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Gender, Childhood and Children's Literature: The CIRCL Approach

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Abstract

This paper explores the unique approach to childhood and children's literature developed by the research and teaching of the Graduate Centre for International Research in Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media (CIRCL). CIRCL follows in its work the arguments of UK critical theorist Jacqueline Rose in her seminal 1984 book *The case of Peter Pan or the impossibility of children's fiction*. Rose's work has been widely and routinely referenced in Children's Literature studies particularly, but CIRCL interprets her arguments as having quite different implications than those usually assumed. Rose is generally attributed with having pointed out that "childhood" is not one homogenous category, but that childhood is divided by gender, race, and ethnic, political and religious (and so on) identities. But for CIRCL this is only a first step in Rose's arguments and certainly one not unique to her work anyway: the perception of various cultural and historical childhoods is widely held. Instead, my paper explores how Rose's arguments are centrally about how "childhood" *itself* cannot be maintained in the face of division, a division, moreover, which operates inevitably at every level, and which derives from Rose's interpretation of psychoanalysis as formulated by Sigmund Freud, which Rose derives in turn from her readings of the interpretations of Freud by French analyst Jacques Lacan and French critical theorist Jacques Derrida. Finally, my paper argues how Rose's position is about *any* "identity," including gender and that this allies her work closely to that of the famous gender theorist Judith Butler, whose arguments are often (mis)understood in the same ways as those of Rose.

Key words

childhood, gender, children's literature, theory, psychoanalysis

Introduction

The Graduate Centre for International Research in Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media (CIRCL), situated within the Department of English Literature at the University of Reading, in Reading, England, has a unique approach to the research and teaching of childhood and children's literature. CIRCL follows in its work the arguments of UK critical theorist Jacqueline Rose in her seminal 1984 book *The case of Peter Pan or the impossibility of children's fiction*, and is, moreover, the only center for children's literature in the world to teach and research this way. There are areas of study where arguments such as those of Jacqueline Rose are in some cases applied to thinking about childhood more widely than just to children's literature, such as in history, sociology, anthropology or the psychology of childhood (Ariès, 1959/1962; Jenks, 1982, 1996; Steedman, Urwin & Walkerdine, 1985; Walkerdine, 1990, 1997; Stainton Rogers & Stainton Rogers, 1992; Zelizer, 1994; Pilcher & Wagg, 1996, 2014; James & Prout, 1997; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Burman, 2008a, 2008b), but in terms of children's literature specifically this work is only done by CIRCL researchers, either located in Reading or working elsewhere (Cocks, 2009, 2014; Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2011; Walsh, 2010). Rose's work in fact has been and continues to be widely and routinely referenced in children's literature studies, as David Rudd and Anthony Pavlik note in their editors' introduction to a special issue of the American Modern Language Association's leading journal on children's literature, the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *The case of Peter Pan*:

> Rose's book threw down a formidable gauntlet; lauded by some, castigated by others, and misunderstood by many, it has more than stood the test of time. Twenty-five years on, it is probably one of the most quoted works in children's literature criticism (Rudd & Pavlik, 2010, p. 224).

At the same time, Rudd and Pavlik also argue that "[i]n short, references to Rose's work are, more often than not, *en passant*, and once made, the critic then proceeds as though it were 'business as usual'" (Rudd & Pavlik,

2010, p. 225).

CIRCL, however, interprets Rose's arguments as having quite different implications than those assumed by other children's literature critics. What for CIRCL is – and remains – unique about Rose's arguments, and therefore also CIRCL's own, has to do with a particular interpretation of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. Moreover, both the fame of Rose and the (in CIRCL's view) continued misunderstandings of her work for thinking about childhood and children's literature are very closely paralleled with respect to gender in the work of the famous American queer theorist Judith Butler (e.g. Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004). Not only will I argue throughout this paper that Jacqueline Rose and Judith Butler's arguments about childhood and gender are closely similar, but also that their work is widely misunderstood in the same ways and for fundamentally the same reasons.

Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature

What, then, in this sense is the wider relevance of psychoanalysis to children's literature and childhood? I should first emphasize perhaps that in CIRCL's case this is *not* about "applying" psychoanalysis to literature as has been widely practiced both in children's literature and literature more generally. In children's literature, psychoanalysis is usually seen as a type of expert, psychological knowledge that can give readers and critics more information about otherwise hidden or secret aspects of the personalities or motivations of authors, characters in texts, or readers of texts. Critic Kenneth Kidd, for instance, discerns "four kinds of critical projects involving psychoanalysis and children's literature," with "most scholarship belonging to the first category," namely, "using psychoanalysis to explain and interpret children's literature and its function," and the third category (which largely overlaps with the first): "explaining how children's literature helps children psychologically" (Kidd, 2011, p. xiv). In such "critical projects," both children and literature are seen as subjects that are thought to be understood – or at least better understood – through certain approaches or methodologies, of which psychoanalysis is one. Its role as a "psychology" is taken to encompass a special knowledge of emotional processes, including children's emotional development.

It must be kept in mind that children's books are, of course, written by adults for children. The subsequent criticism of this fiction is then produced

by adults on behalf of the children who are supposed to be reading the books. A multiple layer of adults is thus involved: those who write, and then those who select and analyze, children's fiction. Ideas are formulated by most children's literature critics[1] about "what children are like" so they can say which books will "appeal" to them and why, and they claim these ideas come from "knowing" about children either from the memory of themselves as children, or from observations of existing children. Both the considerable variations and contradictions in critical judgments, and the idea that it is after all still adults controlling the writing, publication, marketing, and (usually) buying of the books, sometimes lead to the assumption that were children to write and criticize "children's books" this would necessarily create a somehow superior situation: that this would give children "perfect" books, written by themselves for themselves, and selected and read in a situation of liberty of choice. Instead it can be realized, as Jacqueline Rose points out, that this assumption rests on several often unexamined beliefs: firstly, that "children" are a homogeneous group of beings able to speak to each other directly out of a fundamental and crucial similarity of experience and consciousness, and, secondly, that reading is a spontaneous process which can occur in a vacuum, free of previous learning about culture or language. Hence the image of children re-producing "purely" themselves as books in which (other) children recognize themselves.

Rose and other theorists (e.g. Jenks, 1982, 1996; Barker, 1989; James & Prout, 1997; Pilcher & Wagg, 1996, 2014; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998, 2011; Burman, 2008a, 2008b) have argued, however, that "children" are not a homogenous group, in several senses. To begin with they are divided by gender, ethnicity, class, culture, and age, just as adults are. Although this may seem an obvious statement, the implications of these divisions often still cause difficulties in much of the discourse of children's literature criticism (what are the defining characteristics of such identities? And how do they affect reading?). Furthermore, the whole concept of "the child" or "childhood" is inherently problematic: it is neither agreed upon, in terms of definitions and characteristics, within one time-period or culture, and neither is it consistent through history or

[1] For my purposes here I will be referring under this heading not only to critics strictly speaking but also to children's fiction authors discussing their own, or other writers', work, publishers, librarians, or teachers; anyone commenting on children's fiction in this way.

across cultures and societies (Ariès, 1959/1962; Lesnik-Oberstein, 1998). The idea that biologists or psychologists have been able to isolate definitive sequences of development or perception which pin down "childhood" is an illusion. Although models of development have been, and are still being, proposed, they are subject to history and culture: to interpretations determined by the interests and values of the researchers (Shweder & Levine, 1984; Stigler, Shweder & Herdt, 1989; Shweder, 1991; Cole, 1996; Shore, 1996; Bruner, 1997; Burman, 2008a). It should be clearly stated that this does not make them valueless, although this remains a persistent anxiety among most writers on childhood. Indeed, this would only be the case if it were to be argued that these interpretations were "wrong" and were therefore hopefully going to be superseded by a "correct" knowledge. Instead, the value assigned to the proffered models may be said to be different, not based on claims to an absolute truth, but on a participation in a discussion around cultural meanings (even of "truth"). As Diana Fuss notes in her book *Essentially speaking*:

> The deconstruction of identity, then, is not necessarily a *disavowal* of identity, as has occasionally been suggested. Elaine Marks articulates the position I would like to articulate here: namely that 'there must be a sense of identity, even though it would be fictitious' (1984, p. 110). Fictions of identity, importantly, are no less powerful for being fictions (indeed the power of fantasy marks one of Freud's most radical insights). It is not so much that we possess 'contingent identities' but that identity itself is contingent: 'the unconscious constantly reveals the "failure" of identity. Because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved' (Fuss, 1989, p. 104).

For most of children's literature and its criticism the issues around the defining of childhood are even more specific than for that of childhood in general. The typical questions the criticism revolves around – "which books appeal to children?"; "how do children identify with certain books?"; "(how) do children adopt values and morals from books?"; or (as Kenneth

Kidd points out) "how can children be helped psychologically by children's books?" – reflect the involvement with formulations of perception and emotion. Critics want to know which book the child will "love," and which book will (to the critics *therefore*) be "good" for the child. If the child loves the book, they reason, the child will willingly, even unconsciously, learn from the book. These ideas, I have argued at length elsewhere, operate even in children's literature criticism which sees itself as primarily concerned with analyzing the texts rather than engaging with reader's responses. It is the focus of discussion around emotion and consciousness which, then, links children's literature criticism specifically – and in the most obvious way – to psychoanalysis.

However, in CIRCL research psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic theories as such are actually rarely mentioned: children's books are not "psychoanalyzed," nor are children (or children as readers) or children's book authors. Instead, with Rose, the question is raised whether psychoanalysis can be "applied" *at all* in such a way. Rose's thinking about psychoanalysis in this sense has been in turn influenced by specific interpretations of psychoanalysis and its implications in, primarily, the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1967/1997), the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1966/2001), and the related work on literature and psychoanalysis by Shoshana Felman (1977/1982). What does CIRCL then see Rose as saying instead about psychoanalysis, and what does that have to do with, amongst other things, children's literature, but certainly not just children's literature and not even just "adult" literature, but also the child in all areas and fields, from anthropology to medical ethics? Let me take first the idea that many children's literature critics claim Rose was one of the critics to introduce and with which they agree, which is the idea that children *differ*. To CIRCL the crucial point for Rose here is not that children differ, but that differences disrupt the unity of "childhood" itself. In other words, for Rose the statement "children differ" *maintains* after all a category of "childhood" which spans all claimed "differences," and which guarantees an ongoing similarity of the child in the face of difference: the children may be seen to differ, but they are also all still recognized and recognizable as *children*. Furthermore, this paradox is for Rose not just applicable to children and childhood, but to *all* identities.

Childhood, Gender and Difference

I will give an example of how the paradox of claiming "different" children maintains the child nonetheless. There are many children's literature critics who disagree with what they understand to be widely-spread views of children and childhood, even in other children's literature criticism. American critic Joseph Thomas, for instance, sees

> Playground poetry as operat[ing] as one of these subversive opposites. It dismantles nostalgic notions of the innocent, obedient, and controllable child and thus, in my experience, tends to disturb adults, as it implies sexualized, complicated child-agents who are able to control their world through linguistic play and sometimes violent, antiauthoritarian imagery. [...] The poems are public property. [...] no one child "owns" these poems; they belong to each child equally, and each child retains the right to alter and revise the poems as he or she sees fit, as context and mood dictates. [...] The authors are anonymous, yet the authors are everywhere (Thomas, 2007, p. 42).

The "subversive opposites" are each within the view and knowledge of the narration, which is here therefore itself neither. The playground poetry is *produced* by the child poets *as* a "dismantl[ing]" of "nostalgic notions of the innocent, obedient, controllable child," so that the adult tradition is played with in terms of the child poets knowing the ways it engages, and is engaged with, by the good student, and is seen as needing to be corrected. The child poets here "serve" the grown-ups in being the source for the correct version of themselves for the grown-ups who it knows have forgotten that which they once knew about the child poets. Yet, this correction "tends to disturb adults," according to this narration which thereby is either not itself adult, or is an exceptional adult, who knows of this disturbance, but is not itself affected by it.

The child poets, then, offer themselves to the grown-ups as "sexualized, complicated child-agents, who are able to control their world." By whom these child-agents are "sexualized" remains a question, unless the

"sexualized" is somehow also to be understood here as an autonomous force of innate development, whereby the child poets are split into a pre-sexual state and a "sexualized" state, and in the grips of which they are powerless to withstand the part of themselves which sexualizes another part. Their "agency" in any case lies in controlling a world which is "their[s]," and as such is uncontrolled until they control it "through linguistic play and sometimes violent, antiauthoritarian imagery." "Agency" is a popular term in recent thinking about childhood (See for critiques of this Steedman, Urwin & Walkerdine, 1985; Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1998; Lesnik-Oberstein, 2011). It often seems to be seen as something that children either lack or have an insufficiency of, but which adults can - and should - foster or develop in the child. This raises the difficulty that this "agency" can only be an agency under the definition and control of the very adults who are permitting it to the children. In other words, as with Thomas's "playground," "agency" is the non-supervised space or activity that is identified and *supervised* as such.

In the end, then, the child is after all neither "not a child" nor a "construction" in this text, despite Thomas's formulations and arguments to this effect. The child is instead according to the text itself correctly recognized as the source of authority for that authority's own recognition of the child as violence, sexuality, and resistance to itself. And this child is the "anonymous [...] author" which is "everywhere," permitted to write playground poetry as long as it is this correct child. It is this poetry which this text claims would fail "as [it would be] ultimately insufficient insofar as it fails to acknowledge and consider playground poetry as poetry, as belonging to a rich poetic tradition" (Thomas, 2007, p. 40). This poetry, known in this text always already as poetry, and as the real and true poetry for the real and true child, goes on through the rest of Thomas's argument to set the standard for poetry written by children and adult poets alike. As Thomas states: "Either way, this rhyme ["Ms. Lucy"] moves towards the classroom; it operates in two realms at once and can be performed near authority without much fear of punishment, whereas the other playground rhymes are meant exclusively for young ears" (Thomas, 2007, p. 59). The child poets mean their poetry for themselves, and they know who they are, and know how to write for themselves and each other. And yet this poetry can and should, according to Thomas, also be recognized, appreciated, and produced, by adult poets too. In the end, then, all are to be the right child:

grown-ups, adults, good students, and playground poets. They are all to be anonymous authors everywhere, writing for themselves and each other in perfect unity, without division in all being the child. Except that here too, division will always intrude its undesired self even in this child, who here can know already what it is itself, and authors that self for the adults.

It is with respect to the paradox that claiming difference does not disrupt the category within which that difference resides that CIRCL's work is also related to (and draws on) the gender and queer theory of Judith Butler, where Butler argues not only that "gender" is not a consequence of biological features of the bodies of women and men, but a cultural, political, and historical construction, but also that "biological" differences and "sex" (i.e. "male" and "female") themselves are cultural, political, and historical constructions too. As Butler argues:

> What is 'sex' anyway? Is it natural, anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal, and how is a feminist critic to assess the scientific discourses which purport to establish such 'facts' for us? [...] If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (Butler, 1990, pp. 6-7)

Exactly as with Rose and CIRCL's own work, Butler's work too is often understood differently: mostly Butler is written about and discussed as if she is arguing (just as with Rose with respect to childhood) that there are indeed differences (historical, cultural, religious, political, or ethnic) in constructions of femininity and masculinity, but – it is then also said or written – either that "of course" there are, in the end, "natural" differences between the bodies of men and women, biologically or anatomically speaking, or, even when an innateness or naturalness is actively disavowed, nevertheless a known body can be read to be ultimately retrieved.

Childhood, Gender and the Body

Examples of such overt disavowals of an innateness or naturalness of the

body which nevertheless inadvertently themselves retrieve the body can be found in many feminist writings around gender precisely where there is a concern about the ways women's bodies are viewed as objects in discourses. Mary Lay, Laura Gurak, Clare Gravon and Cynthia Myntti (2000), for instance, see the "expert" (usually male, or embedded in a male establishment) as the source of discourses which define and control the feminine as body and identity:

> Within these normalizing arguments, although women are certainly subjects or creators of knowledge, they also become objects of knowledge. Their bodies may be fragmented into mechanical parts, and their reproductive functions may become medical conditions, to be fixed or rehabilitated if they fall outside the norm. This fragmentation [...] ignor[es] other aspects of the self, such as emotions and personal relationships and support systems (Lay et al., 2000, p. 5).

In this consideration of the experts' discourses as determinate of identity and experience, however, there is nevertheless a simultaneous instatement of a body and self which exist outside of these stories, as and of themselves. Stories are here seen as external impositions, '"internalized by society's citizens" (Lay et al., 2000, p. 4), where the source of these stories here is explicitly and specifically located as issuing from the experts in control of knowledge. This, first, places those "experts"' as themselves outside of the social in creating it and leaves aside how these experts themselves came to specifically articulate such a narrative. Also, beyond, or below, these external stories, the citizens possess a self which has "other aspects [...] such as emotions and personal relationships and support systems." Lay et al. can therefore know and define this self and its proper attributes. The body too "*may* be fragmented into mechanical parts" (author's emphasis), indicating that the body may also not thus be fragmented and that non-fragmentation is its prior state; a wholeness of, and as, the body is assumed.

The persistence of perspectives which can identify or know entities and identities prior to the imposed stories is also apparent in a judgment offered by the text:

> [...] the births of the McCaughey septuplets in 1997 and the Chekwu octuplets in 1998 ([...] both [...] conceived via fertility treatments) were primarily reported in wondrous terms, with the parents claiming that their successful multiple births were primarily acts of God, not science. Yet in reality these births are both wondrous and frightening – acts of God and acts of science and technology [...] (Lay et al., 2000, p. 4).

The authors here are able to claim a knowledge of a "reality"; a reality, moreover, which is itself determined as composed of the two alternate possibilities outlined: "God and [...] science and technology." Despite the argument, then, that Lay et al. make that they are offering a "[r]hetorical analysis of arguments [...] [which] identif[ies] authoritative knowledge, within midwifery and within the medical community, as not true knowledge but instead as discursive constructs" (Lay et al., 2000, p. 6), their formulations have already claimed such "true knowledge" as something they can know and find. The splitting up of identity, the self, culture, and society into on the one hand imposed "discursive constructs," and, on the other, autonomous and identifiable entities, pre-determines and defines the further arguments of their text.

Further, for Lay et al. the role of "stories" plays an ongoing part in determining gender and the body as already knowable. An internal story is, as is often the case in studies of gender and ethnicity across differing fields (literature, history, anthropology, sociology, politics, psychology), situated in the women's "voice," privileged as the voice heard from the start of Lay et al.'s text. "Voice" in many critical approaches constitutes the expression of the true self, or, as Lay et al. put it, "women's experiential and embodied knowledge, [...] that is, their unique experience with birthing their children and their knowledge of their own bodies' signs and needs" (Lay et al., 2000, p. 6). Consistent with their splitting of identity and the self into external and internal stories, here "experience" is inserted on the side of a body that can provide women with a knowledge of its signs and needs. The body sends signals to the self to which it belongs, and these signs can be read and understood in a privileged way by the self; they are not signs that are available to other selves. The plot of Lay et al.'s narrative lies therefore in

> examining the discourse surrounding reproduction and technology, [to] reveal, explicate, and even shake up that discourse. We can recall women's experiential and embodied knowledge; we can illuminate how language normalizes certain reproductive choices (Lay et al., 2000, p. 6).

This plot requires that Lay et al. are themselves positioned outside of that discourse, able to view it. At the same time, they can recall something that must have been once forgotten in order to necessitate retrieval, and yet they already know that which is to be so recalled. It is the experiential and embodied knowledge which women earlier were said to possess in and of themselves, not needing to be recalled, but an inherent aspect of their unique knowledge of birth and their own bodies. Lay et al.'s text is, then, construed as itself a recollection in the face of the expert technologies which deny or repress the women's knowledge of themselves: it is itself the women's voice.

Childhood, Children's Literature and Gender: Reading Perspectives

Therefore, at CIRCL the understanding of Butler and Rose is that their arguments crucially raise the question as to precisely what those "natural" or "commonsensical" aspects "in the end" then would be, and how and why they *are* then held to be timeless and essential. As Butler writes:

> Theorizing from the ruins of the Logos invites the following question: 'What about the materiality of the body?' Actually, in the recent past, the question was repeatedly formulated to me this way: 'What about the materiality of the body, Judy?' I took it that the addition of 'Judy' was an effort to dislodge me from the more formal 'Judith' and to recall me to a bodily life that could not be theorized away. [...] restored to that bodily being which is, after all, considered to be most real, most pressing, most undeniable. [...] And if I persisted in this notion that bodies were in some way constructed, perhaps I really thought that words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance?

Couldn't someone simply take me aside? (Butler, 1993, pp. ix-x)

In this way CIRCL's thinking about psychoanalysis therefore has to do with continuously working through the implications of considering everything as *analysable* (therefore also, as in the work of Butler, "biology" or "the body"), but at the same time questioning the possibility of positions of entire and complete knowledge or consciousness, whereby everything is formulated as if it could be entirely understood and comprehended ("mastery"). Thinking about psychoanalysis in this way leads to the extensive pursuit of the reading of perspectives (narrations); that is, in departing from the position that everything is known ("children," "gender," "body," or whatever) from a perspective, and not as "objective" knowledge (whereby we therefore also do not invoke "subjectivity," as this itself would in turn postulate its opposite, "objectivity"). For this reason, CIRCL work continually reads perspectives, and, through and as these perspectives, *investments*. In other words, all claims to knowledge are always also held to be already claims to interest or investment, and this also applies to CIRCL's own work, whether or not those doing the work are aware of this or wish it or don't wish it. As Shoshana Felman argues in relation to critics' readings of Henry James's novella *The Turn of the Screw* (1898):

> The Freudian critics' job, [in other critics' views] is but to pull the answer out of its hiding place – not so much to give an answer *to* the text but to answer *for* the text [...] It would not be inaccurate, indeed, to say that the traditional analytical response to literature is to provide the literary question with something like a reliably professional "answering service" [... But] it should be noted that the expression "Freudian reading" is *itself* an ambiguous expression [...] a reading can be called "Freudian" with respect to *what it reads* (the *meaning* or thematic content it derives from a text or with respect to *how it reads* (its interpretative *procedures*, the techniques or *methods* of analysis it uses). [... It is] in the second sense that a [...] reading of Freud has been elaborated by Jacques Lacan [… for whom] the unconscious is not only *that which must be read*, but also, and primarily, *that which reads*. [...] The question

> underlying such a reading is thus not "*what* does the story mean?" but rather "*how* does the story mean?" (Felman, 1977/1982, pp. 105, 117, 118-119, Felman's emphases)

This specific interpretation of psychoanalysis also underpins the fact that the "intentions" of authors are not speculated upon (Brooks, 1951; Barthes, 1967/1977; Foucault, 1991); neither are the reader-responses of readers, whether these are "child" or "adult" readers. CIRCL research does, however, analyze what other critics claim about "authors" and "readers" from their particular critical perspectives, not in order to judge them as being "wrong" (because that would imply that a "right" answer could or would be found instead), but in order to read what (in this view, *inevitably*) is invested in the constructions of these "authors" or "children" (whereby again it is not assumed that these critics construct these authors or children intentionally or on purpose necessarily, and therefore CIRCL does not write about what these critics are supposed to be thinking or intend, but only reads the texts, and the investments read in the texts).

I will now give some examples of children's literature critics' misunderstandings of the work of Jacqueline Rose and its implications: Kimberley Reynolds, one of the first and leading professors of children's literature in England, argues, for instance, that Rose has had a "particularly powerful, but sometimes misunderstood influence" on children's literature studies, and Reynolds herself[2] describes Rose's position as being that "the 'child' in children's literature is a phantasm based on adult constructions of what they think children and childhood 'should' be like" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 129). However, I can read Reynolds's formulation (even taking the qualifying quote marks around "should" into account) as claiming that Rose objects to "constructions" of children and childhood in childhood which make of them "phantasms" which they "should" *not* have to be, implying that, in Reynolds's claim, there is after all an alternative way for children to be than as adults' "phantasms." Similarly, when Reynolds explains that Rose "is working from the perspective of psychoanalytic criticism [...] which holds that the self is

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[2] I would like to emphasize here again that when I include the name "Reynolds" (or any other name), I do not do this to attribute an intention to the author, but only to label perspectives I am reading to which I give this name in certain places for the sake of convenience. It is entirely possible that Kimberley Reynolds would not agree with my readings of her book.

a product of language" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 129), Reynolds claims that the importance of this is "since language is central to the medium of fiction and young readers are actively involved in learning and experimenting with language" (Reynolds, 2011, p. 130). Here too I can read that there can be "young readers" who are not *themselves*, after all, the "language" which is "central to the medium of fiction." Moreover, the young readers are known from this perspective to be "actively involved in learning and experimenting with language," meaning that the children must be known to be outside of that language which they can then learn, involve themselves in and with which they can experiment. It can also be noted that language is here distinguishable from fiction, where fiction requires a medium to which language is central, implying that there are also other, non-central, aspects of the medium which are not language.

In these ways even critics who place themselves as being in agreement with Rose take her arguments to uphold separations between language and children. There are frequent, similar, claims throughout theoretical discussions of children's literature that "constructivism" has been widely accepted and understood, but, as with the misunderstandings of Judith Butler I have discussed above, CIRCL critics read children's literature criticism as always retrieving essential children and childhood nonetheless. This is primarily because arguments such as those of Rose are only taken to be relevant to noting that child-characters in books are different as all children are held to be different by children's literature critics. The much more extensive psychoanalytic implications are not engaged with, above all the question of reading perspectives, which in turn raises the question of what it means to read, for instance, "plot," "character," "theme," "gender", "child," or "didacticism" in and as texts. Rose's interpretation of psychoanalysis, with its critique of an "objective," transparent, consciousness, prohibits the assumption of known, visible, stable entities in texts which are simply there to be assumed and found. As Rose writes:

> The most crucial aspect of psychoanalysis for discussing children's fiction is its insistence that childhood is something in which we continue to be implicated and which is never simply left behind. Childhood persists [...] as something which we endlessly rework in our attempt to build an image of our own history. When we think

> of childhood it is above all our investment in doing so which counts. [...] Childhood is not an object, any more than the unconscious, although this is often how they are both understood. The idea that childhood is something separate which can be scrutinized and assessed is the other side of the illusion which makes of childhood something which we have simply ceased to be (Rose, 1993, pp. 12-13).

To give a second example of how Rose's arguments are misunderstood and how this then affects the claims of the criticism: American children's literature critic Marah Gubar has been one of the many who have engaged with Rose's arguments also, in her case as follows:

> No one was more instrumental in alerting us to the problems with this way of conceiving of young people than [Jacqueline] Rose, yet observe how Laurie Langbauer recaps her main argument: "Rose asserted that knowledge of children themselves was 'impossible,' always a projection, and that adults should acknowledge the child as an unknown and unknowable other'" [...]. Or, consider Perry Nodelman's claim that children's literature is "an adult practice" [...]. Underlying this statement is the assumption that children and adults are categorically different from one another: adults are involved in the production of children's literature; children are not. [...] As David Rudd and I have argued, such accounts – which often claim not to be saying anything about children – actually suggest that adults have power, voice, and agency and children do not (Gubar, 2013, pp. 451-452).

For Gubar, then, Rose's argument is that the child *is* there, but as such an "other" that it cannot be known to the adult, and that Rose and like-minded critics *therefore*, "try so hard to avoid saying anything about actual young people" (Gubar, 2013, p. 451). This perspective already includes two assumptions of knowledge after all: first, that there are "actual young people," who can by implication be distinguished from not-actual young

people; and, second, that although that actuality and youngness *can* be seen and known, this is apparently something which Rose must try hard not to say anything about, which implies that it is easy to say something about them unless one prevents this. In other words, this perspective knows what it does not know; it knows what "otherness" is, after all, and that things can be said about it quite easily. Moreover, there are further things which this perspective knows about children and can speak about quite easily (according to itself), which is that they have "power, voice, and agency." Gubar can see and know what "power, voice, and agency" are *and* can know which kind of things are adults' "power, voice, and agency" and which are children's, and what the differences between them are.

Note too how Gubar explains Rose as assuming that "children and adults are categorically different from one another," while Rose, in the quote I include above, insists on quite the opposite, which is that "childhood is something in which we continue to be implicated and which is never simply left behind." For Rose, the question would be which perspective identifies "power, voice, and agency" *as such,* and how and why that perspective can do that on behalf of what it cannot do other than identify as *in its view?* For Rose, as she interprets psychoanalysis, memory, and experience, whether of childhood, children, or anything else, are not "truths" impartially observed and recorded, but are productions of desire, a desire not known to the perspective itself (it is unconscious), but which can be read as investment itself: that which causes it to see what and how it sees it.

I will give a final example of how the misunderstandings of Rose recur in children's literature criticism in a book that specifically itself also draws on psychoanalysis, and, moreover, ostensibly the same psychoanalysis as Jacqueline Rose: Karen Coats, in *Looking glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, desire and subjectivity in children's literature* argues that the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan on which Rose also draws[3] is especially pertinent to children's literature because

> The only way we come to make sense of the world is through the stories we are told. They pattern the world we have fallen

[3] It is remarkable that although Coats lists Jacqueline Rose's *The case of Peter Pan* in her bibliography she never mentions it in her book, not even when specifically discussing the relationships between psychoanalysis and children's literature or (other critics') interpretations of *Peter Pan.*

> into, effectively replacing its terrors and inconsistencies with structured images that assure us of its manageability. [...] By offering substantive representations for words and things to the child, stories, especially those found in children's literature, provide signifiers – conventional words and images – that attach themselves to unconscious processes and have material effects on the child's developing subjectivity. [...] Why this should be so is most convincingly formulated by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Coats, 2007, pp. 1-2).

Coats here directly relies on a division between "the world" and "stories" that Rose's interpretation of psychoanalysis, including specifically Lacanian psychoanalysis, fundamentally and crucially rejects. As Rose argues:

> Children's fiction has never completely severed its links with a philosophy which sets up the child as a pure point of origin in relation to language, sexuality and the state.
> The earliest children's writers took from [seventeenth-century English philosopher John] Locke the idea of an education based on the child's direct and unproblematic access to objects of the real world, an education which would by-pass the imperfections of language [...] They took from [eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques] Rousseau the idea that it is sexuality which most totally sabotages the child's correct use of language and its exact knowledge of the world. [...] Children's fiction emerges, therefore, out of a conception of the child and the world as knowable in a direct and unmediated way, a conception which places the innocence of the child and a primary state of language and/or culture in a close and mutually dependant relation. It is a conception which has affected children's writing and the way that we think about it to this day (Rose, 1993, pp. 8-9).

Coats positions her "we" as having stories to "make sense of" and "pattern the world," which may seem like a claim which is the same as

Rose's in seeing the world as only known through the mediation of "stories," and therefore, as Rose argues, *not* "knowable in a direct and unmediated way." But Coats's argument is actually the opposite to that of Rose: for in Coats's view, what *can* be known about the world in a "direct and unmediated way" after all is that it is originally without "pattern," has "terrors and inconsistencies," and is without "structured images" and therefore unmanageable. In fact, the point for Rose's argument is precisely that the "stories" that Coats sees as "effectively replacing" the world of "terrors and inconsistencies" never − in the terms of Coats's argument itself − can actually achieve this "replacement", because that original, unreplaced, world nevertheless always remains known *as such*. In other words, Coats knows what the world before and without stories is like and no amount or type of stories has banished that knowledge: the terror, inconsistencies, and unmanageability remain.

As with the other inadvertent retrievals of the child and the body that I have discussed previously in this article, Coats's initial acceptance of a division between the world and stories (language) pre-determines and pre-directs all the rest of her claims, even as the text also frequently, overtly, rejects ideas of a self-evident "reality." This can already be noted in the divisions which are taken for granted as inherently part of the division between the world and stories: stories are also claimed, for instance, to "offer substantive representations for words and things to the child." "Words" and "things" are therefore here also already known to exist and be separate, even as they are in turn also separate from their "substantive representations *and* from "the child" to whom they are "offer[ed]." In this way, words, things and the child come first, while representations and stories come afterwards even as they are then offered to the child who does not (yet) have them. The child is known to start out without words, stories and things, which it needs to be supplemented with in order to "make sense" of the world. Moreover, the "substantive representations," which are not the words and things themselves although they can substitute "for" them, "provide signifiers − conventional words and images" "by offering" themselves as or in "stories" to the child. "Substantive representations" are not either, then, themselves the "signifiers" that they "provide." The signifiers are "conventional words and images," so that there are also, in this perspective, known to be *un*conventional words and images, but those are not provided by the representations and stories to the child. It seems, from

this, that there are to begin with the "words and things" which are outside of or prior to convention and therefore not "signifiers," and "words and images" which are conventional and part of stories. It is, finally, the conventional words and images which then "attach themselves to unconscious processes and have material effects in the child's developing subjectivity." The implication of these known states and separations is that stories are, in such arguments, known to be, as well as justified as, the uniquely privileged shapers of "unconscious processes and [...] the child's developing subjectivity."

It is these specific definitions of stories and language that for Coats constitute both her understanding of Lacan's psychoanalytic theories and the centrality of such theories to reading and thinking about children's literature. In *Looking glasses and Neverlands*, Lacan is understood to be the authority that supplies the argument that

> The subject is an effect of language, suggesting there can be no subjectivity without language. And while language is the system of symbolic representation that Lacan most privileges, I think it is important to remember from the outset that visual or graphic representation is also an integral part of structuring who we are. [...] Although we are born with what is termed a proprioceptive self – a self that is perceptually aware of its place in space and can judge, to a very minimal extent, the physical properties of the things around it – we have no cognitive centering principle to organize that perception. It is not until we begin to use the processes of representation, both visual and verbal, that we are able to make those sensory perceptions have meaning and consistency (Coats, 2007, p. 2).

In these claims, Coats not only understands psychoanalysis completely differently than Jacqueline Rose – and Rose's reading of Lacan – but also retrieves the body in the ways that Judith Butler argues against because Coats knows that "we are born with [...] a proprioceptive self." Indeed, as I proposed from the outset, such misunderstandings of Rose and Butler, and their readings of psychoanalysis, must *necessarily* go together. For it is

the belief in an innocent, unmediated access to a world of objects − and bodies as objects − which Rose and Butler understand psychoanalysis to question at its roots. As Rose writes:

> In most discussions of children's fiction which make their appeal to Freud [and Lacan], childhood is part of a strict developmental sequence at the end of which stands the cohered and rational consciousness of the adult mind. [...] [T]his is the most reductive, even if it is the most prevalent, reading of Freud. It is reductive to the extent that it holds off the challenge, which is present in Freud's own work, to the very notions of identity, development and subjective cohesion which this conception of childhood is so often used to sustain. [...] The issue [...] is [...] that of how our subjectivity is divided in relation to itself [... Freud's] concept of the unconscious has been refused at exactly the point where it throws into question the idea of our subjectivity as something which we can fully know, or that ultimately can be cohered (Rose, 1993, pp. 13, 15).

Conclusion

For children's literature,[4] *necessarily*, any understanding of any theory or philosophy, including psychoanalysis, must fit into a world in which both that world and the child can be known as such, even when such an understanding − in many cases − claims that that knowledge is always somehow limited or partial: this is how the field can achieve a writing "for" the child, in which "writing" and "child" are separate entities successfully bridged by that "for." Therefore, it is understandable that for Coats, "language," defined as it is in her text as something apart from the unconventional "words and things," is both a "system of symbolic representation" which

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[4] As I have argued above and elsewhere, this is also true for many other areas of study of childhood, but there are some exceptions to this view in other childhood studies as I have noted in this article while children's literature in terms of how it defines itself as a field *must* rely on this view. This in fact is the reason that CIRCL's work is often not seen to be within "children's literature" by other children's literature critics.

can be "privileged" above other systems of symbolic representation, but that this "language" is also in this view different to "visual or graphic representation," where the "visual and graphic" are not only outside and different to "language" but also not a "symbolic system." In other words, "language" in these arguments is always strictly limited in its form and reach, even as it is also seen to be central in its effects as "stories."

The "proprioceptive self" that we are born with according to Coats "is perceptually aware of its place in space and can judge, to a very minimal extent, the physical properties of the things around it": again, this persistently constitutes "the physical properties of the things" which are around the "proprioceptive self" of the newly born child as being objects that can be known transparently and self-evidently for their inherent properties. The fact that according to Coats "we have no cognitive centering principle to organize that perception" does not disqualify "perception" as nonetheless being a something that the infant is known to have in this perspective, even as it is disorganized and not cognitive. Finally, in this view, "[i]t is not until we begin to use the processes of representation, both visual and verbal, that we are able to make those sensory perceptions have meaning and consistency": although the "we" cannot "make those sensory perceptions have meaning and consistency," they do *have* "sensory perceptions" which are, again, known to the extent they can be judged to lack "meaning and consistency." Throughout this the "we" are themselves known to be present and able to "use processes of representation" as well as "make" "sensory perceptions have meaning and consistency," which implies that the "we" know what they do not have and can strive to obtain. *This*, in short, is the fully known and cohered subjectivity that for Coats lies at the end of the developmental path from infancy to adulthood, led and shaped by "stories" and "visual and graphic images" and always, *retrospectively*, able to know what it was and what it lacked, but lacks no longer. It is precisely such a stable, full, undivided and cognitively organised subjectivity which for Rose and Butler is never achievable. However, and necessarily, nor can the child – therefore – be the pure past as the possibility of a self-constituting origin of such a coherent later subjectivity: any such lacking child, on its way to its own self-completion, is always, unavoidably, defined in the present of the perspective that knows it and claims it for itself.

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