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"THE AMBIVALENT STATUS OF TEXTS"
A Rejoinder

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I am grateful to Professor Steig for his important comments on my article and welcome his helpful corrections. I hope this article will open a fruitful discussion on children's literature, which I believe is all too rare an occurence in this field. However, I am afraid Prof. Steig has misunderstood some of my basic arguments as well as some of my theoretical concepts. As my formulations were probably misleading in some cases, I feel the following issues need to be clarified.

(1) *The position of children's literature in the literary polysystem.* My point of departure was the dynamic concept of the literary polysystem as developed by Even-Zohar (Even-Zohar, 1979). Because I was not trying to classify children's literature into closed (and static) categories, I did not need to "define" children's literature. Rather I was trying to describe children's literature in opposition to the adult system, and consequently to deal with the complex relations between the two systems. I believe that children's literature should not be discussed (as it usually is) in terms of a closed category, unrelated to the adult system, but rather as a part of a stratified system. Thus, when dealing with children's literature as a member of the literary polysystem, I was discussing the following issues (though only implicity, in some cases):

> (a) The function of the relations between the adult and the children's system in determining the character of children's literature.
> (b) The function of the literary establishments in determining the stratification of the children's system (For more detailed description of the mechanism of the literary life, see Shavit, 1980.)
> (c) The constraints of the children's system as determined by both (a) and (b).

Only if we accept the idea that children's literature is a member of the literary polysystem are we able to pose the above questions and to shift research from its traditional and normative orientation. Thus, for instance, instead of asking (as has traditionally been done) whether the "people in the culture" underestimate the child's capacity, this article analyzes the way in which their attitudes toward the child and children's literature determine the character of the texts of the children's system.

Those constraints were more thoroughly discussed when dealing with the test case and with the various adaptations of *Alice*. The article analyzed the function of the peripheral position of the children's system and of views of the child (which are mutually dependent) in determining certain norms of the children's system. The fact that various adaptations of *Alice* are simpler is seen in this article not as random but as a result of the governing norms of the children's system. Both Carroll and his adaptors (into English, French, Hebrew and even Japanese, as far as I know) had to obey the constraints of children's literature, which

resulted in the process of reduction and simplification which the text underwent. These constraints, it should be noted, crossed even national borders and cultural differences, because the constraints of the children's system seem to be stronger than any other constraints.

Thus, the fact that both Carroll and his adaptors produced similar texts while addressing the child (and the child only) should not be overlooked, or normatively dealt with, but should rather be analyzed as a manifestation of the constraints of the children's system.

(2) *The notion of ambivalence.* The article presented the notion of ambivalence which Lotman (1977) originated. My use of this notion is necessarily based on the dynamic concept of the literary polysystem, because only a dynamic concept makes it possible to deal with texts whose status is diffuse and which thus cannot be uniquely categorized. Such texts could not be dealt with as long as the notion of the homogeneity of the system prevailed, leaving no room for texts which enter into more than one opposition in the literary polysystem. Thus, the notion of ambivalence was presented in order to make it possible to deal with texts which were otherwise ignored or described normatively as "a turning point," etc., but had hardly been accounted for. (However, it should be noted that this group of texts should not be confused with the larger group of those texts which change their status historically, are displayed from one system to another, change their status in the same system, etc.)

While discussing the notion of the ambivalent text and the test case, the article dealt with the following issues:

> (a) The structure of the text and how this structure enables the text to address two different audiences.
> (b) What the writer tries to achieve by producing an ambivalent text (i.e., approach these texts from the historical point of view).
> (c) As a result of (a) and (b), how the text functions in both systems.

(3) *Test case: the case of Lewis Carroll.* The case of Lewis Carroll was chosen to illustrate the notion of ambivalence mainly because Carroll himself wrote an ambivalent version and a univalent version, addressing different audiences each time. It cannot be denied that while the later version, *The Nursery Alice*, was meant to be read by children only, the well known *Alice* version was meant to be read and *was* read by adults *and* children. In dealing with the Carroll case the article suggested hypotheses designed to answer the following questions:

> (a) Why Carroll changed the first version before publishing it, and
> (b) why he bothered to write a third version, officially addressed to children under the age of five.

The answer lies, I believe, in the fact that Carroll was deliberately producing an ambivalent text, thus trying to overcome the limitations imposed on the children's system. Carroll's solution (and that of other writers as well) was to produce a text which could appeal to adults (on the basis of the prevalent norms of the canonized adult system), and, being accepted by adults as a children's book, could be accepted by the children's system as well. Probably this was the main reason why Carroll changed the first version of the *Alice* text. This version was already too sophisticated to be accepted by the children's system, yet not sophisticated enough to be accepted by adults. This is why Professor Steig is right in arguing that most of the features which were characteristic of the ambivalent text are to be found already in the first version (though none of them happens to appear in the third). Yet, there was a crucial difference between the first and the second versions: various features which were only hinted at in the first version become *the* dominant features of the

second. Thus the difference between the two versions lay not in the presence or absence of certain elements, but in their organization and consequently their hierarchy in the text. In working on the second version, Carroll's direction was clear: he was expanding those elements which were described in the article as giving the text its ambivalent character, thus transforming the structure of the text and making those elements dominant. On the other hand, when Carroll worked on the *Nursery Alice* he eliminated all these elements from the text, thus making it univalent. (By the way, the question of hierarchy is crucial whatever aspect is dealt with. This, for instance, is the case of the regular price of children's books. It is true that some children's books were very expensive, but most of them were as cheap as chap-books. Thus the dominant phenomenon was that of cheap children's books. The same is true of the status of fairy tales: some writers favored fairy tales as early as the beginning of the 19th century, but only toward the middle of the 19th century did these views become prevalent in the children's system, though the demand for morals was still very strong.)

Finally, I did not describe *Alice* as a "turning point," but rather asked why the text acquired such a status. It seems that the text achieved such a high status thanks to its ambivalent status. This enabled it to confer legitimation on new models in the children's system which were struggling to establish themselves at the time. It was the ambivalent text which enabled Carroll to break the prevalent norms of the children's system, and to let the new norms become part of the center of the children's system.

This was the phenomenon and the historical process for which my article sought to account.

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