47) It appeared to Jenkins that a lot of the fan fiction he read over the years, as well as a lot of fan communities he talked to, were trying to complement their favourite narratives. This is, for instance, quite noticeable with *Harry Potter*-based fan fiction where a large number of fans have re-shaped the relationships between the characters, particularly Hermione and Harry, thus sometimes showing how they wish some of the adventures had unfolded. All in all, and this on a more basic and general level, and this is something present in Hunt's childist ideas when dealing with the reading of texts, fan fiction enables us to gain some insight into how readers engage *in writing* with the texts they read.

Kimberley Reynolds's argument is clear about the importance of looking at fan fiction as it is a way to get children's literature critics to engage with children's own writings. It is, I would argue, something Reynolds sees as easily manageable, as it takes us towards new, but still familiar, texts. But I believe that one could also spend some time looking at those texts written by children, those texts which do not necessarily engage with the stories they have read. These texts are the texts which, David Rudd says, would make the world of children's literature studies far messier.

To conclude on this issue of academic acceptance and change, I would like to refer back to one of Jacques Derrida's publications. The title of Derrida's essay in which he reflects on the university as an institution, which, later on, was published as *L'Université sans condition*, was "L'Avenir de la profession ou L'Université sans condition (grâce aux « Humanités », ce qui *pourrait avoir lieu* demain)" (2001). In English, it is entitled "The Future of the Profession, or the Unconditional University (Thanks to the 'Humanities': What *Could Take Place* Tomorrow)" (1999). What I find most crucial in

Derrida's text, in connection to my argument, is the importance he attributes to the necessity to constantly rethink one's own practices. As regards academic studies, and that is what he wishes to express when using the word 'tomorrow', he claims that scholars should think about what constitutes their academic history and their axioms of research (2001: 15). Tomorrow is always away, it is always in coming or becoming. It is this sense of questioning that has led me to argue all the above, and it is this sense of questioning that guides my practices. It is as if definitions were never satisfying enough for someone who wishes to remain *on the move*, aiming for the unreachable. Changes and transformations is what Tom Cohen alluded to when, as he introduced Jacques Derrida before he gave the lecture on the future of the Humanities from which *L'Université sans condition* derives. As they, at the time, had in mind to work on a seminar entitled "Book Ends", he stressed the fact that, at the beginning of a new millennium, we cannot help not noticing that we are moving away from "an era of the book" towards "a variety of tele-technological media and pressures that seem to be transforming the space of the humanities today." (2006: n.p.) What are we going to encounter is what lies at the heart of some of Jacques Derrida's concerns. Literature changes, and so should, perhaps, our way(s) of looking at it.

Texts by Children, Texts by Adults: Possible Critical Intersections

After having argued for a widening consideration of the institution of children's literature, I would now like to suggest that one of the first steps we might be able to take regarding the texts that children produce is not too big, and would not take us too far from some of our current practices, depending on the texts we choose. Indeed, what I

now wish to argue, through some specific examples, is that what is done to some texts studied as part of some children's literature courses can be done, quite similarly, to some texts written by children. In order to do so, I will mention, for example, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, considered a classic text for children, as well as a story entitled *Evil Trees*, written by Celia Morris, a child who lives somewhere in England. The way I am going to refer to these texts aims to avoid issues of bias but also generate some practical rethinking. Therefore, and instead of putting my own ideas forward, I will put those of others, certainly, one might think, more influential than mine. As I do not need to convince myself that one can critically approach a text written by a child in similar ways as one can approach a text written by an adult for children, I sent Celia Morris's story to six scholars whose places within academic circles are truly respected, to see what they thought about it. Some of these scholars are professors of children's literature in British and North-American institutions, some are editors of major journals dedicated to the study of books for children. All of them have written extensively on a great variety of aspects dealing with the production of books for children. All in all, their status is highly respectable amongst, but not only, scholars interested in children's literature. Along with Morris's story, I sent these academics a brief message. I reproduce it here:

> Dear All,
>
> I was wondering whether you could do me a quick summery favour. Shouldn't take too long. It's just about reading a short story and quickly telling me what you think about it. The questions I'd like you to ask

yourself is: How would I teach or write an essay about this text IF I HAD TO? What would I focus on in the story? What literary theories might I find useful? From what critical angle(s) would I approach this text? etc.

I hope you can do this for me. If you're on holidays and haven't got the time, no worries, but please, let me know!

Hope you're all keeping well.

Thanks a lot in advance.

Regards,

seb

And here is the story they had to read, reproduced as well, in full, and unedited:

EVIL TREES

by Celia Jane Morris

Introduction

This story is to tell you about two trees. Two evil trees. I am only writing this story to tell you what happened to a little girl who decided that under the leaves that stuck out in a dome shape, on a tree that had appeared out of no where was a good hiding place. A girl who was brave and who didn't get what she deserved. Don't I'm begging you, ever hide under a tree that appears before your eyes. There sadly is another tree that you must watch out for. This tree is not as dangerous as the other one but you must try to avoid it. Unlike the other tree you can see it. All I can say is that it is very knobbly. Don't touch this tree.

Chapter 1

The start of an example – in which Sally gets caught by three-hundred Smugglehumps

To tell you what happens if you do what I have just told you not to do I am going to tell you about a girl. A girl who played under the leaves in a dome shape and found herself *INSIDE* the knobbly-trunked tree. This girl's name is Sally Lam. She is nine years old and lives very close to Greenwich Park.

It was the afternoon and Sally Lam was in Greenwich Park with her friends. They were all pretending that they were being chased by a dinosaur and were running everywhere. Sally Lam ran into a clearing where there was lots of trees. Sally's imagination was running wild and she was just about to scream for help pretending that a giant dinosaur was about to eat her when she saw it: a huge tree with leaves that stuck out in a dome shape.
'A great hiding place" she thought.
She ran back to her friends and went straight over to a boy called Joey who was her best friend.

"Let's play hide-and-seek!" Sally said. It wasn't a question it was a demand. Joey could tell by the look in her eye.
"I like playing this!" Natasha moaned.
"Please, just one go," begged Sally.
"Ok just one go and then we can play this game again," Said Joey.
"Yes," said Sally happily "can you count?" she asked now sounding hopeful.
Joey sighed. "Alright," he said heavily and he hid his eyes behind his hand and began to count. "One, two, three, four..."
Sally ran to the clearing that she had just been in.
"Seven, eight..."
She saw that strange looking tree.

"Nine..."

She dived in between the leaves and began to wait.

"Ten... ready or not, here I come," said Joey loudly.

Sally settled herself against the trunk of the tree believing that no one could find her and that no one could see her. She was wrong. Three-hundred Smugglehumps saw her quite clearly from up in the branches of the tree.

The Smugglehumps pounced, pinning Sally to the ground.

Chapter 2

Smugglehumps – in which I explain what Smugglehumps do and what they are

A smugglehump is a small green creature that can stretch until it is completely flat. Smugglehumps stick themselves to people's faces until they nearly suffocate and faint.

What Smugglehumps really want is an imagination. They take their victims somewhere (and you will find out where later on) they feast on the persons mind until that person has no imagination or memory. Smugglehumps mostly like to feed on children's mind which are full of fun ideas and excitement . Smugglehumps want to be full of fun ideas and excitement.

Smugglehumps can disguise themselves most affectively as leaves or grass. I suppose that's why those Smugglehumps on top of Sally decided to live in a tree with so many leaves.

Now I have explained what Smugglehumps are and what they do I ask you to please, please watch out for Smugglehumps they could be anywhere. In green cans, beside green cars, on green walls, and many, many more green things.

Chapter 3

The second tree – in which the Smugglehumps capture Sally

The Smugglehumps began to stretch madly. They began to expand over her mouth and the last sound Sally made before she fainted was a long piercing scream.
"N-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-OO-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O."

Sally struggled to her feet and tried to pull the Smugglehumps off her but they stuck fast. Suddenly, everything went black before her eyes. She had fainted.

Sally woke up in what seemed to be a house entirely made of wood. Eyes were watching her from all directions. Sally sat bolt upright. And realised that she was sitting on a grassy floor. She tried to remember how she had got here but she couldn't. Sally looked up. She had been expecting to see a ceiling but instead she was looking up at a star strooned sky. She shook herself and looked up again. The moon was shining above her and then she understood. She was not sitting in a house she was sitting in a tree! It had been completely hollowed out.

The eyes were watching her intently. They looked rather familiar. Sally shivered. Where had she seen those eyes before? and then she remembered. Those creatures had captured her. What could she do? Sally felt a hot tear rolling slowly down her cheeks and wondered if her friends were looking for her? Did they even know that she was missing? Did they care that she was lost? Yes of course the were looking for her. Of course they knew that she was missing. Of course they cared that she was lost Sally told herself firmly. They would come and find her and she would be out of this old log in no time. But time was slowly running out soon it would be morning and her friends still hadn't found her.

Chapter 4

Two diary entries – in which Joey writes about a most unsuccessful but exciting night

Saturday 8th July, 2003 – evening

Sally was missing Natasha and I looked everywhere for her but she could not be found. I asked the park keeper if he had seen Sally but he said that she must have gone home because he had not seen her. Natasha went to check if she was at her house but She was not. The park keeper would not let Natasha back in the park saying that it was to late. I tried to keep looking for Sally but it was to dark to see anything. I decided to just go home. As I walked past a very nobly tree I thought I heard a sob of cause I was sure that I was imagining things. I climbed over the park gates and walked home. I phoned Mrs Lam who I hope has called the police.

It was only when I got to my room that I thought about the sob and I felt terrible. What if it had been Sally crying...?

Sunday 9th July, 2003

I woke up early and phoned Natasha. I asked her If she was ok and to my relief she was fine (I don't think I could stand anything else going wrong). I told her to meet me in Greenwich park by the nobly tree at half past 11. Natasha was already at the park when I arrived and I waved. I told Natasha all that had happened that night. We examined every crack and knot on the tree but the only way to get inside the tree was through the top.

Natasha asked me if I was sure that this was where I had heard the sob. I was sure. We started calling Sally's name and to our horror and delight we heard a long strangled yell.

Chapter 5

Escape – in which Sally gets a surprise

"I'm   in   here   I'm   in   here heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeellllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllp".
Sally had screamed at the top of her voice and her heart had lifted. She was so excited and happy to know that her friends were looking for her that she didn't even notice the huge green, blue and purple blob squelching behind her. it was only when Sally turned round her eyes brimming with tears of happiness did she notice the king of Smugglehumps. Sally got up and stumbled backwards she was terrified the Smugglehump was bearing down on her and then...

BANG

Half the tree had been knocked down and there standing in the ruins of the old tree were Joey and Natasha!

"Come on", yelled Joey, "quick".

Sally scrambled over to where her two best friends were standing "You have got to run and quick there are some horrid creatures back there. We have got to go." Sally panted desperately. The king of Smugglehumps was slouching towards them. Sally felt Natasha shudder beside her.

"Let's go," said Joey. His voice was shaky but Natasha could not move *"COME ON NATASHA, MOVE"*. With great effort Joey and Sally pulled Natasha behind a tree.

"We can't move her any further because she is so scared and stiff that…"

"The king of Smugglehumps will get her." Joey finished Sally's sentence for her.

"Yes, and, and…" Sally's voice tailed away "how do you know that they're called Smugglehumps?", she asked curiously.

"I read it in a book", said Joey carelessly.

The king of Smugglehumps was getting closer and closer and Natasha was still frozen, terrified.

"We're gonna have to pick her up Joey," said Sally suddenly. "Now!!"

Chapter 6

MOVE – in which the King is no more

"Go away", Sally yelled, and without thinking she picked up a large stick with a pointy and rather sharp end. Sally ran towards the king of Smugglehumps the stick in her hand…

Splat

The stick went write through the overlarge smugglehump and he looked at Sally and fell to the floor. He was dead. Sally stumbled backwards and then another noise disturbed the quiet park. A shout

"MOVE"

It was Joey shaking Natasha hard "we've got to run now *come on*", said Joey, desperately. "They're coming after us" Joey was pointing at a swam of Smugglehumps were coming towards them.

"They're not. They're coming for me.", said Sally and she looked at Joey who looked back and suddenly knew what Sally was about to do.

"You can't" he said automatically .

"I have to Joey. Just take Natasha and go."

"I can't go, I just can't."

"You must", Said sally. She turned to look at Natasha who blinked and collapsed. "Natasha! Are you ok" cried Sally falling down beside her friend.

"She'll be fine" said Joey grabbing Sally's arm I'll look after her."

"Bye", and with that she turned around to save her friends. She died.

It took a whole three months for Natasha to recover from her shock but even longer to recover from the loss of a person she had known for so long. It was even harder for Joey who had known Sally or even longer than Natasha. It seemed strange to think that it would just be him and Natasha going down to Greenwich park on a Saturday!

Chapter 7

The end cf an example – in which you find out how Natasha and Joey are in 2005

Natasha and Joey had not been aloud to attend Sally's funeral. There parents had been so horrified to hear how Sally had died that they were not aloud to go to Greenwich park which was were Sally was being buried. In fact, because the news of how Sally had died travelled so quickly that everyone was to scared to go to Greenwich Park so it was only Sally's parents and the priest who came to the funeral.

Two years later when Natasha and Joey were eleven they both moved to houses very far away from each other. They went to new schools and got new friends. Unlike when they had lived in Greenwich they only saw each other during the holidays which is less than once a month. Sometimes they're parent (if they were lucky) would take them both down to Greenwich park to visit Sally's grave. They were the only ones who knew exactly were she had died. They would often wonder over to this place and look at the now ruined tree. The park seemed different with out all the usual girls and boys running about all over the place but what made the park most strange was that Sally wasn't running about laughing. It seemed strange to know that Sally would never jump out at them grinning from behind a near by tree. It seemed sad to know that before those trees, those evil trees had made they're way into Natasha, Joey and Sally's lives they had been happy. Now they had all been separated. It seemed to Natasha and Joey that they're lives had been broken and could never be fixed. (2006: n.p.)

I reproduce the entirety of Morris's story, because it is the only way, so far, for most readers to have access to it. Needless to say, this story has not been published, nor will it probably be, or at least unedited. But despite all this, I still believe that it could be worth looking at from an academically-aware perspective. It also needs to be said that this story is rather close to what Celia Morris, as a child, in terms of form, could have

encountered in the books she buys or borrows from the library. The text chosen here shares a lot of similarities with published children's fiction; this is a conscious choice, the purpose of which was to allow the recipient of this text to think about their own "normal" practices and those which they could engage in if they decided to adopt a childist approach.

Before turning to Celia Morris's story, let us spend some time with Kenneth Grahame and his *The Wind in the Willows*. In order to see how one can approach such an example of a text for children, I will refer to another book written by Peter Hunt who happens to have spent some time focusing on Grahame's work. The book I will refer to is called *The Wind in the Willows – A Fragmented Arcadia* (1994), and was published as part of the "Twayne Masterwork Studies" series which is a series aimed at students of literature, suggesting ways of reading texts. And it is what Hunt does in *The Wind in the Willows – A Fragmented Arcadia*: he suggests ways of approaching Grahame's story. I will not go into too much detail, that is, I will not concentrate on what Hunt actually says about *The Wind in the Willows*. What interests me, rather, is the way in which he believes one can engage with the text and its author. To a great extent, it is also what is at the heart of Roderick McGillis's *The Nimble Reader* (1996), in which he spends a considerable amount of time, and in a great variety of critical ways, looking at, amongst a few others, three instances of books written for children: *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak, *The Mysteries cf Harris Burdick*, by Chris Van Allsburg, and *Charlotte's Web*, by E. B. White.

Peter Hunt's study is organised around three main areas: the first deals with *The Wind in the Willows* and its literary and historical context; the second deals with ways of

reading *The Wind in the Willows*, in which he suggests different themes to focus on; and the third deals with ways of teaching *The Wind in the Willows*. In the first part of his study, Hunt writes about the kind of world and society Kenneth Grahame was born into. He writes about the key events that most symbolise the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, noting the importance of industrialisation in Britain, and of key figures such as Karl Marx and George Bernard Shaw. He also briefly addresses some of the key literary figures of the time, their work and the literary ethos that permeates their writings. Within this contextual frame, Hunt tries to position Grahame's book for children.

In the second part of his book, Hunt deals with the text itself as he suggests different themes of study. In doing so, he concentrates on the characters, the relationships between them, the environment they live in, and so on. He also spends a good deal of time studying the symbolism he associates with the natural world in which the characters evolve, linking Grahame's story to other stories written around the same time. Hunt concentrates on the metaphors present in the text and suggests different readings. For instance, he looks at the idea of water through the story and analyses some of its symbolism. It must be said that Hunt is clear about the fact that what he writes is just one way of reading Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* and that there are other ways of reading it. Hunt finishes his study by suggesting a few ways of teaching the book, addressing the text, the context, and its place within children's literature as a discipline, for instance.

Looking at Roderick McGillis's *The Nimble Reader*, we sometimes find similar approaches, using different texts. What we also find are more precise critical angles from which we can look at, say, *Charlotte's Web* or *Where the Wild Things Are*. One can note

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that one can read *Charlotte's Web* in a great variety of ways, ranging from constructivist readings to deconstructive readings, through psychoanalytical readings. In fact, McGillis's point, in his *The Nimble Reader*, is exactly to show that one can approach texts written for children using all the theories that are present in the domain of literary criticism, a point which is also addressed, and equally persuasively, by Mavis Reimer and Perry Nodelman in their chapter "The Repertoire of Theory", one of the key chapters of their *The Pleasures cf Children's Literature* (2003). This, I already argued at the beginning of Chapter One, and since the study of books for children has found a place in Academia, is a fact of which fewer and fewer scholars are unaware. The number of books published every year in which literary theories are used to approach texts written for children is a proof of some of the possibilities mentioned by McGillis, Hunt, Reimer and Nodelman. One of the last books I acquired is entitled *Looking Glasses and Neverlands – Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature* (2004); another one is called *Wild Things – Children's Culture and Ecocriticism* (2004), and contains long chapters on the fictional books produced for children.

What some scholars are still unaware of, on the other hand, is the fact that what is done to E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*, or Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* can also be done to Celia's Morris's story entitled *Evil Trees*. I had my own thoughts about what could happen to Morris's story, but I believed that asking other voices to join me in my argument, I would, perhaps, make this argument more stable; more stable because of the obviously more astute dimension that those eminent scholars' voices would engage me/us into.

To begin with, one of the first things they all mentioned is the fact that the story contains quite a few spelling and grammatical mistakes or confusions. This led some to think about the age of the writer, and whether or not the mistakes were unintentional. Most seemed to agree that they were, but one wondered whether they could have been intentional. I would also tend to think that the homophonic confusion between the words "they're" and "their" is a mistake, but the comments one of the scholars came up with made me wonder, and think about such an assumption. Why do we so easily make assumptions about a child writer when it comes to spelling and grammatical mistakes? And should such mistakes be a central area of concerns when it comes to us reading the story? We are tempted to think of adult writers such as James Joyce who also, as it happens, included improperly spelt words in some of his fiction. An interesting point to develop could be, then, to concentrate on language as a set of arbitrary rules. The rules being part of the adult world, it could be interesting to see how some children writers negotiate through these rules. I am also tempted to imagine some reflections on what Derrida sometimes referred to as the un-perversion of the child, especially when he talked about the way words come to mean.

Secondly, thinking about the way Hunt started writing about Kenneth Grahame, there could also be some suggestions as regards the environment Celia Morris was born in. This would slightly take us away from her text, towards the context within which she produced *Evil Trees*. This was implicit to some of the comments I received. Some mentioned genre theory quite insistently, reflecting on the generic allusions noticeable throughout Morris's text. More precisely, someone said that Morris's text is interesting in terms of its "narrative tone, parabolic shaping, imagined monsters, etc. [which] mimic a

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long tradition of such things" (n.p.).[6] One could therefore draw some parallels between *Evil Trees* and other stories displaying similar characteristics. One could also work on or discuss the aspects of the stories which make it a fantasy, or a fable, as someone mentioned. I must admit that when I first read *Evil Trees*, I thought of Harry Potter. This is something also mentioned by another scholar. Therefore, and also in connection to issues of genre, one could concentrate, or use, theories of intertextuality.

Thirdly, one could concentrate on the narrative voice, and closely analyse the text in narratological terms. What is the role of the narrator/narrative voice? Someone said that the "form of narration is quite complex – embedded narrative, various narrators – which makes the story more interesting and offers numerous points of view on it. This would offer an interesting entree into teaching the story" (n.p.). This would, in turn, and I believe quite appropriately, to issues of reader-response. One of the scholars who read the story came up with a series of pertinent questions:

> Question: who do the readers identify with? Sally? or Natasha?
> Question: What are the implications of their identification?
> The ending is quite disturbing. The convention of the happy ending for younger children has been transgressed.
> Question: What are the implications of this? (n.p.)

As regards the narrative voice, that same scholar said that they thought it sounded masculine. They then asked themselves why they thought so, and what this could entail in terms of gender issues.

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[6] All the references to the comments made in response to the email I sent are anonymous.

Fourthly, psychoanalysis featured in all the replies I received. As imagination and death seem to be at the heart of Morris's writing, it might be interesting to interrogate these themes a bit more, or take them a bit further. What do the trees symbolise as regards these two ideas of imagination and death? Someone wrote to me that "a Freudian reading might be possible; certainly a psychological one that considers the tale as a metaphor, a transposition of anxieties from the real of the writer's imagination to the literary, perhaps?" (n.p.) Likewise, someone else wrote that psychoanalytical theories could help in an "understanding of the story from the point of view of fear and desire." (n.p.) And, lastly, Marxism was mentioned in relation to a reading based on the materiality of the body.

To summarise, what we have as regards possible readings of Celia Morris's story ranges from contextual readings, leading to readings in terms of genre theories, to closer narratological investigations, taking us to issues of reader-response criticism. There is also psychoanalysis which would lead us to concentrate on the more symbolic – and/or hidden symbolism – of the story. All this about a story written by a nine-year-old child. The point I wish to make is that *even* a text written by a child can be read using the repertoire of theory one usually helps oneself from when analysing stories written by adults. One of the facts that could easily epitomise literary criticism since it started opening its doors to a greater variety of texts is that one can use all sorts of critical tools as regards any sorts of texts. As I said before, some twenty or so years ago, some critics insistently started trying to prove that one could read Enid Blyton using similar tools as those used when reading William Shakespeare. Perry Nodelman insists on that when

reminding us of the bias of some critics. He writes, as he reflects on children's literature criticism in a post-theoretical era, that

> [w]hile I was able to extrapolate much of interest from the after-theory texts I read in terms of my work as a children's literature scholar, I found almost nothing directly concerned with that work. There was just one scholar who even mentioned any texts for children. That scholar was Terry Eagleton, who, in the midst of a project with the central purpose of attacking hierarchical social structures and uneven power relations, makes jokey ironic comments about texts for children, the humour of which depends on the supposedly dumbheaded simplicity of children's literature. "Those who can," he says, "think up feminism or structuralism; those who can't, apply such insights to *Moby Dick* or *The Cat in the Hat*"; or again, "A novel with a moral is not likely to be morally interesting. 'Goldilocks' is not the most profound of fables". The irony, of course, is that "Goldilocks," which has a house-breaking thief as its supposedly empathetic protagonist, is at least as morally ambiguous as *Moby Dick*—and surely as much deserving of critical attention. (2006: 16)

Now we know that Enid Blyton can be read as critically as William Shakespeare. Now, therefore, one should also realise that Morris can be as critically interesting as Blyton and Shakespeare. The thing is that allowing Celia Morris and other children into the world of children's literature studies, or even literature in general, is surely going to raise issues of selection, issues which had been put aside for a while by many. What I have been doing throughout this second chapter is try to raise these issues back to life. I did this because I believe that reading children's own writings can be as challenging, if not more, as reading Rudyard Kipling.

The importance of theory in literary criticism is acknowledged by many. In another issue of *Canadian Children's Literature / Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse*, for instance, Perry Nodelman, notes how the arguments of many scholars use theories such as those of psychoanalysis, Marxism, deconstruction, and so on. Furthermore, he writes that many have noted that when engaging in theoretical debates, one should also engage in issues of politics, as specific theories are the results of specific ideologies (2005: 11). Therefore, and to mention some of the possible readings that a text such as Celia Morris's allows, one could suggest that as much as one can elaborate on the importance of reading, say, Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains cf the Day* from a political angle, one could also address aspects of *Evil Trees* from political angles (issues of gender and Marxism were mentioned). Following the Opies's research and Catherine Belsey's theoretical argument, I believe that focusing on children's practices (Opie) and writings (Belsey) would enable us to interpret children's varying subject positions and engage with them. One sometimes wonders, for instance, why children are most likely to reproduce heteronormative discourses as far as gender is concerned, thus 'othering' gay and lesbian practices[7], and why there is 'a high correlation between the adjectives and traditional ideals of masculine and feminine: [for instance,] pretty, delicate, sweet [are traditionally attributed to females]; [and] practical, robust, jaunty [are traditionally attributed to males]'? (Belsey 2003: n.p.)

In a similar way, focusing on children's own literatures, one will surely be led to wonder about many other things which, because of the fact that they are kept silent, are so far ignored and, consequently, unknown. And because a childist reconsideration of the

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[7] See Mitchell 2000. See also Epstein 2000.

institution of children's literature leads us to ask such questions as regards what children produce, it could also lead us to engage with the reality that the institution of children's literature seems reluctant to accept and see. Extending the sort of questioning I just suggested above, one could therefore also wonder why and how children tend to perpetuate the sort of schemas Margery Hourihan's *Deconstructing the Hero* denounces – for instance, a situation where a passive girl awaits for her prince charming to rescue her (1997: 197-202). This could also lead us to see how one could resist such phenomena. As subjects we are located within certain discourses (discourses about gender, race, economics, and so on): this constitutes our constructed and constructive self.[8] Catherine Belsey's argument suggests that addressing our – or, in our case, children's – subject positions has important pedagogical implications. She writes that

> our own position as individuals is [not] determined for us in advance: that too is a site of struggle, of subjections and resistances. There are choices constantly to be made, but they are political choices of subject-position [...]. And perhaps this above all [has some] pedagogic and political importance [...]. The project, then, is a history of meanings , and struggles for meaning, in every place where meanings can be found – or made. Its focus is on change, cultural difference and the relativity of truth. And its purpose is to change the subject, involving ourselves as practitioners in the political and pedagogic process of making history, in both senses of the phrase. (1993: 561-562)

A Summary: For Practical Reasons

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[8] On the idea of self in children's literature, see Rudd 2006. See also Lecercle and Shusterman 36.

From a more general point of view, Peter Cumming, in an article entitled "What Children's Writing? Read by Whom, How, and to What Ends?", published as a response to an essay called "Quand l'enfant parle et que l'adulte se met à écouter, ou la littérature enfantine de retour à sa source" (2007), addresses some of the practical issues I have been dealing with above. Cumming is also someone in favour of childist criticism, and he wishes to concentrate on the practical side of such a criticism. Starting his article, he writes: "Have children – their voices, worldviews, cultures, reading and writing practices – been glaringly absent from the academic study of Children's Literature as literature? Without doubt. Should they continue to be thus marginalized? Definitely not." (forthcoming) Asking what children's texts we could possibly look at, he comes to the conclusion that we should avoid going from one extreme to another; one extreme being the conservatism which we find in Virginie Douglas's article (2008) I referred to, where she suggests, in a similar way to Kiera Vaklavic in her "Prioritizing Children's Writing: Rewards, Risks, and Repercussions" (2008), that linguistic mastery ought be to taken into account when selecting texts, the opposite extreme being the open-mindedness which I suggest, whereby all sorts of writing are acceptable. Asking us to think about what children's writing, written by whom, read by whom, how, and to what ends, Cumming brings us back to issues of practicalities and compromise.

I believe that the central question, in Cumming's comments, is that of "to what ends" as it has a specific relevance as regards some of the practical issues we could face in terms of academic debates. In other words, what do we do/can with the texts we select? It is always easier to select something when we know the reasons why we are choosing. Indeed, if one considers looking at children's writings in terms of outcomes,

that is, with a purpose in mind, say, eco-criticism in adventure stories, or death as a metaphor in French fantasy stories, it becomes far easier to select the kind of writings necessary to meet our purposes. Therefore, when thinking about the different research projects that are going on in the world of children's literature criticism, it is foreseeable that one day texts written by adults and by children will coexist. Textual criticism often starts from an idea and explores that idea through textual examples. Looking for examples that meet specific purposes would therefore be a task one could be asked to concentrate on.

This takes me to a subsequent point, another practical point. What we need to consider is the fact that published texts seem to have a privileged position in literary studies. For a long time, this was because of issues of accessibility. Indeed, if I was researching texts from the English-speaking world and wished to look at instances of gothic writings, I would have gone to a library and would have picked up a few books by Diana Wynne Jones, Penelope Farmer, and Margaret Mahy. If I had wanted to do the same thing, using some children's writings, I would have found it quite difficult, if not impossible. The problem I would have encountered is not so much one of availability – even though I can only assume that this is the case – but one of accessibility. Because of the way one tends to concentrate on published work, it is almost inevitable that children's writings will be excluded. This is reinforced by issues of privacy. Whereas published works belong to the public domain, unpublished writings mostly belong to the private domain. This reminds us of what David Rudd had to say about the institutionalisation of children's literature. In his "Theorising and Theories: How Does Children's Literature Exist?", he wrote that one of the reasons why children's own

writings are often excluded is due to the fact that "only commercially published work is seen to count" (2006: 19). Nevertheless, and this is something Kimberley Reynolds, as mentioned above, invites us to do in the conclusion to her latest book entitled *Radical Children's Literature* (2007), with the proliferation of websites where children are posting their writings – fan fiction websites, blogs, websites such as MySpace, etc. – we could perhaps start looking for what is available. Issues of privacy will still be raised, but this is a different story. It is no longer a question of accessibility, but a question of acceptance and willingness.

In conclusion, what all the above is implicitly asking us to look at, or at least consider looking at, is the definition of literature, and consequently, literary studies. It is also asking us to define, and re-define, the positions of adults and children in literary studies and society at large. It seems to me that knowing why we are choosing certain texts will help us engage, in a way, with earlier questions of canonisation and selection. It is important, then, that we keep an open mind about such discussions in order to redefine the notion of literature. If not, and it is the case for children's writings, there will always be a discrepancy between children's rights and adults' rights. This, in a way, takes us back to Nodelman's article on colonisation where he wondered whether children will ever be granted the same rights as adults. It might be difficult to argue for such a position, but what seems necessary is a constant reflection on such debates, a constant re-thinking of children's and adults' positions, as this is the only way for us, and here I mean adults and children, to live in a world of equality. Literary studies are changing but only within reason. What children's writings are asking us to do, in a way, is to change our practices without reasons, in a way. I have tried, to a certain extent, to consider the

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real-life side of my argument, but I must admit that I still find it hard to be able to compromise, as choosing is excluding. I think this is what it all comes down to: we might not be able to choose certain texts because we cannot say anything about them. But this is not a failure inherent to the text, but something we need to recognise *vis-à-vis* ourselves. What about someone else? Can they say something about it?[9] The example I used earlier – Celia Morris's story – is not too far remote from some of the texts that are commonly studied or looked at by children's literature critics, at least in terms of form.

Other texts might be more difficult to approach. Consider this one, by Shanikye Newell-Barriteau:
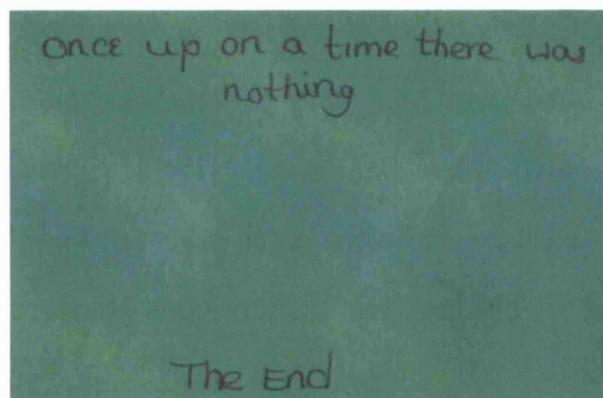
It is possible to imagine some reflection on the basis of Newell-Barriteau's story's narrative structure, but what else? My point here is not to suggest specific ways of approaching this text. Rather, it is to suggest that new forms of writing can lead to new forms of reading in academic terms. It is true that some texts will be more challenging for some critics, due to the fact that their form, their content, and so on, will vary greatly from what one would normally encounter in literary studies. Nevertheless – and here we

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[9] As we saw above, this way of looking at literary studies is, as Peter Hunt made clear, definitely going towards the small, the local, and the particular (n. p.).

are reminded of the fact that Peter Cumming was in favour of a more compromising approach to children's texts, whereby adult critics do not feel too estranged from what they read by selecting "accessible texts" they can engage with – some other texts, such as Celia Morris's *Evil Trees* we read earlier, can lead to fruitful criticism.

The kind of criticism I would personally be tempted to engage in, amongst others, and were I to look at specific children's texts, would be similar to what Emer O'Sullivan puts forward in her recently-translated *Comparative Children's Literature*, published in 2005, where she applies some of the tools developed by comparative literary criticism to some texts written for children. Comparative approaches to children's literatures could make us concentrate on the similarities and differences that there exist between cultures around the globe but also, in an age of globalisation, the ways in which a monoculture is more and more noticeable. Questions that are asked and discussed regarding books for children in terms of globalisation could be addressed through readings of texts by children. Similar questions: but would we get similar answers?

What is suggested here can be seen, I believe, as partly answering Peter Hunt's claim that a childist history of children's literature needs to be written – partly in the sense that I am only looking at the notions of production and institutionalisation, and not so much at that of reception of texts on the part of children that Hunt himself initiated and which, for instance, Peter Cumming is perpetuating at York University in Canada[10] –

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[10] See, amongst other essays, his unpublished "Reading Children Reading: Decolonizing Childhood Through the Voices of Child Experts", presented in June 2007 at the Children's

and I therefore think that most of the critical books published about the texts produced for children in the domain of children's literature studies could be read and approached with an alternative agenda in mind, a childist agenda, based on what I have developed so far in terms of academic flexibility. Indeed, I believe that, and supposing that there are not any problems of accessibility, which I think is secondary to my theoretical suppositions, the theses developed by those children's literature scholars in those critical books written about texts for children could be developed through some examples of children's own texts. This would certainly give us more specific ideas regarding similarities and differences between texts for children and texts by children.

All in all, it appears that the term "literature" is a metal hard to mould. But it is upon its flexibility that children's literatures can exist in academic terms. Children's own literatures should be part of Catherine Belsey's project, a widening academic project, for studying children's own literatures could allow critics to reflect on children's own cultures, and enable us to reflect on children's own constructive subject positions. As Rudd insists, therefore, "it should be emphasised that all [these literatures come] from reworking the discourses around them, through which children negotiate their social and embodied positioning" (2006: 19).

Also, childist criticism opens doors to worlds which are fast-changing and, in most cases, ephemeral. Children's writing habits surprise me, and they make me think: in terms of narrative possibilities, in terms of the media employed – we are moving away from the material book, Cohen (2006) reminded us, as did Peter Hunt in his "Futures for

Literature Association's "Anniversaries, Histories, and Colonialisms" conference, held at Christopher Newport University, in Virginia.

Children's Literature: Evolution or Radical Break" (2000) with which I will deal in the conclusion of this thesis – in terms of opposition between the way I see the world, and the way others see the world... and much more. This is the sort of mess David Rudd is writing about, to a certain extent. Also, and as a way to conclude this chapter, and this is something Peter Hunt said about the books written for children (1991: 17), I believe that reading and studying the stories written by children is extremely important and fun. I enjoy polymorphic writings which often – but not always – defy the rigidity of most adult normative styles. The surprises that I encounter through children's literatures are, to me, unique; unique as they reflect the uniqueness of children's idiosyncrasies. This is not to say that all is new in children's literatures, but that, as far as I have experienced so far, unusual things often abound. Here, it is Roland Barthes's *plaisir du texte* I am alluding to. This *plaisir* I need not explain or justify. *Ne jamais s'excuser, ne jamais s'expliquer*, as Barthes said (1973: 9). It is in me, in my eyes, and I can explain it no more nor justify it further.

CONCLUSION

On Some Possible Futures

Children's Literature Studies, Childist Criticism, and What Might Come

It need hardly be said that the political implications [of childist criticism] are quite revolutionary. Just as the Internet has the potential to destroy cultures, so the acceptance of the validity of individual internal narratives (or cooperative narratives without any authoritarian centre) totally undermines politically and culturally established 'standards'. (Hunt 2000: 118)

We need [...] to think about the ways in which our language and culture validate "maturity". [...] I want us to think what it means when we use metaphors of immaturity to devalue something. I'm thinking of phrases like "immature response," "childish reaction," "adolescent quarreling," "juvenile behavior," "puerile thinking". [...] I would like to see us revalue the status of childhood. (Clark 2003: 4)

Would it really make a difference if we discussed more texts by children in the journal, if the people doing the discussing were still adults? Wouldn't it be less imperious and more liberating if a journal subtitled *Canadian Children's Literature / Littérature canadienne pour la jeunesse* consisted of discussions of texts by children written by children. (Nodelman 2006(b): 12)

Towards the Future

Throughout this thesis, I have arguing that the child's voice should be listened to within the domains of children's literature studies. As I considered the phrase 'children's literature' from the angle of childist criticism, I focused on the constructive child who

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produces something I have described as his or her own literatures. By concentrating on the constructive child, I considered the institution of children's literature and argued that what children produce in terms of literature could be included in the domain of children's literature studies. As these literatures are a mirror of the cultures of childhood, I believe that they can provide us with great insights into their cultures, and also offer us some great possibilities in terms of future developments in literary studies. They could also challenge our assumptions about issues of standardisation and criticism in general.

My childist arguments about the production of literatures by children themselves has been strongly influenced, sometimes explicitly but also implicitly, by the notion of 'cultural respect'. As things are at the moment, and as many critics I have been quoting throughout this thesis have insisted (Jacqueline Rose, Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, Perry Nodelman, David Rudd, Peter Hunt, Roderick McGillis, Jack Zipes, Beverly Lyon Clark, amongst other examples), the relationships between the child and the adult are in most cases unequal and can therefore be described, as Perry Nodelman has done, in terms of colonialism towards the cultures of childhood (1992). The writing of books for children – which is where my entire argument found its origin – is a site where the adult creates his or her version(s) of the child and where the colonisation of childhood, within the domain of children's literature studies, is best exemplified. Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein have clearly demonstrated that the child is very often subjected to adults' desires and, consequently, that his or her identity is very often (un)consciously repressed and marginalised. This followed a reading of the production of books for children from the angle of some examples of linguistic theories of communication which

made the gap between the adult writer and the reading child very clear and which also put an emphasis the constructivist arguments of Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein. In the light of all this, I argued, following David Rudd's essay "Theorising and Theories – How Does Children's Literature Exist?" (2006), Catherine Belsey's "Towards Cultural History" (1993), and Peter Hunt's "The Decline and Decline of the *Children's* Book? The Problems of Adults Reading Children's Books and What Can Be Done About Them" (1991), amongst other examples, that the way books for children are produced and the way children's literature has established itself as an institution led to the marginalisation of children's own literatures. Childist criticism, engaging with the binary opposition between childhood and adulthood, questions, and challenges, such an opposition. Because respect is the basis of my argument, I have insisted that what adults tend to think of as childhood should be reconsidered in the light of cultural respect, and rather than seeing childhood in repressive terms – as Beverly Lyon Clark's introduction to her *Kiddie Lit – The Cultural Construction cf Children's Literature in America* (2003) demonstrates is usually the case – I have been approaching it through the notion of horizontality as developed by Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire in his *Pedagy cf the Oppressed* (1972), for instance. Therefore, the differences between childhood and adulthood are not seen in negative terms but, rather, in productive terms. The notion of horizontality is a *necessary* element as regards the possible existence of childist criticism, as is the acknowledgement of the notion of the constructive child.

Childist criticism has been described as anarchistic by Peter Hunt, implying that respect for individuality is one of the primary concerns of such a criticism (2003: n.p.). As a way to conclude this thesis, I would like to consider this idea of an anarchistic

criticism, a criticism which, I believe, asks us to engage with the artificiality of some of our 'critical standards'. In order to so, I would like to speculate on some more possible futures for children's literature studies *vis-à-vis* childist criticism, reinforcing the idea of individuality which drove most of my argument backward and forward.

Firstly, I will touch upon, one last time, the literatures produced by children and will continue to look at them from the angle of cultural respect. Adding to my previous thoughts, I will speculate on the importance of individuality, thinking about some issues which could be linked to my 'literary' concerns: issues of self-determination, for instance, leading me to wonder whether the voice of the child could/should also be heard in different domains, that is, not just in children's literature studies, and how a literary argument could resonate in other disciplines.

What I will also speculate about is some of the shapes 'children's literature scholarship' may take if one decided to follow my childist argument and go back to what originally concerned Peter Hunt, that is the act of reading. Going back to the act of reading, I will go back to what initiated my argument as I read Hunt's essays on childist criticism; the loop will be looped, until it starts spinning off again. I will supplement Peter Hunt's argument with a personal example, and will reflect on its implication as far as what literary criticism means or does. I will also refer to Peter Cumming's work which is based on childist criticism and which tries to achieve what such a criticism suggests theoretically and practically.

To finish with, I will address, perhaps more programmatically – some of the rhetoric used in the following pages will be slightly more directive: from the above "could", I will now be tempted to use the directive "should" – than as in previous parts of

this thesis, how I see childist criticism to develop politically, through a few examples. I will read through essays concerned with citizenship and education, for instance, and will, as has been the case throughout most of this thesis, see where/how my childist argument sometimes coincides with the thoughts of other critics. I will consider some practical examples and will argue that my argument, which is primarily a literary argument, can perhaps find a way into wider debates. I will therefore suggest other area of research and will work my thoughts towards possible and quite varied futures which could be explored.

Literature, Children, Perspectives: Some Possible Future Definitions

In "Futures for Children's Literature: Evolution or Radical Break", Peter Hunt considers the development and the influence of electronic media on the (possible) evolution of our understanding of narratives and how this affects our understanding of 'children's literature', as an academic discipline, in terms of literary criticism. He starts his article by emphasising that '[e]lectronic media are not simply changing the way we tell stories: they are changing the very nature of story, of what we understand (or do not understand) to be narratives' (2000: 111). This belief is based on the fact that, '[t]he Internet, which was first developed in 1973, and which is estimated to have 100,000,000 computers connected to it by the year 2000, has not yet found its equivalent of the novel' (*ibid.*). Hunt comments on the fact that our understanding of 'children's literature' needs to adapt to the way children encounter narratives nowadays. This leads him to engage with, and question, definitions of the concept of 'narrative' and, therefore, the notion of 'children's literature' as an academic discipline – the two notions, he says, being closely

intertwined. Hunt believes that 'children's literature', as a discipline, needs to reflect on such changes if it is to echo the way children perceive and handle narratives nowadays. Because childist criticism is concerned with the child and his or her cultures, the notion of literature within the domain of children's literature studies, he believes, could be put under considerable pressure. The way children understand the notion of narrative might also be worth considering. Following Peter Hunt's argument in the article I just referred to above, the way children define, or understand, the notion of literature will have some fundamental consequences on the domain of children's literature studies if one decides to take childist criticism further along Hunt's line. It also suggests that children's literature critics will have to negotiate the intellectual shift that these new definitions imply. As Hunt points out,

> [i]t need hardly be said that the political implications [of childist criticism] are quite revolutionary. Just as the Internet has the potential to destroy cultures, so the acceptance of the validity of individual internal narratives (or cooperative narratives without any authoritarian centre) totally undermines politically and culturally established 'standards'. (2000: 118)

Because children's literature, as an academic field of study, sits between the notion of literature and that of childhood, the future of the discipline, from a childist perspective, I believe, partly lies in a clear understanding of what the interaction(s) between these two terms mean. The future of childist criticism partly lies in the debates that the phrases 'children's literature', 'a child's literature' or 'children's literatures' (will) generate. Some major parts of the arguments that I developed throughout the pages of this thesis have tried to answer some the questions at the heart of some of these debates.

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As childist criticism starts from the notion of childhood – because the "'s' in the phrase 'children's literature' presupposes that this is so – it asks us to concentrate on, and question, the notion of childhood and its relationship(s) to the notion of literature. This is something I have done, *to a certain extent,* and from *my* own perspective, an adult perspective. My argument was an *adult childist argument.* But what could possibly come next? One of the questions we might have to engage with is, I believe: what would a childist criticism of childist criticism itself be? And what would the consequences of a childist criticism of childist criticism be? In other words: what would a child make of all this? For instance, asking some scholars to comment on Celia Morris's piece of writing, one could be led to wonder why adult, academic concerns should prevail over what, for instance, some children would have to say about the story? Why should Marxism, psychoanalysis, narratology, and so on, be stamps of seriousness, and not, as I have been implicitly arguing, and as we will see at the end of this conclusion, critical readings produced by children? Somewhat similarly, Hunt addresses the fact that adults tend to dismiss children's thoughts because of issues of power. Such issues have been implicit, sometimes explicit, to my whole argument. Hunt says,

> Childist Criticism [...] suggests that we do not, and cannot, and perhaps should not know what readers are doing in their heads; whatever is being done is valid in its own context. However, as not knowing what interpretations are being made is to relinquish power – power to mould or direct a reader into an interpretation that we recognise or wish to validate, Childist Criticism would be anathema not only to value-traditionalists, but to educationalists who, after all, are not equipped to award marks to anarchy. (2003: n.p.)

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Also, by concentrating on the notion of childhood from a childist angle, I believe that one will have to listen to what children themselves have to say about childhood, that is, about themselves. As it is the case with gay and lesbian studies, for instance, it is arguable that definitions of gay and lesbian cultures are more appropriate (and relevant, perhaps) when they are produced by gay and lesbian people themselves. Have there been definitions of gay and lesbian culture by heterosexual critics? Similarly, definitions of childhood might take different shapes, I think, if they were produced by children themselves, depending on where they emerge from. Some may well argue that children may not be articulate enough (or as articulate as adults) to define who they are but, because childist criticism wishes to engage with the binary opposition between adulthood and childhood, I believe that the fact that children do not usually express themselves like adults should not imply that what they say is invaluable; on the contrary, it just means that what they say is *different*, and it is in this difference that reside some of the interests of childist criticism. Even if it is true that children may not be articulate enough to express themselves clearly, what they say – however clear that is – should be listened to, for it is in listening to what children say about themselves that we can allow them to define who they are, and how they position themselves in the world. In that sense, and as Perry Nodelman suggests towards the end of his "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature" (1992), the adult, whose constructed position in our world is a dominant one, should always make sure that his or her dominant – colonial – position is one that allows the child to express himself or herself. As the world keeps changing, the way childhood is defined, and the way childhood defines itself (in terms of what children are, but also in terms of how they wish to express childhood), also

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change. Childist criticism suggests that the adult enters into a never-stopping dialogue with the child so that the way childhood is defined is not only something done by the adult – for issues of legality, control, protection, and so on –, but also something done by children themselves. This may imply that, in the future, what we most commonly understand childhood to mean will take on totally different definitions, and, possibly, rather *fragmented* definitions; the notion of 'young adult' already comes to mind (but, again, that is an adult definition).

Literature for Children: The Future

To continue, going back to the act of reading and childist criticism, I would like to refer to a personal example which, I believe, very well encapsulates the way in which childist criticism could influence the domain of children's literature studies as regards the criticism of the books written for children. The example I wish to use is that of a picture book a child once gave me. The picture book called *Once Upon an Ordinary School Day*, was written by Colin McNaughton and illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura. The story, I thought, after quickly reading the book, is fairly simple and is based, as most texts produced for children, on a straightforward structure. In this precise case, we have a character who is pictured as having a very monotonous life at school, but encounters a teacher who is going to turn that monotonous life into an extraordinary one by bringing some enchantment into the boy's life. The book starts with a boy waking up and getting ready for school. The text reads:

Once upon an ordinary school day, an ordinary boy woke from his ordinary dreams, got out of his ordinary bed, had an ordinary pee, an ordinary wash, put on his ordinary clothes, and ate his ordinary breakfast.

The boy brushed his ordinary teeth, kissed his ordinary mum goodbye and set off for his ordinary school. (2004: n.p.)

After that, the boy goes to school and meets up with his friends. The illustrations, as far as the beginning of the book is concerned, are, I believe, from my adult and personal point of view, characteristic of the monotonous life that the text suggests. Then, we read, as the boy 'sat at his desk [,] [...] something quite out of the ordinary happened.' (n. p.) Indeed, a new teacher arrives, and upon his arrival the illustrations start becoming colourful so as to suggest that he is, indeed, a quite unordinary teacher. The teacher brings a gramophone along with him and plays some music for the pupils, asking them to close their eyes and 'let the music make pictures in [their] heads' (n.p.). At first, 'the ordinary children whispered: "He's barmy!" "He's bonkers!" "He's as nutty as a fruitcake!" "Music?" "Pictures?" "What's he on about?" [...]' (n.p.). But the pupils, following the teacher's instructions, finally let the music make pictures in their heads and, as he asks them what these pictures are, they tell him that the 'rumbling, rolling, thunderous music that boomed and crashed around the classroom [...]' made them think of '[s]tampering horses [,] [...] racing cars [...] [and] elephants, [...] hundreds of them!'(n.p.).

What interested me, as I discussed that picture book with the child who offered it to me, was what she thought about it. The first thing she told me about the book was that it is a very sad book. That comment came to me as a surprise for, my own reading

made me assume, I was expecting her to reach the end of the book seeing in it, like I did, a seemingly-happy resolution. The bright colours and the words used by the author and the illustrator, as well as the smile on the boy's face, made me think of *Once Upon an Ordinary School Day* as displaying similar characteristics to most picture books, that is, as I said before, as often leading to a happy ending. But what had happened with the girl I was reading the book with is that she had paid particular attention to other elements of the text, thus drawing my own attention back to the basic premise upon which childist criticism is established, that of multiple possible readings.

Another point she quickly wished to comment on was the use of a gramophone by the teacher which, she emphatically stressed, was something she would like to see in her school. This element of the text – an element of alterity – led her to contrast her daily life with that of the fictional character. Thus, she was able to voice her opinion. This, again, may seem very basic as far as literary interpretation is concerned. But, and here is what my childist argument insists we should do, I believe that all interpretations should be treated equally. If it is true that academic criticism can produce more detailed and precise analyses of texts, it is nonetheless true that children's interpretations are also important. As I decided to use one of my own examples, I *deliberately* chose one that will probably seem as very simple and basic. But what this deliberate choice is leading me to argue is that, similarly to what Beverly Lyon Clark claims, we should value childhood for what it is, rather than constantly dismissing it adultist grounds (2003: 1).

In the first chapter of *Kiddie Lit – The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*, chapter entitled "Kids and Kiddie Lit", Clark compiles, in the space of fifteen pages, dozens of references to the way adults tend to view childhood. For

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instance, she refers to 'Carol McPhee and Ann FitzGerald's compilation *Feminist*

Quotations [...] [where] there are more index entries under "Woman/Women as child"

than under any similar heading ("Woman/Women as servant," "Woman/Women as

redeemer").' (2003: 3) Also,

> in her classic essay in women's studies, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to
> Culture?" Sherry B. Ortner challenges the way women have been
> subordinated through their association with nature. Then, as if eager to
> deny a kind of guilt by association between women and children, she
> assumes a "natural" association between children and nature: "Infants are
> barely human and utterly unsocialized; like animals they are unable to
> walk upright, they excrete without control, they do not speak. Even slightly
> older children are clearly not yet fully under the sway of culture." Women
> shouldn't be degraded by being associated with nature, but it's "natural"
> for children to be. (*ibid.*)

And as she goes on, she wants 'us to think what it means when we use metaphors of

immaturity to devalue something. [She thinks] of phrases like "immature response,"

"childish reaction," "adolescent quarreling," "juvenile behavior," "puerile thinking".'

(2003: 4) She wants us to do that because she 'would like to see us revalue the status of

childhood' (*ibid.*). And as she concludes her chapter, she claims that '[a]ll these ways of

belittling and ignoring have a profound impact on the ways in which we think about

children's literature' (2003: 14). She also writes that '[c]hildren's literature has low

status in literary criticism, even though it would provide a fertile testing ground for

investigating [...] such critical approaches as a reader-response one' (*ibid.*). Beverly Lyon

Clark's comments provide me with a good basis to draw some analogies between her

focus and mine, especially her last reference to reader-response criticism. The place and the status of the child have often been dismissed for being *childish* and *immature*. Such ways of approaching childhood exclude the possibility for children to voice their opinions as regards the texts they read. As it concentrates on the voice of the child, childist criticism wishes to revert that adultist tendency that keeps the child silent.

What it means, in concrete terms, is that childist criticism, by allowing the child to express his or her opinion, asks us to keep in mind the fundamental principle upon which Peter Hunt established such a criticism when he said that childist criticism wants us to 'revise our view of what 'reading as a child' can actually mean' (1984: 45). As far as the way I developed childist criticism is concerned, focusing on the notion of respect, what I wish to draw out of the example I just referred to is that it implies that within the domain of children's literature studies, some standards of criticism may have to be revised, or at least reassessed. Thus, we may well have to reflect on questions such as: what does it mean to know? What constitutes knowledge? And how should/could our understanding of the notion of knowledge affect the domain of children's literature studies? Why not including children's own readings in our own criticism? Because I wish the child to be able to participate in the existence, and the development, of children's literature studies, I think that everything that the child has to say about the books that are written for him or her should be included, and considered as worthy of attention. As I mentioned earlier regarding the reading of children's own texts, it can be said that the way some critics such as David Lewis in his *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks – Picturing Texts* (2001), Jane Doonan in her *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* (1993), and Perry Nodelman in his "Decoding the Images: Illustration and Picture Books" (1999),

have written about picture books may well need to be reread in the light of childist criticism, to see how relevant their arguments are as far as the child's own reading of picture books, for instance, is concerned. As regards the study of picture books, the critical standards that critics such as Lewis, Doonan, and Nodelman (in some of his work) set within the domain of children's literature studies can be questioned, not as far as its validity is concerned, but as far as childist criticism is concerned. The hegemony of certain intellectual standards can be questioned. Some additions might be needed.

Quite recently, Peter Cumming, as an advocate of childist criticism, has been engaging practically with the theories put forward by Peter Hunt. Indeed, looking at his "Reading Children Reading: Decolonizing Childhood Through the Voices of Child Experts" (2007), we can see that inviting children to speak about the texts they read can be rather destabilising for some. As he refers to a seminar session he ran at York University, during which he invited a group of three children to come and talk about some of their favourite fantasy stories, Cumming, in his essay, spends some time reflecting on some of the reactions of some of his students as the three children talked about some of their literary preferences. Doing so, he writes:

> What Emma [Emma being one of the three children] was saying and how she was saying it were incongruous with her size, body, voice, and age; in short, with her circumscribed status as a child. [...] [A]s I suggested when I tried to help my students deconstruct that moment after the panel presentation, *our* laughter [...] was also a policing of Emma's [...] sense of what us and is not appropriate for children: in essence, children should not – nay, *must not* – have too much knowledge." (2007: n.p.)

As he continues, Peter Cumming quotes Perry Nodelman who wrote that "a child's response to a poem, based on limited experience of both life and literature, may in some ways seem less complicated than the response of an English professor; but it may also be more complicated in other ways. It is certainly no more and no less significant than the response of an English professor. In being different, it adds possibilities and thus enriches literature as a whole." (2007: n.p.)

This is certainly pertinent as regards some of the possibilities that a childist approach to the reading of literature is concerned. But it could also be true and pertinent as regards the writing and evaluating of children's writing. If it can be said that Cumming's way of dealing with children's reading abilities is crucial in terms of the development, in practical terms, of childist criticism, it can also be noted that it is slightly biased in the sense that he concentrates on children whose skills "impressed" their audience. If it is true that it is important to acknowledge the fact that some children's reading skills are "impressive" from an adult perspective, it is also true – and this is what Nodelman implied – if only theoretically – that less "impressive" ones have their place in the world of children's literature. Similarly, the texts produced by children could be addressed with the same degree of open-mindedness. As Cumming writes elsewhere:

> Would paying serious attention to children's writing and reading destabilize [...] or enrich [...] traditional adult academic study of Children's Literature? Hopefully both. But what precisely is [it] that children's writing can bring to Children's Literature? What is [it] that we adults can discover there? Need a study of children's writing be limited to the juvenilia of canonical adult authors? Of course not." (2008: 106)

If Cumming's work makes it clear that inviting children to speak about the texts they read is feasible, he also insists that critics of children's literature could perhaps reflect on ways to invite children's writing in already-established critical settings within the university. And not just the "impressive" ones bearing in mind the fact that, as Nodelman and Cumming write, we should perhaps try to engage more reflectively with our colonial position *vis-à-vis* childhood.

The fact that childist criticism can be described in terms of anarchy will probably generate some debates within the domain of children's literature studies, debates engaging with the domination of adultist criticism: some debates about *authority*, some debates about certain processes of *standardisation*, and some debates about *individuality*. It therefore seems to me that the future of childist criticism could be a challenging one; and not only could it be challenging, but it could also become extremely messy. What I am talking about is childist criticism or *the acknowledgment cf the child as writer and critic*.

After Literary Studies: Considering the Rights of the Child

Almost reaching the end of a reflection on the position of the child within the domain of children's literature studies, in which I have at times tried to make a variety of critics converse, I would like to try and establish a connection between childist criticism and a domain I am less familiar with, a domain which I would like to consider in greater details in the future, that of the rights of the child. I would like to do so because the notion of childist criticism has been used in articles dealing with children's literature in relation to political debates, as what follows will show.

Childist criticism invites us to reconsider the institution of children's literature and the way it has developed. It also enables us to reflect on issues related to education. What I now wish to do is address the notion of childist criticism in the light of Mary Galbraith and Gertrud Lenzer's own argument. In a special issue of the children's literature journal *The Lion and the Unicorn* they write about a new academic discipline called 'Children's Studies' which I find really interesting for reasons I would like to explain.

Addressing 'Children's Studies' as regards childist criticism, I wish to raise some of the worries Mary Galbraith puts forward when she writes, in her article "Hear My Cry: A Manifesto for an Emancipatory Childhood Studies Approach to Children's Literature", that those

> who see and wish to avoid [the] traps of adultism [that keep the child voiceless] [...] seem either unable to come up with a literary project that allows them to say anything of substance about children's literature in relation to the emancipatory interests of childhood, or to see such a project as inherently delusional. [...] [Some] radical critics in children's literature who work in an emancipatory way using other forms of critique, including feminist [like Lissa Paul] [and ...] Marxist (Zipes) [...] approaches, use arguments that seem to me to cry out for a childhood-studies elaboration – childhood being, after all, the central category that distinguishes our field of literature, however problematically. (2001: 191-192)

This leads her to claim that these critics – childist in essence – 'seem lost in a maze of good intentions without a program' (*ibid.*).

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I would agree with Galbraith when she writes that most critics who wish to engage with the domain of children's literature in radical ways often leave the child aside, unheard, or silenced. The way I have developed childist criticism could perhaps palliate the errors that permeate such critics' writing. Childist criticism, following Paulo Freire's approach to the notion of horizontality, focuses on the notion of cultural respect.[1] If one looks at the texts produced by children in a non-condescending way, one can approach the cultures of childhood through that notion of horizontality. Therefore, childist criticism could help in making sure that the adult adapts to the child's culture and, in dialogue, in making sure that both adult and the child try to understand the world through the other's eyes. This, for reasons which have to do with cultural translatability, is bound to be impossible.[2] *But*, as can be argued, it is not the result *per se* that matters, it is the *process* of trying that is more important.[3] As it can be said that a feminist critique of a text can only be achieved by a woman, it is nevertheless arguable that men can use feminism as a theoretical apparatus to *try to produce* feminist readings. The idea of cultural respect from which childist criticism originates – and which, as I have been arguing, disrupts the common binary opposition between childhood and adulthood –

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[1] See Freire 133-164; see also Boal's use of Freire's methods in his *Theatre cf the Oppressed* 118-156.

[2] This is what my use of Jacques Derrida's *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* [*Monolinguism cf the Other*] helped me demonstrate, as my reading of Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein also pointed out when dealing with issues of constructivism.

[3] See also William Spurlin's introduction to *Lesbian and Gay Studies and the Teaching cf English* xix for similar views on education as a process of *constant* questioning.

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wishes to make sure that both the child and the adult work together. After all, both the child and the adult share the same world, and that world does not belong to one or the other only, it belongs to both, even if it appears to be controlled by one group.

There is a similarity between Mary Galbraith's approach and the argument I derived from Jacques Derrida's approach to the notion of identity. She insists on the necessity of going beyond the cultural aporia that separates the child and the adult. Writing about Jacqueline Rose and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein's theses, she claims:

> postmodern critiques of adult representations of childhood have done a great service to the field by promoting methodological skepticism about "the real child". Such critiques of adult interests in the portrayal of childhood must be returned to again and again in a childhood studies who mission is to investigate, describe, and critique the distorting interests of adults in communication communities.
>
> But childhood studies should not [...] limit itself to a "brashly accepted helplessness" [...] with respect to adult understanding of childhood experience. To do so would be to refuse the possibility of any meaningful interaction between adults and children, and in fact, between any two people at all, since by this (self-contradicting, but nonetheless potent) argument, intersubjectivity must be impossible [...]. (1994: 199)

True communication is impossible, in theory,[4] but, nonetheless, it can happen. This interaction between the child and the adult is what Galbraith believes is necessary as far as the domain of children's literature is concerned. It is necessary because '[w]ithout

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[4] As developed in Derrida's essay "Signature événement contexte" ["Signature Event Context"] 1972: 365-367.

such [a] [...] project, [she does not] see that we are really getting to the heart of the literature we specialize in interpreting.' (2001: 200) So even though intersubjectivity is impossible *by definition*, one must constantly try to make sure it happens *in the praxis*.

This particular brand of 'Children's Studies' was founded at Brooklyn College of The City University of New York. Gertrud Lenzer, one of the founders, notes:

> [i]n response to the increasing fragmentation in child-research, Children's Studies was conceived as a genuinely interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary field of study. [...] In this sense, the disciplines of the arts and the sciences – from the visual and performing arts, music, film, and literature; from philosophy to history; and from the many disciplines in the social sciences, medical science, and legal studies – are brought together to provide an individual focus on children and to bring about new understanding in the form of a series of new conceptualizations of children. (2001: 183-184)

Its main components are:

> *Unit One*: The Child Imagining and the Self [...]
> *Unit Two*: The Child Imagining and Imagined. [...]
> *Unit Three*: The Developing Child [...]
> *Unit Four*: Children and Society [...]
> *Unit Five*: The Human Rights of Children [...] (2001: 184)

This approach is very much what I have been advocating, and it echoes what Catherine Belsey argued in her "Towards Cultural History". Both Belsey and Lenzer are against academic isolation as they believe that all disciplines should work together towards a more complete and better understanding of any area of investigation. As regards English studies, Belsey comments:

I have invoked portraits in the analysis of changing meanings of gender relations. John Barrell and Norman Bryson have both in different ways demonstrated [...] the kind of work that becomes possible when writing and painting are brought in conjunction [...]. (1993: 553)

Childist criticism, as far as children's literature studies are concerned and within the domain of 'Children's Studies', could find a good home in the second and fifth units of the program. The second unit is partly based on children's own productions, and the fifth is based on what corresponds to the way I consider cultural respect. That fifth unit specifically addresses the human rights of children, something which is defined by the United Nations. My purpose, here, cannot be to engage with the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights cf the Child* but, rather, implicitly to consider some of its main concerns, essentially as regards the child's freedom of expression and thought.[5] Childist criticism, therefore, starts with a recognition of the child's individuality and places that individuality within a wider context which is itself also based on respect. Childist criticism, precisely because it is based on the notion of horizontality, insists that both the child and the adult coexist in an egalitarian way.

To address the notion of respect as regards the cultures of childhood and the possibilities which childist criticism might contribute to, let me refer to an essay written by Marian Koren, also published in the special issue of literary journal *The Lion and the Unicorn*. Her article is called "Human Rights of Children: An Emerging Story" (2001: 242-259), and it provides me with a good basis to emphasise further the possible links

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[5] As stated in Article 13 and Article 14 of the Convention; see also Koren 246.

between childist criticism and the way she engages in the definition of children's studies. Similarly to what Augusto Boal advocated throughout his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Marian Koren uses an example based on the same participative principles present in Boal's work. What I would like to comment on is Koren's way of dealing with what children produce in terms of literature and see how this coincides with what I have been saying so far, thus creating a bridge between my earlier literary thoughts to more politically-orientated ones here.

Koren refers to Janusz Korczak, a 'Polish doctor, pedagogue, and author [...] [who] was convinced that one can only educate a child when one communicates with him' (2001: 245). When linking his beliefs to the production of literature, Korczak believed that '[e]verything a child wrote about was important' (*ibid.*). This is why, Koren writes, Korczak

> organized a weekly newspaper in which the children and workers at the orphanage [that he set up in Warsaw] wrote about their experiences and exchanged messages. [And] [l]ater on, he managed to establish a newspaper with and for children, *Little Review*, which was distributed as a weekly supplement to the Polish national newspaper, *Our Review*. The children were reporters and regional correspondents and were encouraged to comment on their situation in daily life. [...] This example shows Korczak serving as an early ombudsman for children – giving them a voice, explaining the rules of society, and advising them on how to solve daily injustices. (2001: 245)

When the child writes about himself or herself, his or her voice becomes public, and the adult is asked to approach it with no sense of censorship in mind. As the culture of the

child must be respected, the adult can then 'inform the child of the wider world of which he [sic] is part.' (247) The adult must pay respect to the child, and '[p]aying respect also means taking into account the evolving capacities of children, thus adapting [...] to their understanding, without underestimating or downgrading their competence, but rather challenging them instead' (2001: 249).[6]

As the cultures of childhood are central to the notion of childist criticism, and as they are asked to be adequately respected – following my theoretical argument – the adultist inadequacies that Mary Galbraith notices in some children's literature critics could disappear (2001: 191-192). By including the cultures of childhood into a wider critical context based on egalitarian principles, childist criticism makes sure that children are included within a similar framework as that originating from the theoretical and political arguments at the heart of some of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal's work. Paulo Freire believes that 'the important thing [for the critic] is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanisation of men.' (1972: 73) Similarly, and because I believe that children have a place and a role to play as regards the transformation of reality (for, after all, they are part of that reality both in the present but also, and with more important consequences, perhaps, in the future), I believe that transforming children's reality can only truly happen if it is changed by children themselves. Similarly to Boal and Freire, I strongly believe that trying to impose one's beliefs onto someone else (this being what Freire addresses alongside the 'the banking concept of education' 1972: 53) is unproductive and rather unethical in terms of cultural

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[6] See also Nodelman 1992: 34.

respect.[7] The best way to work towards a positive transformation of reality, I believe, is to make sure that this transformation happens through subjectivity (this is what corresponds, I believe, to Paulo Freire's term *conscientização* 1972: 49), meaning that change is better achieved if one really understands what is to be changed. The notion of education, in this sense, can truly correspond to what the etymology of the word education itself implies (the word 'education' comes from the Latin *edūcĕre* which means 'to lead out'). The argument about the transformation of reality that emanates from the writing of Freire and Boal as they stress on the necessity to involve all human beings in the transformation of reality, is a transformation that comes from these human beings themselves. Transformation must be *led out* of these human beings, and not put into them. In adopting such an educational methodology, it could be suggested that childist criticism wishes to make sure that children can transform their own reality, really understanding what they are doing. Education, when it is described in such terms, becomes meaningful, in the sense that it wishes to ensure that children understands what is at stake. Could this be an answer to some of Mary Galbraith's worries with which I started this section?

Following Janusz Korczak's example, one could approach other forms of children's literatures. Other instances of children's literatures could include things like diaries, fanzines, electronic materials available on the internet, and many more. Reading these pieces of literature, the adult can encounter what the child is really concerned with, and what he or she wishes to express, and how he or she wishes to express it. A first consequence to that is that the child and the adult can enter into a dialogue primarily

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[7] See Freire's section on cultural invasion in *Pedagogy cf the Oppressed* 133-148.

based on the child's needs. As the child writes and/or tells his or her own stories, the adult must accept the child's right to 'self-determination [implying] that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them [...]' (Koren 2001: 246). It also means that 'children are not only objects but also subjects of rights, and that a determination of the child's best interests should be based not only on what adults think, but also on what the child thinks' (*ibid.*). As children write and tell their stories – literally or metaphorically – both the child and the adult could engage in a positive dialogue based on respect and equality, following the horizontal methodology I refer to throughout the above.

A second consequence, due to the making public of children's literatures is that it can enable different cultures to enter into dialogues with each other. Similarly to the dialogue which unites the child and the adult of a same community, one could encourage the creation of dialogues between different communities. This is because, as Marian Koren writes,

> [o]ne thing children need to know is that the need for basic respect is there for all ages and all cultures, including their own. One way of working with children (and adults) on this topic is to use stories from various parts of the world where this basic respect has been challenged. It might put traditional history in a different light, and it can broaden our views on the background of all people living around us. (2001: 252)

Here, a comparison to what Mingshui Cai writes about multicultural literature becomes interesting, I believe, as what Cai says about multiculturalism as regards books

written for children could also be applicable, I suppose, to what children themselves write.

Mingshui Cai, in his book called *Multicultural Literature for Children and Young Adults – Reflections on Critical Issues* (2002), spends some time discussing the notion of multicultural literature from a pedagogical angle. I would like to suggest that the way in which Cai approaches some issues of multiculturalism and pedagogy bears strong similarities with the implications resulting from my development of the notion of childist criticism. The way Cai starts addressing multicultural literature is based on a recognition that there are essential differences between different cultures and that these differences should be acknowledged and respected on the basis of democracy and equity (2002: 7-13). Not only should they be acknowledged and respected, Cai believes, but they should also be promoted in order to make sure that all cultures are treated equally and democratically and, consequently, that no cultures are marginalised. Thus, he writes that the 'term multicultural [from a pedagogical angle] [...] [is] used to break the monopoly of the mainstream culture and make the curriculum pluralistic' (2002: 4).

Here, he is not writing about children's own literatures but about some of the books produced by adults for children; therefore, what interests me here is not the books he actually discusses throughout his study but, more importantly, the theoretical framework within which he situates his argument. Thus, when he writes about 'multicultural literature', it is his approach to the notion of 'multiculturalism', rather than that of 'literature', that I want to focus on.

Cai writes that multicultural literature serves

the purpose of expanding the curriculum to include literature about nonwhite culture. [...] [Therefore,] the pedagogical definition of multicultural literature is predicated on the goal that this category of literature is supposed to achieve: creating a multicultural curriculum and implementing multicultural education. (2002: 4)

Here, Cai seems to approach pedagogy as something being limited to the classroom, as he writes about some of the pedagogical implications of using multicultural literature in terms of the effects it can have as regards the curriculum. This must be because of the intended audience of his book. As far as my own argument goes, I would suggest that childist criticism must not be seen as limiting itself to classroom discussions. This is what I said earlier, when dealing with the theoretical dimension of my thoughts but also their practical one. Therefore (even though I agree with Cai's comments on the importance of engaging in debates on multiculturalism), I wish to say that the way I approach multiculturalism as regards childist criticism would not limit itself to the classroom but, rather, wishes to engage with education on a much wider basis. Because education is about politics, and because politics is inevitably at the heart of all human discourses, education should be present in all human interactions. As we need to challenge our ways of thinking within the classroom, we should also challenge our ways of living outside it. Childist criticism – in the same way as I see gay and lesbian theories, Marxist criticism, feminism, and so on – is not only to flourish within academic circles, but should also be part of one's everyday reflections. This approach to education is also to be found in Jack Zipes's work, especially when he argues that storytelling (which he deals with in terms of

educational possibilities), and more particularly the debates that it can generate, can

happen everywhere (2002: 135-136).

Because my childist argument stresses the importance of respecting children's

cultures, I think that these cultures could be used in terms of the pedagogical necessity of

multiculturalism. Respecting children's cultures can only happen as one is asked to

reflect on the notion of equity, a notion that is inseparable from the notion of

horizontality which influenced my methodology. Similarly to Mingshui Cai, I believe that

learning about different cultures invites both children and adults to reflect on issues that

are not limited to their own cultures, but also enables them to consider other cultures.

Cai notes that

> [m]ulticulturalism involves diversity and inclusion, but, more importantly,
> is also involves power structure and struggle. Its goal is not just to
> understand, accept, and appreciate cultural differences, but also to
> ultimately transform the existing social order in order to ensure greater
> voice and authority to the marginalized cultures and to achieve social
> equality and justice among all cultures so that people of different cultural
> background can live happily together in a truly democratic world. (2002:
> 7)

But, as he defines the term 'multiculturalism', Cai refers to a possible meaning of the

term 'culture'. He writes that culture

> incorporates nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, disability, age,
> sexual orientation, family status, geographic difference, linguistic variation,
> and any other possible differences [...]. In each of these categories there are
> subcategories of differences. In religion, for example, how many different

faiths are there in the world? Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, to name just the major faiths. In each of these faiths, there are various denominations. A multitude of cultures exist in the world. (2002: 7)

Here, I would take Cai's definition of culture a bit further and claim that, in the world, there exists as many cultures as there are individuals. A culture is something personal, something that belongs to the domain of individuality. Some will probably think that this is taking the definition of culture a bit too far, but, after all, this is what I believe in. Therefore, when I read Cai's approach to multiculturalism as being something guided by a sense of equity, I believe that that should mean that all individual cultures should be treated equally: this is what the notion of respect implies. Childist criticism, within this argument, insists that all the cultures of childhood should be part of a multicultural approach. We can all learn from/about each other, and learning from/about each other should enable us to make sure that the world we live in is a world where respect is the key element: this being what Cai seems to equate to the notion of democracy (2002: 7).

As regards equity, Cai writes that '[m]ulticultural literature is an important component of the multicultural movement and a tool to achieve its goal: diversity and equity in education' (2002: 13). Even though Cai writes about the books written by adults for children as part of classroom practices, as I already said, it is essential to emphasise the necessity of multiculturalism for equity to exist. If one does not promote the sort of pedagogy Cai is arguing for, the domination of certain cultures over others will remain unchallenged.[8] In that sense, a multicultural pedagogy is a pedagogy that

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[8] See also Zipes 2002: 1-23.

wishes to challenge all sorts of non-respectful hegemony. It is this part of Cai's argument that I find most relevant and crucial to the notion of childist criticism. The notion of respect is inseparable from that of equity. Therefore, equity can only be achieved through respectful multicultural attitudes.

Childist criticism concentrates on the cultures of childhood and invites the adult and the child to engage with *any* culture that constitutes childhood. Even if this is practically impossible – or, at least, really hard to achieve – childist criticism and multiculturalism, from a theoretical angle, allow my argument to exist and to make a vital point. And it is because they allow my argument to exist that they enable us to challenge the domination of certain groups over others. Childist criticism and multiculturalism, therefore, create sites of resistance. The practicality of my argument, in this sense, resides in the desire to try to make educational practices as diverse and equitable as possible. Childist criticism invites all children and adults to learn about what constitutes the cultures of childhood in different parts of the world in order to make sure that all these cultures are treated equally. Similarly, Marian Koren says: '[c]hildren's rights have not only to do with the rights of children in extreme or poor circumstances sometimes far away, but also with the life of every child, now and nearby' (2001: 251). Childist criticism invites us to try to consider all the cultures of childhood in order to make sure that all children are treated equally and are offered a place in a truly democratic world – where democratic means, following my previous argument, respectful and equitable – and this, I wish to suggest, in the light of Mingshui Cai's argument, as well as Marian Koren's within the domain of 'Children's Studies', can only happen by adopting a multicultural pedagogy based on the notion of equality.

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Childist Criticism and Education: A View on Educational Practices

On another practical note, and to finish this thesis, I would like to see how childist criticism might operate as regards the books produced by adults for children. Thus, we will see how a theoretical argument can be applied practically. What I wish to do here is approach books for children and define what seems necessary for childist criticism to exist as a pedagogical apparatus. In order to do so, I will focus on a few examples that correspond, in their essence, to the way I have approached education and point out that some practices correspond to what I believe in. These examples are mainly drawn from essays that reflect on classroom situations.

The kind of criticism I am most interested in is a criticism that is centred around the notion of respect, and that notion of respect, as I have approached it earlier on, is inseparable from the notion of equity. Thus, I believe, as regards the notion of respect, the idea of revisionism becomes a key element in the sense that those texts which do not adequately represent certain groups, or cultures, should be criticised and transformed or lead to transformation.[9] When dealing with books written for children, childist criticism is based on this sort of revisionist criticism. Parts of this conclusion were primarily interested in the production of literatures by children themselves, whereas I am now going to be concerned with the reading of those books that adults give children and which, as the work of Jack Zipes, Margery Hourihan, Lissa Paul, and Margaret Meek often shows, can be used to help children develop their critical abilities.[10]

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[9] On transformation, see Boal (1998: 10-11).

[10] See Zipes 1997, 2001; Hourihan; Paul 1998; and Meek 1988.

Looking at the reading of books for children from a childist angle, I wish to read through the pedagogical methods developed by some teachers, or critics, and approach them in terms of childist criticism. In order to do so I will be looking at some teachers', or critics', approaches to teaching and more particularly the way they wish to engage children with the world from what one can describe as a revisionist perspective. I will be focusing on the way they use certain texts and I wish to concentrate and comment on their arguments, saying where, how, and why they correspond to the way I define childist criticism when dealing with the child, the adult, and the act of reading.

A great deal of revisionist work has been published recently. Many critics are interested in the transformation of the texts which happen to misrepresent and marginalise certain groups of people. There is a growing tradition, for instance, in fairy tale retellings influenced by some feminist theories. Vanessa Joosen, in her article "The Apple That Was Not Poisoned: Intertextuality in Feminist Fairytale Adaptations", writes that

> [f]eminism has been, and still is, without a doubt, one of the most powerful critical apparatuses to influence fairy-tale retellings. Many contemporary adaptations are not only written by women, but also revise gender roles and give women a more active part to play. (2004: 29)[11]

Jack Zipes, as one of the most prominent specialists in fairytale scholarship, also stresses the fact that

[11] See also Hourihan 203-206.

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[a]s children, we all hear fairy tales and read our lives into them. But we also want to see and realize our lives as virtual fairy tales even as we grow older. We never abandon fairy tales. So it is not by chance that the fairy-tale film has become the most popular cultural commodity in America, if not in the world. (1997: 1)

Fairy tales, therefore, have been put under close scrutiny by many a critic. They have been mainly criticised, as Joosen suggests, for often portraying women negatively, often attributing them passive roles, as opposed to active ones for men, for instance.[12] When approached from a revisionist angle also based upon the notion of respect which I am interested in, some traditional fairy tales have been used and challenged by critics in order point out the inadequacies that they display. In that context, the purpose of childist criticism is twofold. Firstly, it wishes to stress the importance of revisionism in the domains of children's literature studies, and secondly, it wishes to make sure this happens through a pedagogical methodology within which the presence of the child is necessary. Therefore, childist criticism is not only interested in what revisionist critics have to say, but also in the possibilities that their arguments suggest and seek in terms of pedagogical practices. In this context, childist criticism could try to help to re-shift these arguments towards the child, if necessary (this being what Mary Galbraith sees as lacking in some children's literature critics' approaches to critical literacy). Margery Hourihan writes, for instance, that

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[12] For a very precise and developed analysis – not limited to fairy tales only – see Hourihan 156-202 where she deals with the portrayal of women in a great variety of books for children.

if the traditional patriarchal values of Western culture are to be modified to allow the development of more genuinely humane attitudes we need different hero stories, stories which do not assert the natural mastery of the European patriarchy over all other living things. (1997: 203)

Here is a clear example of what revisionist critics wish to do. Childist criticism could start from such statements, statements which are concerned with respect towards marginalised or repressed groups, and wishes to make sure that what critics like Hourihan have in mind happens through a pedagogical methodology centred around the child. Childist criticism wishes revisionism to include the child.

Fairy-tale criticism has very much insisted on the importance of revisionism, but is not the only domain to do so. In an article published as part of a collection of essays entitled *Lesbian and Gay Studies and the Teaching of English – Positions, Pedagogies, and Cultural Politics* (2000), a collection which engages with the teaching of English and the importance of gay and lesbian theories in the domain of critical pedagogy, Debbie Epstein observes an English classroom and comments on the gender relations that it displays. Her observations lead her to argue that children's understandings of gender-roles are often very much influenced by heterosexual hegemonic norms dictated by most of what surrounds us in our Western societies.[13] She writes, for instance, that

[t]he involvement of [the children] in games, in which both heterosexuality and gender were heavily marked, took place in ways that reinforced the

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[13] See also Angela Ridley's essay "'It's Not the Same as the Real World' – Boys, Girls and Gender" (1995)

hegemonic gender order: macho men and cuddly, caring women were enacted through the conduct of "kiss, cuddle, torture." (2000: 230)

Therefore, what is at stake, in Epstein's article, is a reconsideration – revision – of these hegemonic gender (mis-)representations that she finds at the heart of the children's behaviours. She wishes, for instance, to know why '[t]he way that motherhood is made to signify heterosexuality [is] difficult to shift, especially in whole-class discussions of the "alternative" texts provided by [the teacher] [...]' (2000: 230-231). Similarly, Angela Ridley's comments lead her to similar questions when she notes that, as she also works with some primary school children,

> [t]he children's notions of masculine and feminine were very strong. Women were placed in domestic settings and portrayed as rather frivolous creatures who could be won over with a box of chocolates and a bunch of flowers. They were also seen as being dependent on men, to whom they were nothing but trouble. In contrast to this, men were portrayed as much more active and outgoing, with many diverse interests. (1995: 173)

Let us see how Epstein's observations can be read alongside childist criticism. As she elaborates her argument, she refers to some of the methods used by the teacher to communicate alternative and counter-hegemonic views on gender and sexuality, hence wishing to normalise gay and lesbian cultures. The way the teacher tries to encourage his pupils to discuss and engage with certain aspects of sexuality and gender, as well as the way he invites them to re-consider their own conceptions of gender-roles, for instance, seems to correspond, in its essence, to the way childist criticism would operate, that is, as something based on a horizontal approach to teaching. Focusing on a few examples in

Epstein's and Ridley's essays, we can see some of the principles of childist criticism. In doing so, I just want to define the practical conditions of possibility of a childist criticism of books written for children. In that sense, my argument does not wish to engage with the content of Epstein's argument, for instance, but more with the pedagogical framework which the teacher she observes puts forward as he uses counter-hegemonic texts written for children.

Debbie Epstein's example is based on *Asha's Mums*, by Canadian writers Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paulse. She summarises the book:

> *Asha's Mums* tells the story of a little girl who is required to get the permission of her parents to go on a class outing to the Science Museum. When she brings the permission note back to school signed by two women, the teacher says that no one can have two mothers and that permission must be given in a note signed by Asha's mother *and* father. The next day, both her mothers visit the teacher to explain their familial situation, and Asha is allowed to visit the Science Museum. Along the way, there is a discussion amongst the children in Asha's class about whether or not it is possible to have two mothers. (2000: 223-224)

The teacher uses that book to stimulate discussion amongst his own pupils, and asks them why they think that Asha has two mums (2000: 224) and if they think that this is possible and/or normal (2000: 225). As he asks these pertinent and somewhat puzzling questions – as far as the children's heterosexual understanding of gender is concerned – he never imposes his views on the children. All he does is *stimulate* discussion amongst them. This, as we have seen before, corresponds to the way Paulo Freire also approaches education; education as a praxis that sees both the educator and the one that is educated

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on the same level, that is a horizontal level. This also reminds us of the way Polish pedagogue Janusz Korczak wished to engage children in educational practices. As Korczak's pedagogical method started from what children produced, the gay teacher observed by Epstein starts from his pupils' knowledge to then try to engage their knowledge into wider debates (see Koren 2001: 245). Childist criticism, following such methods, suggests that what the teacher wishes to discuss with his pupils really engages their subjectivity.

This approach is somewhat similar to the way Nikki Gamble writes about critical literacy when she says that '[c]ritical literacy aims to enable readers to understand the subjective positions from which they make sense of the word and to identify the subjectivity in the texts that they read.' (2004: 756) Childist criticism, in this sense, insists on the necessity of creating a pedagogy that enables children to understand their subjective positions. It also insists on the necessity of engaging them in reflections about the notion of respect. Therefore, not only does childist criticism wish to make sure that children understand their own subjective positions, but it also wishes to make sure that children try to understand other people's subject positions. A childist pedagogy sets to invite children to reflect on what constitutes their knowledge, and this is something, I believe, that can only happen as children adopt subject positions different from their own. In order to make sure that boys truly respect girls, for instance, I believe that boys should try to know what it is like to be a girl. This is something I commented on when I quoted from Andy Kempe's article on drama. We saw that Kempe argued that drama is a very effective pedagogical tool in that it enables children to take on different roles and subject positions (2000: 68). Childist criticism is very much concerned with this

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dramatic possibility of taking on different subject positions. Respect, I think, can only truly happen as one goes beyond one's subjectivity and discovers alterity. And literature, like drama, as Jean-Jacques Lecercle argues throughout his *L'Emprise des signes – débat sur l'expérience littéraire*, is a way to take on different subject position. This is why using books written for children as part of a pedagogy based on childist criticism is one way of enabling children to become aware of what the notion of alterity constitutes, and how they can engage with it in a critical way.

This is further exemplified when the teacher moves on to another – but related – exercise. He asks his pupils to write down facts about women and men. As the teacher goes around the classroom to see what the children have written down, one of them says that '[g]irls can marry, girls can't get married to girls.' And just after the teacher tells them that '[i]t's true that girls can't get married to girls because of the law, but girls can fall in love and live together [...]' another child comments: 'I know a man, I think it's disgusting' (Epstein 2000: 228). The teacher's reaction to that child's comment is, I think very interesting. Indeed, as he is gay himself, he tells his pupil: '[w]ell, I'm gay and I'm not disgusting' (*ibid.*). The dynamics created by such a pedagogical reaction invite the children to contrast their prejudiced conceptions of gender and sexuality with what immediately surrounds them. The pedagogical event initiated by the teacher invites the children to reflect on what used to be abstract – and which perpetuated the heteronormative discourses that the society they live in mostly dictates and imposes upon them – and makes them question their (pre-) conceptions in concrete terms. Ridley uses a similar method as she asks her pupils to fill in questionnaires about some of the texts they have read as part of a classroom exercise. Based on the texts they have used,

she asks them to write about 'Earth Women [and] Earth Men [because] the inhabitants of another planet were interested to find out more about Earthlings' (Ridley 1995: 172). As she realises that their answers were strongly influenced by the heteronormative and sexist discourses that surround them (for instance, the questionnaire showed that men love going down to the pub, work in offices, and are thought to be happy with items such as books, football, or tools, whereas women would like flowers and chocolates, and are described as loving shopping, buying clothes, and spend most of their time doing domestic tasks (*ibid.*)), she wishes to engage children in critical discussions to reflect on the 'stereotypical notions [that] are continually being offered to them' (Ridley 1995: 175). From the way they write the world, she wants them to question *themselves*, and it is the fact that children are encouraged to question themselves that childist criticism is concerned with.

This is somewhat similar to what Barbara Comber suggests in an article on early childhood literacy when she writes that one of the teachers she observed 'invited [her pupils] to interrogate, to examine [...] their own knowledge' (2003: 362). As part of a classroom exercise, for instance, the teacher also asked her pupils to consider contrasting versions of the Hansel and Gretel story. She asked the pupils to 'draw the woman as you think [the illustrator] will draw her. Show her face and her clothes. Use a speech bubble to show what she says' (*ibid.*). And she also asked them to do the same with the man. Comber comments that,

> [i]n this way [the teacher] mobilized children's existing cultural knowledge about representations of women and men in texts. The commonalities between children's predictions became the object of [discussion]. [The

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teacher] attempted to increase children's awareness of the ways in which their reading practices were constructed. (2003: 362)

Using a similar method to that of Lissa Paul with which I dealt earlier, the teacher wishes her pupils to engage with the texts they read using question such as

> Who are the important people [...]?
> How do they behave?
> What kinds of words does the writer/illustrator think you should know [...]?
> Who are the unimportant people?
> How can you tell they are less/more important for the writer/illustrator?
> How does this compare with your experience? (2003: 362)

The fact that the children are encouraged to reflect on their own experience is crucial to the notion of childist criticism. Childist criticism is based upon what permeates the pedagogical methodology that the gay teacher uses with his pupils, as well as that of Angela Ridley when she asks hers to question their own writing and knowledge. As both of them do not *colonise*, but just question, the children's beliefs, they manage to give a more concrete shape to the children's understanding of their representations of reality. By adopting an opposite method of teaching to that of the banking system Paulo Freire criticises in his *Pedagogy cf the Oppressed* (1972: 52-67), the teachers are more successful. Debbie Epstein concludes her article saying that

> the impact of [the teacher's] attempts to shift the master narrative and rewrite the myths of family and of happy heterosexuality [despite the fact that heterosexual norms were still dominant amongst his pupils] should

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not be underestimated. Some of the girls in his class were able to articulate opinions about homophobia and heterosexism, even if they could not name them as such, and even for the boys he offered alternative ways of being masculine, thereby disrupting the heterosexual matrix which insists on fixed notions of gender. (2000: 231)

Childist criticism would insist on the necessity to believe in children's capacities of engaging with and changing the world. This idea is partly present in Ridley's article when she writes that we should all be critical towards the world we live in because '[l]iving as we do in a society which encourages conformity, it is perhaps natural that the children would want to create characters in their own writing which fitted in with everything they had met with previously' (1995: 175). She also says that '[t]he children continued to be confined by accepted norms and did not feel able to challenge them' (1995: 177). Childist criticism, following such statements, suggests that children should be encouraged to believe in their ability to criticise and shape the world differently. This, I believe, can only truly happen if the adult acknowledges and focuses on the child's critical abilities. Discussing gender relations with their pupils, the gay teacher and Angela Ridley quickly realised that children do have the power to alter sexist misrepresentations, at least as part of classroom practices. Ridley's pupils, for instance,

> demonstrated an acute awareness of the projection of stereotypical images by television and other media, and to varying degrees resisted these images. [...] [Therefore, we] must encourage children to take their own stances, and to write in their own voice. (1995: 182-183)

Also, as Comber notes, critics interested in critical pedagogy 'know that [children] can deal with questions of fairness and justice. However there is a great deal more that needs to be explored.' (2003: 364) As children become aware of the power they have to challenge what surrounds them, I also believe that they should be encouraged to take their critical reflections outside the classroom. They should be encouraged to change the world and disrupt what they think is not respectful. For this to be possible, I would say that the adult – outside the classroom – should listen to the child and what he or she has to say. Because the classroom can be, I believe, a particularly adequate *site of challenge*, teachers should insist on their pupils' critical abilities and insist that their voice is not only audible in the classroom, but also outside. In that sense, an essential part of childist criticism is the teaching of respect as something that is necessarily *reciprocal*. It is respect not only towards the adult, but also towards the child. The child should become aware of his or her place in society, a place that is as important as that of the adult. In that sense, not only should the adult try to disrupt the controlled-controller binary I dealt with earlier, but also the child. Not only should the adult childist critic fight for children's rights, but the child should as well. Childist criticism tells the child to be aware of his or her place in society, a place from where he or she is entitled to express his or her subjectivity *freely*.

The world children live in is a world where the adult shapes most of what constitutes their cultures. Referring to Roland Barthes's essay on toys, we can see that what mainly constitutes the cultures of childhood is strongly shaped and influenced by adulthood. Because the child is constantly silenced, most of his or her experiences depend on what the adult allows him or her to do. Childist criticism, in this sense, is part of the counter-

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hegemonic principles that Epstein puts forward as she engages with the study of English from a gay and lesbian perspective. It is noticeable that counter-hegemonic practices are more easily achieved in places where one is allowed – and encouraged – to challenge norms (see Ridley 1995: 183). Universities and schools can be ideal counter-hegemonic sites,[14] simply because they are places where one is often asked to think and engage with what constitutes the 'natural' that Ridley comments on and which, we also saw, is at the heart of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*. Just think of the importance and the development of feminist theories, Marxist theories, gay and lesbian theories, post-colonial theories in the academy. Such theoretical movements engage with the *taken-for-granteds*, the *obviousnesses*, and the silences that condemn certain groups of people. Childist criticism follows such critical movements and it insists on the necessity to make the child's voice heard as part of these movements. Childist criticism, because it is based on the notion of respect, can only happen as part of a wider counter-hegemonic pedagogical framework which itself challenges, as far as most of what constitutes the normative discourses of most of Western societies is concerned, the dominance of the white-heterosexual-male figure. Childist criticism, I wish to argue, is an essential component in such a counter-hegemonic struggle which wishes to transform the world and make it an equitable place for everyone. Therefore, not only will childist criticism test the dominance of the white-heterosexual-male figure but, more precisely, the white-heterosexual-male-adult figure. Respect is not only for gay, lesbian, black, physically-disabled people, to name a few

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[14] At least from a theoretical point of view; see Jacques Derrida's *L'Université sans condition* (2001) where he approaches the role and place of universities from a philosophical point of view.

groups that often suffer from marginalisation, but also for children. Therefore, when Genny Ballard writes, in her Ph.D. dissertation on the implied reader in the Hispanic Children's literature of the "Encuento" series, comparing childist criticism to feminist criticism, that "[o]ne difference between "childist" and "feminist" theory [...] is that children cannot achieve equal status in society (nor should they), yet equality is in fact the goal of feminism" (2005: 25), I would suggest that practically she might be right, but theoretically she is not. This *aporia* between the practical and the theoretical needs challenging: infinite and constant challenging. In the same way as equality between adults will – probably – never be obtained, due to differences of opinions about what equality means, the differences between adults and children need to be assessed and constantly re-assessed. After all, all human beings are equal and should therefore be treated as such. And even though, as Laura Robinson writes in her "Poststructuralism and "The Child"", "the adults are still the ones offering the space, stepping aside with a flourish of *noblesse oblige*" (2008), it does not matter that much, I would say. All that matters is that it happens, or, at least, can happen.

All in all, what is to come, after all this, I am uncertain about. A future which will bring us its uncertainties, its surprises, and, perhaps, its deceptions too. A future which I cannot foresee. A future to come. *Un avenir... un futur à venir...*

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A note on Primary Sources and Secondary Sources

The books listed below, as part of the Primary Sources, are not all referred to in the thesis. Nevertheless, I found it important to list some of the books for children I read as I wrote this thesis. They have influenced my thinking in the sense that they helped me understand more clearly the points developed by the critics whose work I used to develop my childist argument.

Regarding the texts written by children part of this bibliography, they also helped me, implicitly as well, give shape to some of my theoretical concerns.

Similarly, as regards the secondary sources in this bibliography, not all the texts listed are referred to in the thesis, especially the more political texts. Despites not being referred to in the thesis, many of these texts helped me as I approached the notions of cultural respect and individuality. Some of the political ideas which one might think of when reading my childist argument are partly to be found, more explicitly perhaps, in some of the texts dealing with critical pedagogy.

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