

Chapter I

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE – AN OVERVIEW

A survey of literature in the past threw into perspective that children's literature appeared to have no place in it, and if at all a place, only a peripheral one. Twentieth century discussions and studies prove that children's literature, a fast developing field, has paralleled the rest of literature from at least the mid-eighteenth century, encompassing virtually all genres and thousands of authors. Reflecting on the multiple and divergent attitudes and opinions, one interprets that children's books, culturally formative and of mammoth exaltation pedagogically, intellectually and affably, cannot be defined by typical textual characteristics either of style or content. 'Children's book' has been defined in terms that contrast it to books for adults; in terms of its technical details; what it does; who it is addressed to etc, reflecting on what has been understood is given below. The particular term 'Children's book' is somewhat a recent development. Till then:

[. . .] books were just books: some you liked, some your ten year old grandson liked, some were read by adults, while

many writers such as Dickens were also enjoyed by children. (Tunis, 24)

This same state of affairs linger even today. Adult books such as *The Street Lawyer* and *The Runaway Jury* by John Grisham are often read by children, and many grown up readers often read and re-read children's books such as *The Wizard of Oz* and C. S. Lewis' *Narnia* series. Tales of fantasy such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Harry Potter* series or *The Sagas* of J. R. R. Tolkien have an extremely wide readership from children through teenagers to adults and even the old too. Classics such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *David Copperfield* and *Mill on the Floss* cater to everyone alike. *Gulliver's Travels* abounding with adventures, voyages to the unknown and predicaments appeal to children though addressed to adults. These books graded as Children's Classics were not specifically written for children. Children read them for want of more appropriate reading material and they did not derive from such books all that they offer more grown-up, experienced readers. A few favourite passages are enjoyed, large and difficult portions are skipped to figure out the end of the adventure, which is a significant one and would have arrested the interest of children. The complex and subtle portions and the messages are way

beyond their limited understanding. Children's books have been read as literature only recently in the American Academy. Prior to the 1970s their study was confined almost exclusively to the fields of education and library science. Thus, despite the increasing attention from literature departments, children's literary criticism in America today remains interdisciplinary. A fast developing domain, this species of writing has been included in the academics in the west especially in Europe, America and Australia.

The Dawn

The initiation of children's literature (that is, literature intended specifically for a child audience) lies in the Puritan society of seventeenth century England. Their core interest for writing for children, was to inculcate their religious tenets in their own children through the readings. The moral preparation of a child for death framed the crux of these novels, attributed to the high mortality rate of children in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, thus, the Puritans deemed it imperative to instruct children to prevent them from going to Hell and as a traditional gateway to an after life in heaven. Herein we find the inception of the "instruct" function of literature intended for children. "Delight" in children's literature receded into the background. Children

derived immense pleasure from adult literature. Prior to the nineteenth century, children gravitated to such works as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). These adventure stories made up for the lack in their literature. The assumption that the instruction oriented works was entirely morbid, forbidding or gruesome is misleading as humorous elements with a range in didacticism from intense to moderate thronged the texts. But the forces of literature as indoctrination remained very powerful, until well into the nineteenth century, when its influence waned a little; didacticism in children's literature is still a force to be reckoned with, even today.

Motifs in Children's Literature

With the advent of the twentieth century, discussions of children's literature often centred on the status of adult critiques of the genre. These discussions have initiated several definitions of children's literature which validate particular types of evaluation as well as support the premise that children's literature exists prior to its definition. Twentieth century debates on children's literature primarily define it in two modes; one, in terms of genre, which argues that children's literature is defined by a set of internal conventions which distinguish it from other genres. Alternatively, children's literature is seen as a sub-genre of a larger

category such as fantasy or adventure. The second mode argues that children's literature is that, which addresses children. Both approaches, powerful and ostensible, seem to affect some of the tensions and, contradictions inherent in the Victorian discourses about the child.

Whatever the approach, this genre is characterized by "the presence of the child protagonist, greater flexibility about the probability of narrative events, the recurring plot elements such as the quest, the journey through time, falls and rises of fortunes and various kinds of initiation into adult life."(Srinivasan 5) From this definition one cannot but accept the fact that certain powers of artistry vested in adult and children literature are the same. The conventions characterizing children's books can equally well characterize adult books; 'the quest and journeys through time; as well as magic and fantasy, simplicity and adventure' is synchronic of the adult canon. This implies that the difference between the two classes is not marked by 'form' or 'essence' but only by 'degree'.

The Footage of Children's Stories

The most significant motif on defining children's book according to its technical details, is the question of length. Children's books are widely accepted as short, rather 'thin' books. It was rare, in children's fiction, to find a three-hundred and fifty page extravaganza, until J. K.

Rowling's *Harry Potter* series came to be. On an average, a two hundred page was the limit. This caters to authors as diverse as the British writer Enid Blyton (with her adventure, animal and school stories which are often akin to fantasy, so divorced are they, from the world of reality); and also to the American writer Louisa May Alcott (with Jo March and her sisters in the *Little Women* series which are completely realistic novels) – dealing with everyday problems and hassles at home and at school). Whatever the theme is; the books are usually the same length, about two hundred pages.

Active Treatment of the Story

Another important emphasis in most children's books is a zealous treatment of the story and character, to a passive one. Description, introspection and reflection in the passive mode are usually avoided, in favour of action, incident and dialogue, "Children in their readings as in their lives, are more active than ruminant, it is just happily so." (McDowell 147) The elaborate description or reflection, as depicted in Hardy's novels negates interest. They "prefer books that deal with concrete events rather than with abstract discussion, and which have an emphasis upon action in preference to introspection" (Tucker, *The Child*, 9). A child's author has, therefore, to further action even through

reflection or description. Thus, the garden and the house are revealed through Alice herself traversing from one place to the other, in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Most children's books portray a preponderance of conversation. Opulence of social intercourse and activity, devoid of contemplation and lethargy, is the order of the day as emphasized in stories by Enid Blyton. Action and dialogue are prevalent in most Enid Blyton's stories. In *Little Animal Stories*, the vivid description of the dog by the protagonist reveals a powerful picture to the reader.

‘Well darlings, you think he's beautiful because he is yours and you love him’, said mummy. “But he isn't really beautiful. His tail is too long. He's too big. His ears aren't quite right. He'd never win a price at a dog show.”

Wagger looked up at the children and wagged his long plummy tail. They stared down at him looking at his bright eyes. (4)

The Language in Children's Books

The unequivocal language and style handled by the author, determines whether the book is a children's book or not. A fairly simple, limited, vocabulary is the common norm. But, this is not indicative that

children will “always necessarily prefer consistently plain direct English in their stories” (Tucker, *The Child*, 13). Children are sensitive to words, their lineament and their sonancy. Words that are unfamiliar are often challenging, and even have a ‘mystery, glamour, beauty, interest and luminosity’. Enid Blyton, much reviled for her simple and repetitive vocabulary, uses words new to children, and in the space of a few pages (Blyton 70 – 75) of *Summer Term at St Clare’s*, the reader comes upon ‘vivarium’, ‘perforated’, ‘loathed’, ‘torrent’ etc – not exactly simple words, surely for an Enid Blyton fan. Yet at the same time, such new or unknown words or vocabulary are necessary to help develop a child’s language building activity.

In addition to language restrictions, restrictions of style and word play are indispensable in a children’s book. Classical allusions, mythology, puns, irony and satire, on an extended scale cause problems to the child reader. *Gulliver’s Travels* ostensibly written for adults, with its all pervasive irony and satire leaves children with severe comprehensive problems unaware of mankind’s history and lacking the literary skills necessary to analyze and enjoy such a book. According to Nicholas Tucker, a noted child psychologist, children naturally susceptible to sarcasm, are easily confused over the way that the surface

meanings of words can convey a contrary interpretation. The kind of style he considered inappropriate for children is “The endless paragraphs of a Proust, the convoluted sentences of a Henry James, or the sophisticated literary English of a Meredith will not get through to children.” (*The Child*, 11 – 12) Narratology with a quintessential style marked with a lot of direct speech is preferred by children.

The Child Protagonist at the Crux

The use of the child protagonist at the crux is a mediant attribute of children’s books according to Srinivasan, “The child at the centre helps the child reader to identify with the protagonist and enter more fully into the work” (5). Thus innumerable child protagonists in *Famous Five*, like George, Anne, Julian, Dick and Timmy, the Dog, march across the pages of Enid Blyton’s books and so also Joe and Frank in *Hardy Boys* by Franklin W. Dixon and Nancy Drew, Bess Marvin and Georgia Fayne in Carolyn Keenes’ *Nancy Drew* with whom the child readers identify, breaking geographical, linguistic and cultural barriers.

Adolescence, a vital stage in the development of an individual denotes a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. It indicates a significant change in the individual’s physical nature as well as in his mental, emotional and social attitudes. Erik Erikson in *Childhood and*

Society captures the adolescent predicament:

The adolescent mind is essentially a mind of the moratorium, a psychological stage between childhood and adult, and between the morality learned by a child, and ethics to be developed by the adult. It is an ideological mind and, indeed it is the ideological outlook of the society that speaks more clearly to the adolescent who is eager to be affirmed by her peers and is ready to be confirmed by rituals, creeds, and programmes, which at the same time define what is evil, uncanny and inimical. (263)

An adult as the protagonist of a children's book can contain experiences, a child reader may find incomprehensible unless a child-like adult with a simple range of experience is depicted.

Animals in Children's Stories

Animals as the protagonists or as supporters of the protagonists, is yet another convention depicted in children's literature. The White Rabbit, the March Hare, the Gryphon and Mock Turtle in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are on par with Alice. In children's books they are not distinct from the usual, whether they are children, adults or animals. C. S. Lewis described it thus:

The life of all characters (in most children's books) is that of children for whom everything is provided and who take everything for granted. But in other ways it is the life of adults. They go where they like and do what they please, they arrange their own lives.

(On Stories, 14)

This is explicitly true of fantasy, as well as the fantastic adventure stories by authors such as Lewis Carroll, Enid Blyton and J. K. Rowling, whose characters experience the freedom of childhood. The child's ability to discern the cut-off point, is of course difficult; thus authors usually try to ward off profuse experiences from their books. Excessive emotions and diverse horror is taboo in children's literature as children are not seasoned to such emotions. Restricted and narrowed down ostensibly by the emotive and intellectual limits of children, divergent experiences are patently non-existent in children's literature. The immaturity and lack of knowledge in children indirectly impose limitations on authors. Adult arenas in children's books, though a complex experience, have to be presented from the stand point of the child so that it can be conceived by the child-reader. Incest, abortions, homosexuality and many other topics associated with sex in children's

books, now treated in books for teenagers cannot be called children's books even though it draws the attention of teenagers and enables them to be sensitive to such problems. According to Tucker:

Although children may be highly interested in sex, adult relationships and the pattern – or lack of it – in life itself, there are ways of treating all these subjects that will mean more to an adult than to a child, because of his greater experience of such things.

(Suitable for Children, 19)

Adults in Children's Books

Adult figures in children's books are considerably negligible; if prominent, they are portrayed in a negative light or censorious tone. Adults usually relegated to the background, supply food, other comforts and necessities to the child protagonist. Kept away from the vicinity, they turn up in the book to help, to advice and in the end to applaud the children's activities as in all Enid Blyton's innumerable stories of adventure and mystery, Franklin W. Dixon's *Hardy Boys* and Carolyn Keene's *Nancy Drew* series.

The realms of magic and fantasy are affluent in children's books as children are not really interested in reality. Similar themes are

depicted simultaneously in books for adults too. Children's literature abounds in a lot of genres, from the quest in fantasy, the picaresque with the rags-to-riches story or vice versa, the verification of identity, the ordeal and the progress of the child heroes and heroines as illustrated in Rowling's texts. The realms of magic and fantasy, a prominent motif in children's books, pervasive with societal values, shirk from reality.

Stratagem

Plots are restricted to one or two ostensibly as children find it difficult to cope with sub-plots, flash-backs and multiple themes.

According to McDowell:

Not many threads run through the story. There will be twists and turns and reversals [. . .] but the main thread, or threads if it is a two-in-hand, must be kept going and not be held up by sub-plots rising and dying across the part of action. (152)

Rowling barricades all restrictions of plot structure, narratology and lineament. She has transgressed all social laws in inculcating spiritual values, yoking together good and bad. Though the main plot is the fight between Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort, numerous sub-plots like the developing friendship amongst the friends, adolescent crushes,

competitions, school life, family relations and many more, referential to the main plot are intrinsically included. These sub-plots adhere completely to the main plot throughout the development of the novel.

Tutelage

Didacticism pervades the powerful and popular domain of children's literature, intrinsically woven with the other exponents of the tale. Most children's books come to a close exuding happiness catering to a specific need that children have. According to Nicholas Tucker:

Children have a strong wish, usually reflected in children's literature, that stories should always be quite clearly rounded off, with justice more or less seen to be done, even if this works against characters with whom children may generally sympathize.

(The Child, 10)

In adult fiction specifically in light romantic fiction, it is considered unrealistic and relegated to the periphery by most adult writers. The optimistic inborn quality of a child makes it imperative that the ending be happy for the good, encompassing pain and suffering *enroute*, and the wicked are taken to trial though they prosper initially.

An ending as depicted in *The Mill on the Floss*, *Madame Bovary* and

Othello will never appeal or arrest the attention of children. Pragmatic to the core, children's stories should sport a didactic ending. "For children are innocent and love justice, while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy." (Tucker, *Suitable for Children*, 20)

Initially, opening out vistas, books for children were meant to enlarge horizons, stretch the imagination, discriminate right from wrong, and impart pleasure simultaneously. Thus, the early works of children's fiction preached, corrected and took to justice, the wrongs committed, focusing on the right choices to be made. But in the nineteen forties, a complete change had materialized; the child protagonist was given a choice to decipher between right and wrong. According to C. S. Lewis, imposing morals in children's stories is 'impertinent' if it does not arise naturally. A story *sans* a moral is more appreciative than a story with a moral:

The child as reader is neither to be patronized nor idolized: we talk to him as man to man. But the worst attitude of all would be the professional attitude which regards children in the lump as a sort of raw material which we have to handle. We must of course try to do them no harm: we may, under the omnipotence, sometimes dare to hope that we may do

them good. But only such good as involves treating them with respect.

(On Three Ways, 34)

The Roles of Adults in Children's Literature

Apart from technicalities a fact forgotten conveniently, sidled to the recesses on discussing children's literature comes to the forefront, that is, all children's fiction is the domain of adults. Governed by adults, children's fiction is written, edited, published, reviewed, recommended, bought and sold by them. Hence the ideology of the authors and the stereotype characters especially of adults are inherent or thrust upon these books and on the child reader. These artifacts varied in mode and frames are segregated into numerous technological guises under the names of fantasy, realistic stories, adventures, allegories and many more. A tremendous impact at that time resulted in a large number of realistic fiction. These books, reflecting the social attitude, events and culture of the time, were devoured by all readers. Realistic fiction by writers like Louisa Alcott, an epitome of information regarding society careened as resources for social history.

Realistic fiction, a by-product of social and economic changes, could be called domestic novel or its close relative, the children's family

story. Alcott's *Little Women*, acclaimed both by girls and their parents was a thorough girl's book that inculcated tradition and change together in a simple and true way with both sound moral message and enormous appeal for girls. These books with familiar values, its intimate narrative, lively entertaining aspect, simplicity, mundane and true, catered powerfully to girls. The characterization, on the other hand, moved children's literature a giant step away from the purely instrumental role of instructor and into the realm of 'real' literature.

A child protagonist, one of the prerequisites of a children's book is seen in an adult's book too. It can be deduced that the obvious disparity is the point of view adopted by the author, which determines the reader of the book. A children's book written from the child's perspective continuously holds the attention of the child. Its point of view does not differ half-way or at any other time. On the other hand a child in the adult's book, can have two perspectives; that of an adult looking into his past, recollecting his innocence and sensibilities and communicating it to his reader; or is through the perspective of an adult. This dual concept with a fluctuation between the two ideas depicts a double view, which is either dependable or contradictory. Adult books with the most powerful and endearing experiences of children portrayed,

is questionable as to whom the reader is. Childhood in *David Copperfield*, some portions of *Jane Eyre* and *The Mill on the Floss* are so appealing to the child that one questions, 'are these after all children's books?'

The Role of the Reader

A book for children, can be determined by the implied reader, thus the text creates for itself a reader, to whom the text applies itself fully. Most often the implied reader and the actual reader are very different, but both these readers enjoy quite a bit of these texts. An example like C. S. Lewis' *Narnia* tales, a set of seven novels is actually meant for children. The tales set in an imaginary fantasy land with lots of adventures will careen to children, but the Christian and Biblical background within which the tales are placed will thoroughly confuse the child. A Christian child may be able to understand part of the background, but a student of theology or a child who knows his Bible well and believes in it will enjoy the *Narnia* books more than any other reader. Thus the actual readers of the *Narnia* series and the implied readers are very different. The implied reader of a book depends a lot on the narrative technique the author uses, the language, the imagery, the references and the allusions. The tone that authors use in children's

books is:

‘clear, uncluttered, unobtrusive, not very demanding linguistically, and which sets up a sense of intimate yet adult-controlled relationship’ between the author and his implied reader.

(Chamber 96)

The emphasis from the text shifts to the child reader invariably. The child reader as the final arbiter about the quality of the book is generally accepted and a theory giving precedence to child response has found favour in the contemporary book scene for children. The child reader brings certain expectations to the texts and the process of reading becomes a literary transaction. Researchers like Louisa Rosenblatt have broadly identified two types of readership. The first type, the aesthetic reader, who enjoys the reading experience for itself, lingers pleasurably over the feelings and attitudes generated by the reading process. Whether a Nancy Drew or Shakespeare, the reader is not activated merely by the mechanical impulse of curiosity but by the “pleasurable activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself” (Rosenblatt 8). The non-aesthetic reader, on the other hand, indulges in efferent reading and by disengaging himself from the qualitative elements in his response, is

only interested in the information acquired. Children should be encouraged to direct their attention to the qualitative responses going on during the processes of reading itself in order to be aesthetic or discerning readers.

The implied reader can be manipulated by emphasizing the child as protagonist and by depicting that child as an ordinary child, easily befriended by the child reader. This rapport is further enhanced creating a fissure between the adult characters and the child protagonists and by portraying adult authority with negative connotations as in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* when Oliver Twist asks for more. Oliver wins the reader's sympathy when the authority outraged at this request, reprimand him. The treatment meted out to Oliver succeeds in arousing pity for Oliver Twist by manipulating the reader through his emotions. Most authors ambivalently leave many things unsaid, and it is up to the reader to analyse the meaning, but an American child's life will perplex children from other countries, especially the Indian; for the language, theme, lifestyles and the like are very puzzling and even bizarre to the child. Sometimes the wild imagination of the author confuses or even frightens the reader as in Grimm's *Brother's Hans and Gretel*, where Hans and Gretel can not even trust their father and step-mother and have to outwit

the wicked witch.

The above mentioned concepts should be weighed duly to determine the reader or the intended audience. The implied reader is most often the actual reader, yet at the same time it is rather difficult to categorize books as books for adults, and books for children. To quote C. S. Lewis:

The neat sorting-out of books into age groups, so dear to publishers, has only a very sketchy relation with the habits of any real readers [. . .] No reader worth his salt trots along in obedience to a time table.

(On Three Ways, 28)

Children read fiction meant for children as well as for adults and many an adult enjoys both children's books and adult's books. Children's books ostensibly simpler and a more comprehensible world of events are in tandem with a lot of adult books. According to Tucker, all literature is always seen, "with a pattern of events that is in itself more comprehensible than the jumble of happenings that seem to make up real life" (*The Child*, 10). A book can be classified as a book only for children when it caters to the very small children, but, these arousing nostalgic feelings are enjoyed by adults too. Myles McDowell says that

“a child’s book is one a child can enter and needs no other guide than the author” (156). Many critics have pondered and enumerated the differences between children’s literature and adult literature, a controversial subject provoking many theories and views, and the most acceptable is that of P. L. Stevenson, who remarks while writing *Treasure Island* (1883): “It’s awful fun, boy’s stories. You just indulge the pleasure of your heart, that’s all; no trouble, no strain [. . .]”(qtd. in Townsend, *Written for Children*, 45). These words were echoed by Arthur Ransome fifty four years later when he said “you write not for children but for yourself, and if, be good fortune, children enjoy what you enjoy, why then you are a writer of children’s books [. . .] (qtd in Hunt, *Children’s Literature* 34).

The Different Themes in Children’s Literature

Making statements about ‘Writing for Children’ is a favourite pastime of writers for children, giving rise to a complexity of themes, though earlier on mere surveys completely dominated by the author’s inclinations successfully thrived creating a canon for children’s literature, which persisted into recent years. Ignoring social and political implications, these critics advocated the presentation of traditional values, giving rise to books which were mainly didactic. With the

emergence and development of literary theories, criticism of children's books also underwent vigorous changes. Following the norms advocated in adult books, various theories were implemented on the so called children's books resulting in multifarious interpretations.

Most authors endeavoured to combine healthy moral lessons with a sufficient amount of exciting interest to render the story attractive to the young, hoping all the while, that the form was not disproportionate; the right proportion being crucial to the success of these influential books.

It is deciphered that books that find a place in the canon of children's literature do so, on the basis of two criteria, roughly. The first being literary, inculcating aesthetic pleasure. The second aspect, on the other hand, is educational. Most books propagate certain accepted beliefs and values passed on from one generation to the other, so do the canon of children's literature. The adult authors instill values in children which they believe imminent for their development as disciplined individuals. These books teach their readers obedience, inculcate respect for the adult's world and emphasize and give due consideration to the adult's advice and views. The canon of children's literature at any particular time helps to propagate ideas acceptable to the contemporary society as

well as for all time. Most mainstream children's books dogged the adult market as it developed in its many layered variety. If boys were eager to read lurid adventure novels produced for a non-genteel adult readership, then genteel writers would learn to write exciting adventure tales more in harmony with the middle class values. If domestic novels attracted enormous audiences among literate middle class women, then surely the domestic tales could be adapted to serve the reading taste of middle class girls.

Books for children underwent a lot of changes from adventure books in the early nineties, to the fairy tales in the nineteen eighties, and to the recent type of fiction in which a one-sided view is clearly presented, which is usually bourgeois, middle or upper middle class and a typical Western society. Values such as honesty, generosity, sense of dignity, justice, and fair play with a lot of hope and optimism were endorsed through these books, featuring White children, in a clean, comfortable and happy world. Even in the bleakest of worlds, a change for the better is endorsed as portrayed in J. K. Rowling's formulaic novels where each novel ends with a sense of optimism and justice which caters to children's emotions.

The class bias in children's books is convincingly portrayed by

excluding all classes except the middle class. The banalities of commonplace concepts of the working class were redeemed to a certain extent. Treated with refinement, they were the privileged devoted servants. Visibly invisible in children's literature is the friction and misunderstanding in families. Perfect families were the tone of the day; unemployment, divorce, separations and death were among other concerns conspicuously unseen in these books. Harry Potter in Rowling's novels strongly endorses today's culture, relegated, neglected, ill-treated and over worked by his aunt, uncle and cousin, confronted by his enemies in his fight against evil and injustice. The last novel relates a change in his uncle, aunt and cousin.

The sexist bias in children's books, clearly portrayed in many novels, with only supportive roles for girls, has aroused the ire of many feminists. But, a novel for girls, elaborated them in two ways; either completely feminine or as tomboys revolting against the restraints imposed upon them by tradition and society. Juxtaposing these two stereotypes within a single book as friends, sisters or classmates was the usual custom; as Anne and George in the *Famous Five* books by Enid Blyton, and the sisters Meg and Jo March in *Little Women*. In the above pairs, the former epitomizes femininity with all paraphernalia of good

qualities associated with it, which the latter despises in the initial stages and then ardently aspires to. The tomboyish ways are discarded with the development of the text and the tomboy heroines conform to society.

This kind of confinement and structuring took place in most children's books and provided a child with his or her initial concepts of 'feminine' roles, games and attitudes. They helped, according to May Hill

Arbuthnot, in determining:

His consequent willingness or unwillingness to accept his own sex. Books such as *Caddie Woollaun* can help in this necessary process of growing up, for today Caddie, despite her love of boy's games and adventures, gradually learns to appreciate her woman's role.

(qtd. in Townsend, *Written for Children*, 169)

In the world of children's literature today, the most dominant critics are those that preach subversion. The studies of children's literature earlier, completely dominated by the author's likes, dislikes and inclinations were more like surveys of the whole tradition of children's literature, usually with semi-biographical, semi-critical and semi-historical views. The critics that preach subversions are usually feminists, Marxists etc. who for different reasons find C. S. Lewis

Narnia series, Enid Blyton's *Noddy* books and many others objectionable leading to books being edited and rewritten now-a-days just as fairy tales were edited and rewritten in Dicken's time. Enid Blyton's *Noddy* texts were revised and rewritten in the 1980s because of the implied values and the power structure that it perpetuated. But if one considers all discourses, one can see that all discourse is connected to power. Whenever objections are raised, whatever be the subject, the objections are raised only for power. Empowerment of any group and of any kind is always at the expense of another group.

Propagation of oppressive power structures and political agendas through children's books would corrupt the minds of children. But now-a-days only a very small part of a child's world is associated with books, if at all books do have any influence on a child. In today's widespread canvas, with its variegated influence on a child, the impact of books, be it a book of racism or sex, has negligible effect on a child. Thus to edit and rewrite out of all recognition is injustice both to the author and reader. The author has the right to write what he/she feels and the reader should have the freedom to read what he/she wants and to interpret it to his/her liking and to adopt his/her viewpoints. Today's critics find a lot to object to, in the books of the past, and future generation critics may

also find a lot that is objectionable in the books of today. It is understood that perspectives change as time and life style change.

Literature does not deal with illusions only but with lasting truths too. It depicts life in a universal way, with the reins of power in the adults, even though it is children's literature. Thus, the schooling, their psychology and their upbringing are completely under the control of adults, for if children are left alone to decide for themselves what is good for them; they might become evil and violent as depicted in Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*. That children are capable and independent is true, but the freedom to live according to their whims and fancies with no control or restrictions over them will lead to absolute chaos and confusion. Most children will be happy to live on junk food, watch the idiot box, play video games all the time neglecting studies which will naturally result in a world of obese, lethargic and short-sighted children, an already fast increasing set. As depicted in *The Lord of the Flies*, sometimes children can become cruel and destructive too without the supervision and control of adults. In spite of the criticism by feminist critics, Marxist critics, Post-colonial critics, children's literature has continued to be published without any restriction due to the belief that children's literature and its criticism is one of the basic tools by which

dominant ideologies were transmitted and endorsed so as to make them self-perpetuating.

The world of children and their literature is a world of reality and fantasy juxtaposed; a magic kingdom, completely devoid of the obvious control of adults or a world with the control of adults. It communicated various ideologies and values which should be taken into consideration. But children's literature should also be looked into as a source of pleasure and knowledge. Peter Hunt wrote that children's literature should be studied

[. . .] because it is important, and because it is fun – children's books have, and have had, great social and educational influence; they are important both politically and commercially. From a historical point of view children's books are a valuable contribution to social, literacy and bibliographical history: from a contemporary point of view, they are vital to literacy and culture [. . .]

(Criticism, 17)

Figures of authority especially teachers and parents in general would agree that the reading of stories is a desirable thing with children. The days when public libraries used to curtail fiction tickets in relation to

non-fiction are over, and the condemnations once heard about the bad effects of novels on impressionable readers are now mostly reserved for certain television programmes. But I wonder how many adults, if pressed, could actively justify story-telling and reading, beyond negative reasons such as keeping children out of mischief or improving reading ability? If a more positive case for fiction is never realized, the whole children's literature movement can risk looking rather precious – an unnecessary fuss about a pleasant but otherwise trivial side of childhood.

Literature and Reading Skills

A study reveals the importance of literature, linking reading with other verbal skills and as an essential extension of any child's immediate experience. Yet it must be admitted that there are certain children and adults, otherwise normal and well-adjusted individuals who never read fiction and would be unhappy if required to do so. Experiences are possible from literature, but there is never any absolute guarantee that any reader will arrive at any of these. When researchers have attempted to assess readers' reactions to particular books, the results have been very inconsistent. But whatever the result, one must never forget the different personality each reader induces into the book, sometimes making all the difference between an exciting literary experience and

something that simply refuses to come alive. 'Why some perfectly literate individuals are uninterested in books' is an interesting but an unanswered question at the moment. But it is one that anyone interested in children's literature would do well to heed; trying to force books on to an able but reluctant reader can be a very short-sighted policy. Given that children have the right to read books for their own pleasure, or not to do so if they don't feel like it.

On accepting the power of fiction for those able to receive it, is the children's book a latter frail vessel in which to invest too much expectation. Do literary experiences really matter very much before maturity and access to adult literature? The best children's books, although harmless in themselves, are straight forward forms of escape, necessarily lacking any real power of irony, or artistic complexity. All right for children perhaps, but adults who persist in reading these limited, inevitably over-simplified works for their own sake are metaphorically thumb sucking, and shirking their intellectual responsibilities. Yet there is a great attraction towards fairy tales no matter what the age. Thus it can be assumed that the adult is not singular in entertaining a very great tenderness for the fairy literature of one's childhood.

Many adults feel that they are, to some extent, mini-experts on children's literature, simply because of the almost unavoidable contact in books and comics experienced when young. In this way, children's literature, unlike some other topics, is fortunate, and can depend upon an initially interested response. But this sort of popular expertise has its limitations as new writers will have sprouted, others withered during the interval of growing up, and generalizations based on such memories may arise from narrow experience and unfocused recollections at that.

Everyone has a right to his own nostalgia, of course, and memories of children's books may quite naturally be as pleasantly self-indulgent as any other childhood recall.

Good children's books, both ancient and modern, in different genres deserve notice from child and adult alike. If potentially bookish children never get near such works, and if the adults around them persist in, out of date, patronizing attitudes towards children's literature, this may result in a lost opportunity that is regrettable. Assumptions of children's literature are difficult for, literature may almost always be something of the above. Injustice would be predominant to make assumptions of individuals who feel this, whether children or adults.

Every child could at least be offered the opportunity to discover whether

he is going to enjoy literature or not. By far, the best way to recommend a book is from personal experience, of the interest, excitement or whatever else one is then trying to bring to other readers. But, with the advent of J. K. Rowling, reading, especially fantasy literature, has become the rage of the day. Rowling and Carroll are both writers, who have captivated their wide range of readers. In his time, Carroll was a refreshing change to the didactic form that was in vogue at that time. He reinstated a new interest and a new concept to writing for literature. Rowling, imbibing the past and the present, inculcating values affected a new concept to reading and to fantasy too. She has reinvigorated fantasy in a new cloth.

The introduction has already stated the sequence of arguments. The first chapter can be seen as of a prefatory nature. The novelists under study are first placed in the pattern of fantasy literature and then studied individually in detail, but on a general plane. The analysis of the particular perspective in Rowling and Carroll as fantasy as well as children's literature and the strategies employed by both of them is the focal point of the study. The depiction of fantasy literature as a genre in children's literature and its integrants form the thematic contents of the next chapter.