



Gráfico 1: Diferentes fases en la consecución de la Aprehensión de la Fecundidad Mágica.

## On Teaching English Children's Literature: Canonical Authors Who Wrote for Children and the Adventure Novel

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### Resumen

En este artículo se expondrán las líneas básicas de un curso de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil (LIJ) inglesa diseñado el pasado año para los alumnos de Filología Inglesa de la Universidad de Vigo. Aunque de una forma más resumida, pretende repasar la historia de la literatura inglesa que los alumnos ya conocen, pero desde un punto de vista diferente, examinando la evolución en paralelo de la literatura infantil y de la literatura inglesa en general. El objetivo final del curso es que los alumnos sean conscientes del alcance y la historia de la LIJ inglesa.

El enfoque es informativo pero también crítico, dado que es necesario seleccionar el material a partir de un conjunto muy amplio. Aunque el punto de partida es, necesariamente, literario, al mismo tiempo se aportarán contextos socio-históricos, imprescindibles para comprender la creación literaria. Cierto es que las primeras obras de LIJ inglesa tienen un interés histórico incrementado por su capacidad de supervivencia, pero en este curso se dará preferencia a la LIJ de finales del siglo XIX y principios del XX.

Todos aquellos implicados en el diseño y en la docencia de cursos sobre LIJ se enfrentan a diversos problemas desde el mismo punto de partida: ¿qué libros presentar y qué enfoque crítico y metodológico seguir? La definición de los autores canónicos será de importancia capital porque el concepto de canonicidad lleva consigo la autoridad para excluir a unos e incluir a otros. En la presentación se seguirá un orden cronológico y el canon británico, lo que implicará necesariamente una visión determinada de la realidad que respalda una estructura de poder dada.

**Palabras clave:** literatura infantil, autores del canon, historia de la literatura

### Abstract

This article deals with a subject similar to that of a special-topics course of English Children's Literature that I have taught last year to the students of English Philology at the University of Vigo. Although far more reduced, it aims to survey the History of English Literature which the students have already studied from a different angle: This is done by examining the parallel evolution of Children's

CELIA VÁZQUEZ GARCÍA

Literature and general English Literature. The course aims to make students aware of both the scope and history of English Children's Literature.

My objective is primarily informative, but it is necessarily also critical, since I must choose for discussion a relatively small amount of material from a very wide field. While I have tried to see Children's Literature in its historical and social contexts, my standards are essentially literary. Where the works of the past are concerned, I have long had faith in the shifting process of time. The capacity to survive, I have always thought, is a good test of a book; and while the earliest children's books are mainly of historical interest, I really want to concentrate my attention on the late nineteenth century and beginnings of the twentieth century.

Those involved with constructing and teaching courses on Children's Literature face also a number of problems; above all, which books to teach and, which critical and theoretical approaches to adopt in the teaching? Defining the canonical authors of Children's Literature is of great importance because the concept of canonicity implies the kind of authority empowered to exclude as well as include certain authors and works. The arrangement will be broadly chronological and will follow the "British canon", term that implies a certain vision of reality that validates a given power arrangement.

**Key words:** Children's Literature, canonical authors, history of literature

Children's Literature has always interested me because what we read when we were children and teenagers is deeply implicated in the kinds of values and ideas we learn to hold about society. Woodsworth's outrageous inversion statement "The Child is Father of the Man" which appears in his poem "My Heart Leaps Up" helps me to explain why I find English Children's Literature a remarkable area of study: it is one of the roots of our western culture and it is enjoyed by children as well as by adults. Its characters (Alice, Peter Pan, Mowgli, Long John Silver, King Arthur, Mary Poppins, Winnie the Pooh, William, the Famous Five and lately, Harry Potter) are part of most people's psyche, and they link us not simply to childhood, but to basic myths and archetypes.

I know that no literature is neutral, but Children's Literature is more concerned with shaping its readers' attitudes than most. Like adult literature, works written especially for children are informed and shaped by the authors' respective value systems, their notions of how the world is or ought to be. These values constitute the author's ideologies. They usually reflect and express the values of the culture at large. For many people Children's Literature is the earliest and often the most important literary influence; it shapes the psychic and psychological hidden child figure in the adult.

Canons provide cultural frameworks for selecting and excluding works of Children's Literature and, as such, they are historically and socially constructed and many "speak for the values and interests of relatively well-to-do educated whites, males, Christians, northern Europeans" (Griffith and Frey 1992:23). The argument that "classics" such as *The Wind in the Willows*, or *Peter Pan* "revolve so imperiously around questions of male self-sufficiency" may help to account for their status, since the place and pressure of male domination is itself a canonical topic. For some critics, reading the novels in this ideological way is not an argument for ceasing to teach these works, we only have to take care of teaching the canon more critically.

Therefore, if we are interested in understanding how British society works we must look at what it has read and also if we want to know why do we think about English people the way we do, we must also look at what we read when we were young or children.

Writers before the nineteenth century, for the most part, were not concerned with writing specifically for children, except for creating primers and other didactic materials. These works in England, by major authors for children, sought to guide the child into the adult world. In Anglo-Saxon times children's books were developed as texts for the Anglo-Saxon church schools. These textbooks were written in Latin. But in the tenth century Alfred the Great encouraged the use of Anglo-Saxon rather than Latin as the language of texts and teaching. During all these centuries, the only stories available for entertainment were oral—the folk ballads, tales and legends that were enjoyed by adults and children alike. In feudal England education became more widespread, but still only instructional books were available to children: Latin grammars and courtesy books, often written in verse.

Let us see the fourteenth century, for example, where the Black Death first occurred in England (1348), under the reign of Edward III and where the Peasants' Revolt took place, during the reign of Richard II. These were the times of Langland, Gower and Chaucer. This latter author wrote his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* (1391) for his son Lewis. It was a technical document written in everyday speech rather than in Latin so that the boy would understand it. It has not survived as a children's book.

Later on, in the fifteenth century, a time of dynastic turmoil, with the advent of printing more books became available for literate adults. And for children too, because it is assumed that children who could read chose from their parents' books those that appealed to them just as they had appropriated many oral, adult folktales.

CELIA VÁZQUEZ GARCÍA

Caxton, England's first printer, translated *Aesop's Fables* from the French and published them in 1484. We know that literate children were included in an adult readership because Caxton, in *The Book of Courtesy* advises "lytel John" to read Chaucer, Gower and Hoccleve. So, the most popular books written for children in the fifteenth century were the moral beast fables and the courtesy books. But this was again instruction, not entertainment.

Along with these instructional works there flourished a popular literature which was not meant for children although they recognised it as their own. It included fables, folk legends, there were the romances of King Arthur, Guy of Warwick, Bevis of Hampton, the ballads of Robin Hood and many others; and the humble folk-tales, passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation.

Walking along history, we arrive now to the reign of Henry VIII, full of executions (Thomas More, Ann Boleyn, etc) and when the Monasteries, where literacy was promoted, were dissolved. During these times Roger Ascham, tutor to Elizabeth I when she was in her teens, wrote *The Scholemaster*, a treatise on the methods and objectives of education. He argued that children should be allured to learning rather than forced. Ascham attacked Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* because he considered it to be unsuitable reading-matter for the moral and intellectual development of the child.

But perhaps the most influential underground literature consisted of the chapbooks. They were in circulation from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. They were small paper booklets, usually printed on a single sheet which was then folded to produce 8, 12, 16 or 24 pages. They cost one penny or less and were the only written literature available to the poor masses. They soon became popular with children too. Chapbooks were decorated with crude but lively woodcuts, and contained stories of heroes and heroines, executions, natural disasters, travels, and much abridged versions of novels, fairy tales, nursery rhymes and medieval romances. They have an important place in the history of Children's Literature for keeping the traditional tale alive at a time when Puritan writers denounced their influence. Their function as a vehicle of popular entertainment was eventually taken over by the "penny dreadfuls".

There is an increase in sales of popular chapbooks during the decades of 1640-1660, in a period when the Civil War begins and theatres are closed by order of Parliament, until the Restoration of Charles II. Thus, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards the Puritans, increasing in numbers and strength, attacked the chapbooks as being ungodly and corrupting.

The books produced for children by the Puritans in the seventeenth century offered them no entertainment, since the very idea of reading for pleasure was a prostitution of the God-given ability to read. In opposition to chapbooks moral tales were developed. Until then, books for children had put an emphasis on civilised behaviour but as the Puritan influence grew the stress fell more heavily on religion and morals.

John Bunyan, the Puritan writer, denounced chapbooks and he sought to capture children's attention in his *Divine Emblems* or *Book for Boys and Girls* (1686). This work, unlike his adult work *Pilgrims' Progress*, which was not intended as a book for children, though it came to be regarded as one, has not survived as fare for children. It was excessively pious and moralistic. It was not as popular from the very beginning as was his allegorical tale about Christian's attempts to reach the Celestial city and all of the adventures he has along the way because there is plenty of action to maintain a child's interest (Christian's fight with Apollion; his encounter with Giant Pope, Pagan and Despair, etc). The *Book for Boys and Girls* now exists as a curiosity piece for scholars.

John Locke, with his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), is commonly credited with influencing children's educational and religious publishing towards entertainment although to us such influence seems rather subtle. Isaac Watts, the non-conformist minister, was certainly a little more persuasive –although a Puritan himself– in his *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715). Watts's attitudes reflect a softening of the old harsh Puritanism. If we compare Watt's verses on the bee with those of Bunyan, less than 30 years before, we can see the change in attitudes. To Bunyan the bee's most notable attribute was its sting:

The Bee goes out, and Honey home doth bring  
And some who seek that Honey find a Sting.  
Now wouldst thou have the Honey and be free  
From stinging, in the first place kill the Bee.

This Bee an Emblem truly is of Sin,  
Whose Sweet unto a many Death hath been...

The lesson drawn by Dr Watts is quite different:

How doth the little busy bee  
improve each shining hour  
and gather honey all the day

## CELIA VÁZQUEZ GARCÍA

From ev'ry opening flower.

How skilfully she builds her cell,  
How neat she spreads the wax,  
And labours hard to store it well  
With the sweet food she makes.

In works of labour or of skill  
I would be busy too,  
For Satan finds some mischief still  
For idle hands to do.

The difference in outlook between Bunyan and Watts is profound. Watts's moral songs were popular for more than a century. It is shown by the fact that among his *Divine Songs*, the one dedicated to the bee, among others, surfaced in parody in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and it is still in use. In the 1740 edition, seven "Moral Songs" were added, including "Tis the voice of the sluggard; I heard him complain..." And this became, of course, Carroll's "tis the voice of the lobster..."

In France at this time, the late seventeenth century, fairy tales became extremely popular among the French nobility and their followers. Before these tales were translated into English, individual stories were soon printed in chapbooks and became very popular in England. The appearance of the translation of the Arabian Nights reinforced a growing interest in fantasy.

English Children's Literature underwent a significant change in the early eighteenth century. In 1719 Daniel Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe* for adults. Four months after its publication an unauthorised abridged edition was printed for children. *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift was published in 1726 and again children adopted an adult book. Both *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's Travels* were quickly put into chapbooks for children.

The 1740s are commonly regarded as the decade in which both the English novel and the English children's book got under way. For example, the first edition of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* bore on its title-pages the words "Published in order to cultivate the Principles of Virtue and Religion in the Minds of the Youth of Both sexes." That was in 1741, and although this novel can hardly be considered first reading for small children it seems almost certain that they read it and that, in Darton's words, "The novel-reading habit reached the nursery almost before grown-ups had acquired it." *Grandison* (1753-5) was certainly widely read by young people –and not only in England, for when Beaumarchais was a young man his

sister could think of no more acceptable tribute when writing to her father than to describe her brother as a veritable young Grandison. It seems clear that the beginnings of the English novel and the English children's book are connected not only with new ways of thought but also with the rise and growing refinement of the middle classes in the eighteenth century.

John Newbery has been credited as being the first publisher to print books for children's entertainment. He was a businessman who discovered and exploited a new market: middle class children or rather their parents. John Newbery published in 1744 *A Little Pretty pocket-book*. His books were also instructional but the advertisement for this book is significant for the inclusion of the word amusement.

In 1765 Newbery published *Little Goody Two Shoes*. This was the first novel written for children. The authorship of this book is unknown, for there were no "children's authors"; publishers employed hacks who wrote books to order. However some of these hacks were excellent writers, and among the men Newbery employed were Oliver Goldsmith, Dr. Samuel Johnson, Christopher Smart and Tobias Smollet. *Little Goody Two Shoes* has been ascribed to Goldsmith, but this has never been proved. John Newbery read Locke and was influenced by his ideas. But the decisive influence was not Locke's. It came from across the Channel with Rousseau's best seller *Émile* (1762).

Between 1780 and 1820 the moral tale dominated Children's Literature. These stories ranged from the heavily didactic to the gently moralistic and the writing of these children's books in England was beginning to rank as an occupation for gentlewomen. These women were educators at heart. Their own philosophies were derived from those of J.J. Rousseau, only diverging in some degrees: the ones who remained closest to his philosophies omitted any reference to religion. The others, although following his basic tenets, continued to link morality with religion in their works for children. Maria Edgeworth is the representative of the former "non religious" school of thought. The writers of religious stories, particularly Sarah Trimmer, Mary Sherwood and Hannah More, were fighting their battles at the same time. For them, religion was the most important aspect of the educational process.

In the 1780s and 1790s many people believed poetry was inappropriate for children. Some suggested that poetry's meter, rhyme, and form were too difficult or unnatural for children to read. It was not until the Taylors' first book of gently moralistic instruction that poetry gained parental approval and many English children were permitted to read poems. Ann and Jane Taylor also combined moralistic instruction with enjoyment. Their verses were first published in *Original Poems for Infant Minds*. "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" is Jane's most famous

CELIA VÁZQUEZ GARCÍA

poem. The Taylor sisters' book was an innovation in Children's Literature. The Romantic age in literature is often contrasted with the Classical or Augustan age which preceded it.

There are contrasts in the ways in which children are regarded and represented in Classical and Romantic literature. For the Augustan writer the child is only important because he or she will develop into an adult. The child's savage instincts must be trained, making it civilised and sophisticated. For the Romantic writer the child is holy and pure. The child is a source of natural and spontaneous feeling. When Woodworth wrote that "the child is father of the man" (in "My Heart Leaps Up") he stressed that the adult learns from the experience of childhood.

Between Watts and the Taylor sisters, ninety years later, the only poet for children was William Blake. Blake is now recognised as a great poet, but until this century his poetry for children, *Songs of Innocence* (1789) was ignored. His poetry abounds in images of children in a world in which people are exploited (a good example is Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweeper").

Charles and Mary Lamb also sought freedom from didacticism in all their work for children, writing with an interest in a child's perception. Collaborating with his sister Mary (1764-1847), Charles wrote six of the enduring *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807). Their aim was to reveal to children the grandeur of the classics that had heretofore not been rewritten for them.

Literature for children flowered with an extraordinary diversity during the nineteenth century. This is especially true of the last half of the century, often called the Golden Age of Children's Literature. Fantasy came into its own with McDonald, Carroll, Kingsley, Ruskin, Wilde and Kipling. Poetry bloomed under the poems of R.L. Stevenson, Christina Rossetti, Tennyson and the nonsense of Lear. Kingsley also introduced children to myths. The school story became also popular. Other authors whose work was directed at adults were to find their way to children in later editions; what is now known as Science Fiction was just beginning. H.G. Wells would be famous with popular novels such as: *The Time Machine* or *The War of the Worlds*; and Arthur Conan Doyle is considered the father of the detective novel with his popular amateur detective Sherlock Holmes.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, appears in the Puritan England of Queen Victoria. During this age it was axiomatic that children's stories should have moral. This book was different and perhaps for this reason it was successful among the public. Carroll and Edward Lear insert a very specific type of

literature, a type that breaks common sense or logic: *nonsense literature*. As it is said by A. Sanders (1994:445):

The emergence of an intelligent and whimsical children's literature was perhaps the most remarkable result of the revolution in sensibility which came to see children as distinct from adults rather than as adults-in-waiting. Essentially the work of both Carroll and Edward Lear transformed adult assumptions by considering them through the eyes of children.

It is very interesting the parody that Lewis Carroll makes of the moral tales of those times. The most clear example is given by the Duchess, who says all the time "the moral of this is (...)" The parody appears even in Children's Literature most popular verses of the past, as we already mentioned when writing of the Puritan writers. In the tenth chapter another parodied poem of this author appears: "The Sluggard":

Tis the voice of the sluggard; I hear him complain,  
"You have wak'd me too soon, I must slumber again."  
As the door on its hinges, so he on his bed,  
Turns his sides and his shoulders and his heavy head.

A little more sleep, and a little more slumber",  
Thus he wastes half his days, and his hours without a number,  
And when he gets up, he sits folding his hands,  
Or walks about sauntering, or trifling he stands.  
(Isaac Watts)

Tis the voice of the lobster: I heard him declare,  
"You have baked me too brown, I must sugar my hair."  
As a duck with its eyelids, so he with his nose  
Trims his belt and his buttons, and turns out his toes.

When the sands are all dry, he is gay as a lark,  
And will talk in contemptuous tones of the Shark:  
But, when the tide rises and sharks are around,  
His voice has a timid and tremulous sound.  
(Lewis Carroll)

Next, I will transcribe a fragment of the poem "The Old Man's Comforts" by Robert Southey, a Romantic author, to see how Carroll parodies this poem as well:

"You are old father William," the young man cried,  
The few locks which are left you are grey;  
You are hale, father William, a hearty old man;  
Now tell me the reason, I pray."

"In the days of my youth" Father William replied,  
 "I remember'd that youth would fly fast,  
 And abus'd not my health and my vigour at first,  
 That I never might need them at last".

"You are old, father William," The young man cried,  
 "And pleasures with youth pass away.  
 And yet you lament not the days that are gone;  
 Now tell me reason, I pray."

"In the days of my youth" father William replied,  
 "I remember'd that youth could not last;  
 I thought of the nature, whatever I did,  
 That I never might grieve for the past."

"You are old, father William," the young man cried,  
 "And life must be hast'ning away;  
 You are cheerful and love to converse upon death;  
 Now tell me the reason, I pray."

"I am cheerful, young man," father William replied,  
 "Let the cause thy attention engage:  
 In the days of my youth I remember'd my God!  
 And He hath not forgotten my age."  
 (Robert Southey)

"You are old father William," the young man said,  
 "And your hair has become very white;  
 And yet you incessantly stand on your head-  
 Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

"In my youth," Father William replied to his son,  
 "I feared it might injure the brain;  
 But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,  
 Why, I do it again and again."

"You are old," said the youth, "as I mentioned before,  
 And have grown most uncommonly fat;  
 Yet you turned a back -somersault in at the door-  
 Pray, what is the reason of that?  
 "In my youth" said the sage, as he shook his grey locks,  
 "I kept all my limbs very supple  
 By the use of this ointment -one shilling the box-  
 Allow me to sell you a couple?"

You are old," said the youth, "and your jaws are too weak  
 For anything tougher than suet;  
 Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak-  
 Pray how did you manage to do it?"

"In my youth" said his father, "I took to the law,  
 And argued each case with my wife;  
 And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw,  
 Has lasted the rest of my life."

"You are old" said the youth, "one would hardly suppose  
 That your eye was as steady as ever;  
 Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose-  
 What made you so awfully clever?"

"I have answered three questions, and that is enough,"  
 Said his father; "don't give yourself airs!  
 Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?  
 Be off, or I'll kick you down stairs!"

(Lewis Carroll)

Now I want to show Jane Taylor's popular poem "The Star", and the Hatter's  
 song that parodies this poem:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
 How I wonder what you are!  
 Up above the world so high,  
 Like a diamond in the sky.  
 (Jane Taylor)

Twinkle, twinkle, little bat!  
 How I wonder what you're at!  
 Up above the world you fly,  
 Like tea-tray in the sky.  
 (Lewis Carroll)

There are some more authors parodied such as David Bates' poem "Speak  
 Gently", transformed in "Speak Roughly" or Mary Howit's "The Spider and the

CELIA VÁZQUEZ GARCÍA

Fly", converted in "The whiting and the snail" or James M. Sayles' "Beautiful Star" transformed in "Beautiful soup"<sup>1</sup>.

It is difficult to make a summary for this article of the different genres and canonical authors who wrote for children during this age. But there are some general aspects in the development of this literature that I would like to highlight like the unique quality of Victorian fictional fairy-tales. Why, for example, are the fairy tales of two eminent Victorians such as Dickens or Ruskin different from the French or German Fairy-tales? What makes them distinctly Victorian? This quality is its earnestness. In the *Christmas Books* of Charles Dickens and in John Ruskin's fairy classic *The King of the Golden River*, for instance, one can find clear illustrations of the importance of being earnest. Both works serve as paradigms of Victorian earnestness. In these fairy tales of the nineteenth century England, earnestness is not merely a matter of self-perfection, but is also the most desirable goal for an entire nation and an age.

I would also like to underline the importance of the adventure story in Victorian Children's Literature, in the making of the national ideology –imperialism, a cluster of ideas which included patriotism, militarism, racialism, Christianity, hero-worship and manliness.

The triple-decker novel and the best-selling adventure novel, both definitive Victorian genres, were infused with imperial ideas of race, pride and national prowess. From the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century imperialism was the dominant national ideology in England, transcending class and party divisions. The impact was greater than that of any previous dominant ideology because its pre-eminence coincided with the rise of the mass market and the mass media.

The aim of Juvenile Literature instead of Children's Literature was clearly stated at the beginning of the century. It was both to entertain and to instruct, to inculcate approved value systems, to spread useful knowledge and to provide acceptable role models. These objectives derived from the work of the Evangelicals and they appropriated existing literary forms such as romance to expand their message. The popularity with boys of certain adventure stories intended for adults and the ones that appeared in the penny dreadfuls led the Evangelicals to seize on the model as ideal for juvenile instruction.

<sup>1</sup> All these poems have been extracted from Martin Gardner in his notes to Lewis Carroll (*The Annotated Alice*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977).

Children had always been interested in Romantic adventures hence the popularity of the chapbooks. Walter Scott's historical romances demonstrated that exciting adventures set in the historical past could be very thrilling for boys. Crucially, such stories appeared when Britain was emerging from the Napoleonic Wars, a great naval and military power. The exploits of Nelson and Wellington in the wars against Napoleon had raised patriotism to great heights, so that the rise, character and popularity of adventure stories for children can be seen both as an expression and a result of popular interest in the rise of the British Empire, which grew rapidly in the nineteenth century, especially after the wars with France.

During the nineteenth century Britain expanded her possessions so much that the area over which Queen Victoria reigned in 1897 was four times greater than at her accession in 1837. It is not surprising that Victorian children shared their parents' interests in the British Empire. Many from the middle class expected to have direct contact with its colonies when they left school, either through trade, through service in the army or navy, or by working as public servants. Thus the interest in exotic places, in exciting exploits on land and sea, all within the hegemony of British imperialism, helped to create a climate in which boys and girls wished to read adventure stories about them, in which the heroes were young people like themselves. By the 1840s the adventure story for adults was well established through the works of Defoe and Scott in England, whether as tales of the sea and shipwreck or thrilling accounts of the past and children had appropriated them.

From the perspective of twenty-first century liberal ideology, there is much to criticise to certain canonical authors however: Kipling's Mowgly stories, from his *Jungle Books*, is an example. Kipling himself, of course, is associated in many people's minds with a racist, sexist, imperialist value system, but it was not his fault, these were the moral values of his times. He was the first Briton to win the Nobel Prize for literature. He was a devout supporter of the British Empire and its mission of bringing moral and political enlightenment to the "dusky races" of the "Third World". Kipling believed in traditional hierarchies and in the maintenance of law and order, through force of arms when necessary. He tended to think of humanity as a vast herd, unwashed and potentially unruly, to be controlled for the good of society by oligarchies of superior beings. In his life and in his fiction, he took a pronouncedly masculine point of view, conservative and militaristic, as many authors of these times.

The Mowgly saga is a rich example of the high heroic style in its late Victorian/early-modern form. But it is also an implicit critique, the story of heroism developing out of the frustrated need for something better. It actually traces the

CELIA VÁZQUEZ GARCÍA

pathology of Mowgly's emergence into a hero. As an infant, Mowgly wanders into a family of wolves, looking for food and care and love. Naively, he supposes he has found what he sought and lives unselfconsciously among "his people" for several years. But as he comes to an age of awareness, he learns that he is wrong; the wolves resent him. Later, attempting to fit into human society, he is rejected again. As a direct result of his emotional trauma, Mowgly becomes preoccupied with honour and revenge. He kills Shere Khan, the tiger; he marshals the animals in a stampede that levels the human village that has offended him; he destroys a huge pack of wild dogs that presumes to invade his jungle. Mowgly rises to be master of the jungle.

In *The Wind in the Willows*, another example of canonical Children's Literature, the chummy, homosocial, escapist, nostalgic, nature-worshipping society of Mole, Rat, Badger, and the rest is of course life with internal contradictions. Why is Toad by far the most memorable, exciting "human" character in the book? Because he loves power? Flaunts his riches? Puffs his vanity and egotism? Uses women? Argues? Immerses himself in the material world? One could counterargue that there is much instinctive appreciation in *The Wind in the Willows* of nature's imperious call. The love of nature is a positive stirring from within the creatures and not just an escape of industrial blight, but at the same time is the representation of male power. So, if we continue studying all these canonical works of the nineteenth century we will see that there are similar characteristics among them and that most of these works belong to the adventure stories.

Within a few years so many writers began to produce such tales that, although it cannot be said that they invented the genre, they established it firmly with such titles as *The Settlers in Canada* (1844), *The Coral Island* (1858), *Treasure Island* (1881) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). Not all of these stories deal with British Imperialism directly, of course, but a strong sense of innate British superiority over all other races is a clear reflection of British expansion overseas in the nineteenth century, and public consciousness of it.

Captain Frederick Marryat is responsible for the establishment of the adventure story as such a dominant form. Popular Marryat books were *Mr Midshipman Easy*, *Masterman Ready*, etc; and Ballantyne soon followed Marryat's example with stories such as *The Coral Island* and *The Young Fur-Trader*, among others. Christianity and Anglo-Saxonism went hand in hand in the thinking of such men, as it did in the works of writers like Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes.

Another follower was G.A. Henty, who became perhaps the most prolific writer of adventure stories in the last decades of the nineteenth century. He is

considered the most imperialist of the writers. His books reflected and reinforced imperial sentiments.

The development of the adventure story outside Britain had been deeply influenced by English-Language writers as early as Defoe, and the works of Marryat, Mayne Reid and Henty were widely reprinted in America, as well as contributing to the evolution of European traditions of adventure stories. Karl May, the popular German author of adventure stories, for example, had read both Marryat and The American Fenimore Cooper.

Given the dominance and popularity of the adventure story by the last decades of the nineteenth century, it is not surprising to find serious writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson using the form for such tales as *Treasure Island*. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* appeared in 1883 and, although serialised for boys, this adventure story won adult approval. But what were the characteristics of the adventure story? What were its formal elements and how writers used them? The first and most important feature of the form is its blending of the probable with the extraordinary. The adventure story offers the reader the excitement of danger and the unexpected. But if the incidents of the story are too ordinary, they fail to excite, while if they are too extraordinary, they fail to be credible. The effect of the marvellous depends on an element of the real, and that combination, practised by Scott, was not forgotten by his successors. This sense of probability is usually achieved by establishing the hero as a very normal and identifiable kind of person, generally a youth or young boy from a respectable, but never wealthy, home.

The young hero's main characteristic is usually his sheer normality; he is neither particularly clever nor stupid, but has plenty of spirit and common sense. There is some change in the presentation of the hero from his treatment in the first half of the century, when under the influence of Evangelicalism, he is apt to be rather pious, even in the novel of Marryat, but, though the hero is still keen to do what is right, he is portrayed in more secular terms by the time of Henty and Stevenson.

The introductory stage of the story usually involves the youthful hero in a preliminary but minor crisis, which enables him to reveal his ability in some way. Frank Harrogate in Henty's *By Sheer Pluck* rescues two companions from drowning in England, before his great adventure starts overseas. Usually as the result of some domestic crisis, sometimes the loss of parents or the family fortune, the young hero leaves home, and begins a long journey, perhaps to seek other relations or to earn a living elsewhere. In Marryat's *The Settlers in Canada* the Campbell family emigrate after losing their estate in Cumberland, a pattern repeated in a lot of



novels of this time. It is quite common for the protagonist to be an orphan or to lose his father early in the story, as Dick Varley does in Ballantyne's *The Dog Crusoe* or Kim does in Kipling's story. So the hero begins his journey –to restore the family fortune, to join the army, to look for a missing relative, to search for a missing treasure– and in the process he encounters all kinds of dangers and difficulties, storms and shipwrecks, dangerous animals and fierce antagonists.

The settings are usually exotic, and even those stories set in Britain focus on its unfamiliar aspects such as the isolation of the New Forest or the Western Highlands of Scotland. Normally, however, the hero's quest takes him overseas, sometimes to European wars, but more often to the desert and jungles of Africa, the snowy wastes of Canada, or even more obscure regions of South America or the Far East. These unfamiliar and often dangerous locations, as well as giving a sense of novelty and freshness to the story, often act almost symbolically to reinforce the sense of obstacles against which the hero must struggle.

His journeys are not unaccompanied, however, and the hero often acquires a faithful companion, sometimes in the shape of a surrogate father such as the old servant Jacob Armitage in Marryat's *The Children of the New Forest* (1847) or, more often, the companion is a friendly native, A Man Friday figure, who can speak the language and knows the local customs. Makarooroo has this function in Ballantyne's *The Gorilla Hunters* (1861), and Umbopo has a similar role in *King Solomon's Mines*. The young hero also often possesses some special asset almost as important as his human companion which will help him on his travels. Henty's young heroes have a remarkable gift for disguises and for picking up foreign languages easily, and Jim Hawkins's map, Dick Varley's dog in *The Dog Crusoe* (1861) and Captain Good's false teeth in *King Solomon's Mines* are similar examples of these really useful acquisitions.

As the hero undertakes his journey, all kinds of unexpected complications develop. Storms and shipwrecks threaten the quest, while wild animals and skirmishes with natives assail travels by land. In *King Solomon's Mines*, for example, the hero has to overcome an enraged elephant, and cross the blistering desert and icy mountain range before encountering his major opponent the bloodthirsty tyrant Twala. The narrative thus rises by a series of minor crises to the great climax, which is often a ferocious battle against powerful adversaries, such as pirates, cannibals, or a foreign army.

Normally, of course, the hero survives, but usually he does more than that, for the ending of most adventure stories shows him rewarded with substantial wealth and honours. It is not simply that the hero returns home and is warmly greeted by

his family and friends, but that, having proved himself on his Quest, and discovered his real worth, this self-discovery has to be symbolised by the lavish trappings of material success.

Although the overt religious didacticism of early children's books is rarely found in these adventure stories, their authors did try to guide their young readers towards upholding such secular virtues as loyalty, pluck and resourcefulness usually stressing the ideological assumption that the British possession of such qualities is unequalled, and that the British Empire was an unrivalled instrument for universal harmony and justice. Some writers indeed articulated the values of late nineteenth-century British imperialism quite emphatically, as G.H. Henty did, often prefacing his tales with a letter addressed to his readers in which he drew attention to the heroic feats of the story which followed, and which helped to create the British Empire. Other writers are less explicit, although it is not difficult to read such stories as Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* as a parable of British colonialism.

In their use of formulaic elements and stereotyped characters, it is clear that adventure stories owe a good deal to the structure of traditional folk- and fairy- tales in which similar patterns tend to repeat themselves: a young hero leaves home to accomplish some great feat of courage before returning home in triumph. Such stories, with their mixture of realism and the marvellous, their narration of the hero's journey as a quest and the frequently happy endings have elements in common with the myths and legends found in ancient Greek and Hindu cultures.

Such myths remain powerful because they express the unconscious desires and fears which underlie conscious patterns of behaviour, and Bruno Bettelheim suggests that folk- and fairy- tales have remained particularly popular with children because through them children learn to master their disappointments and fears, and to gain feelings of self-good and self-worth.

Many fairy tales depict a hero who is not a superman but an ordinary person like the reader, who goes out in a world in which evil is omnipresent. They carry the psychologically reassuring meaning that heroes and heroines can learn to survive in such a world, and even wring triumph out of it.

Despite the realism of their surface structures, it is clear that many nineteenth-century adventure stories are based upon the formula of folk-tales. Inevitably they were transformed by Victorian interests and ideologies, as *The Coral Island*, for example, reflected contemporary attitudes towards race, but they were popular with

their readers in part because they continued to satisfy some of the same human and psychological needs as the traditional tales.

The use of a narrative structure which depends upon the recurrence of formulaic elements has certain advantages which a less conventional or less consistently structured story lacks. The reader of such stories is tested and reassured psychologically by the recognition of familiar patterns of danger and security, but he also obtains aesthetic satisfaction as he or she learns to appreciate the way writers vary the expected pattern or use it to embody values or a personal vision which may be unexpected.

The presence of the familiar structure of the folk tale is very clear in *Treasure Island*, for example. A preliminary section introduces the young hero Jim Hawkins, and then, after the death of his father, establishes the purpose of the Quest, and describes the preparations for the journey. The hero and his companions make their way to the appointed place, in this case literally a faraway treasure island, where, after a series of skirmishes, they achieve victory over their foes, and finally make a successful homecoming. Stevenson's story pattern is thus the familiar one of hero, Quest, struggle and homecoming, containing the same elements as are found in many traditional tales, and offering the reader the same kinds of psychological reassurance as are found there.

But the importance of Stevenson relies on the mixture of familiar elements with imagination, sophistication and seriousness. While part of the pleasure the reader experiences when reading the book for the first time is a recognition of the familiar, which brings a reassurance especially important to the young reader, at the same time Stevenson's manipulation of these elements makes them seem unfamiliar and thus disturbing. In this way by a combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar he creates some of the tensions appropriate to a reading of an adventure story.

In traditional tales, the hero usually acquires some special gift, and here Jim's discovery of the treasure-map is the equivalent of such a gift. And though the journey Jim makes from Bristol to the island, the victory over the enemy, and the journey home also stay close to the familiar pattern, Stevenson introduces various complications, such as the way the ship's crew splits between the loyal men and the pirates, and then he complicates the crisis further through the unexpected intervention of Benn Gunn, and the removal of the treasure from its original site.

The story is also full of wonderfully imaginative touches—the Black Spot used as a deadly warning, Jim's visit to the apple barrel, the haunting voice heard among

the trees, all rendered the more credible because the narrator is the truthful, rather impulsive, and yet absolutely normal young Jim Hawkins.

But what gives *Treasure Island* its great originality is the way Stevenson varies the expected pattern of faithful companions and stereotyped villains. For the faithful companions—especially Squire Trelawney and Captain Smollet—are only too fallible, the Squire erratic and indiscreet, and Captain Smollet a professional sailor who is too unbending. The pirates, on the other hand, are not stereotyped villains, for they combine vulnerability with their aggressive qualities. Indeed, perhaps they are at their most dangerous exactly when they appear most vulnerable—Billy Bones with his nightmarish terrors, the blind beggar Pew, and Israel Hands above all, horribly wounded and half drunk, and yet absolutely murderous when apparently so impotent.

The most striking variation of all that Stevenson plays upon the traditional pattern of adventure, however, is in the character of Long John Silver and Jim Hawkins's relationship with him. Silver is ostensibly the villain, but, though Jim is terrified when he first hears of the seafaring man with one leg, he immediately takes to him when they meet in Bristol, and they become—it is the greatest irony in the book—like father and son.

But when he hides in the apple barrel Jim learns of the dark side of Silver's nature, and from then on he is generally confused. Silver is the leader of the mutineers, kills George Merry quite ruthlessly, and switches back to the loyal party again when the treasure disappears. But he also consistently looks after Jim, and is the only character in the whole book who shows any genuine warmth to him. Is he a villain? Stevenson asks. Silver can be brutal but he is also attractive and kind-hearted. Which is the real Silver?

Stevenson, brought up by strict Presbyterian parents in mid-Victorian Edinburgh, was fully aware of its mixture of respectability and hypocrisy, its combination of prudery and wildness, but, although he rebelled against the tensions of home and of his home town, at the same time he never ceased to love his parents or the Scotland where he found it physically impossible to live. Not surprisingly given this background of contradictions, Stevenson became preoccupied with the problems of the ambiguity and duality of man's nature, seeing it constantly shifting and changing, and all the more difficult, therefore, to come to terms with. And he explores this paradox primarily through the fluctuating relationship between Jim Hawkins and Long John Silver. Stevenson is constantly asking, and he uses the traditional form of the adventure story, with all its opportunities for loyalty and treachery, for disguises and changes of side, to ask his questions.

This use of what had become the traditional structure of the adventure story sometimes gives a book a peculiar ideological interest when the structure breaks down or seems to be in conflict with the author's overt objectives. When this happens, a story may be revealing by a coded version of experiences more about the age in which it was written than the author intended.

So powerful was the tradition of the adventure story established by Marryat and his successors, that it continued even after Henty's death in 1902. But many of the writers of adventure novels in the first decades of the twentieth century reflect the great scientific and technological changes which were taking place like the first flight of the Wright Brothers and Bleriot's journey across the English Channel in 1909. All these changes accelerated the development of a new type of adventure with flying heroes. The flying story replaced the sea story but it retained the formal elements of the traditional tale. And then the decline on the realist adventure story began.

To summarise, Children's Literature is, certainly, a separable subject in literary study. To teach the canon more critically, to admit and to explore the surprising darkness in Children's Literature due to ideological ideas of old times, to find much to celebrate beneath our skepticisms can only help our students develop their own capacities to enjoy and evaluate classical authors and their works for children.

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CELIA VÁZQUEZ GARCÍA

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## RESEÑAS / REVIEWS

Colomer, Teresa (ed.)

*La literatura infantil i juvenil catalana: un segle de canvis*

Institut de Ciències de l'Educació  
 Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona  
 Barcelona. 2002

En 1999, acogiéndose al soporte institucional del Departament d'Ensenyament de la Generalitat de Catalunya, un grupo de investigadores de Literatura infantil y juvenil (LIJ) de las universidades del área catalana constituyeron una red de relación para el intercambio y potenciación de los estudios en este campo. Una de las actividades de esta red de relación fue un ciclo de conferencias divulgativas que obtuvo ayuda y soporte institucionales del ICE de la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. El ICE de la UAB creyó que era oportuno publicar esas conferencias con algunas aportaciones complementarias. El resultado es este interesante libro, un libro denso y ambicioso que aborda un tema amplísimo desde distintos puntos de vista y desde múltiples intereses y abordajes. No es un libro exhaustivo, como se comenta en la introducción, ya que se habla poco de poesía y menos de teatro, por ejemplo, pero es una aportación más a la larga lista ya de trabajos sobre LIJ que, desde las tierras de habla catalana se ofrecen con una frecuencia y un rigor notables y que, con el tiempo, han ido conformando un corpus de gran interés no sólo para especialistas sino también para todas aquellas personas que desde distintos ámbitos se acercan a la LIJ con el objeto de mejorar y ampliar sus conocimientos y contrastar sus experiencias.

El libro recoge los trabajos de dieciocho especialistas de LIJ y sobre todo de la LIJ catalana. Algunos de ellos son especialistas muy prestigiosos y han participado en los más importantes congresos de LIJ. La edición del libro y la coordinación de todos los trabajos es obra de Teresa Colomer, especialista casi imprescindible, que ocupa, sin lugar a dudas, un puesto destacado en la historia de la LIJ no sólo en el ámbito catalán. Su nombre va unido desde hace tiempo a la actividad de estudiar y profundizar desde cualquier ámbito todo lo que hace referencia al libro infantil y juvenil. Y no sólo estudiar sino también estimular y coordinar grupos y trabajos varios y darlos a conocer ya en forma de revista o de libro. Teresa Colomer, pues, aparte de ser la autora de una de las dieciocho conferencias del libro es la responsable de la edición y coordinación de los textos y es quien abre fuego con una breve introducción sobre el siglo XX y la LIJ catalana que sirve para darle al libro un toque de unidad y de justificación y para que el lector se ubique a través de esa mirada atrás para contemplar de dónde venimos y dónde nos encontramos en todo lo que se refiere a la LIJ catalana.

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