
Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects

2011

The Legitimacy of Children's and Young Adult Literature as Literature

Timothy Akers

Minnesota State University - Mankato

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds>



Part of the [Modern Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Akers, Timothy, "The Legitimacy of Children's and Young Adult Literature as Literature" (2011). *Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects*. Paper 105.

This APP is brought to you for free and open access by Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

THE LEGITIMACY OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG
ADULT LITERATURE AS LITERATURE

By

Tim Akers

AN ALTERNATE PLAN PAPER SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE
MASTERS OF ENGLISH DEGREE:
ENGLISH STUDIES OPTION
Minnesota State University, Mankato

THE LEGITIMACY OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG
ADULT LITERATURE AS LITERATURE

By Tim Akers

This report is submitted as part of the required work in the course English 694 (2), Alternate Plan Paper at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and has been supervised, examined and accepted by the professor.

Under the Alternate Plan for the Master of English Degree- English Studies, this paper is offered in lieu of a thesis.

Dr. John Banschbach

Dr. Jacqueline Arnold

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	I
PURPOSE	I
LIMITATIONS	II
KEY TERMS.....	II
 REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	 IV
 CHAPTER 1	 1
THE TRADITION OF CHILDREN 'S AND ADULT LITERTURE IN WESTERN CIVILIZATON.....	1
 CHAPTER 2	 14
CONFRONTING THE AMORPHIC NATURE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE	14
 CHAPTER 3	 33
MIMETIC APPROACHES TO CHILDREN'S AND YA FICTION: USING A RHETORICAL THEORY TO ENABLE READER SUBJECTIVITY	33
WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN NARRATOLOGICAL APPROACHES FOR CHILDREN'S LITERATURE	41
<i>Simplicity</i>	44
<i>Genre Eclecticism</i>	45
<i>Multiple Plots</i>	47
<i>Tonal Shift</i>	47
<i>Degrees of Narrativity</i>	48
<i>Focalization</i>	49
<i>Metafiction</i>	50
 SUMMARY	 53

INTRODUCTION

This study will attempt to argue that children's literature, based on its lengthy history, is a valid form of literature possessing unique literary distinctions that elevate it above the plain aesthetics of genre fiction. A rhetorical based approach in critical theory will help to identify unique distinctions, above and beyond the aesthetics of genre, making children's literature exclusive unto itself.

Children's literature is important commercially and communally. It serves as a tool for language and cognitive development, a means for pedagogical advancement, a media for social development, and a platform to discover new ideas, and a cheap source of great fun. It is true literature and worthy of acknowledgment and respect.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this body of work is to offer a theoretical framework in which to advance the aesthetics of children's and young adult literature, acknowledging that it serves multiple uses.

As a true form of unique literature, children's and young adult novels cannot fairly be judged as "good" or "bad" based on the measure of other forms of literature understood as for adults, and therefore, it requires a formalized framework for evaluation based on its unique nature. Currently there are not broadly defined approaches to such literature due in part to its broad amorphous nature, and lack of respect. Once a theoretical approach is agreed upon, it may be possible to create a

canon and advance this literature as art as well with the intent of advancing literary expectations.

LIMITATIONS

This work cannot create a definitive standard; it can only offer for consideration a way of looking at children's and young adult literature, so as to identify its unique qualities, as well as a justification for acknowledging the merit of young adult and children's literature as literature. There is often more than one way to look at literature, and a variety of critical lenses. This document puts forward a Narratological viewpoint that does not mean that additional approaches cannot be used in unison.

KEY TERMS

Children's Literature – a body of books and stories written specifically for children, and often spans multiple genres.

Narratology – a rhetorical theory that places the understanding of a novel upon a close reading of the text itself, with an understanding based on observed rhetorical devices.

Young Adult Literature – considered a subgenre of children's literature by some, but others argue that it has the merit to be its own form of literature. Usually the target audience is ten to sixteen year old readers.

YAL – Young Adult Literature.

Child Centered - this term refers generally to those theorists that take a dominant view that the child is the most important aspect of children's and YA literature. Many of these people in this camp tend to be educators, more so than academic scholars.

Deviant Reader – A rhetorical phrase given to the editor, or teacher, that reads not for discourse purposes, but mistakes.

Text Centered – This is the antithesis to being child centered. Text Centered individuals tend to a “text only” approach disregarding the primary audience of children all together. They often decry the poor quality of the literary craft involved in children’s and adult literature.

Child People – Those of the “child centered” camp.

Book People – Those of the “book centered” camp.

Practitioner of children’s literature – This is a general term coined by Peter Hunt to refer to those that work with children’s books. Usually these individuals are teachers, writers, librarians, maybe publishers, and parents.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Alberghene, Janice M. "Will the Real Young Adult Novel Please Stand Up?"

Children's Literature Association Quarterly 10.3 (1985): 135-136.

Janice Alberghen discusses the difficulty and problematic nature of, or "neurosis" (135), in the matter of Adolescent Literature and that it possesses an "identity crisis" (135). Alberghen states that Adolescent Literature as a "...field that hedges about its own boundaries or essential characteristics can provide few clear reasons for including one work of fiction rather than another" (135). According to Alberghene there are two different approaches to defining young adult literature, offering two views of how such novels are viewed. There are those that are written especially for them [adolescents] and those that are not written for them, but available for their use (135).

Babbitt, N. "Between Innocence and Maturity. In J. Varlejs (Ed.)" Young Adult

Literature in the Seventies: A selection of readings. Metuchen:

Scarecrow, 1975. 140-144.

Babbitt deals a great deal with audience construction, and theories on how children audiences may be viewed. Often she provides a counterpoint to narratologist's view points.

Booth, Wayne C. The Rhetoric of Fiction. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Booth originated the critical theory of Narratology. He deals extensively with author's voice versus narrator's voice, creation of critical information for the reader within the narrative that effects reader's experience, showing literal examples of how construction takes place within a work of fiction revealing that the idea of showing and not telling is a fallacy. Within narrative voices morality, messages, agendas, and other information is transferred effectively, or ineffectively. Narratology offers a critical lens in which to view children's and young adult literature in that such literature offers the inexperienced viewpoint of discovery to young and inexperienced young adults, and children readers.

Butler, Robert. An Interview With Philip Pullman. 3 December 2007. 12 January 2008 <<http://moreintelligentlife.com/node/697>>.

Butler's interview of Philip Pullman supports the idea that the children's novel is indeed a rhetorical device, with the author having an agenda in mind. Pullman is able to make the novel work because it is very well written, and he makes artful use of postmodern aesthetics.

Byatt, A.S. New York Times. 7 July 2003. 26 June 2011

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/07/opinion/harry-potter-and-the-childish-adult.html>>.

This is an article in which Byatt calls the Harry Potter series and Rowling's readers childish.

Cadden, Michael. "Speaking to Both Children and Genre: Le Guin's Ethics of Audience." The Lion and the Unicorn January 2000: 128-142.

Cadden deals specifically with authorial ethics in their application to themes employed by Ursula Le Guin and her self-imposed boundaries.

— **"The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel." Children's Literature Association Quarterly 25.3 (2000): 146-154.**

This article calls into question the authentic voice of the Young Adult Novel citing that the author is an adult that speaks to the incomplete experience of the young adult reader. I use this article in terms of justification for some ideal approaches in the application of defining an ethical use of content and circumstance.

The potential for forcing an agenda on unsuspecting readers, and exploiting their inexperience will always exist as long as adults write for young adults.

According to Mike Cadden there is a crossover in agendas for the "writer who claims both to write children's books and to write books for children—those writers who conflate text and context" (128). This means that in terms

of identifying critical tools for analysis of children's\young adult literature when an author "describes 'writing to children,' we are invited to see a rhetorical relationship between a writer and a reader; when the children's writer [young adult writer] discusses 'writing children's literature,' we are invited to consider the text as a member of a particular genre or text type" (129). This explanation gives insight into specific ways in which to categorize such an amorphous entity as children's, and young adult, fiction.

Card, Orson Scott. "Margaret A. Edwards Award Acceptance Speech." Young Adult Library Services (2008).

Card in his acceptance speech confesses that his book ENDER'S GAME was originally written for adults, and not young adults. He outlines how the nature of characterization, and plot, are the driving force behind an audience's likes and dislikes, even young adults. His book goes to show that young adults require a specific form of narration in order to access a novel from preference.

Chambers, Aidan. "The Owl Service: A Study." Wilson Library Bulletin 1969: 425--433.

Chambers deals a great deal with the topic of the child audience as an authorial construction. This is of itself a rhetorical creation, which transpires often with little or no thought by the author. He, like Meek, falls into the "child centered" approach.

Cline, Ruth and McBride, William. A Guide To Literature For Young Adults. Dallas: Scott, Foresman and Company.1972

Cline and McBride offer comprehensive observations on the nature of children's books. They offer specific insights to what YA literature does for the intended audience, and highlights historical trends in the history of children's literature.

Christie's. <http://www.christies.com/>. 2010. Christie's. 22 November 2010

<http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=2069100>.

I obtained a graphic of a horn book at auction from this site. It offers an authentic visual aid of an original horn book.

Crowe, Chris. "Defending YA Literature: Voices of Students." The English Journal 92.1 (2002): 114-118.

Crowe offers student viewpoints of YA literature, and allows them to offer their opinions which come to the defense of YA.

—. "The Problem with YA Literature." The English Journal 90.3 (2001): 146-15.

Crowe has a "love-hate" relationship with YA literature. He comes to its defense, but also decries its lack of literary quality.

—. "What Is Young Adult Literature?" The English Journal 88.1 (1998): 120-122.

Crowe attempts to discuss the nature of YA novels. He seldom offers a concrete and distinct view.

Crutcher, C. Responding To Young Adult Literature. Portsmouth: Boynton

Cook, 1996.

Though the quotation used sounds like Crutcher is not pro-children's literature, he is only stating the common perception of children's literature

DeFattore, Joan. "Religious Implications of Children's Literature as Viewed by Religious Fundamentalists: The Mozert Case." Project Muse (1989): 9-13.

This article documents a particular lawsuit that has had lingering effect on publishers of children's materials. In this case the material was a basal reader, but parents strongly reacted to the content. As a result, many publishers are now engaged in self-editing.

Dennis, Suzzane. Casting Characters: An Introduction to the History of Juvenile Literature to 1900. 2010. 13 November 2010

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/Library_Bulletin/Nov1996/LB-N96-Dennis.html#fn1>.

Dennis offers a concise and documented overview of ancient children's literature in eastern and western civilizations. She has documented how artifacts show that children's stories have always been for the education of the young, and passing on values to newer generations.

Endelman, Diane K. Bauerle and Judith E. The Lilly Library. 2010. 28

November 2010. <<http://www.indiana.edu/~liblilly/chapbook.shtml>>.

This site offers a wealth of information on chapbooks, their history, and development from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century.

Feinberg, Barbara. Welcome To Lizard Motel. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

Marketed as a memoir, Feinberg offers parental perspective viewpoints on the disturbing nature of some topics dealt with in YA literature. She found her twelve-year old actually depressed from reading titles like *Walks Two Moons*, and *They Cage Animals at Night*. She voices her concern about heavy-handed approaches by teachers.

Foglia, Marc. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 2009. Marc Foglia. 6 November 2010

This site offered access to the collective works of Montaigne.

Giblin, James Cross. The Gublin Guide to Writing Children's Books 4th Edition. New York: Writer's Institute Publications, 2005.

What is the definition of Young Adult/Children's Literature. This genre is a large, amorphous group that resists definition, and classification. Giblin, a prolific and successful writer, offers the publisher's definition and basic classifications used in the publishing industry.

Hunt, Peter. "Criticism and Children's Theory." Signals 1974: 117-130.

Used only small portions of this as Hunt does not go into as much detail as in his other work, but Jones criticizes him as not allowing room for the constraints of readers' subjectivities. I did not find that to be especially true, but Hunt does not always address this in a satisfying way.

—. Criticism, Theory, & Children's Literature. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991

Like all of the scholars, he hedges a great deal in trying to be authoritative. Often he resists any direct statements referring to the nature of children's

literature. He does state openly, but it is easy to miss in the text, how he defines a “child” for the purposes of his theory.

Still the book is very helpful, and useful.

Lesnik-Oberstein, Karin. "Childhood and Textuality: Culture, History, Literature." Children in Culture: Approaches to Childhood. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998. 1-28.

This is from an anthology. She offers general information into textual approaches. She approaches children’s literature from a postmodernist perspective.

McCallum, R. "Metafiction and Experimental Work." International Encyclopedia of Children's Literature. Ed. Peter Hunt. New York: Routledge, 1996. 397-407.

McCallum is an outspoken critic for the lack of quality in children’s literature. He leans to the “text centered” camp. He does offer interesting insights in the perceptions of children and metafiction.

Meek, Margaret. The Cool Web: The Pattern of Children's Reading. London: Bodley Head, 1977.

Meek shares a lot in common with Nancy Atwell. She is “child person” when it comes to children’s literature. She deals some with cognitive approaches from a genre and child centered approach. She is in favor of going away from the purely adult academic concern, and offers insight into reader’s subjectivities.

Moss, Elaine. *Part of the Pattern: A Personal Journey through the World of Children's Books, 1960–1985*. London: Bodley Head, 1986.

Moss deals with child narrative, and child identity. She offers a series of observations on the nature of children's literature.

Nikolajeva, Maria. "Beyond the Grammar of Story, or How Can Children's Literature Criticism Benefit from Narrative Theory?" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 1 (2003): 5-16.

Nikolajeva offers Narratological theory as a way of understanding adolescent literature due to the fact that the narrative of such novels is unique to a specific audience. Though she admits to limitations, she does offer very useful critical tools.

—. "Exit Children's Literature?" *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1998): 221-239.

This article is useful in dealing with specific attributes of narratology.

Katharine Jones does not think that Nikolajeva considers reader subjectivity, but only text. I did not find this to be true.

Plato. *Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry*. 12 November 2008. 25 June 2008

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-rhetoric/>>.

The web site was useful for verifying rhetorical definitions such as mimesis.

Stephens, John. *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*. London: Longman, 1992.

This is an authoritative analysis of narratives written for children, focusing on the ideologies pervading texts and the ways in which creative literature

represents the individual both as subject and as agent. It uses a wide range of international examples of particular types of children's books: old and new fairy tales, fantasy and historical fiction and poetry.

Stevenson, Dinah. "Young Adult Fiction: An Editor's Viewpoint." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 9.2 (1984): 87-88.

Stevenson brings her insight into the marketing of YA fiction, and speaks to the blurring of the lines between adult and child.

Townsend, John. "Standards of Criticism." *The Signal Approach To Children's Books*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980. 193-207.

Townsend also offers a "text centered" approach, but is not as dedicated to the premise that such approaches should always be strictly adhered to. He leans to the "Universal Child" arguments.

Wall, Barbara. The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction.

London: Macmillan, 1991

This book the author examines the question of whether children's' books have really been written for children. She presents a test for determining the answer - whom is the narrator addressing? She suggests that most books have been written to please an adult's view of children's fiction.

Wilkie-Stibbs, Christine. *The Feminine Subject in Children's Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Wilkie-Stibbs offered a compelling case for comparing the approaches to children's literature to feminist approaches, but Jones counters her arguments very well.

University of South Carolina. The Scottish Chapbook Project. June 2002. 28 November 2010 <<http://www.sc.edu/library/spcoll/britlit/cbooks/cbook1.html>>.

This site offers pictures and examples of early chapbooks. This is useful in tracing the nature and progression of Young Adult \Children's literature.

Yampbell, Cat. "Judging a Book by Its Cover." The Lion and the Unicorn 29.3 (2005): 348-372.

Yampbell deals with topic of publishers and book cover strategies employed to entice young readers. She points out that some strategies border on the edge of manipulation. This is nothing new in the area of marketing for children. This is a good example where the consumer needs to assert the force of purchase power to send a message to publishers. Some book covers do actually enforce unfair stereotypes

Chapter 1

THE TRADITION OF CHILDREN 'S AND ADULT LITERATURE IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION

The intent of this chapter is to show that as “literature” children’s and young adult and literature has existed in western civilization long before the written word, and has been the work of adults for an audience of children. As the literature is now going into the early twenty-first century, there is a concerted effort by many to see it become recognized as a prominent form of literature with its own theory and canon.

To understand a society’s view of adulthood and the process by which a child reaches that state, all one needs to do is read the stories embraced by children. Though young and old may have listened to the tales, remembered them, and passed on the tales to their children and grandchildren, these tales became the literary legacy from the earliest history of mankind becoming a type of history of its own (Georgiou 17).

Suzanne Dennis describes the beginning of the children’s literature:

“The process toward a separate children's literature began millennia ago, in the caves of Lascaux and Altamira, in sand on the shore, on rocks in the American West, and anywhere humans lived.... Children's literature, in particular...has always been influenced by adults' attitudes toward children.”(Dennis)

The literature has from the beginning been an attempt to articulate the process to adulthood, though much of the early work would have been of an oral nature. As Constantine Georgiou states, “above everything else. . . . man’s effort to explain to himself the forces of which he was so vaguely and reverently aware in the material and

spiritual world around him, to explain them without the help of science or revealed religion” (17).

Regardless of when the history is counted, the progression of how children and young adult literature has developed has always been informed by how a society views childhood, and how a society marks the transformational factors of adulthood. Cline and McBride offer a broad breakdown of modern YA literature, a breakdown that can be noted in the earliest forms, by stating that there are two designations for such literature, “ 1)...that which is written especially for them, and (2) that which, while not especially for them, is available for their use” (Prologue). This broad definition speaks to the amorphous nature of children’s and young adult literature. Historically, as is hoped to be seen in this information, every time there is a shift in how society sees childhood, there is always a corresponding change in the nature of the books written for young adults and children.

Good evidence for the beginning of children’s literature was excavated in Samaria and dated from 2112 to 1000 BCE, also known as the third UR dynasty. The analysis of the content of these texts showed them organized into five categories: exercises for writing practice, the lullaby, proverbs and fables, stories of schoolboys' lives, and dialogues or debates (Dennis). Of note is the fact that the categories not only consist of the educational, but the aesthetic. Tracing the ancestors of the modern version of Young Adult, or YA, Literature back to Europe in the 1400’s is not too difficult with such titles as *The Fables of Aesop* from 1484, and *A Book of Courtesy* in 1477 (Dennis). Yet the writing for children by adults is best documented in the Middle Ages.

The earliest known formalized beginnings for Western Civilization start with Aldheim (640-709 AD) and contained lessons for children. They were written in Latin and concerned themselves with the mystical significance of the number “7,” contained puzzles, riddles, lessons on forms, and a treatise on the relationship between teacher and student.

Following Aldheim was The Venerable Bede (673-735 AD), who taught in an English monastery. He prepared lesson books for children. Bede’s book was a more vernacularized form of Latin. The text was clearer and used more imagination than Aldheim (Georgiou 19).

In Charlemagne’s court Alcuin spent his adult life furthering the cause of education, founding schools and monasteries, and writing lesson books to instruct children in grammar (Georgiou 19). King Alfred (849-899) continued the tradition of literature by having Latin works translated into Old English, which would have been understood better by children studying in monastery schools (Georgiou 19). Of great note from this time are the *Vocabulary* and the *Colloquy*. The *Vocabulary* is a Latin-English dictionary, used for centuries after its creation, and the *Colloquy* which is a series of questions and answers between teacher and student. The question and answer utilizes the Platonic method of dialogue—an early forerunner of the second person point of view. All of these works were simple and didactic (Georgiou 19) which points to the origin of the long held tradition of didacticism in children’s literature.

From the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, average European children were considered to be miniature adults. The only difference seen by society between adults and children in this time period was that children lacked the skills necessary to

function as an adult. Once children survived through puberty they were immediately recognized as adults (Cline and McBride 16). Considering most European populations of the Middle Ages were illiterate, much of the instruction to children would have been done orally in the form of songs, ballads, miracle and mystery plays. For much of the masses, with no access to education, these oral traditions became the source of their instruction, and quick instruction was important given mortality rates, and the short time from childhood to adulthood.

Once the printing press emerged, and the Guttenberg Bible was published in 1450, books became far more accessible. As the populations at large were still very much illiterate, many works took on the form of picture books (figure 1). Also during this time horn books, books that had a printed page glazed onto a carved wood handle, became popular as a primer for children. According to Christie's world famous auction house of art and antiquities, the horn book was used from the 15th century up through the 19th century until the availability of paper made printed books cheaper and easier to obtain (Christie's).

Of note during the Renaissance period is Amos Comenius (1592-1670) and his approach to educational reform. Comenius, a Moravian mystic and bishop, believed "Boyhood is distracted for years with precepts of grammar, infinitely prolix, perplexed and obscure. Boys are stuffed with vocabularies without associating words with things or indeed with one another" (Georgiou 25). His philosophy gave way to the first known picture book for children, the *Orbis Pictus*.

Not all books were picture books and primers; many of the well-known works of fiction from earlier periods became available as well. These would be stories of King

Arthur, and heroic\romance novels from period where literate adults, and not children, read them. As Cline and McBride maintain, these books are cases where the children of the time appropriated books originally intended for adults (2). This is also early support to undermine the idea that children's literature must be watered down for its audience. If children are interested in a book, they will push themselves to read it.

Along with the commandeering of these titles by young people, there also came the criticism of the suitability of content. Of note was the criticism of sixteenth century philosopher and Renaissance scholar Michael de Montaigne. He believed that, ". . . education is identified with philosophy, this being understood as the formation of judgment and manners in everyday life: ". . . for philosophy [not fiction], which, as the mold of judgment and conduct, will be his principal lesson, has the privilege of being everywhere at home' " (Foglia). Montaigne openly criticized the practicality of fiction for children, and voiced his distaste of what children were reading. In particular he viewed tales of romance and heroism, criticizing fiction of King Arthur, as idle time consuming "trash" (Foglia). The irony of such criticism from a humanist denouncing popular novels as "trash" should not be lost on modern audiences as the 1980's saw a great deal of the best-documented complaints of inappropriate content in children's and young adult literature coming from practitioners of religion (DeFattore).

During the seventeenth century, Puritanical England mirrored the complaints offered by Montaigne a century earlier. The Puritans promoted and produced didactic works with great regularity. Despite Puritan influence, new perspectives of how children were viewed would slowly bring changes in the literature published for children.

With the advent of individuals like Locke and Rousseau, new ideas of how children were viewed and educated began to circulate. Locke and Rousseau saw children as different from adults. They believed that children should no longer share the world of the adult and children had special needs.

According to Locke, "They [children] should be allowed their liberties and freedom suitable to their ages..." (Cline and McBride 17). The idea put forth by Locke and Rousseau that education should no longer be guided by *rule and force*, but should follow individual interests and needs inspired John Newbery.

Newbery, a contemporary of Locke and Rousseau, began to write new literature that reflecting the belief that education should no longer be guided by *rule and force*, but should follow individual interests and needs. Newbery's name is highly recognized from the current book award, "The Newbery Award," which was named after him. Unfortunately Newbery's efforts largely failed as he was ahead of his time, and had little influence. The literature that followed Newbery's effort for the next several centuries proved to be tedious and didactic (Cline and McBride 27). An exception to this would have been John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress*, and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Both of these works confirm something C.S. Lewis believed about the relationship between adults and children's literature: "I am almost inclined to set it up as a canon that a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story, tend to generate more warmth than light" (Hunt 43).



Figure 1 Horn books from Christie's Auction House in London (Christie's).



Figure 2 15th century Chapbooks (University of South Carolina)

Into the nineteenth century, novels for children might be characterized as “overly sentimental.” Cline offers an example: “. . . readers of all ages wept over the problems of *Oliver Twist* and lamented the fate of little Nell. . . . Both children are victims. . . both are saved from evil by adults . . . both seem to be born with an innate dignity and the ability to conduct themselves admirably in spite of the evils surrounding them. . . . neither . . . were allowed to develop realistically . . . the Reader was only supposed to react emotionally” (24). One must be careful not to generalize, as it would be inaccurate to say that nineteenth century novels for children were all bad, possessing no value. Novels like Spyri’s *Heidi* or Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* came around this time.

Characteristically, and problematically, the child characters of the majority of nineteenth-century novels tended to be static and unrealistic by today’s standards. The children were instantly likable and polite, and had no control of their circumstances. Their “dire” predicaments were never a direct result of their own decisions. This trend would follow into the end of nineteenth century, and go into the early twentieth century with works like Tarkington’s *Penrod* (1914) for boys, and Stratton-Porter’s *A Girl of the Limberlost* (1909) (Cline and McBride 25).

In spite of the overly sentimental approach to young adult and children’s problems, the close of the 1800’s would still leave many good works available like Baum’s *OZ* series, Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, Alcott’s *Little Women* and *Little Men* (Cline and McBride 69), Montgomery’s *Ann of Green Gables* and *Emily of New Moon*, and Stevenson’s *Kidnapped* and *Treasure Island*.

It wasn't until the 1950's that the frankness that exemplified adult literature in the 1920's began to filter into the children's market with books like *Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Such thematic shifts became more commonplace after 1965 with books like *Two in the Town*, a book about teen pregnancy and forced marriage, and *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jones* (Cline and McBride 26), or S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, a novel about gangs in 1967.

Still the children's market would change even more in the 1980's when author Judy Blume would write on topics like racism (*Iggie's House*), menstruation (*Are You There God? It's Me Margaret*), divorce (*It's Not the End of the World, Just As Long As We're Together*), bullying (*Blubber*), masturbation (*Deenie; Then Again Maybe I Won't*), and teen sex (*Forever*). Blume's approach follows her perception of frank realism, and proved to be a constant source of controversy over the appropriateness of her subject matter.

As changes in society escalated so did the nature of the problems in children and young adult (YA) fiction, attracting more and more controversy as time has passed. The controversy involved in YA literature is not relegated to thematic content alone. Pushing into the twenty-first century, the very quality of the writing itself has been called into question. The same arguments of Calvinist England and Montaigne are still with us today concerning the frivolous nature of children's novels, but are being expanded into the very nature and quality of the writing itself.

This time it is not only content that is criticized, as more attempts to define the nature of children's and young adult literature are being put forward by theorists, but the literary merit is also being called into question. As Chris Crowe writes, "'They aren't the Classics'" ("Problem with YA Literature" 146).

Of greater impact is that teachers are now attempting to integrate popular novels along with classic novels, fueling controversy as well as changing the views of how reading is taught. So children's and young adult literature is still evolving finding new venues of readers while still being used rhetorically to teach language, thinking, socialization, helping the reader to define, "What makes a good adult?" This still fuels the biases against children's and YA texts.

As adults have used the "story" (fictional and non-fictional) for teaching societal views, informing the path to adulthood, the inevitable outcome is that such texts find a way in the classroom.

As children's texts became the primary domain of pedagogy and development, a "child centered" approach to children's and young adult literature was inevitable. This approach has created a tension against the idea of such texts as literature. Thus the "popular novel" versus the "literary novel" has created a binary that is currently feeding the discussions on how children's and young adult texts are to be seen and treated. This has tended to result in an either/or approach in the quality of such texts.

Chris Crowe addresses the binary and ensuing tension within the use of YA books, but does not agree that poorly written books have to be the outcome of educational purposes:

The complaints have been varied over the years, but most objections generally fall into one of two categories: YA books are bad because

1. They aren't the Classics.
2. They corrupt the young.

Of course, I have to agree that many YA novels fall short of the depth and artistic development . . . Good YA books can knock the reluctance out of reluctant readers, . . . (“Problem with YA Literature” 146)

The pursuit of readability does not necessarily have to result in the diminishing of quality in children’s literature. Some of the problems children’s and YA literature faces have come as a result of the way YA books have been marketed to children and their caretakers (“Problem with YA Literature” 146). Most teachers are willing to sacrifice quality texts to keep their students reading, and this does not begin to address the financial difficulties of acquiring new and better books for classrooms. Then there is the question of “what books are better?”

The tension created within educational environments has further muddied the water for critics and scholars when addressing the all too common binary of the “popular novel” and the “good novel”.

Cline and McBride offer a broad breakdown of modern YA literature in a way that points to the problems with the “how” of categorizing such literature as they offer two groups; “. . . (1) that which is written especially for them, and (2) that which, while not especially for them, is available for their use” (Preface). The evolving tastes of young readers have morphed the nature of children’s and young adult texts which has shown itself in the “problem” novel in particular ways reflecting the blurring lines between child and adult.

Mary Winn speaks directly to the idea of how the marketing of problem novels is furthering the difficulties in determining how certain novels appeal to younger readers because of their ambiguous self-perceptions:

The problem of giving today's young adults something of their own to read is one that hardcover publishers aren't equipped to solve. . . . 'Children are reaching physical maturity years earlier than . . . a century ago. . . . young people who are interested in 'young adult' problems are not equipped, intellectually or emotionally, to grapple with the literary demands, the length, the sophistication of traditional young adult books. And even if they were, in many areas the people who are responsible for selecting books for them consider many young adult materials too mature, and won't buy them. (Stevenson 88)

The reader is caught between the difficulties of content, reading ability, and literary tastes, as well as numerous distractions of video games and computers. Educationalists are often caught adopting the "popular novel" in an effort to get children to read, thus acquiescing to reader demands.

Dinah Stevenson, as a publisher, believes that the minds of young people between childhood and adult hood cannot be served by a single literature right now (88). It is because of Stevenson's premise that causes many adults to be surprised by young reader's ability to self-censor, and self-edit. This is not the first time this has happened in western civilization.

When the printing press made books more accessible, many older titles originally written for adults became available to young readers. These would be stories of King Arthur, and heroic\romance novels from period where literate adults, and not children, read them (Cline and McBride 16). These books are cases where the children of the time appropriated popular books originally intended for adults to suit their own needs.

This could be thought of as early evidence that supporting the idea that children's literature should not be "dumbed" down for its audience. This speaks to the

fact that if children are interested in a book, they will push themselves to read it because they see within a text something that speaks to them at their current age. This in turn opened up another argument that is dealt with by schools off and on—content suitability.

The commandeering of titles by young people has gone on to fuel the criticism of the suitability of content. Of particular note was the criticism of sixteenth century philosopher and Renaissance scholar Michael de Montaigne. He believed that, “. . . . education is identified with philosophy, this being understood as the formation of judgment and manners in everyday life: “. . . .’for philosophy [not fiction], which, as the molder of judgment and conduct, will be his principal lesson, has the privilege of being everywhere at home’ ” (Foglia). Montaigne openly criticized the practicality of fiction adopted by the reading children of his day, as he voiced his distaste of what they were reading.

In particular Montaigne viewed tales of romance and heroism with great disdain, criticizing the fiction of King Arthur as idle time consuming “trash” (Foglia). The irony of such criticism from a humanist denouncing popular novels as “trash” should not be lost on modern audiences as the 1980’s saw a great deal of the best-documented complaints of inappropriate content in children’s and young adult literature coming from practitioners of religion (DelFattore 13).

This brings all discussions back to something that would help everyone involved; “What is needed is a way of approaching children’s literature which helps us to make informed choices from first principles, as it were” (Hunt 7). In order to do this the amorphous nature of children’s and young adult literature needs to be confronted.

CHAPTER 2

CONFRONTING THE AMORPHIC NATURE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Why study young adult (YA) and children's books as literature? For many that deal with children and books (educationalists, parents, and librarians) the question may seem absurd given the fact that many feel that the study of such books outside of educational approaches is irrelevant. For those that deal with adults and books (practically everyone else), regarding such books as unworthy makes the term "literature" little more than slang (Hunt 27). A.S. Byatt has even equated children's books as nothing more than airport novels, referring to them as "consumable" stories (Byatt). Perhaps a better question to ask would be, "Why not study YA and children's literature?"

One of the difficulties in studying children's literature is that it is a very broad subject. This points to the amorphic nature of children's literature in that many genres can exist inside of it: the school story, texts designed for single sexes, religious and social propaganda, fantasy, the folk and the fairy-tale, interpretations of myth and legend, the picture-book as opposed to the illustrated book, the mixed media text, and the re-telling of myths and legends which are often only found only in children's books (Hunt 18). Trying to come to a consensus as to the nature of such literature is proving difficult.

When looking to the universities for help, Crowe states, “Universities, usually the font of all knowledge, aren’t even sure what YAL [young adult literature] is” (“What Is Young Adult Literature” 122). So determining a definition of what is and what is not YA literature, let alone coming to a homogeneous approach as to what makes such literature good or bad, is proving elusive.

The study of children’s literature itself has been often referred to by academics as a “non subject” (Hunt 9). Chris Crowe, who admits the YA literature can be useful in schools because of the added relevance that it brings within its content, is dubious of its quality stating, “. . . even such a narrow definition of YA literature does not eliminate poorly written, trashy, or just plain dumb books that . . . find their way into print (What is Young Adult Literature 122). C. Crutcher calls children’s literature “a bastard child of real literature” (ix), while J.N. Moore explicitly identifies children’s literature as a “stepchild of high school curriculum for struggling readers” (2). Often the best of children’s literature is relegated, unfairly, to the same standing as second-rate modern fiction (Hunt). Harsh criticism.

It is Crowe who provides one of the most succinct and ironic summaries of an art form that Dennis dates to the beginning of the third UR dynasty (Dennis), easily 1700 years before Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Crowe states, “They aren’t the Classics” (“Problem with YA Literature” 146). This unfavorable view is not entirely unjustified as there are many cases R. McCallum identifies as simplistic and uninspired:

Briefly, the narrative modes employed in children’s novels tend to be restricted to either first person narration by a main character or third person narration with one character focaliser

(Stephens, 1991). Texts tend to be monological rather than dialogical, with single-stranded and story-driven narratives, closed rather than open endings, and a narrative discourse lacking stylistic variation (Moss, 1990; Hunt, 1988). These are strategies, which function to situate readers in restricted and relatively passive subject positions and to implicitly reinforce a single dominant interpretive stance. (397)

So when N. Babbitt boldly asserts the futility of YA, or children's, literature stating: "Teenagers do not need a fiction of their own: they are quite ready to move into the world of adult fiction" (143). The response to that could be "Who are you to say they do not need their own fiction?"

It can be easy, in some cases, to prove the quality of YAL and children's literature is dubious. There is a formulaic approach encouraged in commercial markets where the teenage main character is usually perceptive, sensitive, intelligent, mature, and independent and the actions and decisions of the main characters are major factors in the outcome of the conflict. Before dismissing all works of children's literature as simple, it is possible to have a book be simplistic without it being simple. It would be worth remembering some children's novels have achieved great literary status because of their "simplistic" qualities. Such a quality has produced a near iconic esteem in the case of *Charlotte's Web*, by E.B. White, even though there was nothing simple about it.

A great deal of the conflict in deciding what is, and is not good, also points back to the prejudice toward the intended audience —children and young adults. For any in academia the audience is already deemed "lesser," long before the content is even

considered. This has made creating a unified theory difficult due to a large part to a lack of political will, or getting everyone to go along with it.

A good example of this bias comes from well-known critic, and acclaimed author, A.S. Byatt when she reviewed J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix* in the *New York Times*:

Ms. Rowling's magic world has no place for the numinous. It is written for people whose imaginative lives are confined to TV cartoons, and the exaggerated (more exciting, not threatening) mirror-worlds of soaps, reality TV and celebrity gossip. Its values, and everything in it, are, as Gatsby said of his own world when the light had gone out of his dream, "only personal." Nobody is trying to save or destroy anything beyond Harry Potter and his friends and family. (Byatt)

Of course the series is immensely popular, and Byatt went so far as to call adults that read the Potter series "childish." Her remarks touched off a firestorm of responses from people that disagreed with her. Yet her remarks betray the nature of the ruler she used to measure by: ". . . . would grown-up men and women become obsessed by jokey latency fantasies" (Byatt)? Her remark belies something that critics, and academics, often forget about literature. Literature as a study often begins when other people outside the intended audience begin to read books that were not written for them.

Byatt's remarks further show her bias: "In this regard, it is magic [Potter series] for our time. Ms. Rowling, I think, speaks to an adult generation that has not known, and does not care about, mystery. They are inhabitants of urban jungles, not of the real wild. They do not have the skills to tell ersatz magic from the real thing, for as children they daily invested the ersatz with what imagination they had." Her remark shows that at

least she can verbalize, albeit inadvertently, the cultural shift in a society that can travel around the world in eighteen hours, talk to someone on a computer half the world away, travel to the moon, and many other things once deemed impossible, and how they view the “miraculous.” Such changes brought on by technology would tendency to affect how things like magic, and fantasy, are perceived.

Some of Byatt’s comparisons of Rowling’s work with Cooper come off as an “apples to oranges” type of comparison. She criticizes the book for its “symbiotic” fantasy world, and the lack of magic that pales in comparison to past writers that had a “compensating seriousness” (Byatt 4) to their work. Garner made her feel “in touch with earlier parts of our culture, with supernatural and inhuman creatures – from whom we thought we learned our sense of good and evil . . . Ms. Rowling’s magic wood has nothing in common with these lost worlds” (Byatt 3). Byatt’s comments show more of a cultural based interpretation of relevance that does not affect cultural and societal shifts in what people may, or may not, view as magical. Though the works of Cooper and Le Guin are most certainly worthy books, they offer a different “center of consciousness” than what Rowling’s work is offering a reader. Someone who likes Rowling’s work would disagree and continue on reading. For someone who might wish to use Rowling’s work to help attract young readers and further improve “literary tastes,” understanding how so many people can like a work, and how it can be disliked by a respected “book person” would be very useful.

One of the most interesting responses to Byatt’s article came from Katharine Jones, a critic herself: “When a children’s book hit the headlines because of their popularity . . . the same questions always come up: are they really for children, are they

good for children, how do we evaluate such books” (287)? Jones goes on to make an important point and that is “the concept of children’s literature is not clear cut and the relationship between children and that literature is not so secure that we can label adult readers of such books ‘childish.’ Dinah Stevenson also points out that the line between adult and child is getting increasingly harder to define (87).

Yet would a more appropriate response to those that decry the lack of value in children’s and YA literature be, “. . . and do not children and young adults deserve good literature that they would want to read, and that you do not have to put a gun to their head to make them read?” Here lies a secondary problem that seems attached to the already existing bias: what is “good” when it comes to children’s novels, and how do we know?

The vast generic territory covered by books marketed for children and young adults has been enough to consign it to the views of general adult fiction, except where such works cross into formalized critical theories such as Cultural Studies, Deconstruction and Postculturalism, Marxism, Reader Response, Psychoanalysis, Postcolonialism, Semiotics, New Historicist, and others. From these theoretical perspectives a canon typically emerges. What binds children’s and YA literature, unlike other forms of literature, is not necessarily literary aesthetic, political ideology, or gender identity, though all of these topics show up in children’s literature in some form or another. What binds the genre as literature is its audience, and with the audience comes a bias that is a lesser audience. So because the audience is lesser, less care is given to the books provided for them, and then there is the idea of “stories for the masses” as a consumable product.

What is ironic about Byatt's opinion and the opinions of other "critics" like her is that "once upon a time" Shakespeare, Chaucer, Poe, Dickens, Stowe, Hardin, James, and many more authors whose writing we accept as "measuring sticks for good writing" today wrote their work first for the masses too. The bias continues further.

C.S. Lewis, an author well known for his *Narnia* series, states regarding the nature of writing stories:

In talking of books, which are 'mere stories' . . . the assumption is that excitement is the only pleasure they ever give or are intended to give. Excitement, in this sense may be defined as the alternate tension and appeasement of imagined anxiety. This is what I think is untrue. In some such books, and for some readers, another factor comes in Something which the educated receive from poetry can reach the masses through stories of adventure, and almost no other way...It must be understood that...the plot...is only really a net whereby to catch something else. The real theme may be, and usually is, something that has no sequence in it, something other than a process and much more like a state or quality. (Hunt 36)

Peter Hunt points out that Lewis is often identified as "pro-child." According to Hunt the "sub-text" of Lewis' quotation betrays a basic disrespect for his audience, the child, in that Lewis equates children with the masses, and that narrative is only a "net" which catches the "unworldly, and imprison them . . . that children [therefore] must necessarily have something not only different, but lesser" (52). Katharine Jones reveals the true fallacy of the bias against the concept of the "lesser audience" in Byatt's article:

There is confusion whether she is critical of the Harry Potter books not only because she believes them to be not high literature but also because they are children's books and so inherently "childish." While Byatt later seeks to retrieve some works of children's fiction [Audin, Tolkien,

and Cooper] from this apparently sub-literary category, she has already fatally undermined the logic of her argument. It is as though she is seeking to create some kind of division between a childish child and a child. (286)

Peter Hunt reminds us that, in working with children and books, “. . . we cannot assume the kinds of agreed upon values which exist in academia—for instance, that Leavis is (or not) a baseline value” (Hunt 8). A good example of how the current standards are perpetuated comes from the publishing industry itself. YA novels can often resemble a low-level adult book simply because they gravitate to a “closed text” approach. What must be remembered is that this is often intentional on the author’s part because she is told publishers and the YA and children’s book market, demand it as McCallum reminds us:

Briefly, the narrative modes employed in children’s novels tend to be restricted to either first person narration by a main character or third person narration with one character focaliser (Stephens, 1991). Texts tend to be monological rather than dialogical, with single-stranded and story-driven narratives, closed rather than open endings, and a narrative discourse lacking stylistic variation. (397)

For an author to write to such constraints and still make a novel meaningful to adult critics, adult agents, parents, teachers, and librarians is no small task. This goes back to the idea of how such works are critically assessed, as Jones states:

This also underscores another difficulty in children’s literature, an adult may understand how adults interact with texts, but no one really understands how children interact with texts. . . . As critics we need to change how we look at children’s literature” (287).

Do children twelve and younger even care to read books written for adults?

Understanding what children need or want can be difficult given the fact that we do not

even understand how YA and children's audiences are interacting with books written for them. So Jones' call for a new way to look at Children's and YA literature is not out of order. What is that lens supposed to look like?

Considering that aesthetics that are still being taught in current academic settings are still those of the literary formalist, and liberal humanist, which already have a "closed ideal" to what "good" is supposed to look like—this could be hard. The academy's view of the "ideal" is based on reading books the average person seldom reads anymore, and these books are typically kept on life support primarily because of academia which requires their students to read them.

Because the intended audience of children's literature, being non-adult, does not always bring enough with them to provide a balanced view of the world, the plot shape of a novel, vocabulary, and narrational control often have the feel of "being spoon fed" intentionally to the audience to help them grasp the larger idea of story giving the rhetorical effect of a story being simple. In a lot of cases the simple story is not very good. This approach tends to perpetuate basic prejudices toward YA and children's literature, based on whether or not an adult likes the story. Hunt best states this prejudice:

The situation [is] predicated there is an unbroken value scale running from adult classics down to rubbish for children, with acceptably second rate adult books and the best possible children's books sharing the same rung. (Hunt 35).

What is a "literature" to do? This is one area where a valid critical approach can help.

Critical approaches to children's literature have varied since the 1960s and up

through the mid-1980s, having often been seen two ways: child-centered, or book centered (Townsend 97). The book-centered approach sees children's books to be judged as part of literature in general, using much of the same standards as adult literature. Hunt is not in total favor of this as he writes: "it is irrelevant to consult children on the quality or value of their books" ("Criticism and Children's Literature" 120).

There are others like Margaret Meek (in her earlier work) and Elaine Moss who take a child-centered approach. Their chief concern is to

... focus on the [child] reader and to ask about the nature of his experience." They emphasize "that," although it is possible to judge books for children by ... 'adult standards' and regard them as part of literature, the young reader carries a different world in his head. (Jones 289)

Such a division in the criticism of children's literature corresponds to a generally perceived split in views of criticism in mainstream literary circles between text-centered approaches, as influenced by Formalism and Structuralism, and a reader-centered approach, influenced by F.R. Leavis.

In the following decade, development in children's literature criticism called into question the book-centered approach, often noted to be the dominant form of criticism—including Hunt (in his later work), John Stephens, and Maria Nikolajeva—favoring metafiction, postmodernist techniques in opposition to a classic realist aesthetic (Jones 289).

The criticism of children's literature, broadly corresponding to the change in the 1980s of postmodernism, sought to take a corrective view from what some critics saw as a repressive classic realist ideology. Other children's literature critics sought to declare children's literature as "impossible" (Rose 1) and the child as "fictional" (Lesnik-Oberstein 9).

Taking on a more skeptical poststructuralist approach reflected in more contemporary developments through broader critical theory a number of critics attempted to approach children's literature from the perspective of "child readers" by means of interpretive constructs such as "the implied child reader" (Chambers 251) and "the child narratee" (Wall 234), as a literature that is more for children. Similarly, John Stephens refers to "the child narratee" (Language and Ideology 20), and Hunt to "child culture" (Criticism 458). But in doing so, they draw on aspects of both structuralist and poststructuralist theory. According to Jones, such brief summaries are useful to frame the polarizing binary between "text-centered" and "reader-centered" approaches (290).

All of the debates, as a fully realizable and universal category over children's literature, can be unpacked using a group of critical binaries such as "reader-centered versus text-centered," "metafiction versus classic realist," "fictional children versus the child." These binaries, when examined, will show that each critical component polarizes current discussions, revealing current inadequacies in the varied attempts to confront the amorphic nature of children's and YA literature. Ultimately all of the binary groups prove to be misleading and unhelpful (Jones 290).

A better way to look at children's literature bypasses all the binary polarizations by taking on a rhetorical approach. Jones suggests taking into account the reader and the text, as both acting upon and constraining each other, within the broader context of acting upon and being constrained by social practices (291) and peers. Of course the idea of critics aligning themselves with only specific positions may drive others to take a more extreme approach against the critics they disagree with. This, as Charles Taylor observed, has "...a vested interest in muddying the waters, and obscuring all the

interesting insights which must necessarily lie in the space between these two [reader-centered versus text-centered] absurd theses” (Jones 290). The end product does not have to be an “either\or” as many of the theories offered have useful and brilliant observations.

Book-centered criticism of children’s literature is concerned with literary merit as seen within the context of inherent textual quality (Jones 292). The problem with a totally “text” approach is that there is more going on in the readers’ thought processes than what the text may be saying. It is not unlike asking a jury to disregard their life experiences in court. It could be done, but it takes a great deal of discipline to do. Townsend, who agrees with a straight text approach, writes that in criticism “there is no criterion except literary merit” (“Didacticism” 62); without this “there can be only a jumble of criteria, a haphazard mixture of personal responses” (“Standards of Criticism” 99). In discerning these literary values, book-centered critics inevitably emphasize the role of the reader—in this case, the adult reader/critic. As Cameron observes, “I am speaking of artistry from the point of view of the critical adult” (“The Owl Service” 425). This is problematic at best because the viewpoint leaves out the child.

Book-centered critics run into more difficulties in their apparent “flip-flop,” first affirming the reader, then denying the reader and not just the reader in general, but the child reader (Jones 291). When Townsend closes his major essay outlining a book-centered theory for children’s literature criticism with a concession he states, “I did not . . . mean to imply that . . . whether [the book] actually speaks to the child does not matter . . . if a children’s book is not popular with children here and now, its lack of appeal may tell us something” (“Standards of Criticism” 104). Unfortunately his remark

comes across only as anecdotal. Ultimately these critics hold as Hunt states, “[w]hatever critical theory we produce for children’s literature, it will have little or nothing to do with children” (“Criticism and Children’s Literature” 119).

Worse yet, the solely “book centered” position is made precarious by its lack of focus on children’s literature being involved in a larger continuum of literature, and dismissing the child reader and child responses. The problem with this approach is not that they are making children’s literature part of all literature, but by using their approach the idea of “children” in “children’s literature” as literature no longer has any meaning.

A good example of this is Neil Philip’s comments on Alan Garner’s work. Philip observes that Garner has been published for children’s markets, but comments on Garner the writer, not Garner the children’s writer (Jones 291). This implication does not imply that Garner’s work is not for children, but chooses to study his work as a broader part of general literature. This continues to further underline the problem with the term “children’s literature” being emptied of the “children” part.

Reader-response criticism and child-centered criticism deal with the same faulty binary as the others. These critics have sought to place a chasm between a book’s literary status, based on public appeal, rather than focusing on the textual quality. The reasoning behind this was that by merging popularity and textual quality, the literary merit is undermined, as a “literary book” being contrary to the need of the “non-literary” child (Moss 138). By separating these qualities the impression is given that children, or young adults, as readers can have no say or influence on what is literary as well as reinforcing this concept that criticism is based on a perceived textual aesthetic. The

terms “reader-centered” and “text-centered” become misleading because either boasts a sole reliance on its own primacy of reader, or text, and critics’ actual practices never reflect this view (Jones 292).

In the “metafiction versus classic realist binary,” book centered criticism does appear to support the argument of critics such as Rose, Hunt (later work), Stephens, and Nikolajeva favoring a particular aesthetic (Jones 293). Consequently there is a series of certain conventions by fulfilling a set of narrative patterns. These would be the same thing used by the Carnegie medal for children’s literature: “. . . characters should be convincing, credible... Dialogue should be natural . . . The plot should be constructive in that it ties up loose ends in a secure and satisfying manner” (Jones 293).

The criteria, which feature narrative interruptions, non-chronological ordering of events, complex treatment of space-time relations, unresolved endings, and multiple voices, are an important development in that they break down stereotypes concerning how, and what, children are capable of reading, and they challenges preconceptions; but there are problems with this aesthetic as classical realist and metafiction.

The difficulties arise with the metafiction versus classic realist when upholding the merit of metafiction texts; critics emphasize the unstable nature of metafiction texts and the consequent variety in how a reader responds. The so-called classic realist text tends to be cast by such critics as a stable, unchanging entity and always repressive of the reader. Metafiction texts have a tendency to either become a political weapon with progressive ethics and politics, while classic realist texts become repressive and manipulative. As Hunt writes, “until we have an attitude of mind (and criticism) which not only wishes to expand and liberate the child reader but also attempts to understand

that this cannot be done by the mixture-as before, we will not really have children's fiction at all" (Jones 294)

Such a stance as purported by Hunt denies the notion of reader agency and resistance in the play of language that occurs for readers in all texts. There is also a problem with automatically lumping together of "so-called" classic realist texts with "so-called" metafiction texts.

Metafiction texts have the tendency to promote progressive ethics and politics. Hunt warns that "[t]o break the ideological deadlock which either tries to use the book as a social weapon . . . or strives to keep the book the same, we must experiment" (Criticism and Children's Literature 123). Jones, quoting Mary Galbraith, states:

The key point here is that what is perceived as a liberating investment in the child is still an investment and has implications that need to be made clear. This area opens up a series of important ethical-political issues touching on the rights of children, a topic of increasing scholarly interest across a diverse range of fields, as in Mary Galbraith's "emancipatory childhood studies approach. (294)

Similar problems exist with the binary opposition of "fictional children" versus "the child" as a fully realizable and universal category. Karin Lenik-Oberstein believes that the child as a "fictional concept" (Children's Literature 9) does not exist as a singular category. The concept has been discredited because it makes no genuine distinctions in the differences of gender, class, ethnicity, and so on in children—as there really is not the homogenous child (Children's Literature 7). The problem that many critics have with this concept is that they appear to be setting up something of a "straw man." This

becomes a way that a “ ‘children’ can only be viewed as constructed smacks of the kind of either-or-ism in claims that ‘history is fiction,’ and that ‘postconstructionalism heralds the end of truth claims and with that ethics and politics fall’ ”(Jones 294-5).

Unlike the “fictional child,” the universal child identity does not mean that children are solely construction. As Jones states, “it is impossible to talk about aspects of children’s lives and experiences [as any type of truth]” (295). In essence this binary deals with talking about children and their lives and experiences while questioning the very concept of “children.” A good example of this is found in feminist theory where women speak about themselves and their experience, and the experience of other women. The same does not generally apply to children and their experiences.

Broader approaches to theory tell us that we can be interested in the construction of the subject without needing to say that individual things cannot be spoken. The “fictional child versus universal child” binary focuses on whether or not the individual subject is either an effect of structure, linguistic text, institutional, cultural, and historical—or its center and point of origin.

The valid questions raised by contemporary poststructuralist theory about this area have been taken by some children’s literature critics to cast doubt on whether there can be any adult access to the subject position of children. While some critics, such as Rose, have arguably embraced a more radical position, other critics might be tempted to seek to avoid these issues altogether. But it needs to be said that a careful reading of poststructuralist theory indicates that it is not going as far as some critics have made it out to go. As Christine Wilkie-Stibbs observes:

. . . . feminist literary criticism, like children’s literature criticism, is in pursuit of a language with

which to describe the condition of subjectivity. This desired language is not entirely the decentered subject of post-structuralism, nor the dissolved subject of postmodernism, but is rather one which draws upon both, while also, paradoxically, sustaining and confronting centeredness and agency. (125)

The basic problem of feminist theory, like children's literature, is that the reliance of subjectivity is not necessarily about "woman" but women as a universal category where all interests are identical regardless of class, geography, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age. Children are no more a homogeneous group than women are. Thus the binary of the "fictional child" versus the "universal child" is unsustainable because not all children are the same and treating them as such over simplifies the nature of the "child."

There are options for a postcolonial approach the binary as well, but this runs into the same problem as feminist and fictional child versus universal child. Not all children are oppressed, some may be, but children rarely constitute the role as "other" in most cultures.

Finally, the last binary is the "impossible" children's literature (Rose) verses a "genuine" child's literature (Wall, Chambers, Stephens, and Hunt). Jones agrees with Rose in that "children's literature" is an impossible term because there is no way to adequately define what "children" means (298). Rose's approach is to get rid of children's literature as a genre completely. In what could be seen as an over-correction to Rose, Wall offers in place of the "universal child" the "genuine" children's literature (Wall 234).

Wall's implication is that texts are created and directed for the implied child reader, the child narrator, or child culture. From developments in phenomenology and reader-response theory, structuralism, and structural narratology critics have approached children's literature from the perspective of child readers. Wall moves beyond the closed system of "structuralist through narratology" looking at how the signals directed to the implied child reader might be related to child readers outside of the book.

Wall observes that by "using insights into varieties of narrative address which recent developments in narratology have made possible," she will "propose a method of deciding whether or not a book is a children's book." She adds, "[i]f a story is written to children, then it is for children" (2). Wall suggests that her concept of the child narratee can lead out to decisive answers about what represents "a true literature for children" (157) and about actual child readers' responses to the text.

There is also a broader conceptual problem with the structuralist approach, something that poststructuralist brings out. Structuralist critics see the workings of language to be a closed system, making possible a systematic scientific account of this area and so preserving a certain stability of meaning. Central to structuralist theory is that meaning depends on socially produced systems—codes, conventions, structures—that transcend the control of individuals. However, in highlighting the absence of this extra-systemic presence to validate meaning—meaning is instead a product of convention in a language system—the consequences of structuralist theory effectively erode the authority of the structuralist critics' own claims to knowledge, the apparently

meaningful structures they themselves put forward (Jones 300).

Confronting the amorphous nature of children's literature is a bit like Hercules fighting the hydra: cut one head off, and two others grow back.

Consider the fact that children's books are written by adults, published by adults, reviewed by adults, and purchased by adults suggesting a much stronger relationship between adults and the literature.

Jones suggests a change in the term of "children's literature" to "child literature" as a way to deal with the ambiguity that is so prevalent (Jones 304). This begins to open up the potential for a different way to view the literature, bypassing the polarizing binaries that are hindering the recognition of the literature as true literature. Perhaps it is time to take on a true rhetorical approach, as acknowledging that a textual construction is designed to have an intentional subjective effect particular upon the reader. The question then is "did the book do what it was intended to do?" Did the author provide enough for the reader to understand the work's "center of consciousness?"

Jones seeks to change the name of children's literature to "child literature" as a way of focusing attention from the beginning on child readers and constructions of the varied concepts of "the child" to encourage author, reader and critic to reconsider notions of addressing children so that "...we understand that [children's] this literature belongs to adults, with the child reader usually being the target of the book,..." (305).

Jones' suggestion brings to attention what a rhetorical approach already takes into account: a text provides an argument\proposition for an intended audience that

produces a process in which both reader subjectivity and text constrain each other to produce a desired effect.

CHAPTER 3

Mimetic Approaches to Children's and YA Fiction: Using a Rhetorical Theory to Enable Reader Subjectivity

In dealing with a rhetorical approach to children's literature, there are two very broadly defined concepts to such an approach: the mimetic, which, according to Plato, is art as re-presentation of nature (Plato), and the semiotic, which is associated more with the culture studies of literary theories that began in the 1960's (Chandler) such as feminist, marxist, postcolonial, and others. Often both approaches are presented as an either/or proposition which has not helped the cause of children's and young adult literature: "A field that hedges about its own boundaries or essential characteristics can provide few clear reasons for including one work of fiction rather than another" (Alberghene 135). As many as have struggled for a defining literary approach, a rhetorical answer may hold more promise over literary approaches.

The most recognized rhetorical approaches to literature have their basis in Narratology, which comes by tradition from text-centered critical theories. Any good rhetor understands that the audience is always key when devising discourse. As novels are the topic, in this case all good rhetors understand that the text will be always constrained against the subjectivity of the reader. Good young adult (YA) and children's novels always take this into account, and attempt to imitate the rhetoric of the non-adult.

Narratology has its roots in formalism and structuralism which advocate a strictly “text centered” focus. As both formalist and structuralist approaches have fallen out of fashion in favor of views that are culturally\politically centered, such approaches to literature often are used only when studying early twentieth century American realism authors like Crane, James, Cather, Chopin, and others. Yet in approaching the amorphic nature of children’s and young adult (YA) literature, aspects of Narratology can be useful in a homogenous approach to where the “semiotic” approaches have not.

Gerald Prince offers Narrative Theory, or Narrativity, for consideration, which Prince defines as a “set of properties characterizing NARRATIVE and distinguishing it from nonnarrative; the formal and contextual features making a narrative more or less narrative [as opposed to discourse] as it were” (Nikolajeva 5). Arguing that narrative theory can offer useful tools, Nikolajeva suggests that such tools may help identify “what characterizes a children’s book as a narrative, distinct from all other types of narrative” (5). Of course the most glaring answer to that is the “audience it was intended for”, but before that question is explored, a better question might be what makes a book readable (not necessarily good or bad)?

Booth offers that a way to approach a book is to understand that there is an implied intent, a center of consciousness, and that a good author gives the reader everything the reader needs to understand that intent while camouflaging himself within the layers of the narration (23-24). In this Booth speaks of James stating:

... [James believed] the house of fiction has ‘not one window, but a million,’ that there are ‘five million’ ways to tell a story, each as justified if it provides a ‘center’ for the work...the only absolute requirement is that it be interesting. . . . He will praise...Treasure Island because it succeeds wonderfully in what it attempts. (24)

A book, like any composition, has an intention, a thesis. In novels the thesis is often a result of plot and character entwining through events in order to explore ideas, creating a representation of subtle discourse through narrative. The composition does not use narrative, but straight discourse; yet the total effect of narrative in a novel can be a discourse in and of itself. In the end, results of narrative and discourse are not always all that different. In a composition the reader may find fault that the writer did not support the thesis well, hence the composition is bad; or the thesis may have been supported well but the reader may disagree with the thesis. Does a conflict with a reader's subjectivity make the composition bad? The good listener, based on an appreciation for the art of discourse, would say, "no," whereas the poor listener, based solely on emotion and unwilling to acknowledge the merits of the discourse, may say "yes." It is important to realize that an answer may be yes in spite of a listener's subjectivity, but it is still possible appreciate the merit of the rhetoric.

Of course a rhetorical approach would represent the novel as an exercise in propaganda, but as Peter Hunt states, ". . . children's literature cannot escape, even if some of practitioners would wish it to, from ideology, past or present. Because the text is intended for supposedly 'innocent' readers, it can scarcely be expected to be innocent of itself. Therefore, fundamental questions have to be faced. What exactly is being controlled in the text" (14)? The approach in creation and presentation of novels is not all that different from the essay in a strictly rhetorical sense.

If the unfolding events in a novel do not support the plot\thesis, and cause the unfolding of the plot\thesis to be confusing, contradictory, and difficult to follow, the book is not all that well written. Approaches like satire may play against a thesis on

purpose, but the reason for the contradiction, in good satire, is always clear to the reader. Thus, no matter what approach to literary craft is utilized, the net effect in a novel is that a center of consciousness is created so a reader can discern if a novel accomplishes what it set out to do. For reader enjoyment, the novel must win the reader's subjectivity making the reader desirous to discern a novel's center of consciousness.

Narratology does not require the standard Aristotelian approach that a story must have a beginning, middle, and end. Narratology only requires that the author leave signposts for reader to grasp the work's "center of consciousness." That does not mean that a plot always follows the standard folk tale format in the unfolding of events. The postmodern novel intentionally plays against a great deal of culturally accepted norms.

The "how" of the creation of consciousness, and the means through which it is actually shared, focuses a great deal with how presentation transpires. In the case of the postmodern, this is done in ways that may play against reality, moral sensibility, worldview, tradition, and many other concepts associated with realism—much like the real world whether the books be for adults like *Jazz* and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, or intended for YA and child audiences like *Feed* by M.T. Anderson and *The Series of Unfortunate Events* by Daniel Handler (Lemony Snickett). Employing non-linear time frames and polyphonic voices, or embedded plots and subplots utilizing intended narrators, along with metafiction that are in direct conflict with modernistic viewpoints (Handler and Anderson), a center of consciousness is always created through the use of rhetorical devices.

In a rhetorical based approach, whether or not the “center of consciousness” agrees with a reader’s subjectivity is irrelevant, as long as the reader can understand the novel and its intention. This often calls into question who is at fault when the reader cannot understand the “center of consciousness,” the reader, or the writer? Thus, here the tension created by the subjectivity of the reader against the rhetoric of the writer shows. Is the book just poorly written, or is the reader a poor reader? What makes children’s and YA literature unique is that the text is written for the developing reader. This is often why past children’s novels are criticized as being simple, because they have tended to be more “self-contained” in quality not always giving its reader room to play the text against their own subjectivities (albeit potentially limited subjectivities). The better novels are less straightforward, but still capable of capturing the readers. Their authors are better at circumventing direct “authorial intervention,” thus cutting to the heart of conflict between literature and popular novels, or what A.S. Byatt calls consumable stories (Byatt).

Much has been written concerning the conflict of art (literature) versus popular novels, a binary which lies at the center of in the acknowledgement of children’s and young adult literature as art:

... we may be amused by the cultic solemnities of those who suspect rhetorical concerns, there are good reasons for their suspicion. Do we not see, in every bit of hack work on the bestseller lists, evidence of what happens to art when the audience’s demands are allowed to control what the artist does? ‘I write. Let the reader learn to read’ ... a motto, adopted openly by Mark Harris. (Booth 90)

Judging by Harris’ remark, he probably never wrote for middle school students, but here lies the nexus of the argument in how the classifying children’s and YA novels has

transpired in the current theoretical arguments. Children's literature's greatest irony is that the books written for a primary non-adult audience is written, judged, bought, sold, published, classified, or not classified as art by the secondary audience—adults. This puts the writers of children's and YA literature in a difficult position. If an adult judges a book as poor, when children do not, is the problem with the adult reader and not the book?

Most writers of stories carry the implicit desire to use devices of expression that make his\her work as accessible to as many people as possible. The average reader that reads without any type of critical sensibility ordinarily takes for granted the fact that an author worked to make the novel available to the reader. To the reader, the author is someone that wants to be read, and does what it takes to make his\her work readable. No matter how avant-garde writers are, even they must acknowledge that at some level they long to be read (Booth 105). It could be said that adults may not be the best judges of children's taste—as the “child people” maintain.

Ultimately, whether it is the reader's fault that a text's center of consciousness is not understood, or the result of poor writing, if a book contradicts a reader's subjectivities without winning over the reader's worldview the book is almost always dismissed out hand, and viewed negatively. Whether you are a child, an adult, or a critic this will always be true..

Here is an example. A.S. Byatt wrote a review in the *New York Times* of Harry Potter and the *Order of the Phoenix*, and commented in more general terms on the series itself:

Most fairy storywriters hate and fear machines [generalization]. Ms. Rowling's wizards shun them and use magic instead, but their world is a caricature of the real world and

has trains, hospitals, newspapers and competitive sport. Much of the real evil in the later books is caused by newspaper gossip columnists who make Harry into a dubious celebrity, which is the modern word for the chosen hero. Most of the rest of the evil [apart from Voldemort] is caused by bureaucratic interference in educational affairs. Ms. Rowling's magic world has no place for the numinous. It is written for people whose imaginative lives are confined to TV cartoons, and the exaggerated (more exciting, not threatening) mirror-worlds of soaps, reality TV and celebrity gossip. Its values, and everything in it, are, as Gatsby said of his own world when the light had gone out of his dream, "only personal." Nobody is trying to save or destroy anything beyond Harry Potter and his friends and family. (Byatt)

Byatt is bringing in an idea of how she sees an ideal world of magic based on the portrayal of magic in other works. These are standards she has imposed upon "center of consciousness" created by Rowling: wizards do not use trains, hospitals, newspapers, and competitive sports. The villain is a tabloid reporter and not some near omnipotent evil wizard. Actually the villain is a near omnipotent wizard but Byatt does not mention Voldemort, and one may remember that Princess Diana was killed in a car crash fleeing a tabloid reporter.

Byatt's main objection is that Rowling's mythology did not resemble Tolkien's, Le Guin's, Cooper's or Auden's (Byatt), and challenges Rowling's concept of the "magical world." Byatt goes on to classify adults that read (and enjoy) the *Potter* series as "childish." Not only does Byatt judge Rowling's work, but the adult readers of the *Harry Potter* series too.

A.S. Byatt, a well-respected critic and author of *Possession*, a critically acclaimed novel, judged the book on a dialogical basis stating:

But in the case of the great children's writers of the recent past [Cooper, and Le Guin] there was a compensating seriousness. There was -- and is -- a real sense of mystery, powerful forces, dangerous creatures in dark forests Reading writers like these, we feel we are being put back in touch with earlier parts of our culture, when supernatural and inhuman creatures -- from whom we thought we learned our sense of good and evil -- inhabited a world we did not feel we controlled. If we regress, we regress to a lost sense of significance we mourn for. Ursula K. Le Guin's wizards inhabit an anthropologically coherent world where magic really does act as a force. Ms. Rowling's magic world has nothing in common with these lost worlds. It is small, and on the school grounds, and dangerous only because she [Rowling] says it is. (Byatt)

This article shows a great about Byatt's subjectivity, as she refers back to texts (albeit very good texts), which dialogically communicate forward for her in the present. This in turn affects her subjectivity, which comes from older novels and various perceptions that made her feel "back in touch" with early culture. Byatt complains that Rowling's world did not for her what Cooper's and Le Guin's world did because Hogwarts wasn't supernatural (numinous) enough. It might be said that Rowling was trying a different approach to magic. Perhaps this approach reaches to a far more cynical view of magic better suited for the twenty-first century.

Considering how "magical" our world already seems with computers, the Internet, microchips, and other technologies, looking for wonder in our already magical world is a challenge. We are, as a world, more jaded than from all that human invention can do.

Byatt's approach was not based upon the "center of consciousness" of the book, but a "center of consciousness" created by other books. Cooper and Le Guin have created very fine works, but they are also considerably shorter than the *Potter series*. In Byatt's use of the dialectical, she consulted other books to inform her likes and dislikes

instead of looking at a work on the basis on whether or not the author was clear about her intentions and purposes for the book. This takes us back to Booth's complaint about critics:

...the critic faces. . . Having derived a definition of a certain kind of work, or of 'the novel' as a certain kind of literature, or of "literature" as a certain kind of art, how can he use that definition as a standard for passing judgment on a given novel? Only by giving good reasons for believing that this novel fits the definition or ought to fit it, whether it does or not. Either my definitions are descriptive or they are normative. If they merely describe, then they give me no basis for condemning a work for not failing under the description. If they are openly normative, then of course I have the problem of giving reasons for my standards in the first place, and for thinking that they should apply to all these things called novels. (31).

If a dialectical approach is desired by Byatt, so be it, but not everyone in the world of children has read Cooper, or Le Guin. For this reason, in response to Byatt, Katharine Jones calls for a reassessment of usage for the term "children's literature" (288).

What to Look for in Narratological Approaches for Children's Literature

Much discussion has gone into the validity and definition of children's and young adult literature. Most variations on rhetorical approaches often correctly begin, like most critics believe, with the interrogation of the text first.

Wayne Booth states that,

This generic search for the constants in all good literature or all good fiction can be useful for some purposes . . . But a criticism that begins with such general definitions is peculiarly tempted to move into value judgments without sufficient care about whether those judgments are based on anything more than the initial arbitrary exclusiveness of

general definition...Having derived a definition of a certain kind of novel, or of "the novel" as a certain kind of literature, or of "literature" as a certain kind of art, how can he use that definition as a standard in passing judgment on a given novel? Only by giving good reasons . . . believing this novel fits the definition or ought to fit it...Either my definitions are descriptive or they are normative. (30-31)

Booth's criticism of the critics approach goes to the heart of contention often echoed by the general reader. If those definitions that make a book good or bad are merely described generic qualities [the "what"] of a specific type of novel, there is no basis for condemning a work for failing to fall under such prescribed qualities. If the designated qualities are normative, then there must be a reason given for those standards in the first place, and for applying such standards to all novels. It is easy to note how many critics avoid the problems of such approaches by moving happily from vast generalization to particular work, as if everyone can tell that a novel is trying to come under the shelter of a comforting generalization (Booth 31). Before dealing with the "how" of children's and YA books, perhaps it is better to look at a more fundamental question.

Falling back to the very heart of the discussion, what makes one book good, and another bad? This question is both easy and hard. Booth offers a fundamental answer that ties the rhetorical nature of a text to what Nikolajeva advocates:

. . . . contemporary children's literature is transgressing its own boundaries, coming closer to mainstream literature, and exhibiting the most prominent features of postmodernism, such as genre eclecticism disintegration of traditional narrative structures, polyphony, intersubjectivity, and metafiction. . . . None of these features is normally associated with children's literature (Exit Children's Literature?).

If the adult reader\critic is bringing already preconceived bias against the “child\young adult” as a “lesser” audience (Hunt 7), then there is not opportunity for the author’s rhetoric to address the adult reader’s deeper subjectivity, or at the very least the adult reader has now become the “deviant” or “professional” reader searching for flaws and reasons not to like the work. How can you fault a writer, whose primary audience was a child or young adult, for not writing to an adult? This underscores something most practitioners are not quite sure how to answer: “If your secondary audience is reading as an adult, is it fair to judge the book when the very definition of a child seldom agreed upon?”

This article is not able to come close to the scope of the question, but for the purposes here Peter Hunt states:

“Childhood is protected by law, and yet the period of responsibility lengthens, on average, with increasing technological process. . . . In short, childhood is not now . . . a stable concept. . . . The literature defined by it, therefore, cannot be expected to be a stable entity.” (60)

An easier question to ask is “What is an adult?” Then whatever you have left would define “the child.” So then it is to the non-adult that children’s and young adult literature is directed. So in reference back to Byatt’s judgment on Harry Potter, her adult subjectivities were showing when she called the adult readers that liked *Order of the Phoenix* childish. This is why rhetorical approaches to children’s books can be more useful.

For the practitioners of children’s and YA literature, rhetorical approaches can be used to advance the literature while also taking into account the ever changing “subjectivities” of the primary reader—the non-adult, with an eye kept on the

secondary audience. This is where useful understanding of rhetorical approaches benefit of writer, reader, and teacher while advancing the cause of literary quality.

Simplicity

One of the first criticisms of children's and YA literature is that the novels are simple. Take any poorly written YA fiction and usually you will find that the "simple" story must:

. . . . be concrete and familiar subject matter; clear distinction between genres and text-types (adventure story, family story, school story); one single, clearly delineated plot without digressions or secondary plots; chronological order of events; a limited number of characters who are easy to remember; "flat" characters--that is, characters composed basically of one typical feature to whom can be readily ascribed either the quality "good" or "evil"; closed characters who are easy to understand from their actions and speech; settings familiar to children such as the nursery, home, school, playground, summer camp, etc. (Exit Children's Literature)

Of course a story may be simple, but good books advance simplicity of discourse.

Remember that Booth describes the difference between discourse and narrative as the difference between non-fiction and fictional narratives. Of course this boundary is being pushed a great deal, but for this context it is sufficient to make the simple distinction.

The "real author" always brings in subjectivity with her as writer. If the writer refrains from direct authorial intervention, but skillfully weaves subjectivity as narrative through the implied narrator, the net result according to Nikolajeva is:

The criteria for simplicity of discourse would be a distinct [implied] narrative voice; a fixed point of view--preferably an authoritarian, didactic, extradiegetic narrator who can supply the young reader with comments, explanations, and exhortations without leaving anything unuttered or ambiguous; a narrator possessing larger knowledge and experience than either the characters or the readers. Complex temporal and spatial relations are excluded. Naturally, the verisimilitude of the story, the reliability of the narrator, or the sufficiency of language as the artistic expressive means cannot be questioned. (Exit Children's Literature 222)

To push simplicity even farther is to use certain subjects, characters, and settings that are believed suitable for children such as toys (*A Mouse And His Child*), animals (*Charlotte's Web*), and other such universally shared things of childhood, and then put them in the metaphorical subtext of weak, oppressed, disenfranchised, disempowered, ignorant, etc. so that the death of a pet\relative, sexuality, and\or other controversial themes become a way to inform children and young adults of a wider world and its sensibilities without being overt. A newer and exciting trend is the use of dystopia in books such as Lowry's *The Giver*, or Collins' *The Hunger Games* as evidence of artful ways of dealing with important issues while entertaining.

Genre Eclecticism

One of the most recognizable traits of children and YA literature is the use of specific labels of distinction for the stories themselves. These would be:

....the school story, texts designed for single sexes, religious and social propaganda, fantasy, the folk and the fairy-tale, interpretations of myth and legend, the picture-book as opposed to the illustrated book, the mixed media text, and the re-telling of myths and legends which are often only found only in children's books. (Hunt 18)

Nikolajeva references the traditionally strict barriers established by librarians, teachers, and critics eager to reinforce children's literature as a specific literary system such as "adventure story, girl's story, animal tale, family story, fairy tale, fantasy, nonsense" (Exit Children's Literature 222).

The commercial publishing industry uses the following breakdown to separate the market of Juvenile Fiction into five distinctions: 1) Easy Reader, 2) Chapter Books, 3) Middle Grade Reader, 4) Transitional Fiction, 5) Young Adults (Giblin 83-88).

While book sellers often vary in their approaches to genre display and organization, Cat Yambel describes how many booksellers have reclassified the areas not just by genre, but also by Young Adult and Children's books,

... because they were concerned that teens were unclear about the Young Adult designation. In bookstores and on-line sites terms such as "Teen Literature" and "Teen Series" were developed to clarify and magnify the separation of the genres. (353).

Even the book authors themselves are beginning to blur the lines between genres as Nikolajeva states:

Is I Am the Cheese a thriller? *Is Red Shift* a historical novel? *Is A Wrinkle in Time* science fiction? *Is Sarah, Plain and Tall* a family story? *Is The Mouse and His Child* a toy story? *Is Watership Down* an animal story? *Is Tuck Everlasting* a fairy tale? The answer to all these questions is yes, but we would not be completely satisfied with these genre denominations, since each of these books contains much more than what can be described by a simple genre category. ("Exit Children's Literature?" 223)

Yet there is such wonderful genre bending applications like Handler's successful use of nineteenth century gothic narrative in his *Series of Unfortunate Events*. Handler alternates between second and third person narration, while embedding a complex

backstory using an implied author of the texts and further distancing himself from the reader.

Another example is M.T. Anderson's use of metafiction in the form of Internet commercials, music, and movie genres, which almost require to be heard on the audio book version in order to be really appreciated. All of these use newer rhetorical devices that can be easily adapted to children's perspectives, not as merely literary conventions, but as actual textual construction that always keep the reader's abilities in mind.

Multiple Plots

One such element is the idea of more complex narrative devices to create the integration of multiple plots, as well as the blending of temporality and spatiality. One such series is Philip Pullman's *Dark Materials* series. Pullman admits that he has written this as a rhetorical counter balance to C.S. Lewis subtext of Christianity in the *Narnia* series (Butler). Pullman does play with blending multiple universes, bending time lines, and spatiality. Nikolajeva mentions Alan Garner's *Red Shift*, and many of Robert Cormier's novels also move beyond singular narrative.

Tonal Shift

In the late 1950's a few novels dealt with topics considered taboo. In her article Dinah Stevenson states "an increasingly complex society became more difficult for people of every age, being a teenager became more complicated" (87). Young people

have been willing to trade off childhood early in an effort to gain prestige and sophistication. With the 1960's S.E. Hinton presented the "problem novel" with a book called *The Outsiders*, which opened up a floodgate of other novels. Topics like drug addiction, abuse, and tragedy have led to an elimination of restoring to the original order, or no reparation of damage.

In this area I believe that critic Barbara Feinberg has offered a caution about forcing children to read things that they are not emotionally ready for (Feinberg 39). In this regard it is possible to remind those that demand children's and YA literature mirror the true adult world that hopelessness may be tolerated by adults, but children may not have the capacity to deal with that topic well. Of this topic Cadden writes of Le Guin:

Le Guin, like Paterson and Hunter, is concerned with the real live child audience who reads her books. She describes her duty to her much younger audience by defining what she won't do in the particular genre of children's literature there's a certain type of hopelessness that I just can't dump on kids. On grown-ups sometimes; but as a person with kids, who likes kids, who are members what being a kid is like, I find there are things I can't inflict on them. There's a moral boundary, in this sense, that I'm aware of in writing a book for young adults. (133-134)

In the regard of content Nikolajeva may not always be doing the practitioners of children's literature a great favor by not offering a cautionary warning in forcing readers to deal with content they may not be emotionally ready for.

Degrees of Narrativity

Typically the modern children's fiction has followed the third person narrator. Many novels have moved away from that in favor of the first person narrator, while

supplanting direct speech with free indirect discourse (FID). The fictitious diary has also become popular.

The largest shift has come in the form of the unsophisticated narrator, who cannot quite evaluate the events and people around them, leaving the reader to observe what is truly going on. A good example of this is Mike Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* whose narrator is autistic and incapable of understanding much of the non-verbal communications of those around him. This move toward the polyphonic has the writer stepping back to and allowing the character to come to the foreground so the events are filtered through the character, and suppressing the writer's adult experiences and knowledge, thus imitating the innocence of a child. This is a far departure from early twentieth century children's novel where the children were polite and immediately likeable, but had no control over their circumstances. This made the stories overly sentimental and prone to melodrama (Cline and McBride 25).

Focalization

Another feature that moves toward the improvement of the YA and children's novels is intersubjectivity. This allows for the central character to be a less attractive person or even the villain of a story. Nikolajeva states, "The next step is questioning the idea that the subject of a literary text is fixed and homogeneous by emphasizing the dialogic nature of the subject" ("Exit Children's Literature?" 229). She goes on to bring to mind Tormod Haugen's *Cry from the Jungle* where there are at least twenty focalizing characters interacting in antiphony rather than as a chorus—polyfocalization ("Exit Children's Literature?" 229).

One such example is Rick Riordan's *The Lost Hero* in which Riordan uses three characters in which to tell the story through. Sometimes the characters would talk about the same event; other times the plot would progress through the taking of turns by each character narrating the chain of events.

Becoming more commonplace is the intersubjectivity of gender construction. This is where a character dresses up as an opposite gender and transgresses gender norms, thus questioning conventional gender boundaries. One example that comes to mind is Scott Westerfield's *Leviathan*, where his main character enters the armed forces as a male. Later in the second book the topics of "same gender" attraction is hinted at in the sequel *Behemoth*.

Metafiction

Metafiction has become one of the most "fun" rhetorical devices offered in children's and YA literature. The device represents the self-consciousness of literature about its own status, and according to Nikolajeva, has become one of the most conspicuous features of contemporary literature. This often reveals the awareness of literary texts as artifacts for the individual reader, and becomes a way of teaching the dialectical nature of literature. Metafictions can be, but not always, used to refer back to other texts. Riordan retells Greek and Roman myth with his Percy Jackson and Jason series, reinventing characters like Medea, Jason, Perseus, and a host of other mythological characters in the context of the modern world.

There are many ways to approach children's and adult literature, but one advantage of a rhetorical approach is that it allows a reader to learn the nature of writing through the examination of the rhetoric used by a writer. It also allows the

reader to look at textual reasons for subjective responses. Given that younger readers come to a novel with an inexperienced worldview, or limited subjectivities, exploring literature through the aspects of the textual devices allow the reader to at least identify the text more thoroughly in order to listen more clearly. To the narratologists, asking “How many children do you think Lady Macbeth had?” or, “What type of friend would Huck Fin be to you?” is irrelevant. The reason is because Narratologists do not always acknowledge the rhetorical nature of narrative. Such considerations, often used by “child people,” allow the inexperienced reader means to interrogate the text. This should be encouraged as long as the answers are a result of the “text” **and** “subjectivity.”

Subjectivity must not be neglected, but embraced, confronted, and challenged. In turn one’s subjectivity can be used to interrogate a text, as long as there is a good grasp on the actual text. It is unfair to make a text say something it was not saying.

Adults, the secondary audience, have said much about children’s and YA literature, but maybe someone might consider asking the primary audience. In fact Chris Crowe did:

Christy: In response to the justification question, I just want to point out that I think it is really funny that we have to justify reading YA lit instead of classics, yet no one thinks to justify reading things like John Grisham's works or Tom Clancy's. I think that there is a lot more good to be found in the YA lit. The adult novels that are so popular, much as I love them, do not seem to have anything to learn in them; they are just good thrilling stories, nothing but entertainment (this does not go for all, of course, but many). I think in all the classics there are things to be gleaned. There is something in them that can make your life better if you so choose, and I find that most of the YA lit I have read does the same thing far better than anything I have read by John Grisham. Yet we must continue to defend our reading of "children's" books. Go figure.
 (“Defending YA Literature” 114)

Of course we heard A.S. Byatt's opinion of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, but in light of Byatt's opinion, there is room for growth in approaches to children's and young adult literature. If one thing is true, children's literature has been around for a very long time. It has grown, and will keep growing for the better as long as it is given the regard it deserves. Yes, there are terrible children's books, and terrible YA books. There are also terrible adult books as well. If we do not encourage children's and young adult literature by taking it seriously, how will it get better?

In the end, theory aside, Orson Scott Card said:

I have learned a few things about what young readers choose to read.

1. No amount of bad or hard writing will keep children from the stories they care about. They are so naive and inexperienced they do not know bad writing from good; all the clichés sound new to them.
2. And it goes the other way. No amount of good or much-admired writing will make them like a story they do not care about.
3. You can't make a kid like a book. You can't even make them pretend to like a book—that does not usually happen till they get to college.
4. There is no such thing as children's literature. (15).

A great many people might take exception to Card's fourth point, but perhaps it might serve to illustrate Card's acknowledgement and acceptance of a younger audience as "equals." Why not treat the younger audience as equals? For Card, the younger audience loves his work, a work that he did not originally create for them. Even if there is no such thing as children's (and YA) literature, no one can deny that the audience does exist.

SUMMARY

The intent of this study was to present the idea that children's and young adult literature is worthy of having its own designation as literature apart from general fiction. As a literature, children's and young adult history has a long history in western civilization that goes back the third UR dynasty, and can be traced in an unbroken line to current times.

The nature of children's literature is such that it spans multiple genres, styles, and forms. Though the nature of such literature is amorphic, by using a rhetorical approach, it is possible to organize a more centralized approach to studying it.

Examining rhetorical constructs such as simplicity, genre eclecticism, multiple plots, tonal shift, and degrees of narrativity, focalization, and metafiction, can aid in identifying the quality of writing.

There is no one way to look at any piece of literature, and what this study proposes by no means is intended to imply that other critical approaches cannot be used in conjunction with a rhetorical basis.

Children's and young adult literature is important and viable. From such literature can emerges pedagogical value, developmental value, and hopefully, literary value.