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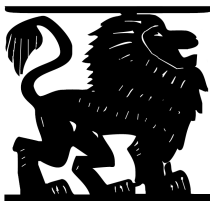
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Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature: The Case for Complementarity

Kenneth Kidd

What can psychoanalysis tell us about children's literature? And what, we should also ask, can children's literature tell us about psychoanalysis? What work connecting these two fields has already appeared, and how might we productively imagine their relation in the future? Although psychoanalysis and children's literature have much in common, psychoanalytic criticism of children's literature is a fairly recent undertaking. Generally speaking, there are three kinds of psychoanalytic work on children's literature so far: close readings of individual texts, analyses of particular genres, and broader meditations on the enterprise of children's literature and/or children's literature criticism.

The 1980s and 1990s saw an upsurge of psychoanalytic work on children's literature. Hamida Bosmajian's engaging treatments of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) and *Johnny Tremain* (1943) set a high standard, offering nuanced psychoanalytic consideration alongside attention to the sociohistorical dimensions of the texts under scrutiny. In their co-edited volume *Psychoanalytic Responses to Children's Literature*, Lucy Rollin and Mark I. West furnish not only lively analyses but also a bibliography of the burgeoning scholarship. Two special issues of the *Children's Literature Quarterly*, edited by Roberta Seelinger Trites, have been devoted to psychoanalysis and children's literature; the second issue specifically explores Freud's *unheimlich* or the uncanny.

Scholars are now looking at genre as well as specific texts, using psychoanalysis to take up broader issues of literary and cultural formation. Exemplary writings include Lucy Rollin's book-length analysis of nursery rhymes, and Karen Coats's essays on alphabet books and young adult fiction. Coats's treatment of young adult fiction draws from Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection to argue that "the exploration of abjection has come to dominate the [young adult] genre" ("Abjection" 291). Like

Coats, Martha Westwater turns to Kristeva to suggest a strong affinity between adolescence and abjection in her book *Giant Despair Meets Hopeful: Kristevan Readings in Adolescent Literature*. Westwater reads Kristeva as a theorist of hope as well as abjection, as does Coats, and while I disagree with Westwater's sense of the current cultural moment, I find intriguing her idea that adolescence and abjection go hand in hand.¹ Critics often see the so-called "problem novel" as emblematic of the young adult's problem interior (along these lines, see Crew).

Identifying the workings of genre does help foster a more dynamic practice of criticism. In such discussions, scholars are starting to underscore the interdependence, or mutuality, of psychoanalysis and writing for young people. This emphasis is promising, as it moves criticism away from a one-way and applied mode, in which psychoanalysis discovers its own truths in the literary text. Psychoanalysis, after all, is not merely a method, but a rich intellectual and narrative tradition. It's time to leave behind the "psychoanalytic approaches" or "responses to" model of scholarship. It seems more productive to treat psychoanalysis and children's literature as discourses that revolve around similar concerns and themes, and which may be mutually constitutive.²

As I show in the first section of this essay, however, disciplinary assessments of children's literature as an enterprise (as opposed to more local readings of text or genre) too often assume an oppositional rather than a complementary relation between psychoanalysis and children's forms. Whatever their orientation, such oppositional readings stage a showdown between psychoanalysis and literature, usually centering around a canonical case of the literary "child" (or child figure): Peter Pan, Pinocchio, Winnie-the-Pooh. These readings treat the very scene of canonicity as symptomatic of analytical and cultural malaise, usually recuperating the text from its sorry social context.

Against this assumption of irreconcilable differences, I then trace some of the relays between psychoanalysis and children's culture. I sketch a provisional genealogy of the psychoanalytic investment in child analysis and children's forms, which I think helped set the stage for the psychoanalytic interpretation of literature more broadly. First, I outline some general thematic and disciplinary parallels between child analysis and children's literature, looking at both as "mother-centered" fields. Next, I consider the psychoanalytic interest in children's play. The study of children's play, as advocated by Melanie Klein especially, helped shift attention to processes of human symbolization more broadly, even as children—actual and/or figurative—remained the grounding subjects of psychoanalysis. Klein's work with actual children made it possible to

produce knowledge about children's symbolic activity, including drawing and writing. In a sense, psychoanalysis "textualized" childhood, through case history writing as well as clinical theory, such that the children's story or work became just as legitimate an object of inquiry as the child herself.

In the last section, I address the centrality of folklore to the field of children's literature. Folklore is often taken as the most primal form of children's literature, since young children listen to stories before they read (or write) them. Folklore has also long inspired psychoanalysis, even as psychoanalysis has been applied to folklore. I suspect that the interest in folklore across the twentieth century owes something to the extraordinary success that psychoanalysis has enjoyed in the United States, as a profession and a discourse that emphasizes the importance of childhood experience and fantasy. Put another way, we reproduce folklore, keep it in circulation, in part because we think it's psychologically useful and/or appropriate for children—something we learned from Freud, Klein, and other theorists (who themselves drew from oral narrative). Thus folklore, like children's play, makes possible both psychoanalytic theory and children's literature, two seemingly different projects that actually have a lot in common.

Oppositional Case Writing

The most notorious oppositional reading of children's literature and psychoanalysis is Jacqueline Rose's now-canonical *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984), designed to disabuse us of childhood innocence, textual simplicity, and other wishful notions. If we believe Rose, children's literature hinges upon the "impossible" relation of child to adult (1). Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, is the discourse through which we understand that impossible relation as such, through which we interrogate the innocence of both childhood and children's literature. For Rose, it is Sigmund Freud who tells more truthfully the story of childhood, exposing it as a myth (if not quite an "impossibility") that gives coherence to otherwise alarming experiences of self and otherness. If we learn to read the "real" Freud, she says, and not the revisionist Freud of ego psychology and object relations theory, we'll realize that Freud sought to dismantle the very ideologies allegedly underwriting children's literature. "In most discussions of children's fiction which make their appeal to Freud," Rose complains (and justifiably so), "childhood is part of a strict developmental sequence at the end of which stands the cohered and rational consciousness of the adult mind" (13).

Rose builds her case around Freud and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), with shorter discussions of Rousseau, Alan Garner, and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883). *Peter Pan* functions for Rose as a quasifolkloric foil to that duplicitous enterprise known as children's literature. She seems to think that *Peter Pan* is the closest thing we have to good psychoanalysis in the imaginative register. Although Rose introduces a useful hermeneutics of suspicion into children's literature studies, she also dismisses children's literature in keeping with a familiar bias. While she makes brilliant use of *Peter Pan*, her celebration of psychoanalysis hinges upon her caricature of this vibrant, diverse field.

A more local and recent example of this oppositional line of thinking is Jennifer Stone's spirited discussion of "Pinocchiology." Noting that virtually every major writer and cultural critic in Italy has written about Carlo Lorenzini's *The Adventures of Pinocchio: Story of a Puppet* (1881), Stone criticizes the discourse of "Pinocchiology" for its obsession with native Italian culture and its evasion of Freud's central insights into the psyche, an evasion that she playfully christens the "Pinocchio Complex." Here the fetish of a child-text serves as a form of resistance to Freud. The *true* story of Pinocchio, she holds, much like the true story of Peter Pan as retold by Rose, confirms Freud's wisdom and exposes the mechanisms of cultural denial. Both Rose and Stone urge respect for the Freudian canon as a safeguard against the cult of childhood/nativism.

Also in this tradition is Karin Lesnik-Oberstein's *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (1994), which declares the impossibility of children's literary criticism. The first five chapters are devoted to the familiar argument that children's literature criticism relies upon various constructions of the child that are finally impossible to maintain. Specifically, she holds, children's literature criticism doesn't own up to its own investment in the "emotional education" of children—a persuasive point in and of itself, even if it doesn't necessarily follow that attempts to theorize childhood are disingenuous. The final chapter ushers in the hero of the story, psychoanalysis, or more particularly, D. W. Winnicott. Lesnik-Oberstein feels that because he especially attends to issues of transference, interpersonal relation, and the analytic space, Winnicott avoids essentializing "the child" and works to accommodate particular children. While children's literature criticism is "inextricably tied to a *prescriptive* role," in her view, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy allegedly function "*non-prescriptively*" (176).

In her compelling study *Hide and Seek* (1995), Virginia Blum comes to different conclusions. Psychoanalytic theories that claim to illuminate childhood, she argues, really mythologize it. The psychoanalytic child is

not the actual child; the latter is an “unknowable subject” and indeed the “ultimate blind spot” of psychoanalysis (23). Blum’s analyses of the writings of Freud, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, and other prominent child analysts make compelling her own deconstructive case. She usefully identifies key truth claims of psychoanalysis—among them, for instance, that the child has direct access to the Real, and that there is later a fall into sexuality and discourse alike. “Any concept of estrangement, Otherness, alienation, mediation,” Blum holds, “depends for its signification on a fantasy of undisrupted wholeness” (53). According to Blum, psychoanalysis obsessively posits a difference between child and adult that it can neither tolerate nor sustain.³

Both Rose and Blum insist that the adult-child relationship is “impossible,” but they disagree over how that impossibility is best represented or handled. While Rose prefers the real Freud as a counterdiscourse to children’s literature, Blum puts her faith in literature rather than psychoanalysis. Blum’s book begins with three chapters on psychoanalysis, then moves into a discussion of canonical literature about (if not for) children: texts by Charles Dickens, Henry James, and Vladimir Nabokov. While *Peter Pan* is Rose’s poster boy, Blum concentrates on a different child-figure, the “go-between” child of literature, who serves as a mediator and messenger. As with *Peter Pan*, the go-between is a liminal or hybrid child, whose function reveals the difficulties of language and love. Blum understands literature as usefully ambivalent. Literature does not promise us the same kind of truth as psychoanalysis, she maintains, and so we should trust it more.

Rose examines three discourses—children’s fiction, *Peter Pan*, and psychoanalysis (or four, if we distinguish the real Freud from bad psychoanalysis)—using the latter two to expose the falsehood of the first. In Blum’s work, two discourses receive scrutiny—psychoanalysis and go-between narrative—neither quite children’s nor adult literature. Blum doesn’t disparage children’s literature, but she has little to say about it (aren’t there plenty of go-between figures in children’s books?). It seems that for these critics, children’s literature is either misleading or inadequate. Other scholars, of course, rightly emphasize that children’s literature is sometimes *quite* self-conscious about its own “duplicity” and (in any case) that it shouldn’t be so quickly dismissed.

The oppositional spirit is not limited to the academic field of criticism, but indeed crosses over into mainstream book culture. I’m thinking of what we might call (after Stone) Poohology, the popular and critical discourse of Winnie-the-Pooh. Over the years, some very creative books for adults have drawn from A. A. Milne’s classic *Winnie-the-Pooh*

(1926), such as Benjamin Huff's *Tao of Pooh* (1982) and *The Te of Piglet* (1992), and Frederick Crews's spoof of criticism, *The Pooh Perplex* (1963). In 2001, Crews gave us a sequel to the *Pooh Perplex* entitled (predictably enough) *Postmodern Pooh*. As in the earlier book, Crews makes fun of the excesses of literary criticism, this time parodying queer theory, postcolonial studies, and so forth. In his review of *Postmodern Pooh*, Jan Susina observes that "[w]hat Crews is trying to suggest in both of his Pooh books is that the best way to show the limitations or flaws of a critical approach is to apply it to a children's text" (276). As Susina notes, Crews mocks the likes of Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak but is respectful toward the work of children's literature scholars, as if the wisdom of Pooh extends to that critical field (and that field alone). Here, even more than in the case of Peter Pan, literature wins. Unlike Rose, Crews is not interested in affirming psychoanalysis. He is, in fact, one of its most impassioned critics, having renounced his earlier psychoanalytic study of Hawthorne. Like Rose, however, he invokes a canonical children's book to make his case against culture, in this instance the culture of criticism.

Operating in the same vein is John Tyerman Williams, whose *Pooh and the Psychologists* (2000)—subtitled "In Which It is Proven that Pooh Bear is a Brilliant Psychotherapist"—completes his trilogy of Poohology primers (the others are *Pooh and the Philosophers* and *Pooh at the Millennium*). Pitched to a wider audience than Crews's Pooh books, *Pooh and the Psychologists* offers a tongue-in-cheek look at twentieth-century psychology and psychotherapy. The way Williams explains it, Pooh is a clinician whose seeming ineptitude is actually proof of his therapeutic genius. Pooh helps Piglet to mature, Rabbit to confront his xenophobia, Owl to communicate with the masses, and Eeyore to overcome his clinical depression. Like all good therapists, Pooh is eclectic in approach, borrowing from Freud, Jung, Winnicott, Piaget, and Lacan, among others. Despite the parody, or maybe because of it, Williams's book is weirdly informative. Williams mocks not only psychoanalytic concepts, but also psychoanalytic writing practices, among them character studies and close readings. Williams, of course, isn't seriously arguing for the profundity of Pooh, but he is certainly poking fun at our collective faith in mind science.

There are responsible academic models of children's culture "case" writing, privileging neither literature nor analysis, which do not assume children's literature to be deceptive or innocent. I have in mind Jonathan Arac's "*Huckleberry Finn*" as *Idol and Target* (1997) and Carolyn Steedman's *Strange Dislocations* (1995), both of which invoke an iconic

child figure (Mark Twain's Huck Finn and Goethe's Mignon, respectively) to underscore the complementary, if often contested, relation of literature to other discourses of culture. In both books, the very liminality of these representative child figures suggests the absurdity of championing literature over psychoanalysis or vice versa. Steedman, an historian, shows how childhood became a mode of interiority through and across literature and psychoanalysis alike; Arac addresses the literary and pop-psychological operations of what he calls "hypercanonization." Arac and Steedman manage to move beyond a polemical practice of oppositional case writing, even as they appropriate to their own critical ends the rhetorical power of the liminal child.

Child Analysis and Children's Literature

Psychoanalysis and children's literature should not be seen as oppositional. A more informed understanding of both disciplines will not only help to challenge oppositional posturing, but also to situate more local readings of text and genre within the wider scene. Even more, an understanding of child analysis will illuminate psychoanalysis's affinities with children's literature. Actually, we could invert the usual practice of seeing child analysis as a subset of psychoanalysis, and argue that psychoanalysis is really a mode of child analysis that recognizes explicitly the adult's early memories and fantasies.

From the start, psychoanalysis was part and parcel of a new interest in childhood that drew from evolutionary metaphor and the emergent social sciences. That interest in turn transformed the scene of children's literature. "When the late nineteenth century found that its researches into origin and development focused attention on the child," writes Juliet Dusinberre, "it simultaneously produced for those children a literature which revealed as clearly as possible adult hopes for the new generation" (32). Dusinberre's *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art* (1987) chronicles that simultaneous interest in children's development and children's books through the modernist period, pointing to the influence not only of Freud but also of Charles Darwin, Friedrich Froebel, James Sully, and others. While there may be no direct or simple correspondence between psychoanalysis and children's literature, it's safe to say that the whole project of writing for children was profoundly altered by the insights of psychoanalysis, and child analysis especially. This period also marks the beginning of professional writing about children's literature; one of the earliest treatments was E. M. Field's *The Child and His Book* (1891), and others soon followed.

In America, the successful popularization of psychoanalysis coincided with the early-twentieth-century heyday of children's book culture. The 1910s and 1920s saw the anxious solicitation of "quality" children's books, often defined against syndicate-produced series fiction. Even as they decried the evils of mass production, more and more people, most of them women, got involved in book publishing and reviewing. They worked to contain and channel the forces of commercialism, and thus became a vital part of the children's book industry. In 1916, Bertha Mahoney opened the first small American bookshop for children in Boston. She also distributed book lists which, by 1924, evolved into *The Horn Book Magazine*, still going strong today. In 1918, Anne Carroll Moore, of the New York Public Library, began reviewing children's books in *The Bookman*. The year before, Children's Book Week was launched, and the Macmillan Publishing Company created the first department of children's books within a major house, headed by Louise Seaman Bechtel. Doubleday Page soon followed suit. In 1921, publisher Frederic Melcher (of *Publishers' Weekly* fame) launched the Newbery Medal, the first award for excellence in children's literature and still one of the nation's most prestigious literary prizes.

Melcher's place in this larger movement is often overemphasized at the expense of the women librarians, booksellers, and reviewers who are largely responsible for inaugurating this new, largely middle-class public sphere. Like the movement to introduce "quality" children's television programming that began in the 1960s (and that produced *Sesame Street*, itself vital to the success of the Public Broadcasting System), this earlier public sphere was conceived and realized largely by women. I mention this because there's a rough parallel between this American culture of children's literature and the contemporaneous scene of child analysis in Europe. Sigmund Freud and his Hungarian colleague Sándor Ferenczi felt that the analysis of children would make significant contributions to the discipline, and they encouraged women to pursue work along these lines. As Freud was inspiring his daughter Anna to expand upon her work as a teacher by becoming an analyst of children, Ferenczi was helping his assistant Melanie Klein to pursue her own studies in this area. Hermine Hug-Hellmuth, a former Viennese schoolteacher, had paved the way, and Freud and Klein were quick to follow her lead. That child analysis long remained the calling of women is clear from the histories of psychoanalysis. Ferenczi, one of the most sympathetic parties and the author of several essays about child abuse, nonetheless pitched child analysis as "a suitable endeavour for a woman" (Grosskurth 74).

Despite their many and acrimonious differences, Anna Freud and Melanie Klein invoke the maternal in their advocacy of child analysis.

Anna Freud's work is directed largely at teachers, and she appropriates pedagogical authority, presenting herself as the mother of teachers. Analysis for Klein was clearly a form of mothering: not the kinder, gentler form of education that Anna Freud advocated, but rather a rough-and-tumble sort of mothering, a practice of tough love. Klein even analyzed her own children—standard analytical practice in the early years of psychoanalysis—but gave them pseudonyms in her case studies. Janet Sayers argues that the influence of woman pioneers, such as Anna Freud and Melanie Klein, effectively transformed psychoanalysis from a patriarchal to a matriarchal system. This conclusion seems premature and a bit simplistic. While psychoanalysis may be “mother-centered,” thanks to the legacy of Klein especially, men still dominate the profession, especially in terms of the theoretical canon.

We might instead conclude that as child analysis underwent professionalization, it was masculinized; in the object relations school, for example, it was W. R. D. Fairbairn and D. W. Winnicott who rose to prominence after Klein. The current psychoanalytic experts on childhood development are men, foremost among them John Bowlby. The teaching and study of children's literature—like teaching, social work, and other professions devoted to children and families—has likewise been denigrated as a feminine project and then recuperated as a proper vocation for men. My fear is that children's literature has become a more legitimate field in English studies as more men have adopted it. Never mind that Francelia Butler of the University of Connecticut was the major mover and shaker for decades, founding the MLA Division and the journal *Children's Literature*. Or that most children's literature scholars are women, as are most authors of children's literature. To this day there exists a divide in children's literature studies between scholars working in English and scholars based in the disciplines of education, library science, and social work. This divide is not so dramatically gendered as to suggest conspiracy, but I do think that the respectability of children's literature as a specialty has come at the professional expense of women across the disciplines.

Women analysts and women specialists in children's literature are routinely figured as mothers, not only because they often *are* mothers, but also because mothering furnishes a lingua franca for professional practice. In the 1920s and '30s, mothering became nearly analogous with both children's book reviewing and with the analytic situation in clinical work. With respect to the latter, in her recent assessment of Klein, Kristeva observes that “Klein's strong tendency to ‘mother’ the unconscious endured and even insinuated itself into her most coherent and objective practices later in her career” (*Melanie Klein* 45). After Klein,

Winnicott imagined analysis as clinical reclamation of “good enough” mothering and the enabling of regression: “I have found that the patient has needed phases of regression to dependence in the transference,” he writes, “these giving experiences of the full effect of adaptation to need that is in fact based on the analyst’s (mother’s) ability to identify with the patient (her baby)” (137). Whether socially progressive or reactionary, this mother-speak permeates both child analysis and children’s literature (and later advocacy for children’s television). Kristeva even suggests that Klein’s work and thought flourished in England precisely *because* that nation had long been preoccupied with the interiority of childhood and had produced an impressive tradition of children’s books (*Melanie Klein* 37).

What I’m trying to outline are some transatlantic institutional and disciplinary parallels between children’s literature and psychoanalysis worth further investigation. The relation of psychoanalysis to child analysis itself is, of course, also complex, and I don’t mean to oversimplify that scene either. But even there we can see resemblances to the equally vexed scene of children’s literature, in the sense that both psychoanalysis and “adult” literature at once affirm and disavow their investments in childhood.

Consider briefly the case of Jacques Lacan, who in his famous Rome discourse of 1953 (“The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis”) made quite clear his reservations about child analysis. Lacan attributes the decline of interest in speech and language—Freud’s real concern, he holds—to work on the imaginary, to object relations theory, and to discussions of countertransference. These three new emphases are “pioneer activities” that have nonetheless led psychoanalysis astray, in his view. The first he attributes directly to “the analysis of children, and . . . the fertile and tempting field offered to the attempts of researchers by access to the formation of structures at the preverbal level” (35). Freud, he says, knew not to venture too far into this field; Lacan praises Freud for discovering infantile sexuality indirectly, through the analysis of adults and through parental mediation in the case of Little Hans.

Lacan’s critique of child analysis is interesting for many reasons, not the least of which is that his own essay on the mirror stage returns us to Freud’s foundational speculations on infantile helplessness (not just infantile sexuality) and depends upon the existential primal scene of the baby in front of the mirror. Even if he’s working to counteract the assumptions of ego psychology and object relations theory, Lacan still reinvents psychoanalysis through childhood; it’s no coincidence that he arranged the mirror stage essay first in *Écrits* (1977). We could even

argue that Lacan develops his discourse of the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real largely through the case studies of childhood conducted by other theorists and his students (Klein's case of Little Dick, for instance, as well as the research of Rosine Lefort). Lacan clearly owes much to Klein, especially her ideas about symbolization. Presumably what differentiates Lacan from child analysis is his attention to language and/as the unconscious, and his remove from the compromised world of mother-analysis. "We would truly like to know more about the effects of symbolization in the child," he remarks, "and psychoanalysts who are also mothers, even those who give our loftiest deliberations a matriarchal air, are not exempt from that confusion of tongues by which Ferenczi designated the law of the relationship between the child and the adult" (36).

Lacan refers to "The Confusion of Tongues between Adults and the Child: The Language of Tenderness and of Passion" (1933), Sándor Ferenczi's final professional paper. Ferenczi notes the tendency of patients to embrace the secret desires of their analysts, much as children unconsciously bind themselves to the secret wishes and emotions of their caregivers. The child/patient thus abandons her native, or "mother," tongue to accommodate the parent/analyst. Lacan holds that mother-analysts do not really listen to the unconscious, and his accusation is part of a larger conversation about transference and countertransference.

The confusion of tongues is likewise central to children's literature and to assessments of it, in that critics routinely accuse one another of forgetting the child's mother tongue or, from the opposite point of view, of subscribing to such a silly notion to begin with. Put reductively, the big debate in children's literature studies is whether or not children's literature is really children's literature, since, after all, it is nearly always written by adults. Is the very idea of children's literature sheer fantasy? What does it mean to write "for" or in the name of children? Do we need their consent to be legitimate? Clearly critics such as Rose and Lesnik-Oberstein find the enterprise problematic at best, while others reply that the "impossibility" of childhood (and of clear child-adult boundaries) is neither news nor something to fret about. In any event, much like child analysis within the larger field of psychoanalysis, children's literature is at once embraced and disavowed in the academy, sometimes treated as a separate (even abject) field, sometimes seen as coterminous with or indistinguishable from adult writing.

But we don't even need to reconstruct these scenes of professionalization to see psychoanalysis and children's literature as complementary. There are canonical texts of children's literature that coincide historically with formative texts and/or moments in psychoanalysis. The case of *Peter*

Pan, for instance, is worth consideration beyond Rose's fine treatment, as it dramatizes as early as 1905 many central themes of psychoanalysis, among them the dreamwork. Rose hints that Barrie was working through the same issues taken up by Papa Freud, but stops short of suggesting that psychoanalysis and children's literature could be intersecting explorations of identity, desire, and subjectivity. Kevin Shortleeve points to a similar and fascinating "coincidence" of the publication of Edward Gorey's melancholic "picture book" *The Object Lesson* (1958) and the intellectual ascendance of object relations theory in the late 1950s. As Shortleeve's essay suggests, it would be a mistake to read Gorey's book simply as confirmation of the wisdom of object relations theory; something messier is happening.⁴ As such examples show, children's literature has been contemporaneous with and even germane to intellectual and artistic work.

Fort-da: Play and Symbolization

Psychoanalytic attention to the material culture of childhood preceded and made possible psychoanalytic readings of children's literature. The earliest readings of children's forms were concerned with folklore and with children's play. As an activity and an idea, play furnished a bridge from the study of children to the analysis of literature, from the simple drawings and stories of children to literature by and for adults. Even if psychoanalytic criticism is a relatively recent arrival on the scene of children's literature criticism, the project of analyzing children's texts owes much to child analysis and its emphasis on play. As Rollin and West acknowledge, Sigmund Freud's *fort-da* game "has become the most famous children's game in psychoanalysis," having inspired *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (5). Rollin and West hint at the significance of play in psychoanalysis, but don't connect play to children's literature.

Although Hug-Hellmuth and Anna Freud were also interested in children's play, it was Melanie Klein whose research on play and "symbolisation" led to dramatic innovations in child analysis. Klein gave her first paper on child analysis in 1921 at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Society. Her interest in play began with her observations of her son Fritz (dubbed "Erich"), but it was with another patient, Rita, that Klein discovered the usefulness of toys. Later, looking back at her long career, she would identify the play technique as the defining element of her practice. Critics of Klein often miss the significance of her insights into play and symbolization, distracted by her dramatic claims about inner objects, unconscious phantasy, and the depressive position.

Klein increasingly turned to toys and other objects in her sessions with children. Nearly any object could be a toy, and in one of her early essays, "The Role of the School in the Libidinal Development of the Child" (1923), Klein shows how the pedestrian objects of the classroom—desk, slate, pen-holder, and chalk—bespeak internal objects and imagoes. Klein, in fact, links the child's mastery of the alphabet with his libidinal and symbolic maturation. Young Fritz/Erich recreates the erotics of the schoolroom within the confines of Klein's consulting room, playing with the cushions on her divan, drawing various characters, even doing math homework. "It can be repeatedly demonstrated," Klein writes in that essay, "that behind drawing, painting and photography there lies a much deeper unconscious activity: it is the procreation and production in the unconscious of the object represented" ("Role" 72). By describing even the letters of the alphabet as objects, and by likening child's play to the free association of adults, Klein alters our very understanding of language and narrative. Hence the importance of objects, such as toys and books, to the study of childhood; studying children's forms isn't that far removed from the direct observation of children, the logic runs. At the same time, critics of children's literature tend to disavow the psychoanalytic dimensions of literary criticism, as if forms of close reading or case writing have no history.

In "The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego" (1930), otherwise known as the case of Little Dick, Klein emphasizes how destructive desires, in tandem with the dread to which they give rise, enable the child's ability to symbolize. For Klein, symbolization offers relief from the intense anxieties and hostilities of early childhood. In this essay, she acknowledges the influence of Ferenczi and Ernest Jones, both of whom also speculated on the origin of symbolization (and by way of folklore). Revising an earlier formulation of the problem, Klein writes:

Since the child desires to destroy the organs (penis, vagina, breasts) which stand for the objects [the adults to whom those organs belong], he conceives a dread of the latter. This anxiety contributes to make him equate the organs in question with other things; owing to this equation these in their turn become objects of anxiety, and so he is impelled constantly to make other and new equations, which form the basis of his interest in the new objects and of symbolism. ("Importance" 220)

For Klein, fear and anxiety motivate symbolization, not, say, the child's innate curiosity or the structure or culture of language. "Thus," she continues, "not only does symbolism come to be the foundation of all phantasy and sublimation but, more than that, it is the basis of the

subject's relation to the outside world and to reality in general" ("Importance" 221). Little Dick suffers from an arrest of symbolization. Because his ego's defenses against sadistic wishes are "excessive and premature" (232), he is no longer able to bring into phantasy the sadism he feels toward his mother.

As Kristeva emphasizes, Klein's play technique was not merely a means to an end, but indeed was constitutive of her work, inseparable from the work of observation, interpretation, and healing. Klein's appreciation of play wasn't limited to the child's physical manipulation of objects, but eventually included the play of words, linguistic and semantic play alongside more nonverbal forms of interaction and fantasy. "By relying on the interplay of the child's diverse semiotic codes, the creativity of psychodrama, and the interplay among the signifiers of free association," holds Kristeva, "Melanie unwittingly foresaw the path that analytic treatment would take in the wake of Freud" (*Melanie Klein* 56). Klein's attention to language, which anticipates Lacan's "return" to Freud, also anticipates the semiotic interest in literature. Whereas Freud recognized man as a symbol user, suggests Kristeva, Klein described the child as a symbol maker.

Kristeva underscores Klein's growing interest in the reparative work of art and literature; certainly Kristeva is the direct inheritor of Klein's vision of art as comprising a "way of caring for other people" as well as raw material for analysis. Klein did try her hand at literary criticism, writing not about children's books but about Colette as well as Julien Green's 1947 novel *If I Were You* (*Melanie Klein* 187–88). But her legacy is more diffuse. Would it be far-fetched to think of children's literature as a mode of reparation, as a way of making up for the adult abuses of childhood? If adults write children's books, as is routinely pointed out by more suspicious critics of the field, couldn't adult intentions be more generous (less manipulative) than we often assume? In any case, play is the vital link for Klein between child analysis and the study of children's literature and culture.

For mother-analyst Winnicott, play is *the* fundamental human experience; in his system, childhood play expands into adult creativity and "creative living." He repeatedly talks about "the cultural field," thus reenacting the disciplinary trajectory of play's emergence into that broader frame of reference, such that playing and reality become synonymous. For Winnicott, even more than for Klein, interpretation is a form of (child's) play. Psychoanalysis, he writes, "has been developed as a highly specialized form of playing in the service of communication with oneself and others" (41).

I may overemphasize the relevance of child analysis to the field of children's literature, but certainly in the twentieth century, play became the central focus not only of writing for children but of children's literature studies. Histories of children's literature routinely note that, beginning in the late eighteenth century, didactic and rationalistic children's literature was challenged by a literature of play and amusement; this advance ostensibly represents the dawn of a new sensibility. It's important to realize that, like Klein and Winnicott, the authors of children's literature and children's literature criticism take "play" to mean not merely recreation, but also "creative living," even moral and emotional maturation. Play and symbolization—the learning and making of meaning—have replaced, as much as displaced, reason as our *modus operandi*; their ascendance marks less a dramatic shift in sensibility than a modernization of terms. Lesnik-Oberstein finds that "amusement" starts its career as a form of claimed love and commitment to learning" and remains "the cry of educators up to the present day" (68).

In their study of postwar children's literature, Margaret and Michael Rustin hold that children's literature is always already child's play, even when play is not thematized. The authors they examine create emotional depth through "symbolic equivalents or containers for states of feeling," which amounts to "a kind of poetic communication, analogous to the symbolizations of children's imaginative play" (3). Literature, they confirm, is a form of play, and critics of children's literature arguably have as much knowledge about childhood as do those who work directly with children and write up case studies, statistical analyses, and other documents.

The Classical Genre and Beyond

Klein shows at least a passing interest in folklore, especially the fairy tales assembled by the Brothers Grimm. In her earliest essay on child analysis, "The Development of a Child" (1921), Klein reviews Fritz/Erich's interest in such material. Like Freud's Wolf-Man, Fritz is both afraid of and obsessed with wolves in fairy tales and picture books, and like the Wolf Man, dreams about wolves. "Here is another dream," continues Klein, "that was not, however, associated with feelings of fear. Everywhere, behind mirrors, doors, etc., were wolves with long tongues hanging out. He shot them all down so that they died. He was not afraid because he was stronger than them" ("Development" 40–41). At the essay's end, Klein remarks: "I have particularly selected listening to Grimm's tales without anxiety-manifestations as an indication of the

mental health of children, because of all the various children known to me there are only very few who do so" (52). These tales suggest for Klein a litmus test for mental health.

In "The Early Development of Conscience in the Child" (1933), Klein again refers to fairy-tale characters as screens for terrifying parent figures (249). Unlike Sigmund Freud, however, Klein does not use the fairy tale to reconstruct the primal scene, because for Klein, aggression and anxiety are already primal enough and don't depend on a traumatic episode. As Klein has it, the child's fascination with fairy-tale figures—sometimes confident, sometimes anxious—represents both an expression of, and defense against, infantile aggression and ambivalence. Like Bruno Bettelheim, she implies that fairy tales are therapeutic, even as she censures the ego for interfering with the child's mental health. Klein didn't speculate further about fairy tales or children's literature, but other psychoanalysts, psychologists, and cultural critics have taken up that task.

I've argued elsewhere that what I call the "feral tale," the folkloric-turned-literary story of a child raised by animals and/or living in isolation from humanity, is central to the psychoanalytic imaginary as well as to children's literature. The Rat Man and Wolf Man histories are (among other things) psychoanalytic variants of the feral tale, variants that Freud uses to dramatize his theories about psychosexual drama and development. In that sense, they are comparable to Kipling's *Jungle Books* (1894, 1895), which Freud knew well, and Edgar Rice Burroughs's many Tarzan tales. Of course, throughout his writing, Freud explicitly and deliberately draws from psychoanalysis to explain folklore, and vice versa. But he also invokes the folkloric to advance his own ideas, in ways that are more implicit and perhaps unconscious. Sarah Boxer's recent *In the Floyd Archives: A Psycho-Bestiary* (2001) pays clever homage to the psychoanalytic feral tale (as well as to Janet Malcolm), casting Freud as a birdish Dr. Floyd and his famous animal-identified patients as Mr. Wolf-man, Lambskin (Mr. Wolf-man's alter ego), and Ratma'am. Boxer's cartoon book, surely also inspired by Art Spiegelman's *Maus* books (1986) and other graphic novels, could be likened to the dreamwork, at once representing and distorting Freudian thought, very much in the tradition of Freud's own lively and creative feral refashionings.

Freud's writing inaugurates the mutual entanglement of psychoanalysis and folklore as documented by Alan Dundes. Dundes acknowledges the early psychoanalytic work on folklore and mythology conducted by Freud's contemporaries Karl Abraham, Ernest Jones, Carl Jung, and Otto Rank, among many others. "Actually," notes Dundes, "almost every single major psychoanalyst wrote at least one paper applying psychoana-

lytic theory to folklore" (21). Such "application" was a foundational practice, even as psychoanalysis has been folkloric in less conscious ways. Case histories, for example, are written transcripts of oral narrative. Dundes writes partly to challenge the success of Bettelheim's best-selling *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), filling in the historical gaps and all but proving that Bettelheim plagiarized this book (a claim subsequently substantiated). Arguably it was Bettelheim's book that made psychoanalytic interpretations of children's literature more palatable within as well as outside of the academy. Like Klein, and unlike A. A. Brill, who warned against their use, Bettelheim thought that fairy tales were useful in monitoring mental health.

For better or for worse, the European fairy tale canon—especially the work of Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Hans Christian Andersen—is generally understood as the baseline of children's literature. Most survey classes and introductory texts begin with folklore and other oral genres, then move on to picture books, and finally more sophisticated genres. It's not surprising that children's literature critics interested in psychoanalysis at first turned to literary fairy tales and other folkloric literary and cultural forms (among them Disney's early films). In his first of many books on the subject, for example, Jack Zipes describes the literary fairy tale as the "classical genre for children" (from his book's subtitle), and sets the stage for a Marxist and New Historicist understanding of children's literature. His reading is residually psychoanalytic—in his words, "an historical psychological point of view" (33)—in suggesting a correspondence between "psychogenetic" and "sociogenetic" factors in the socialization of children through fairy tales. Like Freud himself, who returned again and again to what I call the problem of ontogenetic-phylogenetic correspondence, Zipes tries to account for both cultural inheritance and individual experience. Few people have done more than Zipes to establish the cultural and critical significance of children's literature. Like Bettelheim before him, Zipes capitalizes on the popularity of fairy tales, but this time to the benefit of leftist literary criticism. It's hard to imagine children's literature without folklore, and children's literature criticism without Zipes, Marina Warner, Maria Tatar, and other scholars who have written about the fairy tale, with or without endorsing a psychoanalytic perspective. Children's literature is a very heterogeneous field, but folklore is arguably where it all began.

The debate about the use-value of psychoanalytic interpretation has been staged largely around folklore, with historically oriented critics rightly objecting to static Freudian interpretations of individual tale variants. Zipes, Tatar, and other scholars have taken Bettelheim to task for

his essentializing and ahistorical readings of select tales. Their criticism is just. For too long, critics have invoked psychoanalytic concepts—oedipality, for instance, or abjection, or the mirror stage—as if they don’t have a history, and as if that history isn’t indebted to folklore, literature, and art. Even the kind of complementary readings that I’m envisioning in this essay run the risk of being reductive and tyrannical if either children’s literature or psychoanalysis is understood ahistorically.

It’s not surprising that the “classical genre” has received the lion’s share of psychoanalytic interpretation so far, since folklore and psychoanalysis have a symbiotic relationship. That relationship is often implicitly acknowledged even by scholars who repudiate psychoanalysis as a method. But what of other genres? Picture books, like fairy tales, are fundamentally about the child and her experiences and anxieties and fantasies; like psychoanalysis, they are preoccupied with language and desire. Despite their provocative mix of word and image, however, picture books have not yet received much psychoanalytic attention. In *Inside Picture Books* (1999), Ellen Handler Spitz implies a correspondence between the “inner possibilities” of younger children (10) and the visual and verbal work of picture books, but she doesn’t really offer sustained readings of texts. Still to emerge is a full-length study of picture books that emphasizes the dynamic relation of psychoanalysis and children’s literature. I suspect that some scholars resist psychoanalytic readings of picture books because of the pervasive myth of innocence. Young children are innocent, runs the myth; so too must be their favorite objects.

Presumably, psychoanalytic criticism is more suitable for young adult literature since that literature (like the adolescents it serves) is less innocent. But our assumption that adolescence is a time of stress and growth is itself psychoanalytic; that’s why psychoanalytic criticism seems a viable approach to young adult literature. Kristeva writes in her essay “The Adolescent Novel” (1995) that adolescence, psychic turmoil, and writing are linked in complicated ways. Arguing that the novel itself is a perpetually “adolescent” genre, Kristeva affirms the association of psychoanalysis with adolescence as well as proto-adult writing.

It would seem that our assumptions about the richness and/or maturity of particular genres have been psychoanalytically inflected from the start. Folklore is ostensibly about primal wishes and fears, the product of a primitive/child-like folk mind even when filtered through the adult consciousness of Charles Perrault or the Brothers Grimm. Picture books, on the other hand, as well as other genres for preadolescents, are assumed to be empty of sexual meaning, or at least, such meaning is deemed latent

rather than blatant. With young adult literature allegedly comes the return of the repressed, the flowering of sexual agency and autonomy.

Even if I exaggerate the degree to which we read childhood psychoanalytically, it's clear that play and folklore helped make possible children's literature as well as child analysis. We're just starting to move past an oppositional practice of criticism, to see how psychoanalytic discourse has shaped our understanding of childhood and children's literature, and vice versa. As Freud recognized, psychoanalysis doesn't know anything that literature doesn't also know, which is why he fashioned psychoanalysis not only as a science, but also as a form of literature with children as its principal characters.

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Notes

¹ Like Kristeva, Westwater believes "that we are in a state of cultural decay and that writing—whether for children or adults—may preserve for us values that are on the verge of decline" (xvii). But Westwater's sense of crisis is much more dramatic than Kristeva's; she writes, for instance, that "[w]e seem unable to discern between good and evil. We've lost our passion for absolutes and cannot find replacements . . . Apparently, violence and ugliness have replaced idealism and beauty as youthful realities" (2). Predictably, she bemoans the breakdown of the family, never acknowledging the dramatic social gains of the 1960s and 1970s. She is also much too eager to see literature as redemptive.

² To keep this essay manageable, I pay no attention to children's film (both about and for children), which also has intimate connections with psychoanalysis.

³ Blum goes so far as to rewrite Freud and Lacan as invested not so much in the oedipal triangle as in the dyadic relation of mother and child, describing the latter as a metaconceit of psychoanalysis that assures the child's alternating sense of presence and absence, selfhood and otherness.

⁴ I'm indebted to Kevin Shortsleeve's essay "The Object (Relations) Lesson: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Edward Gorey and the Characters in His Books," written for my graduate seminar on children's literature and psychoanalysis at the University of Florida.

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