Book Reviewing as Public Service

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Abstract

This study combines journalistic and literary approaches to analyze the process of reviewing children's literature for a mass market. In 2007 every fourth copy of a book sold in the UK was a children's book, reaching a unique sales peak. This study covers the public reception of a sample of reviews in the years before and after this 'all time high' and demonstrates reasons why there should be concern about the integrity of the critics as well as the cultural significance of children's books.

Bourdieu's work on cultural status is used to explain the selection criteria all media in question have in common, which favour books close to adult literary ideals written by previously awarded authors. Most reviews tend to present children's books favourably and in the nature of public service to adult buyers and users rather than discussing their cultural significance or pushing for higher literary quality. This tendency is accounted for by the concept of 'service journalism', as defined by Martin Eide and Graham Knight, in which children's books are seen as a means to ensure children's success in life.

Service journalism gives the critic a hybrid identity as part peer, part professional and part promoter. The role as promoter – evangelizing the benefits of reading – presents the greatest challenge to the professional integrity and puts the readers' trust to the test. The most alarming practice is found in newspapers, when critics use invalid arguments of speculations and universalizations the same time that their reviews are offering the assessed books for sale through the newspapers' own bookstores.

The study is based on a substantial selection of reviews from the magazines *Books for Keeps* and *Carousel*; the newspapers *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, and the websites *Achuka* and *Lovereading4kids*. Selection criteria are explained in an appendix.

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction: What Are Book Reviews For?

The following is the full review of *The Earth, My Butt and Other Big Round Things* by Carolyn Mackler, reviewd by Val Randall in *Books for Keeps* November 2006:

> The quirky title of this excellent book could alienate the very audience it seeks to serve – a pity, as Mackler has expertly tuned the narrative away from veiled didactic to thought-provoking entertainment.
>
> Virginia's excess weight makes her feel like an outsider in her own high-achieving, athletic, brittly-perfect family. Her brother Byron's date-rape of a fellow student at his prestigious university pushes the family to the edge of their fragile stability and Virginia knows that she must readjust both her self-image and her relationship with them if she is to do more than merely survive. With the help of her best friend, a sympathetic teacher, a passion for writing and the courage to defy social stereotyping, she succeeds in carving out a respected place on school campus which not only solves her own problems but provides others with the vehicle to do the same.
>
> This is no glib, saccharine solution to a serious problem but a considered story with warmth and credibility which both reassures, entertains and educates in equal measure. [1]

Arguably this book review proves how superficial and inferior is the treatment of children's books in the British mass media. It does, never the less, fit the description of a review offered by most journalism handbooks: it provides basic information on the book and carries an opinion about it.[2] Compared to a newspaper review of a music cd, it does not seem that inferior. In fact, this review may give potential buyers of the book the basic guidance they need to make a satisfying choice. According to Tim Harrower in *Inside Reporting*, this is the purpose of a review – as opposed to a piece of criticism. Criticism is

[1] Val Randall, 'The Earth, My Butt and Other Big Round Things', *Books for Keeps*, no. 161, 2006, p. 27.
[2] See for instance Harriet Gilbert, 'Writing Reviews' in *Writing for Journalists* ed. by Wynford Hicks (London: Routledge, 2004 [1999], pp. 99-123 (p. 99) and Richard Keeble, 'The Art of Reviewing' in *The Newspaper Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2007 [1994]), pp. 246-51 (p. 246).

'the study, evaluation and interpretation of the art', pondering 'the meaning, context and significance of an artist's work.' Reviews, on the other hand, are more practically oriented and 'written on deadline' to help readers answer the question, which in the case of children's literature reads: is this book worth my child's time and my money? [3] This definition places book reviewing firmly within consumer journalism.

Ninety-seven percent of all children's books in Britain are bought by adults.[4] The review of Carolyn Mackler's book is both representative of the current reviewing practices and designed to serve this group. Torben Weinrich labels the adult adressees of such reviews 'passive consumers' – adults not likely to read the book for themselves.[5] Peter Hunt employs the word 'users' – as opposed to 'real readers' – which also includes practitioners with an occupational interest in children's literature, such as teachers and librarians.[6] Val Randall, writer of the review in question, seems to have this audience in mind when offering an insightful summary of the story line with references to didactic and educative aspects. For my purpose, the term 'user' describes the intended audience most precisely. Accordingly, I replace the term 'consumer journalism' with 'service journalism' to cover the full scale of service provided, including guidance to the non-consuming group of users.

However superficial, book reviews are worth studying because they execute power. Critics influence the ideas about why and what children should read: they influence what reading materials children actually are offered; they contribute to the reputation of chosen authors, and they play a part in the distribution of money in the field. Typical of the practice of short reviews is that the assessment process is transferred from the review itself to a supposedly scrupulous – but problematically unofficial – selection procedure including several of the scholarly evaluation skills characteristic of criticism. This invisible process is usually even more lacking in formal guidelines than the reviewing itself. By the time a book has been deemed worthy of a review, a crucial series of judgements have already been made. A person writing even the simplest review may therefore still deserve to be given the title 'critic'. To simplify matters, this is the term I

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[3] Tim Harrower, 'Writing Reviews' in *Inside Reporting. A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), pp. 132-133 (p. 132).

[4] Book Marketing Limited 2008, referred in Claire Squires, 'Marketing the Millennium' in Janet Maybin and Nicola j. Watson (eds), *Children's Literature: Approaches and Territories* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan in association with The Open University, 2009).

[5] Torben Weinreich, *Børnebogens Udbredelsesmønster* (Copenhagen: TIU, 1975), p. 82.

[6] Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature. The Development of Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1995 [1990]), p. 3.

prefer in this dissertation even though I find most reviews in my material too short to qualify rightfully as criticism.

Critics are restrained by the limited space given, their specific instructions, and what Bourdieu calls the 'doxa' of the field – the dominant, legitimate knowledge and structures more or less taken for granted. This dissertation is written in the spirit of Bourdieu, in accordance with his idea that anyone who understands reflexively the mechanisms of 'these determining forces' will have the choice between reproducing and challenging them.[7] Previous studies have usually used literary theory to identify the dominant standards in book reviews; and a classic academic exercise is to discuss to what extent specific reviews pay justice to particular books.[8] I am more interested in how the reviews reflect the field as a whole. Media theory rooted in cultural studies and the social sciences offers new insights into the most powerful structures pervading review practices. On the one hand they disclose book reviewing as an autonomous practice, in which the critics – within the limits listed above – have the freedom of speech to present an independent argument. One the other hand, most critics working with children's literature in the contemporary mass-market media seem to use their relative freedom to write within the parameters of service journalism. Their advice to adult users is combined with priorities likely to be beneficial for their own cultural status, which seems to favour books for older children and more experienced readers. My concern is with how, under this regime, the integrity of some critics is potentially compromised, and the full value of children's literature inadequately acknowledged.

Service Journalism

According to Martin Eide and Graham Knight, service journalism came into existence during the 'tabloidization' of news media, understood as the adaptation of news presentation to a more competitive and popularized media market.[9] This form of popular approach is closely related to consumer journalism. The task of the service journalist is 'responding to and offering commentary and advice on the everyday concerns of their

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[7] Bridget Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory. Critical Investigations* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 179.

[8] See for instance Peter Hunt's collection of influential articles in *Criticism, Theory & Children's Literature* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

[9] Martin Eide and Graham Knight, 'Public/Private Service: Service Journalism and the Problems of Everyday Life' in *European Journal of Communication*, vol 14 (4), 1999, pp. 525-547.

audiences.'[10] In the article 'Public/Private Service: Service Journalism and the Problems of Everyday Life', Eide and Knight explain that service journalism comes in two forms: either it is designed to help people to overcome a grievance, or it advises on how to reduce the risks in life – like how to maintain a healthy body, for instance. To various extents, reviews of children's books form part of the latter category. The risk addressed by book reviews, is the risk of the user's child failing to achieve success in life.

Functional illiteracy is a wide-ranging handicap in many western societies, and Britain is among the bottom countries in Europe. By 2006 fourteen percent of the working age population in Britain were classified as functional illiterates.[11] A user-generated website like Wikipedia fuels parents' fear by pointing out that the percentage of illiterates is higher among prisoners, indicating a link between illiteracy and criminal behaviour.[12] Even though the risks motivating service journalism are often unarticulated, the purported reasons to worry are clearly implied: 'as full of joy for children of 7+ who have given up reading as for those who love it.'[13] To insist on the 'healthy' aspects of a book will usually be enough to remind the reader of the unhealthy alternative. As Eide and Knight point out, service journalism works by double standards. It both feeds parents' fear of a child that will not cope in society, and at the same time helps them take what are advised as necessary precautions.[14]

However, the fear of non-reading children turning into unsuccessful adults is not only a concern of adults close to the young. In their forthcoming book on childhood, *The Empty Throne*, Robert A. Davis and Joseph Dunne note that children are regarded with growing anxiety as 'the nation's greatest resource for the future.' Moreover, education nowadays 'is seen unashamedly as an "investment" whose yield must be maximised if productivity and competitiveness are to be sustained in an ever more globalized economy.'[15] Consequently, book reviews in the form of service journalism promote children's books not only as a service to reduce risk in children's individual lives, but also as a service intended to secure future welfare for us all.

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[10] Eide and Knight, p. 526.

[11] Leitch Review of Skills, *Prosperity for All in the Global Economy – World Class Skills* (HM Treasury, 2006), p. 43, reports 5 million illiterates among 35 million in the working age.

[12] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illiterate> [accessed 16.06.2009].

[13] Amanda Craig, 'Class in and out of school', *The Times*, 18.11. 2006, Book pages, p. 16.

[14] Eide and Knight, p. 531.

[15] Robert A. Davis and Joseph Dunne, 'Introduction: Dissenting from the "New Paradigm" in the study of childhood' in *The Empty Throne: Childhood and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. by Davis and Dunne (Cambridge University Press, [n.d.] forthcoming), incomplete pagination in the manuscript.

Since everybody has an investment in the future, relating children's literature to social welfare ought to make the quality of children's books of interest to everybody. Service journalism, however, sees life as a project to be individually mastered, not publicly debated. The focus is on addressing users in order to help each individual navigate in a life 'fraught with risk but also open to opportunities.'[16] The individual focus is what ensures this media trend appeal to the mass market, by offering the audience an opportunity to become the hero in their own lives. All the users have to do is to follow the critics'' advice, so the logic goes, in order to turn their children into eager readers and mature human beings.

The Case of Anne Fine and *Doing It!*

Whether a review comes in the form of service journalism or not, there are basically two possible reasons for a commercial newspaper (or any commercial media) to publish it: either a review forms part of the ideological agenda of the newspaper, in which children's literature somehow is considered important, and thereby contributes to the newspaper's image, or it helps sales, simultaneously attracting advertisers more directly. Anne Fine's review (legendary in children's literature circles) of Melvin Burgess' *Doing It* – 'Filth, whichever way you look at it' – is an unusual example of a review powerfully doing both.[17] It is the exception to the rule, which demonstrates what most current reviews in Britain are not about.

Characteristic of her review is the prominence of news values. Even the feature and culture sections are influenced by mechanisms designed to sell news media to a mass market, based on what kind of news a mass audience is attracted by and willing to pay for. In 'News Values and Selectivity', Deirdre O'Neill and Tony Harcup present a number of studies on the characteristics of news articles that are given priority in the media selection process, with the main focus on their own study of 1200 British news stories in 2001.[18] The more of these characteristics that occur, the more powerful the article's attraction to the audience. (In the following analysis, I have indicated the news values in Fine's review using italics.)

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[16] Eide and Knight, p. 531.
[17] Anne Fine, 'Filth which ever way you look at it', *The Guardian*, 29.03.2003, Saturday pages, p. 33.
[18] Deirdre O'Neill and Tony Harcup, 'News Values and Selectivity' in *The Handbook of Journalism Studies* ed. by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas Hanitzsch (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 161-174.

Both Fine and Burgess are semi-*celebrities* likely to be recognized by the audience. Fine's review is *exclusive*, giving the newspaper readers a peak into a manuscript not yet published. Both the argument itself, and the book and publishing process the text assesses and informs them about, are *sensational* in the sense that they surprisingly break the norms of what is considered appropriate and polite. Fine ensures the *entertainment* value by a satirical style and by quoting the most shocking sentences she has been able to find: 'I sucked Miss's tits and know what pubes she has.' Then she adds to it by expressing her disgust in emotional and direct prose. 'God help the publisher and their grubby little life if they think this tosh is realistic.' In this *drama* of *sex* and *emotions*, the critic comes across as the offended, but quick-witted, main character, with whom the reader is invited to *identify*. As an author and children's laureate at the time, she is a *prominent* person criticizing *powerful* publishing houses for a choice *relevant* to any reader concerned about society – the choice of publishing a book Fine thinks is possibly corrupting to young people.

This review completes the general journalistic mission of informing, disclosing, criticising and debating issues of public interest. Fine addresses non-consumers just as much as potential buyers and users of the book. In fact, addressing non-consumers is considered so important in reviewing for commercial media on a mass market, that film critic Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian's Guide to Journalism* advises: 'Digression, riffing, going widely off the point – it's all fine, as long as it is entertaining (…). You can annoy or enrage your readers as much as you like. Just don't bore them.'[19] It is debatable whether hostility towards a book (and the author) can be justified ethically – however entertaining it may be perceived – and whether attention by any means undermines the reputation of the field. Hostile reviews hardly occur in my material.

Within the limited space assigned to children's literature, some would argue that a book like *Doing It!* is not worth the attention. If news values were the driving force in the reviewing of children's literature, it would favour a selection of books chosen for their journalistic potential rather than according to literary merit. That would in all probability favour questionable and even speculative books, as indeed may be the case with *Doing It!*, while not conforming to the agenda of the passive consumers looking for the best books to buy for children. What Anne Fine did, was to cause debate.

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[19] Peter Bradshaw, 'Peter Bradshaw on How to Write a Review' in *How to Write Journalism*, ed. by Philip Oltermann (London: Guardian News & Media, 2008).

Literary debates are intended both to stimulate the development of art in order to ensure certain quality standards are held high, and debate which values are to be considered most important in society. Instead of merely warning parents and guardians to protect young people from the book, Fine questioned publishing practices more generally and thereby made *Doing It!* relevant also to non-consumers. She attacked both the book and its publishers by arguing that not any moral compromise ought to be permitted in order to encourage more boys to read. In the great flow of media messages, provocations seem to be the most efficient way to trigger an exchange of views. Focus on debatable books is often designed to stimulate an awareness of which qualities to prefer – and may also be intended to aid consumers in developing their taste and making autonomous choices. Reviews of unquestionably good books, on the other hand, demand much less from the consumer. Service journalism seems to promote reading at the expense of debate and quality demands.

My Sample Sources

I have chosen my material from four newspapers, two journals and two websites to cover a variety of media and practices. Since my focus is on book reviewing for the mass market, it has been essential to select samples accessible to 'ordinary people'. The journals in particular address users in a wider sense than parents, including practitioners like publishers, illustrators and writers in addition to teachers, booksellers and librarians. Usually, however, the reviews are written in a style which indicates that the critics also have non-specialist readers in mind.

- *The Guardian* is a liberal newspaper, as is their Sunday paper *The Observer*. *The Times* is a conservative newspaper, as is *The Sunday Times*. Each has a long tradition of reviewing children's literature. The Sunday newspapers and *The Times* trust most children's books to one specialist reviewer, whereas *The Guardian* use a variety of critics, predominantly children's book authors. In the first half of 2003 *The Sunday Times* had a review on a children's book approximately every third week; by 2006 they occurred every week; and by 2009 they occurred biweekly.[20] This trend can also be found in *The Observer* although reviews here usually appear more randomly and assess several books at the same time. In the first half of 2009

[20] Counted by the first six months of every year.

they treated less than half as many titles compared to the first half of 2006.[21] Both *The Times* and *The Guardian* have reviewed children's books on a weekly basis from 2006 to 2009. In *The Times* the number of longer reviews has dropped simultaneously as the number of 'bunch reviews' has risen.[22] *The Guardian*, on the other hand, had more extensive round-ups in 2006, but apart from that there is little change in 2009.[23] Every week 5-600 words are spent on one children's book, which is the most extensive in my sample. At least once a month a few picture books are assigned around eighty words each.

- *Books for Keeps* is a journal, which dedicates more than half its content to book reviews, usually between 70 and 80 in each issue. It was launched in 1980, with the declared ambition of being '[t]he best independent resource about children's literature.'[24] In 2005 editor Rosemary Stones reconfirmed the initial goal to be 'helpful, practical, stimulating, informative, entertaining, sometimes provocative and always enjoyable to read.'[25] The magazine is issued bimonthly and currently an estimated ninety-seven percent of the income is based on subscription.[26] New critics are asked to bear in mind 'our readership is predominantly a professional one made up of librarians, teachers (at all levels), students, academics and scholars, publishers, booksellers. And quite a large smattering of Mums and Dads.'[27] The normal review length is around 150 words, but the critics are welcome to write more.

- *Carousel* also depends on subscribers and was issued for the first time in 1995 by representatives of the Federation of Children's Book Groups, replacing *Books For Your Children*. In three issues a year they offer 'support and guidance to parents, carers, teachers and librarians' – what they sum up as 'book-loving, ordinary people'.[28] Each issue since 2003 contains around 100 reviews by a maximum of

[21] *The Observer,* first half of 2003: 31 titles; 2006: 40; 2009: 16.
[22] *The Times* , first half of 2006: 36 titles; 2009: 20 titles. In addition 81 titles were listed in 2006. By 2009, 50 titles appeared in round-ups.
[23] *The Guardian*, first half 2006: 22 reviews of more than 500 words, 20 picture books, 28 titles in other round-ups. First half 2009: 19 long reviews and 21 picture books.
[24] Subscriber's page: <http://www.booksforkeeps.co.uk/subscribe> [accessed 01.07.2009].
[25] Rosemary Stones quoting from no. 1, 1980, in the editorial of *Books for Keeps*, no. 150, 2005, p. 2.
[26] Information from Richard Hill in *Books for Keeps*, email, 07.07.2009.
[27] 'Notes to reviewers', provided by Richard Hill, 07.07.2009.
[28] Editorial, no. 27, 2004, p. 3.

200 words. The stated aim is 'to turn children into successful and passionate readers'.[29]

- *Achuka* is a website, established in 1995, offering brief news from the field of children's literature, a blog encouraging debate, and book reviews under the motto: 'chock-full, eyes-peeled, independent.'[30] The site operates at a smaller scale than the journals, more or less independent of income, with reviews of various length. It gives readers the ability to comment interactively on the reviews, just like the website of *Books for Keeps*. Their online archive goes back only to October 2005. Whereas they published 103 reviews in the first half of 2006, the number had dropped to 16 by the first half of 2009.

- *Lovereading4kids* is an Internet bookselling site launched in December 2005 based on the business idea 'to be the ultimate children's online independent bookstore. It has been created using the experience we have as parents and book lovers, who want our children to read great books.'[31] To maximise profit seems a likely ambition. It started with a limited selection but now offers all children's books available in the UK. Each month they feature recommendation lists of approximately six to twelve books in seven age categories, and these titles are followed by a comment. Old lists are no longer available, but most likely a title followed by a comment has been among the featured books at some point. *Lovereading4kids* is part of Lovereading Ltd with similar websites aimed at adult readers and schools. When I use the name *Lovereading*, I always refer to lovereading4kids.co.uk.

By 2007 every fourth copy sold on the UK book market was a children's book. The total sales amounted £382 million before the recent recession set in. I have chosen reviews covering the time before and after this 'all time high', from the autumn of 2005 until spring 2009. On the background of this commercial success, it is particularly interesting to investigate what was characteristic of the public reception. My selection is explained in an appendix. Specific samples are explained consecutively.

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[29] Editorial by Jenny Blanch, *Carousel*, no. 35, 2007, p. 3.
[30] *Achuka* homepage, <http://www.achuka.co.uk/> [accessed July 17, 2007].
[31] *Lovereading* homepage, <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/> [accessed June 16, 2009] None of the entries on this website are dated.

The Positive Attitude

On the basis of my research it can be concluded that to inform, disclose, criticise and debate issues of general public interest does not seem to be very high on the agenda of editors and critics concerned with children's literature. In fact, most – if not all – contemporary handbooks on journalism fail to acknowledge the journalistic potential of what they all recognize as 'a specific form' of writing.[32] Although Erica Wagner, book editor of *The Times*, proclaims the ambition of the book pages 'to help readers choose books – and talk about them, too', this 'talk' applies mainly to adult books since those are the books adults read.[33] In the first six months of 2006 *The Times* carried only three predominantly negative reviews of children's books, and only twenty-two percent of the titles were presented with reservations. By 2009 there were no negative ones. With the rising number of titles reviewed in round-ups, the number of negative remarks dropped to eleven percent.[34] Both *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* present negative remarks on only a small percentage of the titles assessed, and these reservations are, with extremely few exceptions, never of such significance as to hinder recommending the book.[35] *Carousel* even more clearly expresses a service ideology by ensuring that they only review books they 'can recommend'.[36] The percentage of reservations is much higher in the long reviews in *The Guardian*, rising to over half by 2009.[37]

Achuka and *Books for Keeps* rate the books on a scale from one to five, and the latter publishes negative reviews on a regular basis. The average rating in *Achuka*, on the other hand, rose from a stable 3.6 between 2005 and 2007 to 4.2 in 2009 – parallel with the substantial drop in the number of books reviewed. The focus shifted to good books only. In *Books for Keeps*, however, the average rating has stayed stable around 3.5 since 2003. By 2009 this journal is the only one among my samples in which one is guaranteed to find reviews that are predominantly negative. In the rest of my material favourable reviews clearly dominate, well suited to promoting reading to parents and practitioners in

[32] See for instance Harrower, Gilbert or Keeble,
[33] Erica Wagner, 'When it comes to reviews, who do you trust?', *The Times*, 25.11. 2006, book pages, p. 2.
[34] Negative remarks in *The Times* first half 2006: 8 of 36 with negative remark; first half 2009: 8 out of 70.
[35] Negative remarks in *The Observer* first half 2006: 3 of 41; first half 2009: 1 of 16. 1 predominantly negative in 2006, none in 2009. Negative remarks in *The Sunday Times* first half 2006: 2 of 24; first half 2009: 2 of 11.
[36] Editorial by Pat Thomson, *Carousel*, no. 32, 2006, p. 3.
[37] Negative remarks in *The Guardian* first half 2006: 9 of 22, 1 predominantly negative; first half 2009: 11 of 19.

line with the ideology of service journalism. The question consequently rising is whether children's literature actually *is* a matter of general public interest.

As the following chapters show, the attempts to help turn children into keen and skilled readers have several problematic implications. To serve users rather than a more generally interested audience does not only hinder debate, but favours reviews as a form of promotion, making some reviews hard to distinguish from advertisements. Furthermore, presenting children's literature as a means to achieve success indicates an instrumental view of literature, potentially reducing children's books' value as works of art. In the balancing act between literary merit and journalistic demands, too many critics jeopardize their integrity in the eagerness to promote reading, and some critics end up reproducing literary ideals unfit to serve the youngest and least experienced readers.

Chapter 2
Assessment Criteria and Cultural Status

Book reviews in the form of service journalism do not necessarily occur in a pure form only addressing adult users. Critics and their publications have additional agendas, particularly in when attempting to make their reviews of interest to a wider audience and gain cultural status. The economical interests of publishing houses and authors may even be favoured when they coincide with the economic interests of the media. This chapter will demonstrate how some of the priorities of the critics and their publications take precedence over the idea of serving the main purposes of children's literature, which are: to give children reading pleasure, to mediate the literary culture of fictional writing to new generations, and to aid adult society in the raising of young citizens.[38] This will be demonstrated by the fact that a selection of the most frequently reviewed books appears to favour children's authors with adult appeal and children's books with characteristics of adult literature.

My intention was to base the discussion of selection and assessment criteria on titles reviewed by every one of the sample sources, but even after adjusting my requirements to include a minimum of two newspapers, this method produced a sample of only nine titles.[39] These books are not necessarily the most treasured by each of my sample sources, but they represent the 'lowest common denominator' in my material. The common priorities are likely to represent the least defied and most conservative power structures in the field – and consequently, according to Bourdieu, those which it is most urgent to question.

Some very widely reviewed titles did not make the list, which is quite telling about individual agendas. *The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak (2006) and *The Ghost's Child* by Sonya Hartnett (2007) received more reviews than most, but did not appear among the recommendations of *Lovereading*, perhaps because the books have too much of an adult readership, which is outside the market profile of the bookstore.[40] All selected media except the newspapers reviewed *Hair* by Kate Petty (2006) in the multicultural 'Around

[38] Inger Østenstad, 'Kritikken og det barnelitterære feltet' ('Criticism and the field of children's literature'), barnebokkritikk.no, 16.01.2003, <http://www.barnebokkritikk.no/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8> [accessed 08.08.2009]

[39] See appendix for selection crieria. Due to the decreasing number of reviews in *Achuka*, there are more reviews from the first part of the period.

[40] This is my assumption as both titles are offered for sale, but feature without comments.

the World' series, probably because the newspapers usually omit educational non-fiction – unless it features popular themes like dragons. Fiction with topical content, such as *Guantanamo Boy* by Anna Perera, holds news value, and is consequently more likely to receive priority in the newspapers. The reason why this book does not feature in every other selected media may be due to lack of aesthetic qualities. Most picture books by Madonna also made the newspapers, but were largely ignored by journals and websites directed at audiences with a specific interest in children's literature. The fame of Madonna may attract readers, but to prioritize a book only for the celebrity status of the writer does not seem desirable for the image of all sample sources.

Whereas the commercial newspapers show the most concern about choosing books suitable to attract a mass audience, all selected media favour books suited to contribute to their image, which of course has an indirect influence on sales. The only books my sample sources all agree are worthy of attention, are books of high cultural status and a certain news value. Most of them are considered to have exceptionally well crafted plots and style, which is characteristic of autonomous works of art. With only one exception, these books are all intended for readers older than ten years of age:

- *Clay* by David Almond (Hodder, 2005)
- *Ingo* by Helen Dunmore (HarperCollins, 2005)
- *Just in Case* by Meg Rosoff (Puffin, 2006)
- *Ottoline and the Yellow Cat* by Chris Riddell (Macmillian, 2006)
- *Tanglewreck* by Jeanette Winterson (Bloomsbury, 2006)
- *The Stuff of Nightmares* by Malorie Blackman (Doubleday, 2007)
- *The Toymaker* by Jeremy de Quidt (David Fickling Books, 2008)
- *The Year the Gypsies Came* by Linzi Glass (Penguin, 2006)
- *What I Was* by Meg Rosoff (Penguin, 2007)

Selection and Cultural Status

The well-known dilemma of children's literature also applies to children's literature critics: the need to please adults when ostensibly children are the main target group. Just as men appear to be more important than women in the field of sports (e.g. measured by media coverage and salaries), adult books hold a higher cultural status than children's books in the field of literature. Bourdieu explains how reputation – 'symbolic capital' – is

assigned by honour and recognition from those who already hold a high status in the field – the representatives of the dominant culture. Presupposing influential power to be the logical ambition of both the critics and their publications, Bourdieu has pointed out how one gains a more powerful position by reproducing the taste and preferences of the cultural elite. Within service journalism, books for any age group and level of reading ability are equally relevant to the needs of adult users. In the sample, however, books with direct adult appeal seem favoured. Numerous reviews recommend *Clay* and *What I Was* also for an adult audience. In addition, several critics appear as 'real readers' of *Tanglewreck, Ingo* and *The Year the Gypsies Came*, and address their audience as such too: 'You are led into dangerous terrain with such skill and humanity that instead of this hardening your heart, it opens it.'[41] This could possibly be a trait of 'childist criticism' as introduced by Peter Hunt, in which the critic is responding to the book in a voice attempting to represent the role as implied (child) reader offered by the text. Hunt claims: 'This is as close as we can get to reading like a child; but this is a very long way from reading as an actual child does.' [42] More likely, these reviews demonstrate that the reader role is also open to adults, which indicates that the books may be seen as crossover novels. True, Kate Kellaway in *The Observer* is the only one explicitly recommending *Tanglewreck* for the whole family, but it does indicate a crossfictional potential.[43]
Even though the nine books form a selection too small to draw wide-ranging conclusions, it is no surprise that only big publishing houses are represented, that even the three books with their origin abroad are written originally in English, and that picture books and early readers appear to be assigned an inferior status in this hierarchy.

Symbolic Capital and News Value

The symbolic capital of an authorship seems to be built by literary merit based on judgement of adult appeal and originality, in addition to literary awards, market success and acknowledgement abroad, particularly in the US. The three latter categories also imply news value. Since literary prizes like the Carnegie Medal are not awarded until the following year, an award seems to have stronger impact on the selection procedure involving the following book, rather than the awarded one. Although most critics do not

[41] Diane Samuels on *The Year the Gypsies Came*, 'The ties that bind', *The Guardian*, 06.05.2006, review pages, p. 6.
[42] Hunt, 1991, p. 48.
[43] Kate Kellaway, 'Holiday reading', *The Observer*, 02.07.2006, book pages, p. 10.

spend their limited space on the merits of the author, such qualities are pointed out in the press releases following each review copy. In the case of *What I Was* by Meg Rosoff, Philip Ardagh actually refers specifically to the marketing:

> According to Penguin Books, Meg Rosoff is an icon and a brand, but don't let that put you off. What she is really is a fabulous writer. She burst onto the literary scene with the Guardian Children's Book Award-winning *How I Live Now* and her remarkable second novel, *Just in Case*, won the 2007 Carnegie medal. They are a hard act to follow, Rosoff having set the bar to vertigo heights.[44]

Ardagh dismisses her promotional value as an alleged icon and prefers to acknowledge her literary merits. In line with how Bourdieu related symbolic capital to 'habitus', Ardagh confirms that acknowledgement *within* the literary field is more important than celebrity status.

A few months after Sonya Hartnett won the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award of almost £500 000, *The Ghost's Child* received nearly enough reviews to be included in my selection. Equally, *The Book Thief* by her fellow Australian Markus Zusak topped the *New York Times* bestseller list for children's books. British authors, on the other hand, do not need international success to receive attention. *Clay* by David Almond, *Ingo* by Helen Dunmore and *The Stuff of Nightmares* by Malorie Blackman are works by well-regarded authors, who have all received awards for previous novels. Chris Riddell is one of the very few to have been awarded the Kate Greenaway Medal twice, and has the advantage of being known to an adult audience from his work as political cartoonist for *The Observer.* This may explain why *Ottoline and the Yellow Cat* has made the list even though it stands out with a more purely humorous and entertaining purpose targeted at readers as young as seven years of age. With 'exceptionally high production values' and 'retro elegance' it does have adult appeal, but more as a present than a 'real read'.[45]

Several critics recognize *The Year the Gypsies Came* by Linzi Glass as featuring important insights on racial issues, which indicates that the content of a book can contribute to both news value and symbolic capital. The book had already proven a

[44] Philip Ardagh, 'About a boy', *The Guardian*, 01.09.2007, review pages, p. 20.
[45] Jacob on *Ottoline and the Yellow Cat*, *Achuka*, 21.04.2007 and Nicolette Jones, *The Sunday Times*, 11.02.2007, book pages, p. 56.

success in South Africa and the US, and Glass was also a debutant. Every single review mentions the fact that *The Toymaker* is a first novel, thereby confirming the fact that debutants hold news value. Since Jeremy de Quidt appears without previous reputation, he comes across as an ordinary man the audience can more easily relate to and identify with. Debutants are 'nobodies' and thereby offer an opportunity to feed people's dreams of succeeding against the odds. In addition they are selected for ideological reasons of supporting new talents to help them reach their potential and develop the field. *Lovereading* even features a separate browsing category of debutants' works.

The significance of artistic writing is perhaps best expressed by Salman Rushdie's words 'bringing newness into the world'.[46] *Ottoline and The Yellow Cat* is the book most frequently appreciated for its originality, which may be another reason why it is so widely reviewed despite its young target audience. Most books on the list are either presented as wholly original or considered refreshing contributions to well established genres.

Tanglewreck by Jeanette Winterson is the only novel reviewed in every one of my sample sources. Arguably, this is not due to superior literary quality. Few reviews present it as being any better than most books in the selection, and in fact, it has never been shortlisted for any major awards. The most likely reason for the larger number of reviews is that Winterson represents the author on the list best known among a wide adult audience. The symbolic capital she brings from the field of adult literature into that of children's fiction, positions her at the top of the status hierarchy. With her first book for children, she also obtained news value as somebody potentially adding freshness and quality to the field, which made *Tanglewreck* hard to overlook. Even within a service ideology focused on recommendable books, news value and symbolic capital seem to be more important selection criteria than to provide children, especially young and inexperienced readers, with the best books possible. Further down the status hierarchy of this 'least common denominator', does literary merit seem to be a more prominent selection criteria than both capacity to capture a broad group of readers and inherent social importance.

[46] Fowler, p. 67.

The Case of Tanglewreck

Tanglewreck by Jeanette Winterson stands out as an interesting case, and not only because it is the most frequently reviewed book in the sample. As has been seen in the case of selection priorities, the reception demonstrates a variety of agendas concerned with far more than the intention of providing children with a variety of optimal books. Commercial forces are at work both in the selecting of the books and the writing about them. The ambition of service journalism, to assist adult users in the efforts to turn children into skilled and avid readers, may result in a promotional style. In order for the critics and their publications to ensure themselves attention – in competition with for instance reviews of adult books, film reviews, other websites and journals – they may join forces with market interests. As Bourdieu remarks, symbolic capital is usually transferable to economic capital.[47]

Promotionalism

Every review of *Tanglewreck* has an added appeal due to Jeanette Winterson's reputation and popularity within the mass market, and the news value implied in writing for children for the first time. Geraldine Bedell in *The Observer* opens her review by referring to both: 'Jeanette Winterson's first novel, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, stormed into print, demanding to be noticed. Her first for children, *Tanglewreck*, does exactly the same.'[48] Two thirds of the review is a retelling of the plot, which functions not only to inform about the book, but also to entertain adult readers, including non-consumers. She invites the reader to join her through the recapturing of her reading experience: 'every now and then, the sheer exuberance of Winterson's ideas threatens to overwhelm the story, but then she swiftly retrieves the plot and we're off again, breathless but gripped.'[49] More than providing information about the book and stating her opinion, she uses the long synopsis together with the familiarity of Winterson to attract readers to *The Observer*. Furthermore, as the quote shows, she also softens her criticism by referring to a reading experience whose positives outweighs its downsides. By paying attention, and in this case paying tribute, to somebody (or something) already recognized as significant, both the critic and

[47] Fowler, p. 31.
[48] Geraldine Bedell, 'A rabbit called Bigamist?', *The Observer*, 02.07.2006, review pages, p. 24.
[49] Ibid.

the newspaper increase their market value just as their own significance contributes to raise the marketing value of *Tanglewreck*. This phenomenon is called 'promotionalism'.

Promotionalism can be understood as the advertising taking place even outside advertisements. In *Promotional Culture*, Andrew Wernick maintains that promotionalism is pervading our culture. He states that culture has 'become a sector of consumer goods just like any other produced object for human use.'[50] Children's books are cultural products, and even though literary value exists independent of price, every single review in the sample includes the price of the book. Wernick explains how cultural products are superior to other commodities in their suitability for promotion.[51] Usually a book awakes stronger passion among the majority of newspaper readers than for example a 'best-in-test' vacuum cleaner. Thereby the book attracts more readers and consequently advertisers to the newspaper, while the newspaper simultaneously attracts an audience to the book. Such valorising exchanges presuppose that the book and the newspaper share approximately the same audience. This is the misfortune of most children's literature. Even if the newspaper readers belong to the adult category responsible for ninety-seven percent of the purchase, they are not the main audience of children's literature. To passive consumers, most children's books do not possess an appeal much stronger than a best-in-test vacuum cleaner.

Bedell's review works within the cultural sector of promotionalism because she seems to consider *Tanglewreck* a crossover novel. She compensates for the divergent audiences by considering herself and potentially her newspaper audience 'real readers' of this fantasy, which 'will hold *you* enchanted right through to the bitter-sweet ending' (my italics). Arguably, her reading experience appears more 'adultist' than 'childist' because she appreciates qualities related to adult literature: 'She may be writing for children, but Winterson doesn't pull any punches with her subject matter.'[52] Her role as 'real reader' thereby contributes to assign *Tanglewreck* literary status closer to that of an adult book.

Context

Three of the reviews place *Tanglewreck* in a literary context by comparing it to high status books. If the title referred to is sufficiently well-known, it may give the double effect of

[50] Andrew Wernick, Promotional Culture (London: Sage, 1994 [1991]), p. 185.
[51] Wernick, pp. 182-3.

[52] Arguably her review may function like a promotional message, as discussed in chapter four.

both attracting readers to the review and raising the cultural status of the book. To those who are familiar with the reference, such comparisons contribute to describing *Tanglewreck* and placing the book in a wider cultural context. George Fox in *Books for Keeps* describes *Tanglewreck* as '*The Box of Delights* on speed'; Nicolette Jones in *The Sunday Times* compares to *His Dark Materials* by Phillip Pullman, whereas Amanda Craig in *The Times* finds it reminiscent of John Masefield's classic, *The Midnight Folk*.[53] Rowan Stanfield Miller's reference to 'Doctor Who', in which she claims that Winterson has jumped on 'the time-travel bandwagon' is not intended to be as positive, but references to popular culture are familiar to a larger part of the audience and, consequently, may be even more informative than references to works of higher symbolic capital.[54] In such references the critics demonstrate their expertise, and those referring to works of high cultural status will gain more symbolic capital within the field. They may, however, communicate less efficiently with the majority of a mass market audience.

Edubrow Culture

In his study of awarding children's literature prizes in the US, Kenneth Kidd suggests to place children's literature between highbrow and lowbrow, in what he labels 'edubrow' culture. Book reviewing in the form of service journalism shares this educational view on children's books in its intent to improve children's future prospects through reading. Kidd signals his unease with the educational focus: 'how do we address the lingering belief that children's literature builds good citizens, amounts to a form of public service?'[55] In a public sphere focused on developmental potential, neither the child readers nor the artistic creators are fully recognized as autonomous individuals.

However, in my sample, education seems to incorporate every aspect of child development, which implies that an educational agenda may reach from the importance of being exposed to the best written texts (formation of character) via topics and reading experiences likely to help readers mature (socialization), on to almost any pleasurable reading experience suited to encourage further reading and cultivate reading skills. As

[53] Geoff Fox, 'Tanglewreck', Books for Keeps, no. 160, 2006, p. 23; Nicolette Jones, 'Tanglewreck', The Sunday Times, 02.07.2006, culture section, p. 48; Amanda Craig, 'Time travellers in present danger', *The Times*, 24.06.2006, book pages p. 18.
[54] Rowan Stanfield Miller on Tanglewreck in *Achuka*, 13.09.2006. <http://www.achuka.co.uk/achockablog/mt-search.cgi?search=tanglewreck&IncludeBlogs=5> [accessed 20.08.2009].
[55] Kenneth Kidd, 'Prizing Children's Literature: The Case of the Newbery Gold', *Children's Literature*, no. 35, 2007, pp. 166-190 (p. 184).

demonstrated above, literature as autonomous works of art is well represented in the sample. When numerous critics appreciate the 'unflagging pace' and the 'engaging characters' of *Tanglewreck*, they are also recognizing entertaining aspects.[56] From a child's point of view, recreational reading has a value in its own right, whereas adult users usually emphasize the educational effects. Therefore, critics focusing on the enjoyable sides of *Tanglewreck* are siding with both children and parents. However, ignoring parents' interests is not beneficial when addressing an adult audience.

The dominating literary ideal among my sample sources seems to be that of combining learning and pleasure in the understanding that 'literature, if read at all, is read with passion.'[57] Rowan Stanfield Miller demonstrates it in her assessment of *Tanglewreck* in *Achuka*: 'Rarely does one encounter a children's novel which so succesfully [sic] combines pure entertainment with serious philosophical and scientific contemplation.'[58] Kate Thompson in *The Guardian* is more directly linking the serious part of the content to an educational purpose: 'With its explorations of time and space, the quest for eternal youth and the nature of corporate power, *Tanglewreck* offers plenty of food for thought, and it may inspire younger readers to take an interest in some of these fascinating areas.'[59] Enid Stephenson in *Carousel* also addresses adult users with an educational agenda: 'The book contains much that will pass over the head of its intended readership but which may make the reader think and query – always a good thing.'[60] Nicolette Jones in *The Sunday Times* seems more reluctant about giving children something to stretch for: 'the novel's sentence-long paragraphs do not make it simple.' She seems to have both adult users and child readers in mind when informing that it 'can be confusing in its allusions, with, for instance, unexplained references to Schrodinger's cat, Atlantis and Robert Hooke.'[61]

Although some highlight the thought-provoking content, no critic explicitly points out what children may learn from *Tanglewreck*, perhaps in fear of appearing moralistic or of reducing the book to appearing as an educational tool. When Amanda Craig, on the other hand, points out exactly what adults may learn from it, this does not imply an instrumental view of the book since adults arguably are not its main target group. Her comparison of

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[56] Craig, 24.06.2006 and Julia Eccleshare, *Lovereading*, [n.d.] <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/search?indsearch=tanglewreck&advselect=1> [accessed 01.01.2009].
[57] Margaret Meek, 'What Counts as Evidence in Theories of Children's Literature' in Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature. The Development of Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1995 [1990]), pp. 166-182 (p. 177).
[58] Stanfield Miller, 13.09.2006.
[59] Kate Thompson, 'Children's time tornado', *The Guardian*, 10.06.2006, review pages, p. 20.
[60] Enid Stephenson, *Carousel*, no. 34, 2006, p. 29.
[61] Jones, 02.07.2006.

time-travel books gives *Tanglewreck* significance to a far broader audience than only newspaper readers with a specific interest in children's literature when she explains how Jeanette Winterson and Linda Buckley-Archer utilize time-travels in a unique way:

> these children's authors use it to explore the moral debt adults owe children – a challenging preoccupation that guilty parents will recognise all too well. The special nature of childhood rests on having the luxury of time, as Dylan Thomas's great poem, Fern Hill, recognises. *Tanglewreck*, like *Gideon the Cutpurse* and Kate Thompson's *The New Policeman*, is partly a satire on our current perception that we all have too little time due to a change in the nature of reality, rather than our own greed and impatience.[62]

By offering an interpretation which suggests an underlying social comment, Craig contributes to giving the book cultural significance among her readers. How relevant this uniqueness is to *Tanglewreck's* potential child readers, is another matter.

Thompson in *The Guardian* acts like a children's advocate when criticizing the book for its lack of credibility, because children 'have as much right to expect internal logic in a book as adults do.'[63] This is the only objection among the reviews that may be of a certain general interest. Her claim is debatable seen in relation to books in which the lack of logic does not interrupt the reading experience. Indeed, she overrules her own reservation as less important than the potential reading experience offered, concluding that 'the reader will be carried along by the vitality of [Winterson's] style and her ever-present sense of adventure.'[64] The conclusion clearly represents children's interests in a good reading experience, whereas the objection speaks on behalf of users who want high literary quality for children, and authors who want children's books to hold the same literary merit and status as books for adults. It should be noted that Thompson is a writer for children herself. To promote the book appear to be more important than demanding higher credibility in children's literature, and in the next chapters I will discuss in further detail how the eagerness to promote reading influences on the book reviewing practices. Other than Thompson, Nicolette Jones in *The Sunday Times* is the only critic with clear objections to *Tanglewreck*.

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[62] Craig, 24.06.2006.
[63] Thompson, 10.06.2006.
[64] Ibid.

Thompson's conclusion also demonstrates what Margaret Meek labels the 'speculative poetics' of children's book criticism.[65] There is no way of knowing for certain whether most readers will 'be carried along', and as I will return to in chapter four, such speculations share suspect features with advertisements. Even though children are a diverse group, it seems fair to conclude that the genuine interests of most of them are underrepresented in the sample.

The Adult Ideal

In her study of the canon in children's literature, Anne Lundin credits the US librarian Carolin Hewins (1846-1926) with having invented the rhetoric of criticism of children's literature. She insisted that a good children's book 'must be appreciated by adults as well as children' in order for children's literature to be recognized as part of the literary field, and wanted children to be given 'something to grow up to, rather than away from'.[66] Her idea was very successfully demonstrated by the triumph of crossover novels in the period from 1997 to 2007, but remains controversial.[67] In 2004, David Blanch, editor of *Carousel*, urged prize judges to have the age of the target audience in mind when evaluating children's books to ensure they reward satisfying reading experiences.[68] In 'What Counts as Evidence in Theories of Children's Literature' Margaret Meek suggests that '[w]hat we need is an analysis of discourse which does not say that children's stories are simpler forms of adult telling, but insists that they are the primary kinds of structure of later tellings.'[69] Thereby she can be understood to assign children's literature equal value as autonomous works of art, independent of potential adult appeal. In her opinion, the voice of the narrator is the key into the book, which enables her to see the functional aspect of the narration as part of its aesthetics.[70]

The amount of books in the sample recommended for adults indicates that the ability to please adults as real readers remains a measure of superior cultural value compared to pleasing them in the role as adult users. Michael Thorn, editor of *Achuka*,

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[65] Meek, p. 167.
[66] Anne Lundin, *Beyond Library Walls and Ivory Towers. Constructing the Canon of Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 23.
[67] The success of crossfiction is documented by Rachel Falconer in *The Crossover Novel* (London: Routledge, 2009).
[68] David Blanch, editorial in *Carousel*, no. 26, 2004, p. 3.
[69] Meek, p. 176.
[70] Meek, p. 177.

even gives the impression that children's books without adult appeal are, if not incomplete, then at least inferior works of art. This is his review of *The Ghost's Child*:

> I really haven't much to say about this superb novel of remembrance, other than to urge you to read it. No book this author writes is in any essential sense a young adult novel or piece of teen fiction with a readership confined to adolescents. Hartnett is the real thing.[71]

If Thorn finds that adult fiction is 'the real thing', children's literature appears as merely a preparation for something higher in the status hierarchy. Amanda Craig, the main critic of children's books in *The Times*, is thinking along the same line in her review of *Snakehead* by Antony Horowitz (2007), when she criticizes those who dismiss his books as pulp fiction: 'Far too many adults think that children should read books as a kind of Weetabix for the brain rather than because they give pleasure. They [the best spy kids authors] will, however, lead young readers on to Dickens and Dostoevsky.'[72]

There seems to be a discrepancy between the assessment criteria suited to serve adult users and the selection criteria suited to increase cultural status and news value. The frequent occurrence of traditional 'adult' content in the sample confirms that traits of adult literature are favoured first and foremost in the selection process. In eight out of the nine books, lives are at risk. This may be in part due to genre conventions and prove no more significant than in computer games, however, several reviews remark on extreme brutality found in *Clay*, *The Year the Gypsies Came*, *The Toymaker* and *The Stuff of Nightmares*. In addition, the sexual experiments of Justin Case are noted. Brutal and sexual content used to be the preserve of adult literature. As long as the 'shocking' sex and violence serves a non-speculative purpose, it signals that these authors are not showing special consideration towards their young readers. Rather, it indicates that their adaptations for a child or young adult audience are minor and are not ruled by moral concerns. Adapted literature then appears in opposition to 'the real thing'. This is a traditional and romantic view of art, and is in opposition to Meek's opinion. The author Sally Prue holds the children's fiction establishment responsible for part of 'the dark turn' in children's fiction,

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[71] Achuka alias Michael Thorn *on The Ghost's Child*, *Achuka*, May 2008. <http://www.achuka.co.uk/achockablog/mt-search.cgi?search=the+ghost%27s+child&IncludeBlogs=5> [accessed 01.09.2009].

[72] Amanda Craig, 'Deeper and Darker for Alex Rider', The Times, 10.11.2007, book pages, p. 15.

'which has tended to hail each increase in the intensity of the unpleasantness as originality, daring social comment and literary merit.'[73]

However, no critics in the sample praise the traits of brutality, and they never utilize it speculatively to attract their own readers (as did Anne Fine with the sexual content of *Doing It!*). If commented on, the brutality is briefly mentioned, usually without condemnation: 'It's violent in places (...) with threats, torture (fingers snapped "like dry twigs"), and death.'[74] Such remarks serve as information suited to enable adult users to determine for themselves whether or not this is the right book for their children. Jean Allen in *Carousel* is one of the few showing moral concerns: 'I debated for some time whether to include this book or not because of the violent presence throughout. But the story has remained with me and for those of a robust nature it comes recommended.'[75] In line with service journalism, she presents the moral concern as an individual problem rather than – like Anne Fine – a matter of public interest. Subject to the small and probably conservative sample, nevertheless, brutality (arguably non-speculative) appears as a literary quality in the selection process.

The efforts to attract and impress adults may be profitable for the status of the field, and should thereby contribute to raising the quality of children's literature. The problem is that the bias on texts with traits from adult literature not only favours older and more experienced readers, but also maintains a status hierarchy within the field in which books for younger children and inexperienced readers appear as less valuable. When these books are not more widely reviewed and debated, they will not meet the same quality demands as the selected types of books. Within the sample, four out of five books are presented more or less without any objections at all. To push authors and publisher for higher quality is not the main agenda of most of these critics.

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[73] Sally Prue quoted by Amanda Craig, 'Oh, to be away with the fairies', *The Times*, 20.06.2009, book pages, p. 12.
[74] Philip Ardagh, 'Machine skills', *The Guardian*, 30.08.2008, review pages, p. 14.
[75] Jean Allen on *The Toymaker* in *Carousel*, no. 40, 2008, p. 37.

Chapter 3
The Critic as Peer and Professional

In *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* (1991) Peter Hunt denounced most current judging of children's books as suspect. In particular he criticised arguments he found speculative (what children might or will like), moralistic (what children should like) and universalizing (what all children will and do like).[76] According to the rules of rhetoric, it is scientifically invalid to base an argument on predicting the potential reader's reactions, or to universalize the preferences of one group to apply on every potential reader. The tradition of moralistic arguments also deserves suspicion in my view, but mainly for the way questionable values have been used to promote (conservative) educational aspects at the expense of literary merit. I disagree with Hunt that moralistic arguments are suspect as such. When Philip Ardagh proclaims that *The Book Thief* 'could and - dare I say? - should certainly be read by both [adults and children]', it is his rightful opinion, based on what he considers 'an important piece of work'.[77] Literary qualities are infused with moral and educational concerns. Similarly, Adrian Jackson is free to find darkness 'too well embedded' in *Clay*: 'Almond writes so well that he will always persuade his readers but he seems to have exhausted his supplies of hope.'[78]

Hunt points to the tension between determining what is *good* in a text as opposed to what is *good for* a child – socially, intellectually and educationally.[79] His solution – to simply dismiss moral arguments – conflicts with the educational essence of service journalism. Whereas Hunt's main concern is how a strong focus on moral lessons reduces the artistic value of the book, Joseph Dunne in *The Empty Throne* is concerned that moral education does not fully recognize children's autonomy, 'their agencies and abilities to be independent and responsible.' Yet, he identifies three facts hard to dispute, outlining the need for at least a minimum of moral concern: 1) Children have less power than adults – consequently they have less possibility to speak for themselves and to be heard. 2) Children need nurture and education to gain autonomy. 3) Premature exposure to the high stakes, unforeseen consequences and potential costs to others inherent in the adult world – 'the risks and rigours of adult life' – is more likely to disable rather than enable their own

[76] Hunt 1991, p. 189.
[77] Philip Ardagh, 'It's a steal', *The Guardian*, January 6, 2007, review pages, p. 20.
[78] Adrian Jackson, 'Clay', *Books for Keeps*, no. 156, 2006, p. 24.
[79] Hunt 1991, p. 14.

agencies.[80] Consequently, art – at least for children – cannot exist independently of ethics. And even though Anne Fine can be criticised for setting her moral standards over literary values in her review of *Doing It!*, the debate she caused belongs to the field as long as children's literature is seen as part of child culture.

Whereas moral assessment criteria overshadow the artwork (especially, as in the case of Fine, when that is the only criterion applied), invalid arguments reflect poorly on the critic. Speculations and universalizations can easily be criticised from a scientific and rhetorical perspective. More interesting is to see what likely consequences they have for the communication between the critics and their audiences. Eide and Knight argue that service journalism addresses a hybrid social identity – 'part citizen, part consumer and part client.'[81] The critic accordingly then becomes part peer, part promoter and part a professional expert. In fact, all critics can be identified with at least one of these roles regardless of whether their reviews are classified as service journalism or not. In the reviews I surveyed, critics can be seen to balance these roles in a variety of ways. A peer, a promoter and a professional build their integrity on slightly different virtues, and therefore risk trouble with different kinds of invalid and weak arguments. A professional cannot show too much incompetence, a peer cannot be too dictatorial and a promoter cannot be too negative. In particular, professional concerns are put under pressure, which is problematic first and foremost because professional status is the most important in gaining a powerful position as critic.

Profiling the Critics' Qualifications

As already mentioned, influential power is the logical ambition of both the critics and their publishers. Today anybody can publish a review on a blog, but to maximize influence, it is worthwhile striving to be published by the publications holding the highest symbolic capital. Similarly, book editors gain status by picking critics of high cultural status. Bourdieu showed that intellectual capacity and educational qualifications are not sufficient to achieve a powerful position; it takes honour and recognition by the cultural establishment.[82] Later in this chapter I will demonstrate how critics both position

[80] Joseph Dunne, 'The Dialectic of Childhood and Adulthood: A Philosophical Analysis and Critique' in Davis and Dunne, forthcoming. Incomplete pagination in the manuscript.
[81] Eide and Knight, p. 527.
[82] Bridget Fowler, *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory. Critical Investigations* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 20.

themselves and exercise their influence by reproducing the taste of the cultural elite, by demonstrating expertise, and by letting readers gradually learn their personal preferences. First it is essential to understand how the critics and their employers take part in a promotional exchange of cultural status. On the 12th November 2005 *The Times* printed this letter:

> I have been involved with children and reading for over four decades and I was the first reviewer to be entrusted with reviewing children's books in The Times when it instituted its Saturday Review back in the sixties. So reading Amanda Craig's well-informed and enthusiastic pieces brings me great pleasure. I want to thank Amanda for the seriousness with which she approaches a subject that I still believe to be of enormous importance. Elaine Moss, London[83]

Craig works as an author and a journalist, and since 2003 she has been the main critic of children's literature in *The Times*. Moss' letter adds authority to Craigs reviews in particular because Moss is a well-known critic and librarian whose name carries significance with those involved in children's literature. The letter has limited news value and does not contribute to any ongoing debate. Truly, it would have been a nice compliment for Craig to put on her office wall. Printed in the newspaper it becomes a self-advertisement well suited to increase both the value of *The Times* and of Craig. The effect produced by the publication of Moss' letter is the same as that sought by *Lovereading* in their profiling of Julia Eccleshare.

Eccleshare works as editor of children's books in *The Guardian*, and in addition she is co-director of Centre for Literacy in Primary Education and a trustee at Listening Books. On *Lovereading*, her part taking in the selection procedure is presented as their guarantee of quality. All her comments end in the linked question: 'Who is Julia Eccleshare?' A click reveals a list of her merits, including books she has edited, prizes she has judged and the Eleanor Farjeon Prize she received in 2000 'in recognition of her outstanding contribution to children's books.'[84] Her advice is promoted as some of the best available on the market, which accordingly promotes *Lovereading* as one of the best booksellers. An editorial in *Books for Keeps* also recognizes Eccleshare in a more modest, but undoubtedly promotional, fashion: 'Our coverage of books on tape will now be both

[83] Elaine Moss, untitled letter, *The Times*, 12.11. 2005, book pages, p. 2.
[84] 'Julia Eccleshare', *Lovereading*, <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/julia.php> [accessed 01.01.2009].

more systematic and more coherent thanks to Julia Eccleshare, children's books editor of *The Guardian* and director of Listening Books (...) who will be contributing regular reviews.'[85] The browsing category 'awarded books' at *Lovereading* also links Eccleshare to acknowledged literary quality. Whereas her comments usually are spread more randomly among the featured books, in this category she comments on almost every one. Arguably, Julia Eccleshare is the children's book critic holding the largest symbolic capital in Britain today.

Trusting all the children's books to one critic is favourable in a promotional culture because individuals are easier to identify with. Familiarity brings the audience closer, and as individuals the critics become more distinct representatives of their organs in the public. This is the common practice in most newspapers. Like Eccleshare, Nicolette Jones in *The Sunday Times* is a recognized expert on children's literature represented on several boards and juries. She is a writer, journalist and broadcaster who specializes in literature and art journalism. *The Observer* divide their children's books mainly between three critics: Kate Kellaway (also deputy theatre critic), Stephanie Merritt (deputy literary editor until 2005) and Geraldine Bedell. The latter two, like Amanda Craig, are authors of adult novels. Even though they may be better known as critics than writers, they are capable of attracting the audience by producing good reads in their own right.

Concentrating on one critic is the opposite strategy of *Carousel*, which prefers a wide range of reviewers to ensure diversity: 'We all have different tastes and don't, thank goodness, always agree.'[86] The expertise of the *Carousel* critics is given in their 'experience in the children's book world' – as teachers, librarians, authors, booksellers or former publishers. The five editors are among the most prolific contributors, with long experience from several of these categories, but mainly from The Federation of Children's Book Groups.

Similarly, in *Books for Keeps* a diverse range of critics contribute to sustaining the integrity of the publication as a whole. Most of the listed critics are presented with an academic title. Martin Salisbury, for instance, belongs to the cultural elite holding high symbolic capital in the field. He is an illustrator, painter and lecturer, who founded the first Masters program in children's book illustration at the Cambridge School of Arts in 2000. He has written several books on the topic, and has served as a member of the jury judging the world's most prestigious picture book prize, the Bolognaragazzi Award.

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[85] Rosemary Stone, 'Editor's Page', *Books for Keeps*, no. 120, 2000, p. 2.
[86] Editorial by Enid Stephenson, *Carousel*, no. 41, 2009, p.3.

Achuka also seem to feature some academic critics, but in an informal blog-style, their team is not presented. The critic who contributes far more than any other signs himself as 'Jacob', otherwise known as Jacob Hope, a librarian and young people's service assistant with an MA in international children's literature. He was a judge for the CILIP Carnegie and Kate Greenaway Award 2009.

To summarize, the critics in my sample sources represent a wide range of expertise, which ensure a variety of views on children's literature. Children's authors in *The Guardian* and academics in *Books for Keeps* are among the most critical critics, but quality standards are largely individual. The biggest dilemma for the publications is how the promotional need to attract readers, through restricting reviews to a few familiar critics, conflicts with an ideal of diversity.

Of course, even in the journals the audience will gradually learn to know some of the critics, but it takes longer when so many share the attention. Possibly the two journals could profile a chosen few by giving them more prominent space on a regular basis without jeopardizing the diversity of the whole. This is common practise in *The Guardian*, where Eccleshare is well known for her regular reviews on picture books. The remaining books are reviewed by a variety of acknowledged authors of children's literature. For full promotional effect, authors of adult books might be preferable, but children's book writers like Kate Thompson and Philip Ardagh have a more relevant expertise. To the extent that these reviewers are already known to the newspaper audience, *The Guardian* is the only newspaper able to combine diversity with the appeal of familiarity – and still keep a high level of expertise. Eccleshare argues in favour of such a practice from a literary point of view: 'One author writing about the work of another is often a reflection of the way in which writers are influenced by each other. That in itself creates a connection which should send readers back to the recommenders' work as well as forward to what is recommended.'[87] In the valorizing exchange, *The Guardian* benefits simultaneously from the promotional value of two authors instead of just one. In return both authors gain symbolic capital derived from the privilege of attention in the newspaper – and both have the title and the publishing house of their latest book mentioned. The problem of this concept is that it is based on recommendation. The critic's role as promoter becomes more important than his or her role as professional arbiter of taste. This is a general problem in service journalism. The biggest threat to the critics as professionals is not lack of

[87] In Julia Eccleshare's review of *The Ultimate Teen Book Guide*, *Books for Keeps*, no. 158, 2006, p. 25.

expertise, but a generous editorial practice allowing them to use promotional arguments of a kind that jeopardizes their integrity. I will elaborate on this in the next chapter.

The Critic as Peer

In my sample sources, it is rare for critics to address readers primarily as citizens (as opposed to consumers and clients). When Michael Thorn (editor of *Achuka*) compares two retellings of *Pinocchio* in *Carousel*, his conclusion is left out. After first having stated that Iassen Ghiuselev's *Pinocchio* has won a prize 'deservedly', Thorn ends: 'Graham Philpot's version (...) is much more condensed, and in turn more highly and colourfully illustrated, with a closer relationship to the Disney version and a livelier text.'[88] Which one to prefer is left up to his readers. Thorn's remark 'deservedly' arguably indicates which he finds of higher literary value, but he trusts his readers as citizens both able and entitled to decide for themselves.

Even subtler is Enid Stephenson's treatment of *Alone on a Wide Sea* by Michael Morpurgo, in which the ending goes: 'The story is typical Morpurgo. It shows his love of animals, his interest in people's stories and that he is not afraid to be sentimental.'[89] This text carries no judgement or opinion at all, which means that it no longer meets the definition of a review. The concluding sentence may mean that if you liked the former books by Morpurgo, you are likely to enjoy this one as well, but that becomes a question of interpretation. In *Books for Keeps* and *Achuka* such an approach is impossible because the critics are obliged to conclude by giving their rating. Despite how much such 'open endings' respect the readers' integrity, to state an opinion is necessary in order to gain influence, as well as to cause debate.

The best way to address the readers as citizens is when the review provides so many facts to support the argument that the readers are able to disagree with the critic and draw their own conclusions. Reviews longer than 500 words occur on a regular basis only in *The Guardian* and as a few exceptions in *Achuka* and the other newspapers. This format allows for evidence in the form of e.g. examples, quotations and comparisons (unless the critic ruins the opportunity by presenting an extended synopsis). This is the weak point of the typical review which opens my introduction. Val Randall does not have enough space to tell exactly *what* makes *The Earth, My Butt and Other Big Round Things* 'a considered

[88] Michael Thorn, 'Pinocchio', *Carousel*, no 23, 2003, p. 11.
[89] Enid Stephenson, 'Alone on a Wide Sea', *Carousel*, no. 34, 2006, p. 32.

story with warmth and credibility which both reassures, entertains and educates in equal measure.'[90] Whether to believe her allegations or not, becomes a question of trust. How a critic builds such trust is most clearly demonstrated by the reviews of Amanda Craig in *The Times*.

The Case of Amanda Craig

Craig is an extraordinary exponent of service journalism, because she combines exceptional expertise with a distinctive informal style and an extreme enthusiasm to promote reading. Within the limited space granted, she, like most critics in my samples, has insufficient room to show the basis of her opinions and is consequently depending on the trust of her audience. *The Times'* book editor, Erica Wagner, explains in a comment how trust is essential on the review pages when comparing her trust in Craig and her colleagues to the trust in a friend: 'Your friend Stella tells you that she just loved *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*; you trust Stella, and so you'll probably take a chance; unless you also know that anything Stella likes you're bound to loathe, in which case, you'll give it a miss.'[91] Consequently, when *The Times* has most children's books reviewed by one single critic, regular readers will gradually learn to know Craig's literary standards and preferences; when making decisions on what to buy, they may be able to take into account how her opinion differs from their own. Wagner suggests they consider Craig their peer.

According to *The Newspaper Handbook*, however, a review does not only provide basic information and give an opinion; this opinion has to be 'carrying some authority' in order to gain influence.[92] Rigid authority, however, may undermine influence, because, in the postmodern era, authority is met with scepticism. A personal opinion masked as a universal truth – 'this is the best book of the year' – may be harder to accept as valid than an unmasked personal statement – 'I prefer this one'. The authority lies in the expertise this 'I' represents, but influence may equally be exerted through the seeming confidence it establishes between critic and audience. According to Eide and Knight, service journalism is part of popular journalism characterised by an informal style propelled by the anti-

[90] See beginning of chapter 1.
[91] Wagner, 25.11. 2006.
[92] Keeble, p. 246.

authoritarian trend.[93] The advice given is supposed to come from somebody the audience can feel on equal footing with.

With the ambition 'to help readers choose books', Wagner confirms a service ideology. Her addition – 'and talk about them, too' – respects the readers' taste and proves that service journalism is somewhat more complex than Jürgen Habermas indicated when he criticized consumer journalism for turning the audience from active citizens into passive consumers.[94] Wagner expects the newspaper readers to show integrity and act by their own political agenda and moral standards. 'Modern consumerism presupposes citizenship as its basis', state Eide and Knight.[95] When Wagner suggests trusting the advice from a critic no more than the advice from a friend, she confirms the scepticism towards authorities typical of popular journalism and the postmodern era.

Before Christmas 2004, Craig wrote: 'I have no hesitation in recommending *Sea of Trolls* as the best children's novel of the year.'[96] The strong presence of the 'I' emphasizes that this is her personal opinion. In 2006, the freedom she leaves her readers to think differently becomes even clearer: 'Scott Westerfeld's trilogy, *Uglies*, *Pretties* and *Specials* (...) gets my vote for best books for teens this year.'[97] Instead of announcing the books the best of the year, she limits their value to her personal standard. The potential influence of these recommendations depends on how much trust she manages to evoke. She advocates her standard by a combination of expertise and personal appeal. Even though numerous critics in my samples address their readers as peers in an informal style and refer to themselves as 'I', nobody share as much personal experience with the audience as Craig. Her reviews give the reader the opportunity to get to know her family, creating an illusion of intimacy typical of popular journalism. From reading her reviews, readers learn that she has a son and a daughter – 'one an avid reader, the other more reluctant'[98] – and jokingly claims '[m]uch as I love my children, I might not have bothered to have them had I discovered Cavalier King Charles Spaniels first.'[99] Her favourite children's book is *A Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula Le Guin, and for the female half of the family, the World Cup 'is a cause for gloom and irritation as our beloved males turn into drooling, groaning,

[93] Eide and Knight, p. 537.
[94] Wagner, 25.11. 2006, whereas Habermas is referred by Eide and Knight, p. 537.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Amanda Craig, 'From Bard to Norse', *The Times*, 13.11., 2004, weekend review, p. 15.
[97] Craig, 'Here be dragons, lots of them', The Times, 25.11. 2006, book pages, p. 8.
[98] Craig, 'When children know what's best', *The Times*, 17.01. 2009, book pages, pp. 12-13.
[99] Craig, 'Just the thing for dog day afternoons', *The Times*, 29.04. 2006, book pages, p. 16.

cheering telly-fixated idiots.'[100] Then she goes on to introduce children's books about football. Her 'I' sometimes addresses a 'you': 'If you want your children living as well as thinking independently, a cookbook for Christmas beats an encyclopaedia hands down.'[101] The 'you' resembles the 'I' – a parent concerned about how to make children eager to read and mature, and particularly struggling to get boys into the reading habit. Craig earns the trust of her readers by being an ordinary parent in addition to an expert: 'My son insisted on reading me all the jokes, and with chapters a page or two long it's great for building confidence even if it sets adult teeth on edge.'[102] In fact, her role as a parent forms part of her expertise, indicating that she knows exactly the concerns of her readers – the risk of having children unable or unwilling to read. 'Prising the boys away from the lure of technology and getting them to read is hard work, as any parent knows.'[103] Despite her expertise, she is still 'one of us' rather than a traditional authority.

Arguably, Craig's informal style confirms what is commonly referred to as the 'tyranny of intimacy' in modern media, but she follows *The Newspaper Handbook* flawlessly. The personal remarks make her reviews pieces of writing in their own right, able to entertain the casual reader as well as those using the reviews to make decisions on their book choices.[104] They function as appetizers, rather than letting Craig (and her family) get in the way of the books. Most importantly, as the next subsection will show, she does not allow her personal standards to undermine her expertise. That is the major danger of addressing the audience as peers. When Patrick Cave reviews *Setting a Cruel Sun* by Allan Gibbons in *Achuka*, his consistent personal style and amusing reading experience is what keeps the reader interested even though the book arguably is not worth the attention: 'Hmm. Had this one for over three weeks and I've just finished. (Sorry Michael) My wife suggested that this initial sentence would suffice, but on we go.' After 564 words of explaining the reasons for rewarding it only one achukachick, he minimizes his harsh verdict: 'As ever, just one person's opinion. ***You*** might love it.' [105] Belittle his authority is probably a good strategy in order to avoid criticism, just as it serves to respect different tastes. Unfortunately, when Cave presents his expertise as just anybody's

[100] Craig, 'The World Cup at their feet', *The Times*, 13.05. 2006, book pages, p. 18.
[101] Craig, 'The Facts, just give them the facts', *The Times*, 02.12. 2006, book pages, p. 16.
[102] Craig, 'Christmas Books', *The Times*, 11.12. 2004, book pages, p. 12.
[103] Craig, 'Magic of techno for teens', *The Times*, 05.05. 2007, book pages, p. 15.
[104] Keeble, p. 246.
[105] Patrick Cave, 'Setting a Cruel Sun', *Achuka*, 12.12. 2006, <http://www.achuka.co.uk/achukareviews/2006/12/setting-of-a-cruel-sun.html> [accessed June 28, 2009].

opinion, his review lacks the urgency necessary to possibly gain influence and cause literary debate.

The Critic as Professional

There is a danger in popular journalism of the journalist getting in the way of the subject. In the case of Craig, however, her personal approach is part of her expertise rather than a compensation for it. When she informs that *Barefoot Book of Classic Poems* 'instantly attracted my children because of the triumphant tiger on the cover', it functions to make a general point about the importance of covers.[106] More than her experience as a parent, Craig's professional image is founded on expert knowledge reflected in an ability to look at the books in a wider context. She appears simultaneously as a peer of her readers, and as a professional addressing them as clients. The relationship between a client and a professional depends on a different kind of trust than the trust on advice from a friend. Craig has limited space to prove why the thrillers she recommends are likely to tempt teenagers away from computers, much as a doctor has limited time for the patients. In order to trust her as a professional more than a peer, her readers need to believe in her expert image. In addition to demonstrating analytical talent through interesting interpretations and good writing skills, her expert knowledge covers the following categories:

- authorship – e.g. typical style and themes
- fictional writing – e.g. how literary devices work
- genre – characteristics
- intertextuality – e.g. references to similar books
- publishing practice – e.g. availability and what is considered likely to sell
- children's reading abilities and preferences

The Case of Amanda Craig and Ithaka

'Dream-weaving in Ancient Greece', a review of *Ithaka* by Adèle Geras, is one of the few longer reviews of children's books in *The Times* (527 words), and exemplifies a variety of Craig's expertise – from the impressive to the questionable.

[106] Craig, 'Class, in and out of School', *The Times*, 18.11. 2006, book pages, p. 15.

> We observe Penelope and Telemachus through the eyes of both her maid, Klymene, and through Ikaros (...) This is the same technique as in Troy, Geras' Whitbread-shortlisted novel inspired by The Iliad. Its advantage is that we are allowed to see plausible motivations for the stuff of legend. The most successful novel of this kind (which some publisher must, please, reprint) is Roger Lancelyn Green's The Luck of Troy (...) Ithaka isn't in that league, but then it is more experimental than a straightforward children's novel in that chapters are interspersed with free verse, and Argo's doggy dreams.[107]

In this paragraph she places the book in relation to what she considers the best novel of its kind and to a previous novel by the same author, which again is given status through the mention of the Whitbread Award. Additionally she demonstrates her knowledge about writing by explaining the favourable effect of the narrative viewpoints, and tells us the main difference between this book and a more typical children's novel. She even manages to squeeze in that her preferred Homer-story unfortunately is out of print. There are no personal modifications here, meaning that Craig comes across with strong authority. Not until she is making a more questionable point, does she strike a more personal note:

> I found myself getting cross, however, when Geras has Penelope eventually falling for one of her suitors (...) Children, even the kind of sophisticated teenagers who will enjoy this book, hate the idea of mothers being unfaithful. My primary school audience wanted Penelope to shoot her suitors herself, and they would be horrified to hear she might have had sex with one of them instead. I don't myself believe it. If ever there was a man worth waiting for, it was Odysseus.[108]

Craig dislikes the turn of the plot, and argues that the intended reader will not like it either. Her allegation about their preferences can be seen either as expertise or speculation, but is supported by the class she refers to. Her moral objection appears as dissatisfaction situated in herself more than grounded in the text, indicating that she does not consider this reservation relevant in terms of literary merit. Her personal fascination for Odysseus

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[107] Craig, 'Dream-weaving in Ancient Greece', *The Times*, 19.11. 2005, book pages, p. 17.

[108] Ibid.

reveals knowledge of the Greek mythology, which as a sign of cultural status may even function to improve her professional image.

The Problem of Universalizations

The start of Craig's review is what makes it problematic:

> Children love the stories of Homer – the triumphs and the tricks of Odysseus and the account of how he bent his great bow and shot his wife's suitors. But they want to know more about how the young Telemachus, and Odysseus's faithful wife, Penelope, survived.[109]

To assume that every child of a particular age or gender has the exact same passion for Homer-stories, is a universalization most likely scientifically invalid. Speculations about what children love and want resemble allegations from advertisements. The fact that the review offers the book on sale for £11.69 through *The Times,* makes the universalizations more questionable. If, however, Craig had used the modification 'most children' or referred to actual children, it would have made her allegations more probable as expert knowledge on child preferences. Instead she appears as a promoter. Most of her audience, however, know that exaggerations are part of her personal style ('a joy - even on its 300th re-reading'[110]) and that she is fully capable of making objections. If not, invalid allegations could have put her credibility at serious risk.

Universalized assumptions about children's reading abilities and preferences are what most frequently jeopardize the professional expert image and integrity. According to Craig, '[a]ny child over 10 going to France will love the sequel to Sally Gardner's *The Red Necklace*'.[111] The younger the intended readers are, the more frequently generalizations occur: 'Babies love hide-and-seek and dramatic exclamations,' alleges Kate Kellaway in *The Observer*.[112] Most striking are the generalisations about gender. 'Fairy Shopping (Orion £9.99) by Sally Gardner carries a title which marries two words certain to set the pulse racing of any self-respecting girl of a certain age.'[113] Notably, gender stereotypes are

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[109] Ibid.
[110] Craig on *Five Minute's Peace* by Jill Murphy, 'Amanda Craig picks some of her favourites from Books for Schools list', *The Times*, 17.01. 2009, book pages, p. 13.
[111] Craig on *The Silver Blade* by Sally Gardener, 'From a thief who steals tears , to trolls and magical flutes', *The Times*, 27.06. 2009, book pages, p. 12.
[112] Kate Kellaway, 'What's new, pussycat?', *The Observer*, 12.04. 2009, review pages, p. 23.
[113] Tim Adams, 'The pop idol or the pop-ups', *The Observer*, 14.12. 2003, review pages, p. 17.

usually produced by somebody of the opposite gender: 'There is one graphically violent climax too many for me in this taut thriller, but I'd give it to any boy.'[114] Universalizations are more likely to occur when the reviews take the form of service journalism, because this approach is concerned with how the book may function, and therefore requires expertise on children as well as on books. That is, however, no excuse for producing invalid arguments which jeopardize the critic's reliability.

The Case of Martin Salisbury and the Problem of Double Standards

Academic critics, who rarely utter any speculations or universalizations, can also put their reader's trust to test. Martin Salisbury belongs to the cultural elite in the field and contributes reviews in *Books for Keeps*. A closer look at the reviews in which he gives the mediocre rating of three stars, indicates that his literary ideals conflict with his efforts to provide service journalism. From autumn 2005 until spring 2009 I have found eight three-star reviews signed by Salisbury.[115] A few of them contain a single negative remark, but all texts have a favourable conclusion: 'should guarantee plenty of fun for the younger child and reading parent.'[116] An exceptionally high threshold for top score cannot explain Salisbury's tendency to let mediocre ratings follow positive text – in the same time period, he hands out five stars nine times. The review of *Pablo the Artist* by Satoshi Kitamura is where the three stars seems most out of place:

> Kitamura's latest offering is a great example of his gentle, highly individual humour. Pablo the elephant seems to be suffering from a nasty case of artist's block in advance of the forthcoming Hoof Lane Art Club exhibition. His fellow artists helpfully suggest that he might benefit from a little 'plein-air' landscape work, so Pablo heads off into the countryside to give it a try. Kitamura's unique, highly articulate line conveys an extraordinary range of expression and gesture and the various contortions of Pablo's face as he tries to sort out his artistic crisis are an absolute joy. A suitably elephant-sized lunch precipitates an afternoon nap and subsequent events lead to an

[114] Geraldine Bedell, 'Hello cruel world', *The Observer*, 16. 04. 2006, review pages, p. 23.
[115] The archive of *Books for Keeps* is not searchable by critic. His reviews are selected from the categories 'under 5s' and '5-8'.
[116] Martin Salisbury, 'The Fantastic Mr. Wani', *Books for Keeps*, no. 156, 2006, p. 17. A typical example of critical remark on *The Lonely Three* by Nicholas Halliday: 'The fiercely digital photo-manipulated illustrations do though seem somewhat at odds with the organic nature of the theme.' no. 157, 2006, p. 20.

> ingenious solution to the creative block. The author's incomparably economical approach to characterisation and the endearing fallibility and humanity of his characters makes him one of our (well he's been here a long time) most popular picture book creators. This is another winner.[117]

The reader (and most certainly the artist) is left guessing what this book lacks to deserve four or even five stars. Is Kitamura copying his previous work rather than renewing himself? Is the ending too obvious or too educational? Does the book lack seriousness? Bourdieu has shown how you gain symbolic capital by reproducing the taste and standards of the dominant culture. According to him, much of this reproduction is done instinctively.[118] Whether the process is fully conscious or not, personal opinions may be influenced by tactical concerns. Bourdieu's theory is supported by Anne Lundin, who states: 'Individuals in this field aspire to position themselves by their literary taste and hierarchical standards of what literature is and does.'[119] Consequently, Salisbury's rating may not reflect the conclusion in the text because he may lose status by acknowledging low-status books. The discrepancy between rating and text resembles the discrepancy between selection and assessment criteria described in the previous chapter.

Among his five-star reviews, humour is appreciated only once – in a sophisticated form, in *The Way Back Home* by Oliver Jeffers: 'Many of the jokes and puns depend on such things as the interplay between a stylised representation of the moon and more traditional depictions of space.'[120] Educational aspects only constitute literary merit and five stars when they can teach children about art: 'This is a book that will excite young children's interest, whilst also providing exposure to art and design at its best.'[121] Although Salisbury acknowledges *Tiger* by Joanna Skipwith as 'a fascinating and comprehensive study of the history, iconography and current plight of the various species of wild tiger', these educational aspects are obviously not enough to achieve more than three stars.[122] After the rating is done, he seems to turn from academic at the school of art into service journalist with the users and potential child readers in mind: 'Reading and

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[117] Salisbury, 'Pablo the Artist', Books for Keeps, no. 156, 2006, p. 17.
[118] See for instance Fowler, p. 45.
[119] Lundin, p. xvii.
[120] Salisbury, 'The Way Back Home', *Books for Keeps*, no. 169, 2008, p. 16.
[121] Salisbury, 'Wings, Horns & Claws', *Books for Keeps*, no. 167, 2007, p. 17.
[122] Salisbury, 'Tiger', *Books for Keeps*, no. 161, 2006, p. 21.

looking we are reminded of just how established this beautiful animal is in our collective psyches and how fragile its continued survival prospects are.'[123]

In 1985 the Children's Literature Association published a list of exceptional children's books known as 'touchstones'. In order to qualify, the book had to be distinctive and excellently written, it had to be important by challenging old convention, and it had to be widely read.[124] Thereby the academic elite of children's literature established popularity as a quality criterion, in contrast to highbrow standards for adult literature, which according to Catharine R. Stimpson is characterised by 'a close association between difficulty and merit ranking.'[125] Salisbury's review of *Pablo the Artist* acknowledges both distinctive style and popularity, but it does not result in a high rating. Since popularity is not an appreciated quality among his five-star reviews, it is possible that he prefers a standard closer to the field of adult literature. His rating practice indicates a hierarchy of literary merit hard to trace in the texts, reflecting a hidden standard, which seems to have a lot in common with traditional highbrow culture.

Double standards can also be found among Salisbury's colleagues in *Books for Keeps,* and shows that some critics practice a hierarchy in which certain types of books are not considered worthy of top rating. Gwynneth Bailey gives three stars to the 'reassuring' picture book *Time to Say I Love You* by Jane Kemp and Clare Walters, and concludes: 'Perfect.'[126] She gives four stars to *Chimp And Zee's First Words and Pictures* by Laurence and Catherine Anholt declaring: 'This book has shot right to the top of my all-time favourite First Words books!'[127] A closer look at all three-star rated books in two selected issues of *Books for Keeps* indicates, that the critics promoting three-star rated books without reservations, are less likely to rank highly books with primarily educational purposes, 'schoolboy humour', and romance.[128]

The positive texts following the allegedly mediocre books measure them against their own kind and acknowledge that the books succeed in doing what they set out to do, very much in line with how service journalism is concerned with functional aspects. If the quality is limited to a special context and purpose, arguably, it may be fair to consider the

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Perry Nodelman (ed.), *Touchstones: Reflections of the Best in Children's Literature* (West Lafayette: ChLA Publishers, 1985), pp. 7-8.
[125] Catharine R. Stimpson, 'Reading for Love: Canon, Paracanon, and Whisteling Jo March', *New Literary History,* vol.21, no. 4, 1990, pp. 957-76 (p. 961).
[126] Gwynneth Bailey, 'Time to Say I Love You', *Books for Keeps*, no. 176, 2009, p. 16.
[127] Gwynneth Bailey, 'Chimp and Zee's First Words and Pictures', *Books for Keeps*, no. 165, 2007, p. 18.
[128] Counted in *Books for Keeps* no. 158 (May) and no. 161 (November) 2006.

literary value limited: 'The selkie theme may strain credibility for some readers, but others – perhaps most often girls – will find it an intriguing platform for very real dilemmas.'[129] This is a common strategy even in publications without a ranking system, like *Carousel*, where most critics are very reserved towards making negative remarks: 'If you believe that human beings have extra-sensory perception and influence on the thoughts and actions of others, then you will enjoy reading this book.'[130] The main problem with Salisbury, and many of his colleagues, is how seldom they express such possible reservations. As long as the literary hierarchy hinted to by the rankings remains unexplained, they avoid the potential debate about whether, for instance, educative, romantic and humorous books deserve to be considered inferior.

The Case of Jacob

A count of the three-star rated reviews in two issues of *Books for Keeps* in 2006 shows that twenty and forty-five percent respectively are presented with favourable sides only.[131] In *Achuka* just above eighty percent of the reviews ranked with three achukachicks are presented without reservations in the same months.[132] They are all written by Jacob, who has an academic background and works as a librarian.[133] In November 2006, he was responsible for twenty-three out of twenty-six reviews. Twelve of the books are given score three, and the two not written by Jacob are the only two presenting objections. His hierarchic standard is ambiguous. Five out of the ten three-rated books belong to the humour category, but so does *The Emperor of Absurdia* by Chris Riddell, which receives top score. None of the books are for young adults, but neither is *Little Red Train Races to the Finish* by Benedict Blathwayt, which received a top rating. Two of the ten are poetic and emphatic stories with a slow pace, which seem to contrast with the thriller *Nemesis: Into the Shadows* by Catherine MacPhail and the macabre ghost stories *Dust 'n' Bones* by Chris Mould, both receiving five achukachicks. Despite the ambiguity, Jacob seems to favour action, sophisticated humour and books for young adults.

With reference to Bourdieu, Jacob's recognition of sophisticated and complex books can be seen as a reproduction of a literary standard close to an adult book ideal.

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[129] Val Randall on *Fur* by Meg Harper, *Books for Keeps*, no. 161, 2006, p. 22.
[130] Janice Knight on *Erased* by Nick Gifford, *Carousel*, no. 34, p. 33.
[131] May 2006: 4 out of 20; November 2006: 13 out of 39.
[132] May 2006: 6 out of 7; November 2006: 10 out of 12.
[133] See presentation on page 33.

Recreational reads, however, have traditionally belonged to lowbrow culture. Jacob's validation of action may mean a challenge of the dominant culture, but it could also indicate that page-turning entertainment, particularly for boys, has gained higher status. The action-packed stories he rewards five achukachicks seem particularly suited to meet the need of service journalism to help improving the reading habits among teenage boys. However, such educational potential probably also applies to the enthusiastically presented humour books receiving only three achukachicks. The only thing that can be said for certain about Jacob's double standards is that it weakens his credibility.

Books for Keeps and *Achuka* both allow negative reviews, which means that Jacob and Salisbury possibly could have used their limited space to give some reasons for their mediocre ratings. When they prioritize to provide enthusiastic service journalism, the mediocre score undermine both their promotion and their integrity. They avoid debate – but still they manage to distinguish between the good books and the very best. To make such distinctions is usually the main problem of the critic in the role as promoter.

Chapter 4
The Critic As Promoter

Since service journalism is aimed at helping users to turn children into competent and eager readers, the critic is encouraged to take the role of promoter. Promotion links reviewing to advertising. The point of book advertising is to persuade potential buyers that the book is worth the price, and that the purchase will give a satisfaction competitive to any equivalent expenditure. In this aspect, it makes no difference whether advertising employs rational or irrational arguments, or whether or not it is scientifically valid.[134] Speculative claims occur more frequent than universalizations, and in *Lovereading*'s synopses these are most often based directly on blurbs from the publishing houses. The presentation of *Orange Pear Apple Bear* by Emily Gravett is an expressive exception. This is how Macmillian advertise the book on their own website:

> An orange, a pear, an apple – and a bear. Deliciously simple. Perfectly fun. Now available in board book format, the utter simplicity of this beautiful book is breathtaking. By rearranging just four words, Emily Gravett creates a series of playful images which are a sheer joy – and intensely satisfying. The loose energy of the pencil and watercolour pictures will be irresistible to adults and children alike.[135]

Lovereading's edited version of the blurb informs that the playful images are '*suitable* for both adults and children alike' (my italics).[136] From this, it may be inferred that somebody on the *Lovereading* staff has probably decided not to put their credibility at stake in fear that the audience would see through an overstated prediction.

Arguably, most people expect biased information from a bookseller. *Lovereading* needs to make money, and would obviously benefit from setting the standard relatively low for what is to be considered a 'good' book. Book reviews, on the other hand, are

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[134] Wernick, pp. 27-28.
[135] Macmillian *on Orange Pear Apple Bear* by Emily Gravette, <http://www.panmacmillan.com/titles/displayPage.asp?PageTitle=Individual%20Title&BookID=420123> [accessed August 1, 2009].
[136] Synopsis of *Orange Pear Apple Bear* by Emily Gravette at *Lovereading4kids*, <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/4054/Orange-Pear-Apple-Bear-by-Emily-Gravett.html> [accessed August 1, 2009].

supposed to be unbiased. In this aspect, it is alarming to see how closely linked some organs are to booksellers. In the spirit of consumer journalism, both the websites of *Books for Keeps* and *Achuka* present links which take the viewer directly to the online bookstore Amazon with the text: 'To buy this book, click here.' The minor revenue from these links, however, does not depend on number of copies sold. The newspapers are more closely connected to booksellers, because they all offer some of the reviewed books through their own bookstores. For example, the longer reviews in *The Guardian* typical end like this: 'To order *Ithaka* for £11.99 with free UK p&p call Guardian book service on 0870 836 0875 or go to www.guardian.co.uk/bookshop.'[137] This service resembles that offered by *Lovereading*. Favourable reviews of books on sale are profitable for the newspaper owners much like they are for the owners of bookstores. In theory, however, newspapers are organized to ensure their book editors and critics are independent from interference or economic pressures. The critics may profit slightly promotionally from their recommendations, but not directly economically. Still the commercial interests may strain credibility of these reviews, in particular when the critics use invalid arguments characteristic of advertisements. Can the audience trust that *The Fairy Tales* 'will stay in children's memories for life'?[138] When recommendations are formulated like predictions, the critic appears more like a quack than a professional.

In the role of promoter, some critics act like non-profit booksellers in their evangelizing of 'good reads'. A considerable number of critics, however, never speculate on potential effects of the book; but every editor in my sample does seem to allow speculation:[139]

- Martin Salisbury in *Books for Keeps* on *Beware of the Frog* by William Bee: 'the ending will make you laugh out loud.'[140]
- Amanda Craig in *The Times* on *Skybreaker* by Kenneth Oppel: 'features a hero whom boys, girls and adults will fall in love with from the first page'[141]

[137] Leslie Wilson, 'Penelope's loom', *The Guardian*, 22.10. 2005, review pages, p. 20.
[138] Craig, 'Quite Enchanting', *The Times*, 26.11. 2005, book pages p. 17.
[139] Nicolette Jones never seems to speculate, and as *The Sunday Times'* only critic on children's literature, does not appear on the list.
[140] Salisbury, 'Beware of the Frog', *Books for Keeps*, no. 171, 2008, p. 21.
[141] Craig, 'Beware these books can bite', The Times, 03.12. 2005, book pages, p. 19. 'Hodder £ 8.99; offer £ 8.54'.

- Kate Kellaway in *The Observer*: 'Families everywhere (from ages nine to 99) will be revelling in Jeanette Winterson 's *Tanglewreck* (...) this summer – a showstopper of a novel'[142]
- Julie Eccleshare in *Lovereading* on *The Odd Egg* by Emily Gravett: 'readers of all ages will love the surprise.'[143]
- Kate Thompson in *The Guardian* on *Tanglewreck*: 'the reader will be carried along by the vitality of her style and her ever-present sense of adventure.'[144]
- Jacob in *Achuka* on *The Road of Bones* by Anne Fine: 'As with any Anne Fine novel, characters will have you hooting with laughter and howling with rage.'[145]
- Valerie Bierman in *Carousel* on *The Bower Bird* by Ann Kelley: 'Her story will fascinate, stir your heart and give your senses such a boost that you will almost taste the crab sandwiches!'[146]

The claim that a book will make boys, girls and adults fall in love with the hero, is speculative even if it is implicitly understood that it will not apply to everybody. The book is far more likely to make *some* rather than *all* readers fall in love, but it is still not scientifically valid. One of the most common marketing strategies is to insist that the product will give the buyer a better life. When the critics predict the reactions on behalf of a 'you', they combine speculation and generalization in a direct appeal so typical of advertising that their role as promoter may be said to overshadow their role as professional.

Anne Fine's review of *Doing It!* demonstrates how entertaining speculative claims can be: 'Young girls will be begging their parents to send them to single sex schools. Reading this will put many off dating for years.'[147] As long as she does not recommend the book, such a prediction does not jeopardize her integrity, but contributes to the satirical style. Speculative claims are also less likely to undermine credibility in those cases where they are part of the personal style of a critic with which the audience is familiar, as in the case with Amanda Craig. The premise is that this critic is known to

[142] Kate Kellaway, 'Summer books: picture perfect', *The Observer*, 02.07. 2006, p. 10.
[143] Julia Eccleshare, 'The Odd Egg', *Lovereading4kids*. <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/3948/The-Odd-Egg-by-Emily-Gravett.html>.
[144] Kate Thompson, 'Silver's time tornado', *The Guardian*, 10.06., 2006, review pages, p. 20. 'To order *Tanglewreck* for £11.99 (...) call Guardian book service (...)'.
[145] Jacob, 'The Road of Bones', *Achuka*, 01.06. 2006, <http://www.achuka.co.uk/achockablog/mt-search.cgi?search=the+road+of+bones&IncludeBlogs=5>.
[146] Valerie Bierman, 'The Bower Bird', *Carousel,* no. 38, 2008, p. 30.
[147] Fine, 29.03. 2003.

present objections on some books. In general, however, predictions used to express enthusiasm make these reviews hard to distinguish from pure advertisements.

Promotional Messages

Our promotional culture is filled with promotional messages, which are described by Wernick as a special kind of marketing that also takes place outside advertisements. When a review undertakes the work of a promotional message, it appears as an abridged miniature version of the book, and offers a short fictional reading experience (or factual in the case of non-fiction books):

> A boy, reading his comic, slams the front door and absent-mindedly walks to the shop with his dog. Does he see his ball dropping from the roof on to the cat? The cat leaping on to a passing lady? The lady's broken eggs blinding a nearby runner and the chaos that ensues? Not a bit of it, but the reader is left to enjoy a visual feast as the ball bounces its way through a story of few words. Hilarious![148]

Firstly, as can be seen from this example, retelling the storyline (synopsis) takes up the majority of space, and is done in a way that gives a good impression of what this book is like. Consequently, the review represents ('moves in place of') the book. Secondly, the review is entirely positive, even enthusiastic, and thus serves to recommend ('moves on behalf of') the book. Finally, by presenting a book recently, or about to be, published, it anticipates ('moves ahead of') the product on the market.[149] With very few exceptions, all reviews in my corpus focus on new or reissued books.[150] Most of them are recommendations. By far the most complicated issue is to determine exactly when a review truly represents the book in the sense of constituting a miniature version of it. For the purpose of determining the occurrence of promotional messages among the reviews, I have included those in which the voice of the critic impacts in only minor ways on the 'fictional effect' in the course of retelling the plot (or reproduces information from

[148] Marianne Adey on *Slam!* by Adam Stower, *Carousel*, no. 31, 2005, p. 13.
[149] Wernick, p. 182.
[150] Unless the organ is presenting books on a theme, a book has to be new in order to be reviewed: 'Last year's Nestle Prize (...) Gold winner, *Lost and Found*, has just come out in paperback, prompting me to finally get round to reviewing it.' Rowan Stanfield Miller on *Lost and Found* by Oliver Jeffers, *Achuka*, 06.05. 2006, <http://www.achuka.co.uk/achukareviews/2006/05/lost-and-found.html>.

non-fictional books), and only the cases in which the synopsis takes up at least half the review. In order to be included, there must be clear evidence that the boundary between the promotional sign (the review) and the object (the book) has become blurred.[151] In addition, the review has to be 'an anticipatory advocate' of the book, either by direct recommendations or by the favourable information, arguments and evidence given. For example, in a review of *Skin* by A.M. Vrettos the presence of critic Louis Keith can be detected in the opening sequence: 'This is a story told backwards. It starts with the shocking scene where 14-year-old Donnie returns home from school to find his 16-year-old sister Karen dead in the hallway and as Donnie retraces the past year, we learn of the anorexia that has overtaken the lives of all the family.'[152] We are reminded that this is a review, before it shifts to take on an authorial function, summarising the 'real story' in such a vivid way that the synopsis may slightly affect the reader. Keith opens with neutral information from an outside perspective – 'this is a story told backwards' – before we are invited into the book, disturbed only by the critic's presence in 'we learn'. The distancing effect is much the same even when the opening sentence is advocating the book before going on to the resumé: 'Middle children will love this! In the mouse family, Clara is the big one, Ben is the baby, and Martha is in the middle – where she gets squashed and looked over (...)'.[153]

According to this definition of a promotional message, about twenty percent of the reviews in *Carousel* qualify. This is not in line with the guidelines given to *Carousel* critics: 'Please ensure that the account of the plot should be the minor part of the review and the reviewers opinion, the greater.'[154] In *Books for Keeps* an estimated six percent of the reviews form promotional messages.[155] In *Achuka* the number varies from an unrepresentative thirty-eight percent in November 2006, to an average below that of *Books for Keeps*.[156] Less surprising is that a substantial part of presentations in *Lovereading* are written more or less by this formula – either in the 'synopsis' or the 'comment' following most books. As I will return to in the case study of Julia Eccleshare, eighteen percent of her reviews of picture books in *The Guardian* are promotional messages, compared to twenty-three percent of her contributions to *Lovereading*. In the longer newspaper

[151] Wernick, p. 184.
[152] Louis Keith, 'Skin', *Books for Keeps*, no. 158, 2006, p. 26.
[153] Elizabeth Schlenter on *Martha in the Middle* by Jan Fearnley, *Books for Keeps*, no. 173, 2008, p. 18.
[154] Guidelines by editor Jenny Blanch, provided by *Carousel* editor David Blanch, 11.07. 2009. *Carousel* critics are not paid, which supposedly limits how much the editors can demand.
[155] Based on the months May and November 2006 and 2008.
[156] November 2006: 10 out of 26; May 2006, May and November 2008: 2 out of 31.

reviews, all critics usually keep the retelling of the plot just under the half, and they more frequently interrupt to make comments. Promotional messages occur occasionally in round-ups and most frequently in reviews of picture books.

According to Wernick, the purpose of promotional messages is the same as that of promotional culture in general, that is to create a valorizing exchange. *Slam!* is reviewed in a form by which the artist Adam Stover and *Carousel* mutually benefit. Stover's work supposedly attracts readers to *Carousel*, while *Carousel* attracts readers to his book. As already mentioned, such an exchange presupposes that the book and the publication share approximately the same audience. Since most picture books are intended to be read aloud, an increasing number of them are made with an adult reader in mind. The additional adult address makes these books particularly suited for promotional messages. Whereas Marianne Adey's review of *Slam!* invites the reader to consider the book mainly from a child's perspective, Chris Stephenson's *Carousel* review of *Traction Man Meets Turbo Dog* by Mini Grey is an example of a promotional message addressing adults as potential 'real' readers:

> The return of the domestic superhero with the deadpan Buster Keaton-like countenance, along with his partner Scrubbing Brush and plus a new companion – TurboDog, '*As seen on TV*' and '*Utterly Hygienic*' (although '*Batteries not included*'). Is there room in Traction Man's life for two pets? (Let's face it, TurboDog's all-out reliance on batteries can be a bind.) Scrubbing Brush goes missing. Traction Man and TurboDog search everywhere, '*through the underpants*', '*across the wastes of the sandpit*' and '*the Chasm of the Sofa*'. Making sure to arm himself beforehand with a bottle of '*SuperStrong GERMO (wit Ammonia)*', our intrepid hero even tackles the Bin! A glorious antidote to boneheaded machismo, unobtrusively Green, and a visual feast of wit and boundless imagination. A gem.[157]

Partly promotional messages turn reviews into entertaining reads in themselves, and they partly promote alledgedly good books. Entertainment and service journalism meet in enthusiastic retellings of the plot constructed to give the reader an impression of testing out 'the real thing'. If entertainment is the main function, promotional messages could be expected to occur more often in the newspapers, which address the most non-consumers. However,

[157] Chris Stephenson, 'Traction Man Meets TurboDog', *Carousel*, no. 41, 2009, p. 10.

alongside *Lovereading*, *Carousel* is the media in which promotional messages occur most frequently, while they are also the places in which speculation occurs most often.[158] The journal and the bookshop share outspoken policies to promote reading and help parents find the best books for their children. Therefore, despite addressing adults in the role of real readers more than users, promotional messages thereby seem to fit the ideology of service journalism.

The Critic as Bookseller: The Case of Julia Eccleshare

Behind the scenes of the website *Lovereading*, Eccleshare contributes as a critic, but on the site, the writings signed by her are labelled 'comments' rather than reviews. In this context it is interesting to investigate to what extent her bookseller comments resemble her reviews in *The Guardian*. Is this treatment of *Traction Man Meets Turbo Dog* her contribution to the website or the newspaper?

> Those already devoted to the small-scale but bold and intrepid Traction Man will be delighted that he is back for a second set of adventures, along with his side-kick Scrubbing Brush. But then Scrubbing Brush goes missing and a new "pet" turns up. Will Traction Man forsake his simple soulmate for the more sophisticated and hygienic qualities of Turbo Dog? Not likely! Mini Grey's comic-strip story, with its busy frames and witty filmic references, celebrates true friendship, dirt and all.[159]

This is her *Guardian* review presented in a set of Christmas recommendations. Even though the review is unambiguously favourable and informs mainly on the content, the retelling of the plot is slightly shorter than half the review, and thereby does not quite meet my definition of a promotional message. Her comment for *Lovereading*, on the other hand, qualifies:

> Hilarious action-packed new adventures for the intrepid Traction Man and his popular side-kick, Scrubbing Brush, in this fantastic sequel by prize-winning illustrator Mini Grey.

[158] In *Carousel* no. 40, 2008, 11 percent of the reviews contain speculative allegations, 13:112. Craig combines speculations and generalizations in the case of four out of seventeen titles in her summer round-up, *The Times*, 27.06. 2009, book pages, p. 12.
[159] Eccleshare, 'Stand and deliver', *The Guardian*, 13.12. 2008, review pages, p. 10.

> After an intrepid exploration of the compost heap, Scrubbing Brush returns so dirty that the foolish adults put him in the bin. Turbo Dog arrives to take his place as companion and best-friend but soon proves to be no substitute. Traction Man sets out to find his friend and triumphantly returns with him having rescued him from the perils of the dark and terrible underworld of the Bin. Comic strip in style, this is rich in visual and verbal jokes which will repay reading and rereading many times.[160]

This promotional message is designed to contribute to the profit of *Lovereading* by selling the book, while also enhancing their image as a bookstore offering quality books. Both obligations give the text a bias. Obviously, there is no room for possibly unfavourable information or reservations. There is little opportunity for the readers to draw their own conclusions, as this comment by way of introduction simply declares the book 'hilarious' and 'fantastic'. Similarly, it insists that the book 'will repay reading and rereading' – but here the grounds are given in the richness of 'visual and verbal jokes'. This prediction is the most striking difference to *The Guardian* review, in addition to the spoiler. By giving away the outcome, the comment forms a more complete promotional message. The whole concept of *Lovereading* is based on addressing passive consumers, whereas the newspaper remark on Grey's 'busy frames and witty filmic references' seems intended also for adults interested in the picture book as work of art regardless of the potential 'use' of it.

Starting in November 2005, one month before the opening of *Lovereading*, and going through to May 2009, in Eccleshare's Guardian reviews I have found only recommendations.[161] This seems to be her practice even though most of the books are not sold by *The Guardian's* bookshop. The titles reviewed by *The Guardian* can be purchased at *Lovereading*, but Eccleshare does usually not comment on any book, which she is also reviewing in *The Guardian*. If the title features on a list of recommendation, the comment is mostly left to others in the *Lovereading* staff. I have found forty-two titles that she has dealt with for both publications during this three and a half year period. Although a few *Lovereading* comments appear as barely edited versions of her *Guardian* reviews, in

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[160] Eccleshare comments *Traction Man Meets TurboDog* in *Lovereading*: http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/4625/Traction-Man-Meets-Turbodog-by-Mini-Grey.html [accessed 01.09.2009].

[161] Archived under the label 'review', including roundups, weekly picture book choices and her presentations of the shortlist to the Guardian children's fiction prize and meeting the definition of review on page 5.

general Eccleshare produces different texts on the same titles for the newspaper and the bookstore.[162]

Among the forty-two *Guardian* reviews, there are only two containing negative remarks, and – like in any other *Guardian* review by Eccleshare in this period – the reservations occur within overall praise: 'the delight of Hutton's atmospheric lithographs easily makes up for any difficulties in the text', she assures her readers regarding *A Picture History of Great Discoveries* by Mabel George and Clark Hutton.[163] In *The Guardian, Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes* by Alex Scheffler is presented as 'a handsomely produced collection of 88 of the rhymes you know well but can still misquote (...) linked together by 30 nice though somewhat inconsequential stories.'[164] In *Lovereading* the stories have turned into 'some cheerful original short stories'.[165] And even in *The Guardian* she concludes: 'A perfect collection of today.' Even as newspaper critic, Eccleshare seems first and foremost to be promoting books, in line with the agenda of service journalism.

As newspaper critic she sometimes addresses non-consumers alongside potential users by highlighting aspects of more general current interest: 'How do you raise the serious subject of what happened in the concentration camps for a younger audience?'[166] As bookseller she always has consumers in mind, for instance by pointing out suitability as gifts: 'A perfect treat for halloween.'[167] Usually, however, even as bookseller she does not tell people directly what they should buy – with a few exceptions: 'A wonderful treat for young and old alike and a real classic that should sit proudly on every nursery bookshelf.'[168] In *The Guardian* the recommendations are consequently more understated, leaving slightly more room for the consuming readers to draw their own conclusions.

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[162] The reviews copied: on *Baby Brains Superstar* by Simon James, *The Guardian*, 12.11. 2005, review pages, p. 20 and *Highway Robbery* by Kate Thompson, 13.12. 2008, review pages, p. 10.
[163] Eccleshare's picture book choice, *The Guardian*, 31.05. 2008, review pages, p. 16.
[164] Eccleshare, 'Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes', *The Guardian*, 18.11. 2006, review pages, p. 20.
[165] Eccleshare on *Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes* by Alex Scheffler, *Lovereading*, <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/1628/Mother-Goose%27s-Nursery-Rhymes-by-Alison-Green.html>, [accessed 0109.2009].
[166] Eccleshare on The Mozart Question by Michael Morpurgo, *The Guardian*, February 16, 2008, review pages, p. 20.
[167] Eccleshare on *The Worst Witch Saves the Day* by Jill Murphy in *Lovereading*. <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/906/The-Worst-Witch-Saves-The-Day-by-Jill-Murphy.html>, [accessed 01.09.2009].
[168] Eccleshare on *The Wild Washerwomen* by John Yeoman and Quintin Blake in *Lovereading*. <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/4032/Wild-Washerwomen-by-John-Yeoman.html>, [accessed 01.09.2009].

The most striking difference between reviews and comments is the frequent occurrence of speculative claims in *Lovereading*: 'readers of all ages will love the surprise!';[169] 'it will delight old and new fans alike';[170] 'A real turn-on to cooking for any teenager.'[171] This hardly ever occurs in her reviews and signals a stronger integrity in her work as book editor for *The Guardian.*

I have classified eight of her reviews and ten of her comments as promotional messages (nineteen and twenty-four percent respectively). Many more are based on retellings from the books, but they are, in my opinion, only serving as appetizer from the beginning of the stories, or in general are too brief to create a 'fictional effect'. Wernick is concerned with the way in which promotional messages form a force for cultural homogenization. Even thought the reviews and comment on *Traction Man* demonstrate that they are not mere repetitions of each other, the competition between the media ensures semiological complexity 'which makes every point in the flow as intriguing in its formal construction as it is boringly void of deeper content.'[172] Clive Barnes' review of *Traction Man* in *Books for Keeps* proves the point. After 189 words of favourable retelling of the storyline, he sums up by arguments most readers probably already have extracted from his resumé, and adds very little to the reviews presented above:

> Another brilliant picture book from Mini Grey, whose sense of humour and adventure, love of the language of the toy box and understanding of childhood fantasy is matched by her pictorial invention and a skill at characterisation that can make even a scrubbing brush appealing (and ruthless in revenge, where Turbo Dog is concerned). Dare I say it, this is even better than **Traction Man is Here**. Will also appeal to older readers.[173]

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[169] Eccleshare on *The Odd Egg* by Emily Gravette in *Lovereading*. <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/3948/The-Odd-Egg-by-Emily-Gravett.html>,[accessed 01.09.2009].

[170] Eccleshare on *Collected Poems* by Allan Ahlberg in *Lovereading*. <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/3136/Collected-Poems-by-Allan-Ahlberg.html>, [accessed 01.09.2009].

[171] Eccleshare on *Cooking up a Storm* by Sam Stern in *Lovereading*. <http://www.lovereading4kids.co.uk/book/948/Cooking-up-a-Storm---The-Teen-Survival-Cookbook-by-.html>, [accessed 01.09.2009].

[172] Wernick, p. 188.

[173] Clive Barnes, 'Traction Man Meets TurboDog', *Books for Keeps*, no. 173, 2008, p. 17. Rewarded five stars.

Speculations promote books at the expense of the integrity of both critics and their publications. Promotional messages, on the other hand, promote books at the expense of the significance of children's literature because they fail to look for deeper meanings and place the books in wider contexts. Julia Eccleshare's promotional eagerness results in a focus on superficial and positive sides which makes it very hard to discern the books she finds good from those she considers among the very best.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

The disadvantage of reviewing children's literature on a mass market, is the incapsity to attract adult readers in a promotional exchange in which the books provide readers to the media simultaneously as the media provide readers to the books. Book reviews in the form of service journalism can be seen as a compensation for this dilemma. By meeting the practical needs of adult users of children's books, the reviews also serve an ideological purpose in which reading is seen as essential to maximize every child's future prospects. To understand book reviewing by the concept of service journalism implies to see it as a practice fundamentally different from the treatment of adult literature.

Within the time constraints of this thesis, it has been impossible to produce full range statistics. My counts are still significant indications of issues that may deserve further scrutiny. Most alarming are the commercial links between reviews and booksellers in the newspapers, in particular when a review is offering the book for sale through the newspaper's own bookstore, which appears to be a clear conflict of interests. A further study would be useful in order to look for potential differences between reviews offering books for sale and those that are not linked to such economical interests. I have shown how the occurrence of promotional messages, double standards and speculative and universalizing claims could serve as significant indicators in such a study. However, these promotional techniques are found almost as frequently in the journal with the least commercial ties, *Carousel*, as on the bookselling website *Lovereading,* which implies that the role as promoter may overshadow the critics' professional integrity for ideological rather than commercial reasons. Some of the shorter newspaper reviews can be hard to distinguish from advertisements, even when the book being reviewed is not able to be purchased through that particular newspaper.

Even *Books for Keeps* and *Achuka*, with their practice of including reviews predominantly negative, show promotional eagerness particularly when books given the mediocre rating three are recommended without any restrictions. Although objections on the books are common in every selected media except *Lovereading* and *Carousel*, the negative aspects are often set aside by suggestions on what potential groups and situations the books are suitable for. The volume of books considered 'a satisfying read' indicates a low threshold of quality, which gives rise for concern. As a result of this the best authors

become hard to distinguish from the merely good, which undermines the authors' position as autonomous artists. The eagerness to promote even mediocre books may also undermine the critics' trustworthiness, which is crucial since most critics are depending on trust from the audience due to their limited opportunity to support judgements by verifiable facts. Furthermore, to adopt a low standard hinders debate, because there is little to discuss until something is criticized – and somebody provoked. Literary debate is essential in order to question the authoritative perceptions of quality and challenge the dominant forces in the field. Besides, a higher standard could potentially encourage the audience to expect and demand better books from authors and publishing houses. A challenge for most contemporary critics of children's literature is to raise the standard without losing the attention from an audience mainly looking for practical advice.

The literary priorities most in need of critical debate are those delivered by prize judges, since awards prove such a major impact on the selections of my sample sources. Far more critics ought to scrutinize the shortlists and question to what degree their own selections should reproduce the taste of the elite juries. The unofficial selection procedures exercised by book editors and critics also deserve further scrutiny. News values and struggle for symbolic capital can explain most priorities, but it would be interesting to know to what extent these processes are based on conscious and unconscious decisions, and if some editorial offices do operate by certain informal guidelines. It is questionable to favour authors because they are awarded, recognized abroad or have an adult appeal. From the opposite perspective, better knowledge about promotionalism, news values and cultural status will render possible to make reviews of children's books more attractive on the mass market. For example, the relatively high occurrence of promotional messages among reviews of picture books is a reminder of the double and dual address of some of these books. Picture books offering something extra to the adult reading aloud have much of the same potential audience as the mass media, which could be better utilized. The overall inferior position of books for preschool children – perhaps more in the length of the reviews than in the number of titles mentioned – seems unnecessary from both an aesthetical and promotional point of view.[174]

Book reviews in the form of service journalism are intended to help adult users turn their children into keen and skilled readers. Consequently, the interests of parents and

[174] *Books for Keeps*, *Carousel* and *The Guardian* review children's books regularly, but only in *Books for Keeps* does the length of the reviews stand comparison to that of young adult fiction. In *Achuka* picture book reviews are inferior in number. In *The Times*, *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*, picture books usually do not make it further than the round-ups.

children's book practitioners would be expected to dominate among the assessment criteria. In the most reviewed books, however, the diverse understanding of education ensures a relatively versatile presentation of children's literature. Diversity of views is also secured through a blend of critics with varied qualifications. My sample of the most reviewed books indicates that the importance of exposing children to literary works of art and formation of character is considered more important than recreational reads to improve reading skills, but ideally, challenging aspects are paired with entertainment, as the opening review in the introduction chapter demonstrates.

In the sample of the most reviewed books, reading for pleasure is always connected to books suited to aid society in the up-bringing of young citizens or expose children to literary works of art, which indicates that children's interests are under-represented. It is a paradox that the most reviewed books seem to favour sophisticated readers even though the reluctant readers are of most concern to those who see reading as an investment in the future.[175] The favourization of books with adult appeal may not be the main priority in all sample sources, but the sample reviews indicate that market forces and concern about image and cultural status works in favour of books for older children representing high literary merit mainly written by authors holding high symbolic capital. That does not necessarily ensure children the best reading experiences.

In the reception of the nine most reviewed titles, the focus on aesthetical qualities appears equally significant as the books' ability to capture readers. In my opinion none of these factors entirely recognize the cultural significance of children's literature. Children's book reviews stand little chance of being assigned more prominent space in the media if they fail to attract the mass media audiences. A large part of this audience is not interested in the reviews as neither potential adult users nor supporters of literary aesthetics. The critics' attempts to entertain non-consumers by re-tellings of the plot and personal style are trifling if they are not also combined with insights of interest to a broader audience. In my opinion Amanda Craig is quite successful in her review of *Tanglewreck*, in which she points out how its time travel is unique to children's literature. She provides an interesting read to – as she states in the beginning – 'those of us who have ever wondered how different their life would have been if they hadn't said this or done that.' By suggesting that it can be read as 'a satire on our current perception that we all have too little time due to a change in the nature of reality, rather than our own greed and impatience', she makes

[175] Leitch Review of Skills.

Tanglewreck a cultural sign and a social comment of interest beyond the literary field.[176] The review may be criticised of setting the standard too low, but the main point is that Craig manages to see the book as more than an article of consumption and a public service. That is an approach which would add significance to children's literature as a cultural field with relevance to the whole society.

Eide and Knight emphasize the dual nature of service journalism as both public and private service designed to help people reduce the risks in their personal lives. Focus on the private aspects of how to help 'your' particular child to become an avid reader favours practical advice concerned with suitability, and encouragement based on promotional arguments. In order to improve and maintain critics' integrity, literary quality and cultural value, critics must ensure they have general public's interests over those of private individuals in their reviews.

[176] Craig, 24.06. 2006.

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--- *Pablo the Artist* by Satoshi Kitamura, no. 156, 2006, p. 17
--- *The Fantastic Mr. Wani* by Kanako Usui, no. 156, 2006, p. 17
--- *The Lonely Three* by Nicholas Haliday, no. 157, 2006, p. 20
--- *The Story of the Wind* by Sibylle Olfers, no.162, 2007, p. 18
--- *Tiger* by Joanna Skipwith, no. 161, 2006, p. 21
--- *Very Interesting!* by Yokococo, no. 161, 2006, p. 16

Five star rating:

--- *Minty and Tink* by Emma Chichester Clark, no. 171, 2008, p. 21

--- *Stan and his Gran* by Sarah Garland, no. 154, 2005, p. 23
--- *The Aliens are Coming* by Colin McNaughton, no. 174, 2009, p. 17
--- *The Great Peper Caper* by Oliver Jeffers, no. 174, 2009, p. 18
--- *The Odd Egg* by Emily Gravette, no. 171, 2008, p. 21
--- *The Way Back Home* by Oliver Jeffers, no. 169, 2009, p. 16
--- *While You are Sleeping* by Alexis Deacon, no. 157, 2006, p. 18
--- *Zoo-ology* by Joëller Jolivet, no. 174, 2009, p. 18
---*Wings, Horns & Claws* by Chris Wormell, no. 167, 2007, p. 17

Sample Reviews for the Case of Jacob

All the discussed books are catalogued by the same link covering November 2006: http://www.achuka.co.uk/achukareviews/2006/11/ [accessed 29.09.2009]

Sample Reviews for the Case of Julia Eccleshare

(*Lovereading* catalogue books by title and author without dating their entries. I will list them accordingly. All titles are accessed 01.09. 2009. Eccleshare's newspaper reviews from *The Guardian* follow each respective reference to *Lovereading*, and will therefore not repeat the title and author. The reviews are sorted by date of appearance in *The Guardian*.)

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Appendix

Lovereading and the archive of *Achuka* date back to the autumn of 2005, which forms a practical point of departure. Since *Carousel* does not offer a searchable electronic archive, their paper issues have been my starting point in order to track down titles reviewed by every sample. To limit the workload, their summer issues are omitted, starting with the autumn issue of 2005 and ending with the spring issue of 2009. Both statistic counts and other investigations have been carried out on reviews from this time period, but in order to give a fuller picture, a few examples date back to 2003. My focus months have been May and November since the newspapers usually review more books before summer and Christmas, but sometimes longer periods have been necessary to ensure valid samples. The selections are explained consecutively.

All newspaper reviews have been located through the electronic archive, Lexis Library (http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/legal/). I have searched by the term 'review' in combination with 'teenage fiction', 'picture book', 'children's book', 'young adult fiction', 'children's fiction' and 'graphic novel'. In addition I have searched by the name of the critics writing the most reviews on children's literature: Amanda Craig, Julia Eccleshare, Kate Kellaway, Stephanie Merrit, Nicolette Jones and Philip Ardagh. Since some reviews are catalogued in the same manner as adult books, for the focus months I have also made additional searches by the date and number of the page where I have already registered a review. This method fails to identify the reviews written by those critics who are not usually reviewing children's books and which are published separate from other children's book reviews. This anomaly is most likely to have affected some young adult fiction.

Newspaper and journal supplements are not included. Since *The Times Educational Supplement* is omitted, I have also excluded reviews from the 'education pages' of *The Guardian*. Due to some inconsistencies both in the newspaper archive and on my part, reviews that are titled only by the title of the book may be referenced sometimes with the book title in brackets and sometimes with reference to both title and book author. In the footnotes I always refer to title and author when this information is not given in the text.