A Guide for Children's Literature Teachers and Students

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By

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For our children,

Federico and Micaela

and

Pablo

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most surprising things about the term "literature" is that, etymologically speaking, it is a *contradictio in terminis* (Rodríguez Adrados 2014, 29, 597). The reason is twofold: on the one hand, the word "literature" – which comes from the Latin noun "littera" or "līt̄era" and "littera" in turn stems from the European root "deph-" ("to stamp") – only applies to the written word (Roberts and Pastor 2013, 38; Watkins 2011, 16); on the other, it should be borne in mind that before the appearance of literacy there was only "oral literature."

The second surprising thing about literature is that human beings seem to have felt a natural need to tell – *and* to listen to – stories since times immemorial (e.g. Gurdon 2019, 23; Rodríguez Adrados 2014, 31-37; Salmon 2008; Wainryb 2003, 1). More specifically, Irma-Kaarina Ghosn has affirmed that "we humans have a deep-rooted need for stories, and children are no different in this regard" (2013, 11). The implication of this has led several scholars to use different labels to describe our inborn predisposition for stories. For example, Ghosn's *Homo narrans* (2013) and Jonathan Gottschall's *Homo fictus* (2013). There is a particularly fascinating approach to this issue, though: Juan Luis Arsuaga, who approaches this theme from an archeological perspective and has analyzed the importance of storytelling since pre-historic times, argues that this has been the traditional way to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next, something that would not have been possible without grandparents, the living repositories of knowledge, experience, and wisdom (Arsuaga 2006, 81; see also Benton and Fox 1990, 101).

True. No matter whether we approach storytelling orally or in writing, what is obvious is that it has been a source of information and wisdom for millennia. For this reason, we firmly believe that it should continue to play a major role in children's education nowadays. To our view, storytelling is so essential that we cannot overlook this quote often attributed to Albert Einstein: "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales" (Giorgis 2019, xi). This is far from being a wisecrack. On the contrary, the numerous benefits reading provides at several levels – linguistic, psycho-cognitive,

social, cultural, etc. – have been supported by research.[1] In any case, the first part of chapter 7 "Children's literature: Benefits and strategies" is devoted to this issue.

The benefits literature brings are obvious. Therefore, if it can be so enriching to a person's life, it seems logical to think that it should be part of our education as early as possible. As Susan Engel says, "…[t]he stories we tell and listen to shape who we are… Without living in a world of stories, children can never attain full literacy" (1995, vii; ellipsis added). For her part, Maryanne Wolf makes a similar point when she points out that "[r]eading changes our lives, and our lives shape our reading" (2008, 158). And finally, as Martha C. Nussbaum puts it, "[s]tories learnt in childhood become powerful constituents of the world we inhabit as adults" (2016, 36). In effect, fostering storytelling from a very early age is an excellent way to turn children into good readers in adulthood. One of the advantages is that it will enable them to develop their linguistic and literary competence, essential for their personal, academic, professional, and social life or, as Li Gao has expressed it, "[r]eading is central to human development because it underpins the individual's development in modern society" (2023, 4726). A few years before Gao, Eurydice, the Education-based European network, had focused on how commanding the so-called "reading competence" is to the benefit of our personal, professional, and social life: "The written word is present everywhere and therefore reading is a fundamental skill which is increasingly needed in almost every sphere of life. *A wide range of reading skills, including digital reading, are essential for an individual's personal and social fulfilment, for taking an informed and active part in society and exercising full rights of citizenship*" (2011, 7; emphasis added; consult also Sánchez Canales 2015, 11-17). Naomi Baron, for her part, shows how possessing a good literary competence has turned out to be most helpful for children, young people, and adults at an academic level. To give just one example, drawing on the data of a PISA test – 15-year-olds – of 2009, Naomi Baron has demonstrated that those students who read fiction scored higher than those who did not (see Baron 2021, 70-79).[2]

[1] This issue has been extensively addressed. Consult among others Benton and Fox (1990, 1-32), Brewster and Ellis (2002, 14-23), Cárdenas et al. (2020, 1-21), Celik (2019, 215-223), Ghosn (2013, 13-21), Gurdon (2019, 91-115), Leland and Lewison (2018, 17-38), Luri (2020, 473-7), Pfost and Heyne (2023, 127-137), Richards and Rotgers (2001), Wolf (2008; 2018).

[2] There are excellent studies about the importance of fostering reading from an early age such as Bland (2015, 24-36), Cárdenas et al. (2020); Celik (2019, 215-223), Gao

It is clear by now that reading is at "the heart of education" (*G*iorgis 2019, xvi) and, just because of this, it should be at the core of every child's life. During a child's first years storytelling/reading should be a pleasurable activity if what we seek is to engage them in it.[3] It should not be ignored, however, that it is also a "difficult," often solitary task and as such it entails a lot of (self-)discipline and hard work.[4] Pleasure and hard work, two sides of the same coin, should be concurrently worked on at least once children begin to be more independent readers.

There is a further aspect pertaining to storytelling/reading that is worth mentioning. Numerous investigations have demonstrated that reading as a shared experience strengthens emotional bonds not only between parents and their children, but also between siblings – in case parents read out loud at home – between teachers and their students, as well as between classmates.[5] This issue will be briefly addressed in chapter 6 "Children's literature and the importance of 'deep reading'."

❖

Once the importance of storytelling and reading has been presented and justified, we will shortly explain who we are and what has moved us to write a book like *A Guide for Children's Literature Teachers and Students*.

One of us (Gustavo), with a background in English Studies, has been a university teacher of literature since the 1998-1999 academic year. First, teaching British and US literature to undergraduates and PhD students in the Faculty of Philology (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) from 1999 to 2010; and later, teaching English and children's literature in the Faculty of Teacher Training (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) from 2010 to the present time. The professional experience gained at Complutense University has been very enriching from a personal, academic, and professional point of view because for years it gave me the possibility to

(2023, 4725-4740), and Pfost and Heyne (2023, 127-137).

[3] Many scholars have focused on the importance of presenting reading as pleasurable. Among others, we recommend Baron (2021, 21-22), Leland and Mitzi (2018, 1-3), Martín Garzo (2009, 145-149, 169-173, 177-181), and Wright (1995, 3-5).

[4] Bloom (2001, 21-22; 2002, 21), Ghosn (2013, 85-92), and Morpurgo (2015, vii) can be consulted.

[5] This is an often-neglected topic. This is why we include a number of studies where it can be looked at. For instance, Baron (2021, 67-69), Basanta (2017, 40-50), Bland (2015, 24-36), Enriquez (2023, 313-326), Farrar et al. (2024, 993-1005), Gurdon (2019, 41-66); King et al. (2024, 170-181), and Manguel (1996, 109-123).

intensively work on 17th- to 21th- century literary texts with philologist students; this background has enabled me to resort to the knowledge and experience acquired throughout those years to share it with my students of Early Years and Primary Education at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. The reader will find that one of our main goals is to make a literary approach to children's literature – traditionally disregarded for decades as pointed out by scholars like Maria Nikolajeva and Irma-Kaarina Ghosn among others – without ignoring its clear didactic component.

The other author (Amaya) holds a PhD in Education with a background in English teaching as L2 at an Early Years, Primary Education and High School level. Specializing in bilingual education with 15-year-plus teaching experience, I think I have played a relevant role in the development of my students' linguistic competence. Between 2017 and 2022 I taught courses connected with English teaching and children's literature in several state and private universities. From the 2022-2023 academic year to the present time, I have been working at the Department of "Filologías y su Didáctica" (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), where I have been teaching courses in English as L2, English teaching and children's literature.

To conclude, we will simply say that when we began to work on this book, we thought that it would be a useful tool not only for university students; it would also be a good resource for those school and university teachers who want to turn it into dynamic, training and support classroom material. Through a careful selection of literary works this *Guide* aims to promote holistic learning which fosters the development of the student's linguistic competence, on the one hand, and a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity, on the other. To put it in simple terms, the main objective of this book is to bring the world of literature closer to students in such a way that it favours their academic and personal growth.

❖

One of the difficulties we have encountered throughout the writing process of *A Guide for Children's Literature Teachers and Students* has been to make a realistic proposal that fits into a market where excellent book-length studies have been published. (See the "Bibliography" section for a detailed account of these books.) And a second difficulty we have had is connected with the delimitation of the book's "target audience." We will briefly explain both.

As far as the first difficulty is concerned, we soon realized that there are dozens of excellent books about children's literature written in English and Spanish, our two main working languages in Spain. Some of these are full-length studies which address general aspects of children's literature from a literary-historical point of view. These are either general histories of this discipline such as Seth Lerer's *Children's Literature*: *A Reader's History from Aesop to Harry Potter* (2009), and John Rowe Townsend's *Written for Children: An Outline of English-language Children's Literature* (2003), or overviews of it like Kimberley Reynolds's *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (2011).

There is a second category of children's literature-based books – they are teaching-oriented. These books include no details – or just very general ones – about what has been mentioned in the first group above. Among others, Geoff Fox's *Teaching Literature. Nine to Fourteen* (1990), Janice Bland's *Teaching English to Young Learners: Critical Issues in Language Teaching with 3-12 Year Olds* (2015), Pedro C. Cerrillo's Torremocha's *Literatura Infantil y Juvenil y educación literaria: Hacia una nueva enseñanza de la literatura* (2007), Juan Cervera's *Teoría de la literatura infantil* (2003), Irma-Kaarina Ghosn's *Storybridge to Second Language Literacy: The Theory, Research, and Practice of Teaching English with Children's Literature* (2013), Christine H. Mitzi Lewison's *Teaching Children's Education: It's Critical!* (2018), Javier Pérez-Castilla's *Teoría y didáctica de la literatura infantil y juvenil* (2022), Ruth Wajnryb's *Stories: Narrative Activities in the Language Classroom* (2003), and Andrew Wright's *Storytelling with Children* (1995).

There is a third type, research-based studies. To give a few examples, Irma-Kaarina Ghosn's *Storybridge to Second Language Literacy: The Theory, Research, and Practice of Teaching English with Children's Literature* (2013), M.O. Grenby and Andrea Immel's *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature* (2009), M.O. Grenby and Kimberley Reynolds's *Children's Literature Studies: A Research Handbook* (2011), Peter Hunt's *Understanding Children's Literature* (2005), Eleni Loizou and Susan L. Recchia's *Research on Young Children's Humor: Theoretical and Practical Implications for Early Childhood* Education (2019), Maria Nikolajeva's *Reading for Learning*: *Cognitive Approaches to Children's Literature* (2014), Emer O'Sullivan's *Comparative Children's Literature* (2005), and Maria Tatar's *The Cambridge Companion to Fairy Tales* (2015).

Above we have referred to two difficulties encountered at the initial stage of the writing process. One way to work them out was to look at them as if

they were only one problem to solve. It soon became clearer and clearer to us that our book would integrate the three approaches. In this way our "target audience" could be, in first place, school and university teachers of Early Years and Primary Education who either have children's literature as part of their syllabus or they simply want to teach content-based subjects through literature. Secondly, pre-service teachers of Early Years and Primary Education are also an ideal "target audience" of *A Guide for Children's Literature Teachers and Students*. This *Guide* can be very useful for them not only because it attends to key aspects covered in any children's literature course such as what it is, what genres it encompasses, a literary-historical outline of it, etc. but also because in our book they will find plenty of research-oriented ideas that will help them write their final project. And last but not least, a general readership interested in children's literature. Parents with a keen interest in children's literature could particularly benefit from this *Guide.*

❖

To conclude this Introduction, we would like to show what the reader will find in *A Guide for Children's Literature Teachers and Students*. In chapter 1 "Literature: General considerations" we will look at general aspects about literature such as how it was transmitted orally for millennia until it could be put in writing thanks to the invention of the first alphabets some 5,000 to 6,000 years ago.

In chapter 2 "Children's literature: Definition and approaches," on the one hand we have attempted to define what children's literature is, not an easy task because there is no general agreement among scholars; and on the other, under the heading "Approaches" we will explain that different academics have dated the beginning of children's literature in different times and what arguments they have used to defend their respective approaches.

Chapter 3 "Children's literature: Genres" is particularly useful for students for at least two reasons. First, because it will give them a good idea about how this literature has been categorized; and second, because it will prepare them for the following chapter.

Chapter 4 "Children's literature: Theory and research" is also very helpful for students, especially when it comes to preparing a class project. In this chapter they will learn some of the main approaches to literary criticism such as "Reader response theories" and the "Psychoanalytical Approaches," among others.

Chapter 5 "Children's literature: A brief literary-historical overview," the longest, is a succinct study of some of the most important literary movements and writers for children of the past three centuries or so. This chapter will not only provide students with a good literary background that they will need to have in their professional career but also Early Years and Primary teachers as well as a general readership interested in this topic.

In chapter 6 "Children's literature and the importance of 'deep reading'" we will give some keys to reading at different levels through practical examples. Hence the term "deep reading." This has been an often-disregarded aspect in children's literature for decades. For this reason, we want to place an emphasis on the literary aspect of literature classes without underrating the pedagogical component inherent in it.

Chapter 7 "Children's literature: Benefits and strategies" justifies, on the one hand, the benefits children's literature brings at several levels: linguistic, psycho-cognitive, social, etc.; and on the other, it offers a number of strategies that will enrich teacher's literature classes.

Chapter 8 "Children's literature: The writing competence" focuses on key elements such as plot, characters, setting, etc. present in stories whether they be folktales, fables, or myths. Here key ideas about each element will be provided with the aim of preparing the reader for the last chapter.

In chapter 9 "Children's literature: The importance of literature across the curriculum. A proposal within an Early Years and Primary Spanish context" we have made a hands-on proposal based on what the Spanish National Curriculum sets out for Early Years and Primary Education. Our proposal consists in showing how literature can used to Early Years and Primary students' advantage from a personal and academic point of view.

Our *Guide* concludes with two Appendices. "Appendix A" includes a selection of literary texts (nursery rhymes, poems, and extracts of tales and novels) read by Rebeca Mahoney, a teacher of Early Years and Primary Education who has been resorting to children's literature for more than 15 years.

In "Appendix B" the reader will find exercises to foster creative writing. The best thing about this writing practice is that teachers can adapt them to their students' age and level.

1

LITERATURE: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is commonly known that the word "literature" comes from the Latin noun "littera" or "lītera" ("letter"). Hence, from a purely etymological point of view, "literature" only applies to the written word. As Cardinal John Henry Newman appropriately points out, "literature, from the derivation of the word, implies writing, not speaking" (2015 [1852], 184). We should not forget, though, that before the appearance of literacy, there was "oral literature," which is a *contradictio in terminis* (Rodríguez Adrados 2014, 29, 597).

In effect, there is a *contradictio in terminis* because "littera" comes from the European root "deph-" – "to stamp" and by extension "to print." Watkins (2011, 16), and Roberts and Pastor (2013, 38) specify that the noun "littera" or "lītera" was possibly borrowed from the Greek *diphtherā* (διφθέρα) via Etruscan. Words we are so familiar with such as "literary" – and other derivatives like "literal" and "literally" – and "alliteration" – as well as derivatives like "alliterative" – are also probably due to this loanword.

Leaving aside the concept of "oral" and "written" literature from a strictly etymological stance, it is noteworthy saying that literature is a human universal (e.g. Gurdon 2919, 23; Rodríguez Adrados 2014, 31-37; Wajnryb 2003, 1) and, as such, it is a primary human need (Aparicio Molina and Pérez Agustín 2020, 9) which has led scholars like Hugh Crago to regard storytelling as "a process almost as fundamental to human life as breathing" (2005, 185). More in particular, Michèle Petit refers to narration as an anthropological need (2016, 114-116) and Irma-Kaarina Ghosn to the fact that "…we humans have a deep-rooted need for stories, and children are no different in this regard" (2013, 11). In both cases then storytelling is presented as something inherent in our nature. Finally, Isaac Asimov raises two pertinent questions about the role storytelling has been playing in the human being's life for a long time: "Isn't storytelling what one does when one sits around a campfire? Aren't many social gatherings devoted to reminiscences and doesn't everyone like to tell a story of something that really happened?" (1995, 48). For their part, Andrew Newberg and Mark R.

Waldman focus on the importance of language in the process of communicating with others. To our mind, these two neuroscientists hit the nail on the head when they claim that "[w]ithout language, we would find ourselves living in a state of emotional chaos" (2013, 3) and conclude that "[l]anguage shapes our behavior, and each word we use is imbued with multitudes of personal meaning" (3). We firmly believe that this statement is also valid if the word "language" is replaced with the word "literature."

Abounding in the theme of literature as a human universal Teresa Colomer interestingly refers to storytelling as access to the collective imaginary (2008, 5-20), which reminds us of Carl Gustav Jung's "collective unconscious" ("kollektives Unbewusstes"). We are also of the opinion that it is most likely to have been part of the human being even before the appearance of *Homo sapiens*. Jonathan Gottschall explicitly says that "[o]ur hunger for meaningful patterns translates into a hunger for story" (2013, 104). In other words, we have a natural tendency to tell – *and* to listen to – stories. This is why Gottschall proposes the term *Homo fictus* or storytelling man, while Yuval Noah Harari refers to the human being as the "*Homo sapiens* [who] is a storytelling animal" (2019, 313), and Irma-Kaarina Ghosn defines the human being as a "*Homo narrans*" (2013, 3-4). Ruth Wajnryb, who also looks at human beings in light of their inborn ability to tell stories, puts it in the following terms: "Stories are everywhere. Story-telling is both universal and timeless. There's no human collective that doesn't have its stories – going back as far as the peoples of prehistory whose cave drawings are evidence of the earliest urge to communicate a story" (2003, 1). Ana Mª Pérez Cabello underscores the importance of storytelling by referring to it as one of the most natural, spontaneous ways of communication (2009, 31), a claim that takes us back to Gottschall's term *Homo fictus* or Ghosn's *Homo narrans.* Regarding Juan Luis Arsuaga, he focuses on the importance that storytelling has played since pre-historic times. He specifically places the emphasis on the role played by grandparents, who throughout the years have been able to acquire not only knowledge and experience but have also developed the ability to tell stories (2006, 81). One and a half decade before, Benton and Fox had focused on the significance of storytelling because "since the earliest societies oral literature as entertainment first and then as a way to pass on values has been attached a lot of importance" (1990, 101). Like Benton and Fox, and Arsuaga, Christian Salmon highlights in *Storytelling: La machine à fabriquer des histoires et à formater les esprits* (2008) the relevance of transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next. But not only this. He also addresses the importance of storytelling and its beneficial – and less beneficial – effects from a psychological, political, and economic

viewpoint. Apart from this, he examines the current negative connotations of the term "récit" ("story"). As happens with the noun "fable" – etymologically "tell" or "speak" as explained below – "récit" is often associated with the idea of "inventing." Salmon rightly says that storytelling was an effective way to narrate universal facts; conversely, nowadays it may serve a less noble cause (2008, 16). Therefore, when looked at in this light, it may be claimed that the noun "récit" – like "fable" – has not progressed but regressed. And finally, as far as storytelling is concerned, we would like to retrieve a most enlightening explanation Martin Amis gives in *Inside Story* (2020), an autobiographical novel – or "novelized autobiography" (2020, 83) to use his own term. At one point of his narrative Amis brings up an example used by the also British novelist E.M. Foster, who addresses the difference between a story and a plot in his well-known *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). Amis says that, according to the author of *A Passage to India* (1924), "'[t]he king died, and the queen died of grief' is still a story. To mutate into a plot, a story needs a further element – easily supplied, here, by a comma and an adverb" (2020, 61). However, Martin Amis, who disagrees with this idea in this instance, believes that the example provided by Foster continues to be within the realm of the story. To move forward he employs Foster's sentence, and this is what he points out: "*The king died, and then the queen died, ostensibly of grief* is a plot. Or a hook. Plots demand constant attention, but a good hook can stand alone and untouched, like an anchor, and keep things fixed and stable in any weather. Plots and hooks yield the same desideratum: they set the reader a question, with the implicit assurance that the question will be answered" (61; emphasis in the original).

Going back to storytelling, it is clear by now that it is consubstantial to the human being. What about literature itself? How far can its origins be traced back? This issue is taken up by Francisco Rodríguez Adrados, who timely points to ancient religious festivities as arguably the oldest antecedent of literature. For instance, Babilonian *Enuma Elish* – a New Year celebration – Akkadian *Etana*, Sumerian and Greek legends and cosmogonies (2014, 34). The early stories narrated in *Genesis* about the first human beings such as Adam and Eve (1: 26-31), and the First Flood that Noah had to face building his well-known Ark (6-9), a myth inspired in the Babilonian myth of Nukku, are part of our Judeo-Christian tradition. *Genesis* even refers to the myth (?) that "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" (11: 1). Dating the origins of literature then does not seem to be an extremely problematic thing to do. Can the same be said of children's literature? In the next chapter we will first attempt to define this elusive concept; and second, we will try to trace back its origins.

2

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: DEFINITION AND APPROACHES

If one reads the title of this chapter, what one first expects is to read one definition of the term "children's literature." In this case, one would probably assume that there is general agreement about what this term means. However, since it is not *that* simple some clarification needs to be made in this respect.

On the one hand, there are scholars like Harold Bloom who openly reject the label of "children's literature": "I do not accept the category of 'Children's Literature', which had some use and distinction a century ago, but now all too often is a mask for the dumbing-down that is destroying our literary culture" (2002, 15-16). One of his arguments to support this rotund claim is that the vast majority of what is commercially offered under the category of "children's literature" would be inadequate to meet the needs of any reader of any age at any time. Apart from this, he points out that most of his readings between the age of 5 and 15 had been part of his reading up to the moment when his 2002 book was published – he was 70 years old at that time. This is why this book is entitled *Stories and Poems for Extremely Intelligent Children of All Ages*. Another argument of his to back up his proposal is that fantasy "is the nineteenth-century form of the ancient genre of romance" (2002, 17). Among the inheritors of this genre are Rudyard Kipling, Esther Nesbit, and Lewis Carroll – some of his favourite writers and three key authors examined in Chapter 5 "Children's literature: A brief literary-historical overview."

There is a second scholar, Kimberley Reynolds, who is not as radical as Bloom. However, she finds it difficult to see children's literature as a genre. As Reynolds puts it, we should approach this term from two different perspectives. The first approach is the one usually made outside the academic world, where children's literature as works written by adults for children "is not too problematic" (2011, 1). The problems come when someone wants to teach – and do research in – children's literature. In this

sense, drawing on Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan* (1984), Reynolds points to the "'impossibility' of children's literature" (2011, 2). A major reason is that there is not a fixed body of texts that make up what can be considered as "children's literature" (2-3, 31-60).

For his part, Seth Lerer (2009) advocates the theory that children's literature can be traced back at least as early as the times of Aesop's fables. His point of departure is that long before John Newbery, an 18th-century editor who was the first publisher to open up the market of children's books for children, the ancient Greeks and Romans had already devoted time to children to the extent that "Aesop's fables lived for two millennia on classroom and family shelves" (2009, 1). These stories, told by the well-known Greek slave and storyteller who lived in Greece sometime between the late seventh and the mid-sixth centuries, "were told and written for the young, and books originally offered to mature readers were carefully recast or excerpted for youthful audiences (1). And he goes a little further when he rightly claims that "[n]o author has been so intimately and extensively associated with children's literature as Aesop" (35).

There is a third approach which has brought relative consensus among children's literature scholars.[6] These academics put the date of the origins of this literature as late as the mid-eighteenth century. More specifically, after the publication of the English printer John Newbery's collection of poems and nursery rhymes entitled *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744). (This thesis or proposal will be explained in more detail below.)

Once the possible approaches to children's literature have been explained, we find that it is the moment to try to clear up what this term means. Many definitions have been given for the concept of "children's literature." For the sake of brevity and clarity we will offer just a few.

According to Bland and Lütge, children's literature "is generally used to cover all literature for children and adolescents, including oral literature, such as fairy tales and nursery rhymes, graphic narratives and young adult literature, reflecting the eclectic interests of children" (2014, 1). Short et al., who give a similar definition, underscore the need to think in terms of "high-

[6] Key scholars who approach children's literature like this are, among others, Anderson (2020, 3-6), Aparicio Molina and Pérez Agustín (2020, 10-17), Cerrillo Torremocha (2007, 34-35), Cervera (2003, 15-19), Colomer (2008, 63-82, 97-114), Grenby (2009, 4), Hunt (2005a, 5), Rudd (2005, 15), Rundell (2019, 18-33), and Townsend (2003, 3-36).

quality trade books for children from birth to adolescence" (2018, 4). As far as Anderson is concerned, he explicitly approaches children's literature addressing the "fairy tale," which is "a tale with a marked fantastic or magical content and a high moral standpoint" (2020, 1). He hastens to clarify that a fairy tale should not be confused with a folk tale, where the magic or fantastic element is missing. Typical elements present in fairy tales, which except for the second last one are also present in folk tales, include sibling rivalry, the quest for the solution to a problem, sympathy of the reader/listener for the protagonists – i.e., identification with them – a supernatural agent or helper intervenes, and a final reward for the good ones and punishment for the bad ones (2). (We will take this issue up again in Chapter 5 "Children's literature: A brief literary-historical overview.") And finally, there are authors like Irma-Kaarina Ghosn who, for reasons of simplicity and pragmatism, use the terms children's literature and storybooks interchangeably (2013, 5).

If we take the previous definitions into account, it seems that a literary text can be categorized as "children's literature" as long as it is a "high quality" book which appeals to children and adolescents. In other words, at least these two criteria should be borne in mind: on the one hand, the main recipient is the child; on the other, the child accepts a given book as something that meets their needs (see Pérez Castilla 2022, 22). This said, we should move onto the next big issue: what is a child?

3

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: GENRES

Above we have succinctly addressed the terms "literature" and "children's literature," including how different scholars have approached the latter category. Leaving Harold Bloom's radical view aside, we hold that, like Seth Lerer among others, its origins can be traced back as far as the ancient Greeks and Romans. This said, the moment to clarify what a "child" is has come.

It is true that there is no general agreement as regards what age range we mean by the word "child" because it is different from place to place. However, we will see that in general terms age range does not vary significantly. For reasons of space, we will only give a few examples.

First, according to resolution 44/25 included in the *United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child* adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1989, "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." If we look at this definition from a merely educational point of view, we can say that a child will remain a child until they start university. Second, in order to delimit a child's age range, we can take into account to whom children's literature caters. In this case, in the US and the UK at least it is someone roughly aged 0 to 16 (Grenby and Reynolds 2011, 4; Reynolds 2011, 29-30). Nonetheless, they hasten to add that this varies from country to country. Third, we would like to retrieve the definition of "children's literature" given by Short et al., who regard it as "quality trade books for children from birth to early adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children through prose and poetry, fiction and non-fiction" (2018, 4). And fourth, in Spain there is an added problem. In order to translate the term "children's literature" we use "literatura infantil y juvenil." Roughly speaking, "literatura infantil" is considered until the age of 12, when children finish their primary education; and then "literatura juvenil" would range from the age of 12 to 16 or 17, when children conclude their high school years. As anticipated before, the age group does not vary very radically. When we talk about "children's literature" in *A Guide for*

Children's Literature Teachers and Students, we will be referring to "literatura infantil" because our students – our main "target audience," but certainly not the only one – will be teachers of Early Years and Primary Education.

Once the term "child" has been delimited from an educational viewpoint, it would be useful to devote some space to literary genres – i.e. the types of books or literary compositions. We can establish four clear-cut types or compositions on the basis of formal and content-related aspects: (1) Fiction (science fiction, historical fiction, romance, etc.); (2) Poetry (epic, narrative, lyric, etc.); (3) Drama (tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, etc.); and (4) Nonfiction (essay, biography, autobiography, etc.). When it comes to literary genres in children's literature, the list gets longer and more complicated. The categorization below is based on Short et al. (2018, 57-192). (In the next chapter we will give a brief literary-historical overview of children's literature where we will address many of the following genres in specific literary works.)

(1) Picturebooks and Graphic novels (baby books, interactive books, recordable books, "touch and feel" books, wordless books, alphabet books, picture storybooks, graphic novels, etc.)
(2) Poetry (nursery rhymes, songs, anthologies of poetry, etc.)
(3) Traditional Literature (myths, epics and legends, folktales, fables, etc.)
(4) Fantasy and Science Fiction (animal fantasy, miniature worlds, suspense and the supernatural, science fiction, etc.)
(5) Realistic Fiction (peer friendships and bullies, relationships within families, difficult life decisions and coming of age, etc.)
(6) Historical Fiction (mystery and adventure, resistance and challenges to injustice, facing adversity through relationships, etc.)
(7) Nonfiction: Biography and Informational Books (biological science, social science, the humanities, etc.)
(8) Literature for a Diverse Society (multicultural literature such as African American literature, American Indian literature, Latino literature, etc., and international literature like the one by world religions).

4

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: THEORY AND RESEARCH

Roughly speaking, the study of children's literature as a discipline or research area started in English-speaking countries and in Scandinavia in the late 1960s. And then it has continued to spread to other countries worldwide from the 1970s to the present time (Hahn 2015, 123-124). Below we will address the different types of approaches to the study of children's literature such as the "Reader-response theory," "Comparative children's literature" and the "Psychoanalytical Approach."

To start with, it is worth saying that no matter how we approach children's literature we "recognize literature as a discipline and separate course of study, a common focus in high schools and universities" (Short et al. 2018, 24) rather than "as a material used to teach reading, math, science, or social studies" (24). At this point it should be clarified that children's literature has not always been perceived "as a discipline and separate course of studies" (Hunt 2005, 10-11), as an "area of research and teaching" (Reynolds 2011, 3; see also Hunt 2005, 23-24), or as an academic study/discipline (e.g. Hahn 2015, 124; Lerer 2009, 8). One important reason for this is that it has been too dependent on pedagogy. To express it more openly, if children's literature has not been taken too seriously – at best this did not begin to happen until the late 1990s – it is mainly due to the idea that many scholars and critics in this discipline "are interested in the pedagogical aspects of children's literature, what they look for in children's books is subject matter, ideology, and didactic and educational values" (Nikolajeva 1996, 4). We want to be clear about the fact that, much the same as scholars like Maria Nikolajeva, we do not underestimate the value of pedagogy in this area. On the contrary, like her, we simply find that the moment to devote more time to literary aspects has come (5). Consequently, it is not so much a question of marginalizing the pedagogical component as a question of retrieving the literary aspects of these texts to use them to children's advantage. (This is precisely one of our goals as the reader will have the chance to see throughout *A Guide for Children's Literature Teachers and Students*.) Now

we will move onto what has brought us here: children's literature as an area of research and teaching.

Many approaches to (children's) literature have been proposed for the past six decades or so: "Functionalism and Structuralism," "Gender Studies," "Multicultural and Postcolonial Studies," "Postmodernism," or "Cultural Studies."[7] For practical reasons we will look at a few approaches which are more present in our classes.

We will begin with the so-called "Reader-response theory," very similar to "Child-oriented theories." Although they could be explained together, we have decided to separate them because as Johnston timely recalls, when it comes to applying the "Reader-response theory" we need to be very careful because we are talking about children's literature. What we have in mind is a child – sometimes a young adult – whose education is still in its infancy. Consequently, "[t]heir competences and literary experiences may be very limited… their knowledge is unsystematic and achronological" (Johnston 2011, 135; ellipsis added).

First introduced by Louise Rosenblatt in the late 1930s, the "Reader-response theory" dates back from the late 1960s and 1970s. As its name indicates, the focus is on readers, so the main objective is to enable them to bring to their reading all their experiences – i.e. their background. This is as important for reader-response theorists as what the author has actually written. Seen in this light, "[r]eading is a fusion of text and reader" (Short et al. 2018, 24), which ineluctably leads to the often-cited claim that there are as many interpretations for a text as readers. Understandably, since there are not two readers with an identical background, they will interpret different things in that "fusion of text and reader." According to Short et al., this "view of reading has important implications for the way you encourage children to respond to literature" (25). And they add that "children first need an opportunity for personal response to literature as they make connections between their lives and the texts to construct their initial interpretations"

[7] For a more extended analysis of "Functionalism and Structuralism," see among others Moya Guijarro (2014, 20-27), and Nodelman and Reimer (2003, 231-237); for a more detailed study of "Gender Studies," consult for example Johnston (2011, 151-161); for an account of "Multicultural and Postcolonial Studies," see for instance Bradford (2011, 162-170), and Short et al. (2018, 169-192); for further information about "Postmodernism," consult among others Butler (2011, 178-184); and finally, for an overview of "Cultural Studies," see Nodelman and Reimer (2003, 243-246).

(25). This is a beautiful idea. However, we firmly believe that it is not enough. This may be a good point of departure to engage children towards a higher level of understanding (see chapter 6 "Children's literature and the importance of 'deep reading'"). As Short et al. rightly say, it is like this because "[c]hildren need to move from sharing personal responses into dialogue where they critique their individual responses by returning to the text and their lives for evidence to support their interpretations and deepen their understandings" (25). This takes us straight to the second approach we will briefly look at: "Child-oriented theories" (consult Reynolds 2011, 53-57).

Drawing on what Peter Hunt calls "childist criticism," Kimberly Reynolds holds that children's voices should not ignored. As she appropriately puts it, "'childist criticism" has made "attempts to understand how children used and responded to texts in the past" (2011, 54). And then she uses a strong argument that has turned out to be very helpful in our classes: "…good research in children's literature requires good knowledge of its history, texts, and genres, its use of visual elements and constructions of childhood across cultures and periods, and, related to these, elements of style that have evolved specifically in response to the task of writing for the young" (60). This is a good point if we accept – we do – that "Children's literature's links to the past work at multiple levels" (Grenby and Reynolds 2011, 1). To give one example, reading and retelling stories to children is a way to establish a dialogue between those texts and what we can think nowadays. They can help children see how people thought and lived to show them how life has evolved. In this way, children's literature can be regarded "as a seedbed for change [that] can be seen in the areas of equality and diversity" (2). To our mind, this is an excellent way to help our students work on the so-called "critical thinking competence," briefly addressed in chapter 6 "Children's literature and the importance of 'deep reading'." In this respect, particularly interesting is the reference Reynolds makes to the work by Aidan Chambers, who "encourages children to talk about books in a critical way through the creation of reading communities in which readers share enthusiasms, discuss things they find puzzling, identify patterns, and make connections between books" (Reynolds 2011, 54-55; see also Benton and Fox 1990, 5). However, when we examine this approach to reading, we should not obviate that although reading is a "solitary" task or a "difficult pleasure"[8] as well, on many occasions children's reading takes place in small groups. The implications of this are by no means insignificant. This accounts for the fact

[8] Reading as a solitary, difficult task is briefly addressed by Bloom (2001, 21-22), Borges (2007, 25), Luri (2015, 292), and Savater (2019, 92), among others.

that when reading is carried out like this, children influence each other, which entails that "one's child response (laughter, fear) tends to infect others; response is contagious" (Johnston 2011, 135).

Another key scholar who approaches children's literature like this is Maria Tatar. As suggested by Reynolds, Tatar "is interested in how the texts of childhood affect readers, including how adults remember the experience of childhood reading and differences between reading as an adult and reading as a child" (2011, 56). We find this approach especially appealing to the extent that a major criterion we have used in the work selection included in the historical overview of children's literature in the next chapter – *and* in Appendix A – is along the lines of this argument. Most of those literary works made an impact on us when we were children, and we read many of those books to our children and/or our Early Years, Primary students.[9]

The next approach we will look at is "Comparative Children's Literature." We will start saying that we follow Emer O'Sullivan when she includes "Intertextuality" as a comparative area apart from the expected ones such as "Comparative Poetics," "Comparative Genre Studies," "Comparative Historiography of Children's Literature" and "Comparative History of Children's Literature Studies" (see O'Sullivan 2011, 142-145; 2005). Personally, we feel that devoting part of our teaching time to intertextuality is very beneficial to our students.[10]

It is well-known that the concept of intertextuality can be found in Bakhtin's theory explored in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), originally published in 1929, and *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), which had come out in Russia between the 1930s and the early 1940s. In both books the Russian critic advocates the idea that there is a dialogue between different texts which he calls "polyphony," that is "multi-voiced texts." A few years later, Julia Kristeva developed this concept in her book *Σημειωτική (Semeiotiké*, 1969*)* introducing the term "intertextualité." And finally, Gerard Genette, who also worked on this concept, proposed the term "palimpseste" in his 1982 homonymous book.

To our view, intertextuality, "dynamic and dialogic" (Wilkie-Stibbs 2005, 170), is a very enriching classroom strategy because "[c]omparatists seek to

[9] For a detailed account of the child-oriented approach, consult among others Enriquez (2023, 313-326), Johnston (2011, 133-141), Nodelman and Reimer (2003, 219-222), and Reynolds (2011, 128-133).
[10] Culler's full-length analysis (2001) is highly recommended.

identify what different literatures have in common, as well as the peculiarities and individual features of the various literatures, which come to light only when seen in relation to others" (O'Sullivan 2011, 142). To our view, a good point Emer O'Sullivan makes about comparative literature for children is that many of the literary texts, especially in non-English-speaking countries, are translations. "All this makes writing for children and young people a very rich seam for comparative research" (143). However, there is a problem, which has to do with the fact that "the discipline of comparative literature has routinely ignored children's literature" (143). We hold that "intertextuality" has a key role to play here.

We cannot conclude this succinct explanation about the comparative approach without mentioning that the theory of intertextuality "is also a theory of language because the reading subject, the text and the world are not only situated in language, they are also constructed by it" (Wilkie-Stibbs 2005, 170). This basically means that in order to decode a text that a reader – whether they be adults, young adults or children – has read they can draw on their background information. This includes songs the reader knows, videos watched, other stories that can be associated with it, etc. In this way, as Wilkie-Stibbs explains it, "[t]hrough *vraisemblance* the child reader has unconsciously to learn that the fictional worlds in literature are representations and constructions which refer to other texts that have been normalised: that is, those texts that have been absorbed into the culture and now regarded as 'natural'" (170).[11]

Finally, the "Psychological Approach." First of all, we should say that thanks to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) psychoanalysis and literary criticism have been interrelated. A key issue is "Freud's emphasis on the importance of childhood sexuality [which] makes the intersection of his work with children's literature particularly telling" (Butler 2011, 172-173). This connects with Bruno Bettelheim's work, more specifically with his classic *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), "in which Bettelheim reads well-known fairy tales in terms of their capacity to address children's unconscious anxieties and facilitate psychological development" (Butler 2011, 173). These fears, as Butler rightly points out, are explained through Freud's concept of repression. As can be seen throughout the rest of *A Guide for Children's Literature Teachers and Students*, Bettelheim is a reference scholar in our literature classes.

[11] Other suggested readings that focus on this topic are for example Nikolajeva (1996, 99-108, 153-187), and O'Sullivan (2011, 142-150).