

Not for Children Only: Children's Literature and the Academy

Judith Plotz

By arrangement with The Book Review

EVEN though the late twentieth century has been described as a time of "the disappearance of childhood" (to quote Neil Postman), when the injunction "Save Childhood" is painted on almost every wall in Delhi, this is also a period of rapidly increasing scholarly attention to children's literature.

The past twenty years have seen, especially in the US, the recognition of Children's Literature as an adult academic discipline. Until recently, the study of children's literature existed only on the margins of scholarship. According to Montesquieu's wry 18th-century observation, everything having to do with children has something plebeian about it. Caring for children was held to declass, and socially sink the caretaker. Children's authors from Perrault on down claimed apologetically to be telling no more than "Old Wives Tales," or "Tales of Old Mother Goose." From its beginnings in the 18th-century, children's literature was womanly, gendered for humility; it was woman's place to amuse and instruct the young. When quixotic Thomas Day, for example, wrote his Rousseauvian *Sandford and Merton* (1788), his contemporaries regarded this rich man's incursion into children's literature as pure self-effacing philanthropy; why else would a serious man work in realms so unrewarded and unhonoured? From Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth, and Barbauld in the 18th century to Ewing, Yonge, Alcott and Burnett in the 19th, down through Wilder and Blyton in the 20th, women writers have dominated the form. (But like Brer Rabbit in the briar patch, these women authors had considerable room within children's text to fashion tough-minded and uppity feminist critiques of prevailing patriarchy.) Henry James expressed the prevailing hierarchy of art by deriding "lady" writers "romping through the ruins of the Language" in their attempt to "provide a special literature for women and children, to provide books which grown women may read aloud to children without either party being bored." Peter Hunt, a British scholar, is currently writing a book to be titled *The Curious Critical History of Children's Literature*, a history he finds marked by ridicule, derision, contempt, and institutional resistance.

Despite Hunt's sense of a curious and humble history, Children's Literature now

shows signs in the west of official certification and institutionalization. There are forty periodicals and annuals published in English in North America and the UK; there are about ten others in French and German published in Europe. Chief among these are *Children's Literature* (Yale University Press) and *Lion and the Unicorn* (Johns Hopkins University Press), and (notable for its annual bibliography) *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. There are about a dozen organizations concerned with scholarships in children's literature. In addition to the well-known international IBBY (International Board of Books for Young People), the two most active are the largely European International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSC), and the largely North American Children's Literature Association. Publications are proliferating in the field, as are academic programmes devoted to the subject. In 1994 (according to the listing in *Children's Literature Abstracts*) there were approximately 1300 articles and 200 books published on children's literature subjects, mostly in English. Approximately 45 American doctoral dissertations appear annually in the field. Degree programmes offering MAs or PhDs in children's literature explicitly are already in place at Illinois State University, Hollins College, Simmons College, Eastern Michigan College, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte; and other programmes are in the works. Aside from graduate degrees in children's literature, about 60-66% of American colleges offer undergraduate or graduate courses in children's literature. In addition to academic programmes, there are 47 special collections in North America and the UK, offering tremendous opportunities for new scholarship. Especially noteworthy archives are the great Center for the Child and the Book at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC; the UCLA Children's Literature Collection in Los Angeles; and the Kerlan Collection at the University of Minnesota.

Because the practitioners of a new discipline are generally concerned with questions of self-definition, much of the work in children's literature scholarship today is self-reflexive. Because children's literature is a new discipline, albeit one born in an anti-canonical age, the new scholarship is still at the chart-making, information

gathering stage with an increasing need for the reference apparatus that makes research possible and a discipline respectable: reference works, editions, encyclopedias still remain to be written or rewritten. *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* marked a good beginning, but the meticulous scholarship of Brian Alderson is expected to produce a more encyclopedic and accurate volume within the next few years. The Modern Language Association has published a useful volume, *Teaching Children's Literature: Issues, Pedagogy, Resources* (1992). Gale Publishing Co is putting out a multi-volumed project containing critical/bibliographical/essays on almost all English and American children's writers from the mid-17th century until the present. The Twayne series on major writers is being expanded to include a number of children's writers. The Children's Literature Association has two canon establishment projects: Touchstones critical essays on classic texts and, just undertaken through the international caucus under the leadership of William Moebius of U. Mass-Amherst), a new translation project for world classics.

Part of the marking out of Children's Literature as a new discipline is a new tendency towards overreaching its traditional borders. A preoccupation of the last five years has been breaking down what UC Knoepfelmacher calls the "segregation of adult and child" texts. Knoepfelmacher has done interesting work on the double adult/child persona in Kipling and on the "balancing of adult and child" in 19th-century fantasy, while Juliet Dusinberre's exemplary book *Alice to the Lighthouse* charts the contribution of Victorian children's fantasy, notably Lewis Carroll, to the making of high modernism. (This is a rich vein, still to be explored. Behind *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, for example, lies Lawrence's protesting and indignant reading in the works of Frances Hodgson Burnett.) Such work as Perry Nodelman's sophisticated account of picture books, *Words about Pictures* goes far to explain the cultural power and diffusion of such children's artists as Dr Seuss and Maurice Sendak and also the evolution of the adult comic book, most fully exemplified in Art Spiegelman's icily brilliant *Maus* and *Maus II*.

Another sign of a discipline in progress is the self-reflexivity, self-theorizing

about what kind of knowledge you produce. Peter Hunt has begun the conversation with his *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* and promises to continue it with his work on the fashioning of the discipline. The most self-conscious discussion to date, however, has circled around the identity-crisis question: the question of genre. As Perry Nodelman has noted:

Children's literature is not just literature written to children in mind, nor is it just literature that happens to be read by children. It is a genre, a special kind of literature with its own identifying characteristics. Identifying those characteristics and defining that genre are the major tasks immediately confronting serious critics (1981).

In the past ten years, most serious critics have been trying to solve the genre question. Though the genre question remains open, most critics would agree on most of the following, (most of which are elegantly discussed in Nodelman's *Pleasures of Children's Literature*. Compared to other literature, Children's Literature is simple, action-based, repetitious. It focuses on childhood from the point of view of a child, though of course it may center on animals, toys, extraterrestrials or other child-equivalents. It is the literature of hope and often therefore of fantasy; the formal correlative of hope is the tendency towards resolution, happy endings, aesthetic completion. As in Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, those interesting allegories of the genre, evils such as sickness, terror, and cruelty are viewed from the standpoint of innocence and hope (e.g. Anne Frank's "I still believe after all that people are really good"). If the fantastic idyllic element is characteristic so too is the didactic/moralistic element. Most crucial, however, to the genre of Children's Literature is this doubleness. As "the only literary category that defines an audience rather than a subject or an author" (Roger Sale), Children's Literature (almost always written by adults for children) has been usually defined in terms of a dual perspective. Discussions of genre thus sometimes involve discussions of childhood vs. adult modes of reception — there has been wonderful work done in this area by Vivian Paley (*Wally's Stories: Conversation in the Kindergarten*) and Gareth Mathew's *Philosophy and the Young Child*). Often too these discussions invoke some kind of

binary battle or play of contrary states (as in Jacqueline Rose's influential adversarial combat of constructed child and constructing adult in *The Case of Peter Pan: or, The Impossibility of Children's Literature*.) The doubleness of children's literature explains, though it does not resolve, the habitual see-sawing in children's literature, noted by Nodelman and others, between a pedagogic/moral drive to turn children into mature adults and the idyllic impulse to preserve children in their energy and imagination.

This discussion of genre definition brings to the fore the disciplinary issue — also political — of representation: Who speaks for the children? What is or should be the relation of this discipline called Children's Literature Studies to living children? Most of the interesting work done in Children's Literature Studies today links in one way or another to this necessary question. There are two reasons, I believe, for the current concern with representation. First of all, Edward Said's *Orientalism* has provided an almost irresistible paradigm for inquiry into the many spheres in which one group (the West, the metropolitan, the male, the white, the elite, or the adult) represents itself as speaking for a speechless, inarticulate other group. As applied to adults writing about childhood, Said's paradigm suggests that the very discourse of children's literature scholarship works to idealize, denature, disempower, and silence children. But there's a second reason for concern with representation. In the United States at any rate, the fact of epidemic child abuse, child poverty, child homelessness suggests children as a population at risk, as population which needs all the help, all the spokespersons it can find. The issue of representation is being played out among the critics of children's literature in America today as a reenactment of the old debate between the protectors and the empowerers, the didactic moralists and the imaginative liberationists. On the one hand, there is a substantial body of writing informed by a sense of children as socially at risk. Some of this writing is psychological, even therapeutic, in emphasis (Bettelheim on fairy tales or Prancella Butler on the literature of survival), but much of the best of it is wide-ranging cultural critique. For example, Jack Zipes' work on

Continued on page 11

Another 'wonder' drink

asian diary BY ARJUNA



Do you want to stay young, beautiful and healthy? Come to Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, where a cold concoction, now a craze of the town, awaits you.

Called Kombucha, it is a mixture of black tea, honey and a mushroom-like culture made from yeasts and bacteria.

Kombucha, also known as Manchurian tea, is believed to have existed in Russia and Asia as a natural health beverage. In China, experts say, the drink was an ancient folk remedy popular around 200 BC.

The diseases that the tea is supposed to cure are many, ranging from cancer and AIDS to skin disorders. It is also reportedly effective in curing baldness and the elimination of wrinkles.

Today, hundreds of people in Thimphu have begun to culture the drink in their homes. Many are already swearing by its miraculous healing qualities.

"It is an all-purpose drink," says Aum Sonam, who got the mushroom from an Indian friend. "Within a few days of drinking, the tea shows definite results."

She adds: "I feel much lighter and a constant pain which used to be there in my ankle has subsided. I have also been freed of my problem of athlete's foot and feel

an overall sense of well-being."

Another user, Aum Lhamu, who got the mushroom recently, says the chest pain and boils suffered from disappeared after she started taking the drink.

The list of people, both young and old, and their reasons for taking the tea is endless. One woman, for instance, takes it to ease her menopausal problems. An air hostess drinks it to cure her bad eyesight, while another to escape wrinkles. One old man is trying it for his arthritis.

While the exact reasons for the resurgence of the tea, which drinkers say tastes like apple cider, remain unclear, two factors contribute to its rapid spread:

* The mushroom regenerates a baby mushroom every week;

* Promoters of the drink maintain that the baby mushroom must be given free to other people if one is to derive its benefits.

This way, every week, another person gets the baby mushroom and keeps passing it on to her offspring.

Aum Sonam has been giving the mushroom to friends and relatives who, in turn, do the same down the line.

So far, all who have taken the yeast bread say it has helped them overcome problems like high blood

pressure, sinus and bad skin. To be sure, there are some who have expressed scepticism. There is no scientific basis to support the "wonders" that people claim the tea is capable of, many of them say.

The Food and Drug Administration of the USA is reportedly studying the drink. It has been one of the most talked about drinks in some parts of the USA.

Many who have drunk the tea say they notice no change in themselves. Some even suspect an ulterior motive behind the sudden emergence and spread of the drink.

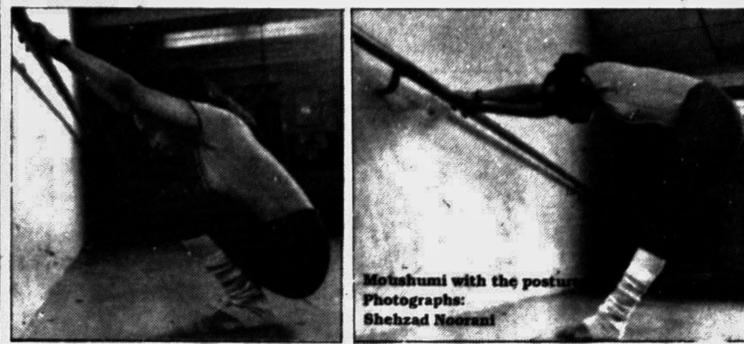
Aum Lhamu has given a sample of the yeast bread to Dr Paolo Morricco, of the National Institute of Traditional Medicine, Thimphu, for testing.

Dr Morricco is, however, not sold on the medicinal prowess of Kombucha. "Yeast was definitely used in the past medically and industrially. Its richness in vitamins is capable of helping the intestinal system of the body to adapt to its different requirements, but it's definitely not a miracle drink," he says.

Dorji Wangchuk, a science graduate, feels the drink is being promoted in the East so that any long-run effects will be made visible before the West fully resorts to the drink. — *Depthnews Asia*

fitness royale

with rani padamsee



Motsumi with the posture Photographs: Shehzad Noorani

GOOD exercise means first learning about good posture: There is a growing feeling among exercisers and those who closely study the working of the body, that posture plays far more vital role in our general well-being than we once thought. But these days, correct posture means far more than walking in a straight line balancing several hefty books on your head without dropping them. This is the old-fashioned idea of how to succeed in walking with elegant grace.

In reality, there is little point in standing rigidly

erect and looking elegant and graceful if your bones, joints and muscles aren't correctly aligned in the first place. Posture means a whole lot more than how you hold yourself when standing around at a party.

These days most of us can rarely incorporate sufficient bodily movement in our daily lives. Tilling the land in order to earn our daily bread is a task of the past. Instead in the modern world, most of us spend eight hours or more a day sitting hunched in an office, driving around in a car; perpetually bent double to attend small children or turning knobs and buttons in

order to operate some kind of automated machinery. Because we are now geared to labour saving devices — both at work and in the home, this means our bodies do far less physical work. It is not easy to re-educate the body into correct posture.

A) With arms stretched out on barre (can use chair, window-sill, table etc) stand about 8 inches away from the wall and relax down to crouching position. Hold for 10 counts. Breathe normal.

B) Stretch legs with knees tight and, keep head down hold for 10 counts. Repeat at your convenience.

BOOK REVIEW

Arab Adonais in English Abbey

Shapta Jhulanta Gitikai Romanticism (Romanticism and the Seven Odes of Pre-Islamic Age)

By Iqbal Shailo Shabujpata Prakashani, 117 Pages Taka 33/- (White) and 23/- (Paperback)

THE pre-Islamic Arabian love for Nature and the post-French Revolution English attitude towards Nature as manifested in literature are not similar. The revolution in France, which was basically a people-centred one, inspired the English Romantics to become nature-lovers. This was possible, because most Englishmen lived in the countryside. On the other hand, almost 1500 years ago in pagan Arabia, there was no dearth of natural beauty in the deserts of Arabia. According to historians, the pre-Islamic Arab society was, in some ways, close to the Classical Age of ancient Greece and Rome where love (for the beloved), feudalism, monarchy and war were dominant.

Iqbal Shailo has tried to prove that there exists a remarkable link between these two ages of two different countries. He has elaborated on how some of the English Romantic poets were influenced by the works of the ancient Arabs. But Shailo, a development journalist by profession, doesn't forget to depict that identical literary trends vary between two different countries of two different times.

Shapta Jhulanta begins with a definition of English Romanticism by elaborating the salient features of the Age's stalwarts like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Byron. As the book was basically written for students of Arabic Literature, this elaboration of

English Romanticism was very necessary. And to this extent, the writer is successful; that his book is taught at Arabic departments in all the universities of Bangladesh.

There is one factor which may make the book a bit difficult for an Arabic student to understand. That is the brevity of the book.

It seems that Shailo really didn't realise that *Shapta Jhulanta* would interest readers who are inclined to go through more hermeneutic study. For the students of Arabic literature, he should have been more elaborate, and explained the literary terms of English literature with more clarity.

For example: A 'quasida' would be an easier term for them to grasp than an 'ode' — and same is the case with 'willing suspension of disbelief' and 'Aashiru Di'wanul Arbi'.

The second chapter is very interesting because, though precise, it gives a clear-cut outline of the Heroic Age in Arabic literature. The Age Shailo covers was extended to 822 AD from 400 AD and the seven odes he mentions and discusses are the *Aas-s'abul Muallaqat* or *Shapta Jhulanta Gitikai* poets. *Muallaqat* means 'hanging'. The poems of these seven poets were written on very expensive Egyptian cloth and were kept hanging at the Quaba, now the most holy place for the Muslims.

Well, the Quaba was always holy for the Arabs, even



when they were pagan and divided into many different tribes. At that time — pre-Islamic era — the Arabs used to believe that poets had supernatural powers like the God himself, though they didn't believe in one God. But according to the historians — and of course, Shailo — they very much believed in Satan and held him to be more powerful than any of their gods.

More interestingly, they thought the poets to be guided by Satan and could solve all the social or individual problems. So, they held the poets in the highest esteem, thereby hanging their stanzas at the Quaba. Shailo quotes a thought-provoking

paragraph from Phillip K Hitti's *The History of the Arabs*: "The Arabian poet (shair), as the name indicates, was originally one endowed with knowledge hidden from the common man which knowledge the received from a demon, his special *shaytan* (Satan). As poet, he was in league with the unseen powers and could by his curses bring evil the enemy."

Iqbal Shailo in his *Seven Odes*, discussed mainly seven leading and significant poets whose impact on the British Romantics according to him, was telling in later centuries. The Arab bards are, Imrul Quayas, Tarfah Bin Abdul Bikri, Zuhair Bin Aabi Salma, Labid Bin Labia, Amre Bin Qulsum, Aantarah Bin Suddad and Haris Bin Hillizah.

There were the poets who fought battles side by side with others, their hearts burnt with passion to make love with their beloveds, admired people's simple way of living, talked of humanity, and last of all, like the modern-day individuals, felt the pinch of human loneliness that tormented them.

There has been considerable research on the works of these poets both in the West and East, but the "nothing-has-happened" attitude of the critics towards the romantic elements, in their poetry is surprising. It is hoped Shailo's *Gitika* will fill up this gap.

Reviewed by Ekram Kabir

DEPARTMENT of International Relations continues its publication of *Journal of International Relations* whose current issue is now in the reader's hand. This issue contains five different types of articles on national and international concerns.

Asheqra Irshad informs us about the latest military development and security dilemma of the South Asian states in her article entitled, "Military Build-up and security in South Asia". She refers to the formidable military growth in South Asia explaining each country's position in the region along with necessary facts and figures. India and Pakistan are the two main actors in South Asian arms race track. One fundamental question is raised in the article: despite their poverty how far would the militarization of South Asian states contribute to their security? The article stresses on the importance of disarmament and development policy for the poverty stricken people of the region.

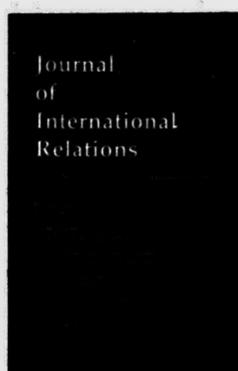
Foreign aid is always a burning issue in development politics. The theoretical characteristics of aid debate has changed in the post-Cold War era. Meghna Guhathakurta reviews the contemporary theoretical debates on aid and their impact on Bangladesh in her article entitled, "The Morning After: The Aid Debate at a Crossroads". She briefly explains and criticizes six different theories of aid literature. The impact of development aid in Bangladesh is immense. It has obstructed indigenous development processes and imposed a chronic dependency situation. Successive regimes in Bangladesh pursue aid policy to control the development processes. She presents some important and

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Interesting statistics, "Only 25.08% of foreign aid funds is spent in Bangladesh." Of the amount, "Indentors receive 11.6%, consultants receive 3.23% constructors receive 2.03% while engineers and bureaucrats receive 10.57% as bribes and pay-offs." The author expounds the current aid debate from a radical point of view and reveals the donors vision and recipients policy formulation and finally proposes to start a more general debate on development aid in Bangladesh.

uz Zaman in his article entitled, "Is Structural Adjustment a Sufficient Condition for Private Foreign and Domestic Investment?" evaluates the effectiveness and consequences of structural adjustment policy from Bangladesh's perspective.

To attract private foreign and domestic investment in Bangladesh various structural adjustment programmes have been adopted in the industrial policies during 1982-1991 by the prescription of World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The author identifies eight important factors to take into account in formulating structural adjustment programmes in Bangladesh. Ruksana Kibria in her article entitled, "US Foreign Policy Between 1919-1941: How isolationist was it?" critically discusses the United States foreign policy from the Treaty of Versailles to the Japanese attack on the Pearl Harbour. She presents strong arguments against the orthodoxy of American historiography's postulation that the United States pursued an isolationist foreign policy during the mentioned period. Foreign trade, overseas investment, international Banking and other inter-state transaction and interactions was increased during this period

than previous time. The United States participation of the Washington Disarmament Conference, 1921, the tactical refusal to ratify the Permanent Court of International Justice, the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 and many other activities proved that the United States foreign policy between 1919-1941 was not isolationist. But the great depression of early 1930s compelled United States to give attention to domestic problems. In the Manchurian crisis the United States was interested in protecting its financiers and businessmen and remained active against Japanese aggression and the rise of Hitler. Considerable increase in military budget during this period indicates "the participating character of United States foreign policy."

The last article of this issue, "Palestinian-Israeli Conflict after the Oslo Process: Changes and Continuity" by Delwar Hossain explores the genesis of the Peace Accord. He emphasizes on the subsequent happenings and development in the post-Oslo phase.

The signing of the Declaration of Principle (DOP) in September 1993 was followed by the Hebron Massacre and frequent attacks of the extremist Palestinian organizations. The author explains issues which is affecting contemporary Middle East diplomacy and peace process and briefly indicates some important factors which could help in settling the historic problems in this concluding remarks. He also adds the text of the DOP in appendix of the article which is obviously a valuable document for the readers.

Badrul Hassan