

# “Once the Hunter”: The little other in children’s literature

## An intercultural analysis

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*«Children... have no use for psychology. They detest sociology. They still believe in God, the family, angels, devils, witches, goblins, logic, clarity, punctuation and other such obsolete stuff... When a book is boring, they yawn openly. They don’t expect their writer to redeem humanity, but leave to adults such childish illusions.»*

(Isaac Bashevis Singer, speech on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, *The Observer*, 17 December 1978. – Quoted in Jenks, 1996, p. 56)

There is an old Saxon Myth declaring that “child” is an abandoned crazy whom one day, through “play”, will become king in another man’s position. “Play” continued all these centuries from the first appearance of the myth and after, distributing the roles of the “crazy” and the “king” that will be overthrown according to the positions that were set each time in a “ready for everything” chest. A chest constructed by the needs of social hierarchy, of economy, of social cohesion, of the narcissism of the various ethnic or economic or religious or any other groups. But also influenced by efforts against the previous factors, as they were articulated by heterodoxies that were ready most of the times to transform themselves into orthodoxies and continue the “play” from the beginning.

Which one could possibly be the role of the child (especially the “other child” or the “little other”, Tsioumis, 2001) in an era where the ethnic-self has to be replaced by a new globalised one and were, due to financial and ideological difficulties, the play of the adults has to be spent in the best of the cases mostly in the effort to avoid or minimise the ‘dystopias’ than in the search of utopias?

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Having late modernity to corrosive slowly, like the liquid salt, the “stable” rock of modernity, sweeping together all the myths that the Enlightenment was bringing with it?

Is child condensation of the “hope” and the “threat” like the old myth requires – still a “lunatic” playing, or has it become the “king” and if yes how it has won its – undefined-kingdom?

What is, thus, child’s image (Doukeri, 1998) within Post-modernity’s social context and what it reveals for society’s self evaluation is going to be examined through children’s literature which, as collective representation, «represents the arrangements of the society and historical era in which it is carried on» (Stone, 1982). That means we will divide this paper into two parts. In the first we will explore parts of the procedure that made child an important factor in the collective operations (both social and psychological) of the west, in the recent centuries and in the framework of the nation state. In the second we will try to explore in a case-study how the new, “post-nation-state” society is reflected in the literature that is referred to children, having as a given that language (and “logos”) – along with children as we will see – operate as a kind of “social prophet”.

But if language is a kind of auto-erotic play that «we can not define without grasping its historical and cultural contexts», as Schwartzman (1979, p. 93), argued writing about the contextual character of play, then words are ritualised symbols of this play itself, that help us learn of a society’s past. In the next pages we will try to learn also about society’s present and future.

## 1. CHILD AS SOCIAL SYMBOL

### 1.1. *Once Upon A Time: From Modernity to Post Modernity*

Any change into the way that the social consciousness apprehends a major and public symbol, like «child» and «childhood», reveals certain perspectives and ideologies – that often are being transferred into delusions or orthodoxies – for other symbols and social parameters, that through them, and within them, the social practice and its interaction with the current, the by-past and the things to come is being reflected.

Thus, the major change, not only into the consequently conditions of the actual children’s everyday life, but mostly into the social status and the related significance of the notion of «child» and «childhood» the last three centuries is subsumed, and at the same time reflects, the socio-cultural stream that, being revealed mostly from the mid 17th century and after, succeeds and meets – within the history of the West – an era of blistering political, social and religious changing classifications, as it tries to articulate its curriculum between the «light» of an enlightenment and the «darkness» of a barbarous industrialisation.

The passage from a collective feudal economy to an industrial and then to a technological one, carried with it much more than changes in the means of production and in social leadership. Most significantly carried a subversion of the distinctive features of the Modern world which were the outcome of a set of fundamental institutional transformations that signalled the beginning of Lyotard’s great narratives.

If we think about it all those centuries we embody in children all our investments, delusions, struggles, racisms, responsibilities, fears and hopes. And child, persecuted or controlled or envisioned through adult orthodoxies, became symbol of the «other» himself, named as Jew or as Black, or as Arab or as liberated woman threatening order and hierarchy. «Are they not human? Are they not flesh and blood like you?» St. Anselm was wondering (quoted in De Mause, 1976, n. 234) projected what was to become the Shakespearean «Merchant of Venice», the ultimate literary symbol of the persecuted. Prejudiced as threat within survival as a social construct (Bauman, 1992) to the extend to be identified with madness itself (Foucault in Ch. Jenks, 1982, p. 170), and glorified as Messiah (Emerson), within «a fabricating protest against natural reality», child, caring the antithesis of a sacred symbol, became the excavation of roots and attachments itself (Jenks, 1996, p. 106), trying to adopt a terminology of belonging for our kind, transcending national or religious or boundaries of any other kind.

## 1.2. *Children in Modernity: Being the «Angel»*

*«What-is-this?» he said at last. «This is a child!» Helgha replied eagerly, coming in front of Alice to introduce her, and spreading out both his hands towards her in an Anglo-Saxon attitude.*

*«We only found it today. It's as large as life and twice as natural!»*

(Lewis Carroll, «Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There»)

«Its one of the puzzles of our history», argues Somerville (1982), «that the greatest exploitation of children coincided with the greatest glorification of childhood». As a period of blistering political, social and religious changes evolved between 1600-1900, industrialisation was recognised as agent and part of one of the most exciting processes in western history and in the way we perceive childhood.

Because as the gathering of the population in cities could no longer hide in isolated landscapes abuse from social consciousness and, meanwhile, as the growing industrialisation was in need for cheap labour and children – children of the poor – became its «primary victims» (Cunningham, 1991), the discourse about the children at work raised fundamental issues about the nature of childhood. Children worked before, all right (Cunningham, 1991; also Somerville, 1982, p. 161), but not in the production line.

Though (within an increasingly urban environment were the offhanded gathering of population was to reveal and reinforce like never before the social diversification (Hall, 1988, «Cities of tomorrow») giving birth or reinforcing related movements, squeezing – among others – the outcasts in the slums or the streets), the children of the streets stopped being just the innocent primitives of Romanticism and «were seen as danger, as «savages», whom – this time – might subvert the stability of mid Victorian civilisation» (Cunningham, 1991, Introduction).

First it was Romanticism, in rebellion against the previous Puritan discourse and also «in rebellion against the coming of mass society, seeing in childhood the glimpses of a lost paradise» (Cox, 1996, pp. 80-121), that took the image of «the child» and called it «innocence». The coincidence of the child stature with this tremendous notion, not only smelted the idea of «the child» into a «Super Ego» (if we are allowed to borrow this useful psychoanalytical term) that put on trial the collective – and through it the individual – «Self Image», contributing into a massive cultural shock, but also loaded its image with plenty of mystique notions.

«With the main stream of emerging bourgeoisie seeping in their conscious, allaying and fretful, came a notion which was not new (in some senses was as old as Christianity itself) which imbued the child with mysticism and with power» (Cox, 1996). This way «the child», with its peculiar qualities that come into conflict with the world of the adults, acquired a vast symbolic power, creating not only social evolutions but also «moral panic» for possible «similar calls» that could shake the social hierarchy of a barbarous system and of a passive society.

Child image was a basic agent in this social awaking, related with folk myths and, thus, with the deeper culture. Dickens's dead children – so contradictory with the orthodox image of the «Romantic child» –, were used to shock the masses, especially of the English middle class, during the entire Victorian era. Most of them were dead little girls (Somerville, 1982, p. 170). If the popular myth of the Dark ages that «it was enough to make love to a young virgin in order to cure yourself» still meant something to the society, that meant that their subconscious may knew there was no healing. The first sign of the catalysis of the myth «the industrial technology and science is God», will throw the first seed of a Postmodernity (that will be maximised so much after the catalysis of the immediately following – despaired and glorious – mythology: «the proletariat is God», used in its turn child's image).

It was the guilt (Somerville, 1982, p. 172) and fear Victorians felt for a victim «having», from the inherited Romantic discourse, an image of beauty and a fragility and a freedom of social conventions

(Cunningham, 1991) that along with the bourgeois oriented agenda to homogenise childhood, made the child innocence to represent «a sheer power» (Mavor, 1994, p. 188) and «energy in the end of the century» (Cox, 1996). It was the power of «forgotten» nature still manifested in the child itself that made it to be seen in muddled image (Cox, 1996, p. 152). The child of innocence, «the ideal of bourgeois home» (Auerbach, 1982), foundation and ultimate justification of bourgeois hierarchy, and that virtuous enemy of man (Cox, 1996, p. 160), embodiment of the violated from the modernistic discourse nature itself (Somerville, 1982) that, sooner or later, was going to take its revenge.

### 1.3. *Children in Nation State: «Being the Enemy»*

*«And once she had really frightened her old nurse by shouting suddenly in her ear, «Nurse! Do let's pretend that I'm a hungry hyena and you're a bone!»*

(Lewis Carroll, «Through the Looking Glass and what Alice Found There»)

As this had to be avoided, «in their attempt to control this strange being» (Cox, 1996) a new status of children was invented, involving the loss of the right of participation in the main stream (Archard, 1993; Somerville, 1982, p. 179). Children were squeezed in institutions, following the Sunday school's movement (Cox, 1996; Somerville, 1982, p. 192), as «their lives should revolve around the stable and the discipline environment of the home and the school, avoiding the dangerous intermediary between the two», filled with rage and ideas, «the street» (Cunningham, 1991).

Used in a diversified way, child image – adopted by hegemonic structures this time – played a part in this process of social maintenance and nation states structured too. Schooling – expanding free for children of the poor – became «not so much a right as a necessity» (Cunningham, 1991) while the rising nation states, in their effort to justify and take more power than ever before hiding social dispositions and their causes (Stone, 1975, 1982), used child's domesticated or successfully institutionalised image to impose the delusion of social harmony. The imposition of a uniform childhood, haunted by patriotism, submission to rules or team spirit, (Somerville, 1982, p. 196; Sutton Smith, 1986) became not just a goal, but a «absolute» – almost religious – ideal.

The «other» said Simmel (1989) attributed the outcast as permanent member in the group's inner games of power «is the one whom – awaking conscious and unconscious fears and challenges – reinforces the coherence of the group»: If we read myths in a Foucaultian (1984) way, (as the growing institutionalisation produced «a new kind of poor, rootless masses beyond the reach of prevailing social standards or religious institutions», Cunningham, 1991), it is that common fear in all cultures of the invasion of the stranger, of the uncivilised (named as Arab, Jew, black, proletarian, Kurd, liberated woman, or even animal), in the civilised self (Cunningham, 1991, p. 123) or territory. Codified as elf, goblin or witch in the folk myths, and in a constant yearn or imposition of assimilation into the hegemonic standards, it was rationalised in the new sympathy to ensure the progress of the human race that started mainly from 18th century's continued to built nationalism up to 20th.

### 1.4. *The Children in The First Half of 20th Century: Being the «Torchbearer»*

*«And a child shall lead them»*  
(Isaiah, «Bible»)

Twentieth (20th) century, an era of blasting evolutions in economic and social level, carrying with it the remarkable trail of childhood in the previous centuries, was charged with miscellaneous agendas

and perceptions. In Ellen Kelly's words the time had come for «the 20th century to be indeed the century of the child» (quoted in Cunningham, 1991, ch. 9).

With this vision before mankind, and after a long trail as projector, scale, or carrier, the child had finally become a 'telos' in himself. One of the last myths of Modernity, «the held of promise in the struggle for social betterment» (Cunningham, 1991, ch. 9, quoting Simeral, 1916). And, thus, the main weapon – once again – for the related political agendas. Either as «the asset of the race, the torch bearer to the civilisation of the future» (Isabel Simeral, quoted in Cunningham, 1991, ch. 9) either as the embodiment of class miseries, propagated in dr. Barnardo's photographs, or as «antidote of the war» himself, propagated western or communist progress, or even fascist «progress» and «paradise society».

Indeed «after the first world war», claimed Sylvia Lynd, and within a discourse of a rising cold war between communism and capitalism fighting to gain the planet as carriers of a new land of promise, «there was a conspicuous consumption change in the appearance of children everywhere. The poor child with tousled hair, wrinkled black stocking and heavy boots had disappeared» from the front-line (Cunningham, 1991). And in their place the happy, clean and well fed child appeared, tremendous emblem of the cultural superiority and the political continuation of the nation, the class or the race which that child represented.

This was an image coming massively through and from many places. Political handouts, cultural events, family portraits...

There was a process going on. «Childhood», reinforced by the antagonistic drives between nations and races and by the very fact that it was the inheritor of our world, «was envisaged», like never before, «as a mirror image of the ideal of adulthood» (Kline, 1993; Cunningham, 1991). If child was the «perpetual Messiah», as Emerson had put it, this should be a Messiah predicting only the «right religion». Having been charged with all the miscellaneous societal and metaphysical notions that contribute to «the manifestations of the Other which so powerfully shape the narrative of the self» (Cox, 1996, p. 127) in modernity, child was hired to promote the totalitarianisms of the era and the myths it carried.

## 2. TRYING TO COMPREHEND LATE 20TH CENTURY THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

But if two of the most stable myths were the Nation Self and the Nation State, we have an almost total reverse of this the recent decades. Due to mass immigration and the intercultural societies that were evolved, western world meets “the disappearance of the Self and the State” as we knew it.

If children and language are used as social prophets enlarging problems to fit our changing situation, as Sutton Smith argued (1984, p. 29) then what could possibly be the image of the “small other” in children's literature?

### 2.1. *The Social Meaning of Literature*

As we mentioned in the abstract the study of the representations (the relation between social structures and the symbolic forms) has become an important field in the social and anthropologic research the recent years. Having language as one of the most important representations (Ingarden, 1958; Mplioumi, 2002; Samara, 1987) comes as a given that the literature as a product of language's use, is relative to temporal or historical circumstances, and power relations, as well as sociocultural context. Children literature is proven all the more a rising field of research (Jenks, 1996; Cox, 1996) since it is a product of society and yet, reproducing values and accepted behaviors, produces society at the same time (Stephens, 1994).

Having this in mind I constructed, under the supervision of A. Karakitsios, a method of literary Analysis, hoping it could “mirror” the complicated era we are going through and hoping it could bring forth the tremendous changes in collective and individual level society faces the recent decades.

The main field of this analysis was to research which are the symbols of the “other” that are mirrored in the literary production that was developed in Greece in the decade of the '90s, a decade of mass

migration? How is the foreigner and the local (strangers to one another) presented and Why are presented in such way?

## 2.2. *Greek Society, a Society in Transition*

According to some researches, the amount of Refugees in Greek state was raised up to 54% in the decade of the '90s. Greek society proved unprepared for this phenomenon of mass migration, that meant a reverse of the migration dynamics, as Greece (on the contrary with the past and on agreement with what happened to the most of the States of the poor European South) had to accept and not to “send” refugees abroad. Thus, and having as a given the major significance of child as a symbol, it is important to explore the way that children’s literature perceives this reality through the image of the “Small Other”, using Greece as a case study.

## 2.3. *Method of Analysis*

In the effort to respond to the multi-sidedness of the topic I recommended in the major paper of my Master that we should construct a synthetic method of Analysis (combining the theories of Wierlacher and Bachelard), able to bring forth not only the linguistic structures but also the psychological parameters that intervene in the literature and can make it an important tool of ‘proper’ (or un-proper”) socialization. Andreas Karakitsios recommended also Genette and the “body” of the method was fulfilled.

Each theory covered a different option without the danger of inner contradictions. After all reading can be a multisided experience that through it we can transform ambiguous messages, transferring even subconsciously the antithesis between the idealizing and the real “Other”. A verb, a word or a comparison can play an important role to that.

In order to bring forth the complicated interactions that intervene between the complicated world of “Literature” and our “Consciousness” and “Reality” we based our analysis on the combination of 3 different theories/practices:

**1)** On the “catholic and local pictures” of Wierlacher (2000) – naming as catholic the ‘scenes’ that ‘link’ us, like scenes of birth, or death etc, and as local those pictures related with the cultural particularities, for instance Muslim ‘Ramazani’ or Greek Easter. This way we may find the important scenes we should concentrate on instead of getting lost inside the text.

In the content analysis of concrete textual points, (“pictures”) the research was based:

**2)** On the theory of Genette (Tziovas, 1987). In this the antithesis in the representation of the “foreigner” and the “local” in literature can be analysed through the “Imagologie”, a sector of the “Comparative Grammatologie”, that tries to explore through the Structure of narration the “icon of the other, the foreign country, its people and its culture”. The theory of the narration seems necessary in those parts of the text where the inner connection of the motives and the function of the view-point of the heroes need to be lightened in order to realise the ways of representation of the foreign (the different) vs the local (the identical).

This is achieved examining the structure of the text in various levels, such as the words that are chosen, the hierarchy of the relationships between the factors of language, the scenarios and the theoretical motives (Ampatzopoulou, 1980).

Genette distinguishes the notion of the “story” (the series of events, their articulation and their order in real life) and the “narration” (the ways those events are presented in the text, their articulation and their order in the narration). The last one, “narration” is examined in a more detailed way through 3 basic axes: a) Time, b) Obliquity (inclination) and c) Voice. All three are examined through the notion of “order” of the presented items or thoughts etc. Time (that is related with the dimensions of order, duration, meaning the length of time, and frequency) is related with the analogies between the “story” (real series of events) and the narration (choices of which event the writer will present first etc) the possible differences

and divergences from a pragmatic narration of the story, the narration that are pro or post the real time and the ways of narration (who is the narrator? the actual hero or a mediator, the dialogue and if the language is direct or not and who's point of view reproduces etc).

3) The choice of words (f.i. surnames or phrases) became an object of an analysis based on the pro-Freudian theory of Bachelard (1967), that examines the psychological/ideological background of those words, which reflect that background and on which finally they depend. The choice of Bachelard is justified because the attitudes related to the "other" do not reflect the objective reality, as we mentioned prior, but the ways the social subject perceives, something that has obligatorily a lot of psychological parameters. It is interesting, consequently, that for Bachelard the phenomenology should be analysed not as a conscience of the external but of the psychological phenomena. "A new approach of the poetic pictures, the systematic psychological analysis of the landscapes of our internal life". Bachelard uses collective signifiers of our civilisation in a way that reminds us a mix approach between Jung (1989) and Freud (1995). For instance "water", "sky" "land" or words with strong investments like "light" of "fear" etc are used in order to reveal and explore the cultural parameters that construct our psychic reality and vice versa and all their possible connotations and relations from mythology to modern aspects of social evolution.

Using initially (because the research is evolving) as a case study a book of children refugee literature ("Once upon a time the Hunter..." by E. Sarantiti, we applied the notions of the 'catholic' and the 'local' in 5 main sectors of social action or personal operation: 1) Social relations, 2) School, 3) Family, 4) Love, 5) Perception of the country-land (land of origin or host-country), that constitute basic anthropologic constants. We should clarify here that even if all and each one are common events of all persons, (that is why they are determined as "anthropologic constants") the way with which they can be expressed or they can be described in the literature, can (bringing forth all the different cultural environments) function not as a universality, but as we will see as locality, creating thus a dipole in which the opposition is that the existence of "stabilities"/'constanten' can belong in the first category (universality) while the its expression in the second (locality).

### 3. BRIEF FINDINGS

In Greece, we locate more than 30 books concerning the topic of immigrants. This is important because the image of the foreigner has been in the mainstream of Greek society only recently. In fact what we have is a total reverse of the word 'immigrant' as from a signifier of the Greek immigrant abroad has turned into a signifier of the immigrant that comes to Greece. This transformation of the countries of the 'poor European south' into countries of migration import, and not countries of migration export any longer, no doubt has been mirrored in the literature that is produced into those areas. Interestingly the field of children literature seems to be the first to take notice into these socio-cultural changes.

Yet the immigrant remains in many cases 'Greekalised' (for instance, due to the special events of Greek history) many immigrant figures are of Greek origin that had to leave during the civil war, or members of the Greek diaspora, that remains for centuries in the eastern Europe. In some other cases the immigrant is the Greek that lives abroad, narrating his or her story. But, especially in the crucial decade of the 90s, we locate stories that are concerned with the foreigner, the people of different origin and religion that comes to Greece (mostly from the ex USSR and Albania).

In most of the cases we have repeatedly with statistic analogies the same anthropological 'constanten' (stability), that are expressed through scenes of locality and universality. More often are the 'constanten' of "Love", social or professional relations, school, the notion of new country, the memory of the old one. "Love" is always a scene of universality that is turned into locality. The way 'love' is expressed is always very tense as this seems natural as this the category that will lead to more intimate relation

with the other when, at the same time, this is the category where the other will meet one of the most intense 'forbidden'. Yet the danger here (due to the tense) is the story to be articulated through the love affair and not to explore the multiple difficulties of the coexistence, turning this way into a romance.

The relations that evolve into the working field (professional) mostly are mirrored as scenes of locality, whether the story has to do with the Greek immigrant **abroad**, or with the immigrant that comes to Greece **from** abroad. The poor salaries, the social exclusion, the language problems (problems of reality, Tsiakalos, 2002) are the most often referred to that field.

The social stabilities ("constanten" in German) of "social relations" is present almost to all stories. In most of its expressions, though, is a scene of locality. In some cases the 'anti-parathesis' (contradiction) of specific words like foreigner of locals, or even patriots and refugees signifies an effort to personalize the social guilt into the faces of the refugees.

In those scenes that concern school in most of cases the text begins with data of locality and ends up with data of universality. Mostly because in those stories the "Little foreigner" is of Greek-origin, and sooner or later will adapt more easily than the 'total stranger' into the Greek school.

In the perception of the new-land, of the country, the significance of this method possibly reaches its top revealing the complexity of the object. For instance in the book called "Once the Hunter", named after Seferis famous lyric, what we have is a scene of locality (its person a story and memories and ideas of his or her own) that intervenes with the past. In this story the grandmother filters the new land through her tragic memories of the Greek civil war that burdens eternally her perception, when the young girl identifies the new land (Greece) with water (river, sea, etc) that strikes her. Thus through what Bachelar, quoting Young and Kerenyi (1979) refers to as a symbol of the womb, a womb that, even through difficulties, gives birth into a new period of life.

What remains to be said concerns the mix scenes, that is a vast and intriguing category and the statistic use of foreign words and its comparison with happens in the literary production of other countries. That last one (use or no use of immigrant words) especially in Greek example (due to the vast political significance that the language required in the construction of the national identity and the "nationalisation of religion and language" throughout Balkans) seems extremely interested in order to explore the reclamation of the methodological tools of the literary analysis and critique in the framework of an extended social critique (Zima, 1985) that we tried to introduce in this research.

We argue that this reclamation will re-establish the relationship between the textual and the social fields of action and practice (Kedurie, 1999). In this way we may lead in a more complete and productive use of the theoretical approaches concerning literature and the representation of the "Other" in political, philosophical, psychological, social and pedagogical level.

We may question, for instance, in what extent the dual reading of the social action as a basic scheme of anthropological arrangement in modern Greek (or any other) society, is in a phase of change and re-articulation, also of search of new ways of expression because of the new face of interculturality that is in process. From this point of view the "issue of language" and its use in literature is, among other things, an obvious, presented realization of the broader semiotic phenomenon of the 'disemia' (dual meaning) as Michael Herzfeld has argued. (Siaflekis, 1988).

This in our opinion finds its basis in the process of socialization and thus in the models of comprehension of the language. The language in general and the hetero-language (the language of the different) in specific. Thus, literature in modern multicultural societies, having to represent not only the formal language (and all cultural elements that carries) of atomic or collective presentation of "ourselves" (From, 1975), but also the modern multilingual environment and all the challenges that brings. This way we may value the children or teenage literature not only as a field that carries fun and knowledge through fun for children or youngsters, but also as an able for inter-scientific analysis field that can be used as a useful resource of social and psychological givens, that reveal parameters for both children and adult society and that in their turn may influence children culture and its pedagogical approaches.

To deal literature as an empirical given that transcends the limits of the traditional grammatological analysis is always extremely interesting yet is not a new approach. The analytical approaches of Vygotsky on the plays of Shakespeare and the acceptance of the Piagetian model of development from the

sociology of literature by Lucien Goldmann in 1977 (Siaflekis, 1988) may consist the most characteristic expressions of a research direction that uses empirical and grammatological givens in order to analyse the social structures and procedures of the social formation of subjectivity and (at some extend) *vice versa*. Through the analytical method we introduced here we tried, making the most of methodological possibilities, to correspond in a subject complicated from its own nature.

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