

# IMAGINÁRIO, IDENTIDADES E MARGENS

Estudos em torno da Literatura Infanto-Juvenil



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## **FREEDOM IN MARGINALITY:**

### **THE CONSTRAINTS OF WRITING FOR CHILDREN, RESULTING FROM ITS MARGINAL POSITION**

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#### **Introduction**

"We who work on children's books inhabit a sort of literary shtetl [A small Jewish town or village formerly found throughout Eastern Europe]. When I won a prize for *Wild Things*, my father spoke for a great many critics when he asked whether I would now be allowed to work on 'real' books" (Kanfer 1980, 41)<sup>16</sup>.

That is how the well-known children's writer and illustrator, Maurice Sendak described the ghetto-like feeling of writers for children.

Another well-known writer, the Swedish Ulf Stark, complained about the common view that writing for children was as an easy, unprofessional task that could be done by anyone. To illustrate the point he told the following anecdote: he was at a party exchanging small talk with someone. "So you write for children, ah? Perhaps I should also try it some day," said his accidental friend casually. "What do you do?" asked Stark in return, "I am a surgeon". "Oh, really, perhaps I should also try it some day," Stark replied.

The bitter and defiant tone of these two anecdotes clearly illustrate the peripheral position of children's literature in the culture as a whole, and in the literary system in particular. In this paper, I should like to explore the historical circumstances which led to the creation of the child culture as a peripheral culture system, and then to explore the implications of this peripheral status in its relations with the adult literary system and in the textual constraints of writing for children.

#### **Creating the child culture – borrowing from the periphery**

Children's literature as a distinct system began to develop in West European society, long after adult literature had become an established institution. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century few books were written specifically for children, and the industry of children's books began to flourish only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Before children's literature could begin to develop, there had to be a total reform in

<sup>16</sup>Kanfer, Stefan. 1980. "A Lovely, Profitable World of Kid Lit". *Time*, 29 December 1980, 41.

the notion of childhood, a reform that was described in the pioneering work of Philippe Ariès<sup>17</sup> and by others (Badenter<sup>18</sup>, Weber-Kellermann<sup>19</sup>, Plessen and von Zahn<sup>20</sup>, deMause<sup>21</sup>, Pollock<sup>22</sup>, to name just few).

The most important implication of this reform was the new understanding of the child as different from the adult and as having different and distinctive needs. Until the 17<sup>th</sup> century children were part of the adult world and shared with adults their clothing, lodging, leisure and work. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the unified world of adults and children became polarized and children were assumed to have special distinguishing characteristics. Once their needs were understood as different from those of adults, it became necessary to create a specific repertoire for the child's world. Several elements, previously shared by adults and children alike, were transferred to the child world and often became the child's monopoly, usually by a process of reduction and simplification. These elements were often appropriated by the child's world after they had lost their central status in the adult world, though they were sometimes preserved at the sacred center of the adult culture as well, or else they were transferred to the child's world from the periphery of the adult world – that of the culture of the lower classes.

This was so because the criterion for social stratification was based on class, not age. The main division of a class society was between the dependent classes lower classes and the independent upper classes. Regardless of their age, people belonged to the social class in which they were born.

When the new notion of children as a distinct class was first introduced into Western society, it could be understood only in terms of the prevailing social stratification – today's biological division did not yet prevail. Since the new understanding of children assumed their status as dependent, children, even the children of the aristocracy, could be regarded only as part of the lower classes.

This linkage between class distinction and the notion of the child was manifested in the linguistic choices: the first words which designated the new phenomenon of the “child” were borrowed from the repertoire of words denoting the lower classes. For instance, at the end of the 17th century the word “garçon”, or “lad”, designated

not a young person but one of lower social standing: a servant or an apprentice. When specific words were needed to designate the new social phenomenon, they were taken from the vocabulary which designated the dependent classes.

They continued to serve both purposes for centuries almost until today, to describe an age difference and social standing. For example the word “garçon” could refer to a child of a certain age as well as to waiter, an attendant, steward or other service person. Likewise, “ein Mädchen” may designate a young girl as well as a servant or the cleaning lady. Remnants of this socio-linguistic distinction are found today in the metaphorical description of inappropriate adult behavior as “childish”, or in the loaded use of the word “boy”, whose straight forward meaning is a young child, but which during the time of slavery was used to designate a black slave. This word is even today a source for racial conflicts, especially in North America, and is a trigger for many violent scenes (as can be seen in many of the TV series and films).

The gradual emergence of the modern notion of the child demanded the creation of a special repertoire for the child's sphere and first of all the child's clothing and toys. In order to create the child's outfit several items were transferred from the adult sphere to the child's. For example, the boys' outfit (boys were the first to be specially outfitted while girls continued to be dressed like women and were recognized as a distinct entity much later) was taken from that of the lower classes: outfit – a military or sailors' uniform. The same is true of jeans, which started out as a garment of dockworkers and were later adopted by the young people and became an icon of youth.

As the new boundary between adults and children became more marked, items which had been common to both groups gradually became confined to the children's sphere – for example, items which were used for ritual purposes.

The history of the doll is a case in point. Originally the doll was employed in various religious rituals (doll-idol). Later it became a child's toy, and simultaneously a collector's items for the upper classes. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the doll was still used for decorative purposes by the lower classes and at the same time was an indispensable item of the nursery, gradually becoming identified with little girls' toys. Today dolls are found at two poles of the cultural system: at the heart of the canon – in museum's collections, and at the heart of the periphery – in little girls' toy box. This process in which elements common to adults and children were pushed to the two edges of the culture – to the center and to the periphery, after having degenerated, so to speak – can be seen in other cases as well, for example, in the case of the cloak or of the horse.

The long coat of the Middle Ages was worn by men and women alike. Later on it was transferred from an everyday garment to a

<sup>17</sup>Ariès, Philippe. 1962. *Centuries of Childhood* London: Jonathan Cape.

<sup>18</sup>Badenter, Elisabeth, 1980. *L'amour en plus: histoire de l'amour maternel, XVIIe-XXe siècle*. Paris: Flammarion.

<sup>19</sup>Weber-Kellermann, Ingeborg. 1979. *Die Kindheit: Eine Kulturgeschichte*. Frankfurt and Munich: Insel Verlag.

<sup>20</sup>Plessen, Marie Louise, and Peter von Zahn. 1979. *Zwei Jahrtausende Kindheit*. Cologne: VGS.

<sup>21</sup>deMause, Lloyd, ed. 1975. *The History of Childhood*. New York: Harper and Row, Harper Torchbooks.

<sup>22</sup>Pollock, Linda, A. 1983. *Forgotten Children: Parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900*. Cambridge University Press.

child's outfit or that of the most canonic social strata – at the court of justice, or in academic rituals. The horse, which used to be the general means of transportation, is to be found today either in the canon – as an expensive sport of the upper classes, or in the periphery – as the rocking horse in the nursery.

To sum up: because the notion of the child first emerged in a class society and because it was at first linked to the notion of dependence, the new stratum of children was first identified not as a biological division, as it is today, but as a class distinction ascribing children to the lower classes. This association made it natural to borrow elements of the lower classes for the construction of the repertoire of the child culture. The linkage between the periphery and child's culture persisted even when the notion of the child became understood not in terms of class division but in biological and psychological terms.

One of the results of the new understanding that the child's needs differ from those of the adult was the creation of children's literature. It was based on constructing the capacities of the child reader as more limited than those of the adult. Writing in the framework of children's literature consequently assumed a different realization of the text by the child as an implied reader<sup>23</sup>.

### The emergence of children's literature and its connection with the educational system

The demand for books specifically for children was primarily the result of the radical changes in the educational system, which was transformed during the 17<sup>th</sup> century from an apprenticeship system to a school-based one. The earlier apprenticeship system did not demand the use of books as learning tools, but the school system treated them as indispensable means for achieving its educational goals. The goals were clear: to teach children (first of the upper classes and the bourgeoisie and later of the poor as well) how to read, in order to enable them to read the Scriptures by themselves. Education, tightly controlled by the church, legitimized reading for serious educational purposes. Reading became thus acceptable only as the gateway to higher religious enlightenment, not for entertainment or pleasure.

I maintain that the view of children's literature as a literature that would serve the goals of the educational system made great impact on determining the peripheral position of children's literature. The evaluation of children's literature was from the beginning linked to educational values, quite unlike adult literature, which is esteemed according to what the "people in the culture" regard as "literary

<sup>23</sup>Vodicka, Felix, 1964. "The History of the Echo of Literary Works". In Paul N. Garvin ed. *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure and Style*, Georgetown UP, 71-81 [Czech original: 1942]; Vodicka, Felix 1976. "Response to Verbal Art". In Matejka, Ladislav & Irvin R. Titunik ed. *Semiotics of Art*. Cambridge, Mass, 197-208 [Czech original: 1942]. Iser, Wolfgang, 1974. *The Implied Reader*. Baltimore.

values". Consequently, children's literature could not be accepted by highbrow society as being of equal value as adult literature. In other words, children's literature was regarded from its emergence as non- – i.e., "what is not adult literature" – meaning, that if in a given period a text is considered suitable for "children," it cannot at the same time be suitable for "adults". The immediate consequence of this was the contrast between the centrality of the hegemonic stratum of adult literature and the subordinate stratum of children's literature, which was automatically given a lower position.

### The rise of a new system of books for children from the popular literature

The new educational system legitimized books for children as well as a corpus of texts and a set of norms which books for children had to follow. It greatly multiplied the number of schoolbooks, as the children of tradesmen, who had previously been sent to apprenticeship, were sent to school like the children of middle, and upper-classes, and taught to read.

However, once the children learned to read, it became impossible to control their reading material and to decide what they should read, and more importantly, what they should not read. In fact, the official books could not have satisfied their appetite for reading as they were too moralistic and dull. Chapbooks<sup>24</sup>, on the other hand, the popular literature of the time, could and did satisfy, and soon became very popular among children. It did not take long for the new educational system, monopolized and institutionalized by the religious establishments, to realize what children read. They could not remain indifferent to the children's preference for chap-books and endeavored to resist the invasion of popular adult literature into the realm of children's reading. In their efforts they were joined by the commercial publishers, who did not fail to discover the potential of the new market and decided to offer an alternative to the popular chapbooks, such that would not violate the values of official books for children and would be welcomed by the educational establishment.

The first commercial publisher who succeeded in building up a solid business of publishing for children was John Newbery<sup>25</sup>. He understood that in order to compete with chapbooks he had to appeal to the child, but to have an advantage over the chapbooks, he was not to violate the values of teachers and the parents. Newbery was aware of the inventory of books for children: chapbooks, textbooks, manuals

<sup>24</sup>Ashton, John, 1882. *Chapbooks of the Eighteenth Century*. London; Neuberger, Victor, E. 1968. *The Penny Histories*. London; Neuberger, Victor, E. 1969. "The Diceys and the Chapbook Trade". *Library*, 24, 219-31.

<sup>25</sup>Newbery, John [1767] 1966. *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*. A facsimile, with an introductory essay and bibliography by M. F. Thwaite, Oxford.

of good advice and Aesop's Fables, and attempted to use elements of each in order to enhance their competitive capacity as much as possible. In his books he combined elements of chapbooks which appealed to the child with moralizing which appealed to the parent or the teacher. For example, in *The History of Little Goody Two Shoes* the heroine Margery is involved in strange adventures, including the accusation of witchcraft, typical of chapbooks. In fact, the story of Margery was a sort of variation on the prohibited tale of Cinderella, which in those days could be found in the form of chapbooks: the story of an unfortunate girl of a good family who suffers many trials and tribulations, but eventually marries the heir of the manor and becomes the noble lady of the manor.

The most obvious device Newbery borrowed from chapbooks in order to compete with them was illustrations, which attracted attention and, from that time onward, became an indispensable feature of children's books. Newbery's books were followed by other publishers who followed him in including illustrations in their books for children. As a result, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, through constant competition with chapbooks, commercial publishing for children had become an established branch of the publishing field.

The various educational establishments involved in the production of books for children understood that unless they managed to compete with the chapbooks they would lose their public. They did so not only by declaring war on chapbooks and trying to prohibit their reading, but also by offering children alternative reading material. Their books used elements commonly found in chapbooks. This was especially true of their use of plots and stock characters, as for example, in the case of Hannah More. Hannah More was one of the Philanthropists and Sunday school enthusiasts, who viewed the spread of chapbooks as a real danger both to society and to children's education. Together with her evangelical friends in Chapham Common, London, she established the Cheap Repository Tracts (the first tract was ready in March 1795), which challenged common components of chapbooks and endeavored to serve as an alternative. The tracts used the familiar format of chapbooks, as well as woodcuts and serialization. Some tracts even deliberately tried to replace chapbooks by offering attractive titles that resembled well-known chapbooks, such as *The Cottage Cook; or Mrs. Jones Cheap Dishes; Tawny Rachel; or The Fortune Teller; Robert and Richard; or The Ghost of Poor Molly, Who Was Drowned in Richard's Mill Pond*. Another tactic was the adaptation of familiar chapbooks genres to didactic teaching. Poem-like texts (*The Carpenter; or, The danger of Evil Company*) were meant to replace bawdy ballads, while histories (*Tawny Rachel; or, The Fortune Teller*), were to replace frivolous romances and adventures. Even the sensational and manual books were not exempt. The chapbooks' Mother Bunch, who gave recipes for finding the right husband, was replaced by

Mrs. James, who taught the art of industry and good management. Criminal stories were also used for moral purposes. Of course criminals were never romanticized in religious tracts, as they were, for example in *Robin Hood*<sup>26</sup>, but they were used to teach the right moral, as if criminals were always punished. Even ghosts, the slandered heroes of chapbooks, were put to religious purposes. Thus, for example, in *The Deceitfulness of Pleasure*, the appearance of a ghost, a former sinful lady brings the heroine Catherine back to a religious life<sup>27</sup>.

Fairy tales were never included in the tracts, but their literary model was turned into an instructive tale. That is, the fairy was transformed into a religious power, while the giants and wild beasts were replaced by dishonesty, gambling and alcoholism. For example, *Madge Blarney, the Gypsy Girl* (1797) a poor girl has to fight single-handed against the wild beasts (the drunken and sinful gypsies). She is eventually saved by religion, which keeps her from falling into a life like her mother<sup>28</sup>.

In this way chapbooks not only set in motion the production of books for children, but also determined to a large extent the character of their texts, thus reinforcing the association of children's literature with popular (and peripheral) literature.

#### Systemic constraints in writing for children

One of the results of the dual linkage between children's literature and the educational system and children's literature a popular literature is the relatively limited scope available to writers for children in their options of writing, compared to the scope available to writers for adults. Writers for children are troubled by the limitations and try to ignore them by denying that they are writing for children. In fact, almost all writers for children, including the best known, tend to deny that their writings address the child.

I could offer countless examples of this denial, but will limit myself to just few: Madeleine L'Engle recalls that when she was asked why she wrote for children she replied: "I don't"<sup>29</sup>. Rosemary Sutcliffe said: "I have never written for any age-group"<sup>30</sup>, and Scott O'Donnell seems to protest when asked about his writing for children: "Books mine that are classified officially as books for children were never written for children"<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>26</sup>see Brockman, Bennett H. 1982. "Robin Hood and the Invention of Children's Literature" *Children's Literature*, 10, 1-17.

<sup>27</sup>Pickering, Samuel F., Jr. 1981. *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth Century England* Knoxville, 104-137.

<sup>28</sup>Pickering, Samuel F., Jr. 1981. *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth Century England* Knoxville, 123-126.

<sup>29</sup>Townsend, John Rowe. 1971. *A Sense of Story*. London: Longman. 127.

<sup>30</sup>Townsend, John Rowe. 1971. *A Sense of Story*. London: Longman, 201.

As a matter of fact, in all interviews with writers for children, they deny both their status as writers for children and the assumption that the child is their specific addressee.

This is evidence of a strange phenomenon: the writers in question are in most cases highly praised and well-known figures, who have acquired their high social position precisely because they write for children. Yet they usually deny not only that they write for children, but also that children's literature exists as a separate system in the culture.

Since we are all aware of the existence of children's literature, it seems obvious that their efforts to deny its existence is in fact an attempt to exclude themselves from it, a kind of protest. Protest against what? – Probably against both the peripheral status of the writer for children, and against the constraints it imposes on them.

It should be emphasized that writing under constraints is typical not only of children's literature. In fact, any written text, even the most avant-garde, is in some degree a product of the constraints of a certain model. However, the constraints of writing for children are much more binding and demanding. The most significant constraints are that the children's system is reluctant to admit new models, that it prefers simplified and simpler models and tends to reject the more sophisticated and innovative ones. Compared to adult literature, children's literature tends to adopt and incorporate outmoded models and to preserve and perpetuate existing patterns. This tendency leads to a preference within the system for what is familiar and known and a rejection of the new and the novel, whose adoption is hedged about by substantial reservations. In the regular process of incorporating a new model into the system of children's literature, a model that has become obsolete at the center of adult literature is pushed to the periphery, simplified and reduced, while still within the adult system. Only then is it transferred to the children's system, undergoing further changes under the pressure of constraints and in keeping with the models of children's literature, which usually involves further reductions and simplifications.

This idea that children's literature is characterized by its marginality and has less potential for sophistication and complexity, at a time when highbrow literary taste regards these as the distinguishing features of quality literature, was probably what made Pamela Travers protest against the label of children's writer, when she said that this label "suggests that this is something different from literature in general, something that pens off both child and author from the main stream of writing"<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>32</sup>Townsend, John Rowe. 1971. *A Sense of Story*. London: Longman 160.

<sup>33</sup>Travers, Pamela. 1975. "On Not Writing for Children." *Children's Literature*, 5, 21.

Elsewhere I analyzed at length<sup>33</sup> of Roald Dahl's different version of the same story, written for adults and for children: "The Story of a Champion of the World"<sup>34</sup>, versus *Danny the Champion of the World*<sup>35</sup>.

I would rather not repeat the analysis of the differences, but will point out the principles underlining the textual variation that result from the differences in the systemic attribution. Before summarizing these principles, it is worth mentioning that Dahl is one of the most unconventional writers for children. You may say with certainty that he does not allow himself a certain theme, or a certain handling of a theme, few other writers for children's will do so. However, when the unconventional children's text is compared to the adult text, fundamental differences are revealed, which are undoubtedly the product of different systemic constraints and different implied addressees. They can be summarized as follows:

The most obvious difference lies in the assumptions about the formal addressee. These assumptions impose constraints on a text, even when the text is not conventional within the children's system. They can be discerned in many aspects, but first and foremost in the level of the text's complexity. In the Roald Dahl case, the text for adults is much more complex than that for children – complex, that is to say, from the aspect of organization as well as from the inter-level relations. For example, in the adult text the various levels are not organized according to the simplest or the most immediate principle. The distribution of material is not chronological but is organized on the basis of the narrator's consciousness. At the same time, the inter-level relations of the adult text are designed to carry more function with fewer elements, (for example, the relations between the order of information and the narrator carry both the function of irony and the characterization of the protagonists, the evaluation of poaching and more). These differences are translated into more obvious differences between the adult and the children's version: difference in genre – short story versus novel; differences in characters and characterization: two friends, as opposed to father and son; differences in attitudes – ambiguous attitudes, as opposed to unequivocal attitudes; as well as differences in stylistics (complicated versus simpler stylistics) and in endings – open ending versus happy ending).

The need to adapt to the children's text the value judgment of the adult version was another result of the assumptions about potential realization. The ambiguous values of the adult text were inconceivable in the children's system, as children are supposed to understand only unequivocal attitudes. Hence, the text for children offers

<sup>33</sup>Zohar Shavit *Poetics of Children's Literature*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens and London 1986, 33-61. Zohar Shavit. "Systemzwänge der Kinderliteratur". in Dagmar Grenz (Hrsg.) *Kinderliteratur – Erwachsenenliteratur*. Wilhelm Fink, München, 1990, 26-33.

<sup>34</sup>Dahl, Roald. *Kiss Kiss*, London, 206-33.

<sup>35</sup>Dahl, Roald *Danny the Champion of the World*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex.

a clear opposition between good and bad, and the characterization is of a black-and-white nature.

As the case of Dahl's texts shows, assumptions about the formal addressee impose constraints on a text, even when the text is not conventional in the children's system. No doubt these constraints, so powerful and demanding, are the prime reasons for the reluctance of writers to admit to being children's writers.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that conservative tendencies are not necessarily characteristic of children's literature only; the linkage between a peripheral status and conservatism is not inherent, but is only one possibility, though a common one, in an array of relations between the literary systems. There is certainly another option, a less common one, in which the center of the system rejects innovations while the periphery endorses them.

#### The advantages of periphery (Alice, The Hobbit, Harry Potter)

We have seen that the peripheral status of children literature is viewed by the best-known writers for children as a burden and an obstacle depriving them of their poetic freedom. I maintain that in certain cases this peripheral, inferior, status becomes an advantage which enables the writer, under certain circumstances, to introduce into the center of the children's system a text which could not have been written either for adults or for children, and allows the writer for children to achieve what he or she could not have achieved as a writer for adults.

In many of these texts, such as *Alice's adventures in Wonderland*, *The Little Prince*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Hobbit*, *Watership Down*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* or *Harry Potter*, to mention some of the best-known examples, the writer utilizes children's literature and its peripheral status to write texts that would no longer be accepted by the center of the adult literature. Playing with what I describe as the ambivalent status, the writer is able to produce an innovative text, which is accepted by the children's literature despite its general tendency to reject innovative models. Thus by taking advantage of the peripheral status of children's literature the writer can bypass the constraints of both systems: adult and children's.

In my book *The Poetics of Children's Literature*<sup>36</sup>, which was recently translated into Portuguese<sup>37</sup>, I dealt at length with this group

of ambivalent texts. I will not expand here on the notion of ambivalence<sup>38</sup>, or on the case of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which I analyzed at length. I confine myself here to a few remarks on the freedom given to writers when they take advantage of the peripheral status of children's literature to produce ambivalent texts.

Writers who wish to ensure the acceptance of their texts with the children's system usually realize that their textual options are more limited than those of writers for adults. C.S. Lewis was probably expressing his awareness of this state of affairs when he said, "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"<sup>39</sup>.

In fact, C.S. Lewis, the well-known author of the *Narnia* series was voicing the secret dream of many writers for children – to appeal to adults as well as children, thus overcoming the constraints imposed on writing for children and being appreciated by both.

Why then not write directly for adults? Because writers like C.S. Lewis wanted to eat the cake and have it. Being aware of the limitations imposed on writers for adults, especially in terms of the models they can use, they try to have it both ways and overcome both hurdles – the constraints on writing for children and for adults.

As already mentioned, the opposition between writers for adults and writers for children is not between lack of constraints and heavy constraints, but between fewer and greater constraints. Writers for adults are also limited in their use of certain models considered inappropriate for adult literature. For example, the model of fantasy or the model of the *Odyssey* are nowadays unacceptable at the center of adult literature. The option to challenge adult literature is inconceivable in that case, because these textual models are no longer legitimate at the center of the adult literature.

All this invites a number of devices to stretch and expand the two systems of constraints in which the author must operate. Primarily, the writer combines in the text at least two literary models by using two or more different repertoires. This special combination enables the writer to sneak a new and revolutionary model into the system.

In this manner, the author manipulates familiar models from at least two repertoires, a model extant in literature for adults and one drawn from children's literature, constructing a text that succeeds in addressing simultaneously two different publics at different levels. This is a complex and interesting game that mingles a multitude of elements: the inclusion of a new model in the system; combining

<sup>36</sup>Zohar Shavit *Poetics of Children's Literature*. The University of Georgia Press, Athens and London, 1986, 200.

<sup>37</sup>Zohar Shavit. *Poética da Literatura para Crianças*. Caminho, coleção universitária, Lisboa, 2003. 255.

<sup>38</sup>Zohar Shavit. "Un testo ambivalente". Franco Moretti, Pier Vincenzo, Ernesto Franco. *Il roma* Volume quinto, Lezioni, Giulio Einaudi: Torino, 2003, 239-253.

<sup>39</sup>Lewis, C. S. [1952] 1969. "On Three Ways of Writing for Children." In Egoff et al. 1969, *Connect*, New-York, 210.



fusing models and repertoires; the status and dynamics of the models within the repertoire – those going out of fashion, primary and secondary, simplified and sophisticated models, parody and satire. All these textual manipulations allow the author to introduce the new model directly into the center of the system of literature for children.

On the other hand, a writer who creates a text for adults on the basis of an outdated model of adult literature, one that is going out of fashion in its system, may still be received by the periphery of the adult literature, but would not achieve a respected position at the center. But an outdated model of adult literature, if used in a sophisticated way and introduced as a new model into children's literature, may find the options which are blocked for the writer in the framework of adult literature are open in children's literature. It is precisely this inventiveness, this "wink" at the adult audience, which is immediately awarded a high status, in contrast with writers for children, who suffer from their relative low standing.

A good illustration may be the case of *Harry Potter*, the currently best-known ambivalent text.

*Harry Potter* deserves of course a separate comprehensive discussion. Here I shall limit myself to a few remarks concerning JK Rowling's decision to write it as a text for children and not for adults.

JK Rowling is not a "naïve" writer. A former student of French and Classics at Exeter University, she consciously wrote a book deeply rooted in numerous mythologies and several literary heritages. In all likelihood she knew that such a text would not have been accepted adult literature. The models upon which *Harry Potter* are based were no longer legitimate models at the center of adult literature. But in *Harry Potter* the outdated model of the gothic novel was interwoven with the model of fantasy story and with that of the school story to offer a new model: that of a gothic mythological fantasy.

In order to ensure the appeal of the text to the sophisticated adult reader, Rowling created a complex text based on this new model. No wonder the multilayered text assumes realization by an educated adult familiar with the world classics with which *Harry Potter* maintains a continuous dialogue. In order to fully realize the text, the implied reader must also be well read in the history of world literature (A riddle: why Hermione's cat is called Cruikshank?).

The young (and global) reader is no more than an excuse, a pseudo-addressee for a gothic mythological fantasy. Rowling pays lip-service to young readers by providing an additional sub-story. This sub-story presents the adventures of *Harry Potter* and his friends in their fight against evil and wickedness, adventures which are constructed according to the Dragons and Dungeons tradition.

As for the adult reader, he or she is challenged by the complicated world built in *Harry Potter* and by the need to deconstruct it, a highly demanding process involving the re-structuring of numerous layers. Rowling, like her predecessors Lewis Carroll in *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* and C.S. Lewis in *Narnia*, creates in *Harry Potter* not only a certain fantastic world (as do many other fantasies), but also the rules upon which that world is built. This play between possible worlds<sup>40</sup> makes the realization of the text by the sophisticated reader extremely rewarding.

As my brief remarks on *Harry Potter* illustrate, ambivalent texts permit the writer to draw on several models, creating in their combination a new model. As a rule, this involves combining a model which has lost its centrality in adult literature with an accepted model in children's literature. This multifaceted interplay is facilitated by the relations between children's and adult literature, turning the limitations of the children's system into an advantage. However, it must be noted that writers who produce an ambivalent text are taking risk. In order to succeed, the ambivalent text must pass through two different stages of acceptance. Even though it violates the norms of the children's system, it has to be accepted as a children's text and must be approved by an adult readership. That latter acceptance is on a totally different basis, achieved specifically by recognizing the text innovations and complexity. It is clear that faced with these two difficult hurdles, many texts fall by the wayside.

But the gain for the few winners is enormous, as the case mentioned above clearly shows – while taking advantage of the peripheral status these texts become the landmarks of children's literature, as *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or as *Harry Potter* does today. This is how marginality becomes a key to the freedom allowing certain writers the use of children's literature as wings which carry them far away, sometimes to immortality.

<sup>40</sup>To the notion of possible worlds, see Pavel, Thomas G. 1976. " 'Possible World' in Literary Semantics". *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 34:165-76.