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The Contribution of Children's Literature Studies

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Introduction

Children's Literature Studies is currently thriving, established as a subject in its own right which is taught in universities around the world. Variously offered as part of programmes in English, Education or Library Studies, it may also include work on publishing and creative writing for children, and illustration. As an academic subject in higher education, however, it emerged relatively recently in the UK and the US in the mid-twentieth century, when literary studies were opened up to social theory and cultural studies. At this point, children's literature and other 'popular' forms became serious objects for academic research and teaching. On both sides of the Atlantic, the study of children's literature was first incorporated as a strand within courses for teachers and librarians, and it has always maintained strong links with pedagogy. However, interest in children's books and in children's literature study has hugely increased over the last twenty years and the subject is now well established and thriving at both undergraduate and postgraduate level with its own encyclopaedias, scholarly journals, academic conferences and funded centres of research excellence.

The burgeoning of children's book publishing and the expansion of children's literature study at university have been accompanied by some re-evaluation of what was traditionally seen as a marginal area of literary studies. Children's literature was relatively neglected in theoretical movements such as New Criticism, Post-structuralism, Post-colonialism and New Historicism, which swept through the academy in the second half of the twentieth century (Clark, 2003). Often seen as less intellectually heavyweight than other areas of English Studies, it is sometimes to be found listed under 'period studies', or 'popular fiction' in English

A. Hewings et al. (eds.), *Futures for English Studies*
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degree programmes. In this chapter, however, we argue that the subject of Children's Literature has much to offer other areas of English Studies, as we discuss in detail below. As a developing area of study, we also suggest that it currently offers rich opportunities for cross-disciplinary work, for instance, forging productive links between literature, language and childhood studies as well as with literacy and education. There are thus a number of ways in which Children's Literature Studies could complement and enhance elements of the expanding curriculum envisaged by Carter and add additional dimensions to Pope's revolving compass of Language Studies' interdisciplinary connections (both this volume).

As an evolving subject, Children's Literature has its own distinctive, quite profound, areas of contestation with continuing, lively debate about its nature, purposes, boundaries and audiences. These debates, and the questions they raise, are particularly pertinent in relation to a number of current shifts of focus in English Studies: from texts and language to practices and discourse, from distinctive genres to narratives across genres and media, and from paper-based text and face-to-face talk to electronic texts and virtual communication (see Pope, this volume). Children's literature has also been the focus of substantial work on visual texts, and this work now contributes to the increasing interest within English Studies in multimodality, which is particularly important in online and multimedia texts. In summary, the subject of Children's Literature makes significant contributions to the following areas of English Studies:

- debates about the changing nature, purposes and boundaries of literary arts. Children's literature has arguably always included a wide range of genres (for example, stories, poems, pantomime, puppet performances, pop-up books, comics), which raise questions about what exactly counts as literature, and its boundaries with other cultural phenomena;
- questions of audience and address. These are particularly complex in relation to the pedagogic associations of children's literature, its complicated relationships with both adults' and children's interests, and changing and contested ideas about what these might be;
- continuing anxieties and debates about quality and value. This particularly applies to popular children's fiction, generically hybrid material and digital and online texts;
- new approaches to analysing and interpreting multimodality in texts (that is, the ways in which different modes such as words, images,

colour, sound and movement intersect and interact to produce meaning). There are many adventurous contemporary children's picturebooks which use ingenious combinations of modes to complicate and enrich their interpretation, and foreground the nature of books and of reading itself.

We discuss below how these various areas have been explored within Children's Literature Studies, and briefly consider the challenges and advantages of an interdisciplinary approach. We then consider current trends in the study of children's literature, and their potential contribution to English Studies. Finally, we return to the question of the place of Children's Literature Studies in the wider academic context discussed in this volume. We use the term 'children's literature' to refer to those books and other literary material that are commonly assumed to be directed at children and young people. We focus particularly on the Anglophone tradition, which has always included translated materials as well as literature written originally in English, although only a small proportion of contemporary children's literature in other languages is currently translated for English language markets.

Children's literature as a field of study: questions and issues

Towards a more practice-orientated definition of children's literature

The nature, purposes and boundaries of children's literature are not clear-cut, but are closely connected with changing ideas about education, literacy and childhood. A useful way of addressing these interconnections is to conceptualise literacy (including both writing and reading) as social practice, imbued with beliefs and values. Thus, children's literature acquires its meaning through different kinds of activities embedded in social institutions such as school, the family, libraries or the academy, and a practice-orientated approach to its study emphasises the importance of understanding what children and adults actually do with books, and the values and beliefs they associate with these activities. Generally speaking, within Children's Literature Studies as within Literacy Studies more widely, there has been a shift from a focus on texts and authors to a more practice-orientated approach.

Children's literature has often been defined in terms of its distinctiveness from adult literature, and particularly in relation to its implied child audience. The traditional view has been that texts directed at

children first appeared in England around the eighteenth century, alongside the emergence of a new middle class and modern beliefs that childhood was a distinct phase of development separate from adulthood. In tandem with changing beliefs about how children should be treated and shifting conceptions of childhood, children's literature was initially characterised by improving, instructional stories written by eighteenth-century Puritan authors. It then became influenced in the nineteenth century by romantic conceptions of childhood as a time of goodness and innocence, and evolved in the twentieth century to become more playful and entertaining. This view of the development of children's literature highlights a gradual historical shift in its purposes, from instruction to entertainment, with Lewis Carroll's anarchic and subversive stories about Alice (1865, 1871) seen as an important turning point within this trajectory.

To a considerable extent, the account above focuses on the texts themselves, and the purposes of the adults who produced them within a particular historical context. Recently, however, there has been increasing interest in how these texts were actually read and used, by children and adults, in so far as this can be historically reconstructed. While ideas about child readers in previous centuries were often traditionally based on adult memoirs, or derived from their fictional representations, recent researchers have used material evidence from surviving reading materials and their annotations by childreaders, together with knowledge about the historical period and census data, to reconstruct how children acquired and actually interacted with literary texts (Grenby, 2011). This shift in research focus has challenged some traditional views concerning the development of children's literature. The 'instruction to entertainment' trajectory now appears too simplistic a view, and researchers are producing a rather longer and more complex history of children's reading, and of the materials prepared for them by adults. For instance, there is evidence that reading materials were given to children in ancient Greece and that alphabet primers and home-made pedagogical materials for children in the eighteenth century also incorporated entertainment. It has been argued that publishers like John Newbury, whose *A Little Pretty Pocket-book* (1744) is often cited as the first modern book designed specifically to appeal to children, were in fact appropriating practices of writing for children that had already existed for centuries before.

This focus on children's and adults' contextualised reading practices also challenges the generic definition of 'children's literature' as books with a presumed child audience, since historical evidence shows that children have always read a much wider range of material (depending

on access) than the texts designed for them. Indeed, the boundaries between children's and 'adult' literature are porous in many ways. For instance, literature traditionally enjoyed by both children and adults includes inter-generational myths, legends and folktales. A number of works originally written for adults have migrated, or been adapted, to become part of 'children's literature', for example, *Robinson Crusoe, The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Gulliver's Travels*. Similarly, children's poetry anthologies have appropriated traditional rhymes and poems that are enjoyed by all ages, rather than only including those originally directed at a child audience. This fluidity suggests that definitions of children's literature, and the idea that children's literature constitutes a specific genre, need to take into account children's and adults' actual literacy practices, around specific texts. The Bakhtinian conception of genre is useful in this context. Bakhtin (1986[1953]) argued that genres emerge in the course of habitual human activity, which results in the temporary coalescence of specific language forms and style, content themes and evaluative perspectives within a particular set of textual material. This view of genre as dynamic and emergent suggests that reading and pedagogic practice will continue to change and may often challenge existing assumptions about the nature of children's literature. For instance, the current success of cross-over texts enjoyed by both children and adults, such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time,* raises questions about changing criteria for age-appropriacy, the contemporary boundaries between children's and adults' literature, and current beliefs concerning the nature of childhood and adulthood.

The patterning of themes and evaluative perspectives, which Bakhtin identifies as an intrinsic part of generic development, is made more complex in children's literature through its pedagogic associations, and its relationships with assumptions about adults' and children's interests. There is continuing debate about whether children's literature is less about children themselves, and more about adult investments in children and childhood. The multiple address of children's literature, to children and adults, further complicates the notion of an inscribed reader, making these materials an interesting site for examining dialogic complexity. Picturebooks and stories have often included humorous touches, intended to be appreciated by the adult who is reading aloud, rather than the child who is listening. Of course, such 'double audience' books may make assumptions about children's interests, and about their lack of literary sophistication, which may not actually be true. Some contemporary books that assume a high level of sophistication in child

readers have been very successful with child audiences. For instance, B.J. Novak's *The Book with No Pictures* (2014), which has no narrative and indeed no pictures, relies for its considerable comic effects on both adults' and children's willingness to knowingly challenge their allotted roles and play with 'reading aloud' conventions.

Even within literature that seems unequivocally directed at children, there are varying degrees of orientation towards adult reading and interests. Many critics have pointed out that *t*he writing of children's literature is often coloured by adult nostalgia for the loss of innocence and youth and, indeed, some authors talk explicitly about a desire to recreate, or re-experience, a remembered childhood. While all literature conveys societal norms and values (as well as on occasion challenging these), in children's books the underpinning values have been presumed, and often explicitly intended, to have a socialising and instructional function. This may be central to the author's purpose in writing, or emerge through the very fact that these books are written by adults for a different social group, that is, children, who are perceived as less powerful and more malleable. Finally, in addition to being influenced by the interests and intentions of adult authors, literature is mediated for children by the literacy practices of family members, teachers and other adults who buy, give or recommend books, read them aloud to children, and read and talk about books and other literary materials alongside them. The interweavings of adult and child interests, and changing assumptions about what these might be, play out in the contents of books and in the ways in which they are used. Dynamics between different interests and assumptions complicate the notion of a specific genre of 'children's literature' and raise questions about authorial address and purposes, and their mediation within literacy practices, which are also being debated in other areas of English Studies.

Multimodality, interactivity and questions of value

Children's literature provides rich resources for students and researchers across English Studies who are interested in 'multimodality', and in how authors and artists manipulate the interaction between different modes within texts and other literary material. One of the most striking and significant multimodal forms of children's literature and also one of the oldest is the picturebook. Often characterised by high-quality artwork, picturebooks frequently incorporate sophisticated interplay between words and pictures, sometimes also incorporating play with other material aspects of the book, for instance, margins, page turns, font and colours. Contemporary picturebooks such as Emily Gravett's

Wolves (2005) and *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* (2007), Drew Daywalt and Oliver Jeffers' *The Day The Crayons Quit* (2014) or Sally Grindley and Peter Utton's *SHHH!* (1991) also provide interesting examples of creative transgressions of the boundaries between content and form, text and illustration, characters and audience, and real and imaginary worlds.

In addition to the long tradition of multimodal picturebooks, children's engagements with literary materials have always included a wide range of modes involving varying degrees of interactivity, and of textual fixity or fluidity. From the beginning, spoken verbal art and performance which incorporate sound, gestures and movement have been important, for instance, in story-telling (which is experiencing a recent resurgence at schools and literary festivals), puppetry, pantomime and children's own staging of pageants, nativity and school plays. These live performances often involve retellings and elaborations of core texts, which are reconfigured on each occasion, for instance, through the interaction between storyteller and audience, or in a local adaptation for a school play. Children's stories have also frequently migrated across modes and media. Within the multimedia landscape of children's literary arts, texts range from book versions of old and newer classics, from *Alice* to *The Paper Bag Princess* and *Tom Sawyer* to *Little House on the Prairie,* through influential stage and film adaptations (for example, Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter)* to child-authored fiction on social media and the most informal and ephemeral playacting among friends.

Children's literature in its many varied modes, and its uncertain literary worth in the eyes of many adults, throws into relief questions about the boundaries and purposes of what counts as literature within English Studies more generally and how this might be rapidly changing. The range of what can be studied in children's literature now includes creative experiments with digital stories. Many young children currently get their first experience of literature on a screen rather than in a printed book, and interact with stories at the level of text, as well as through adult mediation, right from the outset. In digital picturebooks, very young children can tap on images of animals to hear the sound they make and what they are called, manipulate objects by tilting the screen and blow into a microphone to scatter the three little pigs' straw house. For older children, story worlds are often created over a variety of media platforms involving different kinds of artefacts. For instance, the popular British television series *Dr Who* has a connected website with spin-off stories, video diaries, computer games where it is possible to become the Doctor and face typical challenges, a virtual tour of the Tardis time-machine and cybermen masks.

This digital and interactive literary material is reconfiguring relationships between children and literature, and also challenging the canonical forms and structure of literature which has formed the backbone of English Studies. New kinds of interactive and transmedia story-making are replacing children and young people's traditional linear experiences of narrative with more rhizomatic, intertextual sampling of interconnected forms and activities where reader/viewers may also be authors and multimedia creative artists. Online transmedia worlds provide an interconnected network of sequels, prequels, backstories, games and puzzles and, increasingly, materials produced by young people themselves. For instance, postings to fan sites of popular series like *Harry Potter* include young people's imagined profiles as friends or relations of existing characters, parodies, and remixes of computer animation and video games. In the light of these rapidly evolving digital practices, English Studies will have to review and reconfigure some aspects of the English Literature curriculum in response to future students who come to university from a background in these new kinds of narrative and literary experiences, and who may not expect to view static printed texts as representing the only authentic originals. These digital activities again press against the precise limits of what counts as literature in terms of mode (its boundaries with games, puzzles and toys, for instance) and in terms of value (whether it can include ephemera or texts produced by readers as part of an online story world).

Questions about quality and value are also raised in relation to the commercial adaptation and transposition of children's texts, for example, regarding the relative merits of the 2013 Disney 3D computer-animated musical fantasy *Frozen* in relation to Hans Anderson's (often translated) original fairy tale, *The Snow Queen,* or what is gained or lost in complexity and nuance when comparing the 2012 and 2013 film versions of *The Hunger Games* with Suzanne Collins' original books. Such issues are also associated with questions about audience and address, and with adult assumptions concerning children's needs. The notorious discrepancies between adult critics' and children's valuing of particular texts have themselves been explored. For instance, while Enid Blyton's books have sold over 400 million copies worldwide, Hunt (1995) found very little secondary material on Blyton (seen as trash by many literature specialists) in contrast to the huge amounts of critical discussion he came across about Kenneth Grahame, a 'classic' author. To take a more recent example, literary critics have tended to treat Pullman's *Northern Lights,* with its intertextual links to Blake and Milton, as serious literature, whereas the best-selling *Harry Potter* (with links to fairy and school stories and Dungeon and Dragon games) has been often dismissed as a popular

phenomenon, a 'second-rate fetishized fantasy' (Zipes, 2001). Pullman's work won the Whitbread Book of the Year prize in 2002, but *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was merely shortlisted for the 1997 Carnegie Medal, although it won other awards directly involving child judges.

Interdisciplinary possibilities

We would argue that the questions and issues which currently surround children's literature as a field of study, and its multimodal and multimedia nature, are particularly amenable to an interdisciplinary approach. As we mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the study of children's literature has long been associated with education and literacy. One of the best established journals on children's literature in the UK is *Children's Literature in Education,* which has been running since 1970. There is a longstanding rich tradition of pedagogic research although, ironically, at the time of writing children's literature is optional or non-existent in teacher training in the UK, USA and Europe (Arizpe et al., 2013). There are also important connections to be pursued with language/linguistic studies and childhood studies. In particular, language studies now incorporates multimodal or semiotic analysis of images and relationships between verbal and non-verbal material which can inform study of picturebooks and multimedia material for children, and approaches from childhood studies provide insights about how, as a cultural phenomenon, children's literature is shaped by changing beliefs about the nature of childhood.

Firstly, we want to argue that children's literature should be studied through a multimedia approach. Students need to experience and compare different forms of engagement with diverse sources, from museum artefacts like the small illustrated cards Jane Johnson designed to teach her children literacy in the eighteenth century, to contemporary picturebooks, and from stage productions and story-telling to films and online interactive material. Audiovisual material can include these original works and also interviews with authors, critics, publishers and children themselves on a wide range of literary examples. Authors' comments about why and how they work often link with questions about the nature and purposes of children's literature discussed above, and accounts by picturebook authors of how they use text and images to produce a narrative illuminate broader discussions of multimodal meaning-making. Finally, stylistic analysis of authors' techniques, for instance, in the production of realism in young adult novels, or linguistic analysis of the poetic techniques in poems collected in children's anthologies, can illuminate literary approaches more generally, as well as throw light on beliefs about children's aesthetic interests and perspectives as readers.

There has been considerable work in childhood studies on the variability of beliefs about childhood, and the different expectations of children, across history. Students' understanding and appreciation of classic children's books is enormously enhanced by an understanding of the specific assumptions about the nature and needs of children which they encode, and the particular models of childhood which they present. Thus, for example, students may consider critical readings about the construction of girlhoods, and of a literature for girls, in connection with their study of *Little Women* (1868), and then trace how this tradition has developed, up to the present. Similarly, the reading of *Treasure Island* (1883) can be enriched through reading about the shaping of young British Imperialists via vicarious experience of the masculine trials of physical and moral strength portrayed in this and other adventure stories in the 'desert island' genre, with their echoes in later classics such as *Swallows and Amazons* (1930). Debates about morals and censorship in children's literature are intimately connected with beliefs about the nature of children's rights and needs, as well as with questions about the purposes of children's literature. Students can examine and enter into these debates, alongside their reading of texts such as Melvin Burgess' young adult novel *Junk* (1996), with its controversial accounts of drugs and sex. Burgess' arguments for realism in teen literature can generate considerable discussion among students, and heighten their awareness of authors' and critics' assumptions about what is suitable and desirable literature for children and young people, and why.

Cross-cultural studies of children's literature can also highlight such assumptions, and models of childhood, in particularly striking ways. For instance, in a chapter about the success in China of the *Harry Potter* series (translated into Chinese), Gupta (2009) argues that its popularity is partly due to the recent cultural switch in China from the 'we' generation influenced by communism, who grew up pre-1980, to an 'I' generation growing up the 1980s and 1990s, who are exposed to more individualistic, western-orientated, models of childhood. China's embracing of the Harry Potter phenomenon, including films, fan-sites and artefacts, reflects a growing interest in western models of childhood, and is part of the opening up of China to the rest of the world and its engagement with processes of globalisation. The realisation that conceptions of childhood are socially constructed, that these can change and are reproduced in texts via language and literary techniques, and that all this impinges centrally on so many aspects of children's literature study, is often reported by students, in our experience, as a key insight into the field. This understanding, we would suggest, derives

from the combination of literary, language and childhood studies, and provides evidence of the powerful potential of interdisciplinary work.

Emerging trends and their potential contribution to English Studies

The scope of Children's Literature Studies is still expanding. While specialisms may be based on genre, geographical regions, historical periods, significant or popular authors, topical content or the representation of specific childhoods, there is greater interest in empirical data and in theorising uses and practices. The following sections look at some departure points for re-examining existing concepts and approaches. Together they represent an increasingly fluid and open approach to thinking about Children's Literature Studies and its role in relation to continually changing ideas about texts, young readers and practices.

Bringing children into Children's Literature Studies

While historical research has added to our understanding of literacy practices around texts, discussion of actual child readers has been fraught and often avoided (Gubar, 2013). Critics tended to insist—with good reason, originally—that Children's Literature Studies dealt with constructions rather than actual children. This was only ever partly true, as discussions of the child constructed *in* the text often tended to slide into assumptions about the child constructed *by* the text—with the implication that we can determine how real children are influenced by their reading. The idea of a 'constructed reader' is now less taken for granted as simple or explanatory (Rudd, 2013), as researchers look into the gap between the text and its various critical interpretations on the one hand, and the ways actual readers encounter and experience it on the other. This work is strongly connected to contextualised approaches in language studies and literacy practices research, and the ideas of theorists such as Bakhtin (1986[1953]) on dialogicality and genre.

In addition to continuing work on children's practices around texts, inside and outside classrooms, recent contributions from the cognitive sciences (Nikolajeva, 2014) have been assessing evidence of the effect of reading fiction on adolescent development. These cognitive studies add significantly to earlier work exploring the effect on children's self-images and self-esteem of being exposed only to literature featuring privileged, mainstream images of childhood while minority experiences were absent. They represent a marked turn from abstract debates about constructed, idealised childhoods, and instead seek empirical evidence

to address widespread anxieties about the influence on the young of texts viewed as reinforcing negative stereotypes, or as troubling. At the same time, contemporary children's literature is still being studied, both as texts in isolation and in contexts of use, as potentially therapeutic. Textual evidence can be used to examine how the tradition of didacticism in children's literature continues but is being transmuted; empirical studies may take up seriously the idea that through these texts young identities are being constructed for good or bad. Studies of 'problem' literature for the young (books often marketed as such and followed up with school project work, such as the US author Laurie Halse Anderson's 2009 novel *Wintergirls* about anorexia) offer perspectives on what reading about experiences or characters 'like oneself' may mean for young readers whose cultural, gender or sexual identities, histories of mental or physical illness, abuse or dislocation are not well represented in the generality of children's literature. Locating Children's Literature Studies within English Studies can provide the criticality which might otherwise be missing from these more instrumental approaches, which contextualise some works of children's literature as 'bibliotherapy', viewing non-normative texts as needing only strategies for practical use rather than according them equal critical attention.

As those *w*orking in the fields of language studies and literacy practices would expect, Children's Literature Studies cannot take anything for granted about reading and readers, and needs to be cautious in assuming the influence of any text on any individual. Grounded research has usefully moved us on from an earlier position where Children's Literature Studies were mostly cut off from studies of actual child readers. For instance, textual analyses of multimodality, whether of picturebooks or of digital texts along with all their affordances, can be set alongside studies of how such texts are used, disregarded, manipulated or reconfigured as young readers apply their own skills and ideas. As argued above, the skills and experiences of younger readers pose a challenge to many of the earlier assumptions about their lack of sophistication, which have been associated with the positioning of children's literary texts as 'simple', within English Studies.

Digital texts, emerging literacies and adult anxieties

Discussion of adult anxieties about childhood has long featured in Children's Literature Studies, often in relation to innocence, sexuality and a presumed need to protect children from premature knowledge, along with a countering concern about how children and young adults can best be prepared for their future worlds. In the twenty-first

century, a relatively new dual set of anxieties has arisen with a focus on changing literacies, their values and effects: how is the world of digital texts affecting children and their literacy development, and how can children's literature prepare young readers for digital literacy competences they might need now or in future? In a US study, Alper (2013) comments that historically the literature on children and digital or non-digital media has mostly dealt with negative effects, rather than considering what young readers may be gaining.

As Alper and others have commented, adult anxieties have contributed to a marginalisation of children's digital literacies in school. A substantial proportion of literature aimed at children in the past supported a traditional formal or informal reading curriculum, providing vehicles for teaching and practising reading. Digital texts of all kinds are now, often explicitly, enabling young readers to develop and practise new skills. A growing number of studies, across a wide age range, describe emerging practices in this area and analyse texts in response to a wider discourse that remains divided between encouragement and alarm, along with concern about inequality of access to digital technologies. English studies, education and children's literature students alike need to become familiar with a wide variety of digital texts, and need the skills to approach them critically.

A text's original form has arguably become less important. Authors writing for children and young adults in the twenty-first century can assume knowledge of a newer kind of contemporary canonical literature, in which images, computer games, cartoons, film and books all converge. The intertextual references, visual and verbal, saturating texts of all kinds for young readers today are wide ranging and multimedia. Cultural knowledge indexed in the texts can be highly specific and local, or generalised and global. The boundary between reading and writing is another partially dissolving distinction, with growing interest in how young readers' social engagement, especially online and via social media, involves the production as well as the reception of texts, for example, in the writing of fan fiction. This active involvement gives rise to a new slant in the study of children's literature, emphasising young readers' agency and their constructions of texts—rather than the construction of young readers by texts.

Visual literacies

Children's book illustration is now a field of study in its own right in higher education. Visual literacies and the analysis of picturebooks have become particularly rich fields for research, both in terms of the

texts available for study, which as well as picturebooks include comics and sophisticated graphic novels, and for developing new perspectives and tools for analysis. Picturebook 'competence' can be analysed as an emerging skill, with studies focussing on how it is fostered in adult–child reading generally, or in more formal educational settings. The critical role of Children's Literature Studies should include developing better understandings of the semiotics of more visual texts, involving but not limited to analysing communicative 'codes' of design and expression (Moebius, 1986). Picturebooks continue to be recognised as sites for experiment. Directions in research include exploring how images can represent a child's perspective and how picturebooks teach visual narrative effectively.

Arguably, picturebooks are also particularly inclined to address dual audiences (that is, where adults and children are simultaneously addressed) or double audiences (where the implied reader shifts between child and adult). However, the question of whether visual 'address' can be distinguished meaningfully and reliably is also contested (Rudd, 2013). For other critics, multiple address in picturebooks is real, intentional and provides an opportunity for adult–child dialogue and the scaffolding of understanding (Melrose, 2012). The connection between picturebooks and teaching narrative to young children has been repeatedly made, although perhaps more emphasis still needs to be given to how, in Anglophone literature at least, this often involves the child's recognition of humorous effects produced through dissonance between pictures and text. Picturebooks have been claimed to present specific analytic challenges. For instance, Nikolajeva (2008) argues that postmodern picturebooks have 'increasing potential for conveying complex mental states, when illustrations can be used when words are no longer sufficient to depict characters' inner worlds'. Picturebooks and comics alike, according to Nodelman (1988), involve very different ways of reading the page, in contrast to engaging with verbal print, though he argues that comics are more complex structurally. Analyses of the potentialities of reading paths in comics and graphic novels draw substantially on studies of multimodality elsewhere in English Studies (for example, Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Here, the encounter between children's literature and English Studies demonstrates the fruitful meeting of texts and analytic tools.

A longstanding critical strand in children' literature has been concerned with identifying normative images, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and the pervasiveness of a limited and constricting view of childhood. It has been claimed that what is at stake is nothing less than a child's self-image, an even more acute argument in relation to visual images. One response has been the provision of literature reflecting

more diverse experiences of childhood. An alternative response is the creation of predominantly visual 'universal' texts, which appear unfixed and open in meaning. The Australian picturebook author Shaun Tan, for instance, uses experiences of migration and crossing linguistic borders in his work, aiming to avoid images of culturally specific places, objects or beings. This deliberately creates texts that are half-finished so that readers can become co-creators. There is scope to explore the use of these and similar texts, and to consider whether they encode newer types of pedagogy. A further question concerns whether verbal art and typography, often foregrounded in children's picturebooks, reflect specifically English linguistic and cultural conventions.

Towards the future

The role of pedagogy in children's literature is an inescapable issue, even when considering Tan's apparently less fixed and 'half-finished' texts. At the time of writing there are intense debates circling young adult fiction, concerning whether it is delivering helpful lessons on contemporary anxieties and issues, offering dystopian visions that arguably mirror and transform adolescent insecurities and fears, or unfairly burdening young readers with adult pessimism. None of these debates are new of course, whether in the study of literature for adults or for children.

Childhood studies also deals with some of these issues, particularly when it is proposed that experiences of childhood have now changed so profoundly around the world that the frankly disturbing—to many adults—nature of young adult fiction matches the violently disturbing lives and futures of contemporary adolescents. It follows that lessons for young readers are not to be found in happy endings, and readers are expected or required to derive their own through grappling with texts. This still assumes, of course, that children's literature carries a weight of pedagogic responsibility which distinguishes it from literature in general. Some contemporary authors explicitly accept that responsibility while others—occasionally notoriously—refuse it. An author's apparent refusal of a pedagogic role or of any moral instruction, and challenges from teen fiction to the long-established romantic image of childhood in children's literature, may or may not convince us that children's literature, especially for older readers, is losing all distinctiveness. Historically informed studies of children's literature can help us see when didacticism, or romanticism in a contemporary form, still lingers on and whether the traditionally hierarchical relationship between adult author and younger reader has merely been obscured.

This leads back again to the distinctiveness of Children's Literature within English Studies. The ineradicable assumptions—regardless of what self-proclaimed radical authors of children's literature might occasionally argue for their own works—remain that one way or another, constructions of childhood and young adulthood, and relationships between adults and children, are always implicated. At one end of a continuum of children's literature today are texts with implied readers who either have very specifically imagined identities, or have a need to understand that they share their world with those who have such identities—texts for specific readers, and texts with specific purposes. At the other end are texts, often picturebooks, which attempt to evade the limitations of depicting persons and places, and strive either for full inclusion or for universality. Both these kinds of texts, however they are presented and marketed, can still be seen as taking their pedagogic responsibilities very seriously whether explicitly or not, in relation to the 'humane' purpose of English as it persists within English as a school subject, with its use of texts geared to solving problems or for supporting the development of identities.

Questions about what texts are for, what they represent, what they do, how they do it, and what is done with them, all questions that matter to English Studies generally, are crystallised in Children's Literature Studies and often take on urgency in this context. In educational studies the current focus is more relentlessly on literacy as a skill, so there is less assurance that children's literature can be studied there with breadth and criticality. Studies of children's literature, young readers and their literacy practices add depth to essential discussions within English Studies about the changing nature, values and purposes of literature, and can furnish productive examples of both texts and the practices around them. Within English Studies there is a space where such critical ideas can still be aired and where many of the tools of analysis and criticism exist, and are being co-developed. Children's Literature Studies in turn owes significant debts to studies of both English literature and language, employing and also developing the tools and approaches held in common by these overlapping fields.

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