



Children's Literature is probably is the most exciting and vibrant of all literary studies. Its wide range of texts; novels, picture books, oral forms, multimedia and internet present a huge challenge. It has different purposes and can be studied for many reasons. It is important because it is embodied in our cultural, educational and social thinking. It is also crucial for our understanding of literary and personal development.

- **There are many questions that we should ask about CL;**
- **How do children understand texts? What meanings do they get from them? How does this meaning differs from a child to an adult?**
- **Should CL be for instruction or delight ? CL is inevitably an oxymoron.**

The role of adults in reading and mediating children's books has to be examined in terms of motivation, ideology, and manipulation, or idealizing of childhood. Ideas of childhood motivate writers and determine both the form and content, influence the way we interpret, judge, analyze and use texts whether we are interested in texts, children or both.

Adults are interested in CL for many reasons; as a relief it is a rest from the rigors of adult studies, and their image is based on nostalgia or wishful thinking; CL is nice, they take us back to the golden world which we might want to share with our children and grandchildren; Books that people enjoyed when they were children have a very personal value and meaning, and there is always urge to revisit them; Lastly, they are an escape either from a painful childhood or from the stress of adulthood.

The relationship between C's books and childhood is far from being simple. Even the bright world of "Winnie the Pooh" carries the author's traumatic experience of the First World War.

C's books do not portray childhood as it was or is, but portray childhood as the writers wished it to be for political, sociological or dramatic reasons. Children's books say a great deal to adults about their relationship to childhood or about the concept of childhood at a particular period rather than portraying the actual one.

Children's books, adults and children; the issue of power

They are about power and power struggle. Adults write and children read, this means that adults are exerting power, and children are either manipulated or resisting manipulation. Children are inactive receivers . C's books do not belong to them, but they are aimed at them. Even the most friendly book adopts implicit attitudes. It is assumed that those who write for children are persons of good will. The difficulty is in establishing the nature of good, and are these books for entertainment or instruction?

Any comments made by critics must serve adults first, because they decide what the text means and what childhood should be. 99.9 percent of C's books are written by adults who have agenda. Even those who claim to be entertaining have their ideas and ideologies about seeing the world, and what is wrong and what is right. The world that these writers depict is an imagined and constructed, it is based on what is left or remote, memories of the past, or their imagination.

Peter Hunt deeply argues that CL is deeply concerned with issues of power and politics, and that adults impose consciously or not their own particular ideologies on children. For example, the Christian allegory in Lewis's Narnia. CL is never politically or ideologically neutral. Ideology is not a set of political values but an entire world view that permeates C's books for the very young whether there are two parents or not in the picture, the character's ethnic background or the type of house they live in is based on ideological decisions made by the author or the illustrator. So, we need to analyze the ideological meanings of the text.

Some books are considered unsuitable for children because they challenge particular ideologies especially the notion that childhood is apolitical and asexual time of life that must be protected by adults. Therefore, all CL is ideological and based on implicit or explicit attitudes, assumptions and world views. It is impossible to deal fully with CL without looking at questions of ideology. Ideology is closely related to ideas about power. The adult-child relationship is not equal, it is adults who produce , write and buy books for children. However, they are less successful at determining what messages children take from them . The issue of power and ideology are not straightforward. There are many competing ideologies around childhood, the role and status of children, and the purpose of literature for them.

How should we deal with CL?

Assumption 1 ; CL is simple and innocent

It is not simple or innocent. It is a complex, active social system. 100 percent children owned and operated book is an impossibility. What looks like innocent is in reality intrusive, controlling and sinister. Dealing with literature involves responsibility. What looks trivial in the first sight might be very powerful. CL is full of different ideologies; female repression, male exploitation, sexism, class distinction, horror, and so on . So, what goes into children's minds is our responsibility just as what goes into their stomachs.

Common Objection ; children will not see all these hidden meanings.

Assumption 2; children are like a shellfish, live among unsavory things but filter them out, this is a wishful thinking. Stories are so powerful. We should make pragmatic guesses about what a child can understand or what is irrelevant to the child and thus must be ignored.

Assumption 3; we will read the same thing from a test, same images, same allusions. This is difficult to imagine among adults from the same class, same generation and the same country.

Should literature instruct or delight?

Examples of CL with topical or ideologically motivated causes; the abolition of slavery “ Uncle Tom's Cabin”, the improvement of the lives of chimney sweeps “The Water Babies” , or normalizing homosexuality “Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin”, where the child is living with gay parents. These books contain a strong ideological stance which is meant to introduce children to a particular vision of the world. There is also a long tradition of adults trying to restrict access to particular books for children that include witchcraft like “ Harry Potter” series.

Reading a text for children is twice complicated. When we read a peer text , we read it in two ways. First, we adopt the role of implied reader. Second, more analytically to discuss it with others. But when we read children's books we first read it as an adult, ignoring the implied readership. Second, as a child, accepting the implied readership. Thirdly, we read it analytically to discuss it with others (critic). Fourthly, we read it to see if it is suitable for the child, we read it on behalf of a child (judge).

The problem of literature, quality and value, good and good.

In discussing literature, there are two fundamental views; 1- there are absolute standards of quality and goodness. These are generally undefined, but perceived by the elite, the cultured and the gifted. 2- it values everything that fit for purposes. These are called the relativists. Every book is suitable for its purposes. Mozart wrote a good music of its kind, the Beatles wrote a good music of its kind. Therefore, to say that C's books are inferior to adults books is dangerous, because this inferior will not be taught , taken or analyzed seriously, and this can cause serious multiple confusions in the education system. Shakespeare at school, and Jackie Wilson at home should be seen as doing different things, not that one is superior to the other, both are leading their readers into different aspects of culture. We cannot decide what is meant by good because it is abstract.

Some case studies of children literature.

Many books that are well known as CL cross over between children and adults. The important question to ask: are C's books designed for the needs and the abilities of the child-reader? Actually no because the adults make them so. Hunt suggests that many books are advertised and sold to children are , in fact, either written for adults or for both audiences in mind. Some books can be read by both like "Northern Lights". Some deal with adults' preoccupations from the adults' viewpoint, the implied reader is not the child, this cannot be assumed as a child book " Five Minutes Peace". Many books which meant to be for children for generations are in fact aimed at the two audiences "Winnie the Pooh". Hunt argues that the real children's books are the ones read only by children, do not have anything to say to adults, and therefore are not subject to adult judgment.

Defining CL

The best literature for children has three elements; literature, children and for-ness. The term literature is constantly changing. It has become inclusive of oral and written texts, canonical, general, respectable and popular texts. For-ness is also slippery , do we exclude books that we addressed to adults? Do we include books with adult themes? Do we include books that instruct or delight? Do we include books that deal with the fantastic or the real? Which of these books are good for children?

Children and childhood mean different things to different groups. The idea of childhood change over time , place, politics and commercialism. It even vary from a family to another. It is important to realize that the concepts of childhood held by writers determine what appears in a text rather than the real childhood. It is different to decide whether we can exclude C's books and films that are aimed at both audiences, but most histories of C's L suggest that these books were initially educational in purpose with delight, and this is the best for children. Rousseau said "nature wants children to be children before they are men." Another obvious way to decide what constitutes C's texts is looking at the content. Many things should not appear in their books; sexuality, murder, rape' racist, incest, drugs religious ideologies and so on.

But we still have the problem of what the child understands as the process vary individually, what terrifies one child might be comic to another, or completely ignored. Therefore, CL is a complex field, traversed by literary critics, commercial marketers and committed parents. Its audience is different with unknowable responses. It also has a wide range of texts with different purposes.



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