Fruits of the Academic Forest: Exploring Books about Children's Books

—Peter Hunt

Cadden, Mike. *Ursula K. Le Guin: Beyond Genre. Fiction for Children and Adults*. New York: Routledge, 2005. 203 pp. US$95 hc. ISBN 0-415-97218-3.

Coats, Karen. *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2004. 191 pp. US$34.95 hc. ISBN 0-87745-882-0.

Clark, Beverly Lyon. *Kiddie Lit. The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003. 257 pp. $53.95 hc. ISBN 0-8018-6900-5.

Glasgow, Jacqueline, ed. *Strategies for Engaging Young Adult Readers: A Social Themes Approach*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2005. 238 pp. US$36.95. ISBN1-929024-78-9.

Lesnik-Oberstein, Karín, ed. *Children's Literature: New Approaches*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 235 pp. $115.00 hc, $37.95 pb. ISBN 1-4039-1737-X, 1-4039-1738-8.

Lundin, Anne. *Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature: Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 178 pp. US$95.00 hc. ISBN 0-815-33841-4.

Natov, Roni. *The Poetics of Childhood*. New York: Routledge, 2003. 289 pp. US$90.00 hc. ISBN 0-8153-3882-1.

O'Sullivan, Emer. *Comparative Children's Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2005. US$105.00 hc. ISBN 0-415-30551-9.

Shavit, Zohar. *A Past Without Shadow: Constructing the Past in German Books for Children*. Trans. Aaron Jaffe and Ataron Jaffe. New York: Routledge, 2005. 353 pp. US$95.00 hc. ISBN 0-415-96924-7.

> Of all the fatiguing, futile, empty trades, the worst, I suppose, is writing about writing.—Hilaire Belloc (qtd. in Winokur 103)

> The fact is that now there are not only books for children, there are books about books about books for children, there are courses where one learns about the books about the books for children; there's this tremendous tottering edifice, piled upon the sagging and beaten down back of the child at the end of the chain, and I must say that I question it.—Russell Hoban (qtd. Fox 119)

> And so there is an ever-increasing supply of books classified as literary criticism which few people interested in literature, and not even all professionals, can read. . . . (Kermode 8)

Once upon a time, under some prelapsarian tree, there was a storyteller and a child. But this is the twenty-first century, and the tree has grown to a scarcely penetrable forest of word trees, tilled by experts and theorists, whose fruits are books of bewildering density and diversity. Harold Rosen once described the academic forest called English as

> the least subject-like of subjects, the least susceptible to definition by reference to the accumulation of wisdom within a single academic discipline. No single set of informing ideas dominates its heartland. No-one can confidently map its frontiers: it colonizes and is colonized. When we inspect the practices which cluster together uncomfortably under its banner, they appear so diverse, contradictory, arbitrary and random as to defy analysis and explanation. (qtd. in Eaglestone 7)

—and much the same could be said of "Children's Literature."

One way of exploring, even mapping, the forest might be to take a sample of its recent fruits—the books. Now, books about children's literature are, we may charitably assume, directed at people who are interested in children's literature. So far, so good. But just who are these people? If we are going to explore the forest of children's-literature-book trees, in pursuit of some of the latest fruits, we need some explorers: just what kinds of creatures are people interested in *reading or writing* about texts produced for children—as opposed to ordinary human beings who merely read the books?

They are—we are—a fairly rare genus, but we can be categorized into several species and sub-species. First is General Reader. This person has, or has had, a real job (not associated with the academic humanities) and an open mind, and thus regards literature, and literature for children, as a natural part

of a full life; the discussion of literature—the exchange of ideas—is equally a natural part of civilized behaviour. General Reader is, I suspect, despite or because of her open mind soon to be the most bewildered of our explorers.

Next is the User of texts for children. User has the task of mediating the texts to their target audience, for general cultural or specific educational purposes. Users may be of the sub-species Teacher or Parent or Lecturer-in-Education-Colleges-or-Departments; they may be dealing with individuals or groups, and they probably have the most difficult task of all, in that they are encumbered with the requirements and opinions of all the other species.

Then there are the Critics—and there are the two sub-species who have little in common, except that they live by their opinions. The Public Critic lives in a world of authors and publishers, mediating the texts to General Reader and User through newspapers, review journals, and other media. The Academic Critic lives in colleges and universities and mediates texts to a much narrower audience through lectures and academic journals. Terry Pratchett, possibly the Ultimate General Reader, reflected on these in his Discworld novel *Guards! Guards!* in which the Librarian of Unseen University (the Wizards' university) negotiates the infinite L-space (or library):

To the untrained eye, the Academic Critic is frequently indistinguishable from its very close relative, the Academic Theorist, who talks about talking about books.

> Creatures evolve to fill every niche in the environment. . . . He waited patiently as a herd of Critters crawled past, grazing on the contents of the choicer books and leaving behind them piles of small slim volumes of literary criticism. . . . And you had to avoid clichés at all costs. (190–91)

To the untrained eye, the Academic Critic is frequently indistinguishable from its very close relative, the Academic Theorist, who talks about talking about books. It is, not quite incidentally, these two sub-species that most mystify General Reader: General Reader fully supports the idea of lively intellectual interchange, but cannot understand why anyone should be paid for it. Terry Pratchett again, on this species, in *Hogfather*:

> Often they lived to a timescale to suit themselves. Many of the senior ones, of course, lived entirely in the past, but several were like the Professor of Anthropics, who had invented an entire temporal

system based on the belief that all the other ones were a mere illusion.

Many people are aware of the Weak and Strong Anthropic principles. The Weak One says, basically, that it was jolly amazing of the universe to be constructed in such a way that humans could evolve to a point where they make a living in, for example, universities, while the Strong One says that, on the contrary, the whole point of the universe was that humans should not only work in universities but also write for huge sums books with words like "Cosmic" and "Chaos" in the titles. (144)

General Reader is a little more tolerant (although not for any very coherent reason) of the next species, the Factists. The main sub-species of Factist are the Librarian (now mutating into the Informationist), who collects the books for practical purposes, the Achivist, who collects books for cultural purposes, the Bibliophile, who collects them for commercial purposes, and the Bibliographer, whose interest verges on the religious. Pratchett has a word about this species. When writing his books, he says:

I save about twenty drafts. . . . Once [the final one] has been printed out . . . there's a cry of "Tough Shit, literary researchers of the future, try getting a proper job!" and the rest are wiped. (Pratchett Quote File)

There is some dispute as to whether the Historian (with its multiple sub-species of Cultural-, Social-, Socio-Cultural, etc.) is part of this genus or not, but one should certainly accompany the team into the book-forest.

And so they are a diverse bunch, and it would be nice to think that they could be relied upon to search amicably. But, as Roderick McGillis has observed, a little less metaphorically:

lots of people in lots of places talk about and even study something called children's literature, but more often than not, these various groups do not speak to each other. The rarified theorizing of the literary academic strikes the practising teacher as arid beyond tolerance, whereas the practical aims of the educationalist seem too limited and limiting to the theorist and historian of children's literature . . . . And the interest in accumulating data, the purview of the librarian/media specialist, some [regard as] interesting but hardly intellectually stimulating or socially engaged. (203)

And they are accompanied, with great enthusiasm, by the final species, the Student. This creature is generally not clear as to *why* it is reading or writing about children's literature, beyond such obvious

goals as graduating, but it *is* very well trained in recognizing critical comments that will support an argument, fit well into a term paper, or add to the number of references in a paper.

So we have our axes and our collecting baskets: let us see if we can find books to match the readers, and that might give us a feeling for the extent and composition of the forest.

One has to say that you would really want to read these books very much—or somebody would—in order to shell out $833.42. (And somebody does, of course, as publishers are not to be confused with charity organizations.)

Not to flog the metaphor any further for the moment, I have on my desk a modest pile of books which have something to do with books written for children. Four are from a remarkable, and apparently bottomless, series from Routledge, one of the biggest and most reputable academic-professional publishers in the world, and, according to Amazon Canada these books would set the average reader back a mere $441.23. Two of the others, from respected U.S. university presses would be a bargain at US$93.97; another, from a U.S. publisher of professional texts, $43.27 (but you do get a CD with it); one is from Palgrave Macmillan at a sharp $115 (cloth)—but you can get a paperback for a mere $37.95; and the last is a stand-alone volume from Routledge, at a whacking $139.95. One has to say that you would really want to read these books very much—or somebody would—in order to shell out $833.42. (And somebody does, of course, as publishers are not to be confused with charity organizations.)

You may feel that it is not generally or actually the reviewer's job to worry about such sordid matters (it is probably, like asking about the private life of an interviewee in the U.K., illegal), but it is the reviewer's job to make a judgment or a recommendation that is relevant to a prospective purchaser—in short, to fit the book to the reader. The fact that this article appears in *CCL/LCJ* may narrow the field a little more than if it appeared in the *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal* or *La Liberté*, but not as much as you might suppose.

And the reviewer's job is made more difficult by the purpose not so much of the review but of the book (and consequently of the review). In 1965, Frank Kermode observed that "the one thing certain about modern criticism is that there is too much of it" (qtd. in Harwood 19), and four years earlier Northrop Frye, in his "Polemical Introduction" to his seminal

book *Anatomy of Criticism* noted that

> the high percentage of sheer futility in all criticism should be honestly faced, for the percentage can only increase with its bulk, until criticizing becomes, especially for university teachers, merely an automatic method of acquiring merit, like turning a prayer-wheel. (23)

Academic publication in the humanities (and in Children's Literature) has increased exponentially since then; jobs and page-output are eerily, or obviously, connected, and so one has to ask oneself, how many of the books before me actually *needed* to be written for any reason other than vita-dressing? And if they were needed, then the function of the review would not be to recommend (presumably, anyone who can understand the more arcane of such books would not actually need to read them) but to acknowledge and validate—and, of course, to validate the reviewer as much as anything else (which accounts for the culture of smart-assed reviewing). Such reviewing doesn't have any outward-looking function: it's not going to make the next book better, or even to affect whether there is a next book. (There is, of course, an idealistic view that reviewing is part of an ongoing dialogue which is part of civilized discourse. This may have been true in some golden world where academic pages were not counted annually, but it is not one that, I think, most working academics would recognize. I remember many years ago, Aidan Chambers, a peerless "non-academic" critic whose thinking and writing is among the best, saying that he envied me the university Senior Common Room with (what he fondly imagined to be) its free exchange of ideas. I'm afraid that it was a vision I didn't recognize.)

Add to this the argument that the Children's Book world might not be well developed enough (in terms of academic resilience) or large enough (in terms of personalities) to cope with negative reviews, and you will see that, as leader of this expedition, I have several reservations—which will emerge as we go along.

And so what follows is largely a matching exercise, rather than a review, and the first book that we come across as we make our way through this overcast jungle looks like one for the Academic Theorists. This species is inclined to be argumentative, not to say fractious, and therefore will be quite at home with Karín Lesnik-Oberstein's *Children's Literature: New Approaches*. Lesnik-Oberstein, leading what might be called the Reading (as in the city of) School of Criticism, once, famously, caricatured the whole project of children's literature criticism as desiring "to find the good book for the child" (7), and as solving the problems "that adult literary criticism struggles with" by assuming that the "child" is an understandable

entity (*Criticism* 7, 6). Her view has not changed in ten years: "in fact," she says in the new book, "I now go on to argue, this aim or goal—the choosing of good books for children—does not change from critic to critic, no matter how much they claim that they will be doing things differently, or applying new approaches or methodologies" (7).

It may well seem to General Reader that Dr. Lesnik-Oberstein is confusing the work of Public Critic and Academic Critic: after all, it is the job of Public Critic to do just what she so disapproves of—and that is true of 95% of what is written about all literature (just as this article is doing now). But, being fair-minded, General Reader would no doubt sympathize with the Reading practice which one might paraphrase as a constantly shifting and generally arbitrary intervention, rather than a push to any fixed conclusion, but, again, General Reader might just wonder why the arguments solidified into print at any moment should be of any particular interest, let alone be worth $115 (or the salaries of the contributors).

This book reminds me of why I retired from academia, because it belongs to the thriving school of academic writing that sets out not so much to say something new and stimulating, as to demolish previous critics in the field and to prove how superior the present writers are, not only to the past critics but to the authors of the fictions ostensibly being written about. It is not, to my mind, an attractive form.

In our group of readers, the Theorist and the Student will probably find a lot to interest them—although the student may not realize that, despite the title, one has to search pretty hard to find something "new" in this book. The opening chapter is virtually identical to the thesis that Dr. Lesnik-Oberstein put forward ten years ago, and the same old Aunt Sallys of criticism are up for attack—she cites only one twenty-first-century book. "Children's Books Critics"—an amorphous mass—claim, she says, to know a certain fixed meaning in a text, and to know childhood. Well, yes, there was (when Dr. Lesnik-Oberstein first wrote her essay) a lot of such thinking about, but one might wonder what Reading has been reading for the last decade and more. Since 1994, the Children's Literature Association and, for example, the journal *Children's Literature* have been widely attacked for ignoring the "child" in any shape or form, and you could read a long way into the massive Routledge Children's Literature and Culture series before you come upon anything that Dr. Lesnik-Oberstein could object to—and then it would be material by Librarians, whose business it is to do that odd thing of trying to match book and child.

(As a kind of footnote, I should say I hope that the fact that one of my books comes in for a good deal of negative criticism here is not biasing my view. Indeed, I'm rather complimented to think that

a book that I published in 1991 still warrants an extensive attack in a book of "New Approaches" in 2004. Nor am I particularly affronted by the fact that what I said seems to be grossly misread—I am, after all, only the original author, and therefore not to be taken into account—and, anyway, all these opinions are fluid and provisional, and they may like me again by 2017. However, I might just be allowed to say that I have never claimed to have "access to the 'true' interpretation of the text . . ." or to have total access to the unmediated response of the audience as Dr. Cocks claims [113]. Rather, in my idea of "Childist" criticism, I merely wished to privilege all the unknowable interpretations that child readers might make over the all-too-knowable, and all-too-inflexible, interpretations of texts by professional critics.)

There is also an unattractive coterie element in this book, where the writers cite each other rather embarrassingly in the footnotes (". . . has been rigorously read by Steven Thompson"), and this reaches its nadir when Neil Cocks (while extensively demolishing an article written in 1977!) attempts to demonstrate that things have not progressed. He cites Perry Nodelman's Children's Literature theory web page, where he complains, a little querulously, "No author collected in this book is represented." Perhaps it would be unfairly pragmatic to point out that, as far as I can find out, five of those authors are not children's book specialists and have never written anything on children's books before, while four of the others have produced only a handful of articles, mostly published by the fifth.

However, as the cover of the book announces (perhaps a little optimistically) that "this is the first volume on children's literature criticism designed specifically for graduate students and researchers," then that must be so, and our graduate Student clutches it to her bosom, and the Theorist eyes it for potential future critical battles, and we move on.

Quite a long way away in the forest (although perhaps not so far as it may seem, in ultimate intent) is Jacqueline Glasgow's *Strategies for Engaging Young Adult Readers: A Social Themes Approach*. No problems here. This is for the User: teachers such as the remarkable Susan Cappetta, sharing their practical experience in a world where the books are both starting points for reflection and ends in themselves: "Students may be asked to interpret literature with art, dance, music, and drama. Through these interpretations, students learn new things about the stories they read, as well as about themselves" (11). Here we have old friends like Rosenblatt and Dewey, interaction and engagement, and Socratic reflection, all based on recent teenage fiction.

General Reader finds this interesting, although rather specialized, and User Teacher thinks that it will be very useful. Others in the expedition ignore

it—unlike the next book, which is quite difficult for anyone to ignore. Zohar Shavit's *A Past Without Shadow: Constructing the Past in German Books for Children* is highly engaging and readable, has every appearance of being a serious contribution to social and political history, and is a serious revisionist reading: it looks scholarly; it seems, unquestionably, to know what it is talking about; and it is clearly grounded in cultural theory. (I must emphasize that the expressions "has every appearance" and "seems" are not implied criticisms—merely my acknowledgement that I know nothing about this field, and it would be positively misleading for me to claim that I know that the book is scholarly. I happily believe that it is, though.) This satisfies virtually everyone, and quite why it isn't one-tenth of the price and out there on the general non-fiction shelves is not clear.

This is almost, but not quite, true of Beverly Lyon Clark's *Kiddie Lit: The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America,* a good idea well done—a history of how children's literature has been marginalized in the U.S.A. The tone falls somewhere between, say, the scholarly Lynne Vallone, and the unbuttoned polemic of Jack Zipes, and it might be that this doesn't belong on the general non-fiction shelves, because, although it is entertaining enough, it maintains a detailed and close-up academicism—which is entirely admirable but which requires perhaps a little more concentration than General Reader might be willing to expend. But the explorers agree that the Student, Critics, and Factists would find it useful, and the Users might find it interesting.

Beverly Lyon Clark spends some time on Children's Literature in the Academy, and it might seem that Anne Lundin's book on the role of librarians in establishing the importance of Children's Literature in the U.S.A., *Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature: Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers*, might be an ideal companion-piece. Certainly, Lundin's book is likely to give the species Factist-Librarian something to enjoy: the problem is that it is only two-thirds of a book. After sketching out, with great enthusiasm, and often with a little too much detail for General Reader or Student, the role of librarianship, Professor Lundin feels that the role of literary scholars in establishing the canon should be demonstrated. Accordingly, she spends thirty pages paraphrasing, entry by entry, Perry Nodelman's *Touchstones* volumes (1985–89) (with some unfortunate slips—for example, Arthur Ransome's Walker family become the Wallace family). Such a move may well, more than anything else, demonstrate the gulfs in the forest—the gulf between what a Librarian and an Academic Critic might regard as criticism.

If Anne Lundin's book has a clear target audience, Emer O'Sullivan's *Comparative Children's Literature*

is a little more problematic, for here is a book directed at—well, at the leading edge of children's literature scholarship, and at people well outside this particular forest, in the nearby forest of Comparative Literature. It's a thoroughly admirable corrective to the Anglocentric. As Professor O'Sullivan says: "This book argues that children's literature studies that neglects [sic] the comparative dimension is approaching significant areas in a questionable manner" (1). And it argues it very effectively, with a lot of satisfying detail, ending with the disquieting observation that "the Utopian idea of a world republic of childhood has become the worldwide children's market" (151). It has the *gravitas* appropriate to its origins as a *Habilitation*, the German post-doctoral thesis, and the sort of impeccable credentials that make it a potentially great ambassador for Children's Literature.

And so we burble on through the tulgey wood, and the Academic Theorist at last has a reward, after all this practical and historical material. Here is a copper-bottomed, quality product of Theory, Karen Coats's *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature*. Karen Coats has a well-earned reputation for intelligent theorizing, and our Academic Theorist is very happy, and the Student is putting on a brave face. For the rest of the party, there's an uneasy feeling that we've hit the hard core stuff here, what with three major buzzwords (two perhaps a little past their sell-by dates) in the sub-title, and with sentences like these—taken totally at random: "I would like to concretize some of this theoretical maneuvering" (41) or "All [subjects] have been alienated through and in language, barred from the desire of the (m)Other, and brought into existence as a defense against the gap introduced by the father's prohibition" (99)—(huh?). This is in such a deep code, not immediately (if ever) relatable to any of the other Children's Literature explorers, that it might be happier over in Theory-Land (a forest noted for its dense underbrush)—although Coats does claim a practical purpose in terms of understanding how literature engages children in the world as Lacanian-type subjects (whatever that may mean to the General Reader).

Working our way into rather more open woodland, we find a perfect specimen of the kind of criticism that would not feel very comfortable in Reading, but which every member of the party (except the Academic Theorist) and especially the Student recognized at once—although only the Academic Critic and the Student showed much enthusiasm for it. For what it sets out to be, and declares itself to be, Mike Cadden's book on Ursula K. Le Guin could hardly be bettered. It describes, it points out links, it makes connections. It is intelligent conversation; somebody thinking closely about something we are invited to think closely about, and it knows the

difference between continuum and continua and makes use of the ideas of Bakhtin without disappearing up its own chronotope. Of course, it can be criticized on the grounds that it treats the author as an authority, that it takes the "we see" reading as unproblematic, and that any Le Guin addict well-enough-versed in her books to want to read it probably doesn't need to. But, within the term-paper production system, it will have its place.

It is intelligent conversation; somebody thinking closely about something we are invited to think closely about, and it knows the difference between continuum and continua, and makes use of the ideas of Bakhtin without disappearing up its own chronotope.

Thus far, everyone has something, even if things have been a little thin for the Biblio-species, and so, to balance things up we have an example of the downside of the Children's Literature system—a book that doesn't seem to be designed for anybody. At first glance (despite the dementedly nightmarish cover image—quite what that can be about is not clear) Roni Natov's *The Poetics of Childhood* seems to be authoritative and staggeringly well-informed, and if somewhat thin on theory, is very aware of theories that swirl around it. Forward the Student and the User and the Critics? Maybe, but they would have to be more intelligent than I am, because having read the introduction four times, I still have no idea what it is about (and, as a consequence, who it is for).

I don't even understand what Professor Natov means by her title. In the "Introduction" she says: "The dominant images [?] embedded and stored in the imagination . . . when expressed artistically [?] through the eyes [?] and in the voice of childhood memory [?], they can resonate deeply [?] for others. This is the poetics of childhood" (2; question marks mine). Well, if it is, it doesn't seem much to write a book about. Try again:

> Through exploring [the literature of childhood] and the states of mind inherited from childhood, we might identify the images through which we saw the world [?]; we might approximate the lenses [?] through which we view the world even now. . . . The poetics of childhood draws attention [?] to the ways in which we might see the flux of our imaginations [?] more clearly [?]. (5–6)

That sentence made so little sense to me that when I

was first typing it out, I mistakenly skipped to the top of the next page and tagged on the wrong sentence ending.

One more time:

> The poetics of childhood represents both to the reader and the writer, the creator and the witness to the creation [??], the potential of even our darkest moments of dislocation to metamorphose into a rejuvenating and creative energy. . . . And the child, as guide [?] to their body of literature [?] remains a source of hope [?] and suggests [?] that . . . healing can come through the use of childhood [?] to create a poetics, an imagined but tangible [?] state, inspired and illuminated by the child, [?] to return to [?]. (7)

(Every question mark is a point where I need clarification.) And, unfortunately, I'm not helped by reading, later in the book, that David Almond's *Skellig* "is in itself the story of creating a poetics for children" (238).

I wouldn't like to give the false impression that I actually read to page 238; rather, in the hope that I could see which were the potential readers of this book (Students-cleverer-than-me were the obvious candidates), I read bits at random, but I only became more bemused. The section on *The Shrinking of Treehorn* (161–64), for example, spends three pages describing the book, unpacking laboriously what is "there"—or what Professor Natov says is there—in the pictures (including one picture reproduced in the text). But why? Who needs to be told? Is Professor Natov assuming that her readers, who must be pretty bright to have got this far, can't see what is in a picture? Or is she deciding that her reading is superior to theirs—as she ignores a mountain of writing about the problematization of reading pictures, and the fact that her readers might, possibly, even probably, be seeing something rather different? (Actually, I'm one of them: in the reprinted picture, Professor Natov sees Treehorn's parents "turning to see Treehorn's eyes"—when as far as I can see, they're both already facing him . . . but, no matter.) After all this primary-classroom exegesis, the conclusion is that children, having perceived (although quite how, without Professor Natov's help, is not clear, seeing as we, whoever we are, needed it) the dysfunctional nature of the family might gain "some release through humor" (164)—and through Gorey's "cool and elegant" pictures. (Both the Theorist and the User-Teacher in me gave up at this point, both bemused by where the humour is, who sees it, who is making the "cool and elegant" judgments, and for whom?)

And so, casting myself both as General Reader and ex-Academic ex-Theorist (God help me), I'm afraid that I'm defeated by this book. I came to assume that it is for an untheoretical audience, if only because it

is given to unverifiable (and inherently improbable) assertions, such as this one, about contemporary children's fiction: "Freedom from inhibitions about what one can and cannot say inspire creativity and originality in children" (219)—which seems to need a smidgeon of evidence to support it, quite apart from apparently damning every book published before 1970. But then, in the same paragraph, just when I thought it was safe to rejoin the argument, Professor Natov turns theoretical, citing Kimberly [sic] Reynolds, who "claims that Kristeva sees the entry from the 'maternal semiotic realm to the paternal symbolic realm.'" Quite apart from the lurch of registers, this immediately raises the question of whether Kimberley Reynolds is only claiming this, or whether Kristeva actually says this.

I can only conclude that it's me, because I have every possible respect for Professor Natov, and she clearly teaches well and knows an awful lot. And, since I first drafted this article, I have discovered that *The Poetics of Childhood* has won the 2005 Best Book Award from the International Research Society for Children's Literature—so it's obviously for them.

. . . few explorers of academic forests emerge without at least a touch of those three terrible diseases—UNC (Unseemly Name Calling), SAC (Smart-Assed Criticism) and ISS (I'm So Superior).

At this point, I think it's time that I got out of the forest, because it's clearly having an unfortunate effect on my charitable nature, and few explorers of academic forests emerge without at least a touch of those three terrible diseases—UNC (Unseemly Name Calling), SAC (Smart-Assed Criticism) and ISS (I'm So Superior).

But, as we emerge back into the real world, we might reflect that any book on children's literature is going to have a very mixed audience, many of whom would not regard themselves a part of the children's literature gang. Equally, we who are interested in the field, or forest, might aspire to be a kind of super-reader, a being who could be interested in all the possible books. It might well be that such a creature would coincide with what we should aspire to as children's literature "experts." You might like to make your own definition. Mine is: a person with

> first-hand experience of raising children; first-hand experience of telling or reading stories to children at a variety of ages; a good working knowledge of the theory and practice of child development, literacy, criticism, linguistics, literary

and social history (worldwide); competence in several languages; and a good knowledge of feminism and other -ismic movements. And a sense of humour.

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