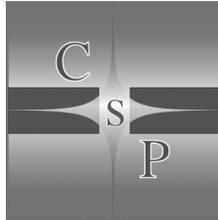


Changing Concepts of Childhood and Children's Literature

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Edited by

Vanessa Joosen and Katrien Vloeberghs



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INTRODUCTION

The varied collection of essays presented in this volume is the result of a productive encounter between junior and established scholars at the second International Child and the Book Conference, organized by the University of Antwerp in April 2005. It was the aim of the organizers, who are also the editors of this volume, to bridge the gap between continental and Anglo-American approaches to children's literature, and to discuss the state of the art of what is topical in children's literature studies in Europe and the United States. Varied as the different subject areas under discussion were, considering different subgenres, historical periods, and geographical contexts, two main themes surfaced in nearly all the lectures and subsequent discussions: ideology and children's literature on the one hand, and images of childhood on the other.

In the discussions of these foci, some important tensions and influential discourses can be discerned. The conflicting but also productive relationship between pedagogy and aesthetics is one of the most important tensions which have determined the characteristics and modes of children's literature and its criticism since their emergence, and still continues to influence the production of and reflection on children's books at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The contributions in this volume play out this tension in their methodological choices in the first place. Children's literature at the beginning of the twenty-first century enters into a critical and creative dialogue with two theoretical approaches and critical practices that have exerted a great impact on the development of literary criticism in the last three decades of the previous century. The fruitful encounter between so-called "Ideologiekritik" or criticism of ideology on the one hand and Cultural Studies on the other, is notable in several essays collected in this volume. Secondly, the orientation to pedagogical or aesthetic impulses and criteria of evaluation becomes apparent in the figurations of childhood in primary and secondary texts. The influence of the Enlightenment and Romanticism is unmistakable, but the legacy of these two paradigms is dealt with creatively when applied in a twenty-first-century context.

I

The tradition of "Ideologiekritik" (criticism of ideology) has fuelled a revolutionary change in reflections on and characteristics of children's literature from the late 1970s onward. Rather implicitly than explicitly, several voices in the critical field today recognize the continuing validity and even necessity of this often dismayed perspective in the context of the

analysis of children's literature. In addition to this, the emergence and rapid expansion of Cultural Studies in the Anglo-American critical landscape has created a free space and an analytic instrumentarium for the serious consideration of hitherto marginalized forms of cultural expression, such as children's literature and—within the field—doubly marginalized productions such as popular fiction or series fiction for the young.

Both approaches intended to be a counterweight to the predominant strands in literary criticism at the time of their emergence, which were reproached with a lack of political reflection and social engagement. The move of “Ideologiekritik” in the late 1960s and 1970s reacted against mainstream paradigms such as New Criticism and New Historicism which excluded any reflection on the political relevance, leave alone impact of literature. Cultural Studies in the second stance came about after turning down the hegemony of a formalist deconstruction. While preserving some of poststructuralism's premises—such as the ubiquity of textual structures in any cultural expression—Cultural Studies has opted to reintroduce the political dimension of criticism of ideology. The fact that both “Ideologiekritik” and Cultural Studies claim the inevitability of “doing politics” (in a broad sense) while writing children's literature explains the predominant concern with ideology in the field's practice in general and in the contributions in this volume in particular.

The confrontation between these two approaches allows for an increasing differentiation in critical analysis, which becomes manifest throughout the essays in the volume. While some essays start out from a sincere humanist conviction that children's literature can contribute to the conceptualization of a better society and stick to a hardcore application of criticism of ideology, others choose to focus on the participation of marginalized cultural expression in the unmasking of any heteronomous representation. The oppositional impulse of traditional “Ideologiekritik” meets the more subversive approach of Cultural Studies and both benefit mutually from this encounter. On the one hand, the legacy of “Ideologiekritik” calls to memory the need for criteria to determine what passes for “literature”—criteria that threaten to be transcended by the sometimes deliberate juxtaposition of any cultural practice. On the other hand, the analysis of children's literature as a socio-cultural phenomenon takes from Cultural Studies a higher degree of self-reflexivity and therefore a necessary scepticism towards any criticism of ideology claiming to be in the “right” position.

Not unlike the state of the art in contemporary literary analysis in general, children's literature criticism fuelled by the legacy of “Ideologiekritik” put into the service of Cultural Studies risks at times to lose out of sight the specificity of its *literary* potential, its aesthetic criteria, as well as the critical competence of its readership. Charles Sarland's assertion that “the debate has been essentially about representation, and ‘literary standards’ *per se* have not generally been challenged” (60) still holds true for a great deal of children's

literature criticism at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Coupled with assumptions about the straightforward representation of ideology in the text is the implicit image of the child as an incompetent reader, prone to uncritical absorption of represented values and norms. The model of direct identification still seems to prevail. Umberto Eco's strategy of "aberrant readings," in which readers ignore or take a critical position to the sender's message (see Sarland 69), is notably absent in many discussions where the reader is envisaged as a child. However, at the same time, one notices a growing awareness of this rather limited and limiting view of childhood, and several authors in this volume explicitly address and expand the notion of the child (reader) in need of adult guidance.

The contributions in this volume illustrate the wide range of subject areas and the increasing level of sophistication with which *Ideologiekritik* and Cultural Studies have enriched children's literature criticism. Not only textual analysis has gained from the insights of these perspectives, the two paradigms have also given us insight into the production process of children's literature. The essays address, among others, the influence of globalisation and mass market culture on the production of children's books, as well as the choices governing the production of translations and adaptations of texts for young readers. It is striking how several authors combine John Stephens and Peter Hollindale's tools for textual analysis with Zohar Shavit's polysystem approach, and how both models supplement each other with their insights.

Stephens and Hollindale have certainly offered to contemporary critics complex and sophisticated tools for close textual analysis, and they are among the most cited names in this volume. However, a comparison between the different practical applications of their model also marks its limitations and unclarity. The difficulty of distinguishing between implicit and explicit levels of ideology, and the different ways in which these levels are interpreted by individual researchers, is striking. Linked to this often problematic distinction is the level of consciousness with which ideology is supposedly introduced in the text: the author's intentions occasionally surface in the discussion of individual texts, as do the typical problematics of such a discussion, most notably the disregard of aesthetic techniques and possible uses of irony.

The awareness of the omnipresence of ideology in books for the young—an awareness which Stephens and Hollindale have helped to raise—leads to at least two observations with regard to children's literature criticism. On the one hand, the variety of levels on which ideology is identified is striking, ranging from explicit content to discourse analysis (see Stephens 1-46). On the other hand, children's literature criticism does not remain unaffected by its own hypothesis of ideology's ubiquity. It is a challenge to be aware and question one's own presuppositions when it comes to children and children's literature. The often divergent concepts figuring in the essays in this volume

can offer a stimulus for questioning our own bias and the suppositions we consider self-evident.

II

With regard to these divergent concepts of childhood, the influence of the enlightened and romantic paradigms permeates both the primary works and the critical reflection on children's literature. The importance of these two paradigms from Modernity remarkably and surprisingly exceeds even the discourses on Modernism and Postmodernism which dominate general literary criticism today. It becomes clear how some contributions prove their adherence and loyalty to an enlightened and humanistic view of childhood and humankind, while others portray an image of childhood which is strongly indebted to Romanticism, and yet others provide us with complex and creative uses of both paradigms.

The enlightened concept of childhood helps to explain the dominance of criticism of ideology in the study of children's literature: the belief that literature exerts a direct influence on the child governs and fuels the need to question the norms and ideologies that this literature conveys. More affirmatively, the enlightened view of children's literature values its potential to educate, to provide *Bildung* and guidance to the young. It thus invests literature with a transformative force to improve society and raise humankind to a supposedly more advanced level.

When this enlightened view of childhood and literature is confronted or combined with a romantic concept, its limitations and presuppositions become clear. The one-sided view of the child (reader) as incompetent has been addressed above, as well as the lack of consideration for aesthetic literary characteristics and criteria. In a romantic view of childhood, other aspects of the child and the book are emphasized. With reference to the traditional analogy between the child and the artist / poet, the young reader or character is endowed with an uncorrupted affinity for beauty. This results in a view of the child as a competent reader, albeit that this competence is largely intuitive, even pre-conscious. In poststructuralist analyses of children's literature and its reading processes the influence of this and other aspects of the romantic paradigm becomes obvious.

The contemporary production of literature for the young and its critical analysis often implement the legacies of the Enlightenment and Romanticism by critically transforming or ironically inverting these models of childhood and growing up. Similar to the fruitful encounter between the two critical approaches of *Ideologiekritik* and Cultural Studies, the essays in this volume can further insight into the figurations of childhood in children's literature and its criticism today as multilayered implementations of Modernity's two dominant discourses.

III

The methodological approaches and recurring objects of analysis determine the content of each of the five chapters. The essays in the first two chapters, “The Legacy of Criticism of Ideology and the Impact of Society on Contemporary Children’s Literature” and “(Post)Structuralist Approaches: From Theory to Practice” represent different views on the development of children’s literature criticism in the last three decades. The articles in “Transforming Cultural Legacy” are concerned with the implementation of traditional and classical text forms (fables, fairy tales, biblical stories) into contemporary thinking about childhood and children’s literature. This third chapter also contains an influence case study which traces aspects in the work of a reknowned picture-book artist back to a nineteenth-century illustrator. The fourth chapter gathers essays which deal with the representation of the World Wars in texts for the young. As such, it uses most manifestly a thematic resemblance as a structuring principle, as a prism which discerns significant evolutions in the recent history of children’s literature. In a similar vein, the final chapter explores the modes, aims and function of translation processes to gain insight into the changing concepts of childhood and children’s literature at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Representing a broad array of methodological approaches and of representations of childhood, this publication intends to render visible actual manifestations of the tension between pedagogy and aesthetics, inherent to and constitutive of children’s literature. It is our hope and conviction that the child and the book, the children’s book and the books on children’s books will continue to constantly and energetically renew these very impulses by which they exist and yet in a never ending game of “hide and seek” refuse to be grasped by.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE LEGACY OF CRITICISM OF IDEOLOGY AND THE IMPACT OF SOCIETY ON CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

The opening essay of the volume situates one important strand of current research on children's literature within the legacy of ideology criticism ("Ideologiekritik"). Through a panoramic overview of important young adult novels published in the United States, **Roberta Seelinger Trites** points at the ongoing relevance of this approach. She roots developments in children's literature and its criticism in the humanistic conceptualization of childhood, mankind and society. Seelinger Trites demonstrates how Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* mark the onset of a long and rich tradition of novels of social hope which embody the possibility of reform on a collective or structural level. The essay contrasts these novels to two conceptually differing categories: novels of individual hope on the one hand and of social despair on the other.

In a similar attempt to trace the direct and mutual transformative impact between society and literature for the young, **Maria Nikolajeva** scrutinizes which covert ideology young adult novels can convey. She reflects on how Swedish young adult fiction has evolved since the 1980s under the influence of authors such as Aidan Chambers. Whereas the ambivalent combinations of conventional male and female features proved to be liberating for the literary figuration of male adolescent characters, several very recent books in Swedish fiction for young adults portray a disturbing view of femininity. Gossiping with friends, getting drunk and having sex are high on the list of the female protagonists' priorities, while intellectual stimulus and self-development are not. With reference to the ways in which these novels recycle traditional literary genres such as the epistolary novel, the dystopic story and the Künstlerroman, Nikolajeva shows how a new stereotype is introduced and transcended.

The figuration of gender is the central theme of **Anastasia Economidou's** analysis of three Greek children's books as well. In a similar vein as Seelinger Trites and Nikolajeva, she chooses the critical analysis of ideological constructions in contemporary literature as her starting point. Economidou frames her analysis in a discussion of the rapid evolution of feminism. Analogous to the actuality of a post-feminist era in Greece, militating against gender stereotypes is not high on the agenda of contemporary Greek writers

for children. Three detailed case studies construct alternative and even subversive gender positions. In these books for the very young, the traditional Greek hero is deconstructed and traditionally feminine qualities are allowed to mingle with masculine traits. Other than the two previous essays, this contribution discerns a hope for social change and innovative constructions of gender not so much in the protagonists' excelling maturity and sense of responsibility (typical of an enlightened paradigm) as in the presentation of a redeeming childness in the romantic tradition.

Roberta Seelinger Trites

Hope, Despair, and Reform: Adolescent Novels of Social Hope

Instances of Hope in American Adolescent Fiction

American novels that admit the possibility of reform tend to have underlying ideologies that are hopeful.¹ Such works, especially in the United States, appear to be influenced by Louisa May Alcott's and Mark Twain's novels that were among the first reform novels to be marketed for young readers. Alcott's *Little Women* (1868, 1869) concerns itself with gender reform in the context of female artistic development and sororal bonding, while Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) relied on a first-person narrator and the male bonding of the picaresque to critique American race relations. Many of Alcott's and Twain's novels for youth imply that social change is possible: *Eight Cousins*, *Rose in Bloom*, and *The Prince in the Pauper* are the most notable examples in the ways that they critique the American education system and class structures. What Alcott and Twain discovered, then, was that American readers were willing to buy novels that imply that adolescents are capable of effecting social reform.² Their legacy is a body of literature for youth that implies that social change is possible, that hope is a viable thing. Whether the reform ideology in a text concerns itself with gender, race, politics or any other social issue, novels written in the traditions established by Alcott and Twain communicate that individuals can make a social difference, as long as they are strong and try hard enough. These novels for adolescents can be classified as "novels of social hope," and they can be contrasted to "novels of individual hope" on the one hand and "novels of despair" on the other.

Novels of social hope share several characteristics. The protagonist is usually an ethical character who transcends his/her society by some form of self-reliance. S/he lives in a society that is demonstrably less ethical than s/he. That society needs to improve its values is made evident either by directly depicted flaws in the culture or when the character is falsely repressed by it. If the protagonist experiences growth—and s/he usually does—this process provides a commentary as to how the society itself might also "grow" (that is, improve). The character's growth is thus a sign that the society can, indeed, potentially change too. It is a means of communicating the hope for social change. Ultimately, these texts articulate direct agendas of social justice: the growth that the characters in the story experience leads to at least one person's ability to live in the world more justly.

These texts share a romantic faith in the ability of youth to improve the future. The message to readers can invariably be summarized as: "with self-improvement, you can improve the world." Twenty-first-century critics of adolescent literature in the U.S. take it as a given that many novels for youth rely on the adolescents' growth and imply hope in the future. What we frequently fail to recognize as critics, however, is how often these texts create a parallel between the individual's need to grow and the society's need to improve itself. In focusing on the growth of the individual we often miss the metaphorical use to which the individual's growth has been put. The social agenda advocating reform for youth appears in twentieth- and twenty-first-century novels for youth in the United States as consistently as it did in the nineteenth century. Herein, I will identify some novels that fit the pattern of novels of social hope, especially in the ways that they appear to be influenced by Twain and Alcott. As I conclude, I will also contrast the novels in that legacy to novels that operate in different paradigms. In this last section of my essay, I will focus on the adolescent novel of individual hope and the adolescent novel of despair as two distinct counterparts to the novel of social hope.

Two criteria mark the legacies of Twain and Alcott: these texts directly articulate a progressive ideology, and the protagonist's idealism contrasts with the culture's corruption. By narrative implication, the protagonists in these novels are usually superior to the culture in which they live, which is how they ultimately emerge as metaphors for the need for social change. These texts imply that if only all Americans were as noble as Huck Finn or Jo March, we would live in a more perfect world. Although there are thousands of possibilities for social reform, three topics in adolescent literature are particularly useful in illustrating the phenomenon of Alcott's and Twain's legacy: race, gender, and political awareness.

Racial Awareness

Many multicultural novels lend themselves easily to the pattern established by Twain and Alcott. Given that both nineteenth-century authors were deeply concerned about conditions for African-Americans, it seems appropriate that they may have inspired other authorial voices to write about justice and race. Virginia Hamilton's *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1971), for example, is about imbalance in the universe. Buddy Clark is a homeless boy who meanders on a journey through the streets of New York perceiving injustice as imbalance. The depiction of a particular interracial friendship in this novel is highly evocative of Huck and Jim's friendship. Buddy Clark befriends an overweight artist named Junior Brown. Junior's mother is repressive and hostile to her son's artistic expressions, so Buddy rescues *his*

buddy, Junior Brown, in much the same way that Huck rescues Jim. Buddy hides Junior, first at school, where they construct a solar system with a huge tenth planet designed to balance the other nine planets. Buddy names this balancing planet after Junior. Later, the boys must hide in an abandoned building where Buddy and a community of homeless boys have learned to "live for each other" (Hamilton 217) in what they call the "planet of Tomorrow Billy" (74). The boys are invisible and able to live in their counter-culture because they are black in a city—New York—that ignores impoverished people of colour. Buddy is self-reliant and a brilliant mathematician. He is a mature adolescent who does not need to grow as much as the bigoted culture around him does. Junior is an artistic genius, sensitive to the point of being empathic. He is driven to the brink of insanity by his mother and his piano teacher, who has not come to terms with her own racial identity. Hamilton depicts New York as a city that does not care for its poor or its children, especially if they are black. It is a city that does not even see black people, except to fear them. Buddy admits that Junior's mother is "halfway right" in fearing that "they gonna lynch you if you go downtown too far" (Hamilton 32). Hamilton's ideology is direct and her protagonists are greater than the culture in which they live.

Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* (1975) narrates the story of Chinese immigrants to America. Like *The Planet of Junior Brown*, this book has two protagonists: a father, Windrider, whose integrity parallels Jim's on the raft, and his son, Moonshadow, who comments on the corruption of the culture around him. Moonshadow's observational narrative makes him not unlike Huck.³ Windrider learns in the course of the novel to accept the limitations of being human. Moonshadow's story is an assimilation story that includes an accurate depiction of racism in San Francisco at the beginning of the twentieth century. Moonshadow is bullied by white children who call him names and throw rotten vegetables at him; white men hang Chinese men by their hair from lampposts. During the San Francisco earthquake, the Chinese are evicted from the refugee camp and white businessmen try to use the earthquake as a ploy to steal their property. But when the leader of Windrider's company refers to all white men as greedy, Windrider remarks "that's the way it is with most men" (Yep 193). Moonshadow is superior to the racist white children who taunt him; Windrider is superior to almost all the people in the novel, American or Chinese. He even concludes the novel believing that it is his destiny to "raise a brood of superior women and men," and the reader has no doubt that he will succeed because of his intelligence, integrity, and profound spirituality (Yep 242). While the narrative purports to deplore racism of any type, the book still suffers from the same inherent flaw that troubles *Huckleberry Finn*: at the end of the day, the narrator still believes that his race is superior to any other, even though the overt ideology is anti-racist.

Maleeka Madison is the narrator of Sharon G. Flake's *The Skin I'm In*. Her father has died three years earlier, which causes financial problems and explains her wearing ill-wrought clothes that her mother has sewn. She is self-conscious of having darker skin than most of the other African-American students at her school. And she is a writer who learns to reconcile herself to difference by finding strength in the creation of fiction. Maleeka writes a slave narrative about a girl on a slave-ship. She rearranges the letters of her own name to give the character who becomes her alter-ego a similar name, Akeelma. Through Akeelma, Maleeka learns to stand up to the bullies at her school and to take pride in her intelligence. Maleeka's best friend tells her early in the story: "It's not about color [...]. It's how you feel about who you are that counts" (Flake 40). But only after Maleeka has shorn her head in a scene reminiscent of Jo's cutting her curly crop is she able to develop enough poise to tell a teacher who has a birth defect of discoloured pigmentation on her face: "Some of us is the wrong color. Some is the wrong size or got the wrong face. But that don't make us wrong people, now does it?" (Flake 119). Like Jo March, Maleeka has very little self-confidence. Once she gains some, she is able to perceive herself as the strong and articulate writer that the reader has understood her to be all along.

Concepts of Gender

Jennifer Donnelly is more direct about addressing the issues that confronted Twain and Alcott than any other novelist discussed in this essay. *A Northern Light* is a "Künstlerroman" about a young writer, Mattie Gokey, who has to make the same choice between work and art that Cynthia Voigt's Dicey Tillerman believes she faces. Mattie works in the hotel where Grace Brown—the girl murdered in the news story on which Theodore Dreiser based *An American Tragedy*—has been staying before she is drowned by her boyfriend, who knows that she is pregnant. Mattie struggles with Grace's story—and her own—and the stories of the women who surround her. She asks: "How exactly do you stand up like a man when you're a girl?" (Donnelly 33). The answer in Grace Brown's case is clear: she does not and dies as a result. Mattie observes her best friend experiencing the unromantic reality of marriage that Marilyn French once dubbed "baby shit and string beans" (Donnelly 67). She witnesses her neighbour being repeatedly impregnated and kept in abject poverty by the adulterous attentions of a married man. That woman, at least, is aided out of her abjection by the sisterhood that comes through friendship with another woman. But the artist that Mattie most admires, a poet named Emily Baxter, is hounded by an abusive husband and can only transcend the situation by hiding from him and writing more. When Baxter tells Mattie to use her voice as a writer, Mattie

thinks: "Just look where your voice got you [...]. And look where Grace Brown's got her" (Donnelly 362). Mattie's boyfriend, Royal, cannot understand why anyone would want to waste time on writing or reading. Eventually, Mattie breaks off their engagement and journeys to college because she realizes Royal is stifling her voice.

Before she goes, however, she has contemplated seriously what it means to be a writer. She admires Mark Twain for his honesty. Emily Baxter tells her that

Mark Twain had a pitch-perfect ear for the vernacular of the Mississippi River and that this talent of his changed writing forever by allowing a wild, truant boy to sound like a wild, truant boy, and an ignorant drunk to sound like an ignorant drunk. (Donnelly 180)

Mattie concludes:

it seems to me that there are books that tell stories, and then there are books that tell truths. The first kind, they show you life like you want it to be. With villains getting what they deserve and the hero seeing what a fool he's been and marrying the heroine and happy endings and all that. Like *Sense and Sensibility* or *Persuasion*. But the second kind, they show you life more like it is. Like in *Huckleberry Finn* where Huck's pa is a no-good drunk and Jim suffers so. The first kind makes you cheerful and contented, but the second kind shakes you up. (Donnelly 201-02)

Mattie then lists Charles Dickens, Louisa May Alcott and Jane Austen in the first category: "Why do writers make things sugary when life isn't that way?" (202).

But Mattie cannot escape from what Harold Bloom might refer to as Donnelly's anxiety of influence.⁴ Mattie's mother read *Little Women* to her when she was a child, and "[s]he used to tell me that I wrote real nice, as nice as [...] Louisa May Alcott, even" (Donnelly 210). One of Mattie's sisters is named Lou. She is a tomboy who cuts her hair. Their sister Beth contracts an almost fatal illness: "Beth, whose voice was only a whimper now. Whose small, busy hands had fluttered like doves against me as I'd washed her" (Donnelly 289). The four sisters in the family even have an aunt named Josie. Eventually, Mattie wonders why writers like Emily Dickinson and Louisa May Alcott never married. She realizes Emily Dickinson never would have written poetry had she

had two howling babies, a husband bent on jamming another one into her, a house to run, a garden to tend, three cows to milk, twenty chickens to feed, and four hired hands to cook for [...] I knew why they didn't marry. Emily and Jane and Louisa. I knew and it scared me. (Donnelly 274)

Mattie does not want to choose between marriage and writing. She comments that "Mark Twain didn't have to" (Donnelly 274).

Mattie is only able to pursue her education because of the examples she has in the poet Emily Baxter and her closest male friend, Weaver Smith. Weaver is an African-American who is almost lynched; angry racists burn his mother's house down and steal his college money. His intelligence and her own desire to see him reach his potential as a lawyer are central to her decision to go to college. Before she goes, she gives him some of her own college money to ensure that they can both pursue their dreams. Then, instead of lighting out to the territory, they both light out for New York City to get educations.

In Katherine Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved* (1980), the Jo-prototype and the Amy-prototype are paired as twins named Louise and Caroline. In this book, Louise's "Apollyon," jealousy, overwhelms her: she cannot perceive that her blonde, blue-eyed, artistic sister is not a threat to her. Louise is androgynous and drawn to male occupations—crabbing and medicine. Caroline, like Amy, wins all the prizes: the education of her choice, artistic success, and the husband that both girls have once considered marrying.

But Louise (like Jo) ultimately transcends her antipathy for her sister. She does this by rejecting her anger. It becomes apparent to her and to the reader that much of her anger has not been motivated by her sister but by her gender: "Males, I thought, always have a chance to live no matter how short their lives, but females, ordinary, ungifted ones, just get soft and die" (Paterson 162). Although Louise is talking about crabs in this particular quote, her metaphorical self-reference is obvious. When a friend tells her, "You were never meant to be a woman on this island. A man, perhaps. Never a woman" (Paterson 192), she decides to leave the culture that is repressing her and seek her fortune elsewhere. Although she is denied entry into medical school because of her gender, she decides "that if you can't catch crabs where you are, you move your pots" (Paterson 204) and becomes a nurse-midwife with a rewarding practice. Like Voigt's Dicey Tillerman and Alcott's Jo March, Louise is able to balance her career with her marriage.

Political Awareness and Empowerment

American novels for youth take a variety of political stances, including those on race and gender. Novels that address government politics or consumerism tend to be more openly ideological than most social novels, even when authors employ metaphors to make their message less direct. For example, with *Before We Were Free* (2002), Julia Alvarez writes the story of an adolescent girl, Anita, living in the Dominican Republic during the revolution that toppled the dictator General Trujillo in 1961. Alvarez

acknowledges that she is writing the story in the Latin American tradition of the "testimonio," a text commemorating those who died fighting for freedom. The "testimonio" is hardly a product of romantic evangelism, yet it shares with that nineteenth-century religious movement a concern for social justice. But Alvarez is also writing within the American tradition that celebrates the individual. For example, Anita's father calls educating each individual citizen "the key" to democracy (Alvarez 37, 58).

Anita is a first-person narrator whose innocence sometimes creates dramatic irony. She wrongly expects the first snowflakes she sees to look like doilies or assumes that the women revolutionaries her father calls "the butterflies" have been killed in a car accident, although the reader suspects—and later has confirmed—that they have been murdered by the fascist regime (Alvarez 18). Anita is also a writer who comes to terms with her art by keeping a diary while she is in hiding with her mother. In the face of the growing horrors that she is confronted with, including her father and brother being imprisoned and eventually killed by the secret police, Anita grows more and more silent, even though her family once nicknamed her "Cotorrita," little parrot, because she talked "too much" (Alvarez 4). Once she begins to write about her pain, however, she recovers her speaking voice and her sense of self: "When I write in [my diary], I feel as if I've got a set of wings, and I'm flying over my life and looking down and thinking, Anita, it's not as bad as you think" (Alvarez 124).

Anita's entire family is honourable, and Alvarez depicts a nation with many such people. As one member of this nation, Anita is unequivocally portrayed as a metaphor for freedom. Anita's father and her nanny both tell her that she can fly (Alvarez 66, 113), and images of butterflies, moths, kites, and birds soar through the narrative. Anita acknowledges the meaning of the flight metaphors when she proclaims the book's ideology:

I guess I finally understand what [my nanny] and Papi meant by wanting me to fly. It was like the metaphors [my teacher] was always talking about. To be free inside, like an uncaged bird. Then nothing, not even a dictatorship, can take away your liberty. (Alvarez 160)

Anita, her family, and the other revolutionaries are superior to Trujillo's supporters, creating the sense that people can grow to become reform-minded liberators who resist injustice and repression.

Josh, the narrator of Janet Tashjian's *The Gospel According to Larry* (2001), acknowledges his direct debt to the traditions of romantic evangelism on the first page of the novel, when he typifies Thoreau's politics: "nature is good, materialism is bad" (Tashjian 7). He quotes Thoreau to inspire others to social activism: "For every walk is a sort of crusade" and "[h]e who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all" (qtd. in Tashjian 108). Like Thoreau, Josh regards Christ as a role model: he quotes

scripture and Thoreau as examples of how meaningful lives should be lived. Josh uses a website to convince other Americans to protest consumerism and advertising. The overwhelming response to his site communicates Americans' readiness to quit being exploited by business. Using his alter-ego, Larry, Josh writes on his website:

Change the world?
Did
Are.
Can. (Tashjian 129)

In an ironic narrative backlash, however, Josh becomes consumed by his alter-ego. The fame is too much for him, and he realizes that he is selling out to the media and becoming himself commodified. He does not perceive himself as a messiah, although others do. To escape this untenable life, he stages his own death, and he claims Tom Sawyer as his inspiration.

When I was little, I adored *Tom Sawyer*. I read and reread the part about Tom and Huck attending their own funeral—listening in while everyone sang their praises, the looks of surprise on Becky's and Aunt Polly's faces when the minister spotted Tom and Huck upstairs.
 Dying yet not dying. (Tashjian 178)

He calls his fake suicide "Project Tom Sawyer just for laughs" (Tashjian 178)—although the book-lover Josh seems to be remembering the movie version better than the book, since the boys do not hide in the gallery but walk in down the aisle in the book. Josh's plan for his pseudocide carries with it all the spectacle of Tom Sawyer's funeral, but the actual pseudocide is much closer to Huck Finn's staging his own death to escape his untenable life with Pap than it is Tom Sawyer's showy grab for attention. Josh genuinely wants people to believe he is dead, just as Huck does: "My death became the act I'd been rehearsing for my whole life" (Tashjian 183). He protests that he is no messiah, but the biblical references he quotes about resurrection cast that into doubt. The reader is encouraged to internalize his refrain: "Be the hero of your own life" (187). His final prayer is "just an old-fashioned is-anybody-out-there kind of prayer," and he concludes that there is: "It's me" (215). He decides that instead of trying to change the whole world, he will improve the world by improving himself. The sentiment is very Thoreauvian—as he acknowledges in his conclusion. Josh is a loner, an ironic first-person narrator with a reform agenda that includes teaching youth to be self-reliant. His story might well resonate with both Twain and Alcott.

In Contrast: Novels of Individual Hope and Novels of Despair

Novels of social hope can be contrasted to at least two types of adolescent literature that are less reform-minded. Novels of individual hope are the most common type of YA books in the American context. They are the heirs of Goethe and Dickens: books that demonstrate the growth of one individual resolving her or his self-conflict in ways that function largely alongside the "Bildungsroman" tradition. In such novels, maturation becomes a form of empowerment: with more self-awareness, with more education, with financial success, and/or with a romantic partner, the individual has a greater capacity for self-fulfillment. But adolescent novels of individual hope focus on the individual's ability for self-fulfillment, rather than on the individual's capacity to improve society. These novels range from moving and powerful narratives like Angela Johnson's *Heaven* (1998) or Ursula K. Le Guin's *Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) to the saccharine novels like Ann Brashares' *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2001). The psychological growth described in these novels generates a hopefulness available for readers who chose to embrace it; they send the affirmative message that many personal problems can be overcome with enough time, patience, wisdom and luck.

On the other hand, novels that imply that some problems cannot be overcome tend to conflate the idea of personal despair with social despair. I therefore collapse them into one category, novels of despair. The "Desillusionsroman" or "Anti-Bildungsroman," in German typology, involves individuals' despair at their inability to change their situation. Sometimes the despair is personal and individual; sometimes it is a matter of such widespread societal corruption or "Weltzschmerz" that hope is impossible for anyone. Either way, when the Desillusionsroman occurs in adolescent literature, the novel depicts the impossibility of social change or reform. Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974), with its unrelenting message about the corruption of human culture, is prototypical of this genre. Any one of a number of novels that explore social despair contains the same message, that society is irredeemable because people cannot change. For example, Gordon Korman's retelling of *The Great Gatsby* in *Jake, Reinvented* (2003) ends with the Gatsby-character taking the blame for the Daisy-character's attempted murder—and no one in the high school ever identifies what has truly happened because all of them are so invested in protecting Didi/Daisy. Even worse, the narrator—rather than breaking off his relationship with the cynical woman who has proven so destructive to his self-esteem, as Nick does in *Gatsby*—resumes his relationship with her. Nick/Rick seems to have a doomed future because he cannot shake the

woman who openly admits that her narcissism is the only thing that matters to her. At the end of the novel, everyone's future looks bleak.

Jacqueline Woodson's *If You Come Softly* (1998) is narrated by a Jewish-American girl in New York who falls in love with Miah, a gentle and loving youth in her high school who is black. Ellie's family—especially her lesbian sister—is unsupportive of her interracial dating. The only possible resolution of the tension is for Miah to die—which he does when he is shot by a racist white cop who wrongfully assumes Miah has committed a crime. The novel ends with Ellie's sense of grief and hopelessness implicated in her social awareness of the rigidity of class and race:

Time comes to us softly, slowly. It sits beside us for a while.
Then long before we are ready, it moves on. (Woodson 181)

Ellie understands that her greatest happiness is over, that she will never love anyone as she has loved Miah. And she understands that the tragedy of his death is paralleled by her tragic loss of faith in her family and in how society structures itself.

Gail Giles' *Shattering Glass* (2002) is a similarly compelling critique of social class in a Texas high school. A group of popular boys decides to transform the class nerd—Simon Glass—into the boy who wins the election for Class Favourite. The ringleader, Rob, is motivated by his own victimization: his father has been imprisoned for sexually molesting Rob for five years. When Glass—who is more manipulative than Rob and his friends had anticipated—ultimately rejects Rob's engineering of the election for Class Favourite, hacking the computer so that Rob wins instead, Rob and another boy take out their rage on Simon. They beat him to death with a baseball bat while the narrator watches, doing nothing. The final line of the novel, as the boys stand over Glass' shattered body, reads: "We stood silent and unmoving" (Giles 215). The novel is a devastating commentary on the rigidity of social expectations and the seemingly inevitable destructiveness of human emotion.

Conclusion

Many books have been identified as heirs to Alcott and Twain long before the novels discussed in this article. J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), and S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967) are three of the most noteworthy adolescent novels influenced by Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The same can be said of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, the Little House books, and *Harriet the Spy* in relation to *Little Women*. But it would be a mistake to say that all American adolescent novels are descended from *Huck Finn* or *Little Women*. Alcott and

Twain were participating in a "Zeitgeist" that was profitable for them. They were floating in an intellectual current that still flows through contemporary literature because many American readers are still idealistic enough to want to read stories about uncorrupted youth with reform agendas.

But any cursory glance at a list of Young Adult novels in the American landscape will include books that are motivated by different trends, including novels about individual hope and novels about despair. For example, one profitable branch of adolescent literature has been novels that focus intensely on an adolescent's emotional maturation. These books often centre around one person's emotion—grief, fear, longing, or love, for example. Such novels play a pivotal role in defining the canon of adolescent literature, and they are an integral part of what adolescents read and enjoy. But books that focus on emotional maturation and have little or no reform ideology cannot claim to be working in the same intellectual tradition that influenced Alcott and Twain to rely on adolescents as metaphors for the need for social change. Even in novels devoid of first-person narrators, male bonding, sororal harmony or female artistic development—the characteristics most often associated with Twain and Alcott—the political awareness of adolescent narrators advocating reform is so entrenched a pattern in American young adult novels that the tradition largely goes unobserved.

Even more remarkable, these ideologies sometimes work counter to the prevailing trends in the literature. Literature written for younger children is often, by its nature, a conservative genre that reinforces the status quo to assure children that their worlds are safe: Mummy and Daddy will love you no matter what; your home is wherever you are loved; your hopes and dreams can come true; all children have good traits. Adolescent literature, on the other hand, often purports to be radical, but still usually communicates to adolescent readers a repressive ideology that teenagers need to overcome their immaturity and grow out of their subject positions as adolescents in order to become adults.⁵ Few authors depict adolescence as a stage of life that is desirable to remain in permanently. Despite these conservative and repressive tendencies, young adult novels in the Twain and Alcott legacy articulate progressive ideologies about gender, race and government or class politics. Novels of social hope differ from novels of individual hope and novels of despair in their ideological affirmation of the possibility of collective reform.

This classification is by no means comprehensive, nor are the three categories in it mutually exclusive. For example, many novels demonstrate an individual triumphing in a despair-filled world: Holocaust novels for youth, such as Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose* (1992), often fit that pattern. Some novels depict one protagonist with no hope while the other one does hope, despite all evidence to the contrary. M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002) could be described in those terms. Thus, I suggest the distinction between novels of social hope, novels of individual hope, and novels of despair, not in the spirit of rigidly

categorizing literature for youth, but by way of demonstrating how adolescent novels of social reform function differently than other types of novels for youth. By recognizing the legacy of hope in American novels for youth, we can teach students the impact that two authors, Alcott and Twain, had in shaping the history of the canon of adolescent literature in the United States.

Notes

1. New Historicist scholars of nineteenth-century social change in American literature tend to share several assumptions that help to define the type of reform literature that Twain and Alcott wrote. First, nineteenth-century American authors of social reform fiction tended to base their motivation for writing in some permutation of Christianity that implied "reform is simply the right thing to do" (Koistinen-Harris 3). Reform writing ranged from overtly didactic religious tracts to critically acclaimed novels; this body of writing included a complex variety of narratives, genres, images, and style in its many fictional assertions that certain behaviours or inequalities be eradicated from the culture (Reynolds 55). Furthermore, for many of the authors, reform had practical implications based on a desire to make the country's resources operate more efficiently and more fairly; in theory, the more people who had access to the country's abundance, the more productive the nation would be (Koistinen-Harris 3; Elbert xviii). Thus, consumerism walked hand in hand with Christianity in providing a major impulse for reform (Shulman ix, 20). Another truism among critics of literary reform is recognizing the influence of the Civil War in inspiring reform movements. From Abolitionism—which influenced the factionalism that led to the war—to the hygiene movements that occurred as a result of poor sanitary conditions for troops in the war, the Civil War was the watershed from which many progressive movements of the Gilded Age emerged (Eiselein 3-5). Very significantly, within American literature, reform fiction also tends to revisit Civil War tensions in tracing conflict between the rights of the individual and the needs of society, especially focusing on the tension that exists when some people are more disempowered than others (Koistinen-Harris 3; Shulman 3-5). But most essential to these reform writers' functioning is their belief in social progress—their belief that humanity is capable of improvement, which principle is also tied to Judeo-Christianity.

2. For my purposes, "reform" refers to any social movement that assumes that individuals in the society can be improved by a collective action that inspires greater social justice for some group of people. Gregory Eiselein defines the goal of humanitarianism elegantly as "the reduction and elimination of suffering" (15). Twain and Alcott both seem to have subscribed to this definition of humanitarian reform. Both of them, operating from memories of the Civil War and principles of romantic evangelism, democracy, and a belief that social groups can improve, wrote various reform novels for youth that relied on adolescent protagonists. In their novels, social reform becomes almost synonymous with a concept of social growth, that is a depiction of an improved or reformed society that could grow in the same basic sense that people grow, from dependency and solipsism into a greater awareness of community and altruism.

3. See Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* (41-43).
4. Harold Bloom defines the "anxiety of influence" as the way in which poets "[misread] one another, so as to clear imaginative spaces for themselves" (5). Donnelly relies on Alcott as a feminist author, but her protagonist misreads the novels as "sugary," ignoring the poverty in *Little Women*, the death of the Hummel child and Beth, and Jo's repressed anger.
5. See Trites, *Disturbing the Universe* (54-83).

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Maria Nikolajeva

New Masculinities, New Femininities: Swedish Young Adult Fiction Towards the Twenty-First Century

Introduction

It all began in 1982 when Aidan Chambers' *Dance on My Grave* was published. This remarkable young adult novel entered the history of juvenile fiction as the first book that explicitly and candidly discussed homosexuality. But it also became a trendsetter in a different manner, introducing a new kind of male character in YA fiction, a new "way of being male" (Stephens, *Ways of Being Male*). Boys and young men are exposed to societal pressures just as much as girls and young women, merely in a different manner (Nodelman 2). While girls, in reality as well as in literature, have been forced into silent and submissive roles, young males have always had the pressure on them to be strong, aggressive, competitive, and so on (Stephens, "Gender" 18-19). Similarly, while real and literary girls have relatively successfully insisted on their right to be strong and independent, masculine role models turned out to be much more tenacious. The masculine stereotype has been dominant in juvenile literature because it has prevailed in Western culture at large, going back to myths and classic literature, argues Margery Hourihan. In Swedish YA fiction, "new masculinity" did not become prominent until quite recently, perhaps the mid-1980s (Lundqvist, *Tradition*).

This paper will take a brief look at recent trends in Swedish young adult novels focusing on gender-related issues. It is trivial to point out that the gender construction in fiction for teenage readers reflects societal changes and expectations; yet it is quite remarkable to observe how different the portrayal of male and female characters appears depending on the author's gender, and also what a significantly higher status young adult fiction has enjoyed since male authors have intervened into the area. While the YA novels of the 1960s and '70s were written mostly by women, with Gunnell Beckman as the leading name, from the mid-1980s men definitely took over, with all the implicit and explicit consequences. Moreover, the earlier YA novels, whether written by male or female writers and whether featuring male or female protagonists, strove to be as gender-neutral as possible. Mainly as a reaction to the traditional barrier between adventurous "boys books" and domestic, slow-paced "girls books," in Swedish publishing signaled by red

and green book spines, YA novels brought forward more or less universal adolescent dilemmas, such as alienation and confusion, with J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* as the primary model. The "new masculinity" emerging in the works by male writers of the 1980s and '90s, in which young men become softer and more feminine, apparently still appeals to both categories of readers, boys and girls. However, the "new femininity" that can be observed in the novels by women writers at the beginning of the new millennium, clearly signals that the seemingly obsolete category of the "girls novel" is back, in a slightly new shape.

Some questions that arise are the following. Do YA novels reflect what the adult authors believe to be the contemporary teenagers' genuine experience? Or do they provide guidance from clever adults to innocent adolescents? Or do they, as so much of children's literature, convey the adult authors' nostalgic memories of their own youth? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, the books hardly seem to reflect the contemporary teenagers' view of themselves. The ideology that the novels convey is apparently based on alterity, the authors' perception of their protagonists as "the other." Here we have once again the inevitable dilemma of writing for young audiences, the unequal power position between sender and recipient.

Alternative Ways of Being (Fe)Male Since the 1980s

Let us, however, first return to the late 1980s and early 1990s in Sweden. Aidan Chambers' influence on the Swedish YA novel of this period cannot be overestimated; and unlike the previous decades, the dominance of male authors became obvious. In novels by Ulf Stark, Mats Wahl, Peter Pohl, Per Nilsson and several other male authors, the new male, encumbered by the social pressures and uncomfortable in his conventional gender role, enters the scene. Since gender construction in fiction is an essential part of the implicit ideology of any text, the novels made a substantial contribution to the ongoing debate on gender stereotyping in literature for the young. Yet unlike the earlier YA novels with their overt, authoritarian narrative voice, the views and values are hidden behind the confused voice of the first-person narrator. The novels do not offer clear and fixed subject positions and thus demand that the young reader is indeed sensitive enough to their covert ideological statements.

In Wahl's *Winter Bay* (1993), the moral qualities of the protagonist are dubious, and it is not so easy to share his subjectivity, which is perhaps one of the first attempts on the Swedish YA writers' part to subvert the identification compulsion generally propagated by educators. Wahl goes so far in his ambiguity that only halfway through the novel do we realize that