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***Barnlitteraturanalyser* [Analyses of Children's Literature]**

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Reviewed by B Epstein

Call for Papers – next edition 1st April 2010

Editorial

What do you do when you spot a gap? You take the initiative and fill it. That is precisely what we did when we realised the academic journals that combined research on writing for children with research on children's literature were very thin on the ground. And since critically creative and creatively critical ideas on writing, and indeed, ideas on reflexive practice were now being engaged with in educational institutions all over the world, filling this gap came from a need to provide a forum where further academic scrutiny and debate could place. So welcome to our first edition of *Write4Children: The International Journal for the Practice and Theories of Writing for Children and Children's Literature*.

Our aim for this ground breaking scholastic venture is to produce an e-journal that provides a forum for critical and creative debate and discussion that acts as an accessible resource for academics, tutors, writers, practitioners, librarians and students alike. With the support of the University of Winchester's Research Informed Teaching initiative, we have set up the first journal of its type in the world. This follows in the footsteps of the highly successful MA Writing for Children, here at the University, which was also the first of its kind back in the mid 1990s.

It was our intention to locate at the centre of journal the needs of students; researchers; practitioners (writers); tutors and academics working within the field, anticipating that the intellection exploration of writing for children and children's literature will strengthen the provision of an educational environment in which students, academics and indeed the wider writing for children audience can feel challenged and supported. We see the e-journal as providing an international forum for better academic and pedagogic research whilst promoting best practice and academic research in advancing debates, including those on controversial issues in writing for children and children's literature such as: race, gender, sexuality, drug culture, sex education et al. It has the potential to be an exceptional resource with cross-links and hyper-links to other material and debating forums (join our Facebook Group) which aims to explore the diversity of writing for children and children's literature. We believe that the published research, informed by a notion of 'global learning and research communities' will expand the international focus of writing for children and children's literature just at a time when the world becomes smaller through e-learning and e-reading. Of course, this is all dependent on our readers and contributors because all we are doing is facilitating their work.

Using a lot of the contacts and conference visits we all establish in our working lives, a formidable international editorial board of leading members of both the creative writing and children's literature establishment. The editorial board is:

Tony Bradman
Children's Author

Prof Graeme Harper
University of Bangor

Prof Peter Hunt
Cardiff University

Prof Jeri Kroll
Finders University

Prof Maria Nikolajeva
Cambridge University

Prof Kim Reynolds
University of Newcastle

Prof Michael Rosen
Birkbeck, University of London

Prof David Rudd
University of Bolton

The eclectic editorial board and mix of articles in the first edition of the e-journal highlight how even though the e-journal has an academic basis it is likely to be a resource useful to many practitioners.

Even though we were determined to develop its international connections we decided to stay close to home for the design and illustrations. The website design was undertaken in-house by Chloe Battle of the University's marketing department whilst the water colour illustrations were supplied by another University of Winchester research student, (now Dr) Karenanne Knight, ensuring an eye catching, user-friendly e-journal.

Write4Children

It is anticipated that the e-journal will enhance the development of a research-informed and informing environment that stimulates the knowledge of writing for children and children's literature to all levels of students learning in higher education across the world. In particular, we hope it will embed research-informed teaching and research in the realm of writing for children and children's literature by allowing the curriculum to be kept up to date and active, whilst encouraging professional and pedagogic development thus ensuring teaching is informed and enriched by research. The e-journal offers a platform for debate on both critical and creative practice-led research in all aspects of children's literature and at all levels.

We hope too that the e-journal continues to grow at its current rate and opens the world of research into writing for children and children's literature to all to promote the importance of the relationship between the two subject areas. When asked where we are going next with the project, we replied: 'A book, a conference maybe....watch this space...'In the meantime - we hope you enjoy the first edition!

Andrew Melrose and Vanessa Harbour
Editors

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Reading Children's Literature and Writing for Children

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Abstract

Writing for children is more difficult than writing for adults, and reading published children's literature is extremely useful for developing our own writing techniques, for discovering what sort of writers we are, and what sort of writers we are not. This paper examines three ways in which writers for children can learn from how the masters/mistresses of the past did it: avoiding 'mechanical' pitfalls (the 'he walked through the door' syndrome); choosing the appropriate mode of address and tone of voice; and choosing the best devices to narrate speech and thought.

Key Words

children's literature, narrative, address, tone, reading, technique, speech and thought

*

If imagination cannot be taught, the craft of writing can. Andrew Motion (Kemp, 1997: 274)

What narks me tremendously is people who pretend they're writing for children and they're really writing to get laughs from adults. There are too many of those about. Roald Dahl (Wintle and Fisher, 1974: 10)

All writers are thieves; theft is a necessary tool of the trade. Nina Bawden (Kemp, 1997: 168)

The real trouble about writing for children, Ursula K. Le Guin once observed, is the 'adult chauvinist piggery.'

'It must be so relaxing to write *simple* things for a change.'

Sure it's simple, writing for kids. Just as simple as bringing them up. (1992: 49)

Writing for children *is* more difficult than writing for adults, just as reading children's books (for adults) is much more difficult than reading adults' books. Somewhere in the equation is a child, or the idea of a child, or a group of children, or some amorphous mass defined as children, or a specific childhood, or our idea of childhood, or the culture's idea of childhood, or the publisher's idea of childhood. Then there is our relationship with these various childhoods, and our motives and our needs and *their* needs...

All of these things have to be reflected in what we choose to write, and how we write it. It's a complex business, and as with any skill and craft, good intentions and genius will only take us so far. Like every apprentice, the writer for children needs to learn from how the masters/mistresses of the past did it, and to measure what we want to do against what *they* wanted to do.

My argument is that reading published children's literature is extremely useful for developing our own writing techniques, for discovering what sort of writers we are, and what sort of writers we are *not* - and, of course, to save us re-inventing the wheel (if we have this great story about a Hobbit and a ring, it might just be useful to know that someone has got there before!). And so the whole of children's literature should be an object-lesson as well as an inspiration to us.

In this paper, I would like to look at just three of the many ways in which the habit of dipping into past children's books (in a spirit of enquiry, rather than plagiarism, of course) might help us to be more effective writers. As T. S. Eliot said, 'It's not wise to violate the rules until you know how to observe them' (Winokur, 1986: 91).

1. There's an old adage that to become a better writer, one first has to become a better *reader*, and by doing so to recognise 'mechanical' pitfalls - what I might call 'he walked through the door' syndrome.
2. What mode of address - what tone of voice - is appropriate to what we are writing? What choices are there?
3. When we come to narrate speech and thought, what devices can we use?

And, finally, I would like to include an example of what I regard as accomplished writing - partly for my own pleasure, but also to show you what my yardstick is. I think that this is important because all writing - *not* especially writing for children - requires a good understanding between reader and writer, and so it might be useful to begin with a look at where you are coming from, and where I am coming from.

In my experience, there are four types of creative writers, and if you can identify to which type(s) you belong, then some of you may be saved the trouble of reading the rest of this paper! The first two types are, shall we say, less inclined to consult authors from the past than the second two,

The first type of creative writer consists of those people who write for therapy; they are, in fact, writing for themselves first (and often last), and I suspect that many creative-writing teachers, while no doubt sympathetic, feel that perhaps specialist therapies might be more effective. But the fact that these writers have chosen to write 'for children' means that they are joining a long literary tradition, and they might well find it useful to read the work of fellow-souls from the past. These include (and some critics would argue that the list could include 80% of children's writers) Enid Blyton, Kenneth Grahame, J. M. Barrie, and, of course, Lewis Carroll. As Victor Watson put it, Carroll established new possibilities for children's books. He showed how they could be made into an imaginative space for writing about the dynamics that exist when adults and children engage with one another - dynamics that might be complex, loving, intimate or problematical, but were no longer just authoritarian. He demonstrated how a children's story could become a celebratory utterance of greeting, farewell, or longing. Since that time, many of the greatest children's books have had about them a touch of the valedictory. (Watson, 1992 :8)

The fact that a large number of readers and critics have found this type of writing sinister, exploitative, violating, and generally undesirable might give writers of this type pause. Or they could read the White Knight's farewell to Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871, Chapter 8) to see just how subtle and touching and sad such self-therapeutic writing can be.

Then there is what might be called, in adult creative writing, the 'must write or die' syndrome, where there is something that the writers *have* to say: creation is at work, and it will out! To this type of writer, as with the therapees, how people have said things in the past is really irrelevant - but (again) for the fact that they are choosing to write *for children*. This, inevitably brings in questions of audience, and those questions in turn bring in questions of technique. The chances are, however, that these writers are writing (explicitly or not) for specific children - or for a group of children that they have in their eye. These writers might find it helpful to look at others, simply because the good children's book comes from a respectful mutual negotiation of the ground between adult and child, taking into account needs and understandings, so that the negotiation can be quite precise. And that requires a knowledge of technique.

The third and fourth types of writer are those for whom children's literature provides an essential resource.

The third type of writer might take up C. S. Lewis's 'third way of writing for children' as a mantra, for Lewis, this type of writing, the only one I could ever use myself, consists in writing a children's story because a children's story is the best art-form for something you have to say: just as a composer might write a Dead March not because there was a public funeral in view but because certain musical ideas that had occurred to him went best into that form. (Lewis, 1966: 23)

Now the audience is more general: certain assumptions are made about abilities and knowledge of the audience - just as they are about every book and every act of communication - and so there are clearly certain skills we might learn, and pitfalls we can avoid, by looking at past practitioners. (If you are in this group, your reading of other people's children's books may well have led you to the 'I can do better than that' syndrome. Or despair.)

And the fourth type of creative writer is the practical writer who wants to write for children because it looks like a good market - and wants to read published books to find out how it was done, and how it can be done. Here, imitation of style and technique is the sincerest form of practicality - and there are plenty of writing manuals that recommend immersing yourself in other people's works and plenty of writers who say that that is how they got started. Reading children's literature can help you aim for specific markets, if necessary to aim your style at the lowest common denominator, raise your cliché-density, and so on. As the 'how to succeed' manuals say, read widely in the genres you are aiming at, and you may be soon efficiently and successfully writing books that bring excitement and happiness to their audience. You will be adept at phrases like 'before they knew it', 'she had not gone far before', 'everybody roared with laughter' and 'the door had to lead somewhere!' I can only say, with genuine humility and envy that I admire your skill: but that kind of writing does not interest me (as a writer).

The type of writer I am really addressing is the third type - and I have to admit that this is not necessarily a popular choice. I have worked on both undergraduate and postgraduate creative-writing courses, despite that fact that I am the kind of intensely private writer who thinks that even telling someone else about what you are writing will break the spell. Consequently, I fear that I was not (correction: I was *not*) entirely flavour of the month with my colleagues when I offered incoming students quotations such as:

Unless you think you can do better than Tolstoy, we don't need you. - *James Michener* (Winokur, 1986: 95)

Many people who want to be writers don't really want to be writers, they want to *have been* writers. They want to have written a book. - *James Michener*. (Winokur, 1986: 5)

The true function of a writer is to produce a masterpiece and ... no other task is of any consequence. - *Cyril Connolly* (Winokur, 1986: 3)

We cannot, they said, all be great writers. The answer to that is, I think, why not? At least we can *try* to be the best: as Anthony Hope Hawkins, author of *The Prisoner of Zenda* (and Kenneth Grahame's gravestone) said, 'Unless one is a genius, it is best to aim at being intelligible' (Winokur, 1986: 19) - or, as Philip Pullman said: 'For me, prose should be a plain glass window, and not a fanciful mirror - not that you need make it so workmanlike that it's drab' (Carter, 1999: 184).

Let us see what kinds of things we can gain from reading children's literature.

If you read well, you may find yourself noticing things that you yourself might not like to have written. For example:

She took the mother's hand, and they ran across the road.

That doesn't bear thinking about too closely: all that blood. Nor does

...he woke up with a jerk

(answer: either he shouldn't have gone to bed with one, *or*, we do not want to know about his personal habits). Unfair? And what about my favourite (and there's a lot of competition - although I have cheated, as this is from an adults' novel):

She kissed him fervently on the eyes, first one, then the other...

(Try doing it some other way?).

Or if you're reading poetry, you might expect it to scan (if it apparently sets out to do so) - or maybe you wouldn't - after all, who cares, it's just for kids: any old junk will do:

Pets are the Hobby of my brother Bert,
He used to go to school with a Mouse in his shirt.
His Hobby it grew, as some hobbies will,
And grew and *grew* and GREW until -

(Of the remaining 24 lines of that 'poem', only four scan, which may be a record - but there is a lot of this sort of thing about in the world of children's poetry, where contempt, as Jan Mark once put it, for the poor little bastards is rife.)

Of course, it is not just the unskilled, ludicrous, or shoddy that one might look out for. There is the lack of freshness:

[She] felt a thrill of fear. There was only one thing this could mean

or

And so [she] found herself walking through the wood arm in arm with this strange creature as if they had known one another all their lives. They had not gone far...

Obviously some balance has to be struck between language which is predictable (and therefore easy to absorb, or, for other readers, boring), and language that is so *unpredictable* that it is incomprehensible or demands a disproportionate amount of de-coding. But reading widely can stop you falling into those traps. (Incidentally, if you were wondering where the previous six extracts were from, they were perpetrated by Enid Blyton, Michelle Magorian, D. H. Lawrence, Ted Hughes, Philip Pullman, and C. S. Lewis. Even the mightiest can nod.)

And so if *awareness* is one thing we can learn from (re-) reading the past, what else can be learned?

Perhaps the most important is the mode of address, or tone of voice that can be taken in children's books. Historically, until the mid nineteenth century, children's books were (generally) seen as instruments of education, where the adult narrator was instructing the child - that is, addressing an inferior. The same overall tone appeared in less obviously didactic fiction, with the narrator apt to punctuate the story with direct address. So, for example: from Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857):

I sometimes think that you boys of this generation are a deal tenderer fellows than we used to be. At any rate you're much more comfortable travellers, for I see every one of you with his rug or plaid, and other dodges for preserving the caloric, and most of you going in those fuzzy, dusty, padded first-class carriages. It was another affair altogether, a dark ride on top of the Tally-ho, I can tell you... Then you knew what cold was... (Chapter 4)

Or, for girls, Mary Louisa Charlesworth's *Ministering Children* (1854):

When we see a child dressed neat and warm in her school-dress, we think she is well taken care of; but it is not always so; and sometimes the little school-girl or boy is much more hungry and faint than the child who begs his food in the streets. We cannot tell how it really is with poor children, or poor men and women, unless we visit them in their homes. (Chapter 1)

Even Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868):

Now Aunt March possessed in perfection the art of arousing the spirit of opposition in the gentlest people, and enjoyed doing it. The best of us have a piece of perversity in us, especially when we are young and in love. (Chapter 23)

And most notoriously in the opening words of Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863):

Once upon a time there was a little chimney-sweep, and his name was Tom. That is a short name, and you have heard it before, so you will not have much trouble in remembering it.

That overt attitude was more or less swept away with Lewis Carroll, whose direct address to his readers (as peers) has become the norm for the 20th and 21st centuries - although you may still come across it, especially in picture-books (and at the end of each of Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* books).

But if we now have a fairly uniform, and neutral address, disguising the inevitable presence of the adult, there are still, as Barbara Wall put it in her seminal book *The Narrator's Voice*

...three distinct ways in which writers known as writers for children address children in their stories. First, they may write as [Arthur] Ransome does, for a single audience, using single address [that is, *only to children*] ...narrators will address child narrates, overt or covert ... showing no consciousness that adults ... might read the work.

While this might seem to be the obvious way to write for children, it is much rarer than one might suppose - and is, in theory, impossible to achieve, given that adults have to be involved in the process of producing the book. A notable example is Pat Hutchins's *Rosie's Walk*, and, of course, Ransome himself. Ransome may have achieved his effects because he didn't believe in writing 'juveniles' - only in writing to audiences of fellow-enthusiasts. In *Swallows and Amazons*, the children are preparing their dinghy, and they - and the readers - are treated as slightly less-experienced equals:

John and Susan had done plenty of sailing, but there is always something to learn about a boat that you have not sailed before. They stepped the mast the wrong way round, but that was set right in a moment.

‘She doesn’t seem to have a forestay,’ said John. ‘And there isn’t a place to lead the halyard to it in the bows to make it do instead.’

‘Let me have a look’ [said Mother]. ‘These little boats often do without stays at all. Is there a cleat under the thwart where the mast is stepped?’

‘Two,’ said John, feeling. The mast fitted in a hole in the forward thwart, the seat near the bows of the boat. It had a square foot, which rested in a slot cut to fit it in the kelson. (Chapter 2)

Secondly, Barbara Wall goes on, writers might write for a *double* audience, using double address, as [J. M.] Barrie does; their narrators will address child narratees overtly and self-consciously, and will also address adults, either overtly, as the implied author’s attention shifts away from the implied child reader to a different older audience, or covertly, as the narrator deliberately exploits the ignorance of the implied child reader and attempts to entertain a implied adult reader by making jokes that are funny primarily because children will not understand them.

Peter Pan, that object-lesson in confusion, ends - or at least one of its non-dramatised manifestations, *Peter and Wendy* (1911) ends - thus, with a savage swing away from the implied child audience:

...and every spring-cleaning time, except when he forgets, Peter comes for Margaret and takes her to Neverland, where she tells him stories about himself, to which he listens eagerly. When Margaret grows up she will have a daughter, who is to be Peter’s mother in turn; and thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless.

It took A. A. Milne a little while to adjust to the problem of writing for children, as the notorious first story in *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) demonstrates:

Once upon a time, a very long time ago now, about last Friday, Winnie-the-Pooh lived in a forest all by himself under the name of Sanders.

(‘What does “under the name” mean?’ asked Christopher Robin.

‘It means he had the name over the door in gold letters and lived under it.’)

This kind of writing, which continually betrays the ostensible audience, might be seen as the worst kind of writing for children: Carroll, for all the complexity of his texts, would never have descended to this winking over the child’s shoulder (that is, in the two ‘Alice’ books). But, as Roald Dahl noted, above, there is a lot of it about - to the extent that a sad cynic might say that there are more books with a double audience than with a single audience. For example, Jill Murphy’s witty and well-observed ‘Large Family’ picture books begin (*Five Minutes’ Peace* 1986) with an adult joke, almost literally over the children’s heads: ‘The children were having breakfast. This was not a pleasant sight.’ (Type 4 readers of this article might note now many recent sentimental picture-book mega-sellers, featuring small animals, parents, bedtimes, and so on, are actually narrated from an adult viewpoint.)

Barbara Wall’s third kind of writing, and this is very much the norm, is by authors who

...write for ‘dual’ audiences ... sharing the story in a way that allows adult narrator and child narratee a conjunction of interests...(Wall, 1991: 35)

These are books - the vast majority - that acknowledge the difficulties of communicating with children, but keep faith with the need for mutual respect.

Reading past children’s literature can, then, alert us to technical/mechanical mistakes that we might prefer not to make, and also to the modes of address that are available to us. It can also give us help with the details of technique.

‘Stylistics’ is an unfashionable branch of literary studies these days, which is a pity, because it is one of the rare branches of academia that can really help developing writers. When I rule the world, every creative writing enthusiast will be issued with a copy of Katie Wales’s *A Dictionary of Stylistics*, and one of the things they will find therein is a discussion of the communication of speech and thought.

Although we rarely notice it consciously (it would seem), we can present speech in texts in several ways: directly (that is, within inverted commas), or indirectly (without inverted commas), with or without tags (‘she said’), or by report or summary. And we can do the same with thought. Some of these options are rarely used, but it is fascinating to look at the effect of different techniques: the theory is that the less tagging and the less reporting, the less the narrator has control; the more reporting, the more characters are silenced. (The supreme virtuosi of the manipulation of these techniques are probably Jane Austen and Enid Blyton.)

‘Direct Tagged Speech’ means adding ‘she said/he said’ to a line of dialogue: this is the most frequent form, and sticking to ‘said’ generally means that the tag is ‘invisible’. Here is Richmal Compton with a nice variety:

‘I think,’ said William, ‘that it’s time we did something a little more exciting than some of the things we’ve been doing lately.’

‘They seem to be exciting enough to *me!*’ retorted Ginger.

‘Oh, yes,’ admitted William, ‘they’re excitin’ in a way all right... What we want is somethin’ new.’

‘Yes,’ said Douglas sardonically, ‘some of your things are a bit too exciting for us.’ (‘William the Showman’, from *William* (1929))

A. A. Milne was also the master of ‘over-tagging’:

‘Good morning, Eeyore,’ said Pooh.

‘Good morning, Pooh Bear,’ said Eeyore gloomily. ‘If it is a good morning,’ he said. ‘Which I doubt,’ said he. (*Winnie-the-Pooh*, Chapter 6. ‘In which Eeyore has a Birthday’)

And note how that interchange progresses:

‘Why, what’s the matter?’ [untagged]

‘Nothing, Pooh Bear, nothing. We can’t all and some of us don’t. That’s all there is t it.’ [untagged]

‘Can’t all *what?*’ said Pooh, rubbing his nose. [tagged plus action]

‘Gaiety. Song-and-dance. Here we go round the mulberry bush.’ [untagged]

‘Oh!’ said Pooh. [tagged]

Direct Untagged Speech, where who said what is left out, leaves (in theory) the reader to do most of the work, and is a feature of some complex texts, notably Alan Garner’s *Red Shift*. But it can be effective in picture-books and texts for younger children. Here’s one from my own childhood, first published in 1937, and very much of the Joan Lankester Brisley *Milly-Molly-Mandy* era: *Timmy Turnpenny* (1937) by Rosalind Vallance. Note how the tags are unnecessary, even for a four-year-old reader:

One day a little boy got lost.

He sat down on the pavement and began to cry.

Along came the milkman, pushing his barrow.

‘Milko, milko,’ he cried.

He saw the little boy.

He stopped his barrow.

‘Hullo, sonny! What’s the matter?’

‘I’m lost. Boo-hoo!’

‘Lost, are you? Well, let’s see if we can find you. What’s your name?’

‘Timmy.’

‘Tommy what?’

‘Timmy nuffin’.

‘Timmy Nuffin! That’s a funny name. I never heard of a boy called

Timmy Nuffin before.;

‘I’m *not* called Timmy Nuffin. I’m Timmy nuffin’ else.’

...and so on for 26 exchanges. At which point the baker comes along, and we have a three-sided untagged conversation:

‘Hullo, Milko! Hullo, Little-un! What you crying for?’

‘He’s lost.’

‘Boo-hoo! I want my Polly! I want my Daddy!’

‘Well, stop crying, then, and tell us where your Dad lives.’

‘He says he lives in a house with a face on the door. That’s all I can get out of him’

‘How old is he, do you think?’

‘He says he’s a hundred and fifty-three. He says his name’s Timmy nuffin’ else’...

... and so on for another six exchanges until the Postman comes along ... and so on.

Then there is indirect tagged speech, as in this example from Eve Garnett’s *The Family from One End Street* (1937, Chapter 4):

‘Sure it’s lucky this time?’ he said.

The docker said yes, he thought so, *this* time, but added (with a wink at Mr Watkins) that perhaps it might be safer to sit out of sight on the floor.

Which moves into summarising speech, as in:

Old Tom told Pollyanna wonderful things of her mother, that made her very happy indeed; and Nancy told her all about the little farm six miles away at ‘The Corners’ where lived her own dear mother, and her equally dear brother and sisters. She promised, too, that sometimes, if Miss Polly were willing, Pollyanna should be taken to see them. (Eleanor Porter, *Pollyanna* (1912, Chapter 7).

While ‘direct tagged’ is the norm for speech, direct tagged thought is a little artificial: Here’s Pooh bear:

For a little while he couldn’t think of anything. Then he thought: ‘Well, it’s a very nice pot, even if there’s no honey in it...’ (*Winnie-the-Pooh*, Chapter 6)

or

‘Aha!’ thought Edmund. ‘When it springs at the dwarf then will be my chance to escape.’ (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950, Chapter 9.)

or, without quotation marks:

Harry started to remove his many layers of clothing. Where ‘chivalry’ entered into this, he thought ruefully he was not entirely sure. (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007) Chapter 19)

The most common way of conveying thought is ‘Indirect Untagged’ - sometimes known as ‘mind style’ (although, naturally, there is a good deal of debate about the finer points of definition), which often blurs what the narrator is saying, and what is going on inside the heads of the characters. Here is a random example from Blyton’s *The Ship of Adventure*:

Jack poured over the map of the islands...So that was where the legendary fleet of treasure ships went, years and years ago! They put in at the city by the sea, sailing into the port at the dead of night. How did they unload the treasure? Were there people there in the secret? Where was it put?... (1950, Chapter 13).

or from Michael Morpurgo's, *Waiting for Anya*:

As Jo went into the kitchen his suspicions were confirmed. Something was wrong. Christine was sitting silently on her mother's lap. Christine never sat on anyone's lap, and was never quiet. (1990, Chapter 7).

or from the opening of Alan Garner's, *The Stone Book* (1976)

A bottle of cold tea; bread and a half onion. That was father's baggin. Mary emptied her apron of stones from the field and wrapped the baggin in a cloth.

The hottest part of the day was on. Mother lay in bed under the rafters and the thatch, where the sun could send only blue light. She had picked stones in the field until she was too tired and had to rest.

The ways in which these variations move the focus of the writing, helping to make scenes more or less dramatic, intimate, immediate, or involving are a matter of personal choice and judgement, but reading children's literature of the past makes these devices available to the creative writer.

What we value, what we judge to be good, to be worth emulating, is intensely personal (unless we're only in it for the money!), so I would like to end by giving an example of what *I* think is masterly prose. This is from Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906), an unfashionable celebration of Englishness, but, for me, what prose writing is all about. The two children, in deepest Sussex are walking with a new friend, Hal, and Puck, the embodiment of Old England:

Then they walked through the grass to the knoll where Little Lindens stands. The old farmhouse, weather-tiled to the ground, took almost the colour of a blood-ruby in the afternoon light. The pigeons pecked at the mortar in the chimney-stacks; the bees that had lived under the tiles since it was built filled the hot August air with their booming; and the smell of the box-tree by the dairy-window mixed with the smell of earth after rain, bread after baking, and a tickle of wood-smoke.

The farmer's wife came to the door, baby on arm, shaded her brows against the sun, stooped to pluck a sprig of rosemary, and turned down the orchard. The old spaniel in his barrel barked once or twice to show he was in charge of the empty house. Puck clicked back the garden-gate.

'D'you marvel that I love it?' said Hal, in a whisper. 'What can town folk know of the nature of housen - or land?'

They perched themselves arow on the old hacked oak bench in the Lindens garden, looking across the valley of the brook at the fern-covered dimples and hollows of the Forge behind Hobden's cottage. The old man was cutting a faggot in his garden by the hives. It was quite a second after his chopper fell that the clump of the blow reached their lazy ears. (*Puck of Pook's Hill*, 'Hal o' the Draft').

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Inaugural speech for Birkbeck College as Visiting Professor

Michael Rosen
Former Children's Laureate

This is the inaugural speech given by the former Children's Laureate, Michael Rosen, when he was awarded a Visiting Professorship at Birkbeck College, University of London.

Here's a poem I wrote triggered off by the NHS asking me to write something that would celebrate the sixtieth birthday of the NHS. I thought that I was writing a poem for adults. It turns out that they thought I was writing a poem for children. It now turns out that it's going to go up on every surgery wall in England and Wales.

NHS

These are the hands
That touch us first
Feel your head
Find the pulse
And make your bed.

These are the hands
That tap your back
Test the skin
Hold your arm
Wheel the bin
Change the bulb
Fix the drip
Pour the jug
Replace your hip

These are the hands
That fill the bath
Mop the floor
Flick the switch
Soothe the sore
Burn the swabs
Give us a jab
Throw out sharps
Design the lab.

And these are the hands
That stop the leaks
Empty the pan
Wipe the pipes
Carry the can
Clamp the veins

Make the cast
Log the dose
And touch us last.

Quite often, the conversation about children's books focuses on questions of audience. Who's reading the books? Or who's the ideal reader? We hear about books being ideal for this or that age of child, or this book is a girls' book or girls of 12 will like this. Again, it's quite usual to say of a picture book that it appears to be making nods to an adult reader, or that there are sly references in the text or pictures - as with a book by Anthony Browne, say, with his allusions to the painter, Magritte. Another way of thinking of audience in these conversations is to notice that some kinds of books - famously the Harry Potter series and Philip Pullman's trilogy - are what are called 'crossovers'. Adults have been spotted reading them on the Tube. They've even been re-bound by the publishers in adult-friendly covers. This focus on audience is also the cause of a row in the publishing world: a campaign initiated by authors Anne Fine and Philip Pullman vigorously opposed the labelling of books with badges announcing what age of child was the ideal or intended reader of the book. Fine and Pullman's argument was in essence about the way such labelling would, they claimed, restrict the audience for the books: books labelled for young children would scare off older children who wouldn't want to be sneered at for reading books that were supposedly too young and books that were labelled for older children might frighten off younger children or, more likely, their parents, for fear of young ones getting into unsuitable stuff.

So, children's books are often surrounded with these discussions about audience. They are of course based on an assumption that children's books are for children. I would like to contest that idea or at the very least modify it. I have two broad reasons for contesting it: one comes from why and how children's books are read and the other from why and how they are written.

There's a long and decent history of people trying to figure out what are the defining characteristics of children's literature. These are mostly attempts to find structural and/or generic elements in the books that can be said to exist only in literature for children, rather as biologists find the distinctions between sloths and apes. So, Tony Watkins, for example, has examined how a large part of children's literature, very nearly all of it, for all ages (bar a few novels directed at young adults), involve some sense of restitution, a restoration, a redemption, a homecoming. Then we can all have fun looking for exceptions - Roald Dahl, who achieved a status for himself where he could overrule his editors - decided that the boy at the end of *The Witches* did not need to be restored to his human self but could go on being a mouse. Not very homecoming at all. Interestingly, the film of the book couldn't or wouldn't repeat this motif, and, just as the formula demands, restored the boy to boyhood. So while I'm speaking now, you might want to consider children's books you've read and think of the endings. Have any or many of them did or did not leave its main protagonist without hope, away from home, with matters unsolved, the self in a state of confusion or unrelenting loss? Not many.

Another area of focus has been formal or generic: certain forms of book seem largely restricted to the arena of children's books - the picture book, the pop-up book, the lift-the-flap book or 'moveables' as the antiquarian book world calls them; the heavily illustrated 'chapter book' for what are sometimes oddly called 'self-supporting readers' seems restricted to children's literature too. Then there are the classifications along thematic lines. These are harder to prove: take the Robinsonade, which developed out of Robinson Crusoe and became within children's literature, the family or group of children who become stranded and isolated, starting of course with *Swiss Family Robinson*, the name being no coincidence. But as we know, some famous books like *Lord of the Flies* and Nobel Prize-winning Kenzaburo Oë's *Nip the buds, shoot the kids* are child-centred Robinsonades, that's to say, child-centred books intended originally for adults. It's true that books which devote their whole story to a school seen through the eyes of a child - the school story - is largely a product of children's literature, though the first major novel in the genre - *Tom Brown's Schooldays* was what we might now call a crossover book. The crime-busting child-detective or secret agent is perhaps a children's-only genre - its origins lying most probably in Erich Kastner's

Emil and the Detectives from 1928. It burgeoned in later years with the *Famous Five* and the *Secret Seven* and many others. But you could argue that these are parodies (not in the humorous sense) of the adult form - now most clearly stated with Charlie Higson's young James Bond novels.

Sex, murder, rape, incest, bloody violence and child abuse are almost entirely avoided in children's books, unless it is handled folklorically - as with the Grimms' so-called folk tales or satirically and hyperbolically as with *Struwwelpeter* and Hilaire Belloc's *Cautionary Verse*. Famous exceptions to the 'no sex and violence' rule tend to be clearly marked 'teen novels' or 'young adult' and the like. We may well find that whatever definitions and descriptions we come up with for children's literature, the teen novel escapes and refuses to be bound by the same descriptions and conventions. However, because of our tendency to live in mixed age families, and children do insist on being born a few years apart some books, like Judy Blume's *Forever* escape from the corral and easily get into the hands of much younger children. For centuries, nudity, peeing and pooing were taboo but there is a whole new genre of picture book that has opened its doors to this too.

There's an argument to be had at the level of language, perhaps. Children's books clearly work on the assumption that certain kinds of complex concepts, abstract argument, psychological and political reasoning (and the customary language these ideas come in) aren't suitable for a young audience. In fact, you could say that this is clearer now than it was in the past. If you compare the output of, say, Puffin novels from when I was a child and Puffin novels of today, then it's clear that something has gone on here. The language of children's books has become much more informal and the leisurely literary pace of novels from fifty years ago seems to have mostly disappeared. As the children's author, Morris Gleitzman once told me, 'You have to start every scene as late on into the action as you can.' There is an assumption amongst editors and writers that children are informed by the timing of film-cutting and novels should try to keep pace with that. And perhaps, we could say that children's novels avoid the inner landscape, the interiority of the traditional novel just as film and television have to, though even as I say that, children's fiction has recently been revelling in the 'diary' form which is often a feast of interiority. The problem with this linguistic approach as a defining characteristic of children's literature is that there is of course plenty of literature for adults that is linguistically simple, fast-moving and low on interiority too.

So all these ways of trying to define children's literature leaves us with a bit of rag-bag, doesn't it? As people interested in literature, we might like to have something clearer than that. After all, if we go about calling something with a distinctive name - a dog, an elephant, 'children's literature' - we should be able to come up with a neat and tidy species description based on either what the books are about, or on how they are written.

But I think we are looking in the wrong place. I've a feeling that the answer doesn't lie inside the books, an intrinsic definition, if you like, but outside - an extrinsic definition.

So, to my mind, children's literature is distinctive for sociological reasons. Unlike any other literature it sits within or in very close relation to two social institutions of massive importance: nurture and education, with the understanding in both institutions, (and always made explicit), that an essential part of the audience will be children.

It is largely through these two institutions or processes (nurture and education) that adults relate to children. That's to say, the people who mostly deal with children are carers and educators. We have devised buildings and rooms for this - flats, semis, detached houses, bedrooms, dormitories, nurseries, schools, classrooms and the like. Millions of people work at it, parents, grandparents, playgroup leaders, teachers, teaching assistants, librarians and headteachers and many more. There are even ministers in government who are actually or theoretically in charge of it all, sending out directives and policy documents, creating taxation and benefit systems and the like to mould the processes as they see fit. The major media outlets - TV, magazines, newspapers and the internet devote millions of words to both matters - how to have a happy baby, how to make your kids clever, how to deal with stropky teenagers and the like. A discourse around motherhood and fatherhood

rages in the press, with examples of what is seen as bad parenting regularly making the headlines and there are regular alarms sounded about the state of children and teenagers and what measures should be taken to restrict their movements. We can say here as a rough guide that the prevailing attitudes to children that emerge in mainstream discourse demand that children should be protected punished and instructed: protected because they are innocent, punished because they are evil (don't worry about the contradiction here) and instructed because they know nothing. Meanwhile, a cluster of capitalist enterprises deliver products and services into the institutions of nurture and education- formula milk, frame steel structures for schools, kids' clothes, toys, school-friendly equipment and of course books.

When we get closer in to all this, we can see where books are. Carers are sitting with their children on their laps or alongside them at bedtime, reading books out loud, talking about books with their children. Some carers construct shelves for their children's bedrooms. Schools spend hours and hours a week, teaching children how to read and historically varying amounts of time encouraging children to read whole books. But let's freeze frame here. Though it is clear that the books in these processes are being consumed by children, it is also clear that are being handled and shared by adults too - mostly the carers and educators. Yes, we might spot a child in a corner of a nursery, looking at a book on her own, a child at home, sitting in his bedroom reading alone - but the means by which the book got there, the context for the book itself is nearly always one mediated and arranged by the adult carers and educators. Not every piece of children's cultural life is like that - the passing around of rude jokes and rhymes, for example, is usually carried out furtively and privately between children, with no adult intervention.

So I would suggest that what we call children's books are in fact shared books, books shared between children, carers and educators and this sharing nearly always goes on in the context of nurture and education or as an immediate and direct consequence of nurture and education. In other words, built into the children's book is a multiple audience - not just as buyer, but very often as an actual reading or listening partner. So I would say that one of the defining characteristics of the children's book is not simply or only that it is for children but that, unlike its adult counterparts, it is a book for a shared audience in the two contexts of nurture and education. When we say that this or that book is suitable for a six year old boy, what we are really saying is that it is suitable for a six year old boy when he is at home or in school near or with a carer or educator.

I'll put that another way: I think that children's books are literary interventions into two discourses - the one about nurture and the one about education. So, children's literature does what literature does, parades scenes and narratives and images predominantly with language, but does so in these two specific contexts, and either intentionally or as a consequence jumps straight into the ding-dong battles over how children are raised and how children are educated. In other words, the books frequently engage with those three broad themes that I mentioned earlier - the requirement that we protect, punish and instruct our children. And it does these things in the knowledge or with the awareness that much of what is written addresses the shared audience of those taking part in those two contexts - the adult carers and educators on one side and the children on the other.

To take one example: a book like *Where the Wild Things Are* shows us a boy who has said to his mother that he'll eat her up. The text tells us that he's done wild things. He's sent to his room from where he magically goes away where he tames some very large wild things and returns to find that someone has put out his supper and it's still hot. This is a book which is about how children handle being brought up and which will nearly always be read in the context of either that bringing up - at bedtime, on a carer's lap, or within education at playgroup, nursery, or early years schooling. It speaks to both child and adult as it negotiates questions of what is an OK way of going on, either as a child or as a parent, raising questions around the issues of punishment and forgiveness. It pinpoints with painful accuracy the moment of emptiness when the child, 'wanted to be where he was loved most of all', which at first glance appears to be about the child, (it's about 'he wanted') but in the context of an adult reading it, raises for that adult questions of whether that adult or any adult can or will or does deliver that kind of love, that intensity and totality. This is why the book in the contexts of its reading, will instantly create conversations. Having read the book many times with

my then three year old, he suddenly said, as I read the line 'where he was loved most of all' - 'Mummy!'. Just to remind you, we never see Mummy in this book, she is the off-stage presence who has sent the boy to his room, and presumably, though it's not said, she is the presence who has left the supper in the bedroom waiting for him, after his trip to tame the Wild Things. What my three-year old decided was that she's also the agent in the passive construction 'where he was loved most of all'. What I'm saying here then is that *Where the Wild things Are* is children's literature because it is an intervention for both children and adults in the conversations we have about the processes of nurture and education.

The book is not (as some would have it) simply or only about how a child should or could handle his anger, but is as much about how we as adults get to understand that anger and how we should or could negotiate with that angry child. It will of course do this partly by awakening memories in ourselves of how we were angry as children and how we felt when we were punished or forgiven or loved. And then as we read the words out loud and turn over the pages, children tell us what they think and what they want, so the book becomes a platform or springboard for talk within an ongoing relationship. With the active participation of adult and child the book helps modify that relationship, if you like. I think this is a different view of what children's literature is about or for, than is usually described.

When it comes to looking at the history of children's literature, I'm suggesting that what we are really looking at is the history of a kind of literature that is written in intimate relation to prevailing attitudes and policies to nurture and prevailing attitudes and policies in education. It is not simply or only a matter of a history of kinds of books. It is, then virtually always and inescapably tied up with questions for carers on how we raise children and for educators on how we teach and run schools.

What kind of exceptions might we think of? Perhaps the economically self-sufficient 11 year old who goes shopping with her mates and buys up the latest Jacqueline Wilson or Meg Rosoff, does at that moment appear to have broken free of nurture and education? Yes, but no. Most (not an absolute all, admittedly) of the books for pre-teens and even teens involve a key moment where the adult carers and educators have to be negotiated with. Take Robert Cormier and his two *Chocolate War* novels or *After the First Death*. They take place in the contexts of how the people designated as your educators or ultimate carers have political concerns that appear to run counter to humanistic values. This is the meat of the three novels. One of the most child-led book-buying phenomena of the present era - the very first *Harry Potter* book - is on almost every page about how a child or children collectively negotiate adult carers or educators. So, even when the buying and private reading habits (children avidly reading the books in their bedrooms with doors clearly marked 'keep out') would appear to counter my argument that this is about a shared audience, we find that the books themselves address the adult-child relationship and in a matter of months, they are gobbled up by adults and turned into films for family viewing, for that shared audience.

What I want to do now, is read you some poems and trace why and how I came to write them. This way, I hope to get a sense of how I grasped some understanding of who I wrote them for. I think it will be possible to see within the poems how I've incorporated a sense of the shared audience I've been talking about and how these poems have been what I'm calling literary interventions in the discourses of nurture and education.

I share my bedroom with my brother

I share my bedroom with my brother
And I don't like it.
His bed's by the window
Under my map of England's railways
That has a hole in it
Where his friend, Tony Sanders, he says
Stabbed a Roman soldier

With a rolled-up magazine.

My bed's in the corner
Where the paint wrinkles
When you push it,
Which I do
Sometimes when I go to bed
Sometimes when I wake up
But mostly on Sundays
When we stay in bed a-a-a-all morning.

That's when he makes pillow-dens
Under the blankets
So only his left eye shows.
And I jump on to his bed shouting:
Yeahhhhhh
Piling pillows on to his bed:
'Now breathe! Now breathe!'
...
...and it all goes quiet and silent.
Oh no! What have I done!
I whip the pillows away quick
And he's laughing
Because he's turned his fingers into a
Breathing-tube
And he's sucking fresh air through his
Breathing-tube fingers
So he can play dead.

Actually, sharing's not so bad.

Father says

Father says,
Never
Let
Me
See
You
Doing
That
Again.

Father says,
Tell you once, tell you a thousands times.
Never
Let
Me
See
You
Doing
That
Again.

My brother knows all my Dad's Little Sayings
Off by heart,
So he practises them in bed at night.

I wrote these poems when I was about twenty. I think in my head was an idea that I could apply James Joyce's principle he manifested in *Portrait of the Artist*. That is, I could write about your childhood in the voice or imagined voice or simulated voice of the child at that stage of life. I remember very clearly thinking that reading Joyce gave me permission to try that way of writing myself. In passing, I would say that a good deal of my experience as a writer has been like that: coming across a kind of writing that I haven't encountered before and finding that that writing has, as it were, said to me, 'Now you have permission to write like that.' So I sat down and wrote what I thought was a kind of writing that people who read poetry would read. I knew people who read poetry. They were my parents, and friends of theirs who, incidentally, mostly seemed to be teachers.

As a consequence of writing that poem and a sequence of others, I discovered that the publisher who had published a play I had written and had gone on at the Royal Court, didn't think that they were worth publishing. The children's editor in the same publishing house didn't think they were suitable for children either as, they were, she said, written in the voice of a child. However, eventually, they were published in a book clearly marked as being for children, with illustrations by Quentin Blake. This was 1974.

I should say, that this process of being drawn into the world of children's literature wasn't quite as passive as I've made it sound. While I was playing with this kind of writing, both my parents were avidly engaged both theoretically and practically with the question of how to teach literature in primary and secondary schools. That's to say they were teachers of literature; they were anthologists and broadcasters of poetry for schools; they produced papers, talks and books on literature, including poetry in the classroom. Part of this involved my mother sitting at the kitchen table with piles of poetry books looking for poems either for her class or for the next schools broadcast, while my father sat on the other side of the table writing a paper on, say, secondary students' language in the classroom. It did occur to me that if I shoved some of what I was writing my mother's way, she might think it was worth putting in one of her radio programmes. When I heard her saying that she was doing a programme about 'looking closely' or about 'the child alone', I would look at the poems she had found by such people as Leonard Clark, James Reeves, Robert Louis Stevenson, James Stephens and then nip back upstairs and have a go myself. I discovered that there was an overlap between my experiments with Joyce and what these poets seemed to be doing.

In the daytime

In the daytime I am Rob Roy and a tiger
In the daytime I am Marco Polo
I chase bears in Bricket Wood
In the daytime I am the Tower of London
Nothing gets past me
When it's my turn
In Harrybo's hedge
In the daytime I am Henry the Fifth and Ulysses
And I tell stories
That go on for a whole week
If I want.
At night in the dark
When I've shut the front room door
I try and
Get up the stairs across the landing
Into bed and under the pillow
Without breathing once.

Meanwhile, the wild figure of English teacher and poet, Geoffrey Summerfield would appear in the house with bundles of proofs and samples of a brand new kind of book under his arm: a poetry anthology which would be full of poems and songs and chants and proverbs and lists from all over the world interleaved with the most fantastic photos, paintings and drawings that could be collected. New kinds of poetic voices suddenly appeared in the house: American, Australian, African, Caribbean, Scots, cockney - names like Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Langston Hughes.

My brother...

My brother is making a protest about bread.
'Why do we always have wholemeal bread?
You can't spread butter on wholemeal bread.
You try and spread the butter on
And it just makes a hole right through the middle.'

He marches out of the room and shouts
Across the landing and down the passage.
'It's always the same in this place.
Nothing works.
The volume knob's broken on the radio you know.
It's been broken for months and months you know.'

He stamps back into the kitchen
Stares at the loaf of bread and says:
'Wholemeal bread - look at it, look at it.
You put the butter on
And it all rolls up.
You put the butter on
And it all rolls up.'

Clearly, this was all going on in the context of education, but in my own personal case, the educators happened to be my parents, they were the nurturers, if you like!

But to return to the book that was published and which included the poems I've just read - . what happened to me in relation to that book? How and where was it read? Well, anyone who writes a children's book soon finds that they are confronted with a choice: do you take up the invitations that immediately come in from the agencies of children's literature? Or do you ignore them? These invitations are about audience. Do you go and talk to or read to this or that group of children in a school, a nursery, a library, a book group? Do you talk to this or that group of educators or carers about your book, or about writing or perhaps about encouraging children to write? I chose to take up every invite that came.

This altered the reading process that surrounded the book. It set up oral situations where the poems were received by the audience as performance. The context for this was nearly always educational. I found myself in front of classes, sometimes, scarily to start off with, in front of whole schools of children. The performance of the poems was, then, an intervention in a pedagogy, or even a moment of pedagogy in itself. Apart from anything else, the poems started changing from quietly intoned readings into acted out dramas, monologues, chants and songs. The implication here was that there was space in schools for this kind of thing. It said or implied: 'whatever English studies or literacy or literature teaching is, it could include the performance of poetry.' What's more, as I quickly found out, it could be directly linked to children's and school students' own writing. Just as I had found a springboard with, say, James Joyce, I was being asked by teachers to use my poems as a springboard for children's own writing.

Gone

She sat in the back of the van
And we waved to her there

We ran towards her
But the van moved off

The van moved faster
We reached for her hand

She stretched out of the back of the van
We ran, reaching

The van got away
We stopped running

We never reached her
Before she was gone

Pebble

I know a man who sucked a pebble
He found it and he sucked it
During the war.
He found it and he sucked it
When they ran out of water.
He found it and he sucked it
When they were dying for a drink.
And he sucked it and he sucked it
For days and days and days.

I know a man who's got a pebble
And he keeps it in his drawer.
It's small and brown - nothing much to look at
But I think of the things he thinks
When he sees it:
How he found it
How he sucked it
How he nearly died for water to drink.

A small brown pebble
Tucked under his tongue
And he keeps it in his drawer
To look at now and then.

So, let's put this into the ideas that I began this talk with. Poems that began their life as an intended exploration of childhood with an adult poetry-reading audience had ended up in the institution of education. On occasions, I would hear of people who had read the poems at home, within nurture, if you like. The life described in the poems seemed on occasions seemed to have given some people fun on car journeys and on evenings when they were on holiday.

Hot Food

We sit down to eat and the potato's a bit hot
So I only put a bit on my fork
And I blow
Phooph phooph
Until it's cool
Just cool
Into the mouth
Choop
Lip-smack
Nice!

My brother's doing the same
Phooph phooph
Until it's cool
Just cool
Into the mouth
Cccchoop
Lip-smack
Nice!
And my mother's doing the same:
Phooph phooph
Until it's cool
Just cool
Into the mouth
Cccchoop
Lip-smack
Nice!

But my dad.
My dad!
What does he do?
He stuffs a great big bit of potato
Into his mouth.
And that really does it.
His eyes pop out.
He blows, he puffs, he yells
He bobs his head up and down
He spits bits of potato all over his plate
And he turns to us and says,
'Watch out everybody.
The potato's really hot.'

I think the effect of all this was almost unavoidable. That's to say, the phrase 'sense of audience' was becoming tangible. In the performances and classroom conversations about the poems and in the sessions where children wrote poems themselves, I was becoming more and more aware of effects and responses from children, the business of what interested them, what interested me, what interested teachers and, as I say, on occasions what interested parents. This all sounds rather abstract.

Mart and the Hat

Mart was my best friend
I thought he was great,
But one day he tried to do for me.

I had a hat - a woolly one
And I loved that hat.
It was warm and tight
My mum had knitted it
And I wore it everywhere.

One day me and Mart were out
And we were standing at a bus-stop
And suddenly
He goes and grabs my hat
And chucked it over the wall.
He thought I was going to go in there
And get it out.
He thought he'd make me do that
Because he knew I liked that hat so much
I wouldn't be able to stand being without it.

He was right -
I could hardly bear it.
I was really scared I'd never get it back.
But I never let on.
I never showed it on my face.
I just waited.

'Aren't you going to get your hat?'
he says.
'Your hat's over the wall.'
I looked the other way.
But I could still feel on my head
How he had pulled it off.
'Your hat's over the wall,' he says.
I didn't say a thing.

Then the bus came round the corner
At the end of the road.

If I go home without my hat
I'm going to walk through the door
And mum's going to say,
'Where's your hat?'
and if I say,
'It's over the wall,'
she's going to say,
'What's it doing there?'
and I'm going to say,
'Mart chucked it over,'
and she's going to say,
'Why didn't you go for it?'
and what am I going to say then?
What am I going to say then?

The bus was coming up.
'Aren't you going over for your hat?
There won't be another bus for ages,'
Mart says.

The bus was coming closer.
'You've lost your hat now,'
Mart says.

The bus stopped.
I got on
Mart got on
The bus moved off.

'You've lost your hat,' Mart says.
You've lost your hat,' Mart says.

Two stops ahead was ours.
'Are you going indoors without it?' Mart says.
I didn't say a thing.

The bus stopped.

Mart got up
And dashed downstairs.
He'd got off one stop early.
I got off when we got to our stop.

I went home
Walked through the door
'Where's your hat?' Mum says.
'Over a wall,' I said.
'What's it doing there?' she says.
'March chucked it over there, 'I said.
'But you haven't left it there, have you?' she says.
'Yes,' I said.
'Well don't you ever come asking me to make you
anything like that again.
You make me tired you do.'

Later,
I was drinking some orange juice.
The front door-bell rang.
It was Mart.
He had the hat in his hand.
He handed it me - and went.

I shut the front door -
Put on the hat
And walked into the kitchen.
Mum looked up.
'You don't need to wear your hat indoors, do you?'
she said.
'I will for a bit,' I said.
And I did.

I probably don't have to spell out, that this piece of writing has a dual focus, how Mart reacted to the way I behaved and how my mother behaved. I've been fairly true to what actually happened there. In a sense, the dual address, (child and parent) that I've mentioned, is right at the heart of the writing. I have memories here that I was writing to the kinds of conflict that I would see around me in classrooms and playgrounds. I seem to remember that this was around the time what were called 'beanies' came in, woollen hats and hat-grabbing was big in Holloway Boys School, where I was a writer in residence. In a way, I saw myself as a translator - translating experiences that I had had and making them understandable to people who lived in the present world for children who had backgrounds very different from mine. You might be amused to know that this story in fact took place on a camping holiday and the Mart in question threw my hat over a gate into a field. I have then constructed a fiction based on what happened - 'transformed my sources' as the phrase goes. So you could argue that I've gone in for a bit of self-censorship, effacing what I think I may have feared was a context that wouldn't speak to the children I was meeting. They didn't do camping, but they did do buses. And with a bus, I could introduce a time element into the story, and give it a sense of urgency. Teachers who were almost solely responsible for my poems being read, would I thought, be able to get children talking about ripping hats off people's heads, toughing things out, mums' or dads' responses to lost and mutilated clothes by way of getting their pupils writing from their own experience and in their own language. All notions I had imbibed at that kitchen table from my parents.

Another way to incorporate the audience was to listen to what that audience said and performed. At the time, the couple next door to me had three boys, Jason, Junior and Otis, three boys born in Hackney with a mother from Jamaica and father from St Lucia. In the early eighties they were seriously into hip-hop and would regularly ask me to write them some hip-hop lyrics. At first I resisted, saying that it was for them to make them up so that I could watch them performing them. In the end, I wrote something that wasn't of any use at all to them, but was in a way, a reply to them.

Michael Rosen Rap

You may think I'm happy, you may think I'm sad
You may think I'm crazy, you may think I'm mad
But hang on to your seats and listen right here
I'm going to tell you something that'll burn your ear.
A hip. Hop. A hip-hop-hap
I giving you-all, the Michael Rosen rap
Rap, rap, rap, rap, rap, rap, rap

I was born on the seventh of May
I remember very well that awful day
I was in my mother curled up tight
Though I have to say it was as dark as night
Nothing to do, didn't have to breathe
I was so happy, didn't want to leave
Suddenly I hear some people give a shout
'One push Mrs Rosen and he'll be out.'
I'm telling you-all, that was a puzzle to me
I shouted out, 'How do you know I'm a "he"?'
The doctor shouted, 'Good Lord, he can walk!'
I popped out my head, said, 'How watch me walk!'
I juked and jived around that room.
Berlam bam boola. Balam da diddy boom.

Hip hop, hip-hop-hap
I'm giving you-all the Michael Rosen rap
Rap rap rap rap rap rap rap

When I was one I swam the English Channel
When I was two I ate a soapy flannel
When I was three I started getting thinner
When I was four I ate the dog's dinner
When I was five, I was in a band playing drums
When I was six, I ate a bag of rotten plums
When I was seven I robbed a bank with my sister
When I was eight I became prime Minister
When I was nine I closed all the schools
When I was ten they made me King of the Fools

So that's what I am, that's what I be
With an M, with an I, with a K, with an E
That's what I am, that's what I be
Mr Mike, Mr Michael, Mr Rosen, Mr Me
A hip. Hop. A hip-hop-hap.
I giving you-all the Michael Rosen rap
Rap rap rap rap rap rap rap.

Most children's writers I know engage with the ideas of either or both of the institutions of nurture and education. Some, like me, go further and take an active part in political activity in these spheres. So, for example, my own children have been put through the so-called SATs, and have experienced the crude rehearsals for these tests that have become the substance of so much of the curriculum. What that description misses out however, is that the very nature of the SATs focuses children and teachers on one very narrow set of concerns: the logic, chronology, sequencing and so-called facts of narratives. What follows from this, is that schools then issue the children with worksheets that copy the SATs papers. The reading of literature is reduced to a logical positivist inquisition. Here's one that my daughter brought home:

"Perseus and the Gorgons"

This is part of a myth from Ancient Greece

At last Perseus found the Gorgons. They were asleep among the rocks, and Perseus was able to look at them safely.

Although they were asleep, the live serpents which formed their hair were writhing venomously. The sight filled Perseus with horror. How could he get near enough without being turned to stone?

Suddenly Perseus knew what to do. He now understood why Athena had given him the shining bronze shield. Looking into it he saw clearly the reflection of the Gorgons. Using the shield as a mirror, he crept forward. Then with a single swift blow he cut off the head of the nearest Gorgon. Her name was Medusa.

In one mighty swoop, Perseus grabbed the head of Medusa. He placed it safely in his bag and sprang into the air on his winged sandals."

On the back of the sheet there are some questions:

‘What were the Gorgons doing when Perseus found them?
What was unusual about the Gorgons’ hair?
What would happen to Perseus if the Gorgons looked into their eyes?
Why had Perseus brought a bag with him?
What happened to Medusa?’

These are all questions based on the principles of so-called facts, so-called logic and so-called sequencing. This is what they ask the teachers to ask and ask the children to answer. It’s a narrowing-down of what literature is for.

And yet, we know that *Perseus and the Gorgons* is a story that could take a group of children in all sorts of directions and explorations. We might like to ask a set of open-ended questions...what is brave and what is foolhardy? If you were a woman and wanted to be dangerous, what would you make yourself look like? Imagine if you could turn people into stone, and you began to wish you couldn’t. What do the other gorgons think when they lose their sister?

Because I engage in this sort of thing, I ponder a lot on the kind of education I had. I find myself relating the two. So, here’s something I wrote that is in a way a bridge between two kinds of education, my own and children’s today. It talks of the one and talks to the other.

The Bell

There are 48 children in my class.
We sit in four rows of twelve.
We sit in twos, one next to the other,
at desks, with two lids, side by side,
one each.

Miss Williams works out where we sit.
We do tests: Arithmetic and English.
She adds up the marks
and whoever’s got the best mark
sits at the top of the class
in the desk at the end of the first row,
next to the window.
Whoever gets the worst mark
sits at the bottom of the fourth row
furthest from the window.
And she works out everyone else’s place
from the mark that they get.

She does this every week.
Every week, we do tests.
Every week, we change places.
We take everything out of our desks
and move (very quietly) to where
she tells us to go.
This way, we always know
who’s better than you
and we always know
who’s worse than you.
Unless you come top,
when there’s no one better than you.
Unless you come bottom

when there's no one worse than you.
The same people are always in the top row.
The same people are always in the bottom row.
The same people are always in the two rows
in between.

Miss Williams says that only the top two rows
will pass their Eleven Plus.
She stands next to the last person on the
end of the second row.
She holds up her hand as if
she is helping people cross the road.
This side will pass, she says.
This side will fail, she says.

This way we know who are the
Eleven Plus Failures
and who are the Eleven Plus Passes.
We know all that
before we've even taken
the Eleven Plus exam.
Next door, there's another class.
They are all
Eleven Plus Failures. I want to be twelfth.
This is because the person who is twelfth
sits nearest to the bell that sits
on top of Miss Williams' cupboard.
When you're twelfth
you take the bell
you go out of the room
you go downstairs
and you stand in the hallway
outside the headteacher's office
and shake the bell so loudly
that the gonging fills the classrooms
and all the spaces in between.

All the children and teachers hear the sound
and come out of their classes
and walk (very quietly) down the stairs
and out into the playground.

All because you rang the bell.

I never have come twelfth.

I have two young children, eight and four and one of their demands is that I should tell them either true things that happened to me or jokes. The true things should ideally be occasions where I've been naughty. I thought I had run out - surely not - when I remembered the episode I'm going to read to you. Having told the story several times, I went away and wrote it.

The Hole in the Wall

I loved sharing my bedroom with my brother
but one day, my parents said that my brother

was going to move out of our room.
He was going to have:
A Room Of His Own.
We wouldn't share anymore.

So, he moved out the model cars he had made
and the model trains and the model planes.
They all went off to the room next door.
His room.
In there, he set up the model cars he had made
and the model trains and the model planes.

And soon he got to work making something new.
Something Really Big.

I wanted to be in there
while he was making it.
But I had to go to bed in my room.
The room that used to be our room.
So I had an idea.

I had a metal ruler, a hard steel ruler
with sharp edges and corners.
I got into bed with this metal ruler
and just where the bed meets the wall,
just out of sight of anyone looking,
I started to scratch the wall
with the hard corner of the metal ruler.
Scratch scratch scratch.
Scrape scrape scrape.
I was making a hole
through to my brother's bedroom.
I twisted the corner of the metal ruler
round and round and round.
Scratch scratch scratch.
Scrape scrape scrape.

After ages of scratching and scraping
all I had made was a tiny dent in the wall.
So I went to sleep.

The next night, I got working at it again:
scratch scratch scratch
scrape scrape scrape.
The dent got a tiny bit deeper.

And the next night.
And the next.
Scratch scratch scratch.
Scrape scrape scrape.
After a few nights
I reached a bit of wood.
Should I try to scrape through the wood

or round it?
I decided to go over the top.
but this would make the hole wider
and maybe someone would see it...
...but I didn't care. I had to go on.
I had to make the hole.
I had to get through to my brother's room.
Scratch scratch scratch.
scrape scrape scrape.
It was now a little cave in the wall.
A secret tunnel.

I wet my fingers in my drink
and then dabbed the dry plaster with my fingers.
The plaster went dark.
The secret tunnel was wet.
What if I could shrink myself down
and crawl through it?
Be an explorer bravely climbing through
the dangerous cave.
Will I get through
or will I be trapped in here forever?
Just then my Dad popped his head
round the door.
'Goodnight Mick!' he said all cheerily.

I hadn't heard him coming.
Oh no, he mustn't see it.

So I sat up in the bed
and quickly twisted round
to cover up my hole in the wall.
He mustn't see the hole.

But he saw me do this sitting-up, twisty-round thing.

Oh no, he's seen me!
Instead of going back downstairs
he opened the door
and walked into the room.
Still cheery, he says,
'Hey, what's that you're doing?
What are you covering up there?'
'Nothing.'
'No come on, Mick, look at you,
I can see from the way you're sitting
you're covering up something.'
'No.'
Still cheery, he says,
'Come on, come away from the wall.
Let me have a look.'

What could I do?
I had to let him see.

So, in a way, this was written for and to my children. Once again, it involves that bridging gesture, talking of a past bit of a child's thought and action, talking to, to start off with, some specific children. As it happens, as the writer of this, who also happens to be these children's parent, the piece does precisely what I suggested most children's literature does: it enters a relationship between adult and child, it talks of an example of that relationship, it enters the discourse about nurture and when I read it or tell it, it serves as a kind of yardstick for me and them, on child and parent behaviours.

So across the poems I've read, I've explored some variations in where they spoke from and who they speak to.

However, this is not sufficient. What I've done here is describe, if you like, the processes going on around these poems as a way of trying to explain who they are for. But there is another way of looking at the matter. Every piece of writing uses forms of language that its author or authors have acquired. This goes on at every level of language and form - the combination of sounds, the kinds of words, the grammar, the structuring of phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, verses, the narratological methods - first person narration, omniscient narrator, the forms - poem, story, play and so on. A writer has acquired these prior to taking up a pen or hitting the keyboard. They are what has been called a 'repertoire' in the writer's head, or the 'already' the writer works with. When we talk about who a writer writes for, perhaps the answer is to be found somewhere in this repertoire - or, more accurately - in the elements of that repertoire that the writer has used, transformed or embedded in his or her writing. When a writer starts to write, some of the choices being made (some would argue that it's all the choices being made) are to do with that repertoire. The point is that repertoires aren't neutral. Each and every text that a writer might be calling upon is loaded up with baggage that tells of where it's been, who it hangs out with, what kind of people like it, what kind of people despise it, what values and attitudes are attached to it and so on. To take an example: when I first started to write about personal experience, it seemed unexceptional or indeed necessary and logical that I should write in free verse. 'I share my bedroom with my brother and I don't like it'. I've already mentioned the 'already' of James Joyce here, but there is also a few hundred years of lyric poems beginning with the word 'I' and about a hundred years of free verse poems mixing talk of a state of mind around a set of actions - think D.H. Lawrence. There's over a hundred years of the dramatic monologue, which traditionally is a monologue that reveals more about the speaker than the speaker appears to know him- or herself. Think Robert Browning. And there's also a tradition of poems in the first person, about childhood and about play, and addressed to children. It was a literature invented by Robert Louis Stevenson with *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

So, when we ask a question like: who is a poem for? yes, one route to go down is the one I've pursued for most of the time in this talk, but it's also true that in a way, a poem like 'I share my bedroom with my brother' is 'for' or 'about' or 'in conversation with' its predecessors, its forbears, its shadowy ancestors. When the poem talks, the ancestors talk. I'm OK with that. More than OK, for a rather obvious reason. I'm very fond of these ancestors. Not simply because I like what they said and how they said them, but because I mainly acquired them through the loving devotion of my parents. Their fingerprints are all over them - parents whose grappling with theories of the teaching of literature in schools was partly how they parented. But no matter who they were, can we say, it is 'for' this or that audience because a poem's audience is encoded in its language and forms? If I say to you,

Sticker

He had a little sticker
And he had a little ticket
And he took the little sticker
And he stuck it to the ticket

Now he hasn't got a sticker

Write4Children

And he hasn't got a ticker
He's got a bit of both
Which he calls a little 'Sticket'.

Hmm, they won't let you on the bus with a Sticket.

...we could ask, doesn't it announce itself as a child's nonsense poem by the end of the second line? In a very tolerant way, you adults have perhaps smiled at it, but it won't be printed in the *London Review of Books*, will it? If we ask, why not? I don't think it's much to do with whether it's any good or not, and very much to do with how its audience is encoded in its language and form.

One last thought: even in the fifties, at the height of eleven plus fever, and weekly tests, schools seemed to know that you had to give children space to listen to and enjoy and perform poems and stories. The imposing Mrs MacNab would rehearse us in the art of choral speaking and in so doing, we felt the shape and rhythm and music of poetry without anyone giving us the inquisition. 'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller, knocking on the moonlit door'...we chanted. 'Yes, I remember Adlestrop, the name, because one afternoon of heat a train drew up unwontedly...'

These poems seemed to have been written out of a sense of unease or disembodied melancholy and we chanted them in a world that seems to me now to have been anxiously trying to make everything secure after the six year trauma of a second world war. That classroom I described in the poem about the school bell. So anxious about security. A few months ago, I worked with some children from London schools who looked at Robert Capa's photos of the refugees walking away from Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War. Some of the children in the classes were themselves refugees, most came from families where they or their parents were migrants. They wrote poems about what things and thoughts and memories they would or actually did bring with them if they left home in a hurry. I thought of my great-grandparents and grandparents who were migrants too. I thought of the young people I and my wife have met in a kind of Reception Centre in East Ham, who had arrived in London as asylum seekers as unaccompanied minors. I played around with a poem I had half-written before. I wanted to make something that would have shape and rhythm and music, would even invite an audience to join in - chorally if you like - as I had joined in chorally all those years earlier - but this time, I wanted it to be without that sense of disembodied melancholy. I'm hoping that it will turn out to be a poem that will, like the NHS poem I began with, find quite a few different kinds of audience...

On The Move Again

You know
You gotta go
No time to grieve
You just gotta leave.
Get away from the pain
On the move again.

You gotta move it
To prove it
Prove it
To move it.

Take the train
Catch a plane

Make the trip
In a ship

Take a hike
Ride a bike

Go by car
Going far

Use your feet
On the street

Get stuck
In a truck.

You gotta move it
To prove it

Prove it
To move it.

Then you arrive
And you're alive.
You arrive
You're alive.

What you leave behind
Won't leave your mind
But home is where you find it.
Home is where you find it
Home is where you find it
Home is where you find it.

And to finish a poem that I'm trying to find an audience for:

Car School

One day a car pulled up at our school
and said,
'I'm your new Headteacher.'
The old headteacher was taken out the back
and put in a skip
and the car drove into her office.

The car changed the name of our school.
It was called Car School.
and we got a new uniform that had
a picture of a car on the front pocket.

The mayor came to our school
and said how lucky we were
that the car had come
and was sharing with us all that it knew
about cars.

Car School was in the local newspaper.
Everyone wanted to go to Car School.
To get in you had to do a Car Test.
There were questions about cars.

The mayor said that cars had a lot
to offer to the community
so that we could all move forward.

Some of the old teachers left
and the new teachers were cars.
Blue, red, silver, dark green.

A boy in my class wrote a story
about a car that ran someone over.
He was asked to see the Headteacher
and we never saw him again.

A woman came to the school
to talk about road safety
and she said how going by bus
was a good idea.
One of the cars stood up
and said that what she was saying
was unbalanced and unfair.

I go to Car School.
Brrrrrrmmmm
Brrrrrrmmmm
That's our school song.

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Write4Children

Creative Writing for Us or Them: What's the Difference?

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Abstract:

Creative Writing for Children involves a range of activities - Creative Writing is, after all, first and foremost acts and actions and, secondly, the artefacts that these activities leave behind or, indeed, complete. However, a three hundred history of emphasizing commodity production over human interaction has made this kind of discussion of human action almost non-existent. The introduction of the World Wide Web and the influence of new digital and wireless technologies has now alerted us to the relationship between human activity and artefacts, between one human and another, and has highlighted how creative and critical knowledge go hand in hand. Taking this on board, the writing and illustrating of a new book Series for children, the Close-Ups Series is attempting to consider how contemporary children, whose world is essential that of The Web, the mobile, the computer game, think and act in terms of interactivity creative-critical understanding.

Keywords:

Copyright, knowledge, illustrated, new media, interactivity, pictures, words.

*

The Origins of the Question

The question is not meant to pit children against adults, but here in *Write4Children* that is the title's implication. That implication is as good a place as any. Firstly, to think about how Creative Writing has been subject to certain misconceptions. And, secondly, to consider how these misconceptions may have fundamentally affected the relationship between 'Creative Writing for Children' and what might be called, more accurately, but in some strangely oppositional way, 'creative writers Creative Writing for children'. What does such a suggestion of an 'opposition' mean?

In summary terms, up until the later 1990s the impact of particular commodity-fuelled human interactions, promoted from the late 18th Century onwards, had been to increase the importance of objects and decrease the importance of intention and meaning located in human activities (one of these activities being Creative Writing). This fact maps onto the impact of the Industrial Revolution, with all its attendant technologies.

This is a very broad statement (though one that has been written about recently, specifically in relation to Creative Writing¹). It is a statement that usefully begins the work of focusing our attention on key issues of action, interpretation and ownership that are integral to a discussion of creative writers Creative Writing for children (the *activities* of Creative Writing, that is, as well as the *artefacts*).

Creative Writing for children has found itself impacted upon over the past three centuries by such artefactual commodification (particularly beginning in what was once called 'The West', though globalisation long has made such terms obsolete). This focus on commodities has involved certain illegitimate divorces. We can list some obvious examples of these divorces numerically:

1. the divorcing of the creative writer from her or his artefacts;
2. the divorcing of the ownership of creative understanding from the ownership of critical understanding;
3. perhaps even certain major elements of the divorcing of adult from child.

These are three good starting points for discussion. They are, of course, not the only points, and at the outset it is worthwhile recalling that Creative Writing involves a range of acts and actions and that each of these brings together personal, cultural, societal, economic and educational perspectives, to list just a few, without borders or boundaries. Creative Writing is, in its very nature, a fluid activity, and to deal with some aspects of it rather than others is being pragmatic rather than being faithful to it.

With that in mind, the word 'divorce' has been used provocatively, because it symbolically brings to this discussion of children and adults questions of responsibility, the context of legitimacy (personal as well as group legitimacy), the role of societal structures and cultural conditions (for example, religious influences, at certain times and in certain places, or the impact of changing ideas about individual empowerment).

Divorce is thus a word that carries the baggage of definition and, in doing so, it helps us to ask what baggage our own concepts of Creative Writing for children might currently still carry. It likewise asks us to consider what divorces were initiated during the evolution of modern education during the 20th century. How these divorces resulted in separations in meaning and understanding.

For instance, to consider the first numbered example (above), do we understand the artefacts of Creative Writing in a way that accurately portrays them? Is this understanding truly meaningful? For the most part modern Creative Writing objects have been presented to the world as finished artefacts, traded as commodities in a creative industries marketplace, whether individual and small scale or corporate and large. But are such finished objects the only things that creative writers produce? That answer to this question will already be obvious. For example, what about the many unfinished works of creative writers, the notes, collections of research or evidential materials, pieces of non-writing (for examples, doodles, photographs, visual mind-maps of informal or informal kinds)? Creative Writing is activities, a gathering of many acts and action. It also produces artefacts. However, not all these artefacts of Creative Writing have been recognised or considered, and some of them have remained largely hidden from our critical attention to the activities of Creative Writing.

The invention of copyright in the early 18th Century, and as it relates to the Industrial Revolution, might be targeted as the reason for the evolution of such a system in which certain artefacts of Creative Writing (certain, largely finished items, at certain times, in certain locations) were increasingly seen as having commercial and/or cultural value. It is not the only reason; and yet Creative Writing, as a human activity, has been sometimes very poorly perceived because of the misconception that it is almost always well-represented by finished artefacts - finished artefacts emerging into a commercial and/or cultural marketplace. This misconception was fuelled by initial notions about copyright. Mark Rose leads us towards an understanding of the origins of this when he notes:

Before the evolution of the advanced marketplace society of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the major relations of exchange for authors occurred within a traditional patronage system in which, through a complex set of symbolic and material transactions, patrons received

honor and status in the form of service from their clients and in return provided material and immaterial rewards.²

After such notions of copyright were established - and the Statute of Anne (1710) is a key legal document in this regard³ - then, indeed, much changed. Not immediately, and not irrevocably, but they did change. The Statute of Anne did not highlight creative writers' rights, as such, even if we do colloquially perceive copyright as somehow connected with individual creative writer's rights. As Lyman Patterson points on in *Copyright in Historical Perspective* (1968), the Statute of Anne was far more a bookseller's bill, designed to control the rapidly expanding modern book trade, itself supported by the Industrial Revolution. It thus offered a clear indication of a change from the early modern period, where the actions of creating works was a focus, to the modern period in which the object itself became the focus of a more general relationship with Creative Writing.

Thus, already in the foundations of Statute of Anne, rather than find the 'service' (i.e. an action or set of actions of Creative Writing) highlighted in the system of patronage, or even the 'symbolic' exchange that Mark Rose mentions (whereby human interaction occurred through metaphysical as well as physical interactions) new ideals of copyright, and thus ownership, located future Creative Writing relationships in finished tradable commodities.

No wonder, then, that we find a near three hundred year period in which creative writers are so frequently divorced from their artefacts. Or, at very best, where the activities of Creative Writing are only shown to be preternaturally important to us if they produce finished tradable artefacts. Similarly, that we find some kinds of artefacts valued, and some not. Additionally that a system develops, over this period, in which the commercial or cultural worth of Creative Writing is regularly touted above personal, individual worth. How might this relate to the exchange that can occur between individual adults and children in Creative Writing for children? How might such a system impact upon how individual adults and children might create exchanges through Creative Writing?

Commercial worth is easy to understand and trace - it is located primarily in the economic value of an artefact or service. So artefacts of Creative Writing can have commercial value. Some have vastly more commercial value than others - and, in many cases, works of Creative Writing that have considerable commercial value have been considered to have less value in other realms. That is, artefacts of Creative Writing can also have cultural value.

Cultural value is value determined by the ways in which a particular artefact or artefacts, in this instance particular works of Creative Writing, reference and contribute to the prevailing cultural conditions. Cultural conditions change, over time; and cultural conditions are not, of course, necessarily the same between one national or continental arena and another, or even between one regional area and another. Cultural value is also subject to a number of filters - because, as culture is a holistic entity, it is subject to societal control. Thus, such concepts as 'cultural heritage' and 'the literary canon' are founded on notions drawn from largely agreed societal perspectives - but not particularly focused on the inputs or ideals of any one individual. Because the activity of Creative Writing is highly individualised, already it is plain that cultural value is difficult to map onto an individual's personal activities. Valuing in this way, and locating this value judgement in Creative Writing objects, whether they are culturally or commercially valued, or both, is thus one way in which creative writers have been divorced from the vast range of artefacts they have produced. Not that creative writers do not exist in a culture, or that they do not interact with cultures; but to locate primary value in cultural objects is like locating love solely in the mass or group.

The philosopher and Nobel Laureate Henri Bergson once pointed out that while it is possible to divide an object it is not possible to divide an act.⁴ This too is a critical point to consider in Creative Writing for children, because it leads us back to what Creative Writing actually entails, individually as well as culturally. It also leads us toward the second of our numbered examples, and to important questions of human understanding.

The divorcing of the ownership of creative understanding from the ownership of critical understanding occurred largely because of what might be called ‘the professionalization of critical understanding’. This itself might even be called an ‘industrial revolution’, were we to consider modern mass education to have industrial qualities. That is not to be disparaging of those who have undertaken professional criticism. Nor is it necessarily an argument against forms of professionalism. However, what we saw in the evolution of notions of professional academic criticism, particularly developing during the latter 19th Century and throughout the 20th Century, was equally the evolution of a sense that critical knowledge could be contained, even separated, from other forms of *a priori* and *a posteriori* human knowledge.

20th Century educational priorities relating to subject (indeed, industrial) specialisation further enhanced the compartmentalisation of knowledge. So, for example, when the study of literature became formalised in universities in the latter part of the 19th Century such formalising began to emphasize a particular kind of academic knowledge, and promote its significant truth value.⁵ With the emphasizing of these specific kinds of critical knowledge, and the Western preference during the 20th Century for knowledge that fitted relatively narrow, scientised categories, creative knowledge was pushed back from critical knowledge, even if in reality these two were integrated.

By creative knowledge I’m referring here to knowledge derived from the act of creating, openly understood and not contained within categories, both experiential and heuristic knowledge *and* theoretical and hypothetical knowledge. And by ‘scientism’ I am referring here not to science, which is a far more broad range of human understandings, but to a poorer, reductionist version of science in which the varieties of actions and interpretations, interrelations and exchanges, are reduced to a relatively narrow range of critical considerations. Bergson’s remarks on action provide some alternatives to such reductionism. He comments:

We have to do here not with an *object* but with a *progress*: motion, in so far as it is a passage from one point to another, is a mental synthesis, a psychic and therefore extended process. Space contains only parts of space, and whatever point of space we consider the moving body, we shall get only a position. If consciousness is aware of anything more than positions, the reason is that it keeps the successive positions in mind and synthesises them.⁶

Such is the way in which consciousness works; and, indeed, how this might relate to Creative Writing becomes increasingly clear. If knowledge is not compartmentalised, and if creative and critical knowledge are, in fact, entirely connected aspects of human understanding, then the many activities of Creative Writing are themselves never separated from each other. Thus we cannot, for example, truly approach questions about structure without talking about voice or tone or attitude; we cannot talk about form without considering function; we cannot emphasize our range of Creative Writing actions without considering the range of Creative Writing artefacts produced. And, of course, we cannot consider Creative Writing for children without considering Creative Writing generally or, indeed, without considering the ways in which children and adults occupy the same world.

And so, to the third example: those major elements of the divorcing of adult from child. In his very well-known 1962 study, Philippe Ariès⁷ drew attention to the ancient and early modern depiction of children as miniature adults. Others have discussed the concept of childhood and given considerable attention to the contextual and historical evolution of the idea of ‘the child’.⁸ In terms of the impact of the post-18th Century commodification of Creative Writing it is thus worthwhile pointing here to the entirely conspicuous: that children are, in the largest part, not owners of quantities of disposable income and, thus, are not primary purchasers in the modern children’s book market, fuelled by industrial rather than craft concepts. They are, as such, most often indirect participants in such commercial exchanges, involving more adult-generated orchestrations.

So what do we have, in total? A widespread devolution of the activities of creative writers from their many artefacts during a period of industrial revolution. A limiting of the commercial or cultural value applied to a vast range of those artefacts. The evolution of a concept in which a portion of human society (ie. children) is identified as distinctive, and the growth of a commercial and cultural commodity marketing associated with these identified 'consumers', who largely do not control their financial ability to be consumers. In all this, then, Creative Writing for children can quite easily become very little to do with human creative interaction at all, only partly to do with actual activities of children, and quite a lot to do with the industrial production of certain objects, defined by adults and purchased by adults.

That said, technologies that have come to the fore in the past dozen years - notably, the World Wide Web⁹ and, increasingly, mobile telephony -- have changed the way in which all these elements, above, might be considered. We have entered a period of what can be called 'post-industrialism'¹⁰, and in that we find new possibilities.

While commercial and cultural value still locates itself primarily in the market conditions related to the three hundred year status of the modes of production and consumption of Creative Writing indicated by such things as the Statute of Anne and the prioritisation of certain Creative Writing objects for certain reasons and in certain ways, the ways in which we all relate and interrelate has now change. The post-industrial society is a service orientated society, in which action (and interaction) is paramount. Provocatively, The Web and the mobile phone are quite frequently considered to be youth technologies.

Creative writers now, even if one or other of them is individually inclined to keep some distance from society, can be in touch with the world while simultaneously composing their works; and, they can draw on information and ideas from outside of their own locations and physical neighbourhoods at the same time as incorporating this information and ideas into works-in-progress. They can, if they wish, display the evidential trail of their Creative Writing on websites and in electronic files accessible to others. Similarly, they can choose, if they wish, to distribute their works when and how they like, and in what forms they prefer.

This post-industrial society does not have to involve what we might call a 'publisher' or even a 'bookseller', in the sense of these terms known (broadly) for the past three, industrial centuries. Or it can involve versions of these things, but connect them to other avenues of distribution and exchange that may or may not incorporate traditional commodity. Similarly, it can involve children themselves in the direct composition and creation of works, offering opportunities for collaboration and 'pre-publication' exchange. And, while children may not be the primary possessors of the funds to purchase works, they may be the definers of interest and the orchestrators of action that brings about the adult purchase. That is not to suggest that children have ever been universally disempowered, given the influence they have had on adults, and given the general human capacity for freewill. However, the arrival of these key late 20th Century technologies has increased our input at the level of creative experience - that is, our capacity for reinstating the relationship between creative and critical knowledge - and placed the artefacts of Creative Writing within the context of connective human action.

Answering the Question: An Evolving Case Study

The idea for the 'Close-Ups' children's book series began in a conversation between myself and an illustrator/animator (Steve Whittle) with whom I had worked previously, writing and preparing the script and production materials (eg. storyboards) for a television series for children. Interestingly, this association was founded in a government-supported program in which businesses were put in contact with those in Higher Education to help develop particular projects.¹¹

Write4Children

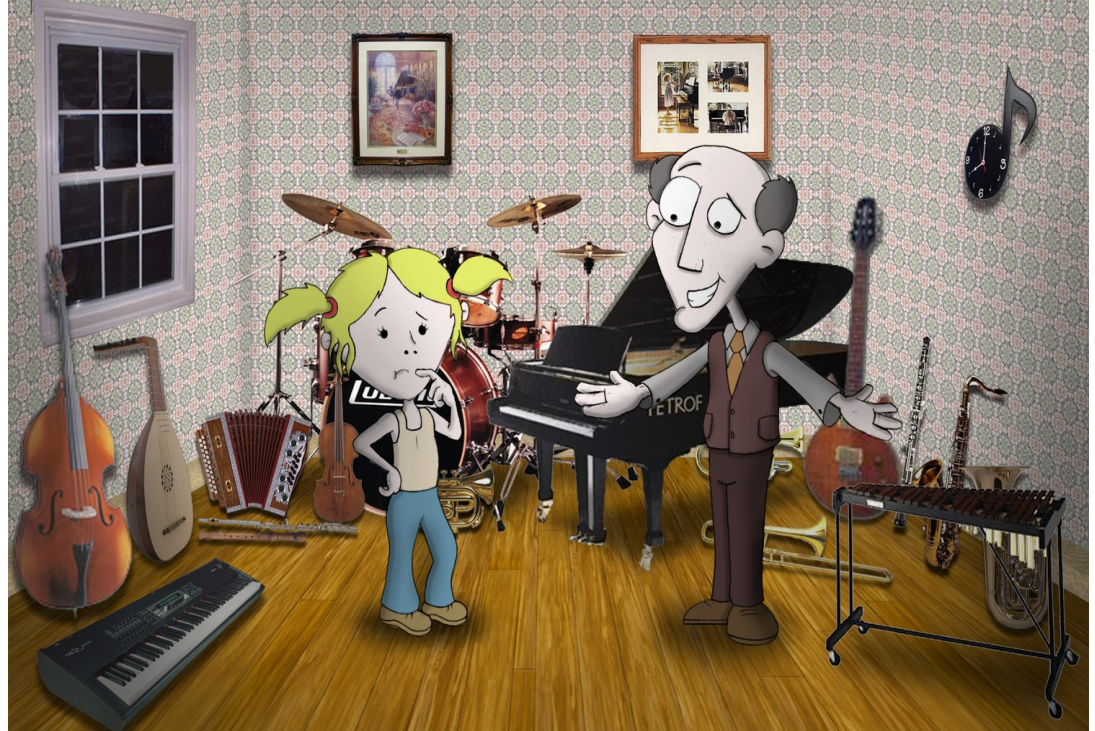
Our prior conversations began (and in the initial phase, concluded) via email and we completed the television series work without ever having met in person - though we shared work electronically and via snail mail. It was then evident, even after the television series was complete, that we both had an interest in developing more creative work, and that we shared some personal interests in writing for children that brought out elements of the comedic as well as shared adult-child perspectives on the world, highlighting aspects of human wonder that start in childhood and never entirely leave us.

In addition, Steve was a 2D/Flash/Cel Action animator, whose film *Shadows and Reflections* was award-winning. We both plainly had an interest in art/communication experiences of contemporary children engaged with new kinds of communication/art - not least film, media and new media. Equally we were both picking up on the key visual and textual pointers of contemporary children, well-versed in the world of digital television, modern animated film, the World Wide Web, and computer games.

So has begun to emerge three works, two of which are new (and one which draws back to Steve's earlier *Shadows and Reflections* piece). The first new work is *The Worst Hotel in the World* (illustrator: Steve Whittle):



And the second new work is *Sally's Music* (illustrator: Steve Whittle):



A number of things seem significant in the evolution of the Close-Ups series, to date (currently the Series is in its mid-draft stage).

Firstly, that the relationship between picture and text feels entirely like a symbiotic relationship, located in considering where we individually can find connective ideals. That is, while much has been written on the relationship between illustration and text¹², the evolution of this Series involves our own individual actions drawn from practical ideals of making progress.

So a final object, itself, is the not the immediate or most pressing focus for us - rather, it is the ways in which perspectives and interpretations meet and can interact in order to make any progress possible at all. Living in a world of perceived completion is a more accurate way to describe this! Words and pictures are formed separately, and exchanged between us. The finished works are currently a projection, something as yet in the future. The focus, thus, is our immediate actions.

Secondly, it has recently dawned on me that we have not ever discussed our own individual childhoods. So, as *The Worst Hotel in the World* and *Sally's Music* emerge they must be doing so on the basis of our personal memories and/or our individual experiences of children. Does producing these works therefore involve a broader historicised version of what constitutes 'childhood' and, if so, how might this relate to our individual versions? This is a question we are yet to approach, never mind answer.

The artefacts being produced (even in draft form; and certainly in their final condition, in the near future) represent points of agreement and exchange - however unstated these things might be. These are thus works founded in cultural action - if we do indeed take culture to be a holistic term incorporating multiple individual human influences and ideals. In addition, as the expectation is that these works will be enjoyed by children, the creation of the series also involves imaginative projections, many of which come about through synthesis, because writing for children must

certainly involve considering past (our own) and present (our sense of what contemporary children enjoy) at the same time. A synthesis of this kind recalls Bergson's notion that time as we see it depicted in the scientific state of clocks and watches, of measurable minutes and hours, is not how time is in actuality because memory, past and present, projections of what will occur in the future, all form part of our experience.

Thirdly, that we both bring to the activity of Creative Writing for children codified knowledge. That is, much as written language codifies and normalises more than spoken language, inscribing as it does on the page or screen (or otherwise), so our individual perspectives (broadly speaking, creative writer and animator) refer back to the established understandings of our respective creative fields. In this sense, the ways in which the new technologies of The Web and mobile phone have changed the modes by which we communicate is not totally a release from practices, functions and formal attitudes established over the period long before these technologies influenced the style, speed and attitude of communication/art.

If, then, our readers are to be 'consumers' whose experiences are far more immediately aware of these technologies as primary avenues of communication/art then unless these works are delivered solely by these means how might they appear? A question, perhaps, of whether the book, generally, is to be the considerable, influential object that it has been over many centuries; or whether this post-industrial society will make our older version of a 'book' obsolete - not least, paradoxically, because it is not as well supported as it once was by universities who are said to be key players in the post-industrial world (trading in knowledge and services) and who have turned increasingly to electronic data over printed materials.

Finally, *The Worst Hotel in the World* and *Sally's Music* carry themes that themselves contain knowledge of the world, individualised no doubt, but nevertheless part of an *a priori* and *a posteriori* engagement. As the sense of symbolic, as well as literal, responsibility surrounds the ideal of Creative Writing for children then the desire to produce works that illustrate some truth-value is strong. Given that Creative Writing for children is, indeed, a set of acts and actions that produces a range of artefacts (already we have sketches and draft texts, emails, comparative notes from looking at other illustrated works for children, and more) how will the final results relate to what occurs during the period of composition? How, indeed, will the final results of this project reflect the activities of two individuals and what might the final range of evidence reveal about a collaborative process of creation where our projected recipient is an amalgamation of our individual experiences? Might a close consideration of this experience (during it as well as after it) assist, even in a minor way, in addressing some of the misconceptions that have surrounded the human activity of Creative Writing? Dare I say: watch this space!

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Notes:

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1. Graeme Harper in *Writing in Education*, No.49, Autumn, 2009. *Campus Review*, August 31st 2009
2. Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994
3. For a detailed study see: Lyman R. Patterson, *Copyright in Historical Perspective*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968
4. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, New York: Dover, 2001, First published in English in 1913, p.112
5. I have quoted perhaps too frequently over the years from Andrew Delbanco's 1999 *New York Review of Books* article, 'The Decline and Fall of Literature'. Nevertheless, it is a useful summary. He writes: 'Literature in English has been a respectable university subject for barely a century. The scholar of Scottish and English ballads Francis James Child was appointed to the first chair in English at Harvard in 1876; the English honors degree was not established at Oxford until 1894.' Andrew Delbanco, 'The Decline and Fall of Literature' *The New York Review of Books*, Volume 46, Number 17, November 4, 1999
6. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, New York: Dover, 2001, first published in English in 1913, p.111
7. Philippe Ariès *Centuries of Childhood: A social History of Family Life*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1962
8. For an interesting discussion of the 18th Century (particularly The Enlightenment) and Childhood see Larry Wolff, 'When I imagine a Child: The Idea of Childhood and the Philosophy of Memory in the Enlightenment', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 4, The Mind/Body Problem, Summer, 1998, pp377-401
9. Quite quickly The Web was also generating meta-textual evidence, with Paul DiMaggio and others noting in 2001, for example, that while 25 million Americans had been online in 1995 85 million were online by 1999. Paul DiMaggio, Eszter Hargittai, W.Russell Neuman, John P. Robinson, *Social Implications of the Internet*, Annual Review of Sociology, Vol 27 (2001), pp 307-33
10. See such works as George Ritzer's *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, Second Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007
11. This was what is often referred to as 'knowledge transfer'
12. For example, the very practical Angus Highland, *The Picture Book: Contemporary Illustration*, Laurence King, 2006 or the more analytical Donna Rae McCann's *The Child's first Books: A critical Study of Pictures and Texts*, Wilson, 1973. Additionally, Perry Nodelman's *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*, University of Georgia, 1990, with its focus on narrative and story and David Lewis's *Picturing Texts: The Contemporary Children's Picturebook*, London: Routledge, 2001. Finally Dilys Evans' *Show and Tell: Exploring the Fine Art of Children's Book Illustration*, Chronicle, 2008.

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Creating a Picture, Story, Reading Book

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Abstract

This paper arises from my PhD studies entitled Text and Image: An Investigation into Children's Picture Books in the Development of Child Literacy. It discusses the results of a survey of reading matter in English Primary Schools and specifically books used for literacy teaching. Based on these findings, I consider a new reading methodology I have created, explored and trialled with a group of beginner and developing readers. The paper is fundamentally concerned with the material nature of reading matter in the development of child literacy. I then show how, using reader response, I might develop a number of 'real reading story books' created using my individual illustrative style combining both text and image.

Key Words: Literacy, Text, Image, Fusion, Lost, Found

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This paper is particularly concerned with texts whose narrative combines words and images in creating story, yet is principally focused on the picture book and the ways in which language and images interact and complement each other as part of the reading process and how we learn to read through this process. This includes a consideration of language, text and image individually, but throughout, attempts to reveal the overarching 'text' as a fusion of two distinct forms of communication and expression to create a whole. The paper goes further than this though, and in some respects is a summation of a study of reader response or more precisely, reader need and desire within the development of a new methodology concerning the material nature of the picture story book and learning to read.

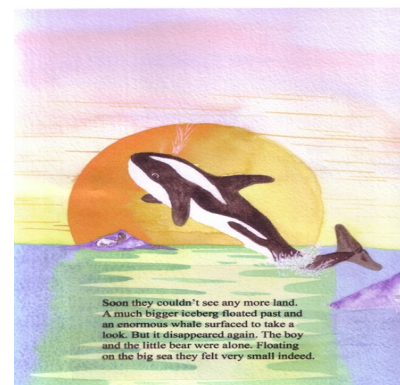
This research found that childhood reading seems to have a profound impact upon the later work of children's writer's and illustrator's. However, some picture book creators notably worked with image and some with text, far less with both. There was also little to no evidence of the particular style of the fusion of text and image that I was looking for within the many picture books explored and that was inherent in my own illustrative style. The word 'fusion' therefore was central to the project. Perhaps the most pivotal and contentious aspect of this fusion though, stemmed from the importance the project placed on what children read as opposed to how they read it (Hollindale, 1988: 7, Hunt, 1994: 10). For the purposes of this paper, I contend that how children read is inherent in what children read. Therefore, if the quality of what is read is given importance and prominence, then how one learns to read will naturally follow.

Initially, my research established, through a survey of schools across England, that the majority of them use mixed methods to teach reading, and that most used two schemes or more to do this. Supported by the 1988 findings of Professor Ted Wragg, these results highlight a major dichotomy. There is a cyclical nature in the reading debate where constant change surrounds how reading is taught yet what materials are used to do this, in the majority of schools, have changed little and date as far back as 1922 - 1964 (*The Beacon Readers*) and 1949 - 67 (*Janet and John*) for example.

Having grounded the research in an understanding of childhood, learning, teaching and reading models and methods I created a number of experiments to find out what children wanted in their reading material. Pachtman and Wilson were one of the few studies available that asked children what they thought about books, and summarized that children must be afforded “due respect when planning reading programmes.” With this in mind, the conclusions drawn from the experiments created for this research project are outlined below.

The children’s most popular choice of paper for a book was both watercolour and glossy paper. A number of children thought it would be good to have glossy watercolour paper and some of the older ones such as Sarah, 7 stated ‘this (the watercolour paper) is the best one as it isn’t flat and the colour will change on the bobbly bits. When it is a proper book (meaning it would be copied onto a glossy paper) it will be shiny as well so that would look good. These are the nicest books when they have the nicest paperand it smells nice when it is new’. ‘This response shows how children are very sensorily orientated, one reason they should have the luxury of fine paper in books’(Stewig, 1995: 104). The smell and feel of good quality paper can be a delight to them. An example of this kind of sensuous delight can be found in *After the Storm* (Butterworth, 1992), the heavy paper having a velvety surface and being totally opaque.

The children decided that the most popular format was profile, with half of those who preferred this format liking the A6 size similar to the Beatrix Potter books, which the children felt comfortable handling. However, almost the same number preferred the square format. Children liked this format because it was ‘good for wide sea and sky pictures’. In essence they felt it was the most versatile format and were comfortable with it having read the *Percy the Park Keeper Series*. “You can see how big the sea and the sky are,” responded Tara (6), “they go on forever, and ever and ever so that you know they are this big (she stretched her arms out wide) no bigger, bigger than the classroom, the school, the road and town. They are really, really big and you can see that in the picture.



The whale is big really but he’s quite small in the sea really, isn’t he, ‘cause the sea’s so big?” Tara showed a remarkably mature grasp of scale, perspective and a vivid imagination in discussing her reasons for choosing the square format.

The surprise was that children didn’t enjoy reading the landscape format book as it “keeps falling out of your hands and is too long, like the monster book,” complained Sara (6). Reading scheme manufacturers seem to have found the right format for children as far as reading scheme books are concerned and my research would suggest, as the majority of reading scheme material comes in an A5 portrait style as opposed to books such as Maurice Sendak’s (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are* which are A4 landscape as identified by Sara, above.

Mid-tone pictures as in *Where the Wild Things Are* were the most popular with the children as “they look right, the others look changed,” stated Jai (5). The original watercolour was chosen by almost half of the cohort. Interestingly, pictures with a blue tonal element were chosen by almost a third of the children. “That one looks like the sea, but the others aren’t real,” whispered Molly (5) who had, like many others, a strong sense of realism. This was enhanced further by her choice of her favourite book, Shirley Hughes’s (2003) *Ella’s Big Chance*.

The fifth experiment demonstrated that pictures are important to young readers in learning to read, opposing the theory of reading with no pictures as stated by Protheroe (1992). Karl (7) explained, “the pictures tell a story too, and they help you read the words, ‘specially the ones you can’t work out, you can find the word in the picture, and you remember that, you do.” The vast majority of the children expressed similar views. Only five of the two hundred children chose the option that didn’t have an image. Olivia (7), noted ‘pictures help you read words. The reading books don’t have pictures when you can read and it makes it difficult which isn’t right is it because everything has pictures, they help you understand.’ Only five children of two hundred chose the page completely made up of text. Ben (7) noted “I would read this page because I can but would like more books with pictures because when you can read our teacher takes the pictures away and I don’t like reading because the pictures make it fun.” The majority of children chose a watercolour picture option because ‘the colours were soft and not bright’, ‘there is a kind of sparkle in them’.

The two most popular text choices were the simple ‘Arial’ and then the almost handwritten ‘Viner Hand ITC’. Arial was chosen by many of the children because ‘it is easy to read’, ‘lots of books use that’ and ‘it’s big’, even though all the fonts offered were the same size, “but it’s a bit boring,” uttered Tom (6), “it would be good if the words looked like that,” as he pointed to the Viner Hand Font. Many of the children like the feeling of what they considered ‘hand written text’. ‘It’s different and I like it’ said Tammy, 5. ‘It isn’t ordinary’, Michael (6) answered, ‘the others are boring’. The children’s slower response to font suggested that few readers consider the type faces selected by a books designer (Stewig, 1995: 105). Text faces using simple shapes which are easy to read and do not tire the eye are prevalent in reading material, yet the children preferred the type faces of magazines or book covers which was “more exciting and tells the story, like if it’s happy or dangerous, I like that” James (7), “like in the pirate story, the words are different shapes and sizes and colours, it’s good that is, I think....it makes it interesting , I think,” Prya (6), “...yeah, that’s a good one,” interrupted James (7), “I like that one best, I like the paper, the colours, the words are big and small and thin and fat and tall and tiny and funny.” Display faces are unusual shapes which will attract and hold readers’ attention; they are generally used on the title page and as section and chapter headings. Display types(Stewig, 1995: 106) often make inferences about the possible content or treatment of content in a book. However, the children’s reactions to the experiment and other books would suggest that they would be drawn to books and the words within them if the interior of the book also used these styles of type. This experiment led to the strongest opinions and ideas from the children and encouraged me in the development of a lost and found methodology within the fusion of text and image.

The top two responses in an experiment to see where the text was placed on the page were a quirky shaped text box/area, which was slightly more popular than a short, wide column of text. Again, this was because the children liked something that was ‘different’ to the normal placement of text found in many of the books that they were reading. “I like trying to follow the words when they make a pattern like that. It makes it more fun to read it” explained Josh, (6) “...and I’d read more books like this because it makes it fun.”

When the children were asked to put font in a certain place and on their favourite image the results indicated that a short wide text box was preferred on a watercolour image. “This looks good” responded Sam, 5, “but none of them are as good as when the words are splattered all over the page.”

“That’s best,” interrupted Evie (6), “it’s like a game.” There was overall consensus that “finding the words”, “making a game of reading the words” and “uncovering the words so they are a surprise,” was far better than being presented with words in a conventional style. “Reading books are boring, I don’t read them at home ‘cause I don’t like them and at school I’d rather paint than read, but I like comics. If all books were like that and did words like comics and magazines they would be good and I would read them, like at home.” Once again the consensus seems to be that display style text has a really strong impact on children within an image based world (Calvino, 1996). The cover and interior design of the book and the way the text is presented would appear to be very important to these children and perhaps more importantly, would seemingly excite many of them enough to want to read. Many more of the children chose the picture that bled off the page rather than those that were framed within the page and often gave the reason for choosing this as ‘you can see more of the picture.’

When given four different word combinations for the first double page spread of a book, the children identified the ‘best story’ as being the one where ‘the words come again and again and sort of make a poem’. Repetition was the main reason given by the children for their choice. The children found the white text on a blue background preferable to black text on a white background as, ‘it’s clear’, ‘it matches the white of the moon’ and ‘it’s like star words in the sky’ and “it’s fun and it works. I think the writer has thought about it, it matches and makes sense, and it’s fun and I think it would be good if the words weren’t as usual (Tom, 6, was talking about the font) because that makes it like our reading book, I like this better, this is good, I’d read this.’

The words *distance*, *beckons*, *darkened*, *something*, *watching* and *faintly* were the least recognised words in the experiments by the majority of children including the thirty year three pupils. However, many of the children were able to have a go at working out the word using their appropriate strategy, which ranged from phonic to alphabetic and guessing to looking at the picture.

Word matching was important to the children as they read a new text. They enjoyed finding words that had similar consonant clusters either at the beginning, middle or end of the word, words that started with the same letter and words that sounded similar. Younger children particularly found this fascinating and those that had participated in onset and rime work earlier in their education were very quick in matching words that had similar patterns. Once again the children saw this as a game “it’s fun, it’s learning like a game which is fun,” concluded Jenny, 6.

The majority of the children had strategies to deal with words that they were unsure of. Some needed prompting. There was no pattern or distinct methodology that was used by more pupils than others. Some reverted to strategies that worked better for them than those they had learned in the classroom namely the synthetic phonic approach.

The children were asked to find any words that go together in terms of rhyming words, words that are repeated, words that are phonically alike etc. They highlighted couplets such as schhhh! and listen, far and away, secret and say, watching and waiting, bright and high, deep and blue, blue and sky, blue and bright. Once again the over-riding factor was reading text that formed a game for the majority of the children. When asked, was there anything on the page that helped you read the text, the children highlighted the words moon, night, dark and sky, ‘which come again and again so you know them the second and third times,’ stated John, 7, ‘some of the words have the same letters and sounds like secret and say, dream and dust, night and bright. They rhyme as well, don’t they?’

The experiments showed how text could be integral to the idea of the image and illustration in terms of its “visualness”. The younger the child the more likely they are to want the picture and text more synchronized, without it being “boring” (Kitty, 5), but as they get older this seemed far less so and from as soon as they can recognise few words, they are looking at other translations in the picture. Illustrations that appear before or after the text seemed to frustrate the children and were expected to work with the text, extend the text, play on the text, develop the text, and not sooner or later but at that precise moment. The visual would seem to have a huge part to play in attracting these children to books but also in retaining them as readers long after they become fluent.

The children in these experiments chose the following aspects of the picture story book as those they would like to see in any future picture story reading books: Watercolour paper that had a glossy enhancement upon publication in a portrait or square format. tonal harmony, positive colouration, but not fluorescent or very pale colours. The font created ongoing discussion which often became quite contentious. However, the group were both consistent and insistent in their decisions regarding the positive use of varied fonts, varied sizes, lost and found words and the idea of a game in trying to read the words. In terms of text placement the children felt that some of the text should be quirky and define volume, feelings and direction whilst other text could, but not necessarily should be traditionally boxed. They also felt that all the books should be mainly illustrated to bleed, believing the fantasy nature of the stories and the wide landscape and cavernous images should look as 'big as they could'. 'The frame closes them off and makes the inside of the cave, the islands and the sea small and they're not' stated Bryony, 6. However, a number of the children stated that "it would be good if we could mix them, 'cause the *Percy* books work, except maybe you don't have to find the words, and I like doing that,' Sita, 6. Finally, many of the children felt that numbered pages were unnecessary with Tara, 6 stating that 'page numbers just make you race your friends, it's better without them and you enjoy the stories more.' Stuart, 6, continued, 'they are for the teachers to write on your card and tell where you are and if you have read enough.' After group and one to one discussions on the content of the stories and how they should be illustrated, twelve children from YR to Y2 formed a team from which to develop the picture books based on the results of the experiments. This team took the books through the process from idea to pre-publication and gave feedback at each stage. The evidence collated seemed to highlight the possibility that the visual aspect of the text, the fusion of text and image that I originally envisaged, could be the nucleus of a new way of reading, where the poetry, the symbolic, the intangible and the interpretation is inherent within the very fusion I suggest.

Ninety seven percent of the children's responses supported the notion that children's relationships with reading scheme books is, 'at best, jaded', and does not encourage the development of a multi-cued and multivalent approach to reading, the very principle that my idea of fusion is based on. Encouraging the reader to search, re-construct, re-read, look again, delve, discover and re-discover in a new picture book form, was therefore the embodiment of my idea of the fusion of text and image in the what, the material nature of the book. Only by being allowed to make choices about what they read, one might argue, can children develop the personal investment in the process of literacy which is essential if they are to engage in real learning, for 'it is what you read (or have read to you) that exerts a crucial influence on the kind of reader you become. What you read might well determine how you read, whether you read, and even define what reading is and what it is good for.(Wray, 1995: 73)'

The findings of this research place the emphasis in literacy education on reading for meaning through story, whereby children are encouraged to use any clues available from phonics, context, pictures, sensible prediction etc. I emphasize the diagnosis of individual need and provision of an approach to meet that need, as it is unhelpful for different approaches to be presented as if it is an either / or issue. I have come to the conclusion that one answer to the problem of how we teach reading, is in the planned teaching of skills within quality literature for meaning, yet this can't take place without the what, the fusion of text and image and the material nature of the picture story reading book. Although all printed materials have potential for helping a student learn to read, some have greater value than others. It is obvious that when possible, the most effective materials should be used for both instruction and enjoyment. The problem is to identify the best materials, for the materials are only one factor in a child's learning to read(Staiger, 1973: 61). However, my research, supported by Wray, Chall, Stieger, Meek, Graham and Solity et al, indicates that the how of reading cannot take place if the what is not effective and the best material possible, one of the main contentions and premises of this study.

The books I created were based on a fusion of text and image, but within this fusion I created a methodology which I called 'lost and found'. I trialed five books from the series with the group of twelve children and later the original two hundred children who had taken part in the initial survey. My research suggested a number of reading methodologies which will inform my creative work, including reflections of Solity's (2002) idea of the 'Theory of Optimal Instruction,' that brings together two polarised approaches, the teaching of phonics and real books. My research and experiments find this a favourable approach, because it involves, initially, 'teaching children an optimal number of core phonic skills that are then applied to a wide range of books, letting the child acquire the status of a 'free reader' very early on.' Whilst there is much agreement that children are best taught to read through synthetic phonics, I will develop the idea that was highlighted in my experiments, which involves creating a picture story reading book that allows the teaching of reading from the point of view of the fusion of text and image. It differs from Solity's and others research considerably. My research supports the development of a different methodology, where the child will be encouraged, to call upon any number of word attack processes that enables them to identify, build up or break down and remember the word, therefore allowing real books to be used from the very beginning with any learning method. This might be through synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, alphabet recognition, guessing, context etc. However, they will also have a strong sense of story and meaning. The fusion of text and image endorses this through the 'lost and found text and image method,' where the how is inherent in the what of reading.

My creative premise therefore is to create real reading books (Wyse, 2007), based on the idea of text being literally subsumed into the image as an intrinsic and fundamental part. The idea of 'lost and found' text works on the premise of layering. The concept of 'found text' is two-fold. Firstly, it is a reading text which has clarity and strength, is bold and has a defined font, such as Arial, the typeface chosen by the children in the experiments as being clear and easy to read, (see Illustrations 1 and 2 below). It is a font that the reader finds simple to follow in terms of story, often used as a light text on a dark background, as in *The Whisperer* by Nick Butterworth (2004) or dark text on a light background as maintained by Protheroe (1992),

Illustration 1.

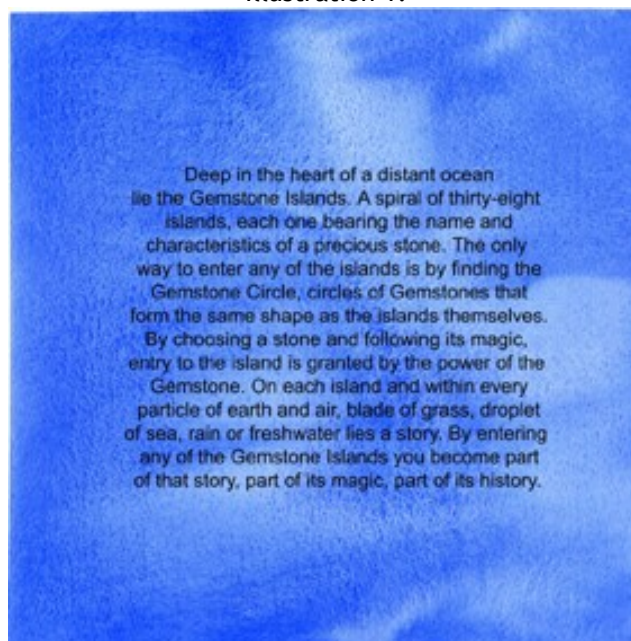
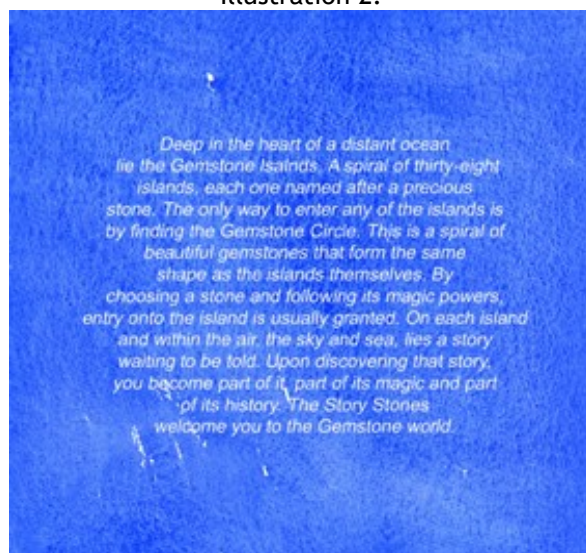
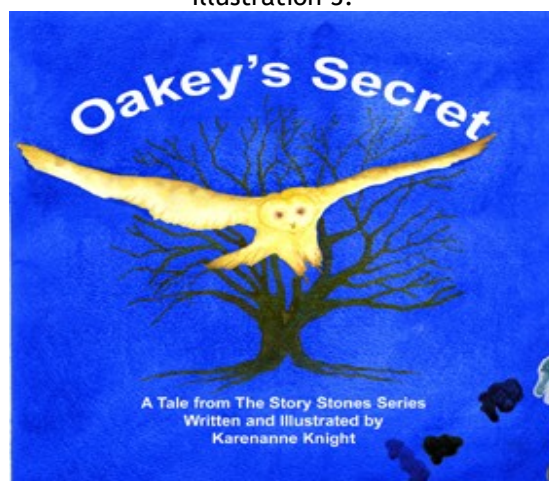


Illustration 2:



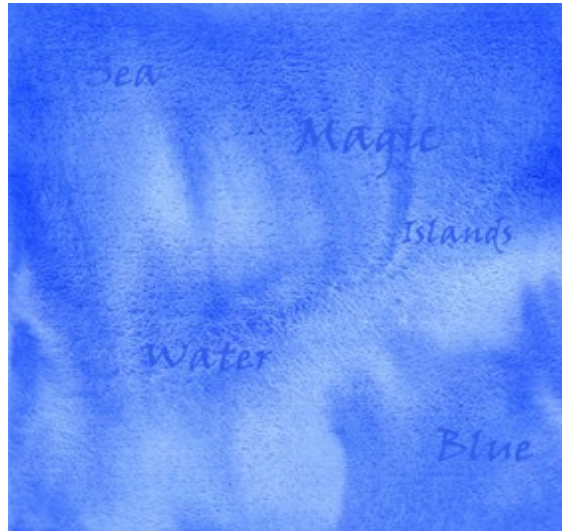
Secondly, 'found text' is a design text that highlights and brings a particular word or words to the reader's attention. More often used for advertising, headings, book and magazine covers, this text and its more complex fonts and font shapes attract the eye and are visually appealing and familiar to the twenty first century child (Calvino, 1996 & Zipes, 2007). The experiments highlighted and reinforced how this style of text influences the appeal and desirability of books for children, therefore encouraging an interest in reading (Rudd, 2008), as noted in the children's comments, (see Illustration 3 below).

Illustration 3:



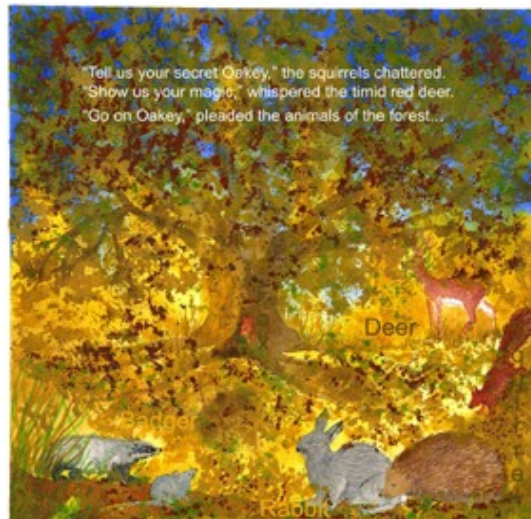
Lost text meanwhile is partially hidden under, behind or within another layer, be that text or image. It will be used to encourage the reader to seek out additional information that will add to their understanding and interest in the story, thereby appealing to a wide audience, beginner reader and fluent reader alike, as there will always be something more the child can find within the page, e.g. context and meaning, and develop outside the confines of the page, e.g. imagination. The reader is involved in a game, intended to be fun, something the children in the experiments desired and enjoyed in the examples I showed them. This idea is founded upon the artistic device of lost and found edges in a picture, creating lost and found elements to the images and often found layered, under or within another image, (see Illustration 4 below).

Illustration 4



Whilst this idea may initially sound very complicated, both in concept and outcome, it has a simplicity and some parallels akin to comics, magazines etc. The text in the story books is intentionally part of the image. The text becomes the image, it is the image, it is symbolic of the image, yet something new occurs in the reading of this fusion. The text and image help the child choose the correct level of perception, identification and interpretation, directing the reader through its layers, avoiding some and receiving others, (see Illustration 5 below).

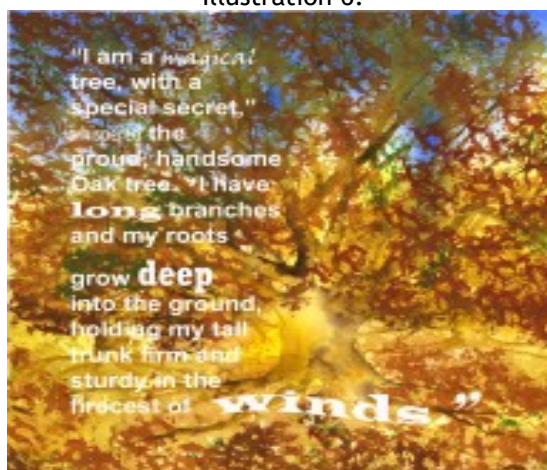
Illustration 5:



The text is in a complementary relationship with the image through the fusion, providing meaning through text and image not as fragments but as a unified, cohesive and integrated force. However, the harmony of the message within the fusion of text and image is still achieved at the level of story. My research supports the idea that the books should encourage the acquisition of the hundred basic word¹. They support tightly focused phonics work but are real books read from the beginning, rather than controlled reading schemes. The books will not be dictated by page numbers and grading systems as the children felt this was unnecessary and only encouraged competition rather than an enjoyment of the act of reading. They have been written to be particularly pertinent to a child's reading journey, imparting a range of different components that provide for a range of individual readers, who use their understanding of how language works to suggest the total meaning.

The 'lost and found' fusion of text and image means that children do not feel they have to read every word correctly before turning the page, they can re-trace their steps or find these words in the 'lost' or 'found' element of the other stories in the series. The books can be looked at before any reading approach is used, as they do not emphasise the 'reading of words' as the only methodology, but the ideas which give meaning to the sentences. These intentions allow the child to find their own book and find meaning in it, (see Illustration 6 below).

Illustration 6:



The picture story reading books received much interest from parents and teachers alike, most noticeably in terms of the mixed learning strategies that the children would use in order to learn to read through the 'lost and found' element of the books

"The books are different in that they have, inherent in their philosophy, a child centred approach. They allow the child to pick up on the reading methodology familiar to them, whilst the text highlights certain words of interest for the child that excites them. In this way they do not feel they are 'learning' to read. The words that are not easy to pick out (the lost words) stimulate the children to 'find' them. This is a new and unusual concept, as reading books are expected to make the words obvious (an obvious need when learning to read), but these words became particularly interesting to the children who really enjoyed trying to work them out. They enjoyed the element of game. I would like to see more of these books in schools."

Jenny, 42, Teacher (Y1)

"I wish I had learnt about different teaching methods at college. They only showed us how to use synthetic phonics, but this is not relevant to many children who do not take to it or who can read prior to school. These books allow the children to find other methods. Troy, for instance, enjoys finding the 'lost words' do you call them? The children love the material itself, which seems to entice them to read. They are children's, children's books. "

Amy, 22, Teacher (Y1)

"I like the idea of finding words. It makes it a bit of a game for both of us!"

Terry, 31, Parent

The children's views have been documented earlier in the paper.

In conclusion, the picture story reading books created within this project are a fusion of the real book and the reading scheme book. The project is still in its infancy, as the series of books needs to be completed and their success measured over a longer period. However, the research has identified the importance children place on the material nature of books used in the teaching of reading, and whilst developing a contemporary approach in terms of the fusion of text and image, and principally the 'lost and found' methodology that was inherent in my own practice and style of illustration, I have taken into consideration the technological world in which they live.

This research has evolved into the creation of *The Story Stones*, a series of 'real reading picture story' books culminating from the ideas of the very children for whom they are intended. They are now being developed further, in order to try and improve literacy standards and a desire for books for the beginner and young reader of today and future readers.

*

Notes:

1. ...as defined by Solity, 2002 and incorporated in the one hundred and ninety five words of the NLS Framework for Teaching.

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Writing Conventions – What's New

Alison Boyle
Publishing consultant and writer

Abstract

This paper draws on a small study into the use of online social networks for writing. The research supports a discussion of the conventions of writing and reading in both physical and online worlds.

As a published author of books for children, I wanted to understand what kinds of impact digital technologies were having on the processes and protocols of print-based publishing. My investigation explored the ways in which comments about a text written for a young adult readership can be elicited through an online social network.

Key messages that emerged from the research include: many conventions are common between texts accessed in physical and online worlds, including reader expectations for episodic presentations; there are financial implications for professional authors working in an environment where there's an assumption that texts are free to view; social networking sites currently offer fragmentary showcasing opportunities.

The paper anticipates a new model for online social networks that suits the narrative interests of authors rather than the design protocols of current site owners.

Key words:

authorial conventions; reading conventions; reader engagement; digital writing; feedback; audience

*

Introduction

A small research study conducted at the University of Bristol as part of the MSc in Education, Technology and Society sought to understand the process of engaging with users of online social networks who comment on fiction text.

Motivated by a wish to take an active part in a social network rather than relying on accounts of the phenomenon, and by asking other writers to share their experiences of online collaboration via a questionnaire, I would be supplying myself with a map for the journey. I set out on the journey with many pre-conceptions, some of which were dispelled by the research findings.

Overall, I found that my lack of knowledge about the forces operating in online social networks lead me to over-emphasise both the advantages and the pitfalls of using these networks, and that their *modus operandi* were much more conventional than I had imagined. In a sense, I made the journey more circuitous than it might have been because I had assumed that most things would be new. I constructed rules for the transactions that were not supported by data collected at the empirical stages of the research.

Although new relationships can be sparked by the enabling technology of social networks, members of these networks tend to communicate with people with whom they have some form of pre-existing relationship, often a relationship forged in the physical rather than the online world. Instead of lawlessness, I found convention.

However, some important differences between physical and online environments did become apparent through the course of the investigation. The control wielded by social networks, for example manifested in the design protocols of web pages where text is posted for commentary, can interfere with an author's purpose; and the shift from technical knowledge residing in the hands of a trained web programmer or designer in a publishing house imposes additional demands on the author.

Notes on terminology

i. The environment of social networking is referred to as the 'online' world, and the environment of daily life as the 'physical' world. These choices are not ideal, since interacting with a social network involves typing on a keyboard or other kinds of physical activity that enable access. Hardware devices such as a computer and modem are also required. However, the terms "virtual" and "real" are even less satisfactory in my view, since they pre-suppose that online experiences are less tangible than offline experiences; in any case, there is insufficient space here to arrive at satisfactory accounts of these terms.

ii. Those users who interacted with the research project are referred to as both 'reviewers' and 'commentators', since the Bebo site (www.bebo.com) where my fiction text was posted features both Review and Comments areas for providing feedback.

iii. Although any reader of my text automatically joins the category of engaged audience for that text, in cases where the author cannot tell who has merely read the online text in this research but failed to comment on it, the term 'audience' defines a potential body of readers as well as actual readers.

Key findings

The research investigation uncovered the following key findings:

Digitally networked projects typically rely on networks established in the physical world to get them going and to sustain them.

For short-term projects which do not build online content in a traditional book-narrative sense, there are additional barriers to achieving sustained user engagement.

Episodic presentation of texts supports continued reader engagement; and online writing often follows epic storytelling conventions.

Technical requirements placed on the initiator of the digital research created barriers to writing.

Some of the design protocols of social networking sites work against an author's purposes, for example by fragmenting the audience, and by automatically incorporating grammatical errors in to web pages - which can be embarrassing.

Spot the difference

The central purpose of the research investigation was to understand what would happen when a short extract of fiction text was posted on a social networking site and feedback invited. Would this process enhance or detract from my usual approach to writing? How I would respond to feedback provided by the social networkers?

To support my understanding, I drew together data collected through my literature review, desk research, author questionnaires and supplementary email responses, feedback on my text from online commentators, and responses to the online evaluation poll.

The following themes emerged from the data:

a. Conventions

- (i) *Conventions demanded by readers*
- (ii) *Authorial conventions*
- (iii) *Digital writing conventions*

b. Commentary types

- (i) *Approbation*
- (ii) *Commentators' influence*

c. Engaging and retaining commentators

- (i) *Audience engagement*
- (ii) *Continuity of engagement*

First I will set the scene. It is worth noting that at the outset of the investigation I had assumed that few physical world conventions for presenting fiction to readers would prevail in online social networks. I discovered that, without recourse to a conventional first chapter, my online readers were resistant to providing comments. In response, I posted additional text. I also altered some of my writing practices to suit the design protocols that restrict options for word-processing and text formatting available online.

Readers on social networks can leave short, text-like messages to provide the author with an instant, low-expense reaction, and write more detailed reviews of the work as chapters are posted and the story develops. Regularly updated hit counters show how many readers accessed a given chunk of text, although not of course whether they read it, still less whether they liked it. For example, one of the highest-ranking episodic stories on the social network aimed at young adults, Quizilla (www.quizilla.com), received over 10,000 viewings for each of its forty-five chapters. If a writer is able to attract such a large cohort of readers, they are getting something right.

Isn't this a return to the past? Storytellers developed their material by attending to the reactions of their audiences. If it didn't go well in Little Hanborough, the narrative could quickly be revised before the tale was told again in Great Hanborough. It is a brutal methodology; but it has produced stories that have persisted for thousands of years, and oral storytelling is enjoying a revival.

Online story sites offer a considerable passing trade of readers and companion authors, again not dissimilar to that enjoyed by roving storytellers. All users of a social network have the potential to generate feedback and suggestions for further developments, and this degree of interactivity was also a feature of the development of stories carried between communities by storytellers. The difference is that sometimes it is difficult to determine who is who online, which can make the establishment of ongoing writer-reader relationships more troublesome than face-to-face contact. However, it is worth asking how much one needs to know about and interact with one's audience in order to write successfully for them.

In terms of commentary types, approbation was a recurring result of online interactions between writers and readers, as evidenced from the literature and through responses to my author questionnaire. The majority of the comments posted on social networks are generalised and minimal, whereas detailed feedback has greater potential to support the self-evaluation of texts and improvements in quality.

Another way of understanding commentator feedback was through implementation of a poll during the last week of the data collection cycle on Bebo (www.bebo.com). Collaborative models such as those developed by John-Steiner (1978 and 2000) rely on discursive probing through conversation with respondents, an approach which is not directly applicable to my investigation, although the questioning style did prove useful when devising questions for my Bebo evaluation poll.

Finally, the launch and continued engagement with online text is supported by networks which comprise the author's target audience first established in the physical world. I concluded that a longer-running narrative spread across a period of months or years would have been preferable to the four-week data collection cycle used for this research.

a. Conventions

So, turning to a consideration of conventions, several findings from the research illuminate how readers and writers operate in online worlds.

At the outset of this research I had expected that the communication methods used by Bebo social networkers would be radically different from my previous experience, merely because digital technology was involved. Technology provides opportunities for faster communication and increased levels and depth of interaction through more efficient transactions between authors and audience. Some audience members will become commentators on a range of media including texts that are integrated into online social transactions.

Social practices exert a strong influence over the way the technology is used by the players in these transactions, and I discovered resonances in Cruz and Lewis (1994), who argue that the cultural practices of audiences affect the production of cultural artefacts; this can be from the point of view of both the reader and the writer. Additionally, through a conceptual framework, Crickman (1976) examined the interrelationships between structural, cognitive, behavioural and affective elements of communities, and these notions are developed further by Lave and Wenger:

Changing locations and perspectives are part of actors' learning trajectories, developing identities, and forms of membership... (1991, p.36)

Online authors and peripatetic storytellers must retain their reader-members once hooked; what better way to achieve this than to adopt the epic form? Peripatetic storytellers used face-to-face contact to engage audiences, and similarly the online environment can bring an immediacy of contact, and on a larger scale, through the presentation of sprawling, episodic texts.

(i) *Conventions demanded by readers*

Readers who operate in online social networks impose many of the same conventions demanded by readers of fiction published in print. For example, as author I was required by online readers to provide a complete first chapter of my novel (a text extract was not acceptable), as well as a greater overall volume of text.

Although a chapter containing almost 3,000 words (representing the fourth iteration of online text) would not be unusual in a printed book, this flouts advice in the literature regarding optimal word counts and reader overload in online environments. The table below shows the increase in the number of words I posted on Bebo over a period of four weeks, in response to the low level of uptake by online commentators.

1st text iteration: 583 words

2nd text iteration: 699 words

3rd text iteration: 967 words

4th text iteration: 2,962 words

I concluded that the recommendations from Burgess (2001) and Hewson et al (2003) are out of date. During the intervening years, users of online spaces have become more accustomed to digesting text via digital user interfaces. Rather than printing online stories out on paper, there has been a significant shift in the acceptability of reading text "live" online. A broader question then is: Should the expectations of e-confident readers affect the practices of writers and publishers? There is insufficient space to deal with this issue in detail, although it would make an interesting question for further study.

(ii) *Authorial conventions*

I would usually write and edit my text in a word-processing program. For the new text required of this research (messages and instructions for potential readers on the social network Bebo) I responded to the site's word restrictions by writing prompts to commentators in "real-time" online. This speeded up the writing process and changed my view about the efficiency of some authorial practices.

Due to my limited immersion in "real-time" writing and the absence of a compulsion to change, my authorial practices did not fundamentally alter during the short time-frame of this investigation. I continue to create text using a fully-functioning word-processing package - a relatively liberating experience after the compulsion to conform to online formatting restrictions.

For my online presence I wished to establish independence from the print publishing tradition of writing for children with which I am already aligned. In other words, the anonymity that is afforded by social networks allowed me to hide my already published identity, although this was done in an ethical way. Having recourse to an alternative persona represented a new and intriguing phenomenon that I had only superficially explored through the use of pseudonyms in print. In spite of the many prompts to give away intimate personal information in templates and spaces designated by the originators of online social networks, the option to separate the entered data from fact apparently offers some form of protection.

(iii) *Digital writing conventions*

I was surprised by some of the new requirements placed on me as an author seeking comments in an online environment. In particular, I found that I had to fulfil the very active role of communicator-about-fiction in addition to the role of creator-of-fiction. Publicity and sales staff in a book publishing company will usually take on the majority of the communicator-about-fiction task, with varying degrees of input from the author. The level of responsibility assumed by the publisher is directly related to the perceived value of the author to that publishing house. On social networks, at present, it is generally the responsibility of the author to find an audience for their work.

b. Commentary Types

Feedback from the four fiction authors I interviewed in the first phase of the data collection, and commentaries received on the fiction text posted on Bebo, fell under two main themes: approbation, and commentators' influence. I now analyse these in turn.

(i) *Approbation*

I was looking to social networks for a high volume of traffic and for detailed commentary that had taken the readers time and care to write. I found through analysis that locating the value in commentary was closely related to understanding the identities and the biases of commentators.

When conducting my literature review I found that the norm was for commentators to leave brief feedback on the fiction text provided, and that the (supposedly) teen writers on Quizilla's Stories hub (www.quizilla.com) are interested in gathering a high volume of adulatory comments rather than detailed comments. This may be as a result of the ratings system, in which pole position on the site is given to narratives that have secured a majority of readers' stars and reviews. In this scenario, detailed feedback becomes relegated. Even when the amount of praise received is minimal, this can be perceived by authors as pivotal, and I found examples of where a single text message from an online supporter had encouraged continued postings.

Creators of chapter-based sequential stories on Quizilla often use text-messaging concisions to hook an audience and seek approbation. Research from Pew Internet (2008, p.2) and consultation of Chationary, the online glossary (www.parentscentre.gov.uk/usingcomputersandtheinternet/chationary/), will support a translation of this message from a Quizilla author:

[I hate you but why do I love you? \(a sesshomaru love story\) ch.38 -the final battle at Narakus castle-](#) 19 June 2008, 21:38:27well heres ch.38 hope ya like it - this is probably my favorite chapter in the whole story....you'll see why once u read it lol - and to remind u all this story is going to end really really soon 0.o yea i no it sux =P lol jk but if you want me to make a sequel/second season of this story just message me - come on i need atleast 5-10 messages saying i should so pllllllzzzzzz message... [sic] (www.quizilla.com/lists/stories/top/feed)

Through my questionnaire that sought out the views of four authors who have written online, I discovered that approbation was considered important, though to varying degrees. One author, Addy Farmer, recommends that some feedback should be 'taken with a pinch of salt because most commentators are very supportive and not like a crit group!' (Response to Author Questionnaire). Here she is distinguishing between a literary group geared towards critiquing a text and a general group of commentators who engage with texts on social networks.

(ii) *Commentators' influence*

So, what was I hoping to gain from posting my text on Bebo? I wanted readers to understand my writing and to some extent accept my preferred meanings, since out of this might come a shared understanding and commonality. In terms of my prior experience as a published author in print, was this placing the same or a greater requirement on my audience once technology (a social networking communications interface) was brought into the picture?

It is helpful here to draw on the literature about open and closed texts, where open texts are broadly defined by audiences as having many different meanings, and closed texts as producing shared meanings. Jhally states:

Whether a text is closed or open is not a property of the text itself. It depends upon the other discourses available to people to make sense of it. It is thus a property of the context - of the other discourses that intersect with it.' (1994, p.164)

Access to the web has increased the modes of communication available for creators of texts and their readers and commentators, amplifying the complexity of an already complex notion, and moving far beyond Hall's 'unilinear model' (1994, p.254). Easy access to self-publishing online means that the creation of artefacts is increasingly not solely in the hands of professional TV producers, directors, or authors of young adult fiction, but also potentially in the hands of every member of a digital social network. Such a shift expands the opportunities for audiences to exert influence on the texts that are created by professional authors.

In addition, due to the multiplicity of communications made possible by technological design, social networks provide a platform for commentator on commentator influence. Evidence of intersecting discourses was found in the many commentary threads begun and then taken up by subsequent reviewers of the fiction text posted on Bebo during the course of the research. Commentators' influence over each other appeared to be stronger than the author's influence over the commentators (whose prompts and instructions were featured in online text surrounding the fiction extract). This may have resulted in a reduction in the originality and range of feedback types although, due to the short time-frame for the data collection, further work would be needed in this area.

Social networks enable reviewers to create multi-modal artefacts intended for posting on writers' sites, not merely textual comments on text. Fans of two writers I interviewed for this research, L. Lee Lowe and Rachael Wing, used graphics software to create online banners. In this example of commentators' influence on the presentation of a writer's work, there is an expectation that banner designs will be integrated in to the web page to provide an eye-catching display that draws in readers. It would be interesting to explore cases where banner designers authored by fans are not deemed by the writer to be of sufficient quality or in a suitable style to enhance their work. This will be irrelevant to those who attach a high value to approbation, no matter how it is manifested.

Much of the value of the textual interventions lies in understanding which areas provoked the most debate. In a longer social writing investigation, there might be a more significant impact on the final text, particularly in cases where authors have recourse to detailed, ongoing communication with multiple, trusted reviewers.

I conclude with a consideration of the ways in which authors can communicate effectively with readers on social networks.

c. Engaging and retaining commentators

As a result of the data analysis, I found that the findings fell in to two strands. The first strand is the recruitment of readers willing to provide feedback on online text; the second is the retention of those commentators over the lifetime of a project.

Before looking at these two areas, it is important to note that, when an author is seeking to communicate with children or young adults on social networks, the chosen site must have suitable e-safety protocols. This was a key area of concern, since I hoped that young adult readers would comment on the text extract I posted for commentary on Bebo.

In qualitative research that supported their quantitative survey, Ofcom (2008) found that although parents were concerned about e-Safety, many of their children were not. 41% of children aged 8 - 17 with a visible online profile had their settings visible to anyone, so making available their personal information such as phone number and home and email addresses. The reason given by survey respondents was the assumption that privacy and safety issues had been taken care of by the sites themselves. Guidance from both the Home Office Taskforce On Child Protection on the Internet (2008) and the UK Council for Child Internet Safety launched in 2008 (www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0215) is aimed at the designers and providers of social networking sites to help them address this mismatch.

The THINKUKNOW website (www.thinkuknow.co.uk) created by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (www.ceop.gov.uk) includes a section called 'Stay in Control', featuring a selection of emoticon-style icons that enable users to access advice on chat, blogs, and social networking whilst hiding their identities to all but trusted "friends":

Use your Privacy Settings! Adjust your account settings (sometimes called "Privacy Settings") so only approved friends can instant message you. This won't ruin your social life - new people can still send you friend requests and message you!
(www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_16/control/social.aspx)

The contemporary style of address is designed to have direct appeal to young users, and so increase awareness of the potential dangers of using social networks. Similarly, in 2008 Bebo launched a substantial e-Safety section featuring animations and videos that communicate the advice in lively and engaging ways (www.bebo.com/Safety.jsp). This style of presentation avoids scaremongering, and it highlights the many positive aspects of social networking. The Bebo e-Safety materials helpfully include guidance for users on how to avoid harassing and bullying other online users. This is highly relevant where original writing is concerned: that any comments posted are responsible and not malicious. Links are also provided to additional sources of help. Such aspects informed my choice of Bebo as the location for the online social writing experiment.

(i) Audience engagement

Turning to the theme of audience engagement, I discovered through the research that social conventions influenced the marketing of my online writing. I had hoped to attract multiple commentators to my research, but misconceptions about engagement flowing automatically from the point of registration on a social networking site like Bebo were quickly dispelled. A fan-base of thousands flocking to the Bebo text was not expected, however there was an anticipation of a different intensity, speed, and volume of audience engagement than might be found in the physical world (perhaps excepting the effects of a high expense publicity drive by a large commercial publishing house).

I felt able to request that my friends and associates in the physical world should engage with the research on Bebo, but I found that those "n00bs" among the group who considered social networks off-putting would only engage to a minimum extent required of our physical world relationship. This was in spite of me creating additional guides to registering on and navigating Bebo, to support their access.

Social networks do some of the work of marketing and publicity departments in their attempts to bridge the gap between a text and its potential audience. However, the advantages of being both an author on a social network and a secondary school student were significant for Rachael Wing, one of the authors interviewed for the research. With a ready-made group of classmates willing to engage with her online text, Rachael had no need for a publicity plan, since her online friends sprang from a network established in the physical world. These online friends helped to launch a highly-rated writing project in the Stories Hub of the social network Quizilla, maintain it over a six-month lifespan, and provide impetus to the online narrative which drew in new, sometimes unknown, commentators.

(ii) *Continuity of audience engagement*

For my social writing experiment I needed commentators to be more than just readers. Additionally, they were required to take on the role of editor and evaluator of my short extract of fiction, and preferably over the life-span of the online data collection. Continuity of audience engagement is not a new concept, as evidenced by long-running weekly comic brands such as *The Beano*, and the Victorian writer Charles Dickens' printed serials.

Two of the authors I interviewed for this research supplied sequential parts of online narratives to their readers. Rachael Wing spent six months writing her *Star-Crossed* story (on Quizilla the story was entitled *Wherefore art thou, Romeo?*), and L. Lee Lowe spent two years writing her 42 online chapters for *Mortal Ghost*. Both authors allowed their online content to build gradually, and their fan bases followed. My project's relatively short time-frame precluded a high level of continuity in the author-reader-commentator relationship.

The adoption of episodic conventions by writers on social networks supports continued audience engagement, although at present there is no financially viable model for professional authors; the authors on social networks like Quizilla do not get paid for their writing, although they can generate some direct income by providing links to Print on Demand (POD) copies of their texts.

So what's new?

Technology is bringing the practices of reading and writing closer together, and a major challenge for professional writers who are comfortable with print-based publishing conventions will be to keep in touch with fast-moving audiences by engaging with them on their territory. But demands placed on authors can be high.

In a territory where authors request audience commentary, this turns readers into writers in some fashion. Thus, interactions morph from the transmission model to a more complex and multi-layered communication where feedback generates more feedback. Professional writers may need to find the time to create original and appealing fiction texts as well as to communicate at the pace and intensity expected by members of online worlds who comment on them.

It is all very well to adopt the convention of the epic form to retain audiences, but in social networks this means giving away multiple episodes for free - this is new! The challenge, therefore, is to find an online model that makes financial sense for the professional, if this form of writing is to be a replacement for the author advance and royalties that usually accrue from a printed or e-book.

Every social group will have their own technical demands. For authors and commentators, baseline technical requirements include the facility to present text flexibly (for example through the use of a range of word processing controls), and grammatically. Errors that are built in to a site's programming design will be acceptable to, or unnoticed by, some users of social networks. But most professional authors and editors will care about spaces omitted between words and failures to pluralise (as in the Bebo evaluation poll template), because this is about conventions of quality.

Since the authors who use online social networks have control of the technology, they are likely to want to influence the way textual comments are solicited. Thus, online customisation needs to be fairly simple so that users can get to grips with it, for example by combining click-throughs with some form of programming.

In addition, the pseudo congregational aspects of many social networking sites are fragmentary. Addy Farmer, interviewed for this research, sees her *Wilf's World* blog as 'a hub for like minded people' (response to author questionnaire). As writing and reading groups continue to grow, if companies like Bebo are to compete they will need to provide new kinds of activity hubs that suit the narrative and professional interests of conventional authors too.

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Write4Children

Key Debates in Children's Literature: *The Child, The Book and the Discipline* A Report on a Roundtable Event: Newcastle University Children's Literature Unit 16th-17th January, 2009

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Abstract:

A report of the proceedings of the roundtable event **Key Debates in Children's Literature: the Child, the Book and the Discipline**, held at Newcastle University and Seven Stories, the Centre for Children's Books, January 2009. This two-day event for emerging scholars in the field explored methodologies and approaches to children's literature studies, mapping out possible directions for the discipline. Delegates also enjoyed access to some of the unique archival holdings from Seven Stories' collections. Leading scholars in the field, including Peter Hunt, Maria Nikolajeva and David Rudd joined early career researchers for this stimulating and enlightening event.

Keywords: research methodologies, research training, developments in children's literature research, archives, historical children's literature, visual methodologies

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The Child, the Book and the Discipline was a roundtable event on 'Key Debates in Children's Literature', funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and organised by postgraduate students from the Children's Literature Unit, Newcastle University. This two-day event aimed to provide a forum for emerging scholars in the field of children's literature to disseminate new research, explore research methodologies, and debate new approaches to the discipline. Delegates were joined by senior scholars in the field, who offered their perspectives on the ways in which children's literature scholarship has developed and provided feedback on the work in progress presented at the event. In addition to Newcastle University's Kim Reynolds, Kate Chedgzoy, and Matthew Grenby, we welcomed guest speakers Peter Hunt, formerly of Cardiff, Maria Nikolajeva, University of Cambridge, and David Rudd, University of Bolton.

Archive-based research

Day one of the roundtable event was hosted by Seven Stories, the Centre for Children's Books. Seven Stories, which works closely with the Children's Literature Unit at Newcastle University, is the only UK institution dedicated to collecting original material relating to modern children's literature. One of the key aims of the roundtable was to provide access to Seven Stories' unique holdings and to receive training on the handling and use of original material in literary research. Delegates were able to explore the exhibitions on display in Seven Stories' visitors' centre, the venue for the event, and enjoyed hands-on experiences of some key pieces from the archive collection.

Original material has much to offer scholars of literature. Manuscripts, correspondence, original artwork and other material generated in the creation of a book offer a unique insight into the creative process and the external elements which shape literature. Such evidence is particularly relevant to children's literature scholars: picture books, for example, frequently grow out of a collaboration between artist and author, and are especially subject to the exigencies of the printing process. The research training sessions hosted by Seven Stories aimed to provide delegates with the skills to utilise original material in their research.

One barrier in the way of children's literature scholars wishing to work on original material is the incomplete and fragmentary approach to literary manuscripts in the UK. There is no single finding aid for literary archives, many of which are uncatalogued or under-catalogued. Children's literature scholars face additional challenges, both because British institutions have historically neglected children's literature, and because relevant material is frequently unidentified as such in catalogues. These problems were addressed in the research training sessions: Seven Stories' archivists guided delegates through the principles of archival cataloguing, demonstrating the Centre's online catalogue, while doctoral student Lucy Pearson provided an overview of finding aids for children's literature collections.

Attempting archive-based research for the first time can be intimidating and sometimes difficult. The process was demystified by the archivists' training on the use and handling of original materials. This training was augmented by some practical advice from Lucy Pearson, whose doctoral work forms part of an AHRC-funded collaborative project aimed at building research pathways into the Seven Stories collection. Starting from the perspective of a newcomer to archival work, her session explored the benefits of using such material in literary research and strategies for making the most of an archive visit. The magical aspects of working with original material were effectively conveyed through the experience of handling the unique material from the Seven Stories collection, including work by illustrators Judy Brook and Faith Jaques, manuscripts and typescripts by Robert Westall and Philip Pullman, and correspondence from the archive of editor Kaye Webb.

Research methodologies: histories and pictures

Kim Reynolds and Matthew Grenby of Newcastle University provided some research training based on the forthcoming *Children's Literature Studies: A Handbook to Research* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), exploring both practical strategies and conceptual approaches. These sessions were intended to guide the development of this handbook, and delegates were invited to give feedback on the most useful elements.

Kim Reynolds continued the theme of archive-based research with a practical session on using visual materials. Utilising diverse material from the Seven Stories collection, including original artwork, cover proofs and editorial correspondence about illustration and design, she invited delegates to consider how such material might be used to answer specific research questions. After allowing delegates to draw some initial conclusions, she discussed theoretical strategies which can be used to guide research on visual materials. Drawing on the work of Jane Doonan, she encouraged delegates to contextualise visual material, locating implied time, audience and location. The relevance of this approach was evident in delegates' secondary response to the materials under discussion, which was enhanced and deepened when augmented by these research strategies.

Matthew Grenby, who specialises in eighteenth-century children's literature, interrogated not only the strategies for researching historical material, but also the reasons for doing so. His session explored the controversial nature of historical children's literature: while narrating the history of children's books has been a central endeavour in the field, from F.J. Darton's *Children's Books in England* (1932) onwards, scholars such as Peter Hunt have questioned the place of historical literature in children's literature scholarship. If a children's book is a book read by children, then should the neglected titles of earlier ages be the preserve of the bibliographer rather than the children's literature scholar? The

resulting debate ran strongly counter to this position: the consensus of delegates was that historical children's literature is still relevant to children's literature research, both for the light it sheds on contemporary material and in its own right. The second half of the session turned to research methodologies for such work; Matthew Grenby questioned the degree to which scholars of historical fiction should seek to place it in the context within which it was written. Understanding some historical texts as children's literature may be possible only if the contemporary conception of childhood is understood; conversely, modern child readers may encounter historical fact solely through the pages of a still-living text, approaching it without any of the contextual knowledge possessed by the book's original readers or the literary scholar. The ensuing debate proposed a model for historical literary research in which the meaning is understood as an interaction of text, reader, author and historical context. While scholarly research may not choose to explore all these elements, delegates agreed that it should take place within an understanding of these multifarious parameters.

Senior scholars: mapping the discipline

On the second day of the event, delegates were joined by visiting scholars Maria Nikolajeva, Peter Hunt and David Rudd. These three notable scholars in the field were invited to give short speeches outlining some key issues in children's literature, providing context for the new work presented by conference delegates.

David Rudd offered an interesting and enlightening summary of children's literature studies in relation to critical theory. Reviewing the history of the field, he explored the way in which the discipline has utilised and responded to some key critical schools, notably the work of feminist and Marxist scholars. David emphasised the need for children's literature scholars to remain aware of the critical paths which have already been explored, and to continue a close relationship with critical theory.

Maria Nikolajeva addressed the question of how critical theory might develop in children's literature studies. Beginning with Perry Nodelman's 2005 assertion that we are working 'post-theory', she challenged the notion that the discipline is incompatible with critical theory. Rather, she argued, children's literature needs not only to use relevant theories from the broader field of literary research, but also to locate a specific theory of children's literature. Maria proposed that such a theory should be rooted in the notion of etanormativity: a theory based upon the key characteristic of children's literature, the presumed age of its audience. In defining the field on the basis of perceived norms for an age-specific point of view, she argued, we are brought face-to-face with the dichotomous power relationship between adults and children. Etanormativity, then, offers a basis for a specific children's literature theory which is rooted in power relationships.

The mapping of the discipline provided by Maria Nikolajeva and David Rudd in the morning was admirably complemented by Peter Hunt's advice to the new generation of children's literature scholars, which opened our afternoon session. As children's literature scholars, he argued, we must be careful: careful to retain our knowledge of theory, even if we do not choose to use it directly, and careful to maintain immaculate standards of scholarship in a field which is still regarded by some as liminal and amateur. Nevertheless, Peter Hunt urged new children's literature scholar not to be afraid of being original. The distinguishing focus of our field - children - offers us a unique opportunity to merge many different interests and disciplines, and this should be regarded as a strength, not a weakness. Above all, he encouraged delegates to be special: both in the quality and methodology of their scholarship, and in their willingness to break new and exciting ground in our research.

New voices in the field: research papers

The new ground being covered in current children's literature scholarship was showcased in the series of papers by emerging scholars in the field. These papers were delivered in intimate roundtable sessions in which delegates and senior scholars provided feedback and entered into a wider debate based upon the themes which emerged from the papers.

Anthony Pavlik of Bogazici University, Istanbul, opened the first roundtable session with a succinct and enlightening paper on the problematic concepts of 'the child' and 'childhood' within children's literature studies. Reviewing the work of Jacqueline Rose and her successors, his paper 'The Silent Child and the Ideal Critic' argued that children's literature studies as a whole has largely failed to engage with the implications of Rose's argument. The second half of the paper cogently engaged with the problems Rose's work presents, and both the paper itself and the debate that followed established a clear argument in response to Rose. The constructedness of the 'child reader' does not, delegates argued, pose a fundamental problem for children's literature studies: in constructing a poetics of children's literature, we rely neither more nor less on an 'imaginary' reader than do scholars of adult literature.

Madelyn Travis' paper 'Representations of Jews in the Children's Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century' was a timely presentation in light of Matthew Grenby's discussion of historical research in children's literature studies. The piece developed from a larger doctoral project on Jews in British children's literature, in which the historical representation of Jewishness throws light upon the way in which Jews appear in modern texts. Madelyn Travis suggested that although anti-Semitism is a pervasive presence in eighteenth-century material, the representation of Jewishness is more diverse than might be expected. Her paper was a clear demonstration of the relevance of historical children's literature to modern scholarship.

The final paper of this session turned delegates' attention to the question of children's literature as a socialising force. Vanessa Harbour's paper 'Oh everyone does it!' - Drug use in young adult fiction' examined the disconnect between the prevalence of drug use among real teenagers and the way in which it is depicted in fiction, noting that the problem of alcohol abuse is rarely portrayed in young adult novels, despite the levels of binge drinking in today's society. The paper provoked a lively debate on the question of the social responsibility of children's and young adult literature, demonstrating that social and educational interests continue to strongly influence modern children's literature research.

In session two, Guri Fjeldberg's paper questioned the criteria used for judging literary quality in newspaper reviews and in major children's literature awards. For instance, should it be possible for a book to be named as Book of the Year if no child agrees with the choice? Might books be reviewed for news or marketing reasons rather than for potential literary merit? This raised issues such as adult-child power relationships within book reviewing and how competing values in newspapers might impact on what is reviewed which have wider implications within the children's literature discipline.

Georgia Carta's paper 'Through the Magnifying Glass' provided delegates with some fascinating insights into the discipline of translation studies and how it might serve as a tool to deeper understanding of children's literature. Since translation is a negotiation it cannot be detached from the literature itself and must answer many questions of ideology, cultural difference and adaptation between original and target language. It was timely to be reminded of the fact that the book market, in terms of the quantity of home-grown and of translated literature, differs significantly between countries.

Continuing the thread of interdisciplinary discussion, the final paper of the session came from Helen List on 'Visualizing Animalism in the pre-literature of the 1960s'. This paper moved the discussion away from words to a consideration of the role of pictures within a literary discipline. A detailed reading of Brian Wildsmith's *ABC* (1962) and *The Hare and the Tortoise* (1967) suggested some new directions for delegates' thoughts. The ensuing debate ranged widely over many topics raised by the three papers, including how much children's literature scholars could and should be engaging with other subjects. The general opinion of delegates was that we can only gain by an interdisciplinary approach to our field.

The child, the book and the discipline: roundtable discussions

The presentations by our delegates and senior scholars provided a starting point for broader roundtable discussions about key issues in the discipline. Delegates and senior scholars debated the way forward for children's literature scholarship, questioning whether the preoccupations of the past still have relevance today.

One question debated in depth was the way in which children's literature relates to sociological and educational concerns. Several delegates argued strongly in favour of the idea that books for children and young people have an additional responsibility to play a sociological role, offering readers information and guidance. Others, however, questioned how far books should be measured by the extent to which they offer the 'right' message, rather than by their honesty and literary integrity. While this discussion represented the kind of division between 'child people' and 'book people' identified by Peter Hollindale (1988), delegates did not diverge into the dichotomous positions identified by Hollindale. On the contrary, there was a general consensus that both approaches have relevance and meaning to children's literature scholarship.

A theme which emerged several times during the event was the perceived luminosity of the field. While many delegates agreed on the difficulty of legitimising children's literature within university departments, particularly as a branch of English literature rather than education or librarianship, there was an encouraging sense that the low status of the discipline is no longer pervasive. Several delegates who completed their undergraduate education in institutions which offered children's literature options commented that they had never considered the possibility that children's literature might be accorded a lower status than other literary disciplines. It was suggested that in many cases, children's literature scholars' anxiety about how our work will be received has created barriers. Summing up the outcomes of the event, Anthony Pavlik of Bogazici University urged scholars to move forward with confidence, assuming legitimacy as our right.

The roundtable event demonstrated that many of the issues which have dominated children's literature research in the past continue to have relevance for today's scholars. The question of how to approach the constructed nature of the child reader, the positioning of children's literature scholarship within other academic disciplines, and the problem of how to situate scholarship within a critical discourse are all important issues for new scholars in the field. Ultimately, however, delegates' contributions showed a confident and assured response to these problems. Scholars beginning their careers within the context of a well-established critical field are not prey to the same anxiety of status which necessarily attended the work which came before. On the contrary, all the delegates showed a willingness to engage with the difficult questions in children's literature studies while confidently breaking new ground. Peter Hunt expressed a hope that children's literature scholars should be special: the contributions of new scholars at this roundtable event indicate that this is a hope that is likely to be fulfilled.

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Write4Children

Discussion Paper: Reading About Writing: Finding Your Ear?

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It is a truth universal acknowledged that there are four principal components to language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Despite the early childhood start we all make, many of us never really master the first of these, most of us get to grips with the second, but the last two seem to exist in an odd relationship. Writing might logically seem to be the graphic equivalent of speaking, the active partner, in opposition to the passives of listening and reading (after all, in reading, the material is provided by someone else - an in writing for children it is usually an adult writing for a child audience). Yet, in developmental terms, more emphasis is placed upon the acquisition of reading than on the acquisition of writing. What parents look for in their children is for them to speak (as the joke goes, you wait a year for your children to speak and the rest of their lives for them to shut up), and then for them to read. Almost no attention is paid to listening, and writing seems to be regarded as a much higher-level skill than reading. After all, it is quite possible to survive for some time without writing more than a few words, but virtually impossible not to read a substantial amount on a daily basis.

From childhood onwards, we are surrounded by non-print material which we are expected to read, from road signs to TV commercials. If we cannot read as adults in western society, this constitutes a significant difficulty, and we may well be encouraged to enroll on an Adult Literacy course. This is how the National Institute for Literacy in the USA describes its mission on its web-site (<http://www.nifl.gov>):

“The National Institute for Literacy, a federal agency, provides leadership on literacy issues, including the improvement of reading instruction for children, youth, and adults.”

For this agency, then, literacy means reading, pure and simple. This may well find echoes in your own experience of learning and using a foreign language. I speak and read reasonable French, and I can operate quite well in France using listening, speaking and reading. I cannot recall when I last needed to write anything in French, except to sign my name on a credit card slip.

Where writing classes exist for adults, they do not, by and large, deal with the business of learning to form words on paper, or what might be called functional literacy. Most writing classes for adults are much more specialist and assume that the students already have the capacity to write words: writing classes are concerned with higher level skills of how to write for specific audiences or in specific formats. If I need to write a grant application, or a business letter, or a novel, I can find a class to join in which the instructor will equip me with this skill, but she will be surprised if I arrive not knowing which way up to hold my pen, protesting “I thought this was a writing class!” Fundamental to this issue though, is that writing for children - or that should be children writing - is crucial to the development of literacy. With some obvious exceptions, adult illiteracy is based around a fairly simple premise, which makes it so difficult to rectify. It is usually that they (adults) don't understand how story works - surely a basic development of writing when encouraged in childhood.

As adults, we may well have forgotten how we acquired the skills of reading and writing, although the processes may be fresher in the minds of those with young children. Two recent books are

revealing in highlighting how these processes work and what they imply. Tory Young's book *Studying English Literature* does what it says on the can: it raises issues for students taking English at university and deserved to be widely read. However, it begins by posing questions on the processes of acquiring the skills of literacy, drawing on the work of Deborah Brandt. In her book *Literacy in American Lives*, Brandt distinguishes between the place of reading and writing in the homes of young children. They are often accustomed to being read to (a friend of mine discovered that the reason her daughter was reluctant to read for herself was that she had adults willing to do the work for her), and to getting support from their families as they learn to read. In her research, Brandt discovered that parents felt much less confidence in helping their children to write. She makes the point that writing is often associated with work or with chores, or with loss, sadness or duty (we need only reflect on the letters we wrote as children). Thus, writing "for" children is a worthy exercise when done well but surely an ongoing case for writing "with" them is well made. I recommend Brandt's study to you, and I also recommend the way in which Tory Young suggests the study be used in the early stages of undergraduate programmes in English. As an addendum, I observe that, when reading is associated with the working lives of parents, some children are reluctant to master it: I base this purely on anecdotal evidence

Brandt and Young point to a fundamental difference between reading and writing: one which is so obvious it had never occurred to me. Writing allows the possibility of displaying individuality, in a way which reading does not and can not do. Even now, we are identified for the purposes of official records by our signature, and distinctive behaviour, for example in cooking, is described as a 'signature dish'. And what do we most frequently write when we try out a pen? Our names, of course. It is possible to intervene in reading to make a book your own, but only by writing on it: either displaying physical ownership by writing your name in the fly-leaf, or intellectual ownership by writing marginalia. A friend of mine claims that he tries to increase the value of books he sells to second-hand stores by writing the name of the author in the fly-leaves and presenting as first-editions. Even as I wrote that last sentence I pondered fly-leaves against fly-leaves, and that is the sort of choice which writing constantly imposes on us (following a little research, I suspect that fly-leaves is more accepted).

Another example of using writing to assert identity, and one which is related to writing in books, is graffiti. Whether or not the graffiti artists sign their pieces, they want them to be read. I was made aware of just how imperative this urge is when I upbraided some young people for spraying graffiti in English across the toilet block of a French Camp-site: surely they realised, I said, that this gave English people a bad reputation. They patiently explained that they were, in fact, Swedish, but that they wrote their graffiti in English because "Who understands Swedish?"

The process of writing as a creative act is often described in terms of the writer finding his or her voice. If reading were a comparable activity, would we describe the process of identifying what you like to read as finding your ear - which begins in childhood as part of our developing identity and surely never leaves us.

References:

Deborah Brandt, (2001), *Literacy in American Lives*, CUP
Tory Young, (2008), *Studying English Literature*, CUP

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Book Reviews

***Barnlitteraturanalyser*. [Analyses of Children's Literature.] Maria Andersson and Elina Druker, eds. Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur, 2008. 213 pages. SEK 211 (paperback). ISBN: 978-91-55-04028-8.**

Barnlitteraturanalyser is a collection of a dozen essays in Swedish by Swedish academics, each focusing primarily on Swedish writers. Scandinavia, of course, is traditionally the home of much excellent children's literature (Swedish authors alone include Astrid Lindgren, Inger and Lasse Sandberg, Maria Gripe, Barbro Lindgren, Gunilla Bergström, Elsa Beskow, and Peter Pohl) as well as of research on children's literature (Swede Göte Klingberg can be said to have started this subject area in earnest), and most recently major figures in the field of the translation of children's literature have come from there as well, such as Finn Riitta Oittinen. Thus this book, while in a sense narrowly circumscribed and inward-looking, is useful for researchers in children's literature, no matter what languages or cultures they come from.

To a certain extent, the collection revolves around and explores the idea of understanding how contemporary Swedish children's literature defines children and childhood, based on gender, ethnicity, and other issues. For example, Mia Österlund, in her analysis of Pija Lindenbaum's three picture books about a girl named Gittan, shows how active, energetic boys have dominated picture books and that when girls are portrayed, they are shown as "nice, passive, and ordinary" (97, my translation). Meanwhile, Mia Franck looks at Peter Pohl's two books about Anette in order to analyse ideas of silence and gender, suggesting that girls who withhold words are provocative. They are not passive in the same sense Österlund finds; rather, they deliberately silence themselves rather than are silenced by society. And Magnus Öhrn looks at males in Ulf Stark's work and finds that their violent tendencies are viewed as the norm for boys (131). Taken together, what all this suggests is that even in a progressive country such as Sweden, traditional gender roles still hold sway, and naturally this includes in children's literature. On this note, it is worth mentioning that only one of the twelve essays in this book was written by a male researcher, and he is also the sole contributor of a piece that deals with boys in children's literature.

Besides this sort of analysis of particular issues, several articles look at one author's work, such as Janina Orlov's in-depth look at Barbro Lindgren's books and Kristin Hallberg's piece on Gunilla Bergström's popular Alfons Åberg series of picture books. Hallberg finds that the formulaic style invariably used by Bergström in these books allows her to write about difficult topics, such as jealousy or feeling alone (23) or even war. Other contributions review particular themes and compare how they are portrayed in various books. Boel Westin, for example, discusses dream texts, and the ways they are used in Selma Lagerlöf's *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* (translated to English as *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*) and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. She finds that dreams "are connected to a longing for change and, in the long term, an individual rebirth - an exploration of the self" (71, my translation). Maria Nikolajeva employs Beverly Cleary's *Dear Mr. Henshaw* and Sue Townsend's *Adrian Mole* books in order to analyse diary-based texts while Maria Andersson studied idylls in work by Elsa Beskow and Astrid Lindgren.

What *Barnlitteraturanalyser* offers is a detailed analysis of mostly Swedish, mostly 20th century texts, looking at their role in shaping ideas of children and childhood in contemporary Sweden, with some connections made to literary texts and theory from beyond Sweden's borders. This volume should be considered essential reading for anyone researching children's literature in Sweden, and it is also useful as a comparison with children's literature in other countries and the way it reflects ideas of children and childhood.

Reviewed by B.J. Epstein Swansea University

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Write4Children

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4. Footnotes should be avoided. Essential notes should be numbered in the text and grouped together at the end of the article. Diagrams and Figures, if they are considered essential, should be clearly related to the section of the text to which they refer. The original diagrams and figures should be submitted with the top copy.
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