Children's response to humor in translated poetry

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CHAPTER 2

Children's literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses why children's literature is hard to define, despite being familiar to many and being largely "self-explanatory." The limitations of arriving at one definition are examined with respect to textual features, intended audience, content and industry practice. The discussion then shows that children's literature is sensitive to the concept of childhood, shifting in focus and form as our views of and beliefs about childhood change over time. The historical account ends with an examination of these shifting conventions with regard to culture. Finally, a new concept called "role dualism" is proposed as an explanation of what validates the "duty" of adults as "gatekeepers" who make choices on what children can and should read. Aside from a literature review, this chapter also presents the responses gathered from interviews conducted with children's publishers in the Philippines.

2.2 The problem of defining children's literature

Since the study of children's literature became an academic field in its own right in the 1970s, much debate has revolved around the definition and scope of children's literature. According to Sale (1979: 1):

> Everyone knows children's literature until asked to define it. Is it literature read by or to people younger than some age? ... Is it literature intended for children? ... Our best definition is going to be

> very loose and unhelpful, or else cumbersomely long and unhelpful; we are better off saying we all have a pretty good idea of what children's literature includes and letting the matter rest there.

Nicholas Tucker (1990: 8) shares a similar view saying that "although most people would agree that there are obvious differences between adult and children's literature, when pressed they may find it quite difficult to establish what exactly such differences really amount to." The task can be so challenging that some scholars and critics have resigned themselves to the impossibility of reaching a definition – the "antidefiners", as Gubar calls them. An early proponent of antidefinition is John Rowe Townsend who suggested that children's literature cannot be defined because the term and the concept themselves are problematic (in Gubar 2011: 210). He comments that there is "no such thing as children's literature, there is just literature" because children's books are no different from other books in the same way that children are no different from other people (Townsend 1980: 196-197). Townsend's view acknowledges that children's literature is not subordinate – and inferior – to adult literature per se.

2.2.1 Definition according to characteristics

To abandon the act of defining children's literature is to disregard the fact that it does display characteristics that are more common to it than to other genres. For instance, Thompson and Sealey (2007) found that children's texts have different linguistic properties than those of adults. Based on three corpora – 30 texts of imaginative fiction written for a child, 317 texts of imaginative fiction written for an adult, and 114 newspaper texts – sampled from the British National Corpus, they found that in terms of the frequency of parts of speech, there were slightly more proper nouns and pronouns in children's fiction, which suggests a higher degree of reference to people. Their analysis of frequent lexical verb forms showed that the word "said" is proportionately more common in children's fiction than in adult fiction and indicated that direct speech is more prevalent in the former. This is confirmed by the high frequency of beginning and end quote marks in their corpus. As for the frequency of nouns, the word "thing" frequently appears in children's fiction but not in adult fiction which could suggest the predominance of simple and colloquial words in fiction intended for young people.

By comparing different semantic categories, Thompson and Sealey (2007) likewise identified the typical features of the world and perspectives on the world that are presented in English literature written for children. They conclude that what distinguishes children's literature from literature for an adult audience is the importance it gives to animals, food and plants, as well as to movement and speed. It is a "world of objects, and a world in which sight and size are emphasized." On the other hand, adult fiction "is distinguished by intimacy and sexuality, and is a world in which beliefs and broad questions about

life predominate, and is a world of social laws" (Thompson and Sealey 2007: 15).

These observations align with what Mcdowell (1973: 51) identified as unique characteristics of children's literature. He notes: "Children's books are generally shorter; they tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment, with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection; child protagonists are the rule; conventions are much used; the story develops within a clear-cut moral schematism which much adult fiction ignores; children's books tend to be optimistic rather than depressive; language is child-oriented; plots are of a distinctive order, probability is often disregarded; and one could go on endlessly talking of magic, and fantasy, and simplicity, and adventure." While most of these observations are still valid, there are also developments in children's publishing such as moving away from merely simple and fantastical themes toward exploring hard subjects and real-world issues. There are books now that help children understand and process sensitive topics such as immigration, war and discrimination. Some examples are the Newberry Honor book *The War That Saved My Life* (2015), the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature recipient *Front Desk* (2018), the Edgar Award nominee *From The Desk of Zoe Washington* (2020) and the New York Times bestseller, Newberry Honor book and winner of the National Book Award *Inside Out and Back Again* (2011).

Other authors have made observations similar to the ones given by McDowell. For Judith Hillman, children's literature exhibits typical childhood experiences written from a child's perspective, children or childlike characters, simple and direct plots that focus on action, a feeling of optimism and innocence (e.g., happy endings are the norm), and a tendency toward combining reality and fantasy (in Nodelman 2008: 189). For Temple, Martinez and Yokota (2014: 9), a children's book usually has three qualities: a child protagonist and an issue that concerns children, a straightforward storyline with a linear and limited sequence in a confined setting, and language that is concrete and vivid and not overly complex. But Gubar (2011: 212) objects to the generalizations expressed by other scholars in differentiating children's literature from the rest, saying that a common, universal trait cannot possibly be shared by all children's texts and that they can only exhibit a "family resemblance", a term she borrows from Wittgenstein. This is based on her study of Anglo-American children's theater in which she did not discover "a single characteristic shared by all professional children's plays that decisively differentiates them from dramas aimed at adults" (Gubar 2011: 214). Similar to children's stories, many of which came from originally adult stories such as folk tales and fairy tales, children's theater evolved from theater in general to entertain and educate children.

2.2.2 Definition according to audience

Children's literature can also be defined by authorial intent. However, this also poses problems. For instance, Maurice Sendak (2011), best known for the picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), once said in an interview that

"I do not believe that I have ever written a children's book. I do not know how to write a children's book... I didn't set out to write a children's book."

Children are not the only intended readers of children's literature. It has a dual audience, a characteristic feature even of what are considered children's classics. Wall (1991) was the first to introduce the three types of audiences of children's literature: single audience, dual audience and double audience. When the child is consistently the implied reader, the text is considered as having a single address as can be seen, according to Wall, in the works of Beatrix Potter. But when the implied reader is a child and adult at different levels, the text is said to have a double address. Such readership was typically found in texts written in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when "authors had not yet found an appropriate voice to address children" (Semizu 2013: 4). Double address "exhibited a strong consciousness of the presence of adult readers" (Wall 1991: 9 in Gannon 1994: 190). A fusion of these two is the dual address, introduced in the 20th century by writers (Birketveit 2020): when the implied reader is simultaneously a child and an adult. More specifically, the narrator "addresses adults without excluding children" (Semizu 2013: 4). The Harry Potter books seem to be an excellent example of texts with a dual address that speak to adults and children on the same level. What is helpful in her analysis is the assertion that the "voice" or "tone" used toward a child is discernible "in speech as in narration through inflection and style" (Lesnik-Oberstein 1992: 252). However, it is also criticized for the lack of distinction between narrator and author, and narratee and reader (Semizu 2013: 4) and for arguing based solely on "*her* knowledge of the 'real' child" [italics in the original] which makes her assertion only one of the many opinions on the subject (Lesnik-Oberstein 1992: 252-253).

For Wall (1991: 2), it is easier to define a children's book than children's literature. She clarifies: "If a story is written *to* children, then it is *for* children, even though it may also be for adults. If a story is not written *to* children, then it does not form part of the genre writing for children even if the author or the publisher hopes it will appeal to children" [italics in the original]. She explains that it is not the content but how it is transmitted and to whom it is said that distinguishes a book for children; in fiction, adults speak differently when addressing children (Wall 1991: 2-3). Wall's take then differs from the traditional definition of children's book based on subject and readability. In narratives for children, the narrator is often presented as an authorial persona and the narratee, though not directly addressed, and his or her characteristics are constantly being defined in the text (Wall 1991: 5). She argues that today, most children's literature published has a narrator that uses a single address: the narrator talks exclusively to a child audience. But even this is debatable as seen in many examples of crossover literature.

For instance, Sale (1979: 1) observed that children's literature includes many books that older people enjoy even when they are not reading them with or for children. Thus, to define children's literature as works made only for children – a standard definition of the genre – already poses limitations. Peter Hunt,

for example, believes that children's literature consists of only texts that were "written expressly for children who are recognizably children, with a childhood recognizable today" (Grenby 2014: 3). However, C. S. Lewis (1982), who read and enjoyed *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) in his late twenties, believes that "a children's story which is enjoyed only by children is a bad children's story" because "the good ones last", meaning that for him, children's books that also appeal to adults are certainly part of children's literature.

Adding to the complexity of arriving at one working definition of children's literature are books initially intended for adults but became popular with children (and vice versa, as in the case of *The Hobbit*). Peter Pan, for example, first appeared in a novel for adults, in J. M. Barrie's *The Little White Bird* published in 1902, and became suitable for children only after it was transformed into a play in 1904 (Rose 1984: 61). The same is true for fairy tales. While many have been (re-)written or adapted for children, fairy tales — myths and legends that evolved into folktales — had adults as their primary audience. In Tolkien's words, they echo the "dark beliefs and practices of the past" and present unpleasant subjects such as child abuse, incest and murder. According to Tolkien (1947), why children are associated with fairy tales is "an accident of our domestic history", such stories having been downgraded to the nursery when they have gone out of fashion for adults. Thus, from the beginning, children's literature has been identified as a lower genre, as explained in Section 2.4.

2.2.3 Definition according to content

During his time, Henry James proposed that children be excluded when writers discuss formerly prohibited topics so that writers could talk freely about their art (in Hughes 1978: 548) without consideration of the delicate nature of children. Nevertheless, this view has evolved. As children's book writer and illustrator Natalie Babbitt (1970) points out, there is little difference between new books for children and those written for adults in this respect: "war, disability, poverty, cruelty, all the harshest aspects of life are present in children's literature." She adds that the only books created to be "gentle and sweet" are those "written by people who have been deluded by isolation or a faulty memory into thinking that children themselves are gentle and sweet." For instance, Evasco (2011: 129-130) describes the period 1990 to 1999 of children's book production in the Philippines as stagnant, during which children's books are too safe and "wholesome", avoiding mature and serious themes.

In recent years, however, local publishers have released books on social realism, exploring a more comprehensive range of themes such as gender and child abuse. For instance, publishers in the Philippines are now able to publish about a broad range of topics especially now that there is more focus on inclusivity; there is an effort to make books for all types of children. A few years ago, Tahanan Books produced its first LGBTQ book for children called *Dalawa ang Daddy ni Billy* (Billy Has Two Dads, 2018) to promote understanding and

acceptance. Tahanan Books believes that just because something is new or different, it cannot be for children; labeling books as "wholesome" comes from an assumption of what is appropriate for children. According to the publisher: "A book about two fathers is not necessarily unwholesome. It is how you write about it that makes it appropriate for children." In Sweden, by the 1960s, fairy tales became outdated as they were believed to draw children away from real problems and children's books started to tackle the "misery, loneliness and anguish" of everyday life (Nikolajeva 1996: 68). Goldstone (1986: 791) posits that these developments happened not because child readers have become more sophisticated in decoding and comprehension but because sociocultural changes are driving publishers to select more mature books for children.

However, not all countries are receptive to such a shift. In Hungary, for instance, some bookstores placed signage at their entrances in July 2021 to inform customers that they sell "non-traditional content." The act was in response to a new law that prohibited "depicting or promoting" homosexuality and gender transitions in materials accessible to children (Washington Post, 16 July 2021). A month later, the government ordered bookstores to seal and wrap children's books containing LGBTQ themes and not to sell books or media content that depict homosexuality or gender change, whether intended for children or adults, within 200 meters of a school or church (Washington Post, 2 August 2021; Reuters, 13 August 2021). According to book publishers, the law's immediate effect is "self-censorship" as they cannot produce books for a much smaller market.

2.2.4 Definition according to industry actors

Some scholars have noted how the literary system as a whole defines children's literature. According to Townsend (1971: 10 in Nodelman 2008: 144), "the only practical definition of a children's book — absurd as it sounds — is a book which appears on a children's list by a publisher." Lesnik-Oberstein (1994: 4-5) says that the definition of a children's book is still "variously based on publishers' and editors' decisions, general trends of style and illustration, supposed or claimed readership, and theories of the creative processes which produce a book." Adarna House, the first children's publishing house in the Philippines, limits children's books to children's stories and poems, young adult novels and graphic literature and stresses that people generally know children's literature as printed books.

However, it is not only the publishers who decide what children's books should be. Other elements that make up the literary system, including award-giving bodies, do so as well. The National Children's Book Awards (NCBA) of the Philippines, for instance, defines a children's book as "a printed and bound volume that explicitly states it is for children and/or young people, hereby understood to refer to those falling within the ages 0-19 years" (Gagatiga 2011). This is an excellent example of the arbitrariness of definition ascribed to children's literature. Although the NCBA still considers those above 18 as children,

in the Philippines, legislation identifies children as persons below 18 years of age, and those over 18 years old are considered children only when "they are unable to fully take care of themselves or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of physical, mental disability or conditions" (Saplala 2007: 88). In the United States, the Newbery Medal and Honor are awarded to books for which children are an intended potential audience, with children defined as persons of ages up to and including 14. Clearly, the criteria vary from one geographical location to another.

One study reveals that adult judgment of books, as manifested in children's lists, does not always agree with that of children. Munde (1997) found that out of the 168 unique titles from the 1995 Children's Choices List as well as the combined 1995 Notable Books for Children and the 1995 Teachers' Choices List by the American Library Association, only six were identified as favorite books by both adults and children. Furthermore, Munde found that selections for humorous books varied greatly between children and adults. For instance, for the ages 8 to 10, children selected books that included shorter fiction and riddles while adults chose poetry, folktales and longer fiction. Aside from being shorter, children's choices were also less "literary" and relied more on plot action than memorable prose (Munde 1997: 225). This supports what Lehman (1991 in Stoodt et al. 1996: 67) generalized, upon analyzing books that appeared on the Children's Choices List: children prefer predictable qualities, optimistic tone and a lively pace; children prefer action-oriented structures and complete plot resolutions; and children do not choose books with unresolved endings, tragic tones, or slow-paced introspective plots. In her study, Munde also drew attention to the fact that adults chose a book of short poems with puns and wordplay while children chose fewer books of verbal humor which included, as Munde described, what adults would consider "the worst puns and word plays imaginable" (Munde 1997: 225).

2.2.5 Summary

Although children's literature is generally accepted as composed of texts specifically written with the needs and interests of children in mind, such needs and interests are understood differently by scholars which leads to differing opinions of children's literature. Regarding characteristics, there seems to be some common ground: it has been observed that children's literature is written from a child's perspective and tends to be shorter, rich in dialogue and has a simple, action-oriented plot. But a complication arises when target audience is considered. The presence of a dual address, a term first introduced by Wall, makes the common definition of children's literature as intended for children debatable since adults can also read and enjoy it. In addition, there are books originally written for adults but now considered to be children's texts. There is also no agreement when it comes to what children's literature should contain, and although there have been developments in this aspect, what is appropriate content is still primarily dictated by culture. Finally, industry actors shape how

children's literature is defined by creating children's lists. All these definitions are influenced by the concepts of "child" and "childhood" and as the next sections will show, just as these concepts have changed over time, so too have definitions of children's literature.

2.3 Evolution of the concept of childhood and its influence on children's literature

2.3.1 The medieval period in Europe

Aside from discrepancies in the age of the intended audience of children's literature, there are also problems arising from the absence of a universal concept of child and childhood. The concept of childhood evolved through time along with major historical and social conditions and brought with it cultural transformations that have lasting effects on modern society. Before the seventeenth century, society did not recognize children as different from adults with special needs, which was why there were no educational systems and books for children. Ariès (1960: 128) mentions that in medieval times "children were neglected, forsaken or despised" and that the awareness of "that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult" was lacking. Back then, children were considered no different from adults and were regarded as "miniature adults." As such, they were depicted in medieval painting and art with adult proportions, stern countenances and formal postures (Goldstone 1986: 792). The stage of childhood was disregarded; it was a "fragile period" that had to be left in advance because of high child mortality due to diseases. Owing to the short life span characteristic of the period, children entered adulthood early and became an integral part of adult society, sharing adult dress, work, and leisure (Shavit 1986: 6). However, some held opposing views from Ariès. For example, Shahar believes that in the Middle Ages, childhood was recognized as a distinct stage in the life cycle, which means that there was a conception of childhood and children were not merely miniature adults (in Nodelman and Reimer 2003: 82).

2.3.2 The seventeenth century

The seventeenth century was a period of new social conditions — the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the bourgeois class (Shavit 1986: 6) — that led to a new concept of childhood.

First, children were now recognized as innocent, sweet and angelic. Ariès credits this view to a new tendency in religious devotion and iconography in which the Infant Jesus was represented by himself in religious painting, engraving and structure. In other words, children were no longer just small adults (6). With this new understanding of childhood, children and childhood became a constant source of amusement (7). Ariès mentions how M. d'Argonne, in his

treatise on education *L'Education de Monsieur de Moncade* (1690), complained that many parents took an interest in their children for the sheer pleasure and entertainment they derive from their "caresses" and "antics" (Ariès 1964: 131). Other moralists and pedagogues disdained such coddling, such as Montaigne (in Ariès 1964: 130) who rejected valuing children only for "amusement, like monkeys."

Second, childhood was associated with the spiritual well-being of the child. It was believed that they should be educated and disciplined by adults. This focused on the serious psychological interest in the child (Shavit 1986: 7). Such a massive shift in the understanding of childhood brought about two new institutions: a new system of education – the school system – and a new readership that produced an unprecedented market for children's books (4). Education and books were seen as pedagogic tools that could reform children who were "delicate creatures" (7) and "must be protected, educated and molded in accordance with the current educational beliefs and goals" (Shavit 1989: 136). Shavit notes that this second notion of childhood served as the framework for canonized children's literature. Because texts, too, must respond to children's capacities to comprehend and their educational needs (Shavit 1986: 7), they varied from period to period, with the changing understanding of children's needs and capacities. For instance, Nodelman and Reimer (2003: 83) mention how children's literature in the seventeenth century was very different from what it is today, composed of texts that were "excessively preachy and unnecessarily depressing" and are related to faith and salvation and directing children to the right path. These first texts for children were developed by the Puritans who believed that children were "as prone to sin and in need of salvation as adults were" (Nodelman and Reimer 2003: 83).

2.3.3 The eighteenth century

The assertion of John Locke (1689: Sec. 2) in the eighteenth century that humans are born with a blank state of mind, a "white paper, void of all characters", which is gradually filled up by knowledge gained from perception or experience, had profound effects on education theory. Daniel (1982: 157) described Locke's conception of the child's mind as like wax, soft and capable of any impression which is given to it, meaning that the child is also a product of external factors such as experience and learning (that is, the nurture side of the nature-versus-nurture debate). Before Locke, many educators believed that children were born with innate ideas and certain knowledge. Because children are born *tabula rasa*, it is up to the adults to guide and teach them since "their want of judgment makes them stand in need of restraint and discipline" (Locke 1693, Sec. 40.). Locke believes that learning might be made "a play and recreation to children" (Sec. 148) and that entertainment can be a source of learning.

Locke's essay influenced British publisher John Newbery (1713-1767) to produce books that children should enjoy reading. Historians of children's literature often regard Newberry's *A Little Pretty Pocketbook: Intended for the*

Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly, published in 1744, as the first real children's book. Its creation signaled the shift from purely didactic literature that infuses moral, spiritual and ethical values in children to one that amuses and educates. Below each illustration of activity and verse is a moral lesson (or "rule of life") as well as a rule on children's behavior. Locke's influence on Newbery is evident in the book's introduction where Newbery called him "the great Mr. Locke" and his beliefs on nurturing children echoed Locke's attitudes and sentiments. The book contains games and activities, such as fishing and baseball, possibly inspired by Locke's saying that "children may be cozen'd into a knowledge of the letters; be taught to read, without perceiving it to be anything but a sport" (Locke 1693, Sec. 149). New editions of fables cropped up as Locke encouraged the use of fables to teach kindness (Butler 1982: 96), introduce children to moral principles (Daniel 1982: 153) and improve general reading and stylistic ability in students, seeing them as practice tools for translation (153). Locke himself published his Latin-English translation of fables in 1703. The mid-18th century then saw the return of the fable to its more traditional form of children's literature concerned mainly with imparting maxims and socially acceptable behavior; in the late seventeenth century, fables were used mainly for pedagogic purposes such as to teach Latin to children (152-153).

2.3.4 The nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century, childhood was reconceptualized as a process of development toward adulthood. It was thought that the early years of children would significantly impact on their adult years. Parents invested in children's formation – "categorizing, managing, and disciplining them" to guarantee their future success (Pugliese, no date). Thus, by the nineteenth century, when the whole industry of children's books flourished, children's literature was still very much linked to the field of education. *Early Lessons* (1809), the book in which Maria Edgeworth's "The Purple Jar" first appeared, clearly identifies its provenance as well as its audience: young children in need of education (Nodelman 2008: 2). One of the earliest bibliographies of Anglo-North American children's literature in the nineteenth century is *The Guardian of Education* by Sarah Kirby Trimmer. In the five volumes published from 1802 to 1806, Trimmer reviewed books for children and young people, printed relevant extracts from other writers, and discussed educational practices (Marks 2014: 314). Her main interest was religion and this reflected on how she reviewed children's books. She criticized books that portrayed death, insanity and sexuality and books that could be frightening for children (Grenby 2002: xxxv).

Reynolds (2014: n.p.) also states how the nineteenth century saw the development of what is called the Cult of Childhood, "with adults exultantly celebrating childhood in texts and images" instead of only a "state to be hurried through" toward adulthood. This belief showed in written works during the "Golden Age" of children's literature such as, according to Reynolds, *The*

Water-Babies (1863).

2.3.5 Modern concepts of childhood

Some scholars argue that the "child" in "children's literature" does not exist at all and is merely constructed by society, in the same way that childhood itself is a socially contrived state of being (Goldstone 1986: 792). The "child" is invented, described in different, often clashing, terms (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994: 8) and set in place by the category, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes (Rose 1984: 65). For Rose, children's fiction rests on the idea that there is a child to be addressed. To assume that there is only one kind of child being addressed, that is, the book can only speak to one group of children and disregard others, is also unacceptable for her. There is no generalized concept of the child as there are divisions – of class, culture and literacy – and this is something that the children's book market faces. For Nodelman (2008: 5), writers produce books based on the assumptions of the adults who purchase them and the child readers are whoever the writers imagine and imply in their works, whether or not they are what adults think about them. He adds: "the childhood imagined by children's books might be the means by which actual children learn how to be suitably childlike" and "the version of childhood presented by children's literature may be accurate as a self-fulfilling prophesy" (Nodelman 2008: 190). Children's fiction has also been described as "a chase or even a seduction": it does not reflect children's desires, interests or characteristics, but adult fantasies about childhood, ideals which child readers are meant to identify with and emulate (Rose 1984: 2).

Darton defines children's books as works seemingly produced "to give children spontaneous pleasure, and not primarily to teach them" (in Nodelman and Reimer 2003: 81), works which did not become widespread until about the middle of the eighteenth century. Even those that take a religious-moral-social tract are made to be entertaining to enhance their appeal (Pellowski 1980: 15). At the same time, those that entertain must also be informative. In a developing country like the Philippines, for instance, it is a luxury to buy books that are not educational (i.e., not used in school) and so publishers give children's books instructional features (Evasco 2011: 129). For Grenby (2014: 2), children's literature covers many forms which have been intended to entertain children at least as much as to instruct them. That children's literature must be both amusing and instructional is grounded on views of education.

2.3.6 Cultural differences in the evolution of the concept of childhood

It must be noted that the notion of childhood did not evolve in other parts of the world in the same way as in the Western world. This strengthens the belief that childhood is socially constructed. For example, according to Evasco (2011: 117), the representation of the child as a "miniature adult" is a contemporary

concept in the Philippines, with the preponderance of modern-day problems such as child labor and child prostitution. While Evasco does not discuss how this influenced the production of children's literature in the Philippines, there are children's books published in recent years that acknowledge and respond to these societal issues such as the bilingual *Karapat-Dapat: Bata, alamin ang iyong mga karapatan!* (Child, Know Your Rights! 2018) which tackles the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child using child-friendly language.

Another reason why such conceptual development of childhood as a framework for understanding the evolution of children's literature should be treated with caution is that, in contrast to what Ariès and Shavit identified in the Western tradition, the delineation of concepts is not clear-cut in other cultures, particularly in colonized nations. The view of childhood can be a blend of multiple beliefs. For example, during the period of Spanish colonization in the Philippines, which began in the 16th century and lasted until the late 19th century, the Filipino child was represented not only as a "holy child, pure and innocent in the mold of the cherubim and the Holy Infant Jesus" but also an "evangelical child" who needs the guidance of the Catholic Church as seen in *Ang Bagong Robinson* (The New Robinson, 1879), one of the first Filipino books for children (Evasco 2011: 117). Likewise, the child is a Europeanized/urbanized indio (native indigenous Filipino) as in *Urbana at Felisa* (1864) (117).

According to Evasco, the notion of the evangelical child and the Europeanized/urbanized indio child continue to exist. The interpretation of the child as an evangelical one affects how children are disciplined and treated as "unfinished adult(s)" (117). On the other hand, the Europeanized/urbanized indio child is conditioned by the education system and the mass media. As a result, most Filipino children possess a colonial mentality and taste (118), for instance, in how they regard skin color as a measure of beauty (e.g., a child with darker skin can face insults from other children). Furthermore, the representation of the child during the American colonization period until the present day is a project of the public school system, a "little brown American" influenced by Americanization and the miseducation of the child (117). The effects of such Americanization are felt to this day. In the Philippines, both Filipino and English enjoy official status as languages but English continues to carry more prestige, used in formal environments as the medium of instruction in schools and for economic and political activity. This could explain why bilingual children's books are popular in the country. For instance, while Tahanan Books targets Filipino children in the diaspora for its bilingual books, Adarna House releases bilingual editions mainly to reach Filipino children from the demographic class A (upper to upper middle classes), composed of families with higher educational attainment and greater access to English language usage.

2.4 The status of children's books

2.4.1 General views

As a category, children's books generally occupy a lower status. Such a negative attitude towards children's literature was already present as early as the late nineteenth century when Henry James published *The Future of the Novel* (1900). Remarking on the commercial success of writing for children as a sign of declining standards, he writes that one can make a great fortune and reputation from writing for "schoolboys" and the "published statistics are extraordinary." However, the taste shown in these publications is "but an obscure, confused, immediate instinct" (in Hughes 1978: 546). Children's books were excluded from "serious literature", those that were based on realism, and were classified under popular literature, an "arbitrary categorization" (Hughes 1978: 550). The belief that children cannot read serious novel became widespread among writers and critics and implied that children needed unique books. Fantasy, characterized by one or more imaginary elements such as a make-believe world, characters with magic powers, or imaginary events (Stoodt, Amspaugh and Hunt 1996: 20), became a trademark of English children's literature. Hughes (1978: 553-555) explains the widespread prejudice against fantasy disseminated by E.M. Forster's 1927 lectures:

> A consequence of the prejudice that fantasy is childish has been that the writer of fantasy has been directed into writing for children no matter how good he or she might be while the realistic writer has had a choice and been encouraged to regard writing for adults as more satisfying ... The fantasist has no option but to write for children since "real" realism was impossible in a children's book. Thus, fantasy came to be understood as the opposite of seriousness, and meant trivial or frivolous.

Editor Reka Simonsen states in an interview with the online magazine Publishers Weekly that "there's still a lot of condescension toward children's books from the world at large and even from within the book industry"; there are people "who don't take [this] entire category of books seriously" enough to be bothered to know the difference between young adult and middle grade (Maughan 2018). Nikolajeva (1996: 64-65) says that for many years, children's literature has been treated as non-culture – "the other" – similar to the criminal novel, romance and other "paraliterature." This could be attributed to the fact that children's literature started to emerge after adult literature had been well established. It was only in the mid-18th century when children's books became a distinct and independent "but subordinate branch of English literature" and only in the second half of the nineteenth century when children's book production grew (Shavit 1986: 3). Before this time, there were stories about what children should read, or did read, stories that emerged from twin

roots – comments on education from classical antiquity, and the Christian educational practices of the church in the Middle Ages (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994: 37) – but not in their current form. Thus, although long considered worthy of critical inquiry – for instance, with the signing of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1989, children's books became a legitimate and recognized form in the academia in the Philippines (Evasco 2011: 114) – children's literature has not been given the same level of attention among scholars as adult literature (Mattson 2015: 4). Scholars of the novel "regard the category as part of lower culture and reference it only to disparage the non-literary in this way casually disregard children's literature's equivalent capacity to adult literature for linguistic complexity, aesthetic sophistication, and thematic radicalism"[6] (Mattson 2015: 5). This again points to the lower status of children's literature in the literary system.

2.4.2 Views of Philippine publishers

Personal interviews with local children's publishers show that how one looks at the status of children's literature also tends to be subjective. For example, publishers believe that there have been improvements in how children's literature is viewed and accepted by society, boosting the genre's image. Adarna House, a leading children's publisher in the Philippines, acknowledges that "there used to be a stigma" (Garcia 2020, personal communication), especially with children's books being compared to comics in the early 2000. But children's literature in the Philippines is now better represented by institutions such as the Philippine Board on Books for Young People and the National Book Development Board which help put children's literature in the mainstream by recognizing achievements in the genre. Similarly, there is healthy competition between children's book publishers "so the status is better than other forms of literature" (Garcia 2020, personal communication). Tahanan Books, another leading children's publisher in the Philippines, admits that it is not aware of any negative impression or attitude toward children's literature because it has always received good reviews and "that is all the validation that [it has] ever needed" (Ong 2020, personal communication). In addition, children's literature is a growing industry – one of the steadiest in book sales – as there will always be children who need these books. In the end, it feels that how one looks at the status of children's literature "depends on the criteria one values." The status that Tahanan Books ascribes to children's literature is influenced by its belief that children's literature is equally important as other genres. Ong explains: "Who

[6] De Mulder et. al. (2022) found that children who spend more time reading books also report being more inclined to understand other people's mental states (mentalizing) and "take other people's perspectives in their daily lives" (253). They also found that there is no difference between eudaimonic ("sad, moving and beautiful") and hedonic ("exciting, scary, funny, happy and romantic") books in their correlation to mentalizing (254). This suggests that written narrative fiction for children can have significant effects on children in the way they navigate the world which makes it just as important as narrative fiction for adults.

will read adult fiction if they didn't start reading as children? Children's literature can provide the foundation for readers to read older and more complex texts." This healthy self-image of local children's publishers, which translates to a good conception of children's literature in the Philippines, also reflects how local children's writers see themselves. According to Tahanan Books: "There is this impression that children's writers are failed writers for adults. But it's a very different skill set. It's not like if you write for adults, you can write for children. It's very difficult to switch mindset" (Ong 2020, personal communication). There is some indication then that children's literature in the Philippines does not occupy a lower status than other genres from the perspective of local publishers. Children's publishers take pride in their achievements in producing literature for young readers, particularly with today's writers, researchers and illustrators having a number of advantages over the writers, researchers and illustrators of the past. Interviews with more publishers can validate whether this holds for the greater part of the industry.

2.5 Proposing a new concept: role dualism

It is almost always the case that adults decide on the books that children read. Such "duty", if it might be called that, is validated by what can be termed as "role dualism", where a fusion of two roles occurs: that of the adult and the child. First, adults believe that they can make choices on what children should and could read because as adults, they know better than the "children [who] are still in the process of learning how to become members of the adult community they have been born into" (Nodelman and Reimer 2003: 97). Adult involvement, in this case, is both a moral obligation and a social responsibility and, in the case of educators and librarians, even a professional duty. The moral duty of adults toward children is to help and encourage them to develop as rational and autonomous adults who can act in their best interests (Bailey 2010: 33). Adults are also expected by some social standard (e.g., law) to provide a supportive environment so that children can become responsible and productive members of society. For instance, in Chapter 3 (Effect of Parental Authority Upon the Persons of the Children), Article 220, number 4 of the Family Code of the Philippines, it states that parents must provide their children with "good and wholesome educational materials" and "supervise their activities, recreation and association with others." In the 2017 National Book Development Board Reading Survey, children identified parents as the main influence on their reading behavior (National Book Development Board 2018: 3).

At the same time, adults believe that they can judge what children would like to read as they were once children themselves, and thus believe they can assume the role of children. Indeed, when the managing editor of Tahanan Books was asked by the author of this thesis how they ensure that the reading interests of children are respected when they select stories to publish, she

said that they "pretty much rely on their memories of how they were when they were children" (Ong 2020, personal communication). The same is true for many children's writers, says writer and illustrator Jean Gralley: "Many writers write out of sentiment and nostalgia for childhood, a sanitized memory of what it was like" (Haertsch 2019). Rose asserts that adults are frightened by the real nature of childhood so to protect themselves, they construct images of childhood that omit everything threatening (in Nodelman and Reimer 2003: 96). According to Adarna House, its bestselling books remain to be the classics such as *Ang Kamatis ni Peles* (The Tomatoes of Peles 1985), one of its first books to be published in the 1980s, since adults choose the books that they enjoyed as children and pass them on to their children or students. Award-winning Filipino-American children's author Erin Entrada Kelly shares in an interview that the main character in her book *Maybe, Maybe, Marisol Rainey* (2021) is "basically [her] as a child" and that "a lot of her thoughts were [hers] at that age" (Kelly 2020). In writing her books, she explains that she thinks about the audience – a "very delicate age" for which one has to write in a "responsible way" – and admits that she often thinks about herself and what she needed when she was young, what she needed to hear or see, without being didactic or patronizing.

Memory research explains how adults, by relying on memory or "the attentive use of prior experience to guide current thought and behaviour" (Moyal-Sharrock 2009: 226), can connect to this state of childhood, particularly to the act of reading as a child. The concept of an episodic feeling of knowing, or a recollection of a personal experience at a particular time and place, is close to the concept of autonoetic (self-knowing) consciousness first proposed by Tulving (1985). He defines it as "the kind of consciousness that mediates an individual's awareness of his or her existence and identity in subjective time extending from the personal past through the present to the personal future" (Tulving 1985: 1). In other words, it refers to the consciousness of the self in subjective time—which can be roughly described as a feeling of mentally traveling through time to reexperience an event—that is characteristic of episodic memory. Waller (2017: 137) calls these concepts "re-memory work" and "re-memorying" which can be applied to how we respond to texts. According to Waller, these are vital elements of "an interpretative phenomenological method of enquiry that acknowledges the lived experience of childhood reading as a continuum, not ending with an initial encounter but enduring as the reader ages" (in Deszcz-Tryhubczak et al. 2019: 4). Waller argues that even if we do not reread a particular text as adults, we continue to respond to it for a long time and as a result, "the full reading act is a diachronic process unbounded by a single moment in time or even a single period of life" (in Deszcz-Tryhubczak et al. 2019: 4). Waller also concludes that our childhood interactions with texts become available as a result of "[t]he reconstructive power of memories of the past", wherein remembering is a creative act rather than a cognitive skill only (in Deszcz-Tryhubczak et al. 2019: 4).

As mentioned, the adults' role as gatekeeper to what children can and should

read is justified by having experienced childhood themselves, a state which they can access when needed. But Nikolajeva (2019), using cognitive poetics and neuroscience, takes a different side and contends that "signs of childness"[7] are lost in adults. This is because as we grow up, the left hemisphere of the brain which is more rational, abstract, detailed and categorizing catches up with the right hemisphere which is emotional, general and exploring and is more dominant in infancy and childhood. Thus, adults and children have different ideas of the world. Imagination is lost as one reaches adolescence to give way to other cognitive activities such as prediction and decision-making (Nikolajeva 2019: 27). (However, what the research fails to explain is how "creatives" such as authors and illustrators can still retain their imagination and create worlds of their own.) She claims that adults will never be able to perceive the world as they did when they were children because the brain keeps no memory of such perception (Nikolajeva 2019: 29). Furthermore, she says that based on memory research, "the romanticised view of so-called authentic childhood memories, whether idyllic or traumatic, becomes highly contestable", that these memories "are not genuine recollections, but confabulations" and "to maintain that children's literature utilises a memory-based child perspective is an illusion" (Nikolajeva 2019: 33). This section, which provides views on how adults hold ideas of childhood, links to the argument made in Chapter 1 on whether adults can truly give an authentic voice to children and their situations in children's literature.

2.6 Conclusions

This chapter shows that any attempt to produce an all-encompassing definition of children's literature leads to a debate spanning educational theory, book and literary history, cultural studies, philosophy and even psychology. Although there are scholars who are up to the task of defining children's literature, this chapter conveys that there are limitations in the present definitions when characteristics, intended audience and content as well as the perspective of industry actors are taken into account. The indicators used to define children's literature are also not stable. For example, while children's texts are generally more straightforward than those meant for adults, children's books today offer readers resources to explore challenging subjects that were thought to be inappropriate for children in the past. Other evidence of this lack of consistency is provided by the age limit for children's literature which differs depending on the publisher and award-giving body, thus raising the question of when childhood begins and when it ends. This chapter mainly aims to demonstrate the lack of children's voice in a genre that is chiefly intended for them. From the medieval period up until modern times, the concept of childhood and its impact on texts intended for children have been shaped mainly by adult

[7] Childness for Hollindale (1997), as cited by Nikolajeva (2019: 24), includes "the child's awareness of being a child."

judgment. From conception to production and critique to recognition, it is almost always only the adults that are involved. Thus, this thesis aims to bring to the fore the voices of children[8] : what they like to read, how they want to read, and how they regard children's texts and their intended audience. This chapter is particularly essential to the last question as it provides a point of comparison between adults' perception of children's literature and what children actually think of it. Tracing the evolution of the concept of childhood provides a basis for analyzing whether these changing conceptions affect how children perceive humorous materials. The discussion on cultural variation reveals that the cultural factor is indispensable in analyzing literature and how readers respond to it, as will be seen in the examination of the data in this study. Moreover, although children's literature occupies a lower status in many Western cultures, this does not seem to be the case in the Philippines from the local publishers' perspective. They possess a healthy self-image which influences how they view children's literature alongside other genres. Finally, a new concept formulated by the researcher, "role dualism", is offered to explain why adults get involved in what children can and should read. This concept, which posits a fusion of two roles, that of the adult and the child, can help account for why adults think they must serve as gatekeepers[9] of children's literature. They believe that they know better as adults which makes it their legal and moral obligation to guide children in what they read. At the same time, having been children once, they believe that they understand childhood and what children want.

[8]With regard to bringing the views of children into the discussion, there are favorable developments in the Philippines that must be mentioned. Publishers employ different ways to reach children directly, whether in the middle of the production process or at the end. Adarna House consults children via "kid testing" during which the stories are read to them in schools and the children share their opinions not only on the stories but also on the studies of the illustrations. According to the publisher, this works because children notice details that adults normally do not see. This is perhaps what Maurice Sendak calls the uniqueness of childhood – "the uniqueness that makes us see what other people don't see" (Sendak 2011: n.p.). Tahanan Books joined book festivals where a book that was not selling well in bookstores because "parents did not know what to make of it" was snatched by mobs of young boys – they knew exactly what it was. The publisher described the moment as "the book finding its market." A recent development in the Philippines in 2021 was the publication of the first children's book series published by Good Neighbors Philippines which was written and illustrated by and for children and youngsters. Children: Our Voices and Innovators of Development (or COVID Book, 2020) is a collection of 10 children's books based on personal experiences, creative imaginations, and observations during the height of quarantine.

[9]According to Zafra (2023, personal communication), the adults' role as gatekeepers of children's literature can also be explained culturally particularly in terms of tradition. For example, during the Spanish colonial period, one of the most popular literary genres was the manual de urbanidad or book of manners. The best example of this is the 19th-century book *Urbana at Felisa* which specified what parents, especially mothers, ought to teach their children. The book was very influential and prescribed by the Department of Education until the mid-20th century.