

FRENCH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FOR 'THE CHILDREN OF THE VIDEOSPHERE'

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Abstract: What characterises children's publishing in France at this time of a uniform worldwide culture imposed in a positive fashion by the 1989 Declaration of Children's Rights and, more dubiously, by globalization and electronic reproduction? Can we speak of the influence on it of a new multinational republic of children through the increasing number of translations from other countries or does French children's literature rest only on a few successful classics such as Jean de Brunhoff's Babar or Charles Perrault's tales, among which Little Red Riding Hood is a world's bestseller? The purpose of this paper is to point out the contemporary literary trends evincing a new awareness of our writers, artist creators and publishing houses expressing the sensibility of our reading public.

Key words: illusion, imagination, literacy, play, pleasure, publishing, surprise

French résumé. [Translation Laurence Pasa].

Qu'est-ce qui caractérise la littérature de jeunesse en France à notre époque où une culture mondiale uniforme a été imposée de façon positive par la Déclaration en 1989 des Droits de l'enfant et, de façon plus contestable, par la globalisation et la reproduction électronique? Pouvons-nous parler de l'influence sur celle-ci d'une nouvelle république multinationale des enfants du fait du nombre croissant des traductions étrangères ou la littérature des enfants français repose-t-elle uniquement sur quelques classiques de qualité, comme le Babar de Jean de Brunhoff's ou les Contes de Charles Perrault, dont Le petit Chaperon Rouge est un best-seller mondial? Le but de cette contribution est d'identifier les tendances littéraires contemporaines qui révèlent une nouvelle conscience de nos auteurs, créateurs, artistes et maisons d'édition, expression de la sensibilité de notre jeune public.

5

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Portuguese resumo. [Translation Paulo Feytor-Pinto]

O que é que caracteriza a edição para crianças, em França, neste momento de cultura uniforme em todo o mundo positivamente imposta pela Declaração dos Direitos da Criança (1989) e, de forma mais duvidosa, pela globalização e pela reprodução electrónica? Poderemos falar da influência de uma nova república multinacional de crianças através do crescente número de traduções de outros países ou a literatura infantil francesa baseia-se nalguns poucos clássicos como o elefante Babar, de Jean de Brunhoff, ou os contos de Charles Perrault de onde se destaca o sucesso mundial do Capuchinho Vermelho? O objectivo deste texto é realçar as tendências literárias contemporâneas que colocam em evidência uma nova consciência dos nossos escritores, artistas, criadores e editores que exprime a sensibilidade do nosso público leitor.

Polish. Streszczenie [Translation Elzbieta Awramiuk].

Co charakteryzuje adresowane do dzieci wydawnictwa publikowane we Francji dziś, w świecie zunifikowanej kultury, a wymuszone w pozytywny sposób przez Deklarację Praw Dziecka (1989) oraz, w sposób bardziej podejrzany, przez globalizację i elektroniczne reprodukowanie? Czy możemy mówić o wpływie na to nowej wielonarodowej republiki dziecięcej poprzez wzrastającą liczbę przekładów z innych krajów, czy francuska dziecięca literatura opiera się jedynie na kilku popularnych arcydziełach, takich jak "**Babar**" Jeana de Brunhoff lub bajki Charlesa Perrault, wśród których "Czerwony Kapturek" jest światowym bestsellerem? Celem tego artykułu jest wskazanie współczesnych trendów w literaturze świadczących o nowej świadomości naszych pisarzy, artystów i wydawnictw wyrażających wrażliwość naszej czytającej społeczności.

Greek. Περίληψη. [Translation Panatoya Papoulia-Tzelepi]

Τι χαρακτηρίζει τις εκδόσεις για παιδιά στη Γαλλία στον καιρό της ομοιόμορφης παγκόσμιας κουλτούρας, που επιβλήθηκε με θετικό τρόπο από τη Διακήρυξη για τα Δικαιώματα του Παιδιού (1989) και, πιο ύποπτα, από την παγκοσμιοποίηση και την ηλεκτρονική αναπαραγωγή; Είναι δυνατόν να μιλάμε για την επίδραση σε αυτή μιας νέας, πολυεθνικής δημοκρατίας των παιδιών, μέσω της αύξησης των μεταφραζόμενων βιβλίων από άλλες χώρες, ή η λογοτεχνία για παιδιά στη Γαλλία παραμένει σε λίγα επιτυχημένα κλασικά όπως ο Μπαμπάρ του Ζαν ντε Μπρινόφ, ή τα παραμύθια του Περώ, ανάμεσα στα οποία η Κοκκινোসκουφίτσα είναι παγκόσμια επιτυχία; Ο στόχος αυτού του άρθρου είναι να δείξει τις τάσεις της σύγχρονης λογοτεχνίας, αποκαλύπτοντας μια νέα συνειδητοποίηση των συγγραφέων μας, των καλλιτεχνικών δημιουργών και των εκδοτικών οίκων, που εκφράζει την ευαισθησία του αναγνωστικού μας κοινού.

German. Zusammenfassung. [Translation Irene Pieper]

Wie lässt sich die derzeitige französische Veröffentlichungspraxis im Bereich der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur beschreiben – angesichts einer uniformen weltweiten Kultur, die einerseits als positive Vision durch die Deklaration der Rechte des Kindes 1989 eingefordert wurde, andererseits aber in problematischer Weise durch Globalisierung und elektronische Reproduktion geprägt ist? Können wir von einer Beeinflussung durch eine neue multinationale Republik der Kinder sprechen, bedingt durch die wachsende Zahl von Übersetzungen aus anderen Ländern? Oder beruht die französische Kinderliteratur einzig auf ein paar wenigen erfolgreichen Klassikern wie Jean de Brunhoffs *Babar* oder Charles Perraults *Märchen*, unter denen Rotkäppchen einen Welt-Bestseller darstellt? Ziel diese Beitrags ist es, gegenwärtige literarische Entwicklungen zu umschreiben, die ein neues Bewusstsein der Schriftsteller, Kulturschaffenden und Verlagshäuser für die Sensibilität unseres Lesepublikums zeigen.

Dutch. Samenvatting. [Translation Tanja Janssen]

Wat kenmerkt de Franse kinderliteratuur in deze tijd van een uniforme wereldwijde cultuur, die in 1989 op een positieve manier werd bekrachtigd door het Verdrag van de Rechten van het Kind en - op een meer dubieuze manier - door de globalisatie en elektronische reproductie? Is er sprake van invloed van een nieuwe multinationale kinderrepubliek door het groeiende aantal vertalingen uit andere landen? Of berust de Franse kinderliteratuur uitsluitend op enkele succesvolle klassieken zoals Jean de Brunhoff's Babar of Charles Perrault's vertellingen, waarvan Roodkapje een wereldwijde bestseller is? In deze bijdrage worden de hedendaagse literaire trends geschetst die een nieuw bewustzijn van onze schrijvers, kunstenaars en uitgeverijen laten zien, uitdrukking gevend aan de gevoeligheid van ons leespubliek.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children's literature is not a unified field and stretches from books for babies to those for young adults: it is more and more read and considered by a dual audience including children and parents or highly-cultured readers who have grown conscious of its importance as a really artistic part of children's culture. This reading public does not oppose adult seriousness to the child's supposed fickleness and light-mindedness. What does being an 'adult' mean, anyway? Some grownups belong more to the kingdom of *Mice and Men* than to that of literacy, and are unable to read 'high' or 'low' literature, which does not prevent them from being genuinely congenial human beings! And what is a 'child', after all? A person under 18, as the 1989 Convention of the Rights of children proclaimed. But in some social categories well-trained children can develop quite a high literary sense from the age of ten-eleven and react with greater cleverness to the niceties of literature than the average adult reader. As we can see, the debate lies on quite muddled grounds and the real problem is to ascertain whether adults can share books devised for children by an ever growing children's book industry, which is now relying on channels of communication that appeal to the child's imagination more than to that of their parents.

And so what we are going to examine in this opening paper is first the context and conditions under which children's literature is practiced in our country. We hold that the full recognition of this literary field depends on that of the status and characteristics of the child as a true reader and on the development of a new kind of research that does not separate the pedagogical preoccupations of the writers nor the psychology of the young readers from a real assessment of the literary quality of their books themselves: and this quality cannot be considered independently from the children's nature, tastes and ways of reading. One of the adults' difficulties in this respect is to understand how the forms adopted by children's books enhance and stimulate the taste for reading. In our opinion, it is because these books ground the reader's pleasure in the wonderland of literary 'surprises', as we wrote in *Jeux et enjeux du livre d'enfance et de jeunesse*, an essay published in 1999 showing, after W.D. Winnicott, Michel Picard and others, that reading is but an extension of play activities. And these 'surprises' are first grounded in the close relationships of texts and images for the very young, but can be appreciated in picture books that are more and more frequently devised as works of art for a dual audience by editors wishing to win the reading parents' curiosity.

So that our aim in the course of this exposé will be to select a few significant examples and mainly to deal with books accessible to young children – but which may be enjoyed by every lover of literature! – which are closer to real objects and toys and which will help us discover the workings of what we will call the 'ludic imagination' or the 'logic of play and games'. Through the psychoanalytical and anthropological approach which we have developed at different levels of our research in books or articles, we will see to what extent these objects can already impart the sense for literature. Doing this, we will come to realize the importance of what can be summed up through the term of 'postmodern Baroque art' (the beginnings of French children's literature can be found in the XVIIth century 'baroque' tales of Charles Perrault, Mme d'Aulnoy; etc.) practiced in a way that changes the child's

views on the functioning of the language, and in a special type of fantasy which stimulates and enlarges the child's imagination, as best suited to children's psychology and cultural characteristics.

The limitations of this essay will not allow us to treat at length many books meant for the young readers who are what I call the 'children of the video-sphere' (Perrot, 1999: 23), that is readers whose activity is more and more dominantly engrossed in the practice of computerized culture, dealing with digital messages bringing in texts, images and sounds. Leisure books for them provide a new sort of intertextuality as they have become inextricably linked with multimedia, games and advertising techniques in the framework of mass consumption, as is shown by the success of books derived from films or CD-ROMs appealing even to non-confirmed readers. We however hope to impart our reader some idea of the richness and scope of the new developments of the book production in France in the recent past years.

2. THE GENERAL CONTEXT AND LEGITIMATING INSTITUTIONS

Children's publishing in France, as in other countries, has come to a turning point: this is the time of a uniform worldwide culture imposed on the 'children of the videosphere' by globalisation, electronic reproduction and the conglomerate laws of the market. Everywhere, the same films and success stories mediated by the corporate industries of communication and video games entertainment overflow and sometimes stifle national and more typically artistic productions. Simultaneously noteworthy films, like Polansky's *Oliver Twist* are new incentives to original interpretations of old 'classics'. Comparatively, It may seem more difficult to define what can be considered as 'good children's literature' than good mainstream literature. The issue is always calling up some moral consideration and brings in passionate debates, for the child is a protected being, and in France this protection is assumed by a law passed in 1949 and modified in 1954, when racist acts of incivility obliged the legislator to add a few articles to it. In this context, the same protests arise under the guise of different reasons, whether moral or cultural: how many 'serious' adults in our country have been affected by the success of Harry Potter, or of Titeuf and other famous comics, and rejected them as worthless, despite (or because of) their very success? Can we surmise that this dismissal was grounded in a lack of understanding of children's culture? But then, what are the dominant codes that define children's culture and literature? And what are their legitimating institutions? Is it the Academy? The Press? Or the publishing houses themselves with their own specific *criteria*? As we can see, different points of views arise on the subject. But a collateral question can be put symmetrically: what is 'mainstream literature'? As the French researcher Antoine Compagnon puts it in *Le démon de la littérature. Littérature et sens commun*:

"Literature is literature. A true *petitio principii* [...] What the institution (the professors, the publishers) include within literature." ("La littérature, c'est la littérature. Une véritable pétition de principe [...] Ce que les autorités (les professeurs, les éditeurs) incluent dans la littérature.") (Compagnon, 1998:46)

What can legitimate children's literature nowadays, then? A few universities where the usual prejudices against its 'childishness' have somewhat abated, but mainly our schools of education (I.U.F.M) and our school system, where it is still considered as a tool for didacticism and only through one of its functions, which is how to teach to read. Needless to say that in France librarians who do not share this concern, insist rather on the cultural and aesthetic benefits of children's ability to read. The growing interest taken by parents in the books read by their children also signals a changing opinion, although the recognition of literature itself is hardly mentioned by the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by 192 countries (two countries have not ratified it so far): in this important document, the right to culture, art and information is claimed, but the part taken by literature itself in the construction of the child's literary tastes is not explicitly established. Needless to say that we consider linking humanitarian and literary principles to be a first necessity, for the love and practice of literature lie at the heart of the 'building' of the truly conscious citizen, that is people whose personal speech style stands as the manifestation of their unique quality and distinction. And it is a such that children's literature has been dealt with within our Primary school system by a program in favour of its teaching issued by the French Ministry of Education in 2002. This was the result of a long evolution starting in 1985 and leading to a similar recognition in the official Grammar School syllabus in 1995: its main consequence is the annual publication of a list of recommended books of fiction, poetry or documentaries, among which teachers and professors have to select the works they wish to read with their pupils. A major change stressed by Max Butlen and Danielle Dubois-Marcoïn in their introduction to a special number devoted to this issue by *Le Français Aujourd'hui*, the review of the Association Française des Enseignants de Français (Butlen & Marcoïn, 2005). The last 2005 decision to have a compulsory teaching of children's literature in the I.U.F.M at the university has led to a new and vivid interest in the field, and should bring a decisive change in the teachers' attitudes towards this part of the syllabus...

3. THE CHILD READER'S GLOBAL STATUS AND THE NECESSITY OF A NEW TYPE OF RESEARCH

And so a first imperative is the acceptance of the status of the child as a fully fledged reader, with its specific features, with its liking for images and for special stories grounded in a definite play of the imagination. The changing status of research in this field has been explored by Maria Nikolajeva in her essay, *Children's Literature comes of age* published in 1996, but one could say that this 'advent' was already effective in 1697 within the Preface of Charles Perrault's tales: in these stories, a dual address, both to the child and to the adult reader, was implied through the light and flippant humour of their narrative. A fact, which Victor Watson confirmed in the English field of children's literature when he declared in April 23rd 2004 in his Cambridge oral introduction to the book *Coming of Age of Children's Literature* that there has always been an adult behind a text for children. (Watson, 2004) Eventually, what should be stressed is the fact that children's literature criticism has now undergone a complete change and become an international object for

research for specialists who work in multicultural research societies, such as the IRSCL (International Society for Children's Literature) or FILLM (Fédération des Langues et Littératures Modernes): so that its full recognition will depend on the widening scope of our investigation. Although we so far do not have an encyclopaedia of French children's literature, many scholarly contributions could provide our reader a budding initiation to our national production in this editorial sector, such as for instance the collected essays included in the bilingual book *The Changing Face of Children's Literature in France* published by the IBBY French Board in 1998 (Renonciat, 1998), or my entry "France" in the new edition of the Routledge *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* edited by Peter Hunt in 2004.

This new trend has been fostered not only by a growing number of researchers but also by small editing houses which are more and more numerous to escape the sway of great conglomerate groups, (about thirty of them have been created in the last five years) and which bring in quite original and unexpected forms of creation both in the field of illustration and in the themes that are being treated (such as the publishers Etre, Motus, Thierry Magnier or Le Rouergue). More generally, publishers (and bigger houses also publish quite interesting, but less daring productions!) in order to survive are bound ceaselessly to invent new objects, thus expressing professional concern less perhaps about the intellectual growth of the child than about profit. In any case, evincing a new awareness of the modern sensibility of the reading public to what has been called in France, "la société ludique" ("ludic society"; Alain Cotta 1980), deeply affected by the spirit of play and games. Technical innovation, founded on the enjoyment of the creators themselves, then serves to promote a literary revival based on the full sway of literary illusion, which in our societies culturally ruled by the pleasure principle, depends on the growing importance of 'serious' entertainment. One has to keep in mind that the word "illusion" comes from the Latin "in ludo", which means "in play". And play is no fickle activity, as we are going to see: it is the most serious activity of the child. And one knows that reading and literary make-believe are associated in the decoding of linguistic signs. These provide both a sensuous pleasure and an overture towards abstraction, but they make the process difficult for readers who are not acquainted with the dominant cultural codes, according to which the constellation of images and of sign systems are understood as substitutes for the objects swept aside by absence. Reading, of course, is rendered (or seems to be) more and more difficult for young people who may not have any interest in literature as they are not able to call up their energies to afford abstract thinking, as we will see. The difficulties experienced in reading may be more numerous in France nowadays, when the urban society replacing the rural communities is as multiethnic as everywhere and when in some schools, more than twenties nationalities can be found in the same classes. But such difficulties cannot be fully explained through systematic references to the cultural environment of the child and are partly due to the affective dysfunctions within the family itself. In this respect, the way books are given and the de-dramatising of reading, which children's literature can support, are to be taken into account within the strategies meant to appeal to non-readers, as the apparent playfulness of the objects it proposes imparts to them the quality of gifts and toys, drawing them out of the context of

school obligations and work and apparently offering relief from the strenuous task of cultural integration.

Images, picture books of every kind, pop-ups but also stories with startling episodes or unexpected laws (like Science fiction) are tools that help the reader to experience what Roland Barthes called "un glissement progressif du plaisir" ("a progressive pleasure slip"), towards "the pleasure of the text" from a three-dimensional universe to a two-dimensional one, ruled by pictorial conventions, or letter characters or other graphic signs. Thus the exploration of make-believe scenarios, that are meant to depict human crises and survival, is decisive for the development of the citizen's and for the strengthening of the reader's consciousness. It is a fact that children's literature, owing to one of its functions to instruct the child, has been considered of greater help than mainstream literature in the project of delineating the features that come into the national constructs of personality (Sandis, 2004: 105). As Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer underlined, following in the steps of Roland Barthes (1973), one should not neglect the specific "pleasures of children's literature" (1992), but these pleasures have to be shared between adults, parents and children to be fully appreciated: and through such sharing only the full status of the child as real reader can be recognized. The enjoyment of adults in this context may be itself mere make-believe, but, as for the belief in the ritual of Christmas and of the coming of Santa Claus down the chimney, it will become real and genuine through the sharing of this illusion in a special affective family compact, which is indispensable for the success of the exchange. Sharing the pleasures of these new books means wielding them with their special formats and shapes, both sensuously experiencing their magnificent colours or refined black and white shades, and appreciating the artistic quality and particular flavour of the stories which are told, at once enquiring into the innuendos and secret ways of moral persuasion resorted to by writers and illustrators.

4. IMAGES AND TEXT: PLAYING WITH FICTION AS A TRANSITIONAL LITERARY OBJECT

A significant feature of the contemporary book industry has been the emergency of literacy for children under three. As we already suggested, achievements in this literary field were helped by the progressive complexities of the printing industry allowing to produce books rivalling toys. Play which is the culture of the child, as Jerome Bruner showed in *Child's Talk. Learning to Use language* (1983), and games have now become the engine or the test bench of 'ludic society' at large, giving rise to a virtual reality that computer software is supposed to create. Their dominance is achieved through the strongest material means. Our children are therefore increasingly developing in a culture that is structured by a central opposition: the opposition between a craving for pragmatism and the cult of the object on the one hand, and a tendency to abstraction and the development of fictitious universes on the other. And so the enjoyment of reading based on make-believe, stands for complete initiation, of the senses as well as of the mind.

Following the work of Freud and mainly D.W. Winnicott's *Play and reality* (1971), we will stress the fact that the production of make-believe must be understood functionally: images and dreams in particular have a 'filling role' and are intended to reinstate an authority figure, and the study of infants smiling in their sleep shows that the dream system of the mind has the single aim of an hallucinatory accomplishment of desire. This satisfaction cannot be reduced to that of oral pleasures, as food may be sacrificed to contact. The smile of the infant has also been considered one of the motor equivalents of attachment behaviour (Bowlby, 1974). It is significant that it corresponds to one of the first manifestations of the dreaming self, master of the imagination and interpersonal area (Rufiot, 1981).

Let us then look at a narrative based on playing with the child's smile through the use of a little moveable book devised by Jean Claverie *A smile, please (Un sourire, s'il te plait)* published simultaneously by Mathew Price and Albin Michel Jeunesse in 1986. In the pages of the album, one can see a baby photographer taking pictures of people peeping out of a fair stand. The faces of the characters alone are visible, and the opening of the cardboard flaps maliciously reveals unexpected aspects of them and of their dressing; for instance, the face, which looks first like that of a finely dressed smart gentleman is in fact that of a pig wearing dirty overalls under it. Further on, a general in beautiful military attire comes to be but an hippopotamus in a bathing costume coyly trying to hide his plump figure, and shyly opening his mouth as he has been unexpectedly caught in no 'decent' appearance. Again the head of what looks like a big large-chest monkey with powerful arms is but that of a small ape standing on top of two other ones. Every couple of these images reveals a logical flaw and break of the laws of what had been set as a first level of reality, and which is replaced by another, thus setting the reader to doubt about what he had seen first. Hence the 'surprise' which here causes a void in the twofold relationship and calls for the 'filling' of a smile. The last set of double spreads lets the onlooker discover a little clown under a big one: mockery is then generally leveled at what stands for an equivalent of the respectable (the adult, the big or the tall) and shares the pertness of popular humour. The story's ending is staged as in a circus! The clown is the exact counterpart of Santa Claus mentioned in the first part of this communication, and he embodies the image of the good father providing safer and more stereotyped surprises, as we have shown in an article "The Logic of Play and Games" (Perrot, 1992), which we are going to consider further down.

The repetition of the humoristic device in *A Smile, please* recalls Freud's basic consideration on the psychological foundation of play in his famous analysis of the "Fort-da" or "reel game" in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Similarly toys, if one agrees with Winnicott's theories in *Play and Reality*, are symbolic substitutes for the body of the mother. So that surprise, an intensely seductive element, the cornerstone of the reader's playful imagination, is set up to counter "das Umheimliche" (the "disquieting strangeness") springing from subversive transformation of the latter's reality. And so, from the mother's body and skin to the dummy, or to the reel, then to the toy, teddy bear or doll, and finally to images or systems of representation embodied in books or in films and video games, the transfer of a meaning is achieved through the power of imagination from our concrete world towards an abstract and subjective one. Playful scenarios in books are kinds of lock-chambers,

intermediary worlds, which supply the missing assurance denied by the loss of the real world.

5. THE LOGIC OF PLAY AND GAMES: FROM SANTA CLAUS TO THE CLOWN'S GLORY

Having worked almost ten years, testing children, but also adults, about the views they entertain on play and games, let us give a brief summary of our conception of the social system of exchanges between adults and children within the family, i.e. a society ruled by what Marcel Mauss termed "le don" (the gift) or the "symbolical exchange". When this exchange is situated on the positive side of the family homeostasis (i.e. affective balance), 'surprises' come from the parents who are the naturally dominant part of the group: they are presented in the shape of "gifts" (food and other necessities). The main ritualistic period for this is Christmas time, when Santa Claus assumes the popular version of the religious ritual of Christ's sacrifice for mankind and gives every child the toys or sweets it has symbolically merited in the course of the year. This celebration has become the greatest yearly worldwide marketing feast through the consumption of goods and food and happiness then principally lies in the feeling of home and in the possession of objects. Homeostasis is made possible because of the effusive relationships of the family members, and principally it is promoted by the symbolical oral satisfaction imparted by the gifts acting as substitutes of the 'good mother's love'.

Yet playing children with surprises leads to satiety, if not surfeit and boredom. Family homeostasis then is disrupted by the children who start doing mischief. This explains why Carnival comes as a time of relief in the rituals of many religions and cultural codes. When boredom gets stronger, clashes between the members of the group bring about outbursts of anger or hatred (or revolution) and the dislocation of relationships lead people outside their homes. That is why fireworks are fired in the streets to celebrate the 14th of July or any major cultural advent introducing a significant break. This is the time and literary territory of mischief-making.

If the purpose of toys and games is partly to master the turbulence of children and to ensure the cultural homeostasis regulating the reciprocal dependence of adults and children through the symbolic representation of the fused indistinctiveness of the family group, it is important to go to the other pole of make-believe and consider the case of the children who question the Law of the Father and resort to violence to express their freedom. Snatching away from the rules currently received by the group is best expressed by means of mischief-making. Mischief and grim humour offer tolerated forms of violence meant to contest or to ascertain the values of any culture at stake, as a close examination of J.R.R Tolkien's *Father Christmas Letters* will show: Santa Claus and the Polar bear stand there as the two polar characters of Tolkien's imaginary kingdom, the first providing the usual surprises and the second one playing the part of the rowdy urchin and of the Lord of Misrule. For the fellow's best prank occurs when, he, like some naughty child, goes to Santa Claus's cellar, "the cracker-hole", where thousands of boxes of crackers are kept, and letting the candle fall into them, provokes the most magnificent fireworks reminding one of

Bakhtin's uncrowning of the Carnival King. The freeing of fire let loose into the social field by contesting forces of un-ruled children is symmetrical to its perfect mastering in the chimney hearth at Christmas, when adults manifest their sway through the all powerful magic of gifts and surprises.

Scenarii of destruction and grim humour expressing the impertinent negation of social order occur in books for children and even in pop-ups in a very special and simple way, for instance, in *Sacrée famille (What a family!)*, a picture-book out of a series of four by Amato Soro published by Syros in 1988. On one of the pages, two children smiling derisively seem to be tugging at the two ends of the same rope, but when the reader unfolds the page by stretching it out to the right, the image of a dismayed grandfather comes out and the two naughty boys are caught in the act of pulling at the ends of his moustache. On another picture, a young woman seems to feed her child with a milk bottle, but between the two, a hidden car will pop out on the unfolded page and disclose the truth of the situation: she is pouring the contents of the bottle into the car tank and the child is sucking the end of the gas pump! In another scene, a young person carelessly flings preserve cans into an empty caddie, but in fact a second caddie appears in the 'wings of the page, with a child in it, smothered by this load of vegetables and parcels...The family of the child, whose photograph is being taken at the beginning has also symbolically disappeared into a trap, which the operating photograph was screening on the folded flap.

The general impression of such picture-books is that such phantasms are not fully gratuitous, however, for they stress the necessary occurrence of loss in the building of personality. They grotesquely deride, but also suggest, the process of integration of the dark sides of the human psyche. No doubt that such books win the favour of young people, but are often rejected by adults as too cruel... Complying with the logic of our play and game system, the next step for the child leaving his family, after his necessary freeing break, is to start a new adventure and to go along the whole initiation process which has been described by the folklorist Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* (1930) and used by Bruno Bettelheim as a starting point to achieve a symbolic model of harmonious human development in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1975).

6. THE INVENTIVENESS OF BOOKS FOR CHILDREN: PLAYING WITH FORMATS, WORDS AND PICTURES, AND POP-UPS

These different aspects of the logic of the imagination are often most cleverly dealt with by books for young children and it will be of some interest to examine more closely a few of them to see how they work. On a first material level for instance, some books made of plush and of small soft rubber provide pleasures equivalent to those given by feeling the mother's skin, such as in Bob Filipowich's *My Ducky* (Innovative Kids, Norwalk, CT, 2000; Gallimard, 2001): in this soft rubber 'book', each double spread shows the image of an animal faced by the corresponding caption on the opposite page: "My Ducky swims", "Little Frog swims", etc. The 'reading' child (or its parent) can take off the puzzle shapes of the represented things and play with them as with a toy, experiencing their softness and mild colours, and en-

joying the liberty offered to the display of imagination by the freed animals suddenly come back to life through the manipulation of the objects. We have here a successful illustration of a positive transitional use of the “Skin-Self”, as defined by Didier Anzieu in his book of this title: *Le Moi-Peau* (1985). Many other examples of books made of cloth and allowing the same function as the transitional object, but endowed with the cultural supplement of words and pictures, could be described here that are meant to help children go to sleep, play in their bath, or assume important rites of every day’s life.

A different type of picture-books presents an apparent lack of meaning but contains hidden systems of signs, such as *Gribouillis* (Scribbling) by Antonin Louchard (2002), where secret motives come out from the muddle of twisted or curling coloured lines, as a result of the reader’s playful mental projections: the plates then work as in a Rorschach test, but interpretation is helped by the juxtaposition of explicitly realistic scenes or elements (such as the tail of a mouse, as in Lewis Carroll’s celebrated fantasy) that serve as hints for an intuitive understanding of the artist’s intention. In another picture-book, *Tout un monde* (A Whole World, 1999) by the same illustrator working with Katy Couprie for the Thierry Magnier publishing house, images have no captions but are linked by undisclosed relationships stimulated by the metonymic and metaphoric meaning they carry. Thus the close view of a lush patch of grass is shown just after the photograph of a beaded man’s face, this picture being followed by another view of a partly mown grass field contrasting the roughly drawn face of a second man with a prickly beard. The whole series leading to the meta-fiction of an insistent tickling of the senses can urge the reader to wake up to a secret story told by the illustrators. By a more evident process, the picture of a bowl of milk followed by that of a child sitting at a table with a bottle of this same beverage is matched by a design of mysterious milk white and brown patches, but the enigma clears up with the next scene showing a cow in a field, thus instigating an inductive strain of thought, from the milk to the skin and finally to the whole living body of the animal...

Other French picture-books are more complex and exploit the possibility of carved out images within their cardboard flaps, letting the reader have dual experiences, both a feeling of loss and then the glee of recovery. This is the case, for instance, with *Cachatrou, c’est ma bouche* (Hide and Hole, it’s my mouth) by Jeanne Ashbé (Pastel, l’école des loisirs, 1996). Stressing the repetitive structure of a rhythmical story, the narrator of the book is addressing the child reader: “What does the badger say?” In French the word ‘blaireau’ (badger) is also used for a man’s shaving brush, and so the picture shows a true badger smearing its mouth with foam with this very instrument. And the animal is then supposed to answer this question, as the caption on the opposite pages indicates:

Hi! Crazy one, Take away the froth
 And you, busybody who can’t keep his hands off things
 You, Filling holes
 From over and from under
 Put your finger into the little hole

And so the child reader will then lift the cardboard flap and disclose the real hole carved through the mouth of the badger, with, written at the back of the lifted piece, the word: "Hello!" The surprise lies in the discovery of the absurd consequences of the actual and concrete staging of a dual abstract meaning of words and in the whimsically given invitation. No doubt that the child reader will follow this invitation and be delighted to thrust his or her finger through the discovered hole! Here curiosity is rewarded by the exceptional freedom of the scenario that runs against all rules of decent behaviour, which forbid to put one's finger into the mouth of a wild animal, as well as through the pages of a book! This device is repeated with several animals till we come to the last double spread that offers a final reversal of this ludic structure: no asking is directed at any one then, but the little boy whom the narrator seems to address, now exclaims:

No busybody who can't keep his hands off
 No filling hole
 No, No No.
 None at all cost
 It is my mouth!

And the page facing this caption has no carved real hole in the place of the child's drawn mouth. The book has acted the phantasms and fear of loss in the body of the Other, exorcising the danger of being swallowed, at the same time as it gave the reader a warning as to the integrity of the child's body, which must be respected and protected. The adult can but admire the cleverness and subtlety of a staging that brings together a humorous play on words, a skilful use of the cardboard material and the positive morals of a successful and saving reaction of the hero. As the last page tells: "It is a game!". A game to be played with one's brother or sister, all the more as the incentive to comply with the book's invitation has been reinforced by the lyrical strain of narrator's language.

Another remarkable movable book by Jeanne Ashbé makes a playful use of another artistic device achieved at low cost: that of the anamorphosis, which has been made famous by Hans Holbein's painting of *The Ambassadors* (i.e., the transfer of shapes and colours from one meaning to another within the same image). To do so, this illustrator provides a variation of the efficient, yet simple, lifting of cardboard flaps, as could be practiced in Mitsumasa Anno's *Peekaboo* (1987): in a series of four books, *ça, c'est petit, ça, c'est moyen, ça, c'est énorme, ça, c'est gros* (This is small, This is medium, This is big, This is huge), Jeanne Ashbé (2001) brings together a string of questions put by what must be the narrator's voice. One of them runs as follows

Me, I have seen,
 Believe me or not?
 A honeyed sweet
 Unless it might have been, tell me, tell me...

The confronted image does suggest that the reader has to deal with a real honey sweet, but lifting the flap once more contradicts this hypothesis and reveals that

what is under, has a slightly different shape and proves to be a 'bee'. In French "bonbon au miel" (honey sweet) rhymes with 'abeille' (bee). Thus a kind of fantastic nursery rhyme is gradually achieved along the double spreads that repeat and diversify the device, "la sucette de Léon" (Leon's teat) rhyming with "papillon" (butterfly), le "biberon" (the child's bottle) being echoed by 'poisson' (fish). Through these successive staged discrepancies a new child-inspired humour comes out of the whimsical surrealism of the fiction, until the aesthetic playful tension, the suspense, thus aroused be dissolved by the final image now showing a little girl playing with her lady-bird toy ('coccinelle') held by a string and which she is glad to greet: ("Salut, ma Belle!") Poetry and humour meet from the successful wielding of images and text and the whole picture-book may be considered as a true artistic feat.

Lifting flaps may appeal to the child's taste for surprises and mysteries, but unfolding full double-spreads that seem to be hidden within the book is still more impressive for the child reader, as it is the case with the Gallimard 'Octavius' series with books based on the solving of playful riddles, as it is the case with *L'île à compter* (The Island where to count, 1998) by Kate Bank and Georg Hallensleben. Still more ambitious is the unfolding of the whole length of the book in a sort of string made by its linked pages, as is the case with *Petits bobos/petits bonheurs* (Little Sores/Short Happy Hours) by Elisabeth Brami illustrated by Philippe Bertrand), where by reverting the sequenced images the child finds a contradictory philosophy of life.

Finally the most disruptive use of an unstable format is provided by the series of 'folded books' 'Dépliages' ('Unfold'em') issued by the publisher Albin Michel Jeunesse: each of these is focussed on a character such as the wolf or Santa Claus, or on a subject, the circus, the Zoo, etc. In *La Sorcière* ('The witch') devised by Merlin (1999), for instance, one has to discover in an unexpected way the qualifications of the witch through a series of guesses. Reading first means discovering a question on the right-hand page, but to get the answer, one has to alternate directions and to unfold what is a huge page divided into nine small ones which stand together by the ridges of their uncut sides. So that one gets a kind of 'boustrophedon' progressively solving the enigma of the character: reading for the reader's eye means first going from right to left, then from top to bottom, then from right to left, and eventually from left to right again. The unpractised adult may well be taken aback, when he has to fold back the opened book!

7. THE CHILD READER AS JACK IN THE BOX. HOW A BOOK PLAYS AND WINS !

But we must conclude the description of these productions with that of a provocative pop-up conceived by Jean Claverie, who made the most of what can be expected from playing with literature through the wielding of cardboard structures, and concluded his *Me voici! me voilà! (Peekaboo!)* published by Albin Michel Jeunesse in France and by Mathew Price in England (1986) with the staging of the triumphant reader as what we will call a kind of Jack in the Box. This is quite remarkable, as 'reading' pop-ups for the young very often merely means gliding through sheer

technical contrivances, and occasionally subduing one's fear of the literary signifier that can contain dangerous truths and realities. What springs from Claverie's amusing pages is first and foremost a feeling of the serene mastery of the magical power developed through the reading process, but more surely the sense of coming to terms with some diabolical and yet enthralling presence. Significantly enough, Jean Claverie's construction shows the implicit equivalence of the Devil (parodying Descartes "malignant genius"?) and of the successful reader, through the jutting figure of the baby that pops out of the book from the last two pages, like a new version of that familiar popular figure "the Devil out of his box", as we call it in France. It is the fanciful illustration of a perilous initiation to meaning which has been depicted, through the highly-flavoured reversal of adult values in a sketch involving the satire of family relationships.

On the first page of *Peekaboo*, indeed, one can read 'Where is Mummy?' and an image shows an invisible human shape apparently sleeping in a bed, with a drowsy cat lying beside it. On the second one, the laughing head of the mischievous mother painted on a cardboard flap really pops-up out of the sheets and the character is shown sitting up with her cat before her, sharing her attitude and similarly sporting a slightly ironical smile: "Peekaboo! Here I am", she shouts. On the next page, the device is repeated with the father hiding behind his newspaper: this newspaper is a very particular one, for it appears to be *Le Monde des bébés* (*The Baby's Times*), with suggestive headlines, such as "The new fashion for the less than three years old" or "Have your parents baby-sitted". The naughty suggestions are multiplied on the next page, when the father's head restored to the third dimension by a rising cardboard flap, juts out from behind the opening newspaper, giving other quite as suggestive headlines to read: "Rock music in kindergartens" and "Is television bad for educators?", again one can read. Other funny characters pop out from the book, such as the boy's dog and, of course, the jocular representative of adult mischief, a clown. The reader has a feeling that the masculine dynasty at play here implies a near glorification and the climax is reached, when the triumphant boy's face pops-up, towering over the book with closed eyes, but seeming to enjoy his reading immensely. The urchin, in fact, is holding in his hands a book, on the cover of which he is himself portrayed with one hand on one closed eye and with his other eye open, the very picture staged on the cover of the book from which he pops out and which the actual reader holds in his hands. The device of 'the book within the book' or of the reader reading his own story is given another turn of the screw with the portrait of the same boy making awful faces on the cover of another book lying by his feet, with the suggestive following title "Faces: General Index". Humour here is also meant as an element of seduction for the adult who reads the book to the child, and whose interest has to be stimulated by such witty advertisements as "The Scientific Feeding Bottle" or "How to get out of your park" or again "Teach yourself to the pot, through imitation." The child's culture is enhanced and the acquisition of correct behaviours and rules de-dramatised. The staged glory of the reading child exorcises the fear of getting lost in a book, since the manipulation of the pages clearly shows that the hero can freely come out and get back into the book. The sharing of laughter with the adult is also an enticement to further and deeper participation and appreciation of the 'pleasure of the text', for the child reader is both deci-

phering social codes and building up his own conception of literacy leading to more complex mental and affective constructions of meaning of social artefacts. The book itself, on can say, plays and wins, wins more confirmed readers through the make-believe of the literary game, which is nothing more than a playful initiation to cultural conventions and to proficiency in intellectual autonomy.

Symmetrically the consumers' productions of the new mass-media market seem to exert on children's literature an influence larger than ever in every country, where children, who, in the age of digitalisation of images, sound and text, can watch television, transfer films and video-games on their computers and have access to Web worldwide culture and reading. How many of these have started their literacy initiation by deciphering the Pokemon stickers (and now the Digimon cards?), playing the game on their Nintendo PlayStation, then reading the Pokemon magazines and watching their everyday serial with the endless fights of the forces of the Good against those of Evil? A conflict, which is at the core of the Starwars Trilogy. In France, how many youngsters have been acquainted with Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island* through Eric Viennot's CDRom *L'île de l'Oncle Albert (Uncle Albert's Island)*, Emme Interactive, 2000)? A CDRom which has its qualities, so far as it brings us to understand and question our national literature better. Significantly it gave birth to a wonderful and complex picture book accessible to confirmed readers: *Le trésor de L'oncle Ernest* by the same author (2000). The adventure story in this brilliant realisation is made of a narrative stored in a manuscript written on a kind of school-boy's notebook, but it is illustrated by images drawn from the CDRom itself or by photographs showing the covers of the books one is supposed to read or again scenes lived by the characters; it also contains real maps or messages in envelopes stuck between its pages. So that the 'life effect' is quite startling and unique...

8. CONCLUSION: THE FEAR TO LEARN AND BAROQUE AESTHETICS

And so one will conclude that pop-ups jutting cardboard structures, as well as virtual scenarii, express the wishful realisation of secret dreams and stand in sharp contrast to holes cut-out in the pages, which often look like vertiginous psychological pitfalls leading to symbolical abysses – like so many wounds – in some imaginary land where the subject can be lost. Both types, however, resort to the same aesthetics, implicitly agreeing with Georg Groddeck's policy expressed in *Das Buch vom Es* (Groddeck, 1923), to reach and act on the unconscious self, the 'It', rather than on the conscious self of the reader. This surely is of great help, when we have to deal with what Serge Boimare has called "les enfants d'Héraclès", "the children of Herakles" (Boimare, 1988), i.e. children or adolescents who are frightened by intellectual action and who prefer to use their muscles like the mythological hero, protecting themselves from the symbolic function with a kind of muscular shield (Boimare, 1999: 161). This feature also explains the success of video games, which screen the literary pleasure under the manipulation of mere technical devices or of stereotyped motives...

One last specific feature that must be underlined in this respect is the particular psychical energy, which is liberated in wielding the folds of such cardboard struc-

tures or in directing heroes within the images of video scenarii. Such psychological expense has to be related to a historical dated change brought about in man's psychic life by Baroque aesthetics. Now according to Gilles Deleuze in *Le pli, Leibniz et le Baroque* (*The Fold, Leibniz and Baroque Aesthetics*, 1988), Baroque art is best expressed through the cultural motive of the fold, an item that in Leibniz's philosophical system reveals a continuity in nature much more suited to the description of material forces than the Cartesian conception of the linear propagation of light: the fold, as the minutest part of matter, stands in sharp contrast to the dot. As Deleuze suggests, one understands that the art of the origami has a baroque flavour (Deleuze, 9), that helps to enlarge our analysis of the pop-up, as it marks some degree of continuity between material and spiritual forces. The spring is also a very significant item of the baroque and the multiplication of jumping and leaping objects in pop-ups also testifies to its permanent and predominant use in the creation of 'surprises', as these were practised at Versailles, the symbol of centralized monarchic France. The whole Park and castle of the Estate with their statues and decorations have been designed as the embodiment and sumptuous illustration of the myth of Apollo, the son of Zeus and Leto, to whom Louis XIV identified himself. And the special flavour imparted by the "merveilleux" (the fantasy of the supernatural or of the marvellous) of the seventeenth century French fairy tales partly results from a transposition of the technical devices (with metamorphoses, machines and living statues) of baroque operas at the king's court, and specially those the king's musicians, Charpentier's and Lully's. Using a set of playful "machines", that are still prevalent in books for children, as I have shown in my essay *Art baroque, art d'enfance* (1991). This major feature, the seizure of moral and cultural matters through some kind of playful concrete illumination and mental elevation, is the lesson delivered through the significant aesthetics of postmodern Baroque art, which, in my opinion, nowadays distinguishes the most efficient literature and art for children.

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